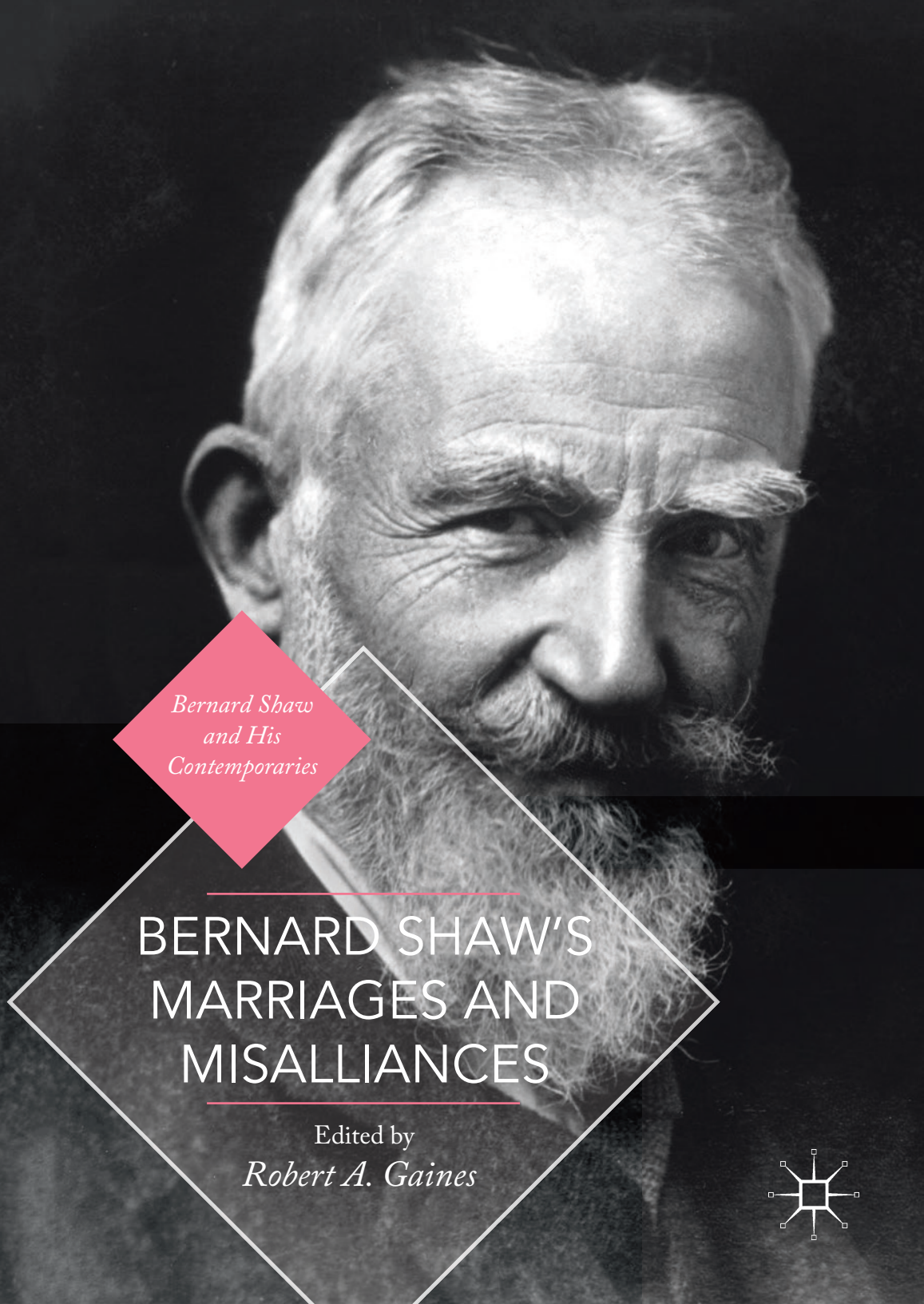


A black and white portrait of Bernard Shaw, an elderly man with a full, white beard and mustache, looking slightly to the right. The portrait is the background of the entire cover.

*Bernard Shaw
and His
Contemporaries*

BERNARD SHAW'S
MARRIAGES AND
MISALLIANCES

Edited by
Robert A. Gaines



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Robert A. Gaines
Editor

Bernard Shaw's Marriages and Misalliances

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Editor

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Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries

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In memoriam
Blair Riepma Gaines,
Beloved Wife and Mother
1945–2014

“These diverse, illuminating essays show Shaw, from first to last, consistently subverting and challenging convention as he redefines marriage and its permutations—legal, sham, wished-for, spiritual—for his own ends. A most welcome addition to Shaw studies!”

—Sally Peters, *is the author of the Choice award-winning biography*
Bernard Shaw: The Ascent of the Superman

“Gaines has enlisted a lively and distinguished array of commentators on the vagaries of marriage, and its shadow, misalliance, in Shaw’s works and life experience, all deftly organized and contextualized. I especially liked Jennifer Buckley’s forceful, cogent, and subtle essay on the Pleasant Plays; L. W. Conolly’s on their Unpleasant predecessors; R.F. Diedrich on Shaw’s early writings; Peter Gahan on the symbolism of clothing and the structural patterns in the Discussion Plays, Fanny’s First Play, and Barker’s Madras House; D.A. Hadfield’s lucid and cogent take on Shaw’s evolving positions on marital relations between the wars, with unexpected sidelights from the pædeutics of Maria C. Stopes, Matthew Yde on Shaw’s later-play versions of companionate marriages (with distracting interludes) like his own, along with his critique of democratic populism. These, and as much more, offer a variety of perspectives, and form a comprehensive overview, on a subject at the heart of Shaw’s lifelong critical anatomy of modern life, its idols of the tribe and the marketplace, and what became his evolutionary politics.”

—Martin Meisel, *is the author of Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century*
Theater *and* Chaos Imagined: Literature, Art, Science

“Bernard Shaw’s controversial views on marriage as a societal institution, expressed in *Man and Superman*, so offended public sensibilities that the head of the New York Public Library circulation department in 1905 had the book pulled from open shelves and placed on restricted shelves inaccessible to minors. In contrast, Robert Gaines’s *Bernard Shaw’s Marriage and Misalliances*, a cleverly commissioned and edited collection of essays by a team of international scholars, should be placed on unrestricted shelves everywhere for all to discover its comprehensive and incisive discussions from a political perspective of how Shaw represented marriage in his plays. The varied perspectives on marriage ideals, marriage laws, and marriage realities in Shaw’s plays and other writings provide much provocative analysis. The volume fills a real gap in Shaw studies.”

—John A. Bertolini, *Ellis Professor of English and the Liberal Arts*
Middlebury College, VT USA

“Bernard Shaw’s *Marriage and Misalliances* is a topic which has not yet (as Robert Gaines divulges in his Preamble) been focused on by scholars, so this book is very original, at the same time demonstrating that its topic is central to Shaw’s plays, while Gaines’ choice of authors offers a really appropriate take on this gender-focused topic, with half the writers – 6 out of 12 – being women. Similarly this list includes at least three younger academics, as well as three emeritus professors giving a wide range of attitudes, although the vantage point is typically American since only one of the authors is from outside North America: Audrey McNamara a vital young scholar from Ireland. In addition, there are historical and factual appendixes backing up the chapters, with one giving an insightful collection of legal and church documents, demonstrating how attitudes were changing during the nineteenth century. Offering a focused interpretation of all Shaw’s plays, this is an excellent and insightful addition to Shaw studies, which should be extremely useful to all: Gaines has done an excellent job.”

—Christopher Innes, *is the author of 16 books on modern drama. He has featured Shaw in Modern British Drama and edited a study of Shaw*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Few create a book all alone and so I take great pleasure in acknowledging with grateful appreciation the contributions of some of the many others who have made this work possible. First to Richard F. Dietrich, who founded the International Shaw Society, and served two terms as its first president. Dick is the intellectual and spiritual godfather of all North American Shavians. He suggested the title for this volume and has gently but firmly pushed me ever forward. To L.W. Conolly, the ISS's second president, who suggested to me the need for this volume and has constantly provided information, support, and guidance throughout this endeavor. He also contributed the Chronology and Appendix B. To Stanley Weintraub, who always knew the right book and where to find it. To A.M. Gibbs and Jesse Hellman, who contributed much-needed materials.

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keep the book on track. Finally, to Palgrave Editor Tomas Rene, who brought us home.

Auburn University Montgomery, where I was a member of the faculty for 30 years, also provided invaluable assistance. Chancellor Guin Nance, Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs Roger Ritvo, and Dean of Liberal Arts Marion C. Michael provided badly needed time and assistance from the very top of the academic ladder. Honors Program Director Donald Nobles and Librarian Ricky Best ran down obscure journal articles and inter-library loan requests. International Shaw Society bibliographer Charles Carpenter reviewed the proposal to ensure there was no duplication with an existing book. John McInerney and Toni Burke provided invaluable proofreading services. Elizabeth Gaines served as the Manuscript Supervisor. Zach Burke provided vital computer assistance on Appendix A. Dorothy Hadfield went above and beyond by graciously volunteering to do the index. Finally, Michel Pharand reviewed, edited, and re-edited the proposal, and served as my “Father Confessor” throughout this project, dispensing sage advice and much-needed absolution in equal measures. My sincerest thanks to them all. While each contributed much, all errors are my own.

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NOTES ON COLLECTION ABBREVIATIONS

- CL* Bernard Shaw. Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874–1950. Under the editorial supervision of Dan H. Lawrence. 4 vols. Vols. 1–2 London: Max Reinhardt, 1965 and 1972 Vols. 3–4 New York: Viking, 1985 and 1988
- CP* Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Prefaces*. Under the editorial supervision of Dan H. Laurence and Daniel J. Leary. 3 vols. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press Group, 1993–1997
- CPP* Bernard Shaw, *Collected Plays with their Prefaces*. Under the editorial supervision of Dan H. Laurence. 7 vols. London: Max Reinhardt: The Bodley Head, 1970–1974
- Holroyd* *Bernard Shaw*. Michael Holroyd. 5 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1988–1992
- Shaw* *Shaw, An Autobiography*. Selected from his writings by Stanley Weintraub. 2 Vols, New York: Weybright and Tally, 1969–1970

BERNARD SHAW: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

BY L.W. CONOLLY

For a comprehensive and detailed chronology of Shaw's life, see A.M. Gibbs, *A Bernard Shaw Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Dates of British and foreign productions of Shaw's plays are given in Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Theatrical Companion to Shaw* (New York: Pitman, 1955).

- 1856 Born in Dublin, 26 July, to George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw.
- 1871 Leaves school and takes an office job with a Dublin property agency.
- 1876 Moves from Dublin to London.
- 1879 Completes his first novel, *Immaturity* (published 1930).
- 1880 Completes his second novel, *The Irrational Knot* (published in serial form 1885–1887, book form 1905).
- 1881 Completes his third novel, *Love Among the Artists* (published in serial form 1887–1888, book form 1900).
- 1882 Completes his fourth novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession* (published in serial form 1885–1886, book form 1886).
- 1883 Completes his fifth (and last) novel, *An Unsocial Socialist* (published in serial form 1884, book form 1887).
- 1884 Joins the Fabian Society.
- 1885 Publishes first music and drama criticism in the *Dramatic Review*.
- 1891 Publishes *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.
- 1892 His first play, *Widowers' Houses*, performed by the Independent Theatre Society, London.
- 1893 Completes *The Philanderer* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*.
- 1894 *Arms and the Man* performed at the Avenue Theatre, London, and the Herald Square Theatre, New York; completes *Candida*.

- 1895 Begins writing theatre criticism for the *Saturday Review*.
- 1896 Meets Charlotte Payne-Townshend, his future wife. Completes *You Never Can Tell* and *The Devil's Disciple*.
- 1897 *Candida* performed by the Independent Theatre Company, Aberdeen. *The Man of Destiny* performed at the Grand Theatre, Croydon. American actor Richard Mansfield produces *The Devil's Disciple* in Albany and New York.
- 1898 Copyright performance of *The Philanderer* at the Bijou Theatre, London (30 March). Marries Charlotte Payne-Townshend. Publishes *Plays Pleasant* [*Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, *You Never Can Tell*] and *Unpleasant* [*Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*]. Completes *Caesar and Cleopatra*.
- 1899 *You Never Can Tell* performed by the Stage Society.
- 1901 Publishes *Three Plays for Puritans* [*The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*].
- 1902 *Mrs Warren's Profession* performed by the Stage Society. Completes *Man and Superman*.
- 1903 Publishes *Man and Superman*.
- 1904 Begins his partnership with Harley Granville Barker and J.E. Vedrenne at the Court Theatre (until 1907). *John Bull's Other Island* performed there.
- 1905 Première of *The Philanderer* by the New Stage Club, Cripplegate Institute, London (20 February). *Mrs Warren's Profession* performed (then banned) in New Haven and New York. *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara* performed at the Court Theatre, London.
- 1906 *The Doctor's Dilemma* performed at the Court Theatre; *Caesar and Cleopatra* performed (in German) in Berlin.
- 1907 *The Philanderer* performed at the Court Theatre, London (5 February).
- 1909 *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* banned in England, but performed in Dublin. *Press Cuttings* banned in England. Completes *Misalliance*.
- 1911 *Fanny's First Play* performed at the Little Theatre, London. Runs for 622 performances (a record for a Shaw première).
- 1912 Completes *Pygmalion*.
- 1913 American première of *The Philanderer* at the Little Theatre, New York (27 December). *Pygmalion* performed at His Majesty's Theatre, London.
- 1914 Outbreak of World War I. Publishes *Common Sense about the War*.
- 1917 Visits front-line sites in France. Completes *Heartbreak House*.
- 1918 End of World War I.
- 1920 *Heartbreak House* performed by the Theatre Guild, New York. Completes *Back to Methuselah*.

- 1922 *Back to Methuselah* performed by the Theatre Guild, New York. Meets T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia).
- 1923 Completes *Saint Joan*. It is performed in New York by the Theatre Guild.
- 1924 First British production of *Saint Joan*, New Theatre, London, with Sybil Thorndike as Joan.
- 1926 Awarded the 1925 Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1928 Publishes *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*.
- 1929 *The Apple Cart* performed (in Polish) in Warsaw.
- 1931 Visits Russia; meets Gorky and Stalin.
- 1932 Travels on a world cruise.
- 1936 *The Millionairess* performed (in German) in Vienna.
- 1938 *Pygmalion* is filmed, starring Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller.
- 1939 Outbreak of World War II. Wins an Oscar for the screenplay of *Pygmalion*.
- 1940 *Major Barbara* is filmed, starring Rex Harrison and Wendy Hiller.
- 1943 Charlotte Shaw dies.
- 1944 Publishes *Everybody's Political What's What?*
- 1945 *Caesar and Cleopatra* is filmed, starring Claude Rains and Vivien Leigh. End of World War II.
- 1950 Dies, 2 November, aged 94, from complications after a fall while pruning a shrub in his garden.

BERNARD SHAW'S MARRIAGES AND MISALLIANCES

There is no subject on which more dangerous nonsense is talked and thought than marriage.

CPP III:452

However much we may suffer through marriage, most of us think so little about it that we regard it as a fixed part of the order of nature like gravitation. Except for this error which may be regarded as constant, we use the word with reckless looseness, meaning a dozen different things by it, and yet always assuming that to a respectable man it can have only one meaning.

CPP III:454–455

...the respectable British champion of marriage ... sometimes ... does not mean marriage at all. He means monogamy, chastity, temperance, respectability, morality, Christianity, anti-socialism, and a dozen other things that have no necessary connection with marriage. He often means something that he dare not avow; ownership of the person of another human being, for instance.

CPP III:455

PREAMBLE

The idea for this book was born when I reached for it on the library shelf, and it was not there. More specifically, I was preparing a paper on *Major Barbara* for an academic conference and wanted to see what others had to say about Bernard Shaw's use of marriage in his novels and plays, only to discover that no such book existed. To be sure, there was the occasional article as well as some less helpful but more widely scattered dibs and dabs—mostly just mentions of the word “marriage.” But no single volume existed devoted to exploring the themes and issues Shaw portrayed in the marriages throughout his major works.

In the final act of *Major Barbara*, Adolphus and Barbara argue about several issues pivotal to whether they will choose to marry. At times, they are almost bartering their strengths/moralities like commodities on the open market. Looking up the word “commodity” in several dictionaries, I found the expected answer: it is something for sale. But in checking a reprint of the *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, I found that the only definition given for “commodity” was “the private parts of a modest woman and the public parts of a prostitute.”¹ The seedling idea for this book suddenly grew roots in fecund soil.

I admit the *1811 Dictionary* is one of slang and also was nearly 75 years old when Shaw began writing. Still, classifying women as either modestly pure or as prostitutes, depending on who was privy to their privates, was an idea that seemed welded to the soul of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, some might argue that this pernicious notion thrives in the present day.

The story of how Shaw uses marriage in his works is inexorably bound up with the cause of women's equality, a cause he championed. Even as late as 1937, when Shaw was entering his early 80s, a new Irish Constitution declared: "In particular, the state recognizes that by her life within the home, a woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved."² Against such notions, Shaw, all of his adult life, made speeches, wrote pamphlets, and gave voice to his better angels in his novels and plays. But it was a battle not easily won. "Women ... have all the vices of men but their follies are never quite so foolish as masculine follies," said Shaw when interviewed by the London *Sunday Express*.³ He shared his secret for being able to write such women: "I have always assumed that a woman was a person exactly like myself, and that is how the trick is done."⁴ Marriage and women's equality are so melded in Shaw's mind that the story of one often becomes the story of both.

To explore these topics, I asked twelve Shavians each to write a chapter addressing the marital void in Shaw criticism: six are women and six are men. They represent Canada, Ireland, and the United States. I gave ten of these scholars a specific series of plays to examine in whichever manner they wished. I asked another one to do the same with Shaw's novels. The remaining scholar was asked to look at Shaw's sexual conduct. In addition to all of Shaw's full-length plays and his novels, we collaboratively decided to include certain of his short stories and one-act plays. The book is organized chronologically through his *oeuvre*, except where thematic concerns overrode a strict adherence to dates. Doubtless, some readers will notice the absence of a favorite short story, one-act, or essay; but all should sympathize with the limits of a single volume.

Richard Dietrich begins the discussion with an evaluation of Shaw's earliest works, the at-first-unpublished *My Dear Dorothea* (1877) and the unfinished dramatic piece called *Passion Play* (1878), followed by his five completed novels (1879–1883) and some short stories typical of his early writing, in all of which Dietrich finds the playwright establishing a dialectical approach to theme, story, and characterization that led easily to the play form Shaw would adopt. Shaw began by writing fiction like a playwright, as he later would write plays like a novelist. Dietrich explains how in such early works Shaw fictionalized the attraction and repulsion to domesticity he himself felt as a young Londoner, between his desire for marriage with a soul mate and his passion for "world betterment" which he feared would be thwarted if he ever succumbed to the domesticating

influence of marriage, no matter how “advanced” the woman might be, and even if she tried to follow his own fictional prescriptions for the New Woman. Misalliance had been Shaw’s experience within his own family, and so the fear of it is mirrored in this early writing.

In Chaps. 2 and 3, Jennifer Buckley and L.W. Conolly tackle Shaw’s earliest plays. Buckley, writing about *Plays Pleasant*, contends that the dividing line between these is not always as sharp as might be thought. She contends that Shaw’s turn toward the commercial theatre was for purposes of cultural permeation, arguing that, after setting up some definite obstacles to marriage, Shaw skirts the central issue by allowing the Life Force to propel the couple down the aisle. Conolly, covering *Plays Unpleasant*, after a brief discussion of the history and the state of the marriage laws in England, dissects Shaw’s purposes in each play. Years and customs had provided for the intertwining of these grossly unfair marriage laws with religious doctrine. Shaw sought to uncouple this alliance and bring both into the light of day for rational discussion.

In *Three Plays for Puritans*, written between 1897 and 1900, Shaw began to conceive of marriage not only as a legal procedure or a religious rite, but also as a social contract that might be most meaningful when decoupled from self-interest or erotic attraction. In Chap. 4, Lawrence Switzky describes several impersonal, “decoy marriages” in these plays—feigned marriages without legal sanction—as tests of disinterested interpersonal obligations. Through these decoy marriages, Shaw rehearsed his conflicting beliefs about human plasticity and altruism.

Chapter 5 does not look at Shaw’s works but rather at his own self-confessed sexual conduct in light of his celibate marriage. Rodelle Weintraub discusses Shaw’s sexual exploits as she tackles the question of whether he was a philanderer. As the story of his marriage to Charlotte has been covered in some detail elsewhere, there is no chapter devoted to their marriage here. Nevertheless, Shaw was a sexual being and exercised his heterosexual nature before and most probably after his marriage to Charlotte.

In Chap. 6, Michel Pharand, while examining *Man and Superman*, *John Bull’s Other Island*, and *Major Barbara*, concludes that whatever else marriage is, it is a compromise both with one’s self and with one’s partner. Often the Life Force pushing two people together demands compromise—but it does not dictate its nature. Pharand suggests that, as none of these plays includes a marriage, at least on stage, much less a happy life for the couples after marriage, there is no guarantee that they

have indeed achieved workable compromises for the survival of their union.

Peter Gahan, in Chap. 7, works from the sartorial context prominent in comedies written between 1908 and 1911 that highlight marriage as a social institution. Civic roles and social responsibilities are ostentatiously signified by costume in *Getting Married* and in *Fanny's First Play's* framing play. With *Misalliance's* underwear manufacturer as well as the underwear retailers in *Fanny's* inner play, Shaw throws his comic spotlight on clothing that is more usually concealed, while Granville Barker's contemporaneous *Madras House* features social ramifications in marriages across the classes of the clothes manufacturing process and fashion industry. All four plays suggest that with marriage, human beings become something more than autonomous individuals, assuming positions within a more complex system of social signification—society.

In Chap. 8, Ellen Dolgin deals with four plays from the last decade before World War I: *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Androcles and the Lion*, *Pygmalion*, and *Overruled*. In the first three plays, she finds that Shaw warns his audiences and readers of the danger of misalliances that result from the pressure of obligatory matches when marriage was often the only career choice a woman had for economic survival. Shaw proposed instead a life of hard work and self-fulfillment, which were much the same choices faced by men. In so doing, he was turning his back on the accepted notions of a woman's place in marriage. Even in *Overruled*, a one-act play set in a conventional drawing room, Shaw features wives reflecting the empowerment of the New Woman.

In Chaps. 9 and 10, Audrey McNamara and D.A. Hadfield tackle the interwar years, when women were being turned out of the factories where they had worked during the war, so that men could resume their work there. While surveying *Heartbreak House*, *Back to Methuselah*, and *Annajanska the Bolshevik Empress*, McNamara believes that after World War I, Shaw realized the impossibility of going back to a pre-war society. He also knew that without marriage, society had no way of healing itself from the scars war had inflicted, but that marriage in its pre-war form was equally intolerable. Shaw thus used his twin concepts of the Life Force and Creative Evolution to help people see beyond the present and to fashion a change that would make marriage—and the nation—stronger and more independent.

D.A. Hadfield's treatment of *Saint Joan*, *Two True to Be Good*, *The Millionairess*, and *The Six of Calais* suggests that Shaw's views of

marriage often show him ahead of his literary and social contemporaries when he advocates for women's autonomy and empowerment, and sometimes even for their independence from marriage. The latter was a particularly difficult proposition during a period when women's post-war experiences of financial and physical independence conflicted with an economic need to eliminate them from the workforce. Hadfield concludes that even so, Shaw's plays support an institution that is reformed to accommodate independent women empowered by their experiences, and their need for something more from married love.

In Chap. 11, Jean Reynolds, looking at *Village Wooing*, *On the Rocks*, and *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, finds that the three couples at the heart of these three plays define marriage very differently. In one instance, a woman simply wants to be married and has selected her mate; in another, the husband of a long-married couple is quite content, while his wife is bored and frustrated; and in the last case, group marriage is tried unsuccessfully, suggesting that, in the end, a marriage is what each couple makes of it.

Matthew Yde, in the concluding chapter, considers *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, *The Apple Cart*, and *Geneva*. While acknowledging that Shaw's opinions on marriage are various and often contradictory, Yde suggests that the best place to look for Shaw's overriding view of the topic is in his own childless yet seemingly happy marriage to Charlotte, as reflected in *The Apple Cart* and *In Good King Charles*.

Appendix A charts year by year the slow but steady increase in the number of divorces or marital separations over time. The efforts of Shaw and others to change the marriage laws were in reality campaigns to make divorce easier and more equitable for women. Appendix B, by L.W. Conolly, lays out in Part I the Anglican Marriage Ceremony and in Part II some of the changes in the laws governing divorce.

Part of what makes a novel or play timeless is its ability to be read in many different ways. Part of what makes this collection of essays interesting is its variety of authors' opinions and perspectives. No attempt was made to bring all into alignment. Instead, the editor hopes that inconsistencies between various writers will generate fresh ideas and further discussion on this long-neglected topic.

While some authors referenced particular staged productions of Shaw's plays and/or the personalities that brought them to life, this book aims to offer insights on the texts themselves, as Shaw wrote and

rewrote them. All contributors used the authoritative Constable editions of the novels and the Bodley Head edition of the plays.

Major Barbara in particular had piqued my curiosity. Did Shaw's characters always barter their strengths/moralities as a prelude to marriage? As with the best philosophical questions, the answer is both yes and no. Yes, because the element of marriage as commodity remains a constant, although frequently not the primary or even secondary, focus of a particular work. No, in the sense that his views on marriage over his entire body of work reflect his evolution as a maturing writer and thinker, ever expanding with insight, nuance, and definition. Shaw does not change his views on marriage from one work to the next so much as he expands on views previously expressed, and follows them to their natural conclusions. As a result, no play, preface, or essay can sum up his views on marriage. Each work is a snapshot, showing us, in still frame, the specific moments that cumulatively outline his arc of ever-expanding marital perspectives.

Thus no matter how fully formed Shaw's ideas appear in the prefaces to some plays, especially *Getting Married* or *Misalliance*, for example, or in essays such as *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* or *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, Shaw always supplements and changes the focus of those ideas, returning to them later. Sometimes he speaks through a housewife (*Candida*) and sometimes through a reigning monarch (*King Charles*); but none of his characters has the complete picture. Therefore, the only way to get a summation of his marital views is to go through his works novel by novel and play by play charting their development, which is the purpose of this book.

Several issues need further exploration before beginning; thus, this essay is a preamble as much as it is an introduction. Those issues include Shaw's views of his parents' marriage. Perhaps their union taught him that "marriage" and "misalliance" are not mutually exclusive. They can exist within the same domestic scene. Placing Shaw among his nineteenth-century contemporaries will help explicate his stature in his own day and perhaps in ours as well. One of those contemporaries, Henrik Ibsen, influenced Shaw greatly. For this reason alone, Ibsen deserves a short mention.

SHAW AND HIS PARENTS

The marriage of Shaw's parents, Lucinda Gurley, hereafter called Bessie, and George Carr Shaw, was a misalliance. Shaw's impressions of that marriage, subconsciously or not, helped shape all the marriages and misalliances of the characters that flowed from his pen. Bessie's mother died when Bessie was 9 years old and the child was raised by her maiden aunt, Ellen Whitcroft, who educated her in the social graces and prepared her to take her place in Dublin society. George Carr Shaw was a sometimes corn merchant with a weakness for alcohol, which Bessie's family had warned her about before the wedding. But when she asked him about it, he assured her that he was a teetotaler. Shaw believed one missed an essential part of his father's character if one failed to realize how sincerely George Carr despised alcohol (*CL* III:365). Then 38-year-old George wed 22-year-old Bessie on June 17, 1852. Soon, because of George's drunken behavior, the newly married Shaws were excluded from the very society Bessie had been trained to enter.⁵ There were three children born to the couple in rapid succession: two daughters, Lucinda Frances (1853–1920) and Elinor Agnes (1855–1876), and the last and the only son, George Bernard (1856–1950), born on July 26.

Bessie was gifted with a beautiful singing voice and came under the tutelage of George John Vandeleur Lee, a singing instructor with original methods of voice training. Although the exact date Lee and Bessie first met is not known, the Amateur Musical Society began in 1852, the same year Bessie and George Carr Shaw were married. Bessie became indispensable to Lee in arranging his concerts and other business of the Musical Society, and she even completed his four-year voice training program.

Perhaps due to George's lack of income, the entire Shaw family moved in with Lee. Although the date is difficult to ascertain, biographer B.C. Rosset, tracing the date through real estate records, believes that "There seems little doubt that the Shaw-Lee *household* was first constituted in 1866 and ... existed for one year in Torca Cottage (on Dalkey Hill) prior to its more permanent establishment in Hatch Street."⁶ This unconventional arrangement lasted until Lee moved to London in 1873. Bessie and her daughter Lucy followed Lee shortly thereafter, presumably so Lucy could continue her voice lessons. Nevertheless, once arrived in London, Bessie and Lucy did not share a house with Lee, perhaps