



*Bernard Shaw
and His
Contemporaries*

BERNARD SHAW, W. T. STEAD, AND THE NEW JOURNALISM

Whitechapel, Parnell,
Titanic, and the Great War

Nelson O'Ceallaigh Ritschel



Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries

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Bernard Shaw, W. T. Stead, and the New Journalism

Whitechapel, Parnell, *Titanic*, and the Great War

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For Deirdre

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The impulse to write this volume began to emerge while working on my previous book, *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* (2011). During the process of writing the earlier book, I became extremely intrigued by Bernard Shaw's involvement in politics outside of, or beyond, his dramatic canon, even to the detriment of his theatrical career. Much of this book grew from working on Shaw's 1910 Dublin lecture "The Poor Law and Destitution in Ireland." I was fascinated with Shaw's public efforts on behalf of the political causes that he believed in, even after such efforts had no role in financially sustaining his existence. My affinity for this aspect of Shaw's life and career then came into focus for me, quite dramatically, when I read a lecture authored and delivered by Michael D. Higgins, president of Ireland. Specifically, the lecture was delivered on February 21, 2012 at the London School of Economics and Politics, of which Shaw was one of the founders in 1895. The lecture, "On Public Intellectuals, Universities and a Democratic Crisis" was delivered during the early months of Higgins' presidency.

President Higgins spoke passionately on the public role, indeed the public duty that intellectuals need to embrace and pursue in bettering our world. In fact, the lecture intimated that Shaw had epitomized the role of public intellectual in his many efforts to improve our collective human existence. The lecture, in many respects, directed me to an almost spiritual realization of Shaw's role, not only with regard to Ireland and Britain, but to the human race—this being a role Shaw pursued for at least seven decades. I am extremely grateful to President Higgins for inspiring me to this

realization which, after some contemplation, propelled me to focus on Shaw's journalistic efforts outside of his art, literary, music, and theatre criticism. I consider President Higgins to be The President for the Irish everywhere, and a remarkable individual who embodies and lives the Shaw model of a public intellectual in his tireless efforts to improve our entire world. He is a president who raises our conscious awareness to our respective duties to follow Shaw's example, and his own example, within the dark times we live in. So I express great thanks, admiration, and friendship to President Higgins.

I also wish to express great thanks to series editor and close friend, Peter Gahan. Peter's willingness to read the various drafts of this manuscript over two and half years—and his subsequent comments and recommendations, which proved to be invaluable—is appreciated beyond any words that I can collect and adequately express. To know Peter is to know a remarkable scholar, indeed, one of the great Shavian scholars of my generation, and of the many to follow.

I also must acknowledge Professor Alan Brody for first introducing me to Shaw, all those many years ago in Saratoga, New York, when he cast me, an undergraduate at the time, as Major Swindon in *The Devil's Disciple*. In time it proved to be an important experience. Thinking then that I knew something of method acting, I approached the role with the "method," but eventually realized (actually during the play's run) that acting Shaw in my then sense of the method was not working. I came to realize that the words and actions of Swindon were far more important than any character an inexperienced actor might create. Swindon was not the stuff of psychological drama, but rather an image of a serviceable tool to his political, in this case imperial, masters. What was needed was a talking image of a dull-witted, lower-level aristocrat, the type that in the late eighteenth century—even into the twentieth century—dominated officers in the British military. They were the tools who enacted imperial law at the expense of reason and common sense and, in the context of Shaw's play and the historical facts of 1777 Saratoga, eventually cost Britain its colonies.

In this vein, I also thank mentor Professor Don B. Wilmeth. His encouragement and nudging me toward Shaw during and after my doctoral work at Brown University, is always appreciated, as was his suggestion that Palgrave Macmillan might be open to a Shaw series.

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I also extend thanks to Desmond Harding for encouraging me to pre-print and present Shaw's 1888 commentary on the Whitechapel murders in the specially themed *Shaw* volume that he edited, *Shaw and the City*. This exercise led me to reconsider Shaw's approach to the Whitechapel events, change my focus on the work from an examination of public hysteria to a journalistic response to the sensational popular press that created the West End hypocrisy toward the murders, and to consider W. T. Stead's role in the process. In this vein, I also thank Kathryn Mudgett, who invited me to present a plenary on Shaw's take on the *Titanic* sinking at the maritime conference she hosted at Massachusetts Maritime Academy on April 12, 2012, the centennial of the *Titanic*'s meeting with a north Atlantic iceberg. I also thank Professor Mudgett for publishing said plenary as "G. B. Shaw and the *Titanic* Hysteria" in the 2013 *The Nautilus: A Journal of Maritime Literature, History, and Culture*, Volume IV. This work exercise, in turn, led me to totally reconsider Shaw's response, moving again from mere reaction to the public hysteria to his careful, courageous, and biting journalistic countering of the Stead-inspired popular press that lied to the British and American publics, rather than encourage reasonable focus on the causes of the calamity in order to prevent future occurrences. These two exercises helped me to realize that Shaw's responses to the above two public crises (and others like them) did not mirror the undisciplined public frenzies in evidence at the time, but rather demonstrated his long-practiced and intelligent journalism that struck at the foundation of public distress over the disasters. Hence, this volume emerged between 2013 and 2016 as a study on Shaw's important, but never previously explored, brand of journalism that engaged with and countered that offered by his contemporary, W. T. Stead.

Thanks are also extended to work and department colleague Elaine Craghead, whose conversation has helped to maintain an even keel while at work—the importance of which, for writing, cannot be underestimated.

Ian O'Hare is thanked for his original artwork that graces the cover of this book. He carefully considered the book's directions, then conceived and created the image. His permission to use the work is gratefully acknowledged.

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My partner and wife Carolina is greatly thanked too. Quite simply, this book, as my previous book, could not have been written without her love and input. I cannot express this enough. She has tolerated my various writing moods while I balanced the duties of chairing a department. Surely such tolerance is monumental.

Finally, I thank Deirdre. Her assistance in writing this book was extensive, and perhaps was more than she knew, but I doubt that.

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Introduction

This volume explores Bernard Shaw’s journalism outside his literary, art, music, and theater criticism from the mid 1880s through the Great War—a period in which Shaw contributed, arguably, some of the most powerful and socially relevant journalism the Western world has experienced. Shaw frequently used his journalism to publicize his plays, books, and lectures, but he could also be an acute and powerful journalist outside of self-promotion—which is the focus of this book. Shaw found, sharpened, and reached his critical voice as a committed journalist during the mid to late 1880s—just as New Journalism was being pioneered and developed. Shaw’s emerging sense of journalism through this period was a precursor to his important literary criticism and plays of the early 1890s that introduced New Drama, as well as his journalistic books that began with *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1893. In fact, Shaw’s playwriting career and political activism owed much, if not everything to his journalistic efforts, which, in turn, pointed the way toward the modern. After all, Shaw lived and worked through the golden age of modernizing journalism.

Recent Shaw scholarship has expanded the understanding that Shaw the dramatist wrote in reaction to and borrowing from differing playwrights. For example, John Bertolini’s “Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw’s *You Never Can Tell*” demonstrates that Shaw wrote at times in reaction to Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde, and in my own *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* I argue that Shaw wrote, also at times, in reaction to and borrowing from fellow Dubliner John Millington Synge. Writing in specific

reaction to other writers was also practiced by Shaw in his journalism, which, of course, began to develop before he wrote his first plays.

In Shaw's journalism, it is necessary to keep in mind that the developing Shaw was emerging at a time when one of the most important figures of New Journalism, a pioneer in a branch of that journalism, was achieving startling and arresting successes that more than once moved the British government into action by defining, harnessing, and then directing public opinion—W. T. Stead. Stead's impact on London and Western journalism was significant, and arguably led, for good and bad, to the exposé journalism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But in the mid-1880s there was no larger journalistic figure than Stead, and the young Shaw took notice.

Achieving great success from 1884 to 1890 as editor of the daily *Pall Mall Gazette*, Stead changed British and Western journalism forever. Rival papers formed, or existing papers adapted to follow Stead's example. Leader writers and editors marched to Stead's striking *Pall Mall Gazette* model—adding to, expanding, and solidifying Stead's journalism style. After the *Gazette*, Stead founded, edited, and contributed to an almost endless number of journals and papers, undertaking each with a feverish confidence to change society for the better, and serving cause after cause to do so. As a dedicated peace advocate during the militarism that gripped Europe from the 1880s to 1914, a militarism that would lead the world into the Great War, Stead was “several times nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize” (Mulpetre). While usually not in agreement with Stead, Shaw monitored Stead's work for decades. Yet in a 1924 letter to Stead's biographer Frederick Whyte, Shaw wrote of Stead: “We never quarreled; but he was no use to me” (qtd. in Whyte, 305). Contrary to being of no use to Shaw, Stead proved to be of great use as both an influence and a catalyst to Shaw's journalism from the 1880s into the Great War, which started two years after Stead's death. And Stead, for his part, preserved Shaw's early letters, even before the advent of Shaw's plays.

The importance Stead proved to be for Shaw was not because of the former's convictions and various causes—most of which Shaw loathed and repeatedly attacked—but through Shaw's reacting to and *use* of Stead's journalism. As Stead riled and rallied the public to his causes, his brand of popular journalism often diverted its readership from careful consideration of the situation. Shaw, on the other hand, sought exactly the opposite through his journalism: the resurrection or instigation of common sense. So just as Shaw wrote many of his plays in reaction to or borrowing from

other dramatists—contemporaries or earlier playwrights—he developed and wrote his journalism in reaction to, and, at times, borrowing from his contemporary Stead and those who replicated Stead’s journalistic tactics—including Stead’s tendency to lose causes to self-seduction as he pursued self-promotion.

However, in 1884 and again in 1885, Stead also demonstrated to Shaw and London the power of journalism to move governments to action. For the newly joined Fabian Shaw, who subscribed to the early Fabian Society philosophy of provoking gradual change, Stead’s journalism must have appeared as fantastic, a clear vehicle for social change if used in the right direction—but excessively dangerous if not. In 1885, at the height of Stead’s early successes with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Shaw joined the paper’s staff reviewing popular novels, a position secured for him by William Archer. Oscar Wilde was also a staff reviewer at the time. In his 1924 letter to Frederick Whyte, Shaw stated that Stead “was unable to distinguish us from the office boy” (qtd. in Whyte, 304–305). Regardless of Stead’s perceived inability to recognize brilliance, Stead’s presence was to be immense for Shaw.

In examining Shaw’s journalism, in relation to Stead and others, it is prudent to consider the historical context of Shaw’s efforts. It is only through such context that the journalism can be appreciated, and its power of countering and provoking recognized. In doing so, we will understand that Shaw was not only a giant in New Drama, but also a force when his voice was needed in New Journalism where he worked against his journalistic contemporaries who preferred popularity over facts. Shaw countered their sensationalized absurdities used to drive the British public into irrational hysteria to sell more and more papers through frenzied crusades at any cost. The struggle and conflict between their contrasting journalistic efforts was as much a part of the modernizing process as was Shaw and his dramatist contemporaries in forging New Drama.

The structure of this book, rather than pursuing all of Shaw’s massive journalistic output, including his frequently acknowledged but sparingly explored achievements as a music and drama critic, examines high profile historical crises in which Shaw contributed journalistically. These examples, representing unimagined horror, ruthless moral persecution, dangerous romanticism, and massive manufactured death, delivered serious consequences for Britain, Ireland, and beyond—and therefore prompted powerful commentary from Shaw. The examples illuminate how the journalist in

Shaw endeavored to provoke public debate and social change, while matching or even defining the highest ideals of New Journalism.

Chapter 2 traces Stead's rise to prominence and dominance, as witnessed by a young Shaw determined to write, on the London journalistic front, where Stead achieved his first great success through his series of articles "The Truth about the Navy" in 1884. The series, under the guise of defending the empire, forced William Gladstone's Liberal government to reverse its efforts to reduce naval spending. The following year, Stead attained even greater success when he took aim at the horrific practice of child prostitution in a series titled "The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon." Shaw and most of London were outraged at the situation, with the result that the government raised the age of consent, with increased penalties for those trafficking in child prostitution. This success, which increased the comfortable and middle classes' awareness of prostitution in general, including fascination as well as concern, was met by the formation of competing evening papers that attempted to replicate the *Pall Mall Gazette's* success and further Stead's journalistic style.

One such paper appeared in 1888, *The Star*, founded and edited by T. P. O'Connor. O'Connor made his own mark in New Journalism by employing editors and writers of future note, including, if briefly, Shaw as a political writer. Into this atmosphere appeared a series of heinous murders during the late summer and autumn of 1888 in East London's economically distressed districts known as Whitechapel and its adjacent Spitalfields. The victims, all women in severe poverty who worked in prostitution to some extent for survival, were savagely slaughtered. Stead, through his paper, was quick to seize on the killings—as was *The Star* and eventually all London papers, even *The Times*—and generated public frenzy that prompted a carnival of solutions to the crisis, except for a reasonable and rational plan that could alleviate the stifling poverty that the fantastic press, oddly, revealed. While the murder press coverage gripped all Londoners, Shaw was moved to respond journalistically and did so with an early example of his brilliant take on the situation—contextualizing the crisis while offering a viable solution. It was, in many respects, the beginning of Shaw's important journalism.

Chapter 3 follows the sensationally charged journalism, as well as the moral backlash from the Whitechapel murders, into the divorce suit filed by Captain William O'Shea against his wife Katharine that named the leader of the Irish Party, Charles Stewart Parnell as co-respondent. The London popular press, led again by Stead, seized on the divorce case once it was

heard in court in November 1890, when neither Katharine O’Shea nor Parnell contested the accusations. The press pursuit of scandal, calling for the Liberal Party to disengage itself from the Irish Party if Parnell remained as leader, drew Shaw to respond journalistically. He did so twice in *The Star*, where he argued that the criminal in the matter was not Parnell, but the antiquated divorce laws that imprisoned women in unhappy marriages. In his second response, Shaw expanded his criticism to the Liberal Party as it joined the popular press in moralistically demanding Parnell’s resignation or removal. Shaw’s animosity towards the Liberal Party grew and became entrenched as their attacks on Parnell increased. Shaw’s masterful press letters on behalf of Parnell, or most definitely against those who opposed Parnell, exposed the absurdities and hypocrisy of the morality position. This episode coincided with Shaw’s increased interest in women’s rights, just as he composed *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, in which he exposed Stead’s notion of the ideal woman as nothing but grotesquely subservient to men.

Following the Parnell case, Chapter 3 then moves to Shaw’s observations of Stead’s new journalistic, but still moralist, career path that included authoring books such as *If Christ Came to Chicago*, based on a series of articles for his newly formed monthly *Review of Reviews*. Stead’s book chronicled his moralizing visit to crime-laden Chicago as the 1893 World’s Fair came to a close. Stead’s return to London saw his journalism shift to advocacy for world peace, which became a crusade that pulled Shaw in—but the two men were not always in agreement. Stead continued his public fascination with Russia’s autocratic ruling tsars, including Nicholas II who in 1898 called for European disarmament. Instead of rallying to echo Stead’s support for the tsar’s peace initiative, Shaw took aim in London’s *Daily Chronicle* at the militarism that was the growing London vogue, despite claims for peace overtures, as epitomized by the Navy League’s commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar in the face of Britain’s then ally France.

Chapter 4 moves into the years following the premier productions of some of Shaw’s important plays, *Man and Superman*, *John Bull’s Other Island*, *Major Barbara*, *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, *Getting Married*, *Fanny’s First Play*, and *Androcles and the Lion*, as Shaw enjoyed a great reputation not only as a playwright, but also as a public intellectual, the latter being achieved most immediately through his journalism and public lectures. In 1912, as Shaw was increasing his activism against destitution, Stead accepted an invitation to travel to New York to speak on world peace. He boarded what had become one of the largest news events up to that time:

the White Star Line's *Titanic*. While Stead disappeared with the ship, his brand of journalism erupted into unprecedented extremes in sensationalizing the ship's loss, romantically celebrating the unquestioned and often fictitious heroism of first-class passengers—including Stead—and ship's officers, most particularly *Titanic*'s Captain Edward Smith. The popular press coverage, raging as if nothing else mattered, at the very least obscured the facts of the sinking, which if known and understood, could have led to the prevention of such a catastrophic event from occurring again. Shaw responded journalistically in the *Daily News*, undermining the London press' repeated romanticizing of the call for "Women and Children First" in the lifeboats. Shaw detailed the facts concerning Lifeboat No. 1 that carried only twelve people to safety, despite having the capacity for forty, and only two were women—the aristocratic couture designer Lady Duff Gordon and her assistant. Shaw's article led directly to Duff Gordon and her husband testifying at the British Board of Trade Inquiry into the ship's sinking.

Shaw's journalistic response to the *Titanic* frenzy also questioned and criticized the popular press' repeated celebrations of the ship's captain as a hero, when much of the responsibility for the sinking rested with him. Shaw's press criticism was challenged in the same paper by Arthur Conan Doyle, who not only disagreed with Shaw's view, but questioned Shaw's journalistic integrity. A press exchange ensued, with Shaw revealing only the truth, not sentimental romances that prevented real consideration. But by taking the view that he did (going against popular thinking that celebrated the ship's captain, and other stories based on fantasy rather than facts) Shaw revealed that he possessed the courage to contribute a voice of reason when it was needed, no matter the risk of unpopularity that could befall him. In two years Shaw would again demonstrate this courage, going much further as the circumstances required, as he responded to the outbreak of the Great War. It was a courage that rivaled Stead's courage during the Boer War when he had publicly opposed and criticized a mostly popular war.

Chapter 5 focuses on Shaw's journalistic response to the Great War, from the months prior to its outbreak when he could see the disastrous potential of the ruling Liberal government's foreign policy as Western militarism became uncontrollable, to the government's bumbling early months of the war. Shaw's first responses to the war were through his journalism, especially as the popular press in Stead's tradition, blindly supported rampant militarism, British Junkerism, and the government's leadership through both its Foreign Office and its War Office. Shaw began first with

some well-placed words in the press, including an interview he granted to American syndicated journalist Mary Boyle O'Reilly. His early war views were carried throughout America as his journalistic letters to the London press—of those published—were replicated directly or in part in American papers and in papers throughout the British Empire. This was particularly the case with New Zealand and Australia; both contributed thousands of soldiers to the European killing trenches.

But Shaw's greatest war response was arguably his finest journalism, and perhaps the finest journalism ever composed, titled *Common Sense About the War*, published in November 1914 as a supplement to the *New Statesman*. Examples of Shaw's war responses are contextualized, revealing the strength of his absolute journalism, absolute in the sense that it served only the truth and—as with all of his important journalism—questioned and criticized that which desperately needed to be questioned and criticized during the Great War. The importance of the war, namely its catastrophic casualties, required Shaw's intervention as a journalist, and he delivered with great courage. While relentlessly criticized in late 1914, even by editors who had been his colleagues and friends, Shaw blazed the trail of modern democratic journalism. The result was that within months of *Common Sense About the War's* publication, fellow Dubliner Lord Northcliffe, a journalist who owned numerous popular London papers including *The Times*, set aside his early War patriotic propaganda and followed Shaw's example of criticizing and questioning the government's inept war policies and practices.

Shaw's role in New Journalism from the 1880s into and through the Great War, reflected, even more directly than his plays at times, the modernizing movement which led the way to modernism, particularly as the horrors of the war affirmed Shaw's war journalism. A greater social awareness, whether fully informed or not, emerged for readers by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a readership far more numerous than in any previous historical period due to the greater levels of literacy, and which led to greater social debate. That debate was undoubtedly enriched by Shaw who cut through the popular jumbled directions of London's mainstream press. When the press and developments required Shaw's direct and immediate commentary, he responded in London's mainstream papers. When corporal punishment in the British navy was raised by a correspondent to the London *Times* in 1904, Shaw entered the debate through a series of letters denouncing naval floggings. The debate was taken up by a vice admiral, who dismissed Shaw as "feeble minded" (Ford, "Notes," 41). Shaw responded: "I submit to your correspondents, without the smallest

respect, that all this is claptrap, good enough, perhaps, for a nautical melodrama in an island booth, but out of place in a serious discussion.” Shaw struck to the truth about flogging as a naval discipline: “The radical objection to flogging is not its cruelty, but the fact that it can never be cleared from the suspicion that it is a vicious sport disguised as reformatory justice” (“Flogging in the Navy,” 41–42). Indeed.

Whether commenting on major and vicious or dangerous developments, or commenting on the more mundane, Shaw’s journalism was powerful, direct, immediate, and always the deliverer of truth and reason, with the intent of instilling the same into the greater public toward a more socially just society. It was a journalism that advocated a modernizing world with modernizing social values.

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Stead and the Whitechapel Frenzy

In November 1914, three months after the Great War had commenced, Bernard Shaw published his *Common Sense About the War* as a supplement to the *New Statesman*.¹ Representing Shaw's great and sane response to the British patriotic jingoism that was overpowering public thought in Britain once war had been declared through a questionable British foreign policy, the article was prompted by Shaw's dutiful attempt to present reason to a hysterical, if patriotic, British public. In essence, it was an effort to stir, once again, an hysterical public toward rational consideration—all in an attempt to provoke social change.

In the opening paragraph of *Common Sense About the War*, Shaw states, "I shall retain my Irish capacity for criticizing England with something of the detachment of a foreigner, and perhaps, with a certain slightly malicious taste for the taking the conceit out of her" (*Common Sense* 16). Thirty years later, in the throes of a second world war, Shaw ended a letter to Sydney Cockerell by similarly explaining himself: "I am an Irish Londoner; but retain my Irish citizenship and nature, and am still a foreigner with an objective view (invaluable) of England, that 'distressful country' in whose public service I am a missionary" (*Collected Letters, IV*, 725). In the same letter, written when he was eighty-eight years old, Shaw related his views on a London monument to his career: "What I should like as a London monument is a replica on the Embankment of the full length statue of me in my platform pose as an orator by Troubetskoy, which is now in the National Gallery in Dublin" (*Letters, IV*, 724). In other words, Shaw

preferred a monument to Shaw the public commentator, rather than merely a monument to Shaw the dramatist.

Shaw's plays, of course, were part of his public role as the intellectual critic of British society, but they only began to surface after Shaw's public activism had been established, evolving through public lectures, essays, and letters to the press. Finding his voice in the mid-1880s through the Fabian Society and his own developing socialism, Shaw—as the Irish foreigner—emerged as the objective and reasoned critic within London. The 1880s were a decade in which Michael Holroyd notes, Shaw “laboriously perfected his technique” (*Letters, I*, 193). Shaw's emergence in the 1880s coincided with the onslaught of the “new journalism.” In fact, Shaw later recalled of his early journalism: “think of me as heading one of the pioneer columns of what was then called *The New Journalism*” (*Autobiography*, 220). Archibald Henderson concurs that Shaw was among the young journalists in the 1880s who “rose up in revolt against academicism in [writing] style,” and helped to usher in the New Journalism (Henderson, 199). This label for the new type of journalism, solidified in the 1880s, was penned by Matthew Arnold in a May 1887 article criticizing the Irish Home Rule Movement, as led by Irish Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell, and introduced in 1886 as a failing Bill to Parliament by the recent Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone. Arnold saw similarities between Home Rule supporters in Britain—namely Liberal Party supporters—and the audience for the new journalism. Arnold defined both as being “featherbrained” (qtd. in Schults, 29). While not naming the editor, Arnold inferred that the new journalism had been invented by W. T. Stead.

In 2001, L. Perry Curtis reflectively argued that the new journalism, or, more to the point, the new type of news reporting in the 1880s had its roots earlier in the nineteenth century in crime reporting, and stipulated that Stead instead expanded sensational and shock journalism far beyond what had been the norm in nineteenth-century London journalism (Curtis, 79). The pre-Stead sensational journalism, the norm as the middle classes grew and working-class literacy was furthered, had emerged through crime reporting that had developed from roughly 1830 to 1880, which increasingly focused on violence; the results of which were often recounted in detailed press reports on autopsies. All of such contributed to a press and public fascination with murder and violence, even leading some individuals to “travel miles to visit the murder site and wander around in search of a souvenir to take home” (Curtis, 69). Coinciding with these developments was the onslaught of newspaper reporting on “ship and train wrecks, great

fires, exploding boilers, military battles,” all facilitating the fascination with violent death or maiming as industrialization grew beyond mid-century (Curtis, 69). But in expanding sensationalizing journalism into lurid details and graphic titillation under eye-grabbing headers for leaders, Stead pioneered the mass production of modern sensationalism and shock to match the late nineteenth-century technological advancements in printing presses (Curtis, 62). No longer were columns of print presented in one universal and conforming font. Furthermore, in casting off the old practices of “printing long transcripts from a trial” in favor of summarizing “the proceedings and then describing the leading actors in the courtroom,” Stead helped to introduce a style of journal writing that spoke to middle- and working-class readers—eradicating the academic style of impersonal and standoffish writing (Curtis, 62). While Shaw assisted in furthering the new writing style, the shock aspect of Stead’s journalism was decidedly not the direction of Shaw’s early journalism (Curtis, 61, 79). But as David Bowman asserted, “it was impossible [for Shaw] to escape him: Stead was the nosiest and most prolific journalist in London” from the 1880s to his death three decades later (Bowman, 29).

In fact, in 1885, one year after the young Shaw joined the Fabian Society in London, and a year after Stead’s journalism changed the British Empire’s annual navy expenditure, Stead, as the relatively new editor of London’s evening daily *The Pall Mall Gazette*, “achieved notoriety by exposing the silent horrors of child prostitution in London” (Curtis, 79).² In addition to selling newspapers, Stead fashioned himself as a social crusader, which perhaps was his most significant attribute—coming to the fore as radicals, socialists, and anarchists were advocating social and revolutionary change. It was to be a decade of modernizing movement—and horror.

STEAD, NAVY, PROSTITUTION, RIOT, AND SHAW

In 1884, shortly after becoming editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Stead commenced a series of articles on September 15, 1884 known as “The Truth about the Navy.” The series had been prompted by Prime Minister William Gladstone’s effort to reduce the British Navy’s annual budget—an issue which had divided Gladstone’s Liberal cabinet. In the series’ first article, Stead wrote:

The scramble for the world has begun in earnest. In the face of that phenomenon how far are we able to prevent our own possessions being scrambled by

our neighbours? The answer to that question depends upon the condition of our navy. If it [the British Navy] is as strong as it ought to be, we have nothing to fear. If, on the other hand, it is no longer in a position of incontestable superiority to the navies of the world, we are in a position of peril too grave to be capable of exaggeration. Not only our Imperial position, but the daily bread of twenty millions out of thirty millions of our population depends entirely upon our dominion of the sea. If that is lost, or even endangered, our existence is at stake. (qtd. in Schults, 91)

To avoid any confusion as to his and his paper's political allegiance, Stead argued that the Liberal Party was "in a better position to build up the navy than the Conservatives [Conservative Party] . . . [being that] Liberals were the free-trade party, which needed the navy to survive" (Schults, 91). Two days later, Stead devoted six prominent pages of the paper to his navy campaign, with sensational headers to his leaders as: "A STARTLING REVELATION" and "THE TRUTH ABOUT THE NAVY" (qtd. in Schults, 92). Facts were stretched and used by Stead's emerging brand of journalism for popular effect.

Stead proceeded by suggesting in his navy series that Britain was no longer keeping pace with naval spending when compared to Germany, France, Russia, and Italy (Schults, 92). As the age of steel ships had arrived, as well as modern propelled torpedoes, Stead claimed that in these areas, Britain was woefully underfunded: "If France is rich enough to pay for her glory, is England not rich enough to pay for her insurance?" (qtd. in Schults, 93). By relentlessly pressing his navy series through September and October—even to December—1884 by playing on, even creating, the British public's fear of being vulnerable to attack, the public was gradually moved and Gladstone was forced to increase naval spending. Stead quickly noted: "I have never written anything in my life [to then] which produced so immediate and so overwhelming an effect on public opinion" (qtd. in Schults, 101). This early success for Stead created and fed a quest for altering and leading the general British public into directions he selected—a dangerous and/or marvelous precedent had been set for democratically leaning Britain. To a young, newly proclaimed Fabian socialist, Stead's gradual but quick success in altering public opinion must have been very attractive—it certainly had to be noted.

The success of Stead's navy series was based on his movement toward sensationalizing public fear, especially with regard to the navies of fellow European countries (whether true or not in 1884) and England's historical

tradition of a strong navy. The very real result was one step toward British militarization and another toward British animosity directed at its European neighbors. In other words, Stead, through a series of newspaper articles, had helped to nudge Britain into a European arms race; the impact of which would have horrific results decades into the modern age, something that an established and successful Shaw would remember well. The power and danger of modern journalism in a free press had arrived. The young Shaw needed to get to work.

Shaw joined the reviewing staff of *The Pall Mall Gazette* in May 1885, months after Stead's navy articles, mostly reviewing popular novels of little literary value (Holroyd, *I*, 205). Two months later, in July, Stead ran a new series of articles that made him the most well-known journalist in London, under the banner of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." The young Shaw may have felt at the time that there was no better paper to be affiliated with, especially if Stead were to use his paper's growing popular power for a worthy social cause, which then seemed to be at hand.

The Babylon series on the surface exposed child prostitution within London, and raised the collective bourgeois awareness of prostitution. The articles also established Stead's self-promoted role as social crusader—and dramatically increased sales for the paper. His articles detailed how a 13-year-old girl from the East London tenements was purchased for £5 from her mother, removed from her home, chloroformed and inspected to confirm virginity, and then deposited into a brothel. Competing editor Frank Harris, of the *Evening News*, who would also eventually utilize sensationalized journalism (but for conservative causes), criticized Stead's first installment of the Babylon series. Harris asserted that Stead's "atrocious and filthy forms of vice—vice so horrible that probably 99 out of a 100 are unaware of its existence, even supposing that it *does* exist anywhere except in the writer's putrid imagination," should not be publicized (qtd. in Holroyd, *I*, 326). The insinuation, of course, was that Stead was unashamedly using child prostitution, and maybe fabricating its existence, to sell papers. The next day, Stead ran a header "To Our Friends the Enemy" (qtd. in Schults, 191). While the 1885 Shaw was apparently quickly drawn in by Stead's crusade, a more developed Shaw in 1894 borrowed and adapted Stead's leader line response to Harris' condemnation for his play *Arms and the Man*: in Act II when the foolish and conventionally over-romantic Sergius discovers Bluntchli's presence, he proclaims, "Welcome, our friend the enemy!" (*Complete Plays*, III, 164). Of course, Harris had a point as Stead's new series was sensationalism and shock to the hilt, as evidenced by Stead's

typical headers for the articles: “Why the Cries of the Victims are not Heard,” “Strapping Girls Down,” “I Order Five Virgins,” and “A Child of 13 Bought for £5” (qtd. in Robinson, 88). But Stead was making bourgeois Londoners aware of prostitution as a social problem of abuse that was thriving under London’s respectable surface.

Stead’s exposé of an insidious form of slavery, which he often depicted graphically, was at first heralded by numerous Fabians and radicals, despite the lurid details. Arguably, it was the realization of the London prostitution system that moved some radicals at first. Brad Kent remarks that Shaw was “horrified” by the described events (Kent, xxiii). In 1925 Stead’s biographer Frederic Whyte quoted a letter Shaw wrote to Stead during the 1885 sensationalism stirred up by the Babylon series: “If a practical protest is needed, I am quite willing to take as many quires [*sic*] of the papers as I can carry and sell them . . . in any thoroughfare in London” (qtd. in Whyte, 304–305). Stead’s exposé had raised so much public uproar, Parliament suddenly and quickly passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which had been under discussion and review for three years prior to Stead’s series (Robinson, 74). The Act raised the age of female consent from thirteen to sixteen years of age and increased penalties for streetwalkers and brothel-keepers who violated the law (Kent, xxiii). Stead had raised London middle-class awareness of prostitution and moved the government into action, which was more than the numerous medical studies on prostitution had done in the 1850s that focused on the economic crisis that fed prostitution.³ Stead and his new journalism had seemingly carried the day with regard to a social crisis. It was the second time Stead had managed to shape public opinion that led to government action—an extraordinary and impressive achievement that was not lost on Shaw in 1885. However, it soon became evident that Stead’s exposé of child prostitution was, as Shaw called it when reflecting in 1924, “a put-up job, and that he [Stead] himself had put it up” (qtd. in Whyte, 304–306).

When the mother of the featured 13-year-old child in Stead’s series tried to find her daughter, with the help of police and rival journalists from *Lloyd’s Illustrated Newspaper*, the child was located in France. Stead had staged the entire scenario, from hiring a supposedly reformed brothel-keeper through the Salvation Army who purchased the child with Stead’s money, then took the child through the various steps, including delivering her to a brothel. The child, Lily in Stead’s articles, was actually named Eliza Armstrong. Stead had arranged most of the scenario with the Salvation Army’s Chief of Staff Bramwell Booth. After the brothel stop, Eliza was taken to France

by a Salvation Army woman, arranged by Booth, and placed in domestic service far removed from her family in East London (Weightman; Robinson, 84).

Stead was arrested, tried, and convicted of abduction as the mother claimed she thought her daughter would be returned. Shaw, again in 1924, recalled that once the truth was known, “Nobody ever trusted him [Stead] after . . . such a betrayal in our confidence in him” (qtd. in Whyte, 304). Of course, the Salvation Army’s role in the Babylon scenarios, in the realm of theoretical salvation through the questionable means of Stead’s sensationalism, provided some fodder for Shaw’s 1905 *Major Barbara*. And in the 1913 *Pygmalion*, as Gavin Weightman outlines, Shaw replicated Eliza Armstrong’s purchase for £5 through Professor Higgins purchasing Eliza Doolittle for the same amount from her father—who never asks Higgins what he is going to do with Eliza. Perhaps the father merely assumes the sexual use and assumes she will be returned (Weightman). Furthermore, the middle-class indignation Stead had generated against prostitution fed the 1893 *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, where Shaw refined that indignation, which was based on morality, by expressing dialogue in Act II on the economics that lead to prostitution. However, plays from Shaw were still years away, and in 1887 Stead returned after his imprisonment to *The Pall Mall Gazette* and shock journalism, where he could only generate more popular attention.

Following his release, Stead’s popularity and reputation, while tarnished among some socialists, remained intact for most middle-class Londoners, who remained outraged at the depravity of prostitution but failed to appreciate the economic realities that forced a person into it in the first place. Stead pushed forward and still on occasions leaned to the left, perhaps courting socialists back to his side. He published a letter written to the editor, himself, by Shaw on February 23, 1887, which argued that evicted unemployed Londoners suffered as much, or more than evicted rural Irish laborers. Shaw was drawing on the recent Glenbeigh evictions in County Kerry, Ireland, and pointed out that while there was some bourgeois sympathy in the London press and public for the evicted Irish, there was no expressed sympathy for evicted unemployed London laborers. Shaw’s pseudonymous letter, signed Jesse Dodd, is written as a London laborer, claiming that “it is enough to make us go to the socialists” and closes with: “Sir, if you suppress this letter to please persons in high stations, you are not the man I take you for” (“Evictions,” 5). The argument of the letter would be echoed, comically, by the British Hodson, of East London origins, in Act