Chapter One
Shaw and the Language of Theatre

Everybody knows that language, in the written and spoken forms, is a very flexible and subtle mode of communication. But just as the poet's language is different from the critic's, so the language of a dramatist is distinct from that of the orator and the preacher, since the former is designed to enable actors to 'impersonate' different characters, to express the feelings, ideas, actions and reactions of other persons. G.L. Evans says:

The language of a play, on the page, has, like music, to be 'interpreted' by actors and directors before it is deemed to be in the correct condition for us to experience it. (3)

The language of drama is often to be distinguished from the language of theatre. Since the theatre-language consists of components like stage sets, costumes, lighting, sound, and — the 'ingenuity of interpretation' by the director, it is at the command of the director's will, rather than at the command of the playwright's (or actor's) intention (the playwright is often taken to be 'dead').

Any critical assessment of Bernard Shaw as 'a playwright extraordinary' must reveal the profundity of his treatment of subject-matter as well as his genuine concern for the improvement of the techniques of the theatre itself. Shaw has been able to procure a permanent berth in the arena of modern theatre by virtue of his tireless experimentation with innovative theatrical matters and his inimitable 'style' of dramaturgy. Shaw in his Preface to Immaturity asserted: "I have never aimed at style in my life: style is a sort of melody that comes into my sentences by itself" (CP 677). But the Shavian drama has a style of its own, which is both a melody and a message — a fusion of rhythm and verbal communication, constituting what may be described as the authentic Shavian voice. This is evident not only in his major plays like Man and Superman and Heartbreak house, but also in the earlier ones, such as Arms and the Man, and Candida.
Theatre is a much more comprehensive concept than drama. Theatre incorporates such items as stage, lighting, music, costume, setting, a written 'text', living actors, and above all, a director and audience. The basic function of theatre is to communicate a comprehensive aesthetic experience to the audience, and in order to achieve this mission, the playwright has to evolve his own 'idiom.' This involves a lot of innovations in terms of theatre techniques. So, it is an integrated enterprise, which needs genuine sincerity and integration on behalf of the trio — playwright, actor/director and audience. In a modern theatrical world the audience is not simply a passive recipient, but an active participant, sometimes to create new meanings of the theatre itself. And therefore when Abraham Tauber observes that "very many people know GBS because of his activities and writings on the subject of language" (XVII), a lover of the Shavian theatre supports it, because he finds that one half of Shaw the dramatist is still under a shroud of neglect. In fact, Shaw felt a hauntingly disturbed passion for language, almost for seventy-five years of creative production. This is supported by his own confession in the Preface to The Miraculous Birth of Language (1948): "My own profession is, technically, that of a master of language" (112), although he does not forget to remind us that he is "not a professor of language: I am a practitioner, concerned with its technique more directly than with its origin" (114).

By the middle of 1880s Shaw realized that "the novel was an unsuitable literary medium for him" — an experience which proved fruitful for initiating him into drama. The novel with its thick verbal substance requires a slow narrative mode, but Shaw's 'arrow-like mind' works too fast for him. So A.C.Ward rightly comments:

Since a speaker is able to cover in an hour what might occupy a novelist for a whole week, the spoken rather than the written word was surely Bernard Shaw's foreordained medium. . . . The playwright's art consists particularly in the ability to provide actors with speakable words and the audience with words that are immediately intelligible. A novelist need only provide readable words.
Shaw was more prone to the 'speakable' words. For this he subjected himself to rigorous self-training for public speaking on the platforms of the Fabian Socialists, after he joined the group and believed in their political and economic ideology. In drama, ideological themes require to be expressed in euphonious phraseology to be rightly spoken by actors and to be immediately grasped by the audience. This constitutes what may be called 'the art of the spoken word,' the verbal component of theatre idiom, which Shaw was aspiring to achieve. Even practised playwrights have failed in it, so that their dialogues fail to come naturally from the actors' mouth. On the contrary, Shaw's dialogues 'are always easy on the actors' tongues, and therefore on the listeners' ears also; and their content is rich and ample and intellectually rewarding. His ideas are absorbed even by unready hearers.' (A.C. Ward 18)

Shaw has established himself as a great dramatist by trying to shed off the poetic effusions in him and to retain the real energy of poetry and its flavour in his language. In Candida, he endows Eugene with poetic sensibilities, but does not allow him to utter any poetry, although there are several emotional scenes or exchange of words between Candida and the young poet, particularly in the third Act, in which Eugene's reading of poetry to Candida is deliberately presented as something inaudible, probably to remind us of the Keatsian concept of 'unheard' melodies being sweeter.

In one sense, Shaw's plays may be treated as the fore-runners of the theatre of the absurd, but unlike Beckett, Shaw evolves a dramatic language which does not utilise the power of silence in a play to any significant extent. His is not the minimalist theatre of Beckett. He makes his characters talk too much — they are never at a loss for words. Words occupy a significant place in the dramaturgic world of Shaw, for his declared purpose is to teach and preach — to convert people to his own ideas.

Throughout his dramatic career Shaw has maintained the purity of the language, so much so that he does not indulge in any slang or abusive words, even when his characters are angry or excited. Here he differs from Osborne, though he may also be called an angry young man of his own time. In fact, Shaw maintains the
Victorian accomplishment of polished language, the need of which is hardly felt by Osborne.

Primarily a comic writer, indebted to the Restoration comic playwrights, Shaw indulges in witty and humorous speeches in his plays. His approach to his characters is apparently not psychological, but rather sociological and philosophical. In his highly philosophical play *Man and Superman*, we find that philosophical order is made subordinate to the “poetically-oriented development” of language (Berst 295). For example, the monologues of Tanner are among the most gripping aspects of Shavian discussion, forming a part of a complex dramatic texture.

II

As a theatre craftsman Shaw has utilised comedy as a weapon to shock his audience out of their complacency — something which he found wanting in the nineteenth century well-made plays. In his article “Playhouses and Plays” (1926) Shaw postulates that “A theatre is therefore regarded as a palace of enchantment, but not as a prosaically comfortable place” (178). It is a place to disturb and convert the audience to his own views and visions. A serious follower of the Ibsenite naturalistic theatre, Shaw relied on ‘discussion’ on the stage to drive his points home, keeping the audience always intellectually alert. In this context, Stanley Weintraub in the essay “The Avant-Garde Shaw” could easily label him as an avant-garde playwright who has been much ahead of his time: “the Shavian canon has remained remarkably alive — even advanced — while theatre fashions come and go and yesterday’s avant-garde becomes today’s fashion or fades from view” (343). Weintraub concludes, “Perhaps he was only as avant-garde as Aristophanes” (345). Shaw is never a die-hard realist (as he is very often accused to be), rather is one who can endow his stage-figures with
maximum amount of self-knowledge to have their individual life and vocabulary — it is not the vocabulary of their creator alone. Shaw confesses in the article "Mr Shaw on Mr Shaw":

Neither have I ever been what you call a representationist or realist. I was always in the classic tradition, recognizing that stage characters must be endowed by the author with a conscious self-knowledge and power of expression. (185)

But it is beyond doubt that it is his contact with real life that forms very often the basic contents in most of his plays. It is his sincere interest in life and human nature that has prompted him to state in "A Dramatic Realist to His Critics" (1894):

I created nothing; I invented nothing; I imagined nothing; I perverted nothing; I simply discovered drama in real life. (38)

The Shavian realism embodies an accurate view of the social as well as the psychological situation with characters defined by both. He found the conventional drama inadequate as a medium to embody any idea that might move the audience with an illumination of life. Bernard F. Dukore has judiciously pointed out Shaw's stance:

Shaw tried to dramatize the essential part of life and the psychology of people, rather than the factitious consequences or the put-up jobs. (12).

As a practitioner of theatre language, Shaw belongs to the long tradition of Greek and Latin rhetoricians who appreciated the reformative power of language, in which Shaw has been an ardent believer. Shaw always wants to give people 'new speech' for the fulfilment of a sociological purpose. In a letter to Chesterton he makes his own point clear:

Dont forget that the race is only struggling out of its dumbness, and that it is only in moments of inspiration that we get out a sentence. All the rest is padding. (Collected Letters II 762, hereafter CL II)

Many critics have been led to believe that Shaw has used his drama only as a means to propagate his sociological and political ideas. In the process of such critical confusions they forget to see how Shaw continuously stresses the need for a new dramatic speech, new devices of theatre language. J.L.Evans actually refers to this critical confusion when he says, "It is not Shaw's language but his
political and sociological ideas and attitudes that gave his plays their astonishing currency" (39).

It is true that Shaw's plays gained tremendous popularity, particularly among the working class, mostly on account of their socio-political ideas. But the appeal or impact was not that of pamphleteering or street-corner speeches, rather of great dramatic art. It was created by Shaw's theatre idiom which could powerfully embody the socio-political ideas. The Shavian plays are sounds written and produced. They are not to be uttered but felt. Shaw is a 'prose dramatist' only in the superficial sense; his plays are 'poetic' in the sense that they require a fine poetic sensibility and feelings both for the performers and for the audience to grasp their real meaning. In the process he developed, particularly with inspiration from Ibsen, a new form of drama known as 'the discussion play.'

III

Shaw thinks that it was Ibsen who replaced the structure of the well-made play (i.e. the exposition, situation-denouement structure) with that of exposition-situation-discussion. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) Shaw describes it as a 'technical novelty' that characterizes the new drama. He shows how 'discussion' came to be recognised as the centre of interest – with 'discussion' producing 'action', or 'action' producing 'discussion', or 'discussion' interpenetrating the 'action' from start to finish in a play. Gradually 'discussion' came to be more widely used in the post-Ibsen drama, not only as a technical feature, but evolving into what came to be known as the Discussion Play. Shaw explains – "the introduction of the discussion and its development until it so overspreads and interpenetrates the action that it finally assimilates it, making play and discussion practically identical" (*Major Critical Essays* 172, hereafter *MCL*).
On a later occasion Shaw refers to the birth of the Discussion Play from Nora’s comment at the end of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* – “We must sit down like two rational beings and discuss all this that has been happening between us.” Though ‘discussion’ as a feature develops at the end of both *A Doll’s House* and also of Shaw’s *Candida* through the initiative of Nora and Candida, this need not be taken as a regular feature, and ‘discussion’ spreads itself over the whole play. The audience and readers understand that incidents and situations in the Discussion Play are ‘only pretences’ and what is interesting is the way the characters feel and argue about those incidents and situations. Shaw says:

> In *A Doll’s House* and *Candida* you have action producing discussion; in *The Doctor’s Dilemma* you have discussion producing action, and that action being finally discussed. . . . Sometimes, as in *Getting Married* and *Misalliance*, the whole play, though full of incident, is a discussion and nothing else.


For a play to be a real Discussion Play, ‘discussion’ must be woven into its very fabric. Dukore rightly distinguishes between a play employing discussions and a real Discussion Play, which evolves greater complexity of using ‘discussion.’ He says:

> Just as the employment of melodramatic elements does not necessarily make a play a melodrama, neither does the employment of discussions make it a discussion play. . . . it is their close connection, loose connection, or lack of connection to a plot – or situation, to use Shaw’s term – that provides the key distinction between a play with discussions and a discussion play. (53-54)

Shaw’s Discussion Plays as well as the discussions employed in his plays exemplify the various aspects and dimensions of the verbal components of his theatre idiom. It is generally believed that *Arms and the Man* (1894) is pronouncedly an anti-romantic play where humour or laughter is purposely employed to deflate romantic ideas of love and war. Yet it is a misreading of the play to stamp it as totally anti-romantic and anti-heroic. Shaw tries to keep a fine balance of tones in its production, as shown in his words of advice to the producers of the play:
unless the general effect of the play is thoroughly genial and good-humored, it will be unbearably disagreeable. The slightest touch of malicious denigrement or cynicism is fatal. If the audience thinks it is being asked to laugh at human nature, it will not laugh. If it thinks it is being made to laugh at insincere romantic conventions which are an insult to human nature, it will laugh very heartily. The fate of the play depends wholly on the clearness of this distinction. (Gibbs 69)

Though in *Arms and the Man* military valour is presented in an unheroic image of Bluntschli fleeing the battlefield, the play does not denigrate the human spirit of courage. What is denigrated is the insincere romantic conventions about military heroism as well as Higher Love. Both these conventional ideas are personified in the character of Sergius. Raina worships both these ideas. When the two meet, they both attitudinize talking in higher tones:

SERGIUS. . . . You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking down at him!

RAIN. And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment.

[Very solemnly] Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.

SERGIUS. My lady and my Saint! [He clasps her reverently]

RAIN. [returning his embrace] My lord and my—

SERGIUS. Sh—sh! Let me be the worshipper, dear. You little know how unworthy even the best man is of a girl's pure passion! (Act II, 105).

We have seen in Act I how the unexpected entry of Bluntschli into her bedroom at night has started the process of de-romanticizing Raina about Sergius and generating sympathy for the exhausted Bluntschli — "Dont, mamma: the poor darling is worn out. Let him sleep." We know how Raina and her mother (Catherine) send Bluntschli off next morning in the safe guise of Petkoff's coat. When Sergius comes back in the glory of victory, both Raina and Sergius continue their romantic attitudinization. Immediately afterwards, Sergius tries to make love to the maidservant Louka, confessing to her that higher love is a "very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time."

The dramatic processes of de-romanticization and re-romanticization, which constitute the total theatre effect of *Arms and the Man*, are carried through most
successfully by Shaw’s use of ‘anticlimax’, which Eric Bentley describes as “the Shavian ‘effect’ par excellence” (63). Shaw employs anticlimax to expose Sergius through his anticlimactic approaches to Louka, and also exposes Raina through her anticlimactic self-realisation. The whole thing is done through the dialectics of language. The process starts with Raina’s attitudinization of having told ‘only two lies’ in her whole life, and Bluntschli’s daring to question it:

RAINAJ[staring haughtily at him] Do you know, sir, that you're insulting me?
BLUNTSCHLI. I can't help it. When you strike that ~: noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say.
RAINAJ[superbly] Captain Bluntschli!
BLUNTSCHLI[unmoved] Yes?
RAINAJ[standing over him, as if she could not believe her senses] Do you mean what you said just now? Do you know what you said just now?
BLUNTSCHLI. I do.
RAINAJ[gasping] I! I!!! [She points to herself incredulously, meaning “I, Raina Petkoff tell lies!” He meets her gaze unflinchingly. She suddenly sits down beside him, and adds, with a complete change of manner from the heroic to a babyish familiarity] How did you find me out? (Act III, 113)

"With this last query," Eric Bentley rightly comments, "Raina passes over forever from Sergius's world to Bluntschli's." This has been the result not of any incidents, “but of words, words, words” (62). It is clear from this example that dramatic action need not always be external. Shaw’s idiom operates as powerful ‘action’ through the inner workings of a character’s mind. The Shavian drama, we understand, is “all words just as Raphael’s paintings were all paint” (62). Through such wonderful uses of anticlimax as a linguistic weapon Shaw destroys the romantic pedestal of Raina and Sergius. It is again through the same weapon that Bluntschli the realist (who keeps chocolates instead of cartridges in the battlefield and runs away like an anti-hero to save his own skin) is proved to be ‘incurably romantic.’ It is Raina who establishes the point – “I quite agree with your account of yourself. You’re a romantic idiot. Next time I hope you will know the difference between a schoolgirl of seventeen and a woman of twenty-three.”
Shaw employs descriptive directions which may appear to be strenuous for the reader and also to be no sign of advancement for theatrical success, because theatre is more suggestive and less descriptive. There is a fine fusion of reality and fantasy in his dramatic presentations which speak for him as a playwright with a supersensitive power of imagination. But actually such directional descriptions become a special "idiom" for Shaw, which help the actors perform their roles well. They are to keep the playwright alive in their mind (consciously or unconsciously), because Shaw is never "dead" in the actual theatrical world. Shaw has his own reasons for such directions as found in his article "How to Make Plays Readable" (1901): "A dramatist's business is to make the reader forget the stage and the actor forget the audience" (95). Shaw's prose in the stage directions is never "cold stuff," as alleged by Arthur Symons (qtd. in G.L. Evans 50). Shaw is perhaps so emotionally involved in a particular dramatic situation that he persistently directs the characters to speak in a specific manner and gives such indications in parenthesis. This happens so frequently that it also gains a special significance to heighten the effects of theatre idiom. Shaw the playwright and Shaw the director are intermingled. In this connection we may refer to Gareth Lloyd Evans's observation that "the language itself, in dialogue form, embodies the direction" (51) and fulfils all the dramatic requirements like mood, tone and disposition. This point may be illustrated in the following dialogue from *Widowers' Houses* with the directional descriptions:

TRENCH. Oh, that's nonsense. No one will accuse you of marrying for money.

BLANCHE. No one would think the worse of me if I did, or of you either. [She rises and begins to walk restlessly about]. We really cannot live on seven hundred a year, Harry; and I don't think it quite fair of you to ask me merely because you are afraid of people talking.

TRENCH. It's not that alone, Blanche.

BLANCHE. What else is it, then?
TRENCH. Nothing. I—

BLANCHE [getting behind him, and speaking with forced playfulness as she bends over him, her hands on his shoulders] Of course it's nothing. Now don't be absurd, Harry: be good; and listen to me: I know how to settle it... You have seven hundred a year. Well, I will take just seven hundred a year from papa at first; and then we shall be quits... .

TRENCH. It's impossible.

BLANCHE. Impossible!

TRENCH. Yes, impossible. I have resolved not to take any money from your father.

BLANCHE. But he'll give the money to me, not to you.

TRENCH. It's the same thing. [With an effort to be sentimental] I love you too well to see any distinction. [He puts up his hand half-heartedly: she takes it over his shoulder with equal indecision. They are both trying hard to conciliate one another.] (Act II, 15)

Without the directional descriptions in brackets, the degree of tension intended to be shown between the two will not be intelligible to the readers, and the whole thing will render Shaw's prose dialogue theatrically 'cold stuff.' But such directional language is not absolutely necessary in all situations.

The experience of Shaw the novelist gave him creative insights which contributed to the development of Shaw the dramatist. This experience particularly helps him create characters with adequate descriptions, but it never hinders the objectification of dramatic situations and dramatic modes. The early plays of Shaw could not outgrow the influence of his novels, but the later ones show his tendency to depend on a cluster of different modes of expressions, including verbal techniques, by which he can take his theatre beyond realistic conventions, even into the world of fantasy.

Shaw has been a great manipulator of dramatic situations. Such situations very often revolve round a single word, creating tremendous tension in the audience:

And it is interesting to realize that all the more credit goes to Shaw, the technician, for so often producing situations in the common meaning of the word, in that he boldly and contemptuously tramples on all the most sacred principles of psychology involved traditionally in those situations. (Burton 254)
In *Candida* he manages a lot of tense situations with a technically perfect skill. Such situations revolve round single words like 'understand' and 'secret', keeping the audience in tension and thus heightening the mystery element of the play. This is also true in case of other plays where we find the combination of the trained hand and the cool craftsman's head resulting in the birth of a capable theatre artist.

The Shavian stage directions can be viewed as "side-texts" (David Birch 11), standing aloof from the main text. But such directions which do not have direct connection with the action of the play, are useful in accelerating the movement of the play. They are as much a part of the main text as the words assigned to characters and should not therefore be given a marginalised status as 'side-texts,' or 'sub-texts'. An interesting kind of stage direction, though apparently quite casual, becomes theatrically effective. In *Widowers' Houses* Trench, a young doctor, and Cokane, his young friend, during their touring visit at Remagen on the Rhine, came in close contact with a very rich man, Mr Sartorius, and his beautiful daughter Blanche. Both the parties are staying in a hotel. Trench and Blanche develop an intimate relationship. Sartorius becomes aware of it, and wants the affair to be settled in the form of an honorable marriage. As Trench and Cokane are talking in the garden lobby of the hotel, Sartorius approaches them. Cokane 'walks away', and Trench tries to evade too. But Sartorius intercepts him and discusses how to settle the question of marriage. He asks Trench to write to his family on the matter. Directional descriptions in this context show an interesting aspect of Shaw's theatre idiom:

SARTORIUS *rising* You will write today, I think you said?
TRENCH *eagerly* I'll write now, before I leave here: straight off.

SARTORIUS. I will leave you to yourself then. *He hesitates, the conversation having made him self-conscious and embarrassed; then recovers himself with an effort, and adds with dignity, as he turns to go* I am pleased to have come to an understanding with you. *He goes into the hotel; and Cokane, who has been hanging about inquisitively, emerges from the shrubbery*. 
TRENCH [excitedly] Billy, old chap: you're just in time to do me a favor...

(Act I, 7)

Shaw's directional descriptions here reveal his intended difference between the play as a reading text and the play as performed theatre. While reading it we experience a dramatic surprise in the sudden discovery that Cokane 'has been' lurking in the shrubbery, because (earlier in the scene) the text says—'He walks away.' The performed theatre, obviously, shows him walking away into the shrubbery. G. L. Evans therefore rightly comments:

Truly, as reader we get one kind of experience, as audience we get quite another. (54)

Such visual aspects of drama further justify Shaw's position as a dramatic artist. The 'visual dimensions' coming from stage-setting, costume, the physical appearance and movement of actors contribute to the creation of meaning. Cokane's sneaking into the shrubbery is an example of such visual representation. In Act I of You Never Can Tell (1897) the dentist's chair which the young lady patient in the opening scene calls 'toothache chair', produces an image of pain, and through this visual image, the playwright produces a comic effect by literally and metaphorically relating it to the dramatic action. This may be called 'the visual language of the theatre' (Gibbs 28), which Shaw employs very skillfully.

Although the later plays of Shaw show some inclination towards absurdity, both thematically and technically, the Shavian "language game" is something different from that of Beckett or Stoppard. Shaw believes in the construction of language, not its de-construction. Even in writing a fantasy like Heartbreak House, he relies on what may be called 'respectable' language. In his preface to The Millionairess, Shaw admits that World War I certainly created a "terrible moral shock," but he refuses to believe such feelings of chaos and anarchy in the aftermath of the War as inevitable results of the collapse of traditional values. Even in his early plays, such as, Widowers' Houses and Mrs Warren's Profession, based on burning social problems (slum-landlordism and prostitution), he shows awareness of "the abyss." Yet it is far-fetched to think of his plays as "fore-runners of the theatre of the absurd" (Dukore 218).
Shaw does not select a language which he finds impossible to perform, because language of theatre is different from just literary language in that it must be primarily "intelligible to the ear" and effectively "speakable by the mouth." Modern actors and directors have no faith in "the text" as a literary artifact. They do not believe that meaning is encoded into a text by an author. They want to be freed from the tyranny of the "text." Colin Counsell comments:

Theatre is a cultural space, and the existing blueprints for theatrical production that circulate within it provide the ideas and parameters within which practitioners knowingly or unknowingly think and work. (2)

V

It has been already noted that in this dissertation I have chosen to concentrate my focus on four major plays of Shaw—Candida (1894), Man and Superman (1903), Pygmalion (1913) and Heartbreak House (1916). In the process of elucidation and illustration of my theoretical perspective, I have also included plays like Widowers' Houses (1892) and Saint Joan (1923)—i.e. plays of the early and middle periods (and not of the later period) of Shaw's creative career. The main reason for my choice coincides with what A.M. Gibbs says:

The later plays command respect for their lively inventiveness and perceptive grappling with the key problems of twentieth-century Western societies. But it is the works of the early and middle periods of Shaw's career as a dramatist which seem likely to remain the most enduring monuments of his art and mind. (38)

The four plays under review have been analysed in the next chapters mainly from the perspective of the use of language. It has been argued that the special theatre idiom becomes the most effective medium to communicate Shaw's sociological and philosophical ideas in the plays. We may now look at some of his other plays to illustrate, and thereby to establish, this main premise.
In his first Unpleasant Play *Widowers' Houses* language based on commerce and property establishes sexual relations, family relations and even human relations. The engagement between Blanche and Trench is referred to as a “transaction” (Act I). Trench angrily protests at a later stage (Act III): “I wont have the relations between Miss Sartorius and myself made part of a bargain.” Trench’s awareness of the tainted sources of the money of Sartorius (owner of slum houses) leaves him into a dilemma between his love for Blanche and his hatred of her father’s tainted money.

In *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, Vivie, daughter of Mrs Warren, comes to learn at a crucial stage of her life that her higher education (she is a Mathematics graduate from Cambridge) and her lifestyle are all derived from the tainted income of her mother who was originally a prostitute herself and now the managing director of a big chain of brothels spread over the whole of Europe. Vivie is in a terrible predicament when she learns about her mother’s past towards the end of Act II. Vivie’s love for her mother is so deep that she allows herself to escape into an illusion of reconciliation with her mother in a moonlight scene. However, she gets out of it. But in Act III, under pressure of the unbearable burden of her awareness of the impossibility of continuing her relationship with Frank, the two lovers get into a make-believe world of romance and childhood innocence:

FRANK. The babes in the wood: Vivie and little Frank. [*He nestles against her like a weary child*]. Lets go and get covered up with leaves.

VIVIE [*rhythmically, rocking him like a nurse*] Fast asleep, hand in hand, under the trees.

FRANK. The wise little girl with her silly little boy.

VIVIE. The dear little boy with his dowdy little girl.

FRANK. Ever so peaceful, and relieved from the imbecility of the little boy’s father and the questionableness of the little girl’s—

VIVIE [*smothering the word against her breast*] Sh-sh-sh-sh! Little girl wants to forget all about her mother. (Act III, 80-81)

This is an example of how Shaw’s language becomes poetic and yet dramatically very evocative and effective, calling up not only a mother-child relationship but also the threat from the polluted adult world upon them. This scene immediately
leads to Vivie’s new awakening and self-assertion as a Shavian New Woman. Meanwhile, Shaw reveals the terrible darkness in human relationship when Crofts, her mother’s business partner and probably her progenitor, tries to entrap Vivie in a perverted romance. When Mrs Warren cautions him that it may be an incestuous relationship, Crofts, like Shelley’s Cenci, finds nothing to object to it: “How do you know that that maynt be one of the fascinations of the thing? What harm if she is?” Vivie finally rejects everything — the legacy of her polluted birth, her love with Frank and her mother:

MRS WARREN [taken aback] Right to throw away all my money!
VIVIE. No: right to get rid of you! I should be a fool not to! Isn’t that so?
MRS WARREN [sulkily] Oh well, yes, if you come to that, I suppose you are. But Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing! And now I’d better go than stay where I’m not wanted. [She turns to the door]
VIVIE [kindly] Wont you shake hands?
MRS WARREN [after looking at her fiercely for a moment with a savage impulse to strike her] No, thank you. Goodbye.
VIVIE. [matter-of-factly] Goodbye. [Mrs Warren goes out, slamming the door behind her. The strain on Vivie’s face relaxes; her grave expression breaks up into one of joyous content; her breath goes out in a half sob, half laugh of intense relief. She goes buoyantly to her place at the writing-table; pushes the electric lamp out of the way; pulls over a great sheaf of papers; and is in the act of dipping her pen in the ink when she finds Frank’s note. She opens it unconcernedly and reads it quickly, giving a little laugh at some quaint turn of expression in it]. And goodbye, Frank. [She tears the note up and tosses the pieces into the waste-paper basket without a second thought. Then she goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in its figures]. (92)

Major Barbara, which is a play “not so much about money as about power” (Wisenthal 61), starts with a theme similar to that of Mrs Warren’s Profession, but proceeds to explore far wider aspects of power derived from money. However, unlike Vivie who is able to renounce her mother’s polluted money, Stephen, the son of the ‘death merchant’ Mr Undershaft, only reacts with a sense of shock, but cannot totally reject, his father’s polluted money:

LADY BRITOMART. I must get the money somehow.
STEPHEN. We cannot take money from him. I had rather go and live in some cheap place like Bedford Square or even Hampstead than take a farthing of his money.

LADY BRITOMART. But after all, Stephen, our present income comes from Andrew.

STEPHEN [shocked] I never knew that.

LADY BRITOMART. Well, you surely didn't suppose your grandfather had anything to give me. The Stevenages could not do everything for you. We gave you social position. Andrew had to contribute something. He had a very good bargain, I think.

STEPHEN [bitterly] We are utterly dependent on him and his cannons, then?

(Act I, 463-64)

Shaw perhaps differentiates between the sense of morality of a middleclass Vivie and that of the aristocratic Stephen, for whom his father has finally to find out a suitable profession. The Shavian idiom is at its wittiest when Undershaft, in his attempt to keep Stephen away from his armament business, at first suggests that he must become a "politician" since like most politicians, he claims to know everything though he knows nothing, and finally suggests that he must be a "journalist" as he talks emphatically of the "character" of the English nation.

The Bill Walker episode reveals another important aspect of the play. He is a Cockney (like Eliza in *Pygmalion*). He invades the Salvation Army shelter in West Ham and roughs up the other poor workers, particularly Jenny. His 'woman' has had the audacity of joining the Salvation Army without his knowledge or permission and he has now come here to take her out of the shelter:

Nah are you gowin to fetch aht Mog Ebbijem; or em Aw to knock your fice off you and fetch her myself? (Act II)

Like Professor Higgins trying to transform Eliza into a better class of person, Barbara too undertakes the task of converting Bill Walker. But the process of conversion here is not through linguistic transformation of the cockney dialect into sophisticated English. She rather persistently prods his consciousness through moral-spiritual questioning to awaken a sense of guilt and repentance in
Bill for having hurt the innocent Salvation Army workers, particularly Jenny. “Theres a man in you somewhere, I suppose,” Barbara keeps on telling him. He gets so much conscience-stricken that he goes to the other Salvation Army shelter, where Mog carries out the missionary work with her new convert Todger Fairmail, the great wrestler and boxer, with the purpose of getting thrashed by the boxer that would be an even punishment for him. But there he finds Todger a totally changed person who, in spite of provocation by him, does not strike back and only preaches the Christian values of love and forgiveness. So Bill comes back here and offers one pound as compensation for having hurt Jenny. But Barbara refuses to accept this tainted money from this anti-social person. At that moment Barbara learns from Mrs Baines (the Salvation Army director) that the latter has accepted five thousand pounds from Undershaft as donation and also that the whole Salvation Army runs on donations from such arms and booze dealers. Bill, who has been almost on the point of conversion, gets out of Barbara’s grip by taunting: “Wot prawce selvytion nah?” (Act II). Barbara is shocked by this revelation of tainted money getting hold of even such missionary activities and tears off her Salvation Army badges. But Undershaft holds her back and finally converts her as well as her lover Professor Cusins to his own religion of money and gunpowder. Here the theatre idiom becomes a profoundly effective instrument. Undershaft’s argument is that his money has saved Barbara’s soul from “the seven deadly sins,” one of them being poverty which is also “the worst of crimes.” Gunpowder, that is, the deadly weapons he manufactures, together with money can provide “command of life and command of death.” All these constitute the means by which to bring about the desired change of society. He challenges Cusins — “Dare you make war on war?” A Dionysiac force expressed through Undershaft’s words compels both Cusins and Barbara to join the armament factory what they call the factory of death and destruction:

BARBARA... .My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. [She is transfigured]. I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God’s work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot
be done except by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my
debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank.
CUSINS. Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?
BARBARA... Never, never, never, never: Major Barbara will die with the
colors. Oh! And I have my dear little Dolly boy still; and he has found me
my place and my work. Glory Hallelujah! [She kisses him] (Act III, 503)
Here the three figures — Undershaft, Cusins and Barbara — join together.
Wisenthal rightly comments:
Nothing less than a fusion of all three will achieve the implicit goal of the play:
a nation of what Barbara would call the saved — a nation of fully developed
men and women. Cusins and Barbara without Undershaft would achieve no
significant results: political advance is impossible without weapons and
religious advance is impossible without money. Cusins and Undershaft without
Barbara would achieve ... only a nation of Philistines — an extension of the
society at the foundry. Barbara and Undershaft without Cusins would achieve
only a minority of the saved. (82)
Shaw’s *Saint Joan* is the story of the transformation of a teen-age girl into a
deliverer of her nation (French) from the British rule and subsequently, into a
supposed witch and a heretic. The play dramatises the tragedy of a seventeen-
year-old girl, Joan of Arc, who — in spite of her lack of education and military
training — led her country to victory in a series of battles, though total expulsion
of the English from France was yet to be completed. This achievement of Joan
was looked upon as a “diabolically inspired” (Cauchon’s words) act of a heretic
and a witch, and charges were framed against her accordingly. The long-drawn
process of Joan’s trial perpetrated what Shaw termed as one of the “judicial
murders” when she was burnt as a witch: “The tragedy of such murders is that
they are not committed by murderers. They are judicial murders, pious murders;
. . . the angels may weep at the murder, but the gods laugh at the murderers”
(Preface to *Saint Joan* 55).
Joan was sent to the stake mainly for the two kinds of heresies — one is
religious as the Earl of Warwick defines as “Protestantism”, that is, “the protest
of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the
private man and his God” (IV), and the other is “secular” as Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, interprets in the following words:

When she threatens to drive the English from the soil of France she is undoubtedly thinking of the whole extent of country in which French is spoken. To her, French-speaking people are what the Holy Scriptures describe as a nation. Call this side of her heresy Nationalism if you will. . . .(IV)

This interaction between the powers of the state and the Church authorities with John de Stogumber, the Cardinal of Winchester, conniving, foreshadows the fate of Joan (before the trial begins and she is arrested) and the final judgement to which these deliberations are preparatory. The Earl of Warwick is interested in making arrangements for the burning of Joan, and the Chaplain, bent on killing Joan, says excitedly: “I would burn her with my own hands.”

The pattern of words, therefore, evolves round the central image of ‘fire’ — both as a verbal and a non-verbal component, until it acquires a cluster of meanings to become a symbol (in Scene VI and the Epilogue) at the end. An example from Scene VI will illustrate the point.

In Scene VI Joan agreed to recant and sign a statement, and yet the authorities sentenced her to “perpetual imprisonment”, by which verdict, they claimed, she was now “set free from the danger of excommunication.” But Joan refused to accept this form of punishment and preferred instant death at the stake to a life term in prison, saying: “Light your fire.” As a result, she now faced the danger of excommunication which (decree) they solemnly “intone” immediately. Even before the official announcement of the sentence of excommunication, the Chaplain ordered the Executioner: “Light your fire, man. To the stake with her,” but Cauchon asked the soldiers to wait till the formalities were fulfilled. Then the Chaplain told the soldiers: “Into the fire with the witch” and rushed at her while Joan was being taken away to the courtyard. The stage direction is significant here, because “the glow and flicker of fire can now be seen reddening the May daylight,” that is, while Joan was encircled by flame at the stake and dying, that fire was seen, though at a distance and off stage, by the Inquisitor and Cauchon. ‘Fire’ thus becomes a non-verbal component.
But a few minutes later, the Chaplain is seen staggering in from the courtyard "frantically howling and sobbing" and kneeling to God, uttering a prayer:

O Christ; deliver me from this fire that is consuming me; she cried to thee in the midst of it; Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! She is in thy bosom; and I am in hell for evermore.

The use of 'fire' here acquires the symbolic meaning of the burden of sin and guilt in the consciousness of the Chaplain, who is now transformed into a conscious sinner undergoing the terrible purgatorial suffering or despair. He echoes Joan's prediction: "He wills that I go through the fire to His bosom; for I am His child."

We find that Shaw's plays illustrate his mastery of both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. His 'lucid, supple and robust dramatic prose' covers a great range of dramatic effects. In his comic dialogues his linguistic resources display the pungent wit of such moments as we find in the opening exchange between Tanner and Mendoza in *Man and Superman*:

MENDOZA [posing loftily] I am a brigand. I live by robbing the rich.

TANNER [promptly] I am a gentleman. I live by robbing the poor. Shake hands.

"The rhetorical virtuosity of Shaw's dramatic prose" is illustrated in many of his satirical tirades — such as those of the Devil and Don Juan (Man and Superman), of Undershaft (Major Barbara). Similarly, in the tirades of Napoleon (The Man of Destiny) we find brilliant rhythmical and syntactical harmonies which unify torrents of words that break into 'denunciatory statements.'

You will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle. He fights you on patriotic principles; he robs you on business principles; he enslaves you on imperial principles; he bullies you on manly principles; he supports his king on loyal principles and cuts off his king's head on republican principles.

Shaw has employed a lot of theatrical techniques for making his plays successful on the stage. He was a box office success without sacrificing his 'art' of theatre. He knows how to intermingle matter and manner of the theatre with a technique which is plastic to cater to the shifting demand of the audience. As Burton says:
Right or wrong as to the results, he knows the rules of the game, consciously alters or ignores them, chooses to do what he does, and takes the risks. (249)

Thus, Shaw has dexterously used both the verbal and non-verbal components of theatre. The audience can feel a psychological tension out of the action on the stage. Modern stage action is more psychological than physical and acrobatic. This is exemplified even in his fifth play *Candida* which is an ample proof of the Shavian theatre architecture creating enough tension in the audience with the help of the mystery aspect of the theatre language.
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