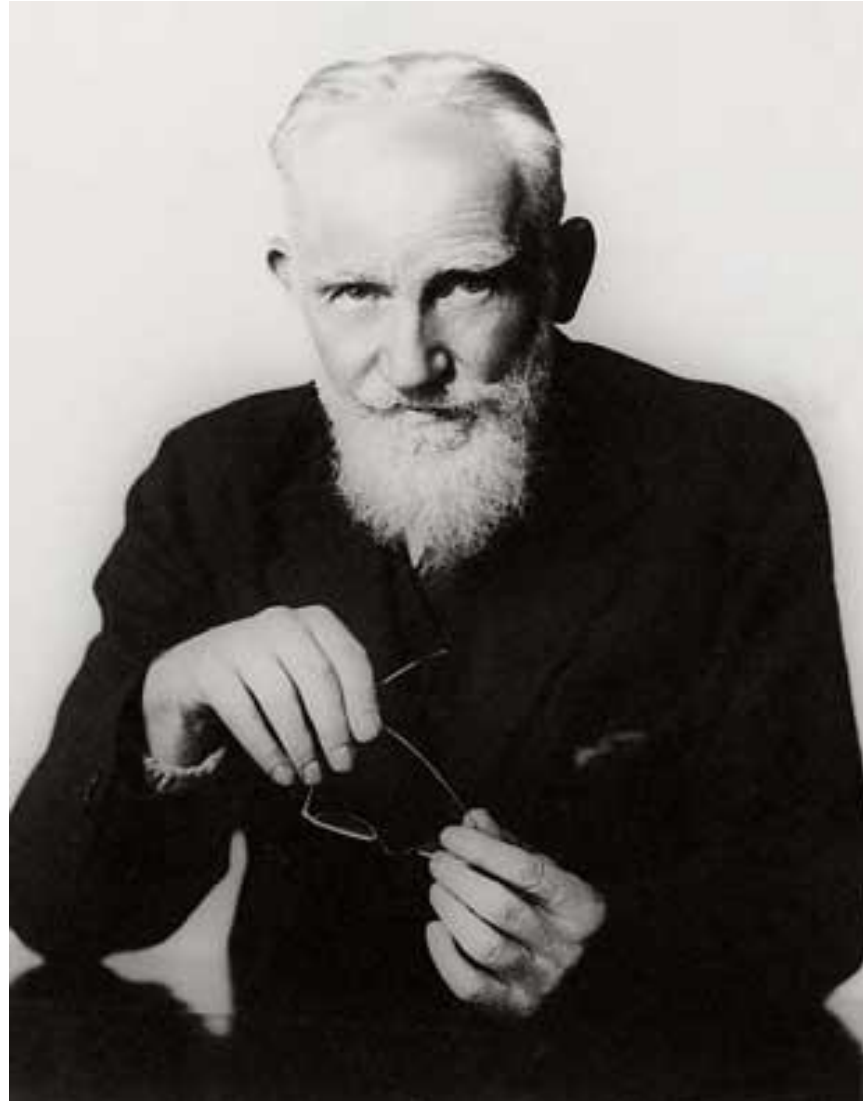


George Bernard Shaw **(1856 -1950)**



George Bernard Shaw

- The playwright, novelist, journalist, political activist, critic of literature and the arts was born in Dublin on 26 July 1856.
- His father was a civil servant and his mother a professional singer.
- The family belonged to the Protestant “ascendancy” (the landed Irish gentry).
- Bernard Shaw grew up in an atmosphere of genteel poverty.
- His education was irregular. He attended several schools. He disliked formal education which stifled the intellect and dulled the spirit.
- He started working in a land agent’s office at the age of 15.

George Bernard Shaw

- When he was 16, his mother left his father and followed her voice teacher to London. She took her two daughters with her, while Bernard Shaw remained with his father.
- In 1876 he joined them in London. In the following few years, Shaw frequented public libraries and spent his afternoons in the British Museum reading room in search of self-education.
- He started his literary career by writing novels. He wrote five novels between 1879 and 1883, but they were not well received.

George Bernard Shaw

- In 1884, he joined the Fabian Society (a middle-class socialist group dedicated to transforming Britain into a socialist state through systematic progressive legislation).
- Shaw was quite active with the Fabian Society. He delivered lectures and wrote several pamphlets.
- *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) presents Shaw as an advocate of the theatre of the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen's modern realistic drama influenced Shaw's playwriting.

George Bernard Shaw

- As a journalist, Shaw wrote music and theatre criticism.
- His musical columns in *The Star* and *The World* between 1888 to 1894 showed his good understanding of music.
- In 1895, Shaw became the drama critic for the *Saturday Review*. He made his mark in that position by using his wit and polemical powers to promote a theatre of important ideas to displace the artificialities of the Victorian stage.
- The London stage in the Victorian era had been regarded as a place for trivial, sentimental entertainment. Shaw considered the stage as a pulpit to discuss moral, political and economic issues (Some regard this as his most enduring and important contribution to dramatic art).
- In 1885, Shaw started to write his first play, *Widowers' House*, then abandoned the idea before returning to it to finish it in 1892. He went on to write over 60 plays.

George Bernard Shaw

- Shaw's experience and popularity as a playwright increased. In the first decade of the twentieth century he wrote plays that displayed his maturity such as *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) and *Pygmalion* (1912).
- Shaw intended to advocate reform through his plays, but that did not diminish their success as entertainments.
- Shaw's plays come with lengthy prefaces written by the playwright to express his views on the issues addressed in those plays. Sometimes the prefaces are longer than the plays they introduce.
- Shaw's views on war which were prompted by World War One nearly cost him his reputation. He was treated as an outcast for voicing his opinion. He strongly opposed the war which exposed the bankruptcy of the capitalist system and the tragic loss of young lives.

George Bernard Shaw

- Shaw managed to rebuild his reputation as a dramatist after the end of the war. He wrote *Back to Methuselah* (1921) and *Saint Joan* (1923).
- He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. Shaw accepted the award but rejected the monetary reward, requesting it be used to fund the translation of the works of playwright August Strindberg into English.
- In 1938, he won an Oscar for his work on the film adaptation of his play *Pygmalion*.