

**NOT**

**BLOODY**

**LIKELY**



Published by the National  
Gallery of Ireland / Art in the  
Contemporary World, NCAD

## Radical Concentration

Upon his death in 1950, George Bernard Shaw bequeathed a third of his royalties to the National Gallery of Ireland. For an author of Shaw's considerable fame (not to mention his astonishing and prolific output) this represented, at the time of his death, a not- inconsiderable gift. The subsequent adaptation of his 1913 stage play, *Pygmalion*, into a wildly successful Broadway musical, *My Fair Lady*, in 1956, and an even more wildly successful Hollywood movie in 1964, meant that this gift expanded significantly, giving Ireland an extraordinary budget for the purchase of art for its national collection. The Shaw Fund, and the related Shaw Archive, have been important resources and touchstones for the Gallery every since.

Shaw's copyright expired at the end of 2020. The bequest has come to an end. Emergence from copyright can be a moment for creative revisiting and reevaluating of an author's or artist's legacy, with new freedom to reflect upon, transform and appropriate their work. The materials assembled in this publication reflect this opportunity. They emerge from an MA module, devised as part of an ongoing collaboration between the National Gallery of Ireland and the MA/MFA Art in the Contemporary World at NCAD. During this module, we talked about Shaw and the Gallery, the Shaw Fund, the Shaw Archive, but we also talked about the methods of experimental and radical publishing, about copyright and authorship, about publishing as a mechanism to destabilise or subvert traditional approaches to writing, and the book, and the act of making public. We talked about the politics of experimental publishing as a method for exploring archives and disseminating ideas; we also talked about its potential for disseminating a collection.

## Contributors

**Nadia Armstrong** is an Irish visual artist and writer whose practice navigates the complex systems in which humans find themselves. She works at the intersection of the analogue and the digital, using performance, writing and expanded video **Simon Bhuiyan** is a Dublin based visual artist with a formal background in photography. His practices range from photographic installations, analogue, alternative process and mixed media **Brian Cooney** is an emerging visual artist originally from Dublin now living in Sligo. He works primarily with photography utilising both digital and analogue processes. He returned to study as a mature student and holds a B.A from the University for the Creative Arts **Tom Creed** is a theatre and opera director, curator and festival director. His productions have been seen at major Irish festivals and venues, and in over 30 cities around the world **Catherine Fay** has worked for thirty years in theatre and costume design but her work has its origins in visual art. She is exploring new possibilities and intersections between contemporary art and her theatre practice **Alison Lowry** is a visual artist from County Down. Currently her exhibition, *(A)Dressing our hidden truths*, is on display in Dublin at the National Museum of Ireland **Anna Maye** is a visual artist, whose practice explores how time epitomises the instability and disintegration of life. Anna's creations exhibit a freedom in what is unpredictable and unknown that captures the essence of time **Aisling-Ór Ní Aodha** is an artist based in Dublin and Wicklow. Her practice interrogates 'the aesthetic of environmental perception' through the medium of sound, text, and sculpture **Kristen Olson** studied at The University of Texas at Austin before moving to Dublin to work in the arts. She was most recently involved in the film festival circuit **Alex Pentek** creates gallery-based and large-scale public realm sculpture internationally. Exploring themes of interconnectedness he is currently completing a commission commemorating black activist Charles H. Houston in Washington DC, US **Belinda Quirke** is inaugural Director of Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, Meath. She is a graduate of both UCC Music dept (B. Mus), and Crawford College of Art and Design (Dip FA). A composer and singer, Belinda will release *The Black Hill* this Spring **Katharina Steins** is an art historian and mediator from Frankfurt, Germany. Her work is based around memory, research, and the complex interplay of identity within contemporary art.

## Colophon

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This publication is the result. Generated collectively but remotely, using free web-based presentation software, this publication represents a configuration or constellation of ideas and responses to Shaw's work and legacy, the infrastructure of the gallery, and the operations of patronage, using methods drawn from the field of experimental publishing.

It is presented in the form of a tabloid newspaper, a phenomenon that emerged during Shaw's lifetime, following a number of advances in print technologies, particularly the invention of Linotype in 1886. Shaw was himself in many respects a product of the press. He understood and supplied what it demanded: positional posturing, 'opinion', controversy, disinformation, fabricated outrage and performative denunciation. He understood that a particularly twentieth-century 'marketplace of ideas' was being cultivated. He also understood the propagandist power of the left-wing press as a vehicle to spread the principles and ideals of the Fabian Society and of Labour as a nascent political force.

*The Daily Mirror* is widely regarded the first 'tabloid newspaper', established in 1903. The term 'tabloid journalism', at that point, referred to a journalistic style, rather than a printed format. In fact, the term 'tabloid' came from another field altogether. In 1884, a pharmaceutical company, Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., coined and trademarked the term – a combination of tablet and alkaloid – to describe concentrated medicines in tablet form. This key idea, of compression, allowed the term to expand to include other compressed forms, including condensed teabags and a particularly compact biplane, as well as a new kind of journalistic reporting which condensed news stories into small columns. It is this obsolete sense of the 'tabloid' that this publication revives: not a sensationalist newspaper but a technique of radical concentration.

Nathan O'Donnell

Cover: Brian Cooney, *Untitled*, 2021

Inside and back cover: Alison Lowry, *Would the Real Bernard Shaw Please Stand up*, 2021, photo-collage, source image: Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

p. 10: details (letterhead, signature) in Catherine Fay, 'Dear Irish Public', cropped from NGI Archive item NGI/INST/2/3/3/1/1, letter from George Bernard Shaw to George Furlong (then Director of the National Gallery of Ireland), 6 July 1944. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

**NCAD** **DUBLIN**

National College of Art and Design

GAILEARAÍ  
NÁISIÚNTA<sup>na</sup>  
hÉIREANN

NATIONAL  
GALLERY of  
IRELAND

I don't know where to land with Shaw. Riveting and complicated he evades any concrete grasp I try to ensure: the heroic elements of his character as well as his shortcomings, the poised gesture of his figure, how photogenic he was, his politics and ethics, his complex love of language, his desire to be didactic and maybe even pompous – a thinker, an intellectual, a man, an Irish playwright, a diverse ego, a master of the signifier, the symbolic and the social.

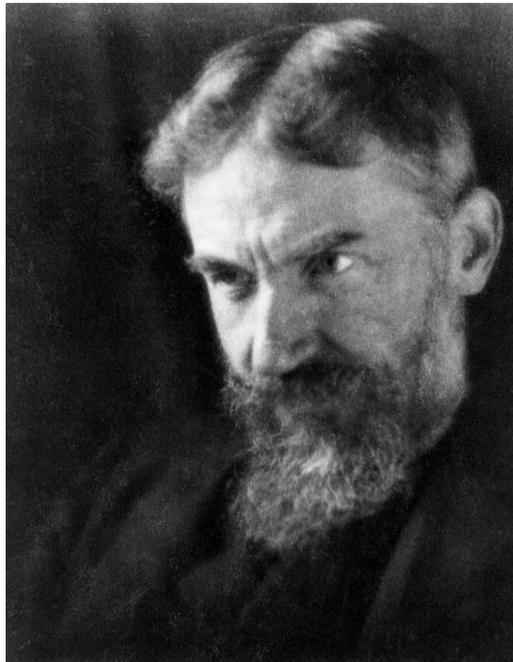
Shaw is more than one hybrid. I present the idea that Professor Higgins and Eliza can be seen as a poetic division between Shaw's core personas. He inhabits the archetype of the professor as much as he does the street urchin – a dualism of stature and subjugation. Professor Higgins teaches Eliza to embody a new voice through the phonograph, studying phonetic precision through repetition and elocution. *Pygmalion* could be read as a blueprint for a commute through the class systems of the 20th century by means of 'proper address' as transport. Shaw put himself through this same transformation. His voice and he as the master of it. He is the educator and the seeker of knowledge, the instructor and the disciple, the patron and the poet – and to take these double personas even further, we have the miser and the philanthropist, the media mogul and the underground activist, the celebrity and the hermit, a man of both clarity and mystery, composure and complacency. Shaw navigated a strange embrace with his own nation and that of the Angloman, experiencing the benefits and claustrophobia of both entrenchments. He was critical of the press while an employer of it, a self-publicising media whore and an ardent defender of the democracy of the fourth estate.

I am fascinated by the performativity that keeps surfacing in regards to his nature, to his being and to his public representations – how he is known by the world, or by us – rather than who he actually was. His identity was fluid, he had circling perspectives and morally shifting approaches – he was both society's worst critic and its biggest fan. There is a charisma and a gentlemanliness there; as well as a sensible, perhaps rigid quality about him. Although however rigidly he may present, in his belief systems or postures – it is clear that he was a shapeshifter in regards to his presence throughout the movements of his time.

gbs

## A POETIC DIVISION

nadia j. armstrong



Glasshouse Images / Alamy Stock Photo

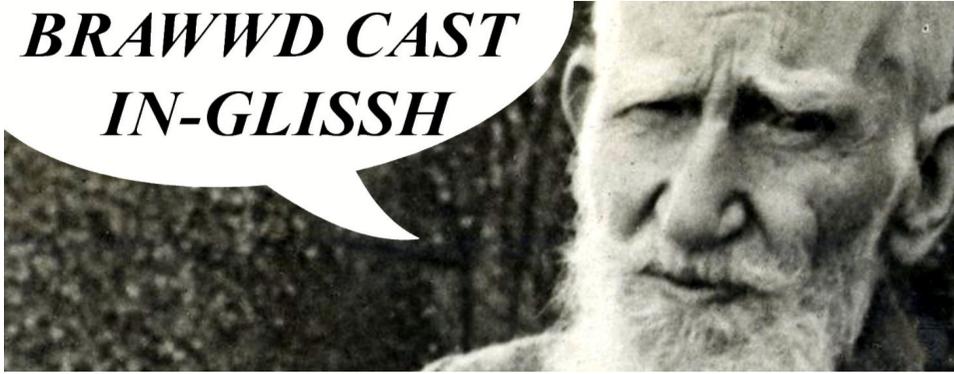
*Pygmalion* was one of my first introductions to theatre. I had seen Eliza on stage before I saw Audrey on the telly. I really enjoyed the story. I liked how tough and fearless Eliza was, her determination to learn, her dignity – I really admired her dignity. There is a line in the play that reads 'why can't a woman be more like a man?' and there have been moments in my adolescence where I've felt stifled by my own position and asked myself this very question. I don't mean the statement quite literally, and even if Shaw intended Higgins to fully mean it, he did not intend us to think it to be true. The line is a paradox playing itself out, an expectation and a division – a stifling binary. However, is this not the pun intended? For it is not that a woman needs to be more like a man, it is that a man needs to freely allow a woman to do what a man does, if she so chooses. I think it is this impossible expectation of women, to do what they are told they cannot, that defines the paradox. For when a woman acts with the agency of a man, in order to carry out or even overthrow said expectation, she is scolded, apprehended and sent back to the position of failure, yet still, she is expected to carry the burden of the notion that she should be more like a man – as well as the presumption that she could not be even if she tried.

For me, *Pygmalion* is a questioning of the social division of gender and its implications, but more deliberately, for Shaw, it casts the shadow of class oppression across the stage – dark and undeniable. We see not only Eliza's inauguration into high society, but also that of her father, Alfred Doolittle, whose moral compass does not sway as he swings from rags to riches, donning the cloak of respectable society but remaining as impermeably malicious as he was to begin with. Shaw articulates to us the fallacy of the belief that class is a question of character; Alfred Doolittle still remains immoral and Eliza – who possessed moral judgement from the start – surpasses the capabilities of all her oppressors. As Fintan O'Toole suggests in the *Irish Times* (2017), perhaps this is one of Shaw's most redeeming judgements, that 'people are not poor because they are immoral; they're immoral because they are poor'.

Shaw's harnessing of language as a tool of political and social agency arises from an obsession with the self as well as an innate desire for control. He believed in regiment and order, a respect for structure and decision making, a set of rules and protocols that society can follow. He had a fundamental belief in centralised, unified power and nationhood. On the other hand, he was a master of subversion, of wit and satire. He challenged social structures, classist values, and the oppressive nature of language, while weaponising it as an expression of his world view.

Shaw believed that the soul – the human spirit – could enact itself independently, outside of the social position it finds itself in, through language and speech. That one could walk on a higher plane that needs no identification with a social structure if one could present oneself through the appropriate language. That one would be liberated by their mastery of an elocutionary technique. That the soul would appear directly as it intended itself to, without judgement of poor delivery. That mastery of control would be your liberation. Oh if only that were true.

# BRAWWD CAST IN-GLISSH



Source photo © National Gallery of Ireland  
Altered image © Alison Lowry

## Aisling-Ór Ní Aodha

**George Bernard Shaw** sat in front of a hexagon-shaped microphone. His tongue, placed right at the front of his mouth in perfect anticipation of the words that were to roll from his lungs, through the larynx and out into the air before being caught on reel-to-reel tape:

*Lit—mee—in—throw—djuce—my-self.*

*Bear—nard—Shaw.*

*I—am—ahh—skd*

*Tuu—give—you—ah—spes—iman*

*Of—spoke—en—In—gliss.*

There is careful attention to his own tongue in his mouth and the device that captures it. Shaw speaks of his distrust of the phonograph compared to the live voice. His careful tongue won't trip, stumble or exclaim. He is adapting to the machine, to its machinations.

It is as if his tongue is a well-trained dog that he is taking for a walk, carefully keeping the dog at his heels.

*But—furst—lit—mee—give—you—ah—waarning*

*You—thinkk—you—are—hee(r)—inng—my—voyce—uh*

*But—un—less—yuu—no—how—tu—yuuze—your—gram—ma—fone—proper—lee*

*What—yuu—arr—hee(r)—inng—may—be—sum—tinng—g(r)ow—tesk—lee*

*Un—lie—kuh—en—nee—soww—und—that—haz—ever—come—fraw—um—my—lips*

Speaking clearly, there is a faint reminder of Alvin Lucier's 'I am sitting in a room': he is smoothing out any irregularities in his speech. Both Lucier and Shaw speak to the future, to the immortalising and mutation of their voice as they speak at that specific moment. For both, there is an acknowledgment (begrudgingly for Shaw perhaps) that the gramophone and his voice are now one. The price for immortality is partial machination.

He foresees his crackle, the glitches, and high pitches and is ready to smooth this out ahead of the moment of hearing. And his voice at this moment is affected by this, he is careful:

*Sow—yuu—see—whawt—yuu—arr—hee(r)—inng—noww*

*Iszz—nawt—my—voyce—uh*

*Un—less—your gram—ma—fone—isz—tuer—en—ing*

*At—exack—tle—thuh—(r)ite—speed*

Shaw describes his voice as he speaks. Touching feeling; saying speaking. He hints to the interior of speech, how it takes place within various timbres of flesh and cartilage. The thingness of the voice and of sound is forgotten cognitively but can be brought to attention, or rather brought to an attentiveness, when the tongue moves, simultaneously inside and out.

The voice is already a finely tuned instrument, however, it is his medium that is letting him down. How can the vitalism of human spirit pass through the recording device and into the ear of eager listeners who know their master's voice? Saying to himself as he listens to himself that his voice sounds as such. That his voice has a sound and it is said as it is being heard.

*Nowuh—thuh—wurst—ov—it—isz*

*That—I—can—not—tell—yuu—how—tu—find*

*Thuh—(r)ite—speed—fur—mee*

He tells them – the listener; you, me, him – they know who he is, like they know any fatherly figure. That is him. A universal and a singular being. Omnipresent and personal.

He is talking to you:

*But—whawt—arr—yuu—tuu—doo—*

*iff—yuu—havv—nev—ur—herd—uh—mee?*

*Well—I—can—giv—yuu—a—hint—that—will—hell—puh—*

*you*

*Ifff—whawt—yuu—here—aw—isz—ve(r)—ee—diss—ah—*

*poyntingg*

*And—yuu—feel—in—stint—ive—lee—*

*That—must—bee—ah—ho(r)—id—maan*

*Yuu—mayy—bee—quite—tuh—shurr—ruh—that—thuh—*

*speed—isz—wrong*

As I write, this text looks a certain way on the page. The word 'page' is below 'isz', the font is Times New Roman and the colour is black. I speak of form but not of what I say. The last few sentences may turn out to lie to the reader. Of course this text will morph and change as it moves through medium. Shaw wants to avoid formal confusions at all costs. I am writing without reading, he is talking without listening. Rather he is not listening with ears but with his tongue. As I am writing not with eyes or mind but with tongue.

Writing with tongue, and writing with machine, the arbitrary nature between speaking, saying and communicating is one of function.

*Sloww—it—doww—unn—un—til—yuu—feel—*

*That—yuu—arr—liss—ning—tuu*

*An—ayy—mee—ahhh—bull—*

*Ole—duh—jenn—till—mann—ovv—seven—tee—wawn*

*With—ah—raww—thurr—pleh—sunt—I—rissh—voycuh*

His accent drifts into mythology, and back again. It has downward Irish inflections, you hear it in 'first' and 'down'. Maybe a hint of the caving and downward divings that happen at the back of the mouth when speaking the Irish language. Little hints of a diminishing language within what is now defined as an Irish accent.

*I—emm—ah—mem—bear*

*Ov—ah—com—mit—tee*

*Ehh—stab—lished—by—thuh*

*Brit—ish—Brawwd—cast—ing—Corp—er—ray—shun*

*Fore—thuh—purr—puss—ov—dee—side—eng*

*How—thee—utt—er—ances—ov—spee—kers*

*Em—ployed—by—thee—corp—er—ray—shun*

*Shud—bee—pro—nowced*

*In—oar—derr—that—they—shud—bee—ah*

*Model—ov—core—rect—In—English—speech*

*Fore—thuh—Brit—ish—eye—lands*

In Irish, the word for 'language' is 'teanga', the same word for 'tongue'. Alluding more to the 'thingness' of speech. The slivery body that moves, caves, flaps at the back or front of the mouth to communicate to others. Although internal, the tongue is maybe that first indicator of the extension of the body into the world.

*Bee—eng—my—self—a—pub—lick—spee—kurr*

*Ov—long—ex—spear—ree—ance*

The thingness of the tongue then comes onto the page. Moving the tongue into action as eyes scan from left to right. Shaw speaks of Broadcast English and performs it, whilst also referencing over there and outside his speech to a mumble, a whisper, calling and wailing, shouting. The strange interior of the voice he houses himself in is decorated in green Victorian wallpaper. He holds this tinge as he enters into a new interior of copper, and a steel stylus.

# SHAW SHAW IN THE IN THE GUTTER GUTTER

*HOW THE UNDERBELLY OF A CITY  
OBLIVIOUSLY REPURPOSED SHAW'S LEGACY  
INTO A HAZY TRIP OF SPILLED DRINKS  
AND NEON LIGHTS*

Dublin celebrates its literary canon with a fondness and dedication that teeters on the edge of obsession. Famous authors' homes are branded with plaques, their heads carved and mounted in parks, their musings photocopied and plastered wherever words suit. Their journals are excavated and displayed, their haunts commodified and advertised, so that we may follow the trail of the highly revered wordsmiths who called Dublin home; in the case of Joyce, bronze footsteps of his masterpiece's protagonist are literally embedded into the concrete of the city.

These love letters overwrite the story of city and writer to a palatable angle, ignoring the volatile relationships that these authors often had with their home. The odes lay claim to their subjects, publicly declaring the objects of affection as Dublin's own, for all to see. The city outlives the writer, and thus spins a fairytale out of sometimes unrequited love. Beautiful memorialisations sprinkle the metropolis, directing us to remember those former flames in wholesome and sophisticated ways.

Samuel Beckett's name adorns a harp-shaped bridge over the Liffey, praised for its innovative design, and a Beckett Theatre is found at Trinity College, where renditions of his work are met with generous applause and followed by white wine receptions. Oscar Wilde is found in Merrion Square, reclining intellectually on a boulder in a fancy blazer of green and pink stone. Legions of visitors scribble his lines onto the rocks around him and snap photos of the house where he and his wit were born, just at the corner of his idyllic park monument. Dublin transplant Patrick Kavanagh once penned a sonnet titled 'Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin,' where he wishes to be 'commemorated where there is water – canal water, preferably'. Now, his bronze statue is seated on a waterfront bench, granting him the eternal lifetime of canal contemplation he so loved, a happily ever after ending. *Then there is George Bernard Shaw*, thrown to the trenches, but please call him Bernard Shaw, or GBS. George is an awful name.

Bernard Shaw was born on Synge Street in 1856, just steps away from Kavanagh's beloved waterway. His home life was 'loveless' and his education sporadic. After leaving for London in 1876, he never lived in Ireland again, neglecting to even visit for the next twenty-nine years as he worked away at authoring many plays, constructing a persona of global fame and building questionable opinions of politics.

There are no Bernard bridges or Shaw shrines in Dublin. There is one birthplace plaque, etched with a humble epitaph that Shaw wrote himself, as though sealing an obligatory love letter with his own kiss. There is a statue and a trail to follow in the National Gallery of Ireland, the one place in Dublin that Shaw loved, but that relationship remains strictly between him and the museum. Out on the streets, Dublin mugged Shaw off, dedicating nary a theatre to his memory. And so Shaw's name and legacy were available for a myriad of other enterprises.

For a man who didn't drink alcohol, Shaw's imprint is suspiciously pint-shaped. It begins with the overwriting of Synge Street's significance, where his birth house functioned as a tiny museum for several years. It eventually closed due to low visitor count, rendering the home temporarily purposeless. The street then fell entirely to its counter purpose: a commuter's line for the youths in '90s-revival attire that descend on Portobello every moderately weathered evening, eager not for Shaw's history, but for cans. Cans on the canal.



I'm willing to tell you...

אני מוכן לומר...

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON BHUIYAN

Kavanagh's sonnet carries a palpable timelessness in this spectacle event. 'Cans,' the lads chant as they present bulky Tesco bags to each other, their matching pairs of scuffed Adidas Gazelles dangling over the murky canal, plastic lighters sparking up the ends of their cigarettes. They unearth their treasures – Rockshore lagers, Bulmers ciders, Coors Lite. The air smells like weed and moss, but it is paradise to these *plein air* drinkers, like a Boschian garden of canal-bank delights. Nearby, a forlorn signpost stands, pointing generously towards The Shaw Birthplace. It goes mostly unread, used instead as a convenient meeting spot.

A symphony of sounds stirs the air: skateboards screeching, guitars strumming, aluminum cans cracking. Swans patrol the scene from the dark green water, commanding more fear than the actual guards who make a hopeless round or two of the area. The boozy haze amplifies as sunlight fades, when the arrival of neon-hued pizza to inebriated pockets of friends illuminates the darkness. The scent of greasy pepperoni drifts down to Synge Street, where the ghost of Shaw is almost certainly standing in his carefully considered signature pose, complaining about the loud kids outside his doorstep, ignoring his marble plaque, leaving their litter and forgetting he existed.

A half-hearted kiss is blown in Shaw's direction just three minutes away in the form of a black box that once bore his name. However, it is not the black box of his industry. It is a broken down, sticky-floored, indoor/outdoor artists' emporium known as the original iteration of the famous pub named after him, despite having very little to do with him at all.

The Bernard Shaw is now an empty carcass of a black cube that at one time was regularly raucous and exciting, grimy and buzzing, with too many bodies navigating the twisting maze of hallways, bartops and sticker-covered walls. The music was loud and the decor was weird; it was a breeding ground for creative expression and a hotspot of progressive communication. Outside, a bright blue school bus – similar to the hue of the Synge Street door, incidentally – churned out

stone-baked pizzas to drunken crowds, continuing Shaw's unconscious connection to the pizza and pint movement. Overlooking the courtyard like the billboard eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg is an art piece depicting not Shaw, but Daniel O'Connell. And so Shaw wept.

The newly reincarnated Bernard Shaw opened in North Dublin in late 2019, miles away from the proximity of Shaw's birthplace, disintegrating any geographic significance the pub once held in relation to its namesake. It boasts a new color scheme of tropical teal and bubblegum pink, as though it sought to shed its scruffy edges to stir jealousy in the eyes of the city council that decided it loved shiny hotels more.

Back on Richmond Street, graffiti and paste-ups emblazon the bones of The Shaw. Daniel O'Connell is still there, left behind in order to preserve the well-aged wall he hangs upon (it would collapse if he was removed), outliving the golden brown letters that once spelled out Shaw's name above the now boarded-up entrance. Even as a pub, Shaw was dumped.

The next dubious love note to Shaw is an establishment tucked away on one of Dublin's most complete original Georgian streets, but what it achieves in architectural conservation kudos, it lacks in everything else. The place is Pygmalion, sharing a name with Shaw's most famous play, but the veterans who swarm its hallowed halls simply call it Pyg. It remains to be seen if the purveyors of this pub intended to associate with the playwright, but if they did, it was a deceptive move at best. Shaw took the title *Pygmalion* from the mythological creature who created such a beautiful statue of a woman that he prayed the gods would give it life. Pyg, rather, is a fever dream come to fruition.

Synthetic pink turf wraps around its outdoor perimeter, an illusion of taste reminiscent of the plastic pink flamingos that littered American lawns in the 1950s. The artificial aesthetic is magnified by the eighteenth-century architecture that it nestles into and exaggerated by the glow of purple lights that spills into the adjacent alleyway. At the door, the resident bouncer is exceptionally tall and particularly rude. It is nearly best to be refused entry (based on conditions set at the bouncer's discretion, changing hourly), for inside it is all broken glass and indiscretion, to apply Beckett's description of the 1930s Dublin pub scene. The vibe is very locked-in-a-dark cellar, perhaps encouraging patrons to develop a sense of Stockholm syndrome and order another round of two-for-one cocktails. The only way out of Pyg is to stumble out, with a house beat endlessly pulsating in the brain.

Despite its dirt-caked corners, Pyg is woven into the fabric of city centre nightlife, unconsciously keeping Shaw's work relevant to stag parties and electronica enthusiasts. Did this club-hopping clientele mindfully select this particular location for its literary reference? Have they come to tick off a box on their pub crawl of Shaw-related pit stops? Is Pyg, in fact, a live-action finale for *Pygmalion*'s greatest fans, desperate to carry on the fiction that they have devoured as a play and two film adaptations? If so, this pink-accented dungeon-like pub could actually be the most romantic gesture to Shaw in the city. However, it is, to quote from the play itself, 'not bloody likely'.

Shaw once stated that an author's merit could only be determined by the posthumous verdict of history. Dublin's gavel ruled him as a picture to burn, perhaps due to irreconcilable differences, an unforgivable betrayal, a turned head, or all of the above. It was never meant to be.

At the same time, Shaw emerges as the capital's most relevant ex of all, omnipresent as he is in the social lives of Dubliners. The coincidental pattern of intoxicated settings relating to his life is completely contradictory to his abstinent lifestyle, but maybe a few ill-conceived love notes are consolation enough for a writer left out of his hometown's nostalgic ventures, like drunken texts received from estranged lovers.

So the underbelly of Dublin grabbed Bernard Shaw's street, his name, and his works and repurposed them to suit a city that can hold more than weathered statues and student theatres. Maybe Shaw would be happiest knowing his ghost-like legacy here boiled down to troublemaking places, provoking the authorities and conjuring noise complaints. It could be an act of Shavian vengeance on the town that was never enough for him, from his troubled youth to his often Irish-denying adulthood. Revenge is a dish best served cold – I suppose it's no coincidence that pints are too.

I'm waiting to tell you...



I'm wanting to tell you...



Five minutes ago you  
were like a millstone  
around my neck...

...כעת אתה כמו אבן שואב סביבי...



Now  
you are a  
tower of strength.

...כעת אתה כמו מגדל של אבן...

Dear Mr. O'Reilly,

Last I heard you were headed north across the city; parading as a one-man marching band for 'The Master', evidently having succumbed to your madness.

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח. ט. י. יא. יב. יג. יד. טו. טז. יז. יח. יט. כ.

I regret to inform you that they have since leveled your home, dug out the foundations and are soon to sow the land with salt. Someone must have forgotten to gather the funds for a load bearing plaque outside. Richmond Place has been cut off, making a convenient dead end for locals and not-so-locals to filter down and drink, shout, fight, piss, shoot up or just aimlessly throw bottles at Mrs. Murphy's house.

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח. ט. י. יא. יב. יג. יד. טו. טז. יז. יח. יט. כ.

Her small bricked cottage still sits there shrouded in the shadow of some grey faceless tower block. I think you may have surfaced somewhere in her memory when I mentioned your name, a sort of blurry glimmer of amiable surprise arose having heard "O'Reilly" in the same breath as Bernard Shaw.

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח. ט. י. יא. יב. יג. יד. טו. טז. יז. יח. יט. כ.

Anyways, I tried to find old Creedon's plaque makers, but I'm afraid they're long gone too. That being said you may find your name etched in brass somewhere along the canal on some decrepit looking bench. I hope this will suffice.

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח. ט. י. יא. יב. יג. יד. טו. טז. יז. יח. יט. כ.

Take care,

א. ב. ג. ד. ה. ו. ז. ח. ט. י. יא. יב. יג. יד. טו. טז. יז. יח. יט. כ.

# EVA GONZALÈS' *CHILDREN ON THE SAND DUNES, GRANDCAMP* AND ITS ROAD TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

katharina steins



Eva Gonzalès, *Children on the Sand Dunes, Grandcamp*, 1877–1878  
Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

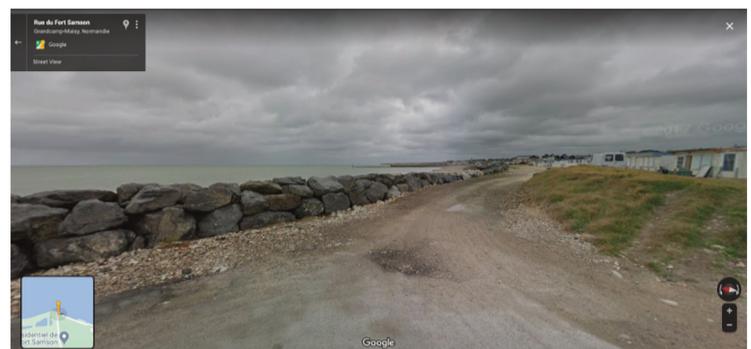
There are many things that an artwork can tell us easily. It can show us a scene, a moment caught by a paintbrush or chisel. Its subject, colours, size, and title are readily available for the viewer to admire. When we walk into the halls of a museum, we see stories of moments, intimate interactions or grand histories. Some things, however, remain hidden in our interactions with art. We fail to see the histories that have brought a work of art onto the walls. In the case of Eva Gonzalès' *Children on the Sand Dunes, Grandcamp*, this history brought a painting from a French coast to the National Gallery of Ireland.

When researching the history of an artwork we assume that all records are flawless; a simple look into the books should show us the stops it has made along the way. But alas, human error and the passage of time will make any historian's work more complicated. Although we have what we assume is the accurate documentation of its ownership, parts are missing, names can't be connected to people.

In the records we find the family history of Eva Gonzalès, a family tree drawn through ownership, with a mysterious gap called H.-W. Hiner at its beginning. After this it traded hands within her close circle: first her husband Henri Guérard, then her sister Jeanne Guérard-Gonzalès (who married Henri after Eva's death in 1883), later Eva's son Jean-Raymond Guérard and finally the Galerie Daber in Paris who sold it to the National Gallery of Ireland, paid for by the Shaw Fund.

The homes and galleries in which it hung do not exist any more. The spaces are likely filled with new images and stories. Eva died of complications related to the birth of Jean-Raymond in 1883, leaving her son to be raised in the city of Paris. I tried to find the places that housed the children of Grandcamp, but while most are still standing, none are as they were. We shouldn't forget that between the actual making of the painting and its purchase by the Gallery two world wars raged, displacing millions and changing the faces of cities.

The fund's eighty-seven artworks encompass another eighty-six stories to be told, stored in files and hidden in archives. Likely not without mistakes, though with a narrative nonetheless. Their histories can be visualised in maps, following narratives around the world.



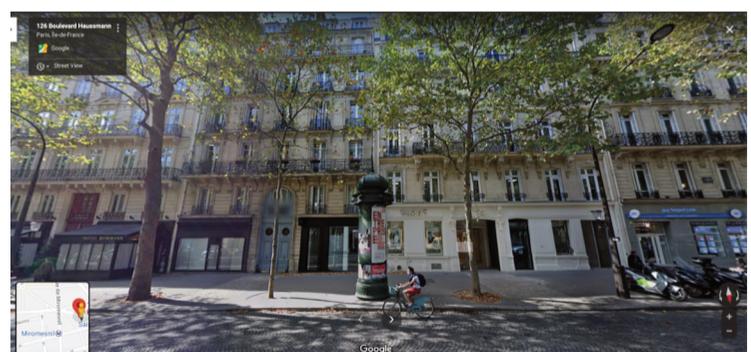
Grandcamp © 2021 Google Streetview



4 Rue. Henry Monnier © 2021 Google Streetview



6 Rue Frochot © 2021 Google Streetview



103 Haussmann Boulevard Paris © 2021 Google Streetview



National Gallery of Ireland © 2021 Google Streetview

# pondering a playwright's legacy

ANNA MAYE

George Bernard Shaw, eager to change the world, bequeathed a gift to a beloved place after his passing, available for all to appreciate to this day. However, he did not state specific conditions as to how his contribution should be utilised. People entertain different views about his character, understandably so – he was a man who did not hold back his opinions, instead forging new (sometimes strange) ideas. For instance, in his lifetime he made clear that the prospect of transforming his writing into a musical was unthinkable, declaring, 'I absolutely forbid any such outrage'.

It is a strange irony, then, that the extent of his gift was so expanded by the adaptation of one of his plays into a musical after his death. How would Shaw feel today if he walked through that very place and looked upon his legacy? What would he think about how *My Fair Lady* influenced the expanse and volume of his gifts? Would he change his opinion?

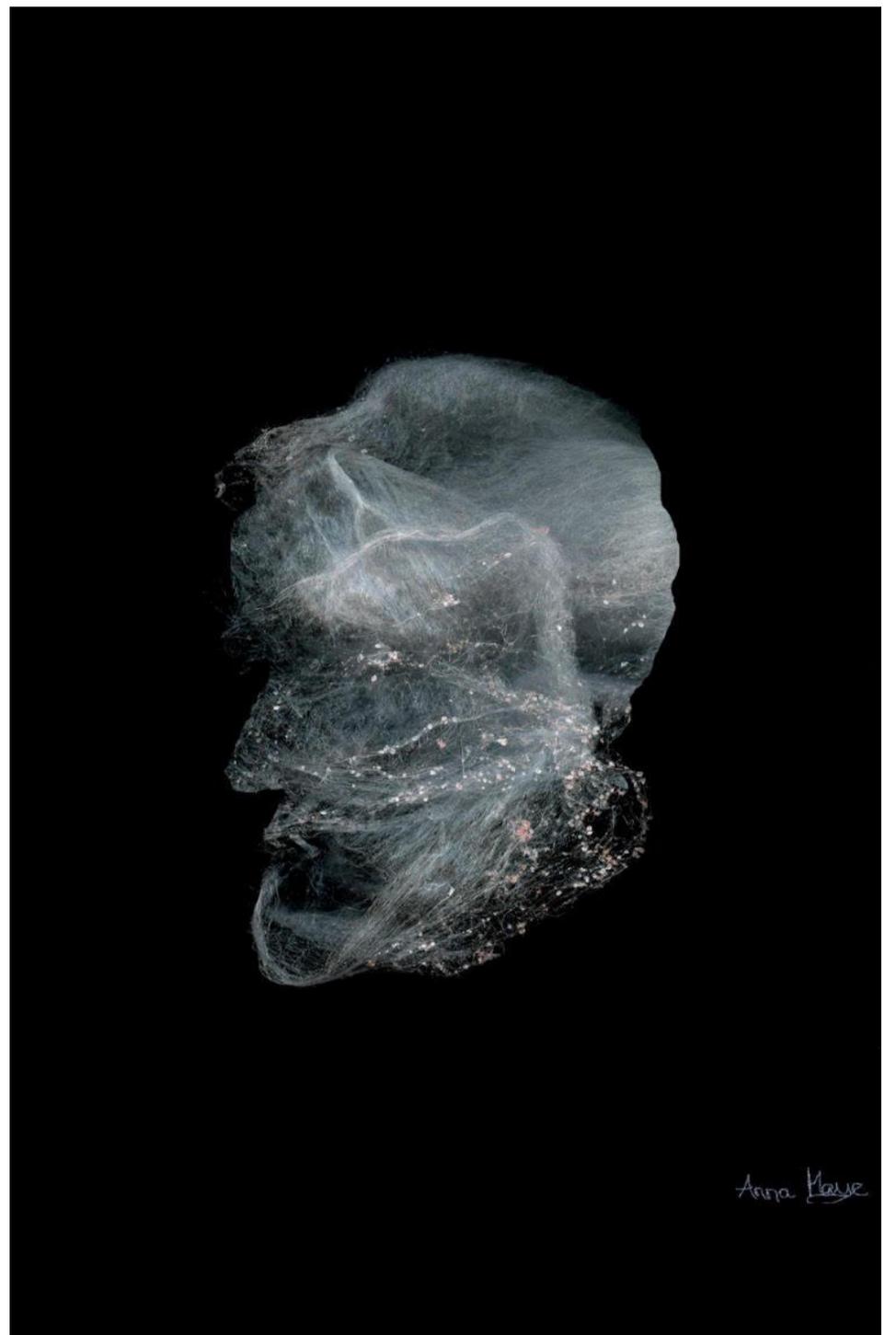
Spaces where art is exhibited and viewed are sites where one can be introduced to different forms of history and different perspectives in conflict with one another. Every individual is capable of making their own judgement. Shaw bestowed confidence in the beholder of his gifts regarding the selection of artworks for purchase, so an education could be awakened for a viewer.

Shaw himself favoured artistic contributions that were an expression of truth concerning the complexity of life expressed by an artist and not a false pretence. The portrayal of the real was a principal preoccupation of his vast body of work.

His aspiration for his gifts would not have been imaginable without the dedication of the Gallery. The first ten years were a transformative time, with many substantial artworks being acquired. Later directors went on to invest in equipment that was essential to the restoration of pieces of historic work, such as the purchase of the Stereo Planigraph X-ray unit which would not have been conceivable without the benefactor, bought using the Shaw Fund in 1966 by the director at the time, James White, for the purpose of investigating oil paintings.

Were these directors attempting to manifest a truth about what art should do or to ask the viewer to decide their own response? Were they striving to reveal the meaning of art, providing an education for the public?

Numerous definitions of art are outlined in Shaw's plays; he was deeply preoccupied with the position of the artist in society. Shaw was disheartened at first when he could not grasp the skills to pursue an artistic career. Nevertheless, language became his artistic expression. It became embedded in his identity.



Anna Maye, *Strands of Shaw*, digital print, 2021

One could propose that certain characters from his plays remain present in his gifts to the Gallery, observing the viewer in a different form, no longer in words. Shaw produced diverse figures who resembled different realms of being, encompassed different issues, represented different fields of life, many of them untold in his time.

Shaw's 1906 play, *The Doctor's Dilemma* features Louis Dubedat, a figure who is present among all of us who view and appreciate art. In the play, Louis Dubedat is dying with tuberculosis, and must prove to the genius Doctor Colenso Ridgeon if he is notable or not. Ridgeon has created a cure for tuberculosis but can only administer it to ten people. Dubedat's determination pushes the individual to contemplate their own existence. This was a typical Shavian tactic, placing one character in a direct line of confrontation with another who holds an opposite judgement to their belief, in order to examine the trials an individual will undergo to express their values.

Perhaps those very characters survive, in some way, on the walls of the Gallery today. One can assert that Shaw's oeuvre runs parallel with a form of visual art, deeper than beauty. Perhaps the magic of these figures is their determination to carve out new ways of thinking about how our world operates, to envisage something greater. To identify one's limitations not as a restraint, but as a test of persistence. But what would linger on Shaw's mind, entering this place where his legacy remains for anyone and everyone to view? Would he be satisfied?



Alex Pentek, *Red Rotunda*, 2021. Photo-collage. Source image: Rotunda Hospital, c. 1900. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

# HAIL SHAW!

alex pentek

*A brass band and a guard of honour of Soviet soldiers supplemented several thousands of people who greeted Mr. Bernard Shaw when he arrived at the Alexandrovsky station, Moscow, today. Among the people on the platform were M. Lunacharsky, former Commissar for Education, M. Khalatov, head of the State Publishing Trust, and M. Karl Radek, a leading journalist. When Mr. Shaw appeared in the doorway of the special car in which he had travelled, the crowd broke into wild applause. Mr. Shaw smiled and waved his hat. Then two lines of soldiers were formed to enable him to pass through the crowds. Lady Astor, who had travelled by the same train, received less attention. She patted a Russian baby on the head while Mr. Shaw acknowledged cheer after cheer. Outside the station the streets were packed with thousands of people, above whom dozens of Red banners waved. 'Hail Shaw!' roared the crowd.*

— *The London Daily Herald*, July 1931<sup>1</sup>

This description captures the moment seventy-five-year-old Bernard Shaw fulfilled one of his lifelong dreams when he said, 'I can't die without having seen the USSR'.<sup>2</sup> But what was his fascination with the new communist state around which were growing rumours of famine in the Ukraine and political purges under the iron fist of communist dictator Stalin? One cannot help but wonder if the irony was not lost on Shaw and his companions travelling in the luxury of 'the special car' (most likely first class) across the wild Russian landscape where crops were being seized by the state, while there were accounts of food being thrown from the train for unknown reasons.<sup>3</sup> And then being given a king's welcome in order to tour the newly created communist state of idyllic socialist equality? Not to mention the immense level of theatrical choreography required to orchestrate thousands of flag-waving people. The smile and hat-waving of Shaw tells us that perhaps somewhere this sort of welcome was appropriate, fitting even. And in this fleeting moment, Shaw has told us something of himself and of his contradictory politics of socialism and centralised power.

Shaw was actually very well known in the Soviet Union at the time; as early as 1910 his work was translated and available across the USSR. He was recognised as a progressive intellectual who openly supported socialist ideologies. Shaw was heavily influenced by Russian writers such as Chekhov and Tolstoy, and in 1921 he sent a copy of *Back to Methuselah* to Lenin, in which he wrote: 'To Nicholas Lenin the only European ruler who is displaying the ability character and knowledge proper to his responsible position. From Bernard Shaw 16th June 1921'.<sup>4</sup> A fan of Lenin and the military genius of Trotsky, after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 Shaw wrote to congratulate Lenin of his victory.

To unravel the many layers of Shaw's political ideas, we must look at those formative years he spent in Victorian Dublin and London. Growing up in a shabby-genteel yet somewhat neglectful household with his mother Elizabeth and father George in Victorian Dublin and being the youngest in the family with two older sisters Frances and Agnes, Shaw was left to his own devices and would often visit the artworks in the National Gallery of Ireland, perhaps seeking an alternative world greater than the house or even city he was born into. Also living with Shaw's family was flamboyant musician George John (Vandeleur) Lee, who was a musical influence for Shaw.<sup>5</sup> Most of Dublin's grand Georgian townhouses had been converted into tenements. While Shaw lived in an affluent neighbourhood on Dalkey Hill, he saw the city's poverty firsthand and was haunted by a visit to Mountjoy prison. This was organised by a friend of Shaw who worked at the office of the Crown Solicitor. In the characteristic Victorian pragmatism of the day, on seeing the prisoners in captivity, Shaw later wrote that it 'was evidently impossible to reform such men, it was useless to torture them, and dangerous to release them'.<sup>6</sup> It later becomes clear that this was an important formative period in his life.

In 1882, while living in London with his mother and sister, Shaw saw the American agitator Henry George speak, who he apparently later modelled his sage persona after. Already an anti-capitalist, around this time Shaw connected anti-capitalist/antidemocratic ideals with the Marxist socialism of the Fabian society and famously wrote the first Fabian manifesto (*Fabianism and the Empire*, 1900). Reading Marx's *Capital*, he believed these ideas 'knocked the stuffing out of the Bourgeoisie'.<sup>7</sup> The socialist realism of the Fabian society, whose aim was to tacitly influence politics, must have seemed like a way for an outsider like Shaw to become an instrument of the zeitgeist and to be a 'world betterer'. But everything changes with war, and as the effects and revolutions unfolded around the First World War and in China, Russia, and Ireland, the period of instability that followed no doubt contributed to Shaw's move towards increasing socialist/fascist idealism.

Seeing how it seemed unlikely for Britain to meaningfully adopt socialist communism after the war, Shaw now looked to fascism as the next best thing, calling it 'the only visible practical alternative to Communism'.<sup>8</sup>

Adopting the dispersed approach of Actor Network Theory<sup>9</sup> could help us to understand that Shaw was very much a product of his time, and that world events and technological advances such as mass immigration, radio and cinema often led to very polarised politics.<sup>10</sup> One crucial part of this contributing network is modern transport, particularly the extensive Soviet train system. For example, the Trans-Siberian Express takes seven days to cross the arctic tundra, often with no visible distinction between where the horizon meets the sky. Making the Russian leg of this journey possible, Russia's train network was ironically created under Czarist rule, when train journeys were considered a luxurious affair for the privileged classes.<sup>11</sup> The stations at Moscow and Leningrad (present day St Petersburg) were designed to be almost identical, so that travellers could enjoy uninterrupted palatial luxury. This was the train journey taken by Shaw's group to Leningrad, one of Russia's most beautiful cities. David Astor (son of Nancy) noted that Shaw seemed completely uninterested in this trip and most of the Russian sites on the tour. On the day of his seventy-fifth birthday, while attending the Bernard Shaw handicap, named in his honour, Shaw apparently fell asleep! This perhaps tells us that Shaw, while obviously becoming old and possibly having no interest in horse racing, may have simply been more interested in the semiotic idea of Russia as a stage for socialist and communist theory, an idea instead of an actual place.

On visiting the Mausoleum of Lenin in Moscow, Shaw said, 'A pure intellectual type, that is the true aristocracy... Henceforth Napoleon's tomb ranks second instead of first'.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that Marx also used Napoleon when he spoke of tragedy and farce, and that Marx was at the beginning of Shaw's Fabian journey all those years ago. The high point of Shaw's visit was when, on the evening of 29 July, the last day of the trip, the party was invited to be hosted by Stalin himself for over two hours. Apart from Lady Astor asking Stalin why he had slaughtered so many Russians, the whole affair remained very cordial.<sup>13</sup>

While we may never truly know the reasons for Shaw's fixation with Stalin that lasted his entire life, it is possible that those formative years in Victorian Dublin and London offered Shaw pockets of stability amidst chaos to launch his career and politics. The essentially Victorian belief in centralised power, intelligence, and a work ethic to get things done seems to be the undercurrent of Shaw's socialist/fascist fantasy, where only Hal Foster's dominant figure of the tyrant or primal father can promise both equality and sovereignty at the same time. Perhaps Shaw was drawn to authority figures such as Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler because he saw himself as their intellectual equal?

1. T.F. Evans, 'Myopia or Utopia? Shaw in Russia', *Shaw*, vol. 5. Penn State University Press, 1985, 131.
2. *Russia Beyond*, Culture, 26 July 2016. Rossiyskaya Gezeta, accessed 5 March 2021.
3. T.F. Evans, 'Myopia or Utopia', 131.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Leslie Evans, 'George Bernard Shaw: Can His Reputation Survive His Dark Side?', *Boryana Books*, 1 February 2012, <https://boryanabooks.com/?p=1042>, accessed 5 March 2021.
6. Fintan O'Toole, *Judging Shaw*, Royal Irish Academy, 2017, 272–3.
7. Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw*. Routledge, 1995, 25.
8. Leslie Evans, 'George Bernard Shaw'.
9. John Law, *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience*, Duke University Press, 2002.
10. Manuel Funke Moritz Schularick Christoph Trebesch, 'Politics in the Slump: Polarization and Extremism after Financial Crises, 1870–2014', [https://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/events/2015/20151001\\_post\\_crisis\\_slump/documents/c\\_trebesch.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/events/2015/20151001_post_crisis_slump/documents/c_trebesch.pdf), accessed 5 March 2021.
11. *Station Russia*, exhibition website, <https://www.archdaily.com/>, accessed 5 March 2021. 895704/station-russia-the-russian-pavilion-at-the-2018-venice-biennale, accessed 5 March 2021.
12. Fintan O'Toole, *Judging Shaw*, 272–3.
13. Hal Foster. *What Comes After Farce?*, Verso, 2020.

AYOT ST LAWRENCE, WELWYN, HERTS.  
STATION: WHEATHAMPSTEAD, G.N.R. 2¼ MILES.  
TELEGRAMS: BERNARD SHAW, CODICOTE.

Dear Irish Public,

Great heavens, my work, my work, my work! How is that to get done if I turn from it every moment to write to you!

**(the audience)**

In (England) I have no copyright in my person. I hope this is legible. What with advancing age, and the fact that I have just banged my hand against an iron bedpost, I cannot write clearly. My ghost would be enormously amused.

**(laug hter)**

I believe that any society which desires to found itself on a high standard of integrity of character in its units should organise itself in such a fashion as to make it possible for all men and women to maintain themselves in reasonable comfort by their industry.

**(A sustained burst of applause)**

I like a state of continual becoming, with a goal in front and not behind. The books and music cannot be kept out, because they alone can make the hideous boredom of the hearth bearable.

**(applause)**

That

Any other treatment that would rouse them to a sense of their civic duty.

A sense of civic duty. I am not unfriendly: it is my entirely friendly concern for your success and welfare that draws this letter from me. What the devil put such a silly notion into your usually intelligent head?

That in his opinion - his opinion! -

The rule in all national galleries. It gave me a priceless part of my education. Of the luckiest bargains in the history of art. I had not achieved a success: but I had provoked an uproar: and the sensation was so agreeable that I resolved to try again.

**(loud applause)**

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This does not matter a rap as far as I'm concerned. You must not trouble to answer this long letter. I know it will have your attention. Just a hasty line - something sensible. Take a holiday: you need one. That silences me. Farewell.

*Bernard Shaw*

p.s. All written in the authors hand.

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# Men's Shed

Belinda Quirke

*In a final Pathé news reel, we see you. One last stride down the garden, slight of frame, still impeccably dressed. You are purpose filled ....suddenly- you see us looking at you.. What's that you say?.. Let me show you.. you seem to imply. You parade this way and that on your grass runway, arm on hip, chin high..-Cut to the writing shedacting George Bernard Shaw- acting typing- acting thoughts.*



PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

Bernard Shaw and wife Charlotte Payne-Townshend, moved from London to what would come to be called Shaw's Corner, Ayot St Laurence, in Hertfordshire in 1906 where he would remain until his death in 1950. The house, constructed as a rectory fashioned in the arts and crafts style, was initially rented from the Church of England. In 1920, Shaw bought the property, and further extended the garden to two acres by buying a plot from his neighbour, friend and Antarctic explorer, Apsley Cherry Garrard.

Many of Shaw's most famous plays were written within a 6x7ft modest wooden hut towards the end of the garden at Shaw's Corner. The hut, innovatively engineered, rested on a circular track enabling Shaw to rotate its position towards the sun throughout the day. In yet another agency of all things Shavian, the August edition of *Modern Mechanics* (1929), features an article, *Bernard Shaw's rotating house is an aid to health*. Shaw is resplendent in shooting breeks and jacket (Jaeger perhaps), right leg bent and extended, shoulder braced against the doorway staging a forward motion. We meet here the virile, resourceful, and modest Shaw, the man of nature, musing amidst flora and fauna.

*At the age of 72 he is in prime physical condition, and attributes this partially to the appreciation of sunlight.*

There is a heroic classicism about the godlike triangulated pose, the mythological strength of protagonists such as Atlas, holding the weight of the world, or crafty Sisyphus; eternally cursed by Zeus to thrust a boulder to the summit of a Hadean peak.

Shaw had well-publicised views pertaining to health, public sanitation, and healthcare reform, which he particularly illustrated with remarkable length and subjectivity in the preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1909). The preface is constructed of forty-five sections of wide-ranging opinion regarding medical practice, from vivisection to the latest castigation of *fashionable* medical remedies. At a young age Shaw contracted smallpox, despite being inoculated. His distrust of vaccinations, disease transmission and rejection of the micro-organism is illustrated within the preface. In *Too Good to be True* (1932), Shaw's satirical character 'Microbe' catches measles from a patient:

*Oh! Oh!! Oh!!! I am so ill! so miserable! Oh, I wish I were dead. Why doesn't she die and release me from my sufferings? What right has she to get ill and make me ill like this? Measles: that's what she's got. Measles! German measles! And she's given them to me, a poor innocent microbe that never did her any harm.*

To Shaw, the transcended; *Mens sana in corpore sano* is a foolish saying. *The sound body is a product of the sound mind*. Within Shaw's vegetarianism, non-alcoholic, non-smoking, celibate and aerobic lifestyle lies a puritanical world view, a tipping point between an ecological naturistic futurism and the alluring fervent totalitarianism he admired in Stalin and Hitler.

In Victorian times, the pursuit of fitness and the benefit of solar and artificial light Therapy had gained both scientific and fashionable traction. In the 1890s the physician, Niels Finsen, designed the Finsen Light, a powerful electric lamp effective in curing lupus vulgaris, a skin disease caused by tuberculosis bacteria. By 1928, such was the interest in heliotherapy that The Times published an entire supplement *Sunlight and Health* featuring scientific essays including renowned physiologist Leonard Hill's *Ultra-violet Radiation of Its Measurement*, recommendations for sun holiday trips, and an array of advertisements; from vitamin D infiltrated baby food (by the power of mercury lamps), to various domestic therapeutic lights. Structures for revolving therapeutic spaces preceded Shaw's writing hut, mostly in the domain of public curative centres for illnesses such as rickets and tuberculosis. Shortly after Shaw's writing hut was completed, Dr. Jean Saidman had patented and built his ambitiously scaled revolving sanatorium in Aix-Les-Bains, France in 1930. Designed by architect André Farde, the rotating platform of patient cabins measured twenty-five meters long and six meters wide, weighing eighty tons. Further Saidman rotating solariums followed in 1934 at Vallauris, Alpes-Maritimes, and Jamnagar, India, as part of Ranjit Institute of Poly-Radio Therapy.

British public interest in naturism manifested itself in publications such as the *Sun Bathing Review* and the formation of societies such as the Monella group, the Sun Ray Club and Sun Bathing Society. In 1932, Shaw co-signed a letter in favour of public sunbathing with Julian Huxley, Vera Brittain, C.E.M Joad and Winifred Holtby;

*Semi-nudity can be viewed on the stage by paying for it, but cannot, it seems, be indulged in for health and well-being in the open air, until for lack of it one is ill enough to go to a hospital or a home for crippled children! The movement needs to be rescued from the ill-informed scorn and disrepute from which it has suffered, and to be raised to the level of other healthy recreations.*

In *Soaking up the Rays: Light Therapy And Visual Culture In Britain, c.1890-1940* (2017), Tania Anne Woloshyn draws a parallel between Shaw's writing hut and 'a heliotropic sunflower' always facing the sun. The windows of the writing hut were manufactured by Pilkington Brothers Ltd, using a new glazing product, Vitaglass, which was designed to enhance the infiltration of ultra-violet rays.

The revolving shed is a further trick that brought Shaw further international attention through films and print news reports. There is the Shaw performing for the world – the look, the gestured stroll down the garden – whose every pronouncement and activity was surrounded by both welcome and unwelcome press. Paradoxically cut to Shaw metaphorically wandering in the outdoors to seek solitude, to create artistic work from a humble wooden hut. The performative gesture suggests an influence from the transcendentalism of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). For two years, from 1845 to 1847, Thoreau lived a solitary, frugal existence within a self-constructed cabin by Walden pond, Massachusetts. In *Walden*, he speculates that man could be regenerated, and become a better self, living within the natural world:

*I learned this, at least, by my experiment ... He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. ... If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be.*

The writing hut was christened internally as 'London' so that staff and Charlotte Shaw could advise, with good conscience, that he was attending to business in the capital. The expedition down the garden to the writing hut transforms Shaw the showman, into notional Shaw, the Nobel prize winner, freed from the domestic and celebrity.

The contents of the writing hut were limited to a lamp, a writing desk, a wicker chair, typewriter, and daybed. Later additions included electric light and heater to improve writing conditions, as well as a telephone (perhaps even solitary thoughts need an audience). There is pause for reflection now on the contrast between Shaw's elective transcendental retreat from the world with our current enforced one, where reconfigured home lives enforce an uncomfortable communality of work, domestic, and third spaces.



Dr. Saidman's Solarium, Aix-Les-Bains, France, destroyed during WWII  
Photographer unknown, coll. AC d'Aix-les-Bains, c. 1940

# the ever changing self

## SHAW, IDENTITY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

### Brian Cooney



In a lecture entitled 'Divesting the Self: A Striptease' (2011), the visual artist Brian O'Doherty gave an account of his experience of living for many years under an assumed name – or in his particular case, names. For thirty-six years he lived his professional life and made his art using the name Patrick Ireland as a protest against the British military presence in Northern Ireland. He also assumed the identities of Sigmund Bode, Mary Josephson, and William McGinn during his career.<sup>1</sup>

For Shaw, as for O'Doherty, identity seems to have been malleable, capable of being shaped and reconstructed continually. He inhabited several identities, performing a multiplicity of selves. Playing diverse and wide ranging roles from the affable uncle dispensing Solomonic advice in reply to a letter writer, to the jester privileged with the freedom to speak what is normally politely left unsaid. Shaw the critic also worked under several pseudonyms and even, tongue firmly in cheek, reviewed his own plays including interviewing their author anonymously. Renaming himself Bernard Shaw he expunged the name George because of the complex relationship with his father, also named George. Perhaps the greatest character he created was GBS, the persona adopted to perform the role of playwright and wit. His prodigious writings drew on a kaleidoscopic, ever-changing and perhaps an unfinished self that offered a lifetime of material. Shaw was a prolific and enthusiastic photographer. An early adopter of the medium, he bequeathed over 20,000 photographic prints, plates and negatives to the care of the UK National Trust and the London School of Economics. He was one of the LSE's founders. Contained within this vast archive are many self portraits indicating that this particular genre of photography held more than a passing interest. Self-portraiture, or the selfie as we might refer to it nowadays, originated in the early years of photography with Hippolyte Bayard's *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840). The intriguing images in the Shaw archive show a man of many guises occupying both sides of the camera, existing simultaneously as the photographer and the photographed. As in his writings the images have a self referential quality; Shaw seems to be trying on different roles, inventing and reinventing himself. In one image we see him dressed as a Dandy admiring his likeness in the mirror, 'one of Shaw's creative tools'<sup>2</sup>, although we cannot see the face of the 'real' Shaw, only his reflection in the mirror.

The image-conscious Shaw, aware that he is living in an age dominated by mass media, transforms the camera into an instrument of performativity rather than resemblance, even deliberately sitting nude before it, creating studies of his body 'posed as if it were a mannequin waiting to be dressed for display'.<sup>3</sup> Setting out deliberately to embody the zeitgeist, he was an influencer long before the current context of the word, were he alive today I have no doubt he would be using Instagram obsessively. His image was in such demand it is hardly surprising, given the innumerable statues, photographs and paintings of his likeness in existence, that he becomes the perfect model, a brilliant poseur with an ability to powerfully project presence onto any medium.

1. IMMA Talks: <https://soundcloud.com/imma-ireland/divesting-the-self-a-striptease-by1brian-odoherty>, accessed 21 March 2021.

2. Fintan O'Toole, *Judging Shaw*, Dublin: Prism, 2017, 66.

3. *Ibid.*, 90.

ART MAKES  
 ART MAKES  
 CHILDREN  
 CHILDREN  
 POWERFUL  
 POWERFUL

Tom Creed

ART  
 MAKES  
 CHILDREN  
 POWERFUL

Bob and Roberta Smith, *Art Makes Children Powerful*, 2013,  
 sign writer's paint on board, 180 x 95 cm in two panels  
 © Bob and Roberta Smith, courtesy of Butler Gallery



Sir Henry Irving.

William Nicholson, *Sir Henry Irving*, 1899

Presented, Brian Lalor Print Collection, 2014. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland.

## 1. EXIT STAGE LEFT

A lithograph in the National Gallery of Ireland's collection depicts a man with a long face, hair down past his ears, dramatic eyebrows. Black on greenish grey on brown, with light blue extending across the horizon. We might be by the sea, or this might be a theatrical set for yet another performance by the actor Sir Henry Irving, whose name appears below the image's dark frame. The print by William Nicholson is dated 1899, when Irving would have been sixty-one, having spent almost half a century chewing up the London stage in his barnstorming brand of total theatre. The figure is facing to the viewer's right, or downstage left as they say in the business, hat in hand and coat over his arm, as if to make a dignified exit off the stage and out of the frame.

Four years before, Shaw had launched a broadside at the actor most identified with the old kind of drama, in his role as theatre critic of the *Saturday Review*. After watching Irving's performance as King Arthur, the young critic wrote:

I sometimes wonder where Mr. Irving will go when he dies – whether he will to claim, as a master artist, to walk where he may any day meet Shakespeare whom he has mutilated, Goethe whom he has travestied, and the nameless creator of the hero-king out of whose mouth he has uttered jobbing verses!

It wasn't personal, but Shaw had a new kind of theatre in mind for the twentieth century that was just around the corner.

For a few months in 2016, the portrait of Irving could be seen at the Gallery as part of *Eclectic Images: Recent Acquisitions 2011–2016*. This exhibition was built around a collection of prints donated in 2014 by writer, printmaker and collector Brian Lalor, who described in the exhibition catalogue the beginning of his interest in collecting and printmaking as a teenager:

As a teenager I became interested in antiques, antiquities and in collecting... Having read a number of books on the topic of collecting, I learned about a nineteenth-century innovation in printmaking, the Baxter Print. Shortly afterwards, I found one in a junk shop in Cork, purchased it, and my involvement in collecting prints had begun.<sup>2</sup>

Shaw referred to the Gallery as the 'cherished asylum of my boyhood', claiming he owed to it 'much of the only real education I ever got as a boy in Eire'.<sup>3</sup> Having left school at 14, he is not the only young person to have found, in art, a refuge and possible future.

## 2. ENTER STAGE LEFT

A mutant ballgown-golden-throne, itself enthroned on a repurposed shopping trolley, looks out a window at the city below. A three-faced sex-doll, mouths agape, hangs by an explosion of pink hair from a chain. Nearby, an eagle in military style perches on a kinky black-winged SS cap. These extravagantly crafted fetish-totems are in fact costumes from Aoiheann Greenan's performance *The Perfect Wagner Rite*, exhibited as part of *Exit Stage Left: The craft of theatre in art*, at Cork's Glucksman Gallery in spring 2017. Stage left is audience right, and stage pictures tend to be read from left to right just like a painting or book in Western art or literature, so an actor entering stage left is moving against the flow of the action, a disruptive presence. The Demon King in *commedia dell'arte* would always enter from the left (*sinistra* in Italian), and pantomime baddies still do today.

A few months before, while Irving looks down from the wall in the Gallery, pondering his exit stage left and still smarting from Shaw's campaign of critical warfare, these costume-creations have come to whirling, phantasmagorical life, not far away at the Royal Hibernian Academy. Greenan's hyper-fetishistic electro-operetta crashes Shaw's essay on Wagner's four-opera Ring Cycle into a touristically-imagined Berlin clubland of strobe lighting, bare breasts, anal beads and a dildo-sword that can't quite get itself up. While a totemic bust of Wagner keeps watch in neoclassical style, a recreation of Shaw's spinning writing hut becomes a peep-show-sex-club-dragon's den and the words of the man himself do their best to help us keep up with the story. Meanwhile, audience members get roped in, and help decide the ending in a reality-TV-style public vote. All in forty-five minutes compared to the seventeen hours of the original.

In an interview before the Dublin performances, presented as part of that year's Fringe Festival, Greenan explained:

I wrote an operetta... using George Bernard Shaw's essay as a guide... this deliberately very selective reading of the Ring Cycle where I only isolated moments that had to do with greed or desire or worship. I'm kind of trying to create this parallel between cultural voyeurism and sexual voyeurism and creating the cult paraphernalia... I'm creating a condition of total excess and a completely warped worldview that is born out of media and pop cultural impressions more so than reality. What I'd like for the show to highlight, is by directly implicating the viewer as the voyeur, and how their participation in this blind participation is actually just perpetuating certain ideas. And so I'm actually more arguing for the creation of culture, and made collectively and creatively, rather than just following the dominant voice.<sup>4</sup>

Where Greenan catches sight of these contemporary urges in the glare of the Nibelung's gold, Shaw could see a glimpse of his own time, and the time in which the monumental cycle of four operas was written and composed, reflected back at him. For Shaw, the libretto of the Ring Cycle, begun when the composer was still young and full of the possibilities that fuelled the European revolutions of the mid-19th century, depicted

a poetic vision of unregulated industrial capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engels's Condition of the Laboring classes in England... You can see the process for yourself in every civilised country today, where millions of people toil in want and disease to heap up more wealth for our Alberics, laying up nothing for themselves, except sometimes horrible and agonising disease and the certainty of premature death... this part of the story is frightfully real, frightfully present, frightfully modern; and its effects on our social life are so ghastly and ruinous that we no longer know enough of happiness to be discomposed by it.<sup>5</sup>

But Shaw pointed out that this social conscience had deserted Wagner by the time he arrived at the end of the cycle twenty-five years later:

Now no man whose mind is alive and active, as Wagner's was to the day of his death, can keep his political and spiritual opinions, much less his philosophic consciousness, at a standstill for quarter of a century.<sup>6</sup>

The same might also be said for Shaw. Towards the end of his life he became seduced by what he perceived as the efficiency of dictators, the purity of their vision, their ability to get things done.

### 3. THE DRESSING ROOM

In the Bishop's Robing Room in Kilkenny, near St Canice's Cathedral, my boyfriend is wearing a beret and pearls, and we're talking about power and responsibility. There's a rail of mid-century coats and jackets, a side table with hats and scarves, a full-length mirror, and a screen in case we need to hide our modesty. Alongside a small library and a record player, a television framed in rough wood sits on a retro bedside locker, playing an interview in black and white with a woman who speaks with a German accent. We're in an installation called *Be Hannah Arendt* by the artist Bob and Roberta Smith, who has transformed the city into an art school at the invitation of the Butler Gallery and Kilkenny Arts Festival. By stepping into the clothes and shoes of the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*, we are invited to "imagine her world, and maybe, just maybe, come to some new ideas about how we live today, and how we might live better tomorrow."<sup>7</sup>

There's a painting named *Art Makes Children Powerful* on display in the Butler Gallery, which has given its name to the exhibition. Bob and Roberta Smith invites everyone to make art, as a way of understanding ambiguity and thinking about the world we live in. The title could refer to the teenage Shaw, who traded school for the National Gallery of Ireland and the real education he found there.

Now that you've spent some time with Shaw, his life and ideas, it's time to do a little dress-up. Cut out the beard that's included with this newspaper, wear it, enter stage left or stage right, look in the mirror, strike a pose, and think about how we might Be Shaw, and how this becoming might help us understand our lives, and art, and the world around us, and how we might try to hang on to our hope, as our lives beat on.



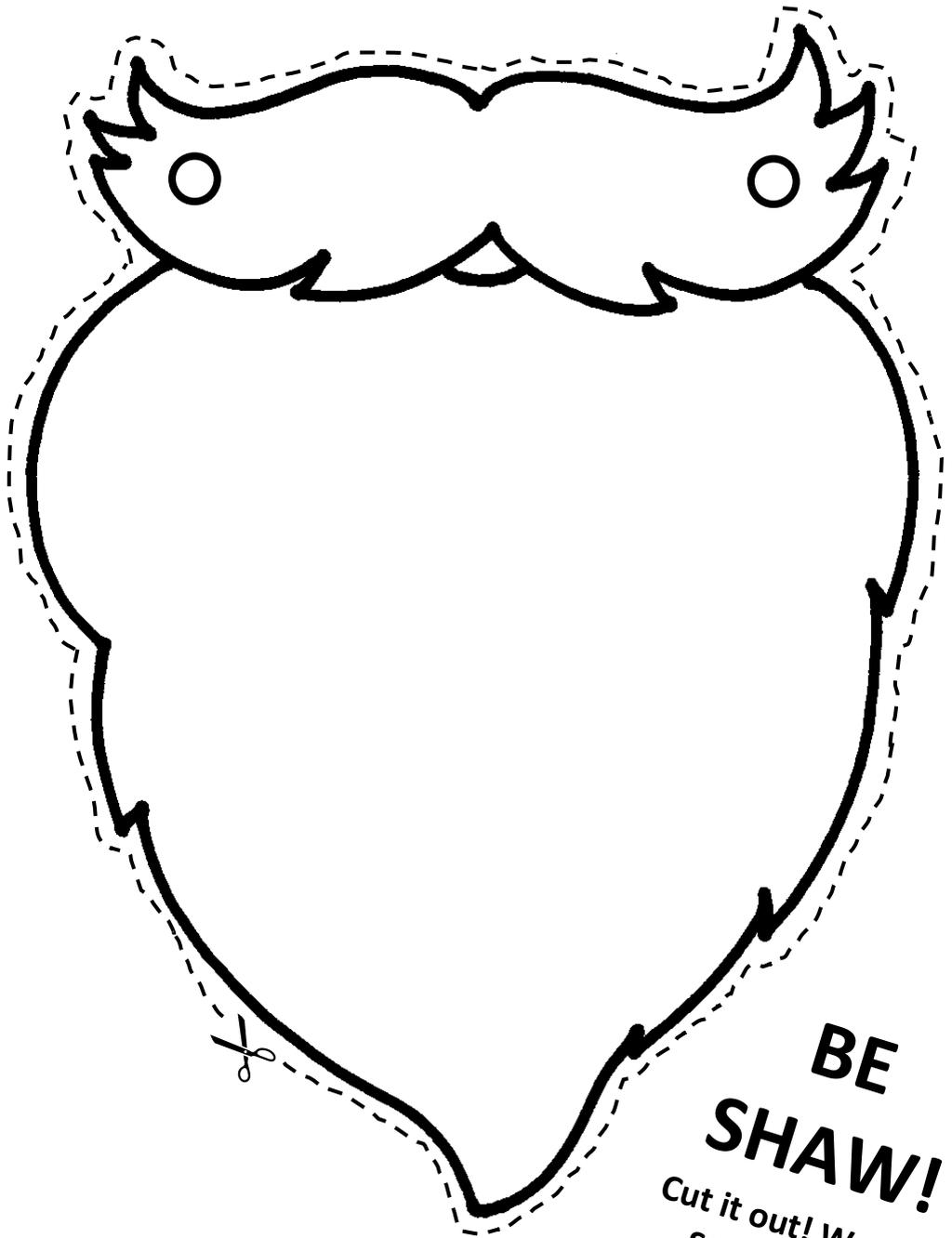
Aoibheann Greenan  
*The Perfect Wagner Rite*, 2016  
performance documentation, courtesy of the artist



Bob and Roberta Smith  
*Be Hannah Arendt*, 2013  
installation view at Bishop's Robing Room, Kilkenny  
© Bob and Roberta Smith, courtesy of Butler Gallery

1. Quoted in John H. B. Irving, 'Shaw Settles His Quarrel with Henry Irving', *Shaw*, Vol. 29 (2009), 79.
2. Exhibition booklet text provided by curator Anne Hodge.
3. Exhibition page on National Gallery website, <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/exhibitions/shaw-and-gallery-priceless-education>
4. Video interview with DRAFF, <https://www.draff.net/aoibheann.html>
5. Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1487>
6. Ibid.
7. Exhibition booklet text provided by curator Anna O'Sullivan.





**BE  
SHAW!**  
Cut it out! Wear it!  
Strike a pose!

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