

Biographical Background:

George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July 1856 in Dublin, Ireland. He was educated at several schools, including Wesley College and the Central Model School in Dublin. When his mother left the family home to live with her voice teacher in London, Shaw was sixteen and decided to remain with his father in Dublin. He became a clerk in an estate office, but remained unenthusiastic about his work and eventually left in 1876 to join his mother. The pocket-money his family provided enabled him to continue his studies, spending his time researching at public libraries and the British Museum and he soon began writing novels (which were initially rejected) and by 1885 was supporting himself as a critic of the arts. As a critic he wrote for several periodicals including the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Dramatic Review*, *Our Corner* and the *Saturday Review*.

It was, however, his novels and, in particular, his talent as a playwright that made him famous. All of his earlier, unsuccessful novels were eventually published: *Cashel Byron's Profession* in 1886, *An Unsocial Socialist* (1887), *Love Among the Artists* (1900), *The Irrational Knot* (1905) and *Immaturity*, although the first to be written was the last to be published in 1931. His plays, like his novels, were generally comedic but also tackled particular moral, political and economic issues close to Shaw's heart. This focus has led to Shaw being credited with revolutionizing British drama from a place of simple entertainment to a forum for discussion of such issues. Shaw's earliest financial success as a playwright was with the American production of *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), which was followed by a further 62 plays including *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1894), *You Never Can Tell* (1897), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) and, arguably, his most famous play *Pygmalion* (1912). Other plays of Shaw's include *Heartbreak House* (1919) about the First World War, *Back to Methuselah* (1921) a five-play work about the evolution of man from the Garden of Eden to thousands of years in the future and *Saint Joan* (1923), regarded as one of his best plays and thought to be the reason for his being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Shaw was a dedicated Socialist and member of the Fabian Society. As part of the Fabian Society he was involved in the formation of the Labour Party and although he refused to stand as a MP, he was elected to the London County Council in 1897. His political leanings also led him to co-found the left wing *New Statesman* in 1913, oppose the First World War and later become a supporter of the Stalinist USSR in the 1930s. Through the Fabian Society he met Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Graham Wallas with whom he founded the London School of Economics in 1895 and also met Charlotte Payne-Townshend whom he married in 1898.

George Bernard Shaw is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Academy Award (1938), presented for his work on the film *Pygmalion*. These were the only awards he accepted, even declining the offer of a knighthood.

He died on 2 November 1950.

Custodial history:

Purchased from Mssrs H.T. Jantzen of East Grinstead, Sussex Nov 1965

Description:

This small collection contains one typed letter from George Bernard Shaw detailing his position against censorship in the theatres and his decision to provide evidence for the Select Committee on Stage Plays.

Extent: 1 item

Related material:

File in the Papers of Robin Page Arnot on George Bernard Shaw [U DAR/1/51]

File in the Papers of Major OA Forsyth-Major on George Bernard Shaw [U DFM/7]

File from the Dictionary of Labour Biography on George Bernard Shaw [U DLB/13/250]

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DP142/1	Letter from George Bernard Shaw to 'Dear Colleague' Evidence to be given to the Select Committee on Stage Plays; need to fight censorship; 'much of our most lucrative work in future will be done in the variety theatres'. Typed and signed 'G. Bernard Shaw' 1 item	28 Jul 1909
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