Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaw's Plays
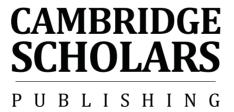
Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaw's Plays: A Linguistic Perspective

By

Zsuzsanna Ajtony

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

A true-born Englishman's a contradiction;
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction;
A banter, made to be a test of fools,
Which those that use it justly ridicule;
A metaphor, invented to express
A man a-kin to all the universe.

*****

Thus from a Mixture of all Kinds began,
That Het'rogeneous Thing, an Englishman.
—Daniel Defoe: *The True-born Englishman* (1836)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms.

Roman Jakobson

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale behind the research: ethnicity and more

Human life is unimaginable without a sense of who we are and some means of knowing who others are. The end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st have brought a great deal of uncertainty to people's and particularly to researchers' lives. This "ontological insecurity" (Giddens 1991: 53) produced by rapid change and cultural contact is diagnostic of post- and late modernity. The urge to find answers to such questions regarding identity in this ambiguous and doubtful world, and to go deeper into the minefield of identity was the main rationale for this research. My concern with the extensiveness of identity, and especially ethnicity as one of its facets and the way they appear in the language behaviour of literary characters is the focus of this work.

While doing research in the field of ethnic identity I encountered an especially pertinent literary source in George Bernard Shaw's plays, which was found relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, one cannot fail to notice Shaw's general preoccupation with ethnicity, which pervades most of his plays, and which, in certain plays comes to the forefront. On the other hand, Shaw's own assumed cultural identity offered itself as a source to reflect upon. The playwright's own awareness and interest in the topic has enabled me to try to understand my own identity, as an ethnic Hungarian with Armenian roots living in Romania. While dealing with the complex issue of self-definition, the Shavian plays proved to be salient areas for fieldwork where ethnic identity practices can be analysed.

Ethnicity, in general, and Britishness[1], in its specific insular[2] version, form a perpetual theme of George Bernard Shaw's most well-known plays and is dealt with–either directly or indirectly–in several others. Ethnicity can be considered as the defining element of Shaw's cultural identity and assumed Britishness, which is transparent in the text(ure) of most plays, or which explicitly appears in the form of direct references in some others, as well as in Prefaces or Afterwords[3]. A vein of ethnic discourse appears in the form of generic sentences or comments about different ethnic groups, having a stereotypical value, mostly about those groups which the British

culture had some contact with: the Greek, the French, the Russian, the American, etc. E.g.:

>   (1) STEPHEN. … You must not mind Cusins, father. He is a very amiable good fellow; but he is a Greek scholar and naturally a little eccentric. (*Major Barbara*, p.128[4])

One French sub-lieutenant in *The Man of Destiny* has a stereotypical "self-assurance on that ground which the French Revolution has failed to shake in the smallest degree" (p. 171). Napoleon readily identifies himself being "born a French subject, but not in France." (idem. p.183) The mysterious Lady talking to him openly mentions the geographical origins of the would-be emperor, saying that "the vile, vulgar Corsican adventurer comes out in [him] very easily." (idem. p.185); "Moscow thinks a lot of itself. But what has Moscow to teach us that we cannot teach ourselves? Moscow is built on English history, written in London by Karl Marx." (*The Apple Cart*, p. 111) English and American culture and lifestyle are put together in a paradoxical comparison in the soliloquy of the American politician, whose name itself gives reference to his country of origin:

>   (2) VANHATTAN. (…) the real English people who take things as they come instead of reading books about them, will be more at home with us [Americans] than they are with the old English notions which our tourists try to keep alive. When you find some country gentleman keeping up the old English customs at Christmas and so forth, who is he? An American who has bought the place. Your people [the English] get up the show for him because he pays for it, not because it is natural to them. (*The Apple Cart*, p.107)

However, the greatest number of ethnic references can be found about the British, and mostly about the English. The Englishmen are considered to be "a joke" who "can't be taken seriously" (*You Never Can Tell*, p. 242). "[A]ll Englishmen are born heretics" (*Saint Joan* p. 96); "the thick air of [their] country does not breed theologians" (ibid.); "Scratch an Englishman and find a Protestant" (ibid. p. 99); "Englishmen are all hypocrites" (ibid. p. 118); "these English are impossible" (ibid. p. 139); according to the Inquisitor, "English is the devil's language" (ibid. p. 119); Warwick, one of the English characters, is looking for the "practical" solution: how should Joan "save her soul without saving her body" (ibid. p. 94). "Politics are not suited to the English, if you ask me." (*The Apple Cart*, p. 111).

On the other hand, there are remarks about the allegedly inborn right of the English people to rule the world: "The English are a race apart. (…)

[E]very Englishman is born with a miraculous power that makes him *master of the world*."[5] (*The Man of Destiny*, p. 205) Shaw also refers to colonial ideology, which constitutes the basis for the British imperialism, the strong belief that it is their duty to illuminate the "less endowed" nations: an Englishman has a "burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who possess the thing he wants." (ibid.).[6] Furthermore, in Napoleon's rhetorical speech, Shaw draws attention to the hypocrisy of colonization, the discrepancy between the pride that the British take in their worldwide expansion and the shame that every British citizen should feel about the state of affairs within the country:

> (3) As the great champion of freedom and national independence, [the Englishman] conquers and annexes half the world, and calls it Colonization. (…) [He] sails to the end of the earth, sinking, burning, and destroying all who dispute the empire of the seas with him. He boasts that a slave is free the moment his foot touches British soil; and he sells the children of his poor at six years of age to work under the lash in his factories for sixteen hours a day. He makes two revolutions, and then declares war on our one in the name of law and order. There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it; but 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 royal principles and cuts off his king's head on republican principles. His watchword is always Duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side to its interest is lost. (*The Man of Destiny* p. 205-6)

In another generic statement, Shaw draws a distinction between the English and the Irish, humbly offering two "famous" men as examples, one of them being himself: "The English do not deserve to have great men. They allowed [Samuel] Butler to die practically unknown, whilst I, a comparatively insignificant Irish journalist, was leading them by the nose into an advertisement of me …" (Preface to *Major Barbara*, p. 23).

In the same play, we come across a dialogue between father and son, where, as a true patriotic feeling, national character is claimed to govern the country:

> (4) STEPHEN. (…) I am an Englishman and I will not hear the Government of my country insulted. (…)
> UNDERSHAFT. And what does govern England, pray?
> STEPHEN. Character, father, character.
> UNDERSHAFT. Whose character? Yours or mine?

STEPHEN. Neither yours nor mine, father, but the best elements in the English national character. (p. 124-5)

Shaw's ideal of England is also present in one of Undershaft's remarks, referring to the possible generosity and unselfishness of all the people:

(5) UNDERSHAFT. (…) I was a dangerous man until I had my will: now I am a useful, beneficent, kindly person. That is the history of most self-made millionaires, I fancy. When it is the history of every Englishman we shall have an England worth living in. (*Major Barbara*, p. 143)

An interesting view is outlined in another dialogue from the same play, which reflects the author's paradoxical metadiscourse about the English:

(6) UNDERSHAFT. You love the needy and the outcast: you love the oppressed races, the Negro, the Indian ryot, the underdog everywhere. Do you love the Japanese? Do you love the French? Do you love the English?
CUSINS. No. Every true Englishman detests the English. We are the wickedest nation on earth, and our success is a moral horror. (*Major Barbara*, p. 146)

A separate line consists of those generic remarks which refer to the English society and language in Shaw's time. In the Notes to *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, Shaw gives voice to his ideas about different English dialects and his acute concern for English spelling, the correctness of which seems to be strongly linked to being part of high society:

I must … most vehemently disclaim any intention of suggesting that English pronunciation is authoritative and correct. My own tongue is neither American English nor English English, but Irish English, so I am nearly impartial in the matter as it is in human nature to be. (p. 344);

or:

nothing annoys a native speaker of English more than a faithful setting down in phonetic spelling of the sounds he utters. He imagines that a departure from conventional spelling indicates a departure from the correct standard English of good society. Alas! This correct standard English of good society is unknown to phoneticians. It is only one of the figments that bewilder our poor snobbish brains. (*Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, p. 345)

A similar reference to snobbery and foolishness being closely linked to "proper" English pronunciation can be read in the following lines:

"Roughly speaking, I should say that in England he who bothers about his *h*s is a fool, and he who ridicules a dropped *h*[7] a snob." (idem. 347)

In *Major Barbara*, Lady Britomart (whose name itself suggests her affiliation to an ethnic group, and who is also referred to by the close members of her family as "Lady Brit") ironically explains how the upper class acquire their speaking habits:

> (7) LADY BRITOMART. In good society in England, Charles, men drivel at all ages by repeating silly formulas with an air of wisdom. Schoolboys make their own formulas out of slang, like you. When they reach your age, and get political private secretaryships and things of that sort, they drop slang and get their formulas out of the Spectator or The Times. You had better confine yourself to The Times. You will find that there is a certain amount of tosh about The Times; but at least its language is reputable. (*Major Barbara*, p. 117)

More fine-grained references to the characters' Britishness appear in *how* they express this ethnic identity, what topics of discussion they consider important. For example, Lady Cicely, in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, speaks of common sense and politeness, two stereotypical features of the English:

> (8) LADY CICELY. … I'm only talking common-sense. Why do these people get killed by savages? because instead of being polite to them, and saying How dye do? like me, people aim pistols at them. (…) when I met [these savage-cannibals and all sort], I said Howdyedo? and they were quite nice. The kings always wanted to marry me." (p. 272)

Similarly, Sir Howard uses very polite language and is in need of "privacy"[8] and "civility", two other stereotypical English values:

> (9) SIR HOWARD. … Well, I am afraid I want a little privacy, and, if you will allow me to say so, a little civility. (p. 293)

The *Apple Cart* itself from the play with the same title is a symbol of the Kingdom, not to mention its reference to the English phrase "*don't upset the apple cart*" meaning "don't create difficulty, don't spoil plans or arrangements", another emblem of Englishness. In *Candida,* the playwright makes reference to the respectable manners and values of everyday Victorian life. The ambiguity and uncertainty of some of the characters is marked by many of their suspended utterances: "Have you never–?" (p.

276); "I have no sympathy with–" (p. 263); "Well, of all the–" (p. 246), etc.

There are several references to the other fellow-countrymen, the Scots or the Irish, the latter being discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Here we make reference only to a character in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Sir Patrick Cullen, whose name, common sense, large build and stature, and occasional turn of speech reveal his Irishness. He actually proves to be a model of Shaw himself. This is underpinned by the stage direction stating that "he has lived all his life in England and is thoroughly acclimatized" (p. 95). An indirect hint to Englishness vs. Irishness is detectable in his acceptance or refusal of morals: "All your moralizings have no value for me. I don't believe in morality. I'm a disciple of Bernard Shaw." (*The Doctor's Dilemma*, p. 151) In *The Apple Cart*, the Scots are referred to in comparison with the English, the latter being despised with contempt: "God help England if she had no Scots to think for her!" (p. 111).

So far we have given examples of generic references to ethnicity, in a general context and particularly to Britishness, in Shavian plays where ethnicity is not the central theme of the literary work. In these plays, ethnicity is not the main, constitutive idea of the play. It is only partly present, as one dimension of a character's identity. For instance, *Pygmalion* (see detailed analysis in Chapter 7) belongs to this group of works, in which ethnicity is indirectly present and it is not a structuring element of the play.

However, the main body of the Shavian plays analysed in this book reveal a series of cultural and ethnic differences as the plays' constitutive elements. They comprise oppositions on the basis of which the plays are structured. *Arms and the Man*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *John Bull's Other Island* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* are plays in which ethnicity is present directly, as a central, structural motif and thus they outline different varieties of identity. *Arms and the Man* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* are based on the opposition of the eastern and western stereotype, the latter play also revealing the double face of the western (English) stereotype. While *The Devil's Disciple* highlights the paradox of the English and American stereotype, *John Bull's Other Island* is structured around another paradoxical opposition: that of the Irish and the English stereotype, which stands as an emblem for the assumed Shavian double identity.

1.2. Novelty of the theme: the paradox of ethnic identities

No systematic study of Shavian plays from a linguistic perspective has been carried out. A small number of books have dealt with the language of the plays. In *Shaw: The Style and the Man*, Richard Ohmann (1962), analyses Shaw's characteristic "linguistic modes", especially present in the Prefaces. John A. Mills (1969) extends the linguistic analysis to the plays themselves in *Language and Laughter* and examines Shaw's employment of dialect, wordplay, and linguistic satire. A linguistic analysis of Shaw appears in one of the chapters of *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, where Andrew Kennedy (1975) discusses Shaw's linguistic naturalism (references found in Weintraub 1988: 46). One single example of a pragmatic analysis that I came across is Professor Geoffrey Leech's interesting study on *Pragmatic Principles in Shaw's 'You Never Can Tell'* (Leech 1992: 259-78).

Literary criticism of Shaw's contemporaries and of the recent past focuses mainly on the issue of paradox as the structuring element of the plays. According to G.K. Chesterton, paradox "means an idea expressed in a form which is verbally contradictory", it is "truth inherent in a contradiction", "collision between what is seemingly and what is really true" ([1950] 2008: 64).[9] Most critics emphasise Shaw's mastery of paradox.[10] Margery Morgan, for instance, highlights Shaw's art of unconventional thinking, of offering his readers a fresh look at the world:

> … the consistent Shavian mask, the created *persona*[11] of the author, defines the master of paradox, operative in a single phrase or in the basic concept on which an entire play is structured. (*Major Barbara* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*, for example, can be analysed and interpreted as paradoxes in dramatic form.) Whether it is an incidental device, or a major reflection of mental attitude, it serves the general effect of liberating readers and audiences from conventional thinking. The self-contradiction at the heart of paradox confronts common sense and moderate 'reasonableness', those lowest common denominators of understanding, with the frankly nonsensical and thus joins with farce in presenting a version of the world as more fantastic than is familiarly acknowledged; fantastic, but not meaningless. An abundant use of paradox does more than shock the mind into re-examining long-accepted propositions; it encourages and gives practice in a mode of thinking which is an unorthodox constant in the Western tradition. The distinction between right and wrong fades into insignificance before the growing awareness that no single rational formulation is adequate to express the many aspects of reality. (Morgan 1972: 341-2)

According to T.F. Evans (1976: 308), "Shaw uses the weapon of paradox, which is to contend that if such and such an idea is sound, another idea, which ought to horrify the defenders of the first one, is just as sound in the light of their arguments." Berst (1998: 58) speaks of Shaw's "taste for paradox, irony, and allegory", while Innes stresses the playwright's typical way of thinking (1998: 173): "The intellectual process operates through inversion, paradox, and divergence within repetition: all characteristic techniques of Shaw's drama, here subsumed into a mode of reasoning." Last, but not least,

> the final period of Shaw's dramatic production, from *Saint Joan* to his plays in the 1930s may be seen as, in themselves, a paradoxical representation of the whole of his writing life. For one who employed paradox to such a great extent in his own style of writing and thought, this in itself is an exquisite example of paradox. (Evans 1998: 254)

Similarly, there have been studies highlighting the mastery of irony in the Shavian plays, just to mention Amalric's (1991) study on *Intertextuality and Irony*. This study also approaches this topic, but from the perspective of linguistic theories of irony (see Chapter 6).

In this study, we propose a sociolinguistic approach to paradox. We suggest that ethnic identity and ethnic stereotypes are present in the linguistic manifestations, in the verbal behaviour of Shavian characters in the form of alternative, paradoxical identities. We claim that Britishness appears in the form of ambiguous, parallel identities the way the characters' linguistic manifestations reveal it.

1.3. Research methodology:
the interface of linguistics and literature

For those interested in applying linguistic methods to the study of literature an obvious procedure is to use the categories of linguistics to describe the language of literary texts. Literature is, as Valéry said, "a kind of extension and application of certain properties of language". The linguist, therefore, can contribute to literary studies by showing what properties of language were being exploited in particular texts and how they were extended or reorganised (reference in Culler [1975], 2008: 64).

The present work investigates the interface of language and literature by analysing literary works with the help of linguistics, or more specifically, it approaches ethnicity, as one facet of identity, with linguistic means. Its aim is to contribute to the body of works that approach literature through linguistic means.

Research shows that "an increasing interest in the pragmatics of literary texts has been making itself felt across the disciplines of both literary sciences and linguistics" (Mey 1999, 2001: 787). Many salient works have emerged such as Traugott and Pratt's (1980) *Linguistics for the Student of Literature*, the Interface Series of Routledge Publishing House and studies in the so-called literary pragmatics (e.g. Mey, J. (1999), Toolan, M. (1994), Fludernik, M. (1993)). In addition, further research articles can be mentioned in this line, published in the journals of this interdisciplinary area like *Text*, *Poetics*, *Journal of Literary Semantics*, and especially *Language and Literature*, which covers the latest developments in stylistic analysis, the linguistic analysis of literature and related areas. These journals also provide firm evidence that the combination of literary criticism and linguistics is both legitimate and creative.

The study of style and the language of literature is one of the most traditional applications of linguistics, "one which has been given new impetus by the rapid new developments in linguistics since the development of generative grammar. At the present time, linguistic analysis of literature is one of the most active and creative areas of literary studies" (Traugott and Pratt 1980: 19-20). Although linguistics is not essential to the study of literature, it can contribute to a better understanding of a text. It can help in raising awareness of why we experience what we do when we read a literary work and it can also reveal how the experience of a work is in part derived from its verbal structure. Above all, however, linguistics can give the conscious reader a point of view, a way of looking at a literary text that will help them develop a consistent analysis, and prompt them to ask questions about the language of a text that they might otherwise ignore. Linguistics helps ensure a proper foundation for analysis by enabling the literary critic to recognise the systematic regularities in the language of a text. In this sense, we can use linguistics to construct a theory about the language of a text in the form of a "grammar of the text". In this way, linguistics forms an integral component of literary criticism.

Alongside this line of research, this work examines the "significance" of the literary text from a linguistic perspective, investigating its language from different points of view. Accordingly, the investigation takes place on two levels:

1. the analysis of the *language proper*, of the linguistic choices the author (G.B. Shaw, in our case) makes, which draws no distinction between the literary text and other types of texts;

2. the analysis of the *significance of such linguistic choices*, which leads the critic to a deeper, more proper interpretation of the literary work.

The significance of linguistic choices is understood in two complementary ways:

(i) Firstly, the literary text is considered to be an answer to the everyday social and political questions of the playwright's time. In our case, Shaw's adoption of one of the ideological trends of the age (Fabianism, socialism) is transparent in the texts of the plays and in the characters' attitudes to certain social and political issues;

(ii) Secondly, the work shapes the ideological views of the time. In this sense, the literary work plays an active role in forming the ideology of an age. This point is especially salient in the case of Shaw's plays (see the detailed development of this idea later in this chapter, section 1.4.).

Within this framework, the methodology of analysis applied to the plays is micro-sociolinguistic. The key problem in this field of linguistic research is always the origin and nature of the social valence attached to linguistic forms. Choices of form are primarily determined by the social characteristics of participants and setting. As Brown and Levinson (1987) state, it is precisely in action and interaction that the most profound interrelations between language and society are to be found. This is the field of micro-sociolinguistics. In line with this approach, the Shavian plays are taken as an authentic socio-cultural linguistic corpus (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). In this context, the social variables that shape the identity of the characters are related to their language use and social behaviour. Born from the writer's fictional world, the language these individuals use is characteristic of the time and society in which the author lived and created them. In this sense, this work is an attempt to capture the typical sociolinguistic features of these literary figures who–though on the surface have nothing to do with real life at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century–basically are the "children" of their creator's age, whether the action of the play takes place in the 16th (*Saint Joan*), 19th century (*A Man of Destiny*) or right in Shaw's own time (*Mrs Warren's Profession, Major Barbara,* or *Pygmalion*).

On the other hand, it might be stated that all Shavian characters are not only "typical" but also "stereotypical" from a sociological perspective, because they embody Shaw's view of the nationality or ethnicity they

belong to. In this way, the texts display several stereotypical English, French, American, Swiss and other nationality characters who behave, act and speak according to Shaw's view about these nations and ethnic groups.

However, nationality and ethnicity form only one side of these characters: like real people, they also bear the features of their own race, class, gender, etc., all the parameters through which their identity is created. As a result, this work considers them as stereotypes of their race, class, gender, ethnicity, but at certain places–wherever the case–they will be viewed as counter-stereotypes, diverging from the stereotype, i.e. being basically different from what society expects them to be.

By offering an ambiguous view of the created ethnic stereotypes, Shaw *constructs* and *undermines* at the same time his characteristically paradoxical plot and character treatment. The present work concentrates on all the conversational strategies the Shavian characters employ while they act like a typical specimen of their ethnic group or nationality, of their gender or their class, or exactly the opposite. These analyses will not only capture these characters in their linguistic interaction with other characters, but–as their ethnical bias is revealed in ways other than language–it will also focus on the way they utter certain sentences or make certain gestures, use body language, etc. In other words, the focus of this book is to analyse how interacting participants use language, which–as a result–shapes their ethnic identity. However, because ethnicity is not neatly isolable from other facets of identity, it is necessary to consider the participants' positioning with respect to other types of group identity (e.g. gender, class, age), as well as personal and interpersonal identities that are adopted, shaped and abandoned in the course of the unfolding interaction.

Since the texts to be analysed belong to the dramatic genre, beside the ideational function of language (the way language is used to convey experience and information about the context and is best exploited in poetry and prose), the interpersonal function of language is highlighted. Drama is prototypically the literary genre composed almost entirely of face-to-face interaction between characters (Tan 1998). The methods of analysis, which focus on the linguistic structure of the dramatic dialogue, are discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics, which deal precisely with face-to-face interaction. All these prove to be useful tools in analysing the meanings of utterances in (fictional) dialogue. Politeness theory, which is also applied in the analyses, can illuminate the social dynamics and character interaction, while discourse analysis can shed light on aspects of characterisation. It can also be added that drama has proved to be a neglected child for linguistic analysis. Only a small number of

articles on the analysis of drama have been published in one of the most outstanding journals of the field, *Language and Literature*[12], and no article on Shaw's language. One of the aims of this study is to try to address this deficiency.

Summing up, the method of analysis of the plays will be based on the interface of language and literature. The plays are approached from a micro-sociolinguistic perspective. Although we follow the close analysis of the texts, concentrating on their different closures, which leads us back to the age of structuralism, in this work we apply post-structuralist, present-day methods, relying on the latest and newly emerging branches of linguistics: pragmatics, conversation analysis, Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory and other methods of analysing linguistic manifestations of identity, and specifically, ethnicity.

It must be added, that through pragmatics, linguistics extends its area of research towards sociology, anthropology, to the study of power relations and language ideology (as discussed by Foucault and Barthes). In our analyses, however, we remain within the area of linguistics (micro-sociolinguistics), by offering analyses based on cultural pragmatics. Thus linguistics provides a method of analysis, it provides us with a battery of concepts, which bridge the space between text and its ideological and sociological significance. The micro-sociolinguistic concepts employed in the analyses originally derive from the fathers of pragmatics and language philosophy; such as Austin and Searle's "illocutionary force", Grice's "conversational implicature", further developed by Leech's "interpersonal rhetoric" (as it appears in his *Principles of Pragmatics*), and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. From the vast area of micro-sociolinguistic research we have chosen the method of conversation analysis, which is viewed as micro-sociolinguistic analysis. The discussion of the roles, identities, ethnicity that the different characters assume takes us to the realm of their language use, the field of socio-pragmatics (as Leech defines it in his "interpersonal rhetoric"[13]), also incorporating Speech Acts, viewed as social transaction.

The question, however, arises: to what extent can these methods be adequately applied? The analyses that follow demonstrate that the plays *can* be analysed on these terms, as ethnicity is demonstrably a structural component of the plot and, to a certain extent, a constitutive element of the characters' identity.

Ethnic issues have such an importance in Shaw's work for two reasons: firstly, he was deeply influenced by the national movements of

19th century Europe[14], and secondly, his own controversial assumed
cultural identity made him more sensitive to the topic of ethnicity.

In the 19th century, during the first half of Shaw's life, the concept of
ethnic and national identity[15] emerged together with the birth of young
nations across Europe.[16] The playwright's worldview and ideological
affiliation is deeply affected by his contemporary social and political
trends. Although Shaw's discussion of Britishness is not a mirror of these
divergent processes, these must be seen as a backdrop to the contemporary
social and political context. Shaw's multifaceted notion of Britishness
remains a salient feature clearly identifiable in the Shavian texts.

The idea of national or ethnic identity is a romantic one. However,
Shaw's approach to it is outspokenly and obviously anti-romantic[17]. The
early 20th century political, economic, social and cultural changes create
the possibility for distancing himself from this romantic approach.
Therefore it can be stated that Shaw takes over the idea of romantic
nationalism from the 19th century, but at the same time he also impairs it
with an anti-romantic, even ironic, paradoxical world-view.

On the other hand, one can only be responsive to the ethnic issues of
one's age if one is an outsider to the status quo, in Shaw's case, his
Irishness in the British context. I believe that Shaw's ironic, ambiguous,
paradoxical attitude towards all the issues he touches upon can be
explained by his deep sense of being an outsider, a complete stranger in
his own country. It is a state of mind that allows for distancing himself
from the issues he discusses. This is especially true for his approach to, or
actually his distant view of the theme of ethnic or national identity as it is
revealed in his Prefaces and plays. This distance creates a more or less
objective outlook, offering him cool, sometimes even bitter ironic attitude.

In the following, a short description of Shaw's time and ideology will
be presented, within the framework of the late 19th–early 20th century
British economic, social and political movements, which influenced the
playwright's world-view. He took the role of a political agitator, social
critic and writer of political essays, but it is mostly his plays and prefaces
to his plays that he considered the best means to advance his ideology.

1.4. Ideology and Shaw's plays

There was a general feeling of unease in the atmosphere of the late 19th
century, when Shaw's career was unfolding in London.[18] Certain opinions
had gone out of fashion, or had been discredited and late Victorian readers
tended to condition the idea of human progress with a prominent
Darwinian question mark. Society was assumed to be developing

according to certain laws. The movement for women's rights, and the
emergence of the so-called "New Woman", were cultural norms as were
the parliamentary debates over the destinies of Ireland within or outside
the United Kingdom and the extra-parliamentary debates concerning the
likelihood of a socialist future. After the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1885
the extension of the franchise to a substantial proportion of working-class
men brought nearer the prospect of future mass politics. Later a series of
reforms extended suffrage to working class women as well.[19] Though
Shaw also included the granting of voting rights to women in his
manifestos and Fabian pamphlets, he also raised the public's attention to
its "side-effects":

> When women are wronged … they grasp formidable legal and social
> weapons and retaliate (…) Give women the vote, and in five years there
> will be a crushing tax on bachelors. (Preface to *Man and Superman* 13, 19)

This created a new climate of popular politics, in which the traditional
two-party system of conservatives and liberals was broken up by the
introduction of the Labour party and then the disintegration of the Liberal
party.[20] However, the extension of franchise and the prospect of
democracy filled Shaw with a deep sense of scepticism. In the Preface to
the *Revolutionist's Handbook*, an annex to *Man and Superman*, he writes:

> That is what a general election enables the people to do in England every
> seven years if they choose: [throw] one set of rules and substitute another
> with different interests and different views. (213)

A determining factor in Shaw's world-view, making him sensitive to
the issue of ethnic identity, was his being a foreigner all his life. In
Catholic Dublin, he was an outsider due to his Protestant family
background and in England he felt like a stranger exactly due to his Irish
origin. Perhaps this attitude towards life, being *the Stranger*,
complemented by his extensive interest in the new movements of his age,
pushed him towards the acceptance of the new ideology of the time,
socialism, or its "milder" version, Fabianism.[21]
    The young Shaw who arrived in London in 1876 (he was 20 years old
at the time) was already very cultivated for his age. He was much more an
expert than the average English young intellectuals of the same age–in
spite of little formal education–not only in literature, but also in music,
arts, Darwinian natural sciences and Spenserian social sciences, due to his
voracious reading programme. He started going to workers' meetings, but
he was more well-known there because of his heavy fists. By the time he

was 24, the red-bearded young man was already the well-known orator of London street-corners. He became not only the characteristic but also one of the most listened to agitators of the English working class movement of the 1880s.

At this time Marx was still living, so his teaching had the effect not of the authority of the classics, but the vividness of a contemporary. But Marx's doctrines, including *Das Kapital*, were not the first experience of this kind. Shaw's conversion to socialism had begun in 1882 when he heard Henry George, the American author of *Progress and Poverty* address a London public meeting. Georgianism considered the private property of lands and land rent the exclusive causes of the disproportionate distribution of income. He was looking for a utopian solution in the imaginary unity of the common property of lands, industrial private property and trade as private enterprise. *Progress and Poverty*–in spite of its biased views and mistakes–was for Shaw an extremely valuable pre-reading for the study of social and economic issues. As he confessed later, George's message "changed the whole current of [his] life". However, Shaw was Henry George's follower only for a short time. In the working class movement he heard more and more about Marxism, so he went to the British Library and read *Das Kapital*. From then on he remained a socialist all his life. As he remembered later, the reading of this book "made a man of [him]". In developing his own ideology, he was also influenced by the works of "Bunyan, Blake, Hogarth, and Turner (these four apart and above all the English classics), Goethe, Shelley, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Ibsen, Morris, Tolstoy and Nietzsche" as writers about whom he writes: their "peculiar sense of the world I recognize as more or less akin to my own" (Preface to *Man and Superman*, 29).

Politically he is–undoubtedly–a socialist, but actually he never belonged to any political party. During the *fin du siècle*, for those who were not attracted to escape into art (like the aesthetics of Walter Pater or Oscar Wilde's art for art's sake[22], Carlyle's ethical programme or Ruskin's aestheticising ethics), there was another alternative. They could choose the tolerant and tiring improvement of society, as Shaw did. The institution that promoted this kind of thinking was the Fabian Society founded–among others–by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, H.G. Wells and Shaw himself, all strong social evolutionists.[23] He also served in its Executive Committee for many years. The society took the name of Quintus Fabius Maximus, who is recorded in Roman history as a "Cunctator" (meaning "The Delayer"), a hesitating Roman general, suggesting that he saw the solution to social and economic problems not in revolution but in evolution.

The Fabians' criticism of the Liberal economic order was not so much that it was unjust, but that it was inefficient and wasteful. A centrally-planned economy and labour market, administered by an élite of trained professionals, would eliminate inefficiency, the trade cycle, and its by-products such as unemployment and poverty. It would attain this end *gradually* through legislation and reforms and not by revolution. Perhaps the chief contribution of the Fabians was to assist in the development of a fresh concept of "progress" on the British left which in the 1880s was becoming limited in its horizons by the persistent wrangles over Home Rule. "The Fabians addressed themselves to the existing intelligentsia: they were not a popular movement but they operated only on a limited scale. The impact of the Society surpassed the circle of its followers, influencing, amongst others, the Labour Party (Matthew 2000: 512).

As a political journalist, Shaw edited *Fabian Essays* (1899). He wrote the section on the economic basis of socialism, providing an analysis of rents, economic value, wages, and property.[24] In another essay he theorised the historical transitions from medievalism to capitalism, state interference, and finally state organisation as a historical account of the inevitable rise of socialist organisation of society. His social, political and ethical opinions are also on display in such studiously and vivaciously controversial works such as *Common Sense about the War* (1914), *How to Settle the Irish Question* (1917), *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928; revised 1937) and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944). *The Intelligent Woman's Guide…* is particularly useful because of the way it clearly presents the Fabian position on a full range of economic issues and engages with capitalism's dependence on poverty, social inequality, international military conflict, private profiteering from public utilities, and the dangers of privatisation. The text argues that feminism and socialism are fundamentally allied because women are necessarily disempowered under capitalism, and it calls for the nationalisation of the land and capital enterprise, as well as the establishment of absolute equality of income and leisure (Okin xv-xviii). Shaw's engagement with these issues allows us to draw the precise connections between his socialist thinking and literary production. (Trexler 2007: 866)

Naturally, his ideology is also present in his plays concerned with ideas. He freely used his plays as vehicles for his social(ist) thinking. His plays reveal an intellectual confidence which is lacking in much of the cautious, agnostic, depressive writing of his non-dramatic London contemporaries. Shaw presupposes that history can be illuminating (*Caesar and Cleopatra, Saint Joan*), that the present can be vigorously

reforming (*Mrs Warren's Profession, Major Barbara, Man and Superman*), and that the future (whether darwinistically determined or not) will be exciting (*Back to Methuselah*).[25]

Beside his plays, the Prefaces tend to be essays that deal more with Shaw's opinions on the issues addressed in the plays than about the plays themselves. As a writer of Prefaces, he wrote nearly a hundred, not just on his dramas, but also on a great variety of personal, political, social, and cultural subjects. The Prefaces to *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* also compare eastern and western variants of polygamy or discuss Darwinian theories of natural selection. They also analyse the social causes of the characters' problems which lie outside their consciousness. One may be impressed by his clear-sighted vision of the connection between family and imperialism, between childhood education and economic exploitation (cf. Innes 1998: 167).

Similarly, his letters also reveal his constant interest in understanding the spiritual realities behind material facts. As he wrote to H.M. Hyndman in 1900,

> I am a moral revolutionary interested, not in the class war, but in the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality, and distinguishing, not between capitalist and proletarian, but between moralist and natural historian (Shaw 1972: 160, ref. in Griffith 1993)

Whether he intended his plays to answer the political or social issues of the day, or to draw the readers' and the audience's attention to urgent political matters, or have a more distant, not so definite point in writing a play, there was always the aim of directly addressing his audience, though from many standpoints and in many guises. In a letter written in 1944, he claims:

> As a Socialist it is my business to state social problems and to solve them. I have done this in tracts, treatises, essays and prefaces. You keep asking why I do not keep repeating these propositions Euclidically in my plays. You might as well ask me why I don't wear my gloves on my feet or eat jam with a spade.[26]

In the Preface written to his first plays, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, entitled *Mainly about Myself*, he actually wrote an essay with the aim of increasing the public's knowledge of his opinions, his history and his fortunes as an already published author. But here he disclosed very little about himself. In actual fact, he gave an insider's knowledge about the

controversies within the playwriting profession, also disclosing to his readers his attitude towards contemporary society and morality:

> I had no taste for what is called popular art, no respect for popular morality, no belief in popular religion, no admiration for popular heroics. As an Irishman I could pretend to patriotism neither for the country I had abandoned nor the country that had ruined it. As a humane person I detested violence and slaughter, whether in war, sport, or the butcher's yard. I was a Socialist, detesting our anarchical scramble for money, and believing in equality as the only possible permanent basis of social organisation, discipline, subordination, good manners, and selection of fit persons for high functions. (…) I was neither sceptic, nor a cynic in these matters: I simply understood life differently from the average respectable man. (7)

Shaw addresses the burning contemporary issue of marriage or divorce, in the Preface to *Getting Married* (1908). He emphasises the reality and seriousness of the legal problems at the time, while the 1933 Postscript affirms its continuing relevance. Just by looking at the headings of the different sections, one may realise the variety of the social and economic topics that concern the playwright, the outline of the problem and suggestion of solutions: *What does the Word Marriage Mean?*; *The Economic Slavery of Women*; *The Manufacture of Monsters*; *Wanted: An Immoral Statesman*, *Divorce a Sacramental Duty*; *We Must Reform Society before we can reform Ourselves*; *Wanted: a Child's Magna Charta*.[27]

Shaw's socialism, however, is not relevant for our studies. What interests us in this work is investigating what might be the *outcome* of his political inclination: i.e. his sharp critical view of all the issues he discusses by continually challenging the current trends of his contemporary society. These challenges appear in the form of his much-acclaimed iconoclasm[28]. As an iconoclast with an Irish sense of distance from the English life that he enjoyed and mocked, he exposed the humbug and hypocrisy in his time, and subverted sanctimonious value systems.

Due to his socialist bias, Shaw was also interested in moral issues, or more precisely, social morality. His plays betray his concern with moral problems if these have social implications.[29] As a creator with leftist inclinations, his prefaces and plays exhibit an intellectual's sensitivity to social injustice. For instance, his *Plays Unpleasant*, especially *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*, are direct attacks against slum landlordism and the hypocrisy of society regarding prostitution. As Shaw remarks in the Preface to the latter play:

> Mrs Warren is not a whit a worse woman than the reputable daughter who cannot endure her. Her indifference to the ultimate social consequence of her means of making money (…) are too common in English society to call for any special remark. (166)[30]

However, all the social issues discussed in his plays are not seen as clearly distinguishable categories. Shaw's oeuvre displays a complex attitude to social and moral questions, in the form of a pendulous expression between different positions. This complexity of positions can be traced in the analyses to follow, in the form of identifying the characters' paradoxical attitudes to issues such as ethnicity and identity (see for example the paradox of Britishness in *Caesar and Cleopatra* in Chapter 5.2, or the double face of the British stereotype in *The Devil's Disciple* in Chapter 5.1.).

1.5. Research Questions

What is missing from the above description of Shaw's work (and to our knowledge, utterly absent from research on Shaw's plays) is the discussion on the relationship between his complex ideology and its manifestation in the language of his plays. This work proposes to address this absence, at least, partially. From among the multiple facets of identity, we have chosen ethnicity, because–as discussed in detail above (see Section 1.3)–it proves to be a structuring, constituting element of the plays or essentially defines certain characters' language manifestation and their attitudes to moral issues (see, for example, middle class morality of Alfred Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, General Burgoyne and Major Swindon's paradoxical parallel in *The Devil's Disciple*, based on their different communicative strategies, or Britannus' stiff moral attitude and hypocrisy as opposed to Caesar's gentlemanly behaviour in *Caesar and Cleopatra*). In order to answer the challenge of such complex issues, based on the above rationale, several questions emerge. We have ordered them according to their reference either to (A) the contents of the plays (poetics of drama) and (B) to the methods of analysis applied:

A.
1. If we follow the poetics of drama, can the linguistic (pragmatic, discourse analytic, micro-sociolinguistic) methods employed in the analyses of the plays bring any novelty to the interpretation of the Shavian plays, and to the Shavian oeuvre in general?
2. Are there any common, generalisable motifs recurrent in the Shavian plays that arise as a result of the analyses employed?