

MR. SHAW

INTERVIEWS HIMSELF

Typewriter sounds

SHAW

The Star newspaper, 1892. The playwright interviews himself on his first play.

[creative pause. Typewriter starts again]

I am an experienced Interviewer; but I confess that when the Star Editor directed me to tackle *myself* on the subject of the play I have written for the Independent Theatre, I felt nervous.

EDITOR

Keep to the point,

SHAW

said the Editor:

EDITOR

Be firm, or you will talk your head off without once alluding to the play.

SHAW (*quaking inwardly*)

You may rely on me sir.

EDITOR

(calling after him)

And Shaw! Whatever you do, don 't mention Shakespear!

[suspenseful travelling music]

SHAW

I went off to my well-known number in Fitzroy Square, and arrived there at half past eleven in the morning. Entering with trepidation, I climbed up some desolate stone steps to the second floor...

COMPANY

WHERE I FOUND... MYSELF!

SHAW

In a very small room, untidy beyond belief, I was dumping down a helping of porridge which I had just extracted from a saucepan on the hob.

I confess I felt embarrassed at myself. No, I did not.

[creative pause.]

[Typing begins again]

I received myself affably--

JOURNALIST

--Good day to me!--

SHAW

-- and piloted myself between the Scylla of the typewriter and the Charybdis of the blazing fire to a chair by the wide-open window.

JOURNALIST

Now, Mr. Shaw, what about "Wendover's Horses?"

SHAW

What?

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw frequently finds the Press incomprehensible. But a Star Interviewer always presses his point.

JOURNALIST

Your play, sir. "Wendover's Horses"--?

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw at once begins a most brilliant account of the entire history of The Star newspaper, from its inception --

SHAW

In 1888, when, on the advice of H.J. Massingham, I was invited to join the political staff, not one of my articles was considered printable!

NARRATOR

to the present time....

SHAW

(voice fading out)

[I proposed as a compromise that I should be allotted a column to fill with some non-political matter, say, music. I chose for my nom de plume Cornet di Bassetto, which simply means basset horn in Italian and began forthwith to...."]

JOURNALIST

This gave me fifteen minutes to observe that he wore

COMPANY

A GRAY COLLAR AND SANDALS.

JOURNALIST

Fascinating, fascinating. Now, Wendover's Horses, Mr. Shaw.

SHAW

What do you mean?

JOURNALIST

Your play, Mr Shaw? That is the title given by the evening papers...

SHAW

Nonsense. Widowers' Houses is the title.

JOURNALIST

Ah. To what genre does the play belong? Comedy, Tragedy, Farce or Melodrama?

SHAW

To none of them. To Humanity solely. That is the only genre I recognize.

JOURNALIST

I see...I see that your play is announced by the Independent Theatre as a " didactic, realistic drama". May I venture to hope that it will

COMPANY

NOT BE TOO DIDACTIC?

SHAW

Sir, it will be nothing else than didactic. Do you suppose I have gone to all this trouble to *amuse* the public? No, if they want that there is

the Criterion for them, the Comedy, The Garrick! My object is to instruct them.

JOURNALIST

Quite so....

NARRATOR

Here Mr. Shaw explains at great length the bearing on the play of

SHAW

(voice fading out)

The Value Theory of Labour of the late Professor Stanley Jevons which, being more favourable to Socialism swept Marx's theory completely into the dustbin in 1871. Marx treats of labour without reference to variations of skill between its parts;(of raw material without reference to variations of fertility; and of the difference between the product of labour and the price (wage) of labour power as "surplus value" without reference to its subdivision into rent, interest and profits).

JOURNALIST

(persevering)

Most interesting.

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw begins to illustrate the theory with a diagram--

JOURNALIST

As a playwright, Mr. Shaw, you are, ofcourse, a follower of Ibsen?

SHAW

What! I a follower of Ibsen! My good sir, as far as England is concerned, Ibsen is a follower of mine.

JOURNALIST

Ah ha. Shakespear is your model perhaps?

COMPANY

Shhh.

SHAW

Shakespear! Stuff! Shakespear--a disillusioned idealist! a pessimist! Shakespear! a rationalist! a capitalist!

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw roots feverishly through his files,

SHAW

Shakespear!

NARRATOR

--throwing up programmes and papers,

JOURNALIST

-- Mr Shaw! what are we looking for?!--

SHAW

Shakespear himself was disgusted at the fact that the only thing that
paid in the theatre was romantic nonsense!

(Shaw finds what he seeks)

Ah--!

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw produces a dogeared copy of his short story entitled

**

SHAW

: "A Dressing Room Secret".

(Hey Nonny Nonny Shakespearean music underscore)

NARRATOR

It is trying-on day; the last touches are being given to the costumes for the Shakespear Ball . A plaster bust of the Bard gazes down from its pedestal as the wearers face the looking glass at the costumiers...:

IAGO

(discontentedly)

It's no use. I don't look right and I don't feel right.

COSTUMIER

I assure you sir, you are a perfect picture.

IAGO

I may look a picture, but I don't look the character of Iago.

COSTUMIER

Well sir, the truth is, we cannot dress Iago in character, because he is not a character.

IAGO

Not a character! Iago not a character! Are you mad? Are you drunk? Are you hopelessly illiterate?

COSTUMIER

I know it seems presumptuous, sir, after so many great critics have written long chapters analyzing the character of Iago.

IAGO

If that bust of Shakespear could speak, it would ask to be removed at once to a suitable niche in the facade of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre, instead of being left here to be insulted.

BUST

Not a bit of it.

As a matter of fact I can speak. It is not easy for a bust to speak; but when I hear an honest man rebuked for talking common sense, even the stones would speak. And I am only plaster.

IAGO

(gasp)

This is a silly trick. You have a phonograph in that bust. You might at least have made it a blank verse phonograph.

COSTUMIER

On my honour sir, not a word has ever passed between me and that bust--I beg pardon Mr. Shakespear-- before this hour.

BUST

The reason you cannot get the dress and the makeup right is very simple. I made a mess of Iago because villains are such infernally dull and disagreeable people that I never could go through with them. My contempt and loathing for the creature--what was worse, the intense boredom of him--beat me before I got to the second act. He began to be clever and witty in spite of me. Then it was all up. It was *Richard III* all over again. I made him a humourous dog. I went further: I gave him my own divine contempt for the follies of mankind and for himself. He ended up as a pleasant sort of chap.

IAGO

(snarling)

You don't call Iago "a pleasant sort of chap!"

COSTUMIER

Sir! Sir! Replace him on his pedestal.

IAGO

Sorry.

BUST

Alas Iago, Oh oh Othello! I let myself go on the verse: thundering good stuff it was: you could hear the souls of the people crying out in the mere sound of the lines. I didn't bother about the sense--just flung about all the splendid words I could find. Oh, it was noble, I tell you: drums and trumpets: and the Propontick and the Hellespont; and a malignant and a turbaned Turk in Aleppo; and eyes that dropt tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum: the most impossible, far-fetched nonsense, but such music! I never could resist an effect. ; and I was well paid out; for I turned the play into a farce.

IAGO & COSTUMIER

A farce! Othello a farce!

BUST

You think a farce is a play in which some funny rough and tumble makes the people laugh. That's only your ignorance. What I call a farce is a play in which the misunderstandings are not natural but mechanical. By making Desdemona a decent poor devil of an honest woman and Othello a really superior sort of man, I took away all natural reason for his jealousy. Like a fool, I belittled him by making him the dupe of a farcical trick with a handkerchief that wouldn't have held water off the stage for five minutes. That's why the play is no use with a thoughtful audience. It doesn't really amuse sensible people to see a woman strangled by mistake. Ofcourse some people would go anywhere to see a woman strangled, mistake or no mistake; and their money is as good as anyone else's. It's nothing but wanton mischief and murder. I apologize for it. I threw it in to sell tickets.

NARRATOR

Iago quits the dressing room in high dudgeon.

BUST

Would you mind shutting the door behind you? I am catching cold.

IAGO

(insincerely)

So sorry.

NARRATOR

He closes the door with a slam.

COSTUMIER

Too late! He's going to sneeze!

BUST

Ah-and I don't know that I cah- an---

NARRATOR

A terrible sneeze explodes the bust, which smashes in to fragments on the floor.

COSTUMIER

Alas!

NARRATOR

It never spoke again.

**

SHAW

If my play is not better than Shakespeare, let it be damned promptly.

JOURNALIST

Quite. Quite so.

But moving from Shakespear to "Widower's Houses", Mr. Shaw --

SHAW

Ofcourse, the nation' s appreciation of Shakespear is

COMPANY

PURE HYPOCRISY,

SHAW

the proof being that where a play of his is revived, they take the utmost pains to suppress as much of it as possible, and disguise the rest past recognition. Have you seen, have you heard the latest modern revision of Shakespear?

JOURNALIST

(with a chuckle)

Would you happen to mean the review of Thomas' "Hamlet" at Covent Garden?

**

SHAW

Hamlet: A *Foolish* Opera at Covent Garden.

OPERA SINGER

(singing from Ambroise's adaptation of Hamlet)

Hamlet, my sorr-row is boundless!

(music underscore)

SHAW'S REVIEW

July 30, 1890.

I have long learnt to leave my commonsense at the door when I go to the Opera; but I cannot help taking in a few of my literary prejudices with me; and when they are outraged, I resort to

COMPANY

VINDICTIVE CRITICISM:

OPERA SINGER

Well have I noticed thy discourse!
Let us leave fair Ophelia and all question of love!

SHAW'S REVIEW

The title ought to be changed! Since Ambroise Thomas has honestly done his best not to remind us of Shakespear, why should the subject be dragged in by calling the people in the libretto Ophelia, Hamlet, Laertes and so on?

If this were altered, and the fifth and sixth acts cut out as the seventh has been, there would be time to have another ballet, and get the whole thing over by half-past eleven.

OPERA SINGER (Gertrude p. 224)

My son! I stretch out my hands to thee in desolation!

OPERA SINGER (Hamlet)

Thy hands are stain'd with blood!

SHAW'S REVIEW

Mlle Richards' playing reminds me of old times, which I thought--in fact hoped--were gone for ever.

OPERA SINGER(Gertrude)

See how with sorrow my reason is impair'd
My son ! my son! my son! Ah!---Ahhh!

SHAW'S REVIEW

She never faces the other *dramatis personae*, but tacks around them, looking at them out of the corners of her eyes and agitating her bosom with a tireless persistence that must be the result of long practice.

LaSalle, in black, and distressingly conscious of something rotten in the state of Denmark, does not tack so much but begins his phrases flat, as a rule--

OPERA SINGER (Hamlet p.233)

Curst be the villain who murdered my father! Oh heavenly pow'rs!

SHAW'S REVIEW

--which Mlle Richards never does.

OPERA SINGER(Gertrude)

Have pity, my son! no more!

SHAW'S REVIEW

Mme Melba sings chromatic roulades very prettily--

OPERA SINGER (Ophelia pg 290)

Share these poor flow'rs with me! La la la la-a la la la

SHAW'S REVIEW

--smiling at the nobility and gentry in the pit and grand tiers, who applaud her with that air of thorough connoisseurship in operatic execution which imposes on everyone who does not know by practical experience how easy it is to take them in. Then she goes to the water--

OPERA SINGER (Ophelia)

Hamlet I love thee!

SHAW'S REVIEW

and drowns herself

OPERA SINGER (Ophelia)

For thee I die!

SHAW'S REVIEW

--in token whereof her "double" presently appears supine on a sort of toboggan car, and shoots along feet foremost through the bulrushes to the prompt side.

It is all absurd as can be; and I, dead beat at the end of the season, have hardly energy enough to make fun of it even on this cheap scale. It relies for success on Shakespear's reputation and the consequent submission of the British Public to be

COMPANY

MERCILESSLY BORED

SHAW

by each of his plays once in their lives, for the sake of being able to say they have seen it.

**

JOURNALIST

Quite. And now, Mr. Shaw, "Widower's Houses"? May I ask for a sketch of the plot? As you do not wish to amuse the public, you need not, I presume, hesitate to disclose it.

SHAW

There is no plot. Surely nobody expects a play by me to have a plot...

JOURNALIST

But ...at least there is a story?

SHAW

[laughing derisively]

A story? I suppose you mean that classic series of dramatic contrivances which drives somebody to death or marriage?

JOURNALIST

Well, yes.

SHAW

You must read my letter to Murray.

JOURNALIST

But, Mr. Shaw I am here to discuss--

SHAW

Read, sir.

JOURNALIST

Your play--!

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw stokes the fire a little higher and opens the window a little wider. We are obliged to read with him:

SHAW

March 14, 1911.
My dear Murray

They tell me you have translated Edipus.
You once said you would like to write modern Medeas, Electras etc.
I once said I wished you'd commit some disgraceful offence and be
extruded ignominiously from Oxford, like Shelley.
These two birds can be killed with one stone, and that stone is your
Edipus.

You will agree with me, Sophocles was the sort of man the English
like, just as Euripedes was the sort of man they loathe. That is, he
had the brains of a ram and the theatrical technique of an
agricultural labourer. Here is Edipus, in skeleton, as I remember it.

(tacky fanfare)

(Company groans at length)

CROWD

We are unwell. What is the matter with us?

NARRATOR

Edipus discovered with crowd

EDIPUS

I have sent to ask the Oracle. My messenger ought to be back by
this: he has been away a year. Ah! Here he is.

NARRATOR

Enter Oracle Man.

ORACLE MAN

Somebody murdered old King Laius; and Apollo won't stand it.

EDIPUS

Damn his eyes--the somebody's, not Apollo's. Who is he?

ORACLE MAN

I don't know . I should ask the gentle hermit of the dale, who knows
everything. Ha! Here he is. How opportune!

NARRATOR

Enter Hermit.

EDIPUS

Who killed the king?

HERMIT

You did.

EDIPUS

Liar! Still, I certainly did kill somebody at a crossroad once. My wife Jocasta would know.

HERMIT

(enigmatically)

Your wife! Ha! ha! Here she is, by the way.

NARRATOR

Enter Jocasta.

EDIPUS

Look here Jocasta. Do you think that man I killed could have been your first husband, the old king?

JOCASTA

Nonsense. A most respectable farmer saw the whole affair. Send for him and ask him.

EDIPUS

Why can't he turn up without being sent for as the others do? Go fetch him.

NARRATOR

Exit Call Boy. Enter a Corinthian Shepherd.

C.S.

I seek Edipus your king.

EDIPUS

By a happy coincidence, I am he.

C.S.

Allow me to congratulate you. Your father is dead.

EDIPUS

A corker for the Oracle that said I should kill him. Hooray!

JOCASTA

I told you so.

EDIPUS

If only my mother were dead, my happiness would be complete. Unfortunately, I gather that she survives. They said I should end by marrying her. I shall never feel safe until she also is buried.

C.S.

Let me be frank with you. She is not your mother. The truth is, I got you when you were a baby from a most respectable farmer, and handed you over to your reputed parents.

JOCASTA

Edipus, I shouldn't go on with this.

EDIPUS

The respectable farmer must clear up this. Where can he be?

NARRATOR

By one of those fortunate accidents which seldom occur more than 6 times even in a play by Sophocles, I, Leader of the Chorus, recognize that most respectable man--whom I have not seen for forty years--in the gentleman who will now enter: the Theban Shepherd !

EDIPUS

Who was the child you gave some years ago to this Corinthian?

THEBAN

If I were you, I wouldn't ask--

EDIPUS

Scourge him until he confesses.

THE THEBAN

Oh well, if you *will* have it, it was the child of Jocasta and Laius.

THE CORINTHIAN

The party he killed at the crossroads, probably.

THE THEBAN

That is so.

EDIPUS

Then--then--I--I--Oh Lord!

NARRATOR

Exit Edipus. Chorus :

CHORUS

Ah me, no chappy
Call I happy

NARRATOR

Enter the Messenger.

[The Messenger begins with a few massive "Ohh's" and "Woe's" to get started]

He proceeds to wallow at great length in--

MESSENGER

the blood of Jocasta!

NARRATOR

--who has butchered herself in a most sanguinary manner. The audience hangs on every drop. When he adds, in minute detail, how--
-

MESSENGER

Edipus plucked his eyes out!

NARRATOR

--the whole house is in one ecstasy.
Enter EDIPUS, rushing in and scattering Rose Pink from his eyes all over the orchestra.

EDIPUS

Woe, woe! Pain! Ah me! Ai ! ai! ai! Me miserable!

CHORUS

The life of man
is but a span.
Talk of bliss
After this!

SHAW

Give this apparently frivolous précis to your students, my dear Murray, and they will at once understand what the stage craft of Sophocles came to.

From Edipus you can learn the difference between spiritual construction and mechanical stage craft-- plot, as you would have it.

The spiritual development--the gradual loading of a man's conscience bale by bale until his back breaks--is nearly as good as a bullfight,

with its provocations and tortures ending with the matador. The stage craft is, as I have said, crude to rusticity.

Yet here is a fascinating dramatic problem. Given a man who discovers himself to be the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother, how will he feel and what will he do?

Let us consider the spiritual scenario. The modern play--yours--- will not end by the completed disclosure: it will begin with it.

Jocasta, if I recollect aright, says that men have often dreamt thus of their mothers; and she implies that they were none the worse for it. Plutarch tells us that Caesar dreamt it, and was so encouraged that he crossed the Rubicon the next day. Evidently it did not shock *him*.

JOURNALIST

Let us get a little nearer home. I very seldom dream of my mother; but when I do, she is my wife as well as my mother.

**

Ah-- Mr. Shaw, this is your *private* letter--

SHAW

Read on, read on!

JOURNALIST

(reluctantly)

Suppose, now, I were to discover suddenly that my mother was not related to me at all, and that my wife Charlotte was my mother...

[he splutters into silence. Shaw takes over]

SHAW

[cheerfully]

(Allow me...)

I have not the slightest doubt of what the effect would be. It would be that of the dream. My affection for Charlotte would not only be intensified but elevated. There would be the addition of the filial

feeling and the redemption of the sexual feeling from "sin" and strain.

JOURNALIST

Although in my waking senses I could not possibly work up the slightest sexual feeling for my mother, or filial feeling for Charlotte, yet --

SHAW

if circumstances tricked me into marrying my mother before I *knew* she was my mother, I should be fonder of her than I could ever be of a mother who was not my wife, or a wife who was not my mother. You see, Murray, your Drama. When Creon says to Edipus,

CREON

"Unhappy man: here are my razors. Give one of them to your wretched mother and despatch!

SHAW

Edipus replies,

EDIPUS

"Scandalous as it seems, I don't feel like that at all."

SHAW

And a conflict between Public Opinion and your Great Poetic and Psychological Drama follows.

JOURNALIST

Most instructive.

SHAW

The messenger's speech would describe your expulsion from Oxford after the publication of your New Edipus.

JOURNALIST

Perfection!

SHAW

I mark this letter Private lest it

COMPANY

HORRIFY YOUR SECRETARY.

SHAW

yrs ever, GBS.

JOURNALIST

The New Edipus.
No plot? No story?

SHAW

Not a bit.

[They share a laugh]

SHAW

[has saved best for last]

P.S. Murray: I have said nothing about the parricide part of the problem, because I am quite unable to understand any man regretting having killed his father to deliver himself from tyranny.

JOURNALIST

What?

SHAW

Despotism must be tempered by assassination.

JOURNALIST

Has Mr. Shaw no reverence for tradition? No fear of society? What of reputation?

SHAW

Pshaw! The English do not know what to think until they are coached, laboriously and insistently for years, in the proper and becoming opinion. For ten years past, with an unprecedented pertinacity and obstination, I have been dinning into the public head that I am an extraordinarily witty, brilliant and clever man. That is now part of the public opinion of England; and no power in heaven or earth will ever change it. I may dodder and dote, I may potboil and platidunize; I may become the butt and chopping block of all the bright, original spirits of the rising generation; but my

COMPANY

REPUTATION

SHAW

shall not suffer: it is built up fast and solid, like Shakespear's, on an impregnable basis of dogmatic reiteration.

JOURNALIST

You speak as though reputation were immortal. What of heaven,
Mr. Shaw?

SHAW

Let us read my treatise entitled AERIAL FOOTBALL : THE NEW GAME.
At once.

**

(A car crash, a horse scream, a human scream)

MOTOR BUS DRIVER *(looking sick)*

Is she dead?

MEDICAL STUDENT

She smells frightfully of your petrol.

NARRATOR

A Motorbus Driver, a Medical Student and a Policeman cluster
round the corpse of an old charwoman which protrudes from the
wreckage resulting from the motorbus having collided with a horse-
drawn carriage.

MOTOR BUS DRIVER

(sniffing)

That's not petrol. It's methylated spirit. She's been drinking. You'll
bear me witness that she smells of drink.

POLICEMAN

Don't you know all you've done yet? You've killed his lordship.

MOTOR BUS DRIVER

(turning from yellow to green)

What lordship?

MEDICAL STUDENT

The back end of your bus swung right into the carriage. I heard his
lordship's neck crack. That is, the Bishop of St. Pancras.

MOTOR BUS DRIVER

Oh my good lord! There's not a scratch nor a speck of mud on him!

MEDICAL STUDENT

I surmise that he was boyishly proud of being a bishop and
expressed his pride by holding his neck very stiff. Consequently it

broke when the carriage was stopped suddenly by the swinging round of the tail of the bus.

MOTOR BUS DRIVER

How could I help it? The bus skidded.

POLICEMAN

So would any bus skid in this mud, going at that rate!

MEDICAL STUDENT

The woman certainly does smell of drink, sir.

POLICEMAN

Ay, that's Mrs. Hairns for you. she done so more or less for forty years whenever she had tuppence to spare. She never been a nice looking woman nor a cleanly dressed one; the passage of the motor bus over her ribs makes suprising little difference in her appearance.

STUDENT

It did not hurt her at all. A single broken rib touching a lung is painful; but when an overwhelming shock annihilates your nerves, and an overwhelming weight makes bone dust of all your ribs, and wraps them up in a squash with your heart and lungs, sympathy becomes ridiculous.

MRS HAIRNS

(whispering)

Orvieto....

NARRATOR

Mrs. Hairns was squashed clean out of the Gray's Inn Road on to the foot of a hill with a city on top.

MRS HAIRNS

(in amaze)

It 's rather like Orvieto...

NARRATOR

There was a photograph of Orvieto in the drawing room of the Vicar of St. Pancras, who employed her as a charwoman whenever he attempted to reclaim her, and was beaten every time by her

acquired taste for methylated spirits, which enabled her to drink furniture polish with avidity; though you could trust her with untold dozens of mere hock.

Mrs. Hairns knows nothing of Orvieto. But she knows when the game is up; when the remediable has become irremediable: the temporal, eternal.

She looks up the hill to Orvieto with the utmost misgiving.

MRS HAIRNS

It must be almost as bad as heaven, with teetotalism, cleanliness, self-control, and being particular, and all sorts of horrors.

NARRATOR

She does not at once see the Bishop observing the City beside her.

BISHOP

Can I obtain a conveyance anywhere here, to take me up to the gate?

MRS HAIRNS

I can't say, I'm sure sir. I'm a stranger here. Mrs. Alfred Hairns, sir, at your service....

BISHOP

Hrmph.

NARRATOR

The Bishop wastes no further time in speech, being anxious to attain the Gates. Mrs. Hairns is watching his ascent, quite forlorn and abandoned, when an equine snuffle in her ear gives her a start.

CHIPPER

Remember me?

MRS HAIRNS

Chipper? It can't be my old horse Chipper!

CHIPPER

It is.

MRS HAIRNS

Have I got to walk up that hill, Chipper?

CHIPPER

Yes.

MRS HAIRNS

Hold on Chipper. What place is it, and why am I going there?

CHIPPER

It's heaven.

MRS HAIRNS

Oh Lord! Why didn't you tell me before? I never done anything to get me into heaven.

CHIPPER

True. Would you rather go to hell?

MRS HAIRNS

Don't be so silly, Chipper. Ain't there nothing between hell and heaven? We ain't all saints, but then we ain't all devils neither. Surely to gracious there must be a place for everyday sort of people that don't set up to be too particular.

CHIPPER

This is the only place I know, and it's certainly heaven.

MRS. HAIRNS

Belike there might be some kitchens in it. You won't let on I used to get a bit overcome once in a way, Chipper, will you?

CHIPPER

(snuffing up Mrs. Hairns aura)

I should keep on the lee side of Peter. That's Peter--that elderly gent with the keys of XII century design. They're more for ornament than for use, the Gate's always wide open. See, the stone placed against it to keep it from blowing-to is covered in moss.

MRS. HAIRNS

It ain't been moved in centuries. Strange. In my childhood, Chipper, it was impressed on me the Gates of Heaven are shut tight, and it's no end of a business to get them opened.

CHIPPER

Hey up. Angels.

(Angelic music)

MRS. HAIRNS

Oooh, ain't they lovely? Their wings, purple gold and--ah--

CHIPPER

-Heliotrope--

MRS HAIRNS

--and silver, amber and black and all fine! Look, at that one's sword blade flaming garnet colours! And here's one with one leg naked from the knee down and a wading boot on the other with a straight slender trumpet long enough to reach to the horizon yet handy as an umbrella!

(Snoring heard from Mathew Mark Luke & John)

Oh my! look through the window of the Gate House, there's Mathew, Mark, Luke and John all in bed with their breeches on, just like the old rhyme! Chipper, it really is Heaven after all!

CHIPPER

Peter. This woman is drunk.

PETER

So I see.

MRS. HAIRNS

(beginning to cry)

Ow Chipper! How could you?

PETER

Sword angel--?

(A light-sword sound)

MRS HAIRNS

Yah--Oeow! That flame is wonderful reviving.

CHIPPER

I'm afraid she's hopeless.

ANGEL

Hm.

CHIPPER

Her own children will have nothing to do with her.

ANGEL

Oh.

CHIPPER

She's a liar and a thief.

[Snoring heard]

(to Peter) I brought her up because she once got out and walked on a hot Sunday when I was dragging her up a hill with her husband, three of his friends, their wives, eight children, a baby and three dozen of beer.

MRS. HAIRNS

Fancy your remembering! Did I really?

CHIPPER

It was so unlike you, if I may say so, that I have never forgotten it.

MRS. HAIRNS

(apologetically)

I dessay it was silly of me.

BISHOP

I say! You there!

NARRATOR

The Bishop strides up, out of breath.

BISHOP

Is this the Gate of Heaven?

PETER

It is.

BISHOP

The Front Gate? You are sure it's not the tradesman's entrance?

PETER

It is everybody's entrance.

BISHOP

An unusual arrangement.

(he clears his throat)

Gentlemen! I am the Bishop of St. Pancras.

YOUTH IN TURRET WINDOW

Come to that, I am St. Pancras himself.

(angelic laughter)

BISHOP

As your Bishop, I am glad to meet you. I take a personal interest in every member of my flock. But for the moment I must ask you to excuse me, as I have pressing business at Court. By your leave, gentlemen. Where is He?

BISHOP

But--but--where is He?

TRUMPET ANGEL

Here, of course.

BISHOP

Here! Where?

SWORD ANGEL

(harmoniously)

He is the presence in which we live.

(Snoring)

ST. PANCRAS

That is why we are angels. What are you looking about for? Did you expect to see somebody in a shovel hat and apron, with a nose and a handkerchief to blow it with?

BISHOP

(reddening)

Sir, you are profane. You are blasphemous. You are even wanting in good taste. But for the charity my profession imposes on me, I should be tempted to question whether you are, in the truest sense of the word, a Gentleman. Good morning.

NARRATOR

And he shook the dust of Heaven from his feet and walked away.

MRS. HAIRNS

Ain't he a cure. But I'm glad there's no throne, nor nobody, nor nothin'. It'll be more like King's Cross. But there's something...in

that Sword Angel's voice makes me feel very humble and even...ashamed of being a drunk.

SWORD ANGEL

Tell us about it.

MRS HAIRNS

I'm Mrs. Alf Hairns, Bonavia Banks that was. I was born with an unaccountable fancy for a horse, wasn't I Chipper?-- what won me the hand in marriage of Alfred Hairns: by economic necessity a carman but by natural vocation a poacher. He were too poor to own a horse. After all, he were too poor to afford a residence in London or but with Alf a horse was equally indispensable, so he always kept a horse. I bore him 13 children; eleven died.

CHIPPER

Due to the malversation of their parental care by the horse.

MRS. HAIRNS

...finally the horse died....

CHIPPER

"A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise".

(Snoring from Mathew Mark Luke and John)

MRS HAIRNS

I wonder, would one of you gentleman say a prayer for a poor drunken old charwoman that has buried eleven, and nobody's enemy but her own, before I offer to go in.

St. PANCRAS

Alright.

(Angels perform a stupendous celebration)

MRS HAIRNS

(laughing)

Oh! It's like an enormous draught of some new and delightful sort of methylated spirit!

Oh, not such a fuss about me gentlemen.

They'll think its a queen or a lady from Tavistock Square or the like. Shh. Here comes the Bishop.

BISHOP

(silencing the angelic celebration)

Gentlemen! I have been thinking over what passed just now; and whilst my reason tells me that I was entirely justified in acting and speaking as I did, still, your point of view may be a tenable one, and your method of expressing it, however unbecoming, effective for its purpose. I also find myself the victim of an uncontrollable impulse to act in a manner which I cannot excuse, though restraint is unfortunately beyond my powers of self-inhibition....!

(a referee's whistle blows)

MRS. HAIRNS

Oh Lord!

CHIPPER

(sportscasting)

And with that speech, he snatches off his apron, makes a ball of it, stuffs it into his shovel hat and kicks the hat off into space... Before it descends, Sword Angel, springs with a single cut of his sword to kick it a mile higher. And St. Pancras, without wings, shot up by mere levitation, is on it in a second, shooting off when he's collared by the trumpet angel, and *what a pass* to the amber and black angel!

(alarm clock bell)

Mathew Mark Luke and John are out of bed and up after Peter in the blue vault above; *what a match* between the Angels and the Saints-- Sirius for one goal, the Sun for the other...

("When the Saints go marching in" is heard)

The Bishop looks in amazement at the flying scrum and with a yell springs into the air, and actually gets up nearly fifty feet, what a dangerous height--oh he's falling, falling! but the Saint he patronized swoops down and catches him in the nick of time, and twenty seconds later he's halfway to the moon-- and the crowd is going wild!

NARRATOR

The exultant shouts of the angels dwindle to mere curlew piping, while the celestial players look smaller than swallows circling over Orvieto in summer.....

Now's your opportunity, Mrs. Hairns, to creep in through the gate unnoticed. See, the houses of the heavenly street shine friendly in the sunshine before you...

MRS HAIRNS

...and the mosaics in the pavement glow like flower beds of jewels...

MOTOR BUS DRIVER

Is she dead?

STUDENT

She's dead. I think there was a spark left when I took hold of her to straighten her out; but it was only a spark. She's dead now all right enough--I mean, poor woman!

JOURNALIST

Is that heaven, Mr. Shaw?

SHAW

Hm? No... It is curious, how little use mere brains are: I have a very fine set, and yet I learnt more from a stupid woman who fell in love with me than ever they taught me.

QUARTET (*singing in harmony*)

Stella Stella Stella Stella Stella

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw remembers his many letters to Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

QUARTET

Stella Stella Stella Stella,
(*and continuing:*)

MRS. PAT

Feb 6th, 1913.

what is there left to say?

(Stella)

I will praise thee with my hands:

(Stella)

I will worship thee with my mouth.

(Stella)

I have just played all sorts of things, almost accurately. I dont believe I could get a headache if I tried. I drove from Hatfield faster than a man should drive in the dark.

(Stella)

What an enormous meal of happiness!

(Stella)When I am dead let them put an inscription on 12 Hinde Street :

HERE A GREAT MAN FOUND HAPPINESS. I will write it on the sky someday.

(Stella)

My wife's last words as we parted (very affectionately on my part) were "I never know now where you spend your afternoons. Once I never thought about it--never doubted. Now I always imagine---"

(Stella)

I see you, like the Flying Dutchman, once in seven years; and I am supposed to see you every seven minutes. It is amazing to myself that I don't. How is it that I will get up and trudge through the mud to any sort of miserable work, but that I must always let heaven come to me?

(Stella)

It is incredible. How did I get it ground into me that happiness is always picked up on the way and must not be sought? Yet there is something in it; it came nobly off today. Stella: I WAS happy. Was! I am. I shall never be unhappy again.

(Stella, Stella, Stella, Stella)

This must wait until morning and will reach you in the afternoon--heavenly hour, oh Stella Stella Stella Stella Stella.

GBS.

SHAW

February 28, 1913.

COMPANY

Who mashed Stella?
I, that rejoice
In a nice Irish voice
I mashed Stella.

Who made her smile?
Dis very chile
With my wink and my wile
I made her smile

Who loves her body
A silly noddy
Drunk without toddy
Dotes on her body.

SHAW

I liked sexual intercourse because of its amazing power of producing a celestial flood of emotion and exaltation of existence which,

however momentary, gave me a sample of what may one day be the normal state of being for mankind in intellectual ecstasy. But I found sex hopeless as a basis for permanent relations .

JOURNALIST

Love affairs always end in rows.

SHAW

March 12 , 1913

Stella:

I'll write no more. I am clean out of heaven and in the mud of the streets again. I am correcting proofs, speaking at meetings, writing articles, and wallowing in what you call the bad taste of politics. You do not write to me, but so long as you are not lonely or bored, why should you? You can always whistle for me when you want me.

G.B.S.

NARRATOR

In January, 1918 Mrs. Pat Campbell heard that her beloved son, Beo, was killed at the front.

SHAW

Stella:

I never saw it or heard about it until your letter came. It is no use: I can't be sympathetic: these things simply make me furious. I want to swear. I do swear. Killed just because people are blasted fools. A Chaplain, too, to say nice things about it. It's not his business to say nice things about it, but to shout that

COMPANY

"THE VOICE OF THY SON'S BLOOD CRIETH UNTO GOD FROM THE GROUND".

SHAW

To hell with your Chaplain and his tragic gentleness! The next shell will perhaps blow him to bits; and some other chaplain will write such a nice letter to his mother. Such nice letters! Such nice little notices in papers!

Gratifying, isn't it. Consoling. It only needs a letter from the king to make me feel that the shell was a blessing in disguise

No: don't show me the letter. But I should very much like to have a nice talk with that dear chaplain, that sweet sky pilot, that--

No use going on like this, Stella. Wait for a week; and then I shall be very clear and broadminded again, and have forgotten all about him. I shall be quite as nice as the chaplain.

Oh damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn,
damn, damn, DAMN *DAMN!*
And oh dear, dear, dear, dear, dear, dearest

G.B.S.

SHAW

I am lighting a bicycle lamp an hour after sunset.
I am bound for Haslemere.
I am tired; and it occurs to me that if I ride hard, I may just catch the train at Guildford, and go to Haslemere in it. The next thing I remember is being told at Guildford that I am in the wrong half of the train.

NARRATOR

From CANNON FODDER, a reminiscence: Nov 21, 1902

SHAW

I make a precipitous dash, race along the platform like the wild ass of the desert; I jump at a moving footboard--
and am pushed and pulled and hustled into pandemonium.

MEN SINGING

Ever the faith endures, England my England
Take and break us we are yours, England my own
[they continue humming].

SHAW

Out of nine men in the third-class compartment, one is distinctly sober ; but he is cynically egging on the others by pretending to be as wild as they. Room is gradually made for me;

SOLDIER 1

Make room then!

SHAW

--and the man who makes it puts his arms affectionately round my neck the moment I sit down. They hail me by the honourable title of "Governor" and convey to me that they are all

THE MEN

GOING TO THE FRONT.

(they recommence singing *England my England*!)

Death is death and we will die
to the song on your bugles blown
England ,my England ,my own!

SHAW

I sing *fortissimo* to keep out the noise of the others; and this clears me of all suspicion of offensive gentility. My new comrade now propounds the question

SOLDIER

"What will Buller do to Kruger?"

SHAW

The question goes round and round the company; and each strives to exceed his fellow catechumen in the obscenity of the answer. By the time four have exercised their wit, the possibilities of foul language are exhausted. To my great relief-- for I feared they would put the question to me-- the man whose arm is round my neck releases me and breaks frantically into "God bless you Tommy Atkins" again.

Now, this friendly man who has made room for me, has made himself drunk and has been roaring songs and clinging to the subject of Buller and Kruger for two reasons: to wit 1) he wants to forget about his wife, from whom he has parted at Waterloo station without a notion of how she is going to live until his return (should he ever return) and 2) he wants to prevent himself from crying.

THE MAN

I dunno what she's to do...

SHAW

he says to me, even his drunkenness failing him completely,

THE MAN

...I had a bit of a drink at the station, you know. I left her there. I dunno what's to become of her. ..

SHAW

And he cries feelingly, and cannot for the life of him start the roaring again, though he makes an effort or two. Someone pulls out a copy of **The Westminster Gazette**, thinking that it is right, on a great political occasion to buy something that he

vaguely understands to be a great political paper. Over the **Westminster**, a debate begins as to the government.

SOLDIER

Chamberlain's a good man;
(other voices affirm)

SOLDIER 2

-- and Lord Roseberry'll see to it things are done right.

SHAW

They have never heard of any other statesmen,

SOLDIER 3

'cept there's Lord Salisbury;

SOLDIER 1

Him wot took up Buller

SOLDIER 2

Ere what'll Buller do to Kruger then? What'll Buller do to Kruger?
(eager voices take up the refrain: Yeah, Buller's going to make ihm wish he stayed home! I wish you'd stayed home and all. Other Voices join: watch it fatty, shove out of my seat; hands off, you watch it, who's fatty then, wot a nerve, rotten cheek, who we fighting : Kruger! Who we fighting: Kruger!)

SHAW

I get out at Haslemere with judicious suddenness; for by that time they're all persuaded that I too am going to the Front; and my disappearance probably seems to them a strange combination of a cowardly and unpatriotic desertion with an audacious and successful dash for liberty.

TWO VOICES

Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind...

They were unrestrainedly drunk, and blackguardly. They were helpless, being shovelled in to the ranks as "cannonfodder", as the German generals candidly put it.

TWO VOICES

...should auld acquaintance be forgot for the sake of auld lang syne...

SHAW

I am no more sentimental over their homesickness than over their seasickness: both affections soon pass, and leave no bones broken. Nor am I under any illusions as to the possibility of carrying on the arts of war, any more than the arts of peace, by men who understand what they are doing. Had I been in good time for my train,

(sophisticated waltz music, discreet chatter)

and made my journey in a first class carriage with Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Brodrick, Lord Methuen, Sir Redvers Buller, and Lord Roberts, the conversation would have come to the same point:

(a clock strikes twelve)

namely, the point of the bayonet.

So don't suppose

don't suppose

don't suppose

that this tale has any moral.

I simply tell what I have seen, and what I have heard.

(the clock ceases)

NARRATOR

Mr. Shaw folds his papers and returns them to files which, if laid out sheet by sheet, would reach from John o' Groats to Land's End. He recalls that he is in an interview situation.

JOURNALIST

You are an exceptionally clever man, Mr. Shaw.

SHAW

If I had only realized that years ago!-- if I had only had courage and faith in myself, as well as brains. Be warned by me--you are a young man still-- beware of timidity and diffidence. They have done me a world of harm, and very little good.

JOURNALIST

Have I your full permission to publish what has passed?

SHAW

Verbatim if you please. Tell the exact truth.

JOURNALIST

I am afraid I have detained you unconscionably.

SHAW

Indeed, I first interviewed myself in 1892 and now, in 1945, I am still talking, to myself.
Might I offer some refreshment-- a glass of water and a few carrots?

JOURNALIST

Thanks, I never take anything on the job.

SHAW

Just so. Remember me to all at The Star.

JOURNALIST

I will. Many thanks. Never mind coming down, Mr Shaw.

SHAW

When you are asked, "Where is God? Who is God?" stand up and say, "I am God and here is God, not as yet completed, but still advancing towards completion, just in so much as I am working for the purpose of the universe, working for the good of the whole of society and the whole world, instead of merely looking after my personal ends..."

JOURNALIST

I will bear it in mind, Mr. Shaw.

SHAW

Do so, Mr. Shaw.

NARRATOR

With that, the Self Interview of the Great Man comes to an end.

JOURNALIST & SHAW

Good day to you, Mr Shaw.
