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Modern Drama, Volume 48, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 11-21 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2005.0017>



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# Bernard Shaw's Weekly *Supplément*

CRAIG N. OWENS

*It appears, in its essence, as the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it adds to itself the possibility of being repeated as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it.*

—Jacques Derrida (168)

*I must honestly warn the reader that what he is about to study is not a series of judgments aiming at impartiality, but a siege laid to the theatre of the XIXth Century by an author who had to cut his own way into it at the point of the pen, and throw some of its defenders into the moat.*

—Bernard Shaw (1: v)

These words, which Shaw penned in 1906 as part of “The Author’s Apology” in place of a preface to his selected critical essays titled *Dramatic Opinions and Essays* and, twenty-five years later, to his three-volume collected essays *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, suggest the focus of my project: to explore Shaw’s construction of his own public expertise on theatre in his reviews for *Saturday Review*, published weekly from January 1895 to May 1898. His performance is at times subtle, elegant, and understated – a journalistic performance akin to the theatrical ones he most admired. At other times, however, Shaw’s rhetoric upstages his subtlety as he descends to pedantry and brow-beating. Shaw himself suggests this very contrast by characterizing his project as part “siege” and part “throw[ing]” his adversaries “into the moat.” The patient waiting game of the siege is punctuated by brutal shows of force. Further, in playing the besieger and the thrower-into-moats, Shaw imagines himself simultaneously within and outside authority. After all, the besiegers are not usually the ones who do the throwing into the moats; the defenders are.

One example of invaders playing the role of defenders, however, is Dublin Castle, the colonial seat of power in Ireland. Dublin Castle stands as a particularly apt analogue to Shaw's siege metaphor because it represents both native impregnability, employing as it did many Irishmen in its bureaucracy, and hegemonizing colonialization. Dublin Castle, then, provides a model for the simultaneity of insideness and outsideness Shaw evokes in describing his mission. Moreover, because the Anglo-Irish Shaws thought of themselves as an Irish family who nevertheless "took their morality, politics and religion from Dublin Castle" (Holroyd 6), such simultaneity would have come easily to Shaw.

In other respects, this apparent simultaneity is not simultaneous at all. It compresses several generations of Shavian self-fashioning. Veiled in his siege conceit lies the fact that the founding member of the Shaws' Anglo-Irish branch was Captain William Shaw, who earned his English family's foothold in Kilkenny through service to the Crown during the 1689 Battle of the Boyne (Holroyd 6). Archibald Henderson points out the way Shaw's self-fashioning reverses the trajectory of his family's history in Ireland: "Captain William Shaw invaded Ireland, as his descendant, Bernard, invaded England, a hundred and eighty-seven years later" (4). Thus, when Shaw imagines himself as an insider to British drama speaking from the Irish margins of the Empire, he echoes and reverses his own family history, in which the Shaws, as outsiders from the imperial center recenter themselves on the margins as Irish Protestants. This echo reversal makes salient how Shaw's public persona as theater critic reiterates and subverts the way colonial politics had inscribed themselves on family history. Hence, by placing himself both inside and outside the fortress of reigning theatrical opinion, Shaw carves out for himself a position founded on a subtle but telling oscillation.

Or, as Derrida might have it, Shaw "hollows out" a position. The logic of the Derridean *supplément* offers a way of reading Shaw's self-construction that is aware of both the necessity and the impossibility of his fully realizing a position of authority – and the necessity of that impossibility. Shaw's critical essays supplement his critical authority by presenting that authority as self-generated and preexistent to the writing, which in turn only represents that authority, while the repetitive nature of such representations attests to the fundamental incompleteness of that authority outside of writing. The supplement works as a stopgap measure, impelling Shaw repeatedly to reproduce his own authority on his own authority. At the same time, it allows Shaw a flexible position from which to operate on the outside of authority in order to secure operations on the inside. Shaw, then, seems to imagine himself a sort of internal exile, coordinating a one-man resistance operation.

Shaw's evocation of Captain Shaw's service to the English Crown, then, oscillates inasmuch as it puts under erasure the difference that would otherwise make the example of Captain Shaw a poor analogue for Shaw's critical

self-fashioning. This evocation offers a special case of supplemental logic akin to what Derrida has orthographically (though not phonetically) termed *différance*. As the spatializing and temporalizing principle that makes signification possible, *différance*, according to Derrida, is language's apparent effect of both invoking different signifieds by means of different signifiers and silently attesting to the present possibility of fully invoking them only in the future: deferring the real presence by means of, and as necessary to, signification. *Différance*, then, is always both an invocation of difference on the level of the signifier and an erasure of difference on the level of the signified. As a result, language functions according to the logic of the metaphor or the simile.

When Shaw, then, makes reference to his illustrious forebear, he does so, let us say, differentially. William Shaw is the "original" whom Bernard imitates, and yet only through Shaw's imitation does William gain the status of original. Perhaps more significantly, by constructing his public identity on William's example, Shaw mystifies the compelling differences that separate him from William: namely, that the ancestral Shaw was fighting on the wrong side of the battle, and so is partly responsible for putting Shaw in the awkward position of having repeatedly – one might almost say obsessively – to make excuses, explanations, and apologies upon and for his own authority.

But Shaw's reference also depends upon a temporal dimension not fully accounted for in Derrida's *différance*. If the sign, according to Derrida, always defers the presence of ideal meaning indefinitely into the future – a future hollowed out by the sign itself – Shaw's comparison of himself to William presents Shaw as the ideal deferred by William's example. This phenomenon is less a function of language, per se, and more an epiphenomenon arising from a particular kind of postcolonial self-fashioning. I will call it *référance*.

If *différance* is the indefinite deferral of ideal meaning erased by the immediate differences among signifiers, *référance* emerges as the logic, supplemental in its oscillation, by which identities – of individuals, groups, and nations – construct themselves as fulfillments of an idealized past. *Référance* tends to close, or detemporalize, the distance between the self under construction and the past particular in which that self appears retrospectively to have been immanent. In doing so, it erases differences that would attest to some flaw in the original, some insufficiency that makes the new version necessary, or even thinkable. Yeats' mytho-poetic drama and Synge's staged idealization of rural, peasant Irishness both attest to the potency of *référance* in Irish nationalist discourse of the early twentieth century.

Similarly, the position from which a performance review is uttered relies upon the same logic: It gains its authority from an "original" performance, temporally prior to the review, that it positions as secondary, for the performance review claims to speak from an authority that exceeds the experience of having watched any particular performance. This strategy of Shaw positioning himself as the fulfillment of a historical and dramaturgical mandate, *référance* is not

just one more piece in the critic's supplemental arsenal, though. Like all supplements, it threatens to undo other supplements in its own oscillation. It repositions Shaw in a tradition of outsideness, requiring his repeated and uneasy supplemental reinsertion into the center again. This uneasiness often manifests itself in the peculiar bivocality of Shaw's plays. Playwriting may have offered Shaw a way around the shaky supplementarity of theatre criticism. That is, by producing plays, rather than hyper-authoritatively commenting on others' plays, Shaw might have imagined himself to have "cut his own way" into the theatre "at the point of the pen." Yet again, his extensive prefaces and postscripts, often interpreting the plays, sometimes informing readers – though not spectators – of what will happen in his plots' non-existent futures, betray the insufficiency of the center as a place of authority. If Shaw the playwright is an antidote to the supplemental position of Shaw the critic, then Shaw the composer of prefaces to his own plays seems to yearn for the critic's authority as an antidote to the supplementarity of the playwright's.

The duality of the supplement and of Shaw's position both inside and outside authority suggests another, more fundamental, duality: Shaw the Irishman claiming his place in English critical practice. As such, he operates as spokesperson from the center – the "Theatres in the Nineties" are, after all, "*Our Theatres*" – who nevertheless champions invasions from such forces as Ibsen's *New Woman*, Nietzsche's *Superman*, and his own problem play. Shaw's staging of these invasions both solidifies his position in the center and aligns him with forces on the outside. This oscillation – for it is more rapid and less articulated than mere ambivalence – provides Shaw with a critical and rhetorical dexterity essential to the construction of his own expertise.

The logic at work here is a supplemental one: On the one hand, Shaw's constant berating of widespread critical wrong-headedness in the least "recalcitrance," "deviation," or "refusal" in coming around to Shavian views on dramaturgy seems to argue for an increased permeability in the bounds of acceptable theatre; on the other hand, that berating also helps to construct Ibsen's, Nietzsche's, and, ultimately, his own marginal status and to preserve that marginality by means of an obsessive print reproduction of the very critical "deviations" Shaw so deplored. I wish to emphasize that the stakes of this supplemental strategy are not Ibsen's position, nor Wagner's, nor anyone's but Shaw's. The Irishman, laying siege to, yet speaking from, critical authority, legitimates his position in the center by reproducing the otherness of other others, while surveying his own distance from his Irishness. But, in reproducing that otherness, he also memorializes – that is, makes reference to – his own status as *novus homo* who "cut [his] way" into the center "at the point of the pen." Shaw's rhetoric here, as elsewhere, centers upon *how* he entered the critical discourse, and, in doing so, mystifies *whence*. Further, by championing these other others, Shaw argues for his own inclusion in the center; in the end, the censor became as much Shaw's enemy as Ibsen's.

Significantly, I think, Shaw characterizes his preface to *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, as he does the prefaces of a number of his plays, as an “apology,” for, because of its two denotations, the term *apology* is already riven by the same supplementarity that underpins the necessary instability of Shaw’s position as outsider speaking from the inside. It is difficult imagine that Shaw is “apologizing,” in the current sense of the word: proposing retractions, expressing regrets, burying hatchets. His rhetoric, however, as we shall see, often deploys the tropes associated with just such apologies. For instance, he repeatedly takes on a self-deprecatory, almost regretful tone, seemingly to ingratiate himself into the skeptical reader’s sensibility. Elsewhere, Shaw deploys the rhetoric of the classical apology, as in his 1906 preface. Such an apology takes as its model Socrates’ apology to the Athenian court before which he stood accused of treason. Like Socrates, Shaw offers his criticism as a judgment upon the reigning opinions by which he imagines himself to stand accused, and his tone seems querulous and defensive. His outsider status, the necessity that impels him to make his apology, is also what empowers him to do so. “The Author’s Apology,” like the criticism, creates a space for Shaw’s critical maneuvers by means of a supplemental oscillation between insideness and outsideness. Shaw’s position within authority, of which position he frequently and bluntly reminds his readers, depends largely upon his and his favorites’ positions as marginal to that authority.

#### THE IDENTITY FUNCTION OF ADDITION

The logic of the supplement at play in Shaw’s writings is not easily explained. The constraints of language as always already supplemental requires even Derrida, the inventor of “the supplement” in its deconstructive context, to employ supplementarity as a means of exploring supplementarity. He frequently returns to the term, obliquely sketching out its “graphics,” without ever fully explaining it. For Derrida as for Shaw, the example, the allusion, and the object lesson become the tools of supplementarity (*Dissemination* 168). The closest he comes to defining supplementarity comes in “Speech and Phenomena,” in which he refers to the supplement as “an *addition*” that “comes to *make up for* a deficiency, [...] to compensate for an originary nonself-presence” (28; emphasis in original). The epigraph to this essay fleshes out that definition by emphasizing the supplemental necessity of repeatability. Because the supplement’s function is both to complete the logic to which it is added and to announce the radical incompleteness of it, it must respond repeatedly to that newly announced incompleteness with yet further supplemental additions. Hence, its dual nature is self-undermining, always calling attention to the breach it attempts to fill. The repetition it calls for begins to seem an almost obsessive reproduction of its own logic iterated into itself to shore up again the breach it announces. Naturally, such a logic gives rise to a considerable play of signification.

Significantly, the plays under Shaw's consideration give rise to the repetitive logic of the supplement. It is this repetition that marks Shaw's constant restaging of Ibsen's, Nietzsche's, and his own otherness, the otherness his writing apparently attempts to recuperate. Furthermore, Shaw's critical writing becomes a supplement to his identity, both completing it and attesting to its chronic incompleteness. Identity – critical, authoritative, and, finally, national – becomes a performative category of experience and self-representation, and its performativity becomes a strategy of empowerment that creates a space for otherness within a subjectivity of the center.

Shaw's criticism, in light of such considerations, begins to emerge as an extremely complex performance in which Bernard Shaw plays the part of GBS, a role Arthur Ganz has described as a "glittering persona" combining "artist, prophet, and clown" (5). It is a self-representation profoundly concerned with national identity, aesthetics, and ideology, which, under close analysis, suggests ways of deconstructing the binary logic of colonial center and colonized periphery as well as of rethinking theatrical boundaries and values of the late Victorian period.

The space Shaw creates for himself by means of supplemental logic is, in its oscillations, an uneasy space. Shaw himself betrays his own uneasiness in two ways. First, in providing an "apology" for what he calls a "body of doctrine," Shaw implicitly admits that the "doctrine" he espouses is neither transparent nor timeless (*Theatres* 1: vi). The logic of its foundations needs reproducing, bolstering up, by means of an "apology." Second, for the 1932 publication, Shaw appended a further explanation – a supplement – that sounds like an apology more in the current than in the classical sense of the word. It asks the reader to "forgive; but make the necessary allowances" (1: viii). These "allowances" for Shaw's failure to be "kinder and more reasonable in [his] demands," notwithstanding that his "head had [...] been full of Ibsen and Wagner" (1: viii), are the allowances that supplementarity always demands. Simultaneously claiming and disavowing authority requires a double move. And when the impossibility of holding both positions unwaveringly (rather than laying claim to them by means of supplemental oscillation) becomes apparent in the excessive zeal of a defense or an exuberant condemnation – whenever, in short, the critic doth protest too much – "allowances" become "necessary."

#### THE STAGE CRITIC

As a model for the kind of position Shaw's authority affords him within a national discourse, I propose the Stage Irishman. Shaw's critical position and the Stage Irishman's dramatic one bear more than superficial similarities – similarities that may elucidate the extent of Shaw's self-conscious critical theatricality and its national-colonial stakes. The Stage Irishman, characterized

by his partiality for potent potables, for blarney and blather, and for frequent burstings into song, occupies a place outside both English and Anglo-Irish national identity. This outsider position allows him the freedom to offer wry, witty, and often subtle and sage commentary on the play's action and characters. Never fully implicated in the intrigues of the plot, he is often involved both marginally and accidentally. For instance, in Dion Boucicault's *Colleen Bawn* (1860), the comic Irishman Myles-na-Coppaleen saves the day only because of a coincidence that brings the misguided Danny and the kidnapped heroine, Eily, to the very cave (one of many) in which Myles is distilling his whiskey. Because of his geographical marginalization (in an obscure cavern), his legal marginalization (as bootlegger), his national marginalization (as stereotype of intractable native Irish backwardness), and his dramatic marginalization (as only accidentally involved in the diegesis), his final act of heroism serves as an intervention from the outside that defends the ideologically mainstream position from its own corrupting influences. In symbolizing and advocating a romantic notion of native Irishness, Myles rescues Eily, and, by extension, the whole of genteel Anglo-Irish society, from errant and predatory sexuality, which is itself a product of the entanglements of lands, monies, and mortgages. He is, in short, supplemental to the genteel status quo, simultaneously shoring it up and announcing its breaches. The Stage Irishman's oscillation between a choric and a protagonistic position marks him as incompletely integrated yet strategically empowered. By the end of the play, the protagonist, Hardress, and the two romantic supporting characters, Anne and Kyrle, have achieved the same kind of empowerment by re-embracing their native Irish dialect.

In his review of the 1896 revival of *The Colleen Bawn*, provocatively titled "Dear Harp of My Country!" Shaw takes the opportunity to present his homeland in a more accurate (if less picturesque) light than Boucicault's play does. Lamenting that he has yet to "see [*The Colleen Bawn*] with real Irishmen in it," he dismisses the "alleged Arcadian virtues of [...] half-starved drudges" in favor of a more even-handed, if not always so pleasant, image of an Irish national identity marked by "the intense melancholy, the surliness of manner, the incapacity for happiness and self-respect that are the tokens of his natural unfitness for a life of wretchedness" (*Theatres* 2: 28, 29). There is no mistaking the implicit critique of English hegemony, which, by this time, had exploited Ireland officially for nearly 100 years and unofficially for much longer. The half-starvation and drudgery of the Irish peasantry were as much the product of English restrictions on land use and requisitioning of agricultural products as of potato blight. Wretchedness, in this light, becomes a symptom of colonization.

What interests me here is the link between the Stage Irishman's multiply determined outsider status and his power to inveigle himself into the intrigues of the center – a power that emerges from the detachment that his position on



the margins allows. Shaw himself comments at length on the Stage Irishman's duality, which he dubs "blarneying": "Dion Boucicault, when he invented Myles, was not holding the mirror up to nature, but blarneying the British public precisely as the Irish car-driver, when he is 'cute' enough, Blarneys the English tourist" (*Theatres* 2: 28, 29). Boucicault, in Shaw's estimation, commits the same acts upon the English playgoing public as the Stage Irishman does upon his social betters. Blarneying becomes a survival strategy, whether it is Boucicault's professional survival, the survival of Myles' lifestyle, or the Stage Irishman's survival in the public imagination. Blarneying, the picturesque telling of picturesque lies, is precisely what the weighed and considered judgments of the critic, whose purpose, like Shaw's, is didactic, does not do. Yet, in the "Author's Apology," we have not only Shaw's admission of having overstated and exaggerated his claims *but also his disavowal* of critical objectivity. The "Apology" attempts to lay claim to the truth of the matter behind the rhetorical display. From such a perspective, Shaw begins to appear more akin to the Stage Irishman than he himself might have wished to admit.

Shaw's attempt to correct Boucicault's romantic image of the Stage Irishman by means of a lengthy and detailed description of authentic Irishness merely, albeit subtly and complexly, substitutes one construction of Irishness for another. Particularly remarkable are the similarities that Shaw's correction bear to Boucicault's misrepresentation:

His vices are the arts by which he accommodates himself to his slavery – the flattery on his lips which hides the curse in his heart; his pleasant readiness to settle disputes by "leaving it all to your honor," in order to make something out of your generosity in addition to exacting the utmost of his legal due from you; his instinctive perception that by pleasing you he can make you serve him; his mendacity and mendacity; his love of a stolen advantage; the superstitious fear of his priest and his Church which does not prevent him from trying to cheat both in the temporal transactions between them; and the parasitism which makes him, in domestic service, that occasionally convenient but on the whole demoralizing human barnacle, the irremovable old retainer of the family. (2: 29)

Notice that Shaw's authentic Irishman and Boucicault's Stage Irishman both perform a fundamental oscillation between inside and outside, between servitude and authority. Shaw's version performs servility in order to secure advantage, just as Myles' apparent drunkenness and inveterate sloth enable him to carry out his bootlegging and lifesaving unsuspected in his obscure retreat. The difference is that what Shaw characterizes as Myles' blarneying is elevated, in Shaw's description of authentic Irishness, to the status of "mendacity." That is, the difference is primarily rhetorical, while the similarities in strategy are fundamental. Beyond the similarities between the stage performance of Irishness and Shaw's original of it, Shaw's own rhetorical perfor-

mance reproduces the oscillation that marks Irishness both in his description and in Boucicault's portrayal of it. A closer reading of this description may help disentangle the threads of logic, rhetoric, identity, and stereotype woven through it.

First, his reliance upon the paradoxes of Irish behavior is telling for their revelation of a "native" oscillation between self-interest and deference. The Irishman will turn the decision over "to your honor" in hopes of claiming "his legal due" from "your generosity"; his "vices are [...] arts"; "by pleasing you" he makes "you serve him." Importantly, these strategies are not employed alternately, one or the other at a time. Rather, his deference and his claim are made simultaneously. It is not a matter of ambivalence, but of rapid, minute oscillations that allow him to hold two seemingly contradictory positions at the same time. Shaw's rhetoric highlights the Irishman's position as subject of empowerment and object of authority by reproducing that duality grammatically: "to your honor" becomes "from your generosity;" "pleasing *you*" becomes "serv[ing] *him*." This knack seems both "instinctive," arising from "mendacity," a natural tendency toward prevarication, as well as material, to be attributed to "his mendicity," a poverty born out of centuries of exploitation. Shaw's use of simultaneous and seemingly paradoxical survival strategies reproduces a supplemental logic that, in acknowledging disadvantage, seeks a "stolen advantage." The position of the pitied object empowers him to *act*, to "turn," to "cheat," to "extract." The logic of the supplement, however, becomes an internalized, native survival instinct, never finding overt expression, but always lurking, underpinning behavior necessary for a subject on the margins.

The terms *mendacity* and *mendicity*, paired as they are in Shaw's commentary, highlight the native Irish doubleness in their near homophony. In this, their relationship resembles that between Derrida's *différence* and *différance*. In the case of the latter pair, their identical pronunciations imply an oppositional distinction between the two words. And yet, in Derrida's figuration, their phonetic identity in French speech is precisely what reveals the difference between *différence* and *différance* as not oppositional, but rather differential. By embedding the sense of deferral in *différence* by changing the final voiced vowel from an *e* to an *a*, Derrida suggests that the way signification works is not only by means of a Saussurean concept of difference, but also by deferring (temporally and spatially) the presence of the signified. Still, the phonetically undetectable distinction between that *e* and the *a* that replaces it reminds us that the signifier, even in deferring the presence of the signified, denies its own act of deferral.

That deferral is both, in Derrida's view, necessary for the emergence of language and yet possible only in language. But his aim, in *Speech and Phenomena*, is not to answer the chicken-and-egg question of *différance* and language; instead, the notion of *différance* alerts us to the way signification

functions along spatio-temporal axes. It brings into the present the promises of presence even as it presents those promises as always *to be kept* in the future.

The logic of Shaw's *mendacity/mendicity* pairing works according to the logic of *différance*, only in reverse. That is, in pairing these two terms, Shaw seems to be deploying *différance* with a difference. Whereas *différance* necessarily allows for inherent deferral to be put under erasure, the Irish character allows for the inherent necessity of accusation to be disguised as deferral. The deferral, then, emerges as the seen, while the signified accusation disappears. If mendicity, generationally enforced poverty, stands as an indictment of English colonial economic practices, it does so silently, taking the form of deference to "your honor." In the accusation put under erasure by deference, the Irish peasant engages in mendacity, the self-serving lie perpetrated in language, by which he may continue to survive, if not to thrive. As a result, the present accusation becomes a deferred threat to undermine the colonial system by engaging with it in the present on its own terms. The logic of *différance*, and its reversal in Shaw's commentary, emerges as a specific instance within the more general logic of the supplement. Its reversal, however, in Shaw's commentary happily highlights the fact that the Irish position is not one of conventional supplementarity – over-fullness – but of its opposite, poverty.

Likewise supplemental, Shaw's use of the second-person pronoun, which at first seems straightforward, begins to open upon two conflicting interpretations, and finally undergoes an important shift by the end of the essay. "Your honor" and "your generosity" are, we presume, the honor and generosity of a collective, ideal public readership, participants in a learned conversation about art, ethics, and nature, among whom Shaw seems to include himself. The "legal due he extracts from you [...] to make you serve him" might as well be "the legal due he extracts from *us* [...] to make *us* serve him." Shaw, writing in England to the English on the English theatre, from a position of authority both contrary to the abject disempowerment of the Irish peasant and supported by the English journalistic and public-discursive tradition, is, for (almost) all intents and purposes, one of "us." These *yous* and *yourses* then appear as generally inclusive pronouns of experience shared between reader and writer.

Nevertheless, the frequent references to "your honor" and "your generosity" might also be read as echoes of the politely deferential addresses of the comic Irishman and the poor Irish. If so, the readers who imagine themselves as "you" become implicated in either unreal comedy or very real exploitation. The addresses to "your honor," then, seem to flatter while they accuse, seem to be spoken humbly while they demand explanations for humiliation. Shaw's rhetoric, by this reading, illustrates the strategy of the deferential Irish peasant, not only by describing it, but also by reproducing it and the relationship it implies. Shaw is to the reader what the deferential Irishman is to the middleman, the magistrate, and the master.

The pronouns gain markedly more political force when Shaw self-con-

sciously turns to the first person later in his review, referring to "my countrymen" and "the helpless dependence of the British Empire on us," just as he refers to "My Country" in the title of the review (2: 31). Shaw, as he rarely does in his reviews, not only aligns himself with an English national other, but claims that otherness for himself and opposes it to a "British Empire" that is separate from him. But, because this claim is made in the first person, it effects a startling reversal. No longer is he, the Irishman, dependent upon you (i.e., privileged us); rather, they, the British Empire, are dependent upon us, the Irish.

Three months after his review of *The Colleen Bawn*, Shaw again finds occasion to expand upon his characterization of the Irish, claiming that "the Irish have a natural delicacy that gives them a very keen sense of indelicacy" (2: 96). Taking into account the fact that Ireland is Shaw's homeland, we might find in such generality a betrayal, if not of a nationalist sentiment, at least of a desire to encapsulate and render knowable "Irishness." The sense of this generalization seems to be that the Irishman's "natural delicacy" allows him to behave and think and speak with delicacy, and gives him a knack for recognizing indelicacy when he sees it. Such is certainly a flattering picture of the Irish compared to Thackeray's pseudo-ethnography, for instance, in his 1844 *Irish Sketchbook* and to melodramatic portrayals of the Irish of the nineteenth century.

#### FINE SPEECH AND PRETTILY UTTERED WORDS

Proper diction becomes one vehicle by means of which Shaw can effect his oscillations from outside to inside, and it is a strategy he is eager to teach to his readers and the actors he critiques. Though Shaw, out of a self-avowed "dislike of pedantry and personality," which "prevents [him] from publishing" every comment upon stage diction as its ill use gives him opportunity to, he nevertheless comments extensively upon it (2: 38–39). In several cases, his desire for actors to "speak finely" seems not only pedantic, but also tinged with personal interest (2: 39). What is at stake in these diction lessons is nothing less than cultural and class passing, as they frequently become lessons as much on diction lessons as on diction itself. The supplementarity at work in them betrays Shaw's own anxiety about his place as an Irishman at the center of the Empire.

Asserting that, despite the relative unimportance of the issue, "the fact is, the diction of our stage is becoming appalling," he proceeds, in his 8 February 1896 review of Fergus Hume's comedy *The Fool of the Family*, to enumerate three distinct slips in diction (2: 38). He follows that enumeration, however, with an odd disavowal:

Now [...], this by itself, does not matter in the least. I go further: I hold that the man who regards an intelligibly spelt or prettily uttered word as "wrong" because it does

not conform to the dictionary is a congenital fool. I therefore do not cite these instances as faults; but I do offer them as corroborative evidence of my general indictment against young actors, that they do not study diction. [...] I do not see why I, a mere critic with a very superficial knowledge of phonetics, should so often find myself noting on my program slips in diction which my dislike of pedantry and personality prevents me from publishing, made by people whose profession it is to teach me to speak finely. (2: 38–39)

The didactics of this passage play on two levels. First, Shaw takes it upon himself, dubiously dubbing himself a “*mere critic*,” to teach actors the importance of studying diction. It is their job, he asserts, in turn to teach him, and by extension the rest of their audience, “to speak finely.” This lesson cannot, I assert, be taken at face value. On the contrary, Shaw’s acquaintance with phonetics was by no means “very superficial,” as he frequently engaged in debates over pronunciation and orthography, most notably with and against his friend William Archer’s position (“A Plea”). What Shaw offers, instead, is a thinly veiled lesson on the mechanics of colonial ideology. While he stops short of proposing a standardized or dictionary-bound diction, he propounds nevertheless a code of correct taste and lays the burden of educating the play-going public to that taste on the shoulders of the actors. The lesson is a how-to in passing for a high-class Englishman. In that way, it is a lesson about both class and nationality.

The ideological stakes of Shaw’s views upon diction become clearer later in his critical writings in his 17 April 1897 review of *Madame Sans-Gêne*:

In their raw native state [...] [actors] take great pains to parrot a detestable convention of “smart” talking, supposed to represent refined speech by themselves and that huge majority of their audience which knows no better, but actually [...] caricature [...] the affectations of the parvenu and the “outsider.” (3: 107)

In Shaw’s characterization, the “parvenu,” having acceded to the upper classes without being accepted by them, and the outsider, having arrived from remote provinces or suburbs, are united by their lack of familiarity with the habits of “fine speech.” They betray themselves not by their refusal to “parrot” fine speech, but by their inability to do so convincingly. It is here, then, that the ideology behind the rhetoric begins to peek through. The appearance of authenticity, while always an appearance, must be seamless and seamless, as much for the actor playing the part of a high-class gentleman as for the Irishman “outsider” playing the part of English authority.

The point at which Shaw explicitly links diction to national identity comes in his review of Victoria Sardou’s *Fedora*. What he has elsewhere called “‘smart’ talk” and “parrot[ing]” he links here with a specifically Irish habit. He contrasts the calling of “stage usage” to serve as “one of our few standards

of diction" to the too frequent use of the "cheap [...] Irish recipe" of speaking from the teeth and lips for achieving authentic, upper-class English (1: 135–36). This "Irish recipe" attempts to disguise a rural, peripheral, or working-class accent by over-pronouncing consonants and neglecting "pure vowels" (1: 135–36). The snobbery indicated by the "Irish recipe" is an "alarming [...] stage trick" that causes the actors to "mince" their speech rather than achieve a "genuine refinement of diction" (1: 136).

The critical question that arises from this explicitly national labeling of a "cheap trick" is this: What is at stake for an Irishman who, in giving advice on refined speech, disparages the "Irish recipe" of English usage? A closer look at Shaw's caveat on the subject suggests that it is a question neither of affectation nor of authenticity versus inauthenticity, but rather one of what kind of affectation and inauthenticity are allowable:

In order to secure refinement of tone, [Mrs Campbell] articulates with the tip of her tongue against her front teeth as much as possible. This enters for what it is worth and no more into the method of every fine speaker; but it should not suggest the snobbish Irishman who uses it as a cheap recipe for speaking genteel English; and once or twice Mrs Campbell came dangerously near to producing this mincing effect. (1: 135–36).

It appears that "refinement of tone" is always an "effect," but that that effect can "suggest the snobbish Irishman" or it can reproduce "genteel English." In either case, it is always a kind of passing, a border crossing. Shaw, who defines himself largely in the context of his own border crossing – or, rather, his oscillations upon borders – seems to try to validate his own cultural passing by subtly describing it not simply as an Irishman passing in England, but as doing so in the least Irish way possible.

#### NIETZSCHE AS ANOTHER OTHER

The Irishman, whether of stage or of life, is not Shaw's only depiction of otherness; there are other others as well. Nietzsche is one of them. In his review of volume 1 of Nietzsche's collected works, newly translated by Thomas Common, Shaw elaborately stages his own otherness by linking it to the otherness of other others: Nietzsche and Ibsen. His condescension in introducing his English readership to philosophy provides a useful study in just such a maneuver. "Whilst I am still at large I may as well explain that Nietzsche is a philosopher – that is to say, something unintelligible to an Englishman. To make my readers understand what a philosopher is, I can only say that *I* am a philosopher [...] of humanity and the fine arts" (2: 92).

The striking feature of Shaw's philosophy lesson are, first, his portrayal of philosophy as utterly foreign to and ultimately unknowable by the English; and,

second, his use of himself to exemplify that otherness. At first, Shaw appears at least to attempt “to make” his “readers understand what a philosopher is” by introducing himself as an object lesson. But, he has already established that a philosopher “is something unintelligible to an Englishman.” Hence, his attempt to enlighten his readers would seem futile, unless we understand Shaw as an example not of what a philosopher is ontologically, but of the extent to which he himself, as a philosopher, is “unintelligible.” The lesson, then, does not enlighten the English about philosophers and philosophy, but only drives home Shaw’s claim that a “philosopher is [...] unintelligible,” as if to say, “None of you understand philosophy – for none of you understand me.”

He continues by railing against the mental troglodytism of the English public, laying waste to their morality and their bourgeois sense of decorum. But, as if to downplay his own subversive project, he compares his sentiments to Nietzsche’s: “These are shocking sentiments, I know; but I assure you you will think them mere Sunday School commonplaces when you have read a little of Nietzsche. Nietzsche is worse than shocking, he is simply awful: his epigrams are written with phosphorus on brimstone” (2: 94).

After having aligned himself as a philosopher with Nietzsche, Shaw proceeds to construct the “shocking” character of Nietzsche’s work, although the metonym “Nietzsche” may well refer to the man himself and not simply his *oeuvre*. Nietzsche, writing “with phosphorus on brimstone,” becomes the Satan as whom Shaw was depicted in a caricature by Sava (Henderson 672–73). The statement that says “if you think I’m shocking, just wait till you see Nietzsche,” far from downplaying Shaw’s shock value, actually heightens it by setting him up as the benchmark against which Nietzsche’s shockingness is measurable. Just as Shaw must posit his own unintelligibility to make his readers realize how unintelligible philosophers are, so he must highlight his own “shocking sentiments” to successfully convey the superior shock value of a Nietzschean epigram. In both cases, Shaw replaces an absolute standard of comparison with a relative one: himself.

Shaw, as exemplar of a relative standard of shockingness, questions the absolute status of the English notion of morality:

Thus, I blush to add, you cannot be a philosopher and a good man, though you may be a philosopher and a great one. You will say, perhaps, that if this be so, there should be no philosophers; and perhaps you are right; but though I make you this handsome concession, I do not defer to you to the extent of ceasing to exist. (2: 93)

Shaw’s language of concession and deferral recalls his description of the Irish servant who will, in a dispute, “leave it all to your honor” in the hopes of “extracting the utmost of his [...] due.” Shaw’s refusal, moreover, to “defer [...] to the extent of ceasing to exist” suggests that there are less extensive deferrals that he will make. But he leaves them unspecified, though the impli-

cation leaves him nominally in an inferior position. His refusal to "cease to exist," however, implies a remnant of authority with which to back up his refusal.

Yet more telling is Shaw's apparently "native" ability to play two roles, servant and master, simultaneously and seamlessly. He is, on the one hand, the "philosopher" who "cannot be [...] a good man"; his "blush" betrays a modesty, shame, or even a "natural delicacy that gives him a keen sense of indelicacy" in himself; he makes a "handsome concession" and even hints that he might "defer to you" to some extent. On the other hand, he claims the potential to be a "great" man; he recognizes that "concessions" can be granted from a position of power as well as from a position of powerlessness; and, at last, he asserts that the very facticity of his existence serves as the foundation both of his refusals and of his concessions.

Deference is, of course, not *deference* if it can be limited by a refusal to defer. Deference, in fact, implicitly disavows the very authority upon which such a refusal could rest. And yet, Shaw insists on the language of deference rather than the perhaps more accurate language of condescension and patronization, as if he were determined to have his status both ways: disempowered other and authorized elite, besieger and besieged.

#### FJORDING AHEAD

Shaw, however, does not stop simply by positing a kind of alliance between himself and Nietzsche. He goes further by bringing in Ibsen, his own championing of whom anticipates Nietzsche by half a decade: "Nietzsche's criticism of morality and idealism is essentially that demonstrated in my book [*The Quintessence of Ibsenism*] as at the bottom of Ibsen's plays" (2: 94).

Shaw not only aligns his own philosophy with Nietzsche's, but also makes his antecedent to it. More importantly, the earlier version of Nietzsche's philosophy is Shaw's championing of yet another other: Ibsen, the critic's scorn for whom Shaw repeatedly restates in *The Saturday Review*, with gleeful exuberance, as if to make the most of Ibsen's marginal status.

Shaw repeatedly reproduces Ibsen's otherness in his reviews and then aligns himself with Ibsen. By doing so, he effects a double move: On the one hand, he rails against the intractability of the play-going public and his fellow critics in accepting Ibsen's New Drama; and on the other, he jealously guards Ibsen's unpopularity as an orator might guard a cherished soapbox. Shaw's position, oscillating as it does from inside to outside authority, depends upon the irredeemability of other others like Ibsen.

For instance, in a scathing obituary of E.F. Smyth Pigott, titled "The Late Censor," Shaw uses Ibsen as a weapon against Pigott's small-mindedness, though he writes his obituary in response to a more flattering one, which he suspects to have been written by Clement Scott: "Mr Scott may reply that Mr



Pigott actually did license Ibsen's plays. Fortunately, I am in a position to give both Mr Pigott's opinion of Ibsen's plays and his reasons for licensing them" (1: 52). That "fortunately" betrays Shaw's glee, even in the midst of complaint. Shaw continues by giving us Pigott's "own words, uttered on one of the most responsible occasions of his official career":

"I have studied Ibsen's plays pretty carefully; and all the characters in Ibsen's plays appear to me morally deranged. All the heroines are dissatisfied spinsters who look on marriage as a monopoly, or dissatisfied married women in a chronic state of rebellion against not only the condition which nature has imposed on their sex, but against all the duties and obligations of mothers and wives. As for the men, they are all rascals or imbeciles." (1: 52–53)

Shaw further reports that Pigott's reasoning, despite his criticism, for licensing Ibsen's plays was "that they were too absurd to do any harm" (1: 53). Tellingly, Shaw does not continue his essay by defending the quality or the importance of Ibsen's plays. Instead, he leaves Ibsen unexplained and focuses upon Pigott's shortcomings.

Reporting on the *Théâtre de L'Oeuvre's* productions of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *Master Builder* during the week of 25 March 1895, Shaw first waxes ironically self-congratulating, stating that Pastor Rosmer's possession of "a volume of my own dramatic works I thought right and natural enough, though when he took that particular volume down and opened it, I began to speculate rather uneasily on the chances of his presently becoming so absorbed as to forget all about his part" (1: 73). From self-congratulation, Shaw then moves to pedantry:

We know Kroll perfectly well in this country: he is one of the many instances of that essential and consequently universal knowledge of mankind which enables Ibsen to make his pictures of social and political life in outlandish little Norwegian parishes instantly recognizable in London and Chicago [...] For saying this I may be asked whether I am aware that many of our critical authorities have pointed out how absurdly irrelevant the petty parochial squabbles which stand for public life in Ibsen's prose comedies are to the complex greatness of public affairs in our huge cities. I reply that I am. And if I am further pressed to declare straightforwardly whether I mean to disparage these authorities, I reply, pointedly, that I do. I affirm that such criticisms are written by men who know as much of political life as I know of navigation. (1: 73)

Again, Shaw uses Ibsen as a means to "disparage [...] authorities" who refuse to recognize Ibsen's "universal knowledge of mankind." Further, in evoking the narrow-mindedness of the "critical authorities" who claim Ibsen to be "irrelevant," Shaw refutes his own statement of the previous sentence

that Ibsen's characters, such as Kroll, are "instantly recognizable in London." Shaw seems less interested in providing a clear, coherent, and uniform estimation of Ibsen's works than in revealing his own perspicacity as superior to his colleagues'. He casts himself in the role of the insider – the "authorities" he disparages are, note, "*our* critical authorities" – taking up the cause of the outsider, the "irrelevant" playwright obsessed with his "little Norwegian parishes" and their "petty parochial squabbings."

When Janet Achurch and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, two leading lights of the London stage, volunteered for a subscription performance of Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*, to be sponsored by Elizabeth Robins and the Avenue Theatre, in November 1896, Shaw hailed the upcoming performance – in a review of Westland Marston's *Donna Diana* appearing three weeks before – as a harbinger of Ibsen's more general acceptance in London. Nevertheless, he could not resist imagining the performance in advance as a potential "torture chamber" (2.241), the play providing the "rack" upon which the audience would "moan" with "excrutiation" (2.240). Pretending to attempt to allay the fears of the "pious playgoer" who has grown tired of romantic comedies (and who probably existed in Shaw's imagination and nowhere else), Shaw consoles him thus:

Do not be alarmed, pious playgoer: people get tired of everything, and of nothing sooner than of what they most like. They will soon begin to loathe these romantic dreams of theirs, and crave to be tormented, vivisected, lectured, sermonized, appalled by the truths which they passionately denounce as monstrosities. Already, on the very top of the wave of stage illusion, rises Ibsen, with his mercilessly set mouth and seer's forehead, menacing us with a new play. (2: 239–40).

If Shaw is to maintain his place as prophet of doom to stage illusion and romantic comedy, then he must make sure that that doom looks like doom. When, in fact, Campbell took over the lead role, Rita, from Achurch, as Shaw notes in his later review of *Little Eyolf*, Shaw takes exception to how "melodramatic" Campbell's performance turned out to be – for which, he avers, he will "never forgive her" – much preferring Achurch's more "impetuous," "ungovernable," "horrible," and "threatening" portrayal" (2:261).

Three months later, in his review of Archer's translation of Ibsen's most recent play, *John Gabriel Borkman*, Shaw feels it necessary once again to drive home Ibsen's utter foreignness:

The most humorous passages of Ibsen's work – three-fourths of *The Wild Duck*, for instance – still seem to the public as puzzling, humiliating, and disconcerting as a joke always does to people who cannot see it. Comedy [...] must therefore proceed on a thoroughly established intellectual understanding between the author and the audience – an understanding which does not yet exist between Ibsen and our playgoing public. (3: 32–33)

It is hardly surprising that such an understanding did not exist by 1897. After all, not a year earlier, Shaw estimated that Ibsen was five minutes short of ten years ahead of the “ordinary dramatist” (1: 44).

The almost compulsive repetition of such dicta, reproducing time and time again the otherness of “the Ibsen volcano” – its unpredictability, unknowability, and inaccessibility – betrays the supplementarity at work (1: 17). For Shaw’s efforts to introduce the play-going public to Ibsen are sabotaged by Shaw’s own incessant staging of Ibsen’s otherness.

#### SOME FINAL (RE)MARKS

Ibsen, though his concerns and characters remain particular, transcends irrelevance, according to Shaw, by means of a universal knowledge. This clash and eventual unity of particulars with universality constitute one example of a repeated pattern of supplementarity throughout Shaw’s *Saturday Review* criticism. His remarks on diction are another, for he congratulates the Irishman T.P. O’Connor because when he “delivers a speech, he does not inflict on us the vulgarities of the Beggar’s Bush but he preserves for us all the music of Galway.” Proper diction allows the particulars of national background to become part of the universal phenomenon of “fine speech.” Nietzsche’s epigrams, in Shaw’s description, likewise perform the same double move, combining the pith and wit of minute sayings into a demonically enlightened worldview.

On a larger scale, Shaw’s repeated depictions of otherness – Irish, Ibsenite, Nietzschean, as well as feminine and Fabian – become part of Shaw’s performance of his own authority. Profoundly aware of his outsider status, Shaw reproduces it, transfers it to others, and disavows it time and time again. By doing so, he creates a flexional space from which to speak. Never quite in the center of things, but never wholly outside them, he can never be pinned down. In this, Shaw’s self-fashioning seems prescient of the double-consciousness later critics of colonialism would identify as a fundamental condition of being colonized. Shaw, however, has already complicated this condition by putting that doubleness into action. For Shaw, these two consciousnesses – of himself as Irish and of his family history and customs as English – cross the virgule that would separate a simple binary opposition. Instead, by deploying supplemental logic, he puts them into a dialectical dynamic, offering a model not just of individual self-fashioning or theatre criticism, but of postcolonial critique *avant la lettre*.

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