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## SHAW, HITLER, AND THE SATIRIC FICTION

LIKE MOST OF SHAW'S LAST PLAYS, *Geneva* belongs to no particular genre, apart from the indeterminate one of "extravaganza", a bran-tub in which elements of fantasy jostle with satiric commentary on contemporary events. The play is clearly an inconclusive discussion of the principal forms of government, Communistic, democratic, and dictatorial, with particular reference to the political situation immediately before the Second World War. In addition to the dictators, Bombardone, Battler, and Flanco, who are obvious caricatures of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, Shaw produces a British Foreign Secretary, a Russian commissar, and even a political "little man", a minnow in the national political ocean and therefore little more than plankton for the sharks of the international ocean. The main ingredient in the discussion is satire, most consistently applied to the dictators; as the Deaconess remarks on their pride, "God has ordained that when men are childish enough to fancy that they are gods they become what you call funny. We cannot help laughing at them".<sup>1</sup>

Satire, as David Worcester<sup>2</sup> and Maynard Mack<sup>3</sup> suggest, utilizes a deliberate fiction to convey an attack; the fiction, however, must be recognizable for what it is, and its audience or reader always aware of the reality that the fiction emphasizes rather than obscures. If the Lilliputians did not resemble the English seen through the wrong end of a telescope, the first part of *Gulliver's Travels* would lose its satirical point, however much it might continue to provide suitable nursery entertainment. Had *Absalom and Achitophel* not been obviously relevant to the contemporary political situation, it might have been praised as a literary *tour de force*, but not for its satirical truth. The problem confronting the satirist is that he must create a fable as the means of conveying his contempt for his victim. Direct vituperation and abuse as we find them in plays such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Look Back in Anger* and more familiarly in Job's curse<sup>4</sup> do not constitute satire; to be transformed into genuine satirical methods, they must be concealed in that laughter which expresses itself in a fiction, since the force of satire comes from its indirectness.

The satirist then is that paradoxical figure who reveals the truth through a fiction. He must ensure that his fiction is not taken at its face value alone; it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; not a race-horse, but a stalking-horse, behind which the satirist should be visible. Distortion, exaggeration, parody, burlesque, may all be applied to the satirist's victim; Orwell can recount significant events in recent Russian history, but attribute them to the actions of animals, and Dryden condemn Shaftesbury and Monmouth in the guise of figures from Jewish history: neither exposes through simple denunciation. Both rely on the reader's discerning the truth beneath the fable—that Stalin, not a pig called Napoleon, and Shaftesbury, not an Achitophel, are the real villains of their respective pieces.

Though there is no compulsion for the satirist to be perfectly consistent in his use of a fiction to the exclusion of any overt factual references, consistency is nonetheless a virtue. Whereas *Animal Farm*, for example, discusses modern Russia entirely in terms of the farmyard, *Geneva* mingles a world of fantasy with a real and historical world. Though the trial of the dictators at The Hague is the sustaining fiction of the play, the events outside the courtroom are often undisguisedly factual: references are made to the Spanish Civil War, the League of Nations, the violation of the Locarno Pact, and the annexation of Abyssinia, among others. Jarringly though, unhistorical references also appear in the background, references to the dissolution of the British Empire through an alliance, albeit unwanted, between Great Britain and Japan, and to a science-fiction announcement of the end of the world.

Almost invariably, the satirist exaggerates his victim's foibles and attacks them through a fiction. Yet he also has an obligation to that scarcely definable and highly inconvenient quality, truth; his assessment of his victim, or the world, must be accurate: it must fit the facts that we have, if he is not to appear either a fool or a slanderer rather than the stern moralist who has as his end "the amendment of vices by correction". This stricture applies, in the main, to satire dealing with particular figures rather than with mankind in general. Dryden's conception of Achitophel, therefore, must match the historical character and actions of the Earl of Shaftesbury; if he errs through ignorance, he is a fool: if through malice, a slanderer. Shaw cannot evade the satirist's responsibility towards truth by pleading that *Geneva* is a mere extravaganza, a fantasy. The fantastic in *Geneva* is after all a satirical weapon whose use is governed by the same law that governs satire as a kind: to be effective, it must derive from reality. In Max Beerbohm's words, "No fantasy is good unless it is founded in solid reality. None revels more than I in the impossible,

but it must spring from the possible, else it is without meaning and gives no illusion. That is an aesthetic truth which any worthy weaver of fantasies would admit".<sup>5</sup> Beerbohm's own practice as a weaver of fantasies bears out his precept: the suicide of Oxford's entire undergraduate population in *Zuleika Dobson* is given meaning because it is motivated by a real emotion—the adolescent romanticism of a generation that was prepared to pay more than lip-service to ideals that experience alone could expose: "dulce et decorum est pro patria—et pro femina?—mori".

The satirist faces a complex task: where applicable, he must conceal an historically verifiable truth under a fiction that must not become an end in itself. For Shaw, the task becomes still more complex because of his elevated conception of the art of literature. His criticism depends very considerably on the belief that literature has a didactic end in view, a belief by no means incompatible with the traditional definition of satire. In his Preface to *On the Rocks* he announces "All great Art and Literature is propaganda",<sup>6</sup> and his treatment of Ibsen in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is consistent with this principle. In addition, he has profound respect for literature as prophecy, so that in the 1922 Preface to *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* he states that a careful reading of Ibsen might have prevented the First World War and that now "old prophets stir in their graves, and are read with a new sense of the importance of their message".<sup>7</sup> As a practising satirist, didacticist, and prophet, Shaw has a tremendous obligation to be true to his facts and at least attempt to justify his own boast "I hurl the truth about like destroying lightning".<sup>8</sup> In addition to accuracy of interpretation of characters and events, and soundness of instruction, as a prophet he must be vindicated by history to be acceptable outside his own country as well as within.

Shaw has not received the blessing of history on his prophecies and assessments in *Geneva*. Indeed, Edmund Wilson considers him to have made a "jackass" of himself in his attitude toward the dictators.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, Shaw's inability to understand the principal characters of the 1930s and the events they set in motion vitiates his performance as a satirist in *Geneva*, which sometimes bears so little relevance to the actual political situation it purports to satirize that it seems like the opaque fiction that is an end in itself rather than the diaphanous fiction that serves as a means to a satiric end.

Shaw's failure as satirist, propagandist, and prophet reveals itself most clearly in his handling of the dictator Battler who appears in the courtroom at The Hague. The setting recalls Shaw's interest in the theme of justice which appears in his earliest work and perhaps culminates in the coming of the Day

of Judgment in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*. The Hague's justice is raised above British justice, and indeed paralleled with that of God when the British Foreign Secretary asks which court can try leading politicians. The Judge's answer is "... this court if necessary. There was a time when I might have answered 'Before the judgment seat of God'. But since people no longer believe that there is any such judgment seat, must we not create one before we are destroyed by the impunity and glorification of murder?" (p. 101). In the courtroom of The Hague, as before the Judgment Seat, all is to be revealed: "In the International Court no walls can hide you, and no distance deaden your lightest whisper. We are all seen and heard in Rome, in Moscow, in London, wherever the latest type of receiver is installed . . . . The knowledge that we all live in public, and that there are no longer any secret places where evil things can be done and wicked conspiracies discussed may produce a great improvement in morals" (pp. 89-90). Justice will find out its enemies now, provided that the dramatist, as counsel for both prosecution and defence, understands the crimes and presents them objectively to the audience, which represents the jury. When in Act II the Judge parallels the court's sentence with the sentence of excommunication, the supernal quality of the justice is made clear, as well as the fact that the dramatist aims at moral condemnation, not at physical punishment: "the man whom the Hague condemns will be an uncomfortable man" (p. 59).

From the evidence of his Preface to the Second Volume of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, Shaw would seem to be an ideal counsel for presenting both sides of a case with judicial objectivity: "... the obvious conflicts of unmistakable good with unmistakable evil can only supply the crude drama of villain and hero, in which some absolute point of view is taken, and the dissentients are treated by the dramatist as enemies to be piously glorified or indignantly vilified. In such cheap wares I do not deal".<sup>10</sup> Yet a satirist is, by definition, a man who takes some absolute point of view, from which he judges and punishes the deviations from this absolute on the part of his fellows. Clearly it is necessary for him to have some criterion by which he can distinguish what is acceptable from what is unacceptable, and hence ludicrous. The desire to avoid the stark confrontation of social good and social evil is irreconcilable with satire as it is usually defined; the satirist's contempt and the philosopher's impartiality and imperturbability are strange bedfellows indeed. Yet Shaw attempted to unite these irreconcilables, and *Geneva* is the fruit of their union.

Shaw presents Battler with some justice as the saviour of the German

people: "I have made better men and women of them. I live for nothing else. I found them defeated, humiliated, the doormats of Europe. They now hold up their heads with the proudest; and it is I, Battler, who have raised them to spit in the faces of their oppressors." (p. 109). Shaw repeats this view in the Preface to the play, written in 1945, when he describes Hitler as "restoring the self-respect of sixty millions of his fellow countrymen" (p. 20). What Shaw considers neither here nor elsewhere is the morality of Hitler's action, neither the means by which it was achieved nor the end for which it was done. Though his Deaconess makes the token retort to Battler's messianic claim, that "Jesus does not spit in people's faces" (p. 109), Shaw does not treat of the morality of the Nazi "nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, the worship of success and force" or "the exaltation of the State".<sup>11</sup> In short, there is a startling gap where the moral point of view should be, a silence that the historian Alan Bullock, in his objective study of Hitler's rise and fall, does not feel the need to observe:

They [some Germans] argue that what was wrong with Hitler was that he lacked the necessary skill, that he was a bungler. If only he had listened to the generals—or Schacht—the career diplomats—if only he had not attacked Russia, and so on. There is some point, they feel, at which he went wrong. They refuse to see that it was the ends themselves, not simply the means, which were wrong: the pursuit of unlimited power, the scorn for justice or any restraint on power; the exaltation of will over reason and conscience; the assertion of an arrogant supremacy, the contempt for others' rights."<sup>12</sup>

The absence of moral condemnation in Shaw is a testimony to what Eric Bentley calls his lack of a "sense of horror";<sup>13</sup> he finds it in Molière and Jonson, and it is, it may be suggested, the sustaining emotion of all great satire. *Geneva* conspicuously lacks it, and it is a matter for idle speculation what Swift, who had the sense of horror in abundance, might have written had he the motive and the cue for passion that Shaw was provided with in Hitler. But the breaking of treaties, the annexation of smaller, weaker nations, bring no condemnation from a satirist anxious to avoid the "obvious conflict of unmistakable good with unmistakable evil". Concern for neutrality of tone has betrayed him into such reticence that perhaps it is charitable to agree with Sir Desmond MacCarthy that by 1938 "Shaw had grown old and indifferent: he has been unable to write a page that did not betray his secret, that he can no longer feel anything much".<sup>14</sup>

But it is relevant to note here that Shaw's view of Hitler, until the war

convinced him that he was a "pseudo-Messiah and Madman";<sup>15</sup> was consistently myopic. His Preface to *The Millionairess*, written in 1935, reveals misconceptions about the nature of the dictator that disqualify his opinions as prophecy or profitable instruction:

He [Hitler] bullied and snubbed as the man who understands a situation can always bully and snub the nincompoops who are only whining about it. He at once became a popular idol, and had the regular executive forces so completely devoted to him that he was able to discard the brown-shirted constabulary he had organised on the Mussolini model. He met the conventional democratic challenge by plebiscites of ninety percent in his favour. The myopia of the powers had put him in a position so far stronger than Mussolini's that he was able to kill seventy-seven of his most dangerous opponents at a blow and then justify himself completely before an assembly fully as representative as the British Parliament, the climax being his appointment as absolute dictator in Germany for life, a stretch of Caesarism no nineteenth century Hohenzollern would have dreamt of demanding.<sup>16</sup>

Here Shaw couples his lack of horror at the assassination of Hitler's political opponents (in 1933 he had himself defended extermination of political undesirables in his Preface to *On The Rocks*) with statements and language suggesting incredible naïveté. The German Official *Gazette* announced on July 14, 1933, after the Nazi suppression of all other political parties, that "The National Socialist German Worker's Party constitutes the only Political party in Germany".<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, when Hitler defended the purges of June, 1934, he was scarcely doing so before "an assembly fully as representative as the British Parliament", however unflattering a view of Parliament Shaw held. The fallacy behind plebiscites in a police state ought to have been obvious to Shaw; though it is true that 89.93 per cent of the total number of those who voted in the plebiscite of August 19, 1934, supported Hitler's assumption of office as Reichs Chancellor, it is also true that in the Reichstag elections of 1933, when an alternative to the Nazi party was presented, the party polled 43.9 per cent of the vote.<sup>18</sup> As for the suggestion that Hitler disbanded his "brown-shirted constabulary" because "the regular executive forces were devoted to him", Shaw displays an ignorance of the intrigues within Germany in 1934 as well as a blithe indifference to the phoenix-like rise of the S.S. from the ashes of the S.A.<sup>19</sup>

It should be made clear that in 1935 and 1938 Shaw did not have the advantages of hindsight that we now enjoy; it should also be added that he did not have the satirical prerequisite, the virtue of foresight. He did, however,

have the benefit of newspapers and of Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf*, but it seems that the spectacle of democracy, a system for which he had little respect, being superseded by the Superman, an institution for which he had much, anaesthetized his critical faculty. By 1944, events and an acquaintance with *Mein Kampf* had modified Shaw's attitude toward Hitler. In *Everybody's Political What's What*, he sees a Hitler demented by power but attaches the blame for the imminent downfall of the Nazi regime to Hitler's "lack of time to be everywhere and attend to everything",<sup>20</sup> which has resulted in important tasks devolving on the incompetent shoulders of minor officials, rather than to the means adopted by the Fuhrer himself to achieve his ends. And he has come to see that, although "*Mein Kampf* contains a good deal of sound doctrine", some of Hitler's aims, like "German hegemony, subjugation of 'non-Aryans' and such" and the "extirpation of the Jews" are not universally desirable.<sup>21</sup> Implicitly, the overthrow of Parliamentary democracy and the substitution in its place of totalitarianism still have Shaw's support. And even though in *Everybody's Political What's What* there is some comprehension of the horror that was Hitler, the Fuhrer of the Prefaces and *Geneva*, at least, is a whitewashed, watered-down version of the historical figure.<sup>22</sup>

Typical of Shaw's failure to understand, a damning fault in prophet, teacher, and satirist, is his treatment of the Jewish question. Most unprophetically, he announces in the Preface to *On The Rocks* in 1933: "The extirpation of the Jews as such figured for a few mad moments in the programme of the Nazi party in Germany" (p. 129). Still worse, in the Preface to *The Millionaire* in 1935 he remarks: "He [Hitler] carried out a persecution of the Jews which went to the scandalous length of outlawing, plundering, and exiling Albert Einstein, a much greater man than any politician, but great in such a manner that he was quite above the heads of the masses and therefore so utterly powerless economically and militarily that he depended for his very existence on the culture and the conscience of the rulers of the earth. Hitler's throwing Einstein to the Anti-Semitic wolves was an appalling breach of cultural faith. It raised the question that is the root question of this preface: to wit, what safeguard have the weaponless great against the great who have myrmidons at their call?" (p. 123). To which we might reply with a question: what safeguard have the weaponless small?

Shaw's treatment of the Jewish question in *Geneva* illustrates the anxiety to avoid a confrontation of unmistakable good with unmistakable evil and is evasive and irrelevant. In the courtroom in which "no walls can hide you and no distance deaden your lightest whisper", the Jew accuses Battler of attempting

"to exterminate the flower of the human race". Battler replies, ". . . then what right have you in my country? I exclude you as the British exclude the Chinese in Australia, as the Americans exclude the Japanese in California" (p. 104). "Exclude" is substituted for "exterminate", and the counsel for prosecution and defence avoids the issue, unchallenged by the Judge or the spectators. This is avoiding unmistakable evil with a vengeance. As H. M. Geduld says, "Battler is a rational thinker: his arguments have a certain validity and coherence that is lacking in the real Fuehrer's hysterically supercharged tirades."<sup>23</sup>

Shaw's debate continues in the same vein; to the Jew's claim that he has been beaten and robbed, Battler replies that he cannot be everywhere—a startlingly dishonest piece of irrelevance whose reappearance in *Everybody's Political What's What* suggests that Shaw believed it himself.<sup>24</sup> Nor does Battler's final warning to the Jew have any basis whatsoever in reality: "Keep away; and you will be neither beaten nor robbed. Keep away I tell you. The world is wide enough for both of us. My country is not" (p. 105). The extermination of four-and-a-half million Jews in Europe, on a conservative estimate, under Hitler's rule,<sup>25</sup> suggests how little Shaw really understood of the man he depicts as Battler.

Shaw not only mitigates Hitler's capacity for evil by substituting rational speeches for irrational ones; he also unnecessarily denigrates the Jew by endowing him with the greed commonly associated with the caricature of the Jew. As the news of the imminent destruction of the world reaches the courtroom, the Jew leaves to instruct his lawyer "to sell gilt-edged in any quantity, at any price", since, we are told, "the Jews, with the business faculty peculiar to their race, will profit by our despair" (p. 125). Though Archibald Henderson believes that all the characters react to the news of the end of the world "in a highly characteristic way",<sup>26</sup> the image of the Jew preying on human despair seems false in the extreme to modern history. Even in 1938 Shaw's image seemed gratuitously distasteful. As Desmond MacCarthy rhetorically asks in his review of December 3, 1938: "What do you think of introducing such an incident, *and at this moment in European History*, as symbolic of the soul of the Jewish race when revealed under the stress of disaster?"<sup>27</sup> Despite the events of the War, the original ending of the play appears unaltered in the revised edition of 1946.

Archibald Henderson considers that in *Geneva* Shaw has "the Jewish Question thoroughly threshed out".<sup>28</sup> The threshing process, however, is an imperfect one; the conflict of the predatory Jew with a rational Battler who



desires only the deportation of the Jews from his country and who laments that only his lack of ubiquity prevents the immediate conclusion of assault and battery on the weaponless weak, hardly suggests the realism we expect from the political satirist, the accuracy we demand from the prophet, or the impartiality we associate with the teacher.

Shaw does make a token attempt to counteract the extravagances of racialism in general and anti-Semitism in particular. In the Preface to *The Millionairess*, he hazards the view that "Herr Hitler is not a typical German. I should not be at all surprised if it were discovered that his very blood (all our bloods today are hopelessly mixed) got fortified somewhere in the past by that of King David" (p. 125). Bombardone is the mouthpiece of this view in *Geneva*: "As to our races, they are so mixed that the whole human race must be descended from everybody who was alive in Abraham's day. Ernest [Battler] has his share in Abraham" (p. 106). Battler's reaction to such eminent common sense leads us to suspect that in 1938 Shaw saw in Hitler not the potential master of Europe and perpetrator of genocide, but an intemperate and impotent schoolboy: "This is an intolerable insult. I demand satisfaction. I cannot punch your head because you are at least two stone heavier than I; but I will fight you with any weapon that will give me a fair chance against you" (p. 106).

This suspicion is strengthened when we observe the "highly characteristic way" in which Battler receives the news of the world's imminent destruction: "Let me alone. My dog Blonda will be frozen to death. My doggie! My little doggie! (He breaks down, sobbing convulsively)" (p. 125). Shaw's presentation of Battler as a sentimentalist is, at best, an attempt to draw the dictator's teeth: it suggests that he derives his characteristics not from the man Bullock describes as a modern Attila,<sup>29</sup> but from Shaw's own gallery of tearful males. (Drinkwater in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, Octavius in *Man and Superman*, Bentley Summerhays in *Misalliance*, and de Stogumber in *St. Joan* come immediately to mind.) As a deflation of outward bravado, it passes muster in the satirist's armoury; but is it a worthy technique to apply to a man who said "Now I know men I prefer dogs",<sup>30</sup> and behaved in accordance with his preference? The contemporary German Gunther Grass has used the Fuhrer's affection for animals as the cornerstone of his novel *Dog Years*, a review of Germany during and after the Hitler regime. However, far from using the emotion as a glib means of exposing a latent sentimentality in Hitler, Grass uses it to expose the irresponsibility of the Fuhrer at the end of the War.

when rather than surrender and save lives, he chose to salvage what was left of his pride: in Bullock's words,

Goebbels scorned any suggestion that by leaving the capital [Berlin] he might allow the two million people still living there to escape the horror of a pitched battle fought in the streets of the city. "If a single white flag is hoisted in Berlin" he declared, "I shall not hesitate to have the whole street and all its inhabitants blown up. This has the full authority of the Fuhrer."<sup>31</sup>

Grass, albeit with the advantage of hindsight, assesses the character of Hitler and the events of 1945 accurately; Shaw, in 1938, saw with none of the penetration demanded of the satirist, and assessed inaccurately. Grass exposes Hitler's lack of consideration for the German people by presenting Hitler's dog, Prinz, sensing the affinities of the Berlin bunker with the proverbial sinking ship, and consequently following the example of the rats; Hitler's reaction is to draw his armies away from the defence of the city to the pursuit of the ungrateful dog, an operation known as "Wolftrap":

The Fourth Armored Corps postpones counterattack south of Spremberg indefinitely and secures Spremberg-Senftenburg highway against deserting Fuhrerdog. Similarly the Steiner Group transforms the deployment zone for the relief offensive scheduled to move southward from the Eberswalde sector, into a deeply echeloned dogcapture zone. The operation proceeds according to plan. All available planes of the Sixth Air Fleet fly ground reconnaissance missions for the purpose of determining Fuhrerdogescape route. Pursuant to "Wolftrap", the main battle line is pulled back behind the Havel. Fuhrerdogsearchgroups are set up from combat reserves. They receive orders to maintain walkie-talkie contact with Fuhrerdogcapturegroups consisting of motorcycle and bicycle companies. The Holste Corps digs in. But the Twelfth Army under General Wenck launches a relief offensive from the southwest and cuts off Fuhrerdogescaperoute, for presumably Fuhrerdog is planning to desert to Westenemy.<sup>32</sup>

Grass seizes upon the Fuhrer's affection for dogs and exploits it with fine inventive energy to illustrate Hitler's criminal inconsideration for the German people, while Shaw uses it as a tame, rather silly, end in itself.

Though the Judge in *Geneva* cannot enforce his sentence, he is allowed, like the King of Brodingnag, to offer his opinion of the pernicious vermin put through their paces before him:

"Your objective is domination: your weapons fire and poison, starvation and ruin, extermination by every means known to science. You have reduced one another to such a condition of terror that no atrocity makes you recoil and say

that you will die rather than commit it. You call this patriotism, courage, glory. There are a thousand good things to be done in your countries. They remain undone for hundreds of years; but the fire and the poison are always up to date. If this be not scoundrelism what is scoundrelism? I give you up as hopeless. Man is a failure as a political animal. The creative forces which produce him must produce something better" (pp. 121-122).

All the politicians then are patriotic scoundrels, and Shaw makes no distinction between them. The Begonia Brown who has a strong parochial preference for Camberwell over Peckham is the same as the Battler who immediately after the Judge's condemnation is revealed, in the later editions of the play, to have invaded Ruritania (Poland). Shaw's point, that parochialism is nationalism in embryo, is not in dispute; but the implication that the nationalism of a Battler, embracing racialism and aggression, is the same in degree as Begonia's parochialism and Sir Orpheus Midlander's hesitant imperialism, is both confusing and shallow. That Shaw does not permit his judge to distinguish between degrees of scoundrelism undoubtedly speaks well for his unwillingness to antagonize powerful European states by clear and relevant satirical denunciation, though the uncompromising satirist never conceals his intolerance of, and willingness to condemn, the anti-social tendencies of his fellow man. In *Geneva*, as Desmond MacCarthy says, the general condemnation is equivalent to a general acquittal.<sup>33</sup>

Only twice does Shaw offer any pointed criticism of Battler as an individual. He deflates his grandiloquence by allowing Sir Orpheus to interrupt him in full oratorical flow with a quibble over the Fuhrer's pronunciation of "Kikkeronian" instead of the "Sisseronian" dear to the Foreign Secretary's old school (p. 99): and as a *reductio ad absurdum* of nationalistic jargon, he presents "Up, Camberwell!" as a suitable English equivalent of "Heil, Battler!" (p. 97). On neither occasion does Shaw's use of anti-climax illuminate, more than superficially, comparatively trivial aspects of Hitler's character. He makes two very palpable hits, but his point does not pass through the clothing to the flesh.

*Geneva* has its advent in the Preface to *On The Rocks*, where Shaw pleads the case for toleration among nations:

The concentration of British and American attention on the intolerances of Fascism and Communism creates an illusion that they do not exist elsewhere; but they exist everywhere, and must be met, not with ridiculous hot-headed attacks on Germany, Italy, and Russia, but by a restatement of the case for Toleration in general (p. 175).

*Geneva* is the restatement of the case for toleration in dramatic form, where discussion and debate can lead to the understanding and solution of serious political differences. Shaw's contempt for Parliamentary democracy and his respect for the Superman, however, lead him to concentrate on the motes in the eyes of democratic states, and ignore the beams in the eyes of totalitarian ones. We are conscious throughout the play that toleration of Fascist and Communist "intolerances" means ignoring them and magnifying and concentrating on our own, and that Shaw is burying his head in the sand in *Geneva*, and inviting us to do the same. That he does so in a play that adopts some of the formulae of satire is surprising, since toleration, particularly in Shaw's definition of it, is alien to the spirit of satire, which moves the satirist to laugh from a position of superiority, conferred on him by his conception of an absolute point of view, at the ludicrous indignity of those who deviate through perversity or ignorance from his standard. His natural tendency is to exaggerate, not to mitigate, in the creation of his victim, whose foibles are, therefore, larger than life rather than smaller. Where indeed is the fellow of Battler, a satirist's victim whose faults have been minimized for the reader's scrutiny? And how is the reader or spectator to understand this reversal of the satiric pattern? He is accustomed to allow for the satirist's overstatement; can he recognize a deliberate understatement? The questions perhaps are purely academic. The evidence of the Prefaces and the political essays suggests that Shaw did not consciously minimize the faults of Hitler; he approved of the Superman, and he comprehended neither genocide nor the chaos and old night to which nationalism and militarism run mad might lead. So he presented a satirical portrait of what he could conceive Hitler to be, in the person of Battler, and as a consequence fails in his interpretation of historical facts.

The play suffers primarily from being irrelevant to historical fact. Shaw grossly underestimated Hitler's capacity for evil, and failed to understand both the Nazi attitude to the Jewish question and the character of the man who formed that attitude. His refusal to condemn absolutely where he could—in the Judge's summing-up, for example—suggests a temperament opposed to the vision of the satirist, who sees in terms of "unmistakable good and unmistakable evil" and accepts the implications of that vision. These reasons, coupled with Shaw's lack of a sense of horror, make *Geneva* "satire *manqué*".

The problem remains, however, why Shaw chose not to rewrite those scenes that, in 1945, clearly revealed his earlier lack of comprehension—the confrontation of Battler with the Jew, and the sentimental tears over the dog. Certainly he was prepared to make some textual revisions, adding in the 1940

edition the dialogue in which Bombardone and Flanco dissociate themselves from Battler after his invasion of Ruritania; and in the edition published in 1946, Shaw inserted an entire new Act (Act III) to illustrate that discussion was capable of dissolving old enmities and prejudices. That the addition of the new Act converts the Judge's final words from quiet optimism to futile self-delusion did not appear to worry Shaw; before the invasion of Ruritania the Judge's faith in discussions and conferences seems well-founded: "They came, these fellows. They blustered: they defied us. But they came. They came" (p. 130). After the news of the invasion, which arrives in the middle of the debate, one can only question the Judge's faith in discussion as a means of promoting peaceful co-existence and understanding between nations. As a result of this addition, the character of the Judge alters as well as the emphasis of the play. Originally intended to embody the values of toleration, justice, and humanity, he is so altered that one critic sees in him only a defeated "weaker player" of the political game.<sup>34</sup>

Despite some radical alterations, however, Shaw did not alter his portrait of a rational, sentimentally ineffectual Battler. Perhaps he recalled the opening words of his Preface to *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*:

I have never admitted the right of an elderly author to alter the work of a young author, even when the young author happens to be his former self. In the case of a work which is a mere exhibition of skill in conventional art, there may be some excuse for the delusion that the longer the artist works on it the nearer he will bring it to perfection. Yet even the victims of this delusion must see that there is an age limit to the process, and that though a man of forty-five may improve the workmanship of a man of thirty-five, it does not follow that a man of fifty-five can do the same.<sup>35</sup>

The specific ages are by the way: the principle is important, and Shaw's practice is clear. Despite some additions to *Geneva*, he stood by the delusions evident in the play rather than submit to the "delusion" of revision. As a result, in *Geneva* he hurls, not destroying lightning, but shooting stars.

#### NOTES

1. Bernard Shaw, *Geneva*, Library Edition (1946), p. 111.
2. David Worcester, *The Art of Satire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), passim.
3. Maynard Mack, "The Muse of Satire", in R. C. Boys, ed., *Studies in the Literature of the Augustan Age* (Ann Arbor, 1952), p. 223.
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