When Shaw died in 1950, the world lost one of its most well-known authors, a revolutionary who was as renowned for his personality as he was for his humour, humanity, and rebellious thinking. He remains a compelling figure who deserves attention not only for how influential he was in his time but also for how relevant he is to ours. This collection sets Shaw’s life and achievements in context, with forty-two chapters devoted to subjects that interested him and defined his work. Contributors explore a wide range of themes, moving from factors that were formative in Shaw’s life, to the artistic work that made him most famous and the institutions with which he worked, to the political and social issues that consumed much of his attention, and, finally, to his influence and reception. Presenting fresh material and arguments, this collection will point to new directions of research for future scholars.

Brad Kent is Associate Professor of British and Irish Literatures at Université Laval and was Visiting Professor at Trinity College Dublin in 2013–14. His recent publications include a critical edition of Shaw’s *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (2012), *The Selected Essays of Sean O’Faolain* (forthcoming), and essays in *University of Toronto Quarterly, Modern Drama, ARIEL: A Review of International English Literatures, English Literature in Transition, Irish University Review*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. He is also the programme director of the Shaw Symposium, held annually at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada.
For Anne, Ryan, and Zoé
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41.1 Shaw with his official biographer Archibald Henderson, Shaw’s Corner, c. 1906. Photo reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Authors, the National Trust, and the London School of Economics.
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Unlike for some writers of the modern period, scholars need not be defensive about reading Bernard Shaw in context, nor suggest that doing so presents a radical departure in scholarship. As countless studies and biographies of Shaw attest, he is the consummate subject to be read in context. His writing was not only informed by many of the popular modes, genres, and trends of his day – from melodrama and farce to the New Drama, from the Victorian novel to the New Journalism – but also bent them into idiosyncratic forms. ‘Make It New!’ commanded Ezra Pound. But Pound was coming rather late to the party: Shaw and his colleagues had already been making it new for decades.

From the time in 1876 that he quit the provincial backwater that was his native Dublin for the lures of London – the capital of the all-powerful British Empire enjoying perhaps its most dynamic century – Shaw sought to be in the thick of things and of the moment in which he lived. He first made his name as a reviewer of art, music, and theatre, using his columns not merely to comment on culture and society, but to mould public tastes and to forge his identity. In tandem, he circulated in almost every fashionable, avant-garde, and radical organisation, movement, and body of thought there was, from the Fabian Society to the Stage Society, from vegetarianism and evolutionary theory to feminism and continental philosophy. Not happy to take a back or passenger seat to history, he often imposed himself in many of these arenas, becoming a key player by lecturing and pamphleteering on their behalves and, almost inevitably, coming into conflict with many like-minded individuals and friends.

In addition to his perennial writing and lecturing, Shaw held public office as a vestryman and councillor in the Borough of St Pancras from 1897 to 1903 and was active on a wide range of policies that would affect the lives of his fellow citizens. In his travels, socialising, political work, and writing, he enjoyed relationships with luminaries in several fields and attracted the admiration of individuals who would transform the world.
in significant ways: Albert Einstein, W. B. Yeats, Bertolt Brecht, Oscar Wilde, Gene Tunney, Auguste Rodin, Charlie Chaplin, Emmeline Pankhurst, Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Vladimir Lenin, and Jawaharlal Nehru, to name a small but revealing sampling. All of this activity made him distinctly of his time.

When Archibald Henderson contacted Shaw about the articles that he had written in the late-nineteenth-century press, Shaw responded that Henderson would have to consider ‘misspending several weeks at the British Museum’ to go through what he estimated to be over a million words. Shaw further warned him that ‘many of them become absolutely unintelligible now that they can no longer be read with the context of the events of the week in which they appeared’ (CL II: 425). Fortunately, the same cannot be said for the majority of Shaw’s writings for which he is best-known, especially his plays. But there is no doubt that a more profound understanding and perhaps even greater enjoyment of Shaw’s works can be achieved by reading them through the filter of Shaw’s times. In turn, it could be argued that the times in which he lived can be better understood through the filter of Shaw, such was his personality, scope of thought, and breadth of influence. Henderson would, after all, subtitle the last of his three biographies of Shaw ‘Man of the Century’ – rather provocative, considering that it was published only in 1956. Yet as early as 1889 Shaw himself had declared that it was his business in life ‘to incarnate the Zeitgeist’ (CL I: 222).

The essays collected in this volume are arranged in six sections: People and Places; Theatre; Writing and the Arts; Politics; Culture and Society; and Reception and Afterlife. Broadly speaking, they move from the factors that were formative in Shaw’s life, to the artistic work that made him most famous and the institutions with which he worked, to the political and social issues that consumed much of his attention, and, finally, to how he has influenced and been received by others. Although there are over forty subjects surveyed, that number could very well have been much higher owing to the diversity of Shaw’s activities and interests.

It should be noted that while context is the distinguishing emphasis of these essays, the notion of context is approached in various ways, focused to different degrees on Shaw and the specific subject under discussion. There is also some range of opinion on Shaw and his legacy, and while the contributors by and large celebrate him for what he did, many hold him up to critical scrutiny. As Shaw regularly courted controversy, such discordance is both inevitable and welcome.
The reader will find that the volume treats a number of the more studied aspects of Shaw’s life with new critical insights and makes some forays into less explored terrains. In drawing up the projected table of contents, it became abundantly clear from the outset that each of these entries, which run to approximately three thousand words, could easily have been twice as long. In fact, some of these topics have been the subject of a number of books already. But these essays reveal that there is still plenty of work out there for the interested scholar, with many debates far from settled and piles of archival material waiting to be mined. Moreover, while Shaw has featured prominently in accounts of modern British theatre and studies of British socialism, he has yet to be adequately addressed in such fields as Modernism and Irish Studies, both of which are threaded through several of the essays. It is hoped that readers will find other avenues to explore that are perhaps only noted here in passing.

Throughout his career, Shaw cultivated a Mephistophelean persona, and one might mistake him for the devil-as-serpent in *Back to Methuselah*, proclaiming: ‘You see things; and you say “Why?” But I dream things that never were; and I say “Why not?”’ (*CPP* V: 345). Yet utopia was not merely enough to theorise or dream about: it needed action to come into being. In *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, Vivie, one of Shaw’s most independent-minded characters, says to her mother: ‘People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can’t find them, make them’ (*CPP* I: 310). This was, to some extent, Shaw’s mantra: not satisfied with the world as it was ordered, he sought to create opportunities to re-order it. He wrote of his perspective in a letter to the American novelist Henry James: ‘I never idolized environment as a dead destiny. We can change it: we must change it: there is absolutely no other sense in life than the work of changing it’ (*CL* II: 828). Indeed, as he once remarked:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no “brief candle” to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it over to future generations.  

And thus did he live for most of his ninety-four years, feverishly working to change his context and, along the way, reflecting it—with all of his contradictions and paradoxes—perhaps more than any writer of his lifetime. As popular as he has been, Shaw remains a compelling figure who deserves continued scholarly and public attention, not only for how important he was to his day, but for how relevant he is to ours.
Acknowledgements

One of the distinct pleasures of editing this volume has been the opportunity to work with the many contributors. Their collegiality, professionalism, and enthusiasm are exemplary and bode well for the future of Shaw studies. I am privileged to be associated with them and to count so many of them as friends.

A number of people have given significant time and energy in supporting this project, and were especially generous with their encouragement and advice. My thanks in this regard to John Bertolini, Al Carpenter, Leonard Conolly, Peter Gahan, Tony Gibbs, Nicky Grene, Christopher Innes, Michel Pharand, and Nelson Ritschel.

At Cambridge University Press, I have been fortunate to work with Vicki Cooper and Fleur Jones, two of the best editors one could hope for. For the collection of images and for granting the rights to publish them, I would like to thank Jenniffer Anand (Shaw Festival), Matthew Bailey (National Portrait Gallery), Sarah Baxter (Society of Authors), Conna Clark (Philadelphia Museum of Art), the Customer Service team at Alamy, Jonathan Goldman, David Kornhaber, Martin Meisel, Ginger Pharand, Thérèse Renaud (Université Laval), Emmanuelle Terrel (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice), Anna Towlson (London School of Economics Library), Claudia Tremblay (Université Laval), Julia Wyatt (Berlin Associates), and Grant Young (Cambridge University Library).

For their continued support of academics and for once again permitting the use of Shaw’s writings and photographs, I would like to thank the Society of Authors.

The dedication speaks to an acknowledgement of a more personal nature: to my family, without whom this book – and so much more – would not have been possible. And yes, Zoë, consider yourself forgiven for suggesting, after I had not shaved for a few days, that should I let my beard grow I might soon come to look like Shaw . . .
A Chronology of Shaw’s Works

Plays and novels are listed according to the dates on which their composition was completed. The parenthetical information provides the date and place of the play’s first performance, not including specially arranged copyright performances, as well as the subtitle in some instances; in the case of novels, the date on which each was first published as a book – as opposed to a serial in a journal – is indicated. Other major writings are listed according to their date of publication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Work Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Born in Dublin on 26 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Passion Play (unfinished)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Immaturity (1930)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>The Irrational Knot (1905)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Love Among the Artists (1900)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Cashel Byron’s Profession (1886)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>An Unsocial Socialist (1887)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Fabian Essays in Socialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>The Quintessence of Ibsenism</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Widowers’ Houses (9 December 1892, Royalty Theatre, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>The Philanderer: A Topical Comedy (20 February 1905, Cripplegate Institute, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Mrs Warren’s Profession (5 January 1902, New Lyric Club, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Arms and the Man: An Anti-Romantic Comedy (21 April 1894, Avenue Theatre, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Candida: A Mystery (30 July 1897, Her Majesty’s Theatre, Aberdeen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>The Man of Destiny: A Fictitious Paragraph of History (1 July 1897, Grand Theatre, Croydon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>You Never Can Tell: A Comedy (26 November 1899, Royalty Theatre, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title and Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td><em>The Devil’s Disciple: A Melodrama</em> (1 October 1897, Hermanus Bleecker Hall, Albany, NY)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Married Charlotte Frances Payne-Townsend at the Registry Office, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, on 1 June</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td><em>The Perfect Wagnerite</em></td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td><em>Caesar and Cleopatra: A History</em> (1 May 1901, Anna Morgan Studios for Art and Expression at the Fine Arts Building, Chicago, IL)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td><em>Captain Brassbound’s Conversion: An Adventure</em> (16 December 1900, Strand Theatre, London)</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td><em>The Admirable Bashville: or, Constancy Unrewarded</em> (14 December 1902, Pharos Club, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td><em>Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy</em> (21 May 1905, Court Theatre, London; <em>Don Juan in Hell</em> first performed 4 June 1907, Court Theatre, London; the entire play first performed 11 June 1915, Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td><em>How He Lied to Her Husband</em> (26 September 1904, Berkeley Lyceum, New York)</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td><em>John Bull’s Other Island</em> (1 November 1904, Court Theatre, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td><em>Passion, Poison, and Petrifaction: or the Fatal Gazogene</em> (A Brief Tragedy for Barns and Booths) (14 July 1905, Theatrical Garden Party, Regent’s Park, London)</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td><em>Major Barbara</em> (A Discussion) (28 November 1905, Court Theatre, London)</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td><em>The Doctor’s Dilemma: A Tragedy</em> (20 November 1906, Court Theatre, London)</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td><em>The Sanity of Art</em></td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td><em>Getting Married: A Disquisitory Play</em> (12 May 1908, Haymarket Theatre, London)</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td><em>The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet: A Sermon in Crude Melodrama</em> (25 August 1909, Abbey Theatre, Dublin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td><em>Press Cuttings</em> (A Topical Sketch Compiled from the Editorial and Correspondence columns of the Daily Papers during the Women’s War in 1909) (9 July 1909, Court Theatre, London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td><em>The Fascinating Foundling</em> (A Disgrace to the Author) (28 January 1928, Arts Theatre Club, London)</td>
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xxx

A chronology of Shaw’s works

1910  The Dark Lady of the Sonnets: An Interlude (24 November 1910, Haymarket Theatre, London)

1910  The Glimpse of Reality: A Tragedietta (8 October 1927, Fellowship Hall, Glasgow)

1911  Fanny’s First Play: An Easy Play for a Little Theatre (19 April 1911, Little Theatre, London)

1912  Androcles and the Lion: A Fable Play (1 September 1913, St James’s Theatre, London)

1912  Overruled: A Demonstration (14 October 1912, Duke of York’s Theatre, London)

1912  Pygmalion (A Romance) (16 October 1913, Hofburg Theater, Vienna)

1913  Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores) (A Thumbnail Sketch of Russian Court Life in the XVIII Century) (18 November 1913, Vaudeville Theatre, London)


1914  Common Sense About the War

1915  The Inca of Jerusalem: An Almost Historical Comedietta (7 October 1916, Repertory Theatre, Birmingham)

1915  O’Flaherty, V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet (17 February 1917, Western Front, Treizennes, Belgium)


1917  Heartbreak House: A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes (10 November 1920, Garrick Theatre, New York)

1920  Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch (A Play Cycle) (Parts I and II, 27 February 1922; Parts III and IV, 6 March 1922; Part V, 13 March 1922, Garrick Theatre, New York)

1921  Jitta’s Atonement, by Siegfried Trebitsch, translated by Shaw (8 January 1923, Shubert-Garrick Theatre, Washington, D.C.)

1923  Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue (28 December 1923, Garrick Theatre, New York)

1926  Translations and Tomfooleries

1928  The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism

1928  The Apple Cart: A Political Extravaganza (14 June 1929, Teatr Polski, Warsaw)