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Bernard Shaw, Henry Higgins, and the Irish Diaspora

Ever since Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* premiered in London in 1914, critics and audiences have assumed that Shaw chose the name Henry Higgins for the male lead primarily for the comic effect produced by having the Cockney characters drop the letter "h" that begins his Christian name and surname. However, such an explanation ignores the crucial fact that Higgins is an Irish surname; the name is found in all four provinces of Ireland (though primarily in Connaught) and comes from the Irish Gaelic name Ó hUigín, meaning "son of the Viking."[1] Shaw was undoubtedly aware of the name's Hibernian origins, and not simply because he was born and raised in Dublin. By his own estimation, he knew "more about Irish names than anyone outside the professions of land agency . . . can possibly know"; this knowledge was gained while working in an estate office in Dublin as a young man, in a job which required him to "collect . . . rents from tenants in every province in Ireland" and to enter their surnames on receipts and in ledgers.[2] Shaw's decision to give Higgins a name he knew to be Irish cannot be lightly dismissed, for, as many critics have pointed out, Shaw's character names frequently tell us something about the fictional figures who bear them.[3]

1. Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1985), p. 157. According to the National Genealogical Office, in 1996, Higgins was the 79th most common surname in Ireland. (See "Surname History: Higgins". http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/index.cfm?fuseaction=History&Surname=Higgins&UserID=. Although Higgins is a very common surname in both Ireland and the Irish diaspora (including among those who settled in Britain), in England it is occasionally—though much more rarely—a diminutive of the names Higg or Hick. See P. H. Reaney and E. M. Wilson, *A Dictionary of English Surnames* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1606. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Irish Research Council, as well as the Moore Institute at the National University of Ireland, Galway, for assistance during my research for this article.

2. Bernard Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, ed. David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence (London: Hill, 1962), p. 62.

3. Daniel J. Leary's observation about the character names in Shaw's *Heartbreak House* (1919) could easily be applied to most Shaw plays: "the unusual names surely evoke symbolic undertones." Daniel J. Leary, "Entry for *Heartbreak House*," *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, ed. John Gassner and Edward Quinn (New York: Dover, 2002), p. 414.

Shaw elected to endow his rude but winning phonetics professor with an Irish name to signal that Higgins is an Englishman of Irish descent. Those who watch or read *Pygmalion* are meant to understand that the professor's Englishness is somewhat altered by an outside cultural influence, which explains why he is so at odds with the society in which he lives and why he can analyze it so coldly and sharply. To strengthen this Irish, "outsider" aspect of Higgins's character, Shaw also imbues the professor with many of the traits that he repeatedly associates with a canny Irishness in his other writings. Ultimately, the positive diasporic Irishness of Henry Higgins helps to complicate Shaw's reputation for being rudely dismissive of the Irish identities of those born in the diaspora.[4]

The main Irish aspect of Higgins's character in *Pygmalion* is the fact that he is, in Shavian fashion, a cynical fact-facer, puncturing English "sentimentality" and "intellectual laziness" with the same pleasure as many of Shaw's other Irish characters.[5] When Higgins repeatedly makes incisive speeches in support of the dignity of the individual and the need for greater equality between social classes; when he is ruthlessly honest in telling Eliza how she looks; and when he explodes Clara's notion that life would be easier if everyone said exactly what they think, he brings to mind the clear-sighted, if unpopular, analyses enunciated by Larry Doyle and Peter Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), Sir Patrick Cullen in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), Mrs. Farrell in *Press Cuttings* (1908), and Private O'Flaherty in *O'Flaherty, V.C* (1917). Likewise, Higgins's ability to spot immediately that Alfred Doolittle is a blackguard recalls Sir Patrick Cullen's ability to see through "chancers" like Dubedat and corrupt surgeons like Sir Cutler Walpole in *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

Perhaps the most "Irish" of Higgins's tirades in *Pygmalion* are the ones in which he—like the Kerryman Hector Malone from *Man and Superman* (1903)—disdains the English for not being able to "speak [their] own language properly."[6] In expressing this anger, Shaw is echoing a sentiment to be found frequently among Irish writers, who, for centuries, delighted in puncturing the linguistic pride of their English overlords. Maria Edgeworth suggests in the 1809 novel *En-*

4. On Shaw's reputation as someone who was dismissive of the diasporic Irish, see: Michéal Ó hAodha, "Some Irish American Theatre Links," in *America and Ireland, 1776–1976: The American Identity and the Irish Connection*, ed. Con Howard, David Noel Doyle, and Owen Dudley Edwards (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 300; Matthew Pratt Guteri, *The Color of Race in America: 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 79; John H. Houchin, *Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 59–60; James Moran, "Meditations in Time of Civil War: *Back to Methuselah* and *Saint Joan* in Production, 1919–1924," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 30, 1 (2010), 150–51.

5. Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island* (1904; London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 113; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*JBOI* 14).

6. Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman* (1903: London: Penguin, 2004), p. 180.

nui that the Anglo-Irish Lady Geraldine speaks English more precisely than her English guests, Mrs. Norton and Lady Hauton.[7] The Anglo-Irish characters Major Yeates and Mrs. Knox in the Somerville and Ross story, "The Aussolas Martin Cat" (1915), are bemused at the way the "grotesque 'stage Englishman'," Mr. Tebbetts, drops his "h"s.[8] And, of course, James Joyce suggests through Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man* (1916) that the best English in the world is spoken in Lower Drumcondra on Dublin's Northside.[9]

This pride—indeed, reverse snobbery—over the Irish way with English was, of course, shared by Bernard Shaw, who claimed that his English was that of the Dublin-born Jonathan Swift and not the "unspeakable jargon" (*JBOI* 9) found in London newspapers.[10] In the 1916 preface to *Pygmalion*, Shaw even claims that "the English have no respect for their own language" and that he wishes that they spoke "the noble English of Forbes Robertson."[11] It is revealing that Shaw singles out the actor Johnston Forbes Robertson for praise, as Robertson was the English son of Scottish parents from Aberdeen; the character of Henry Higgins was originally written with Robertson in mind.[12] From the start, Shaw seems to have been suggesting that Higgins is a man with roots in the "Celtic Fringe" who speaks English better than the English do.

In *Pygmalion*, Higgins's anger over the poor language skills of many English people leads him to help reform the accents of his London clients, who engage Higgins to help them fulfil their social ambitions. The need to reform one's way of speaking in order to be taken seriously by the English middle- and upper-classes is historically a very "Irish" concern. In the mid- to late eighteenth-century, the Dublin-born actor Thomas Sheridan conducted popular elocution classes throughout Britain and Ireland, in which he taught Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and working-class English people how to speak "properly." For his son, the playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan, having such an influence in his childhood home paid off handsomely; when he was in parliament, English politicians praised him for the fact that, although he spent his formative years

7. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent / Ennui* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 224.

8. Violet Powell, *The Irish Cousins* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 148; E. Œ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Irish R.M.* (London: Abacus, 2005), p. 431.

9. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p. 145.

10. Shaw reiterated the view that the Irish speak the English language better than the English do on a number of occasions. See *The Matter with Ireland*, pp. 60, 84, 201, 269.

11. Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (New York: Dover, 1994), p. xii. The Dover edition reprints the original 1916 text of the play. Many important Shaw critics, including Leonard Conolly, A.M. Gibbs, Arnold Silver, Diderik Roll-Hansen, and St. John Irvine, have argued that this original version is superior to the later 1939 Constable and 1941 Penguin versions, which were altered to their aesthetic detriment by Shaw himself. However, none of the portions of the play examined here is from the radically altered sections of the text.

12. Leonard Conolly, Introduction, *Pygmalion*, p. xx.

in Dublin, he spoke with a "correct" English accent. By contrast, they lamented that another Irish politician, Edmund Burke, who was raised in Dublin and Cork, spoke as though "he had never quitted the banks of the Shannon."[13] In subsequent centuries, Irish people in England would face the same dilemma as these celebrated eighteenth-century Irishmen: whether or not to reform their "barbarous tongues." Shaw himself decided to adjust his accent, depending on his audience. We see this in film footage of him speaking. When in America, he spoke in his normal Irish accent.[14] When speaking at formal engagements in England, Shaw's pronunciation was decidedly more "RP" (received pronunciation), though still clearly Irish.[15] Shaw presumably made this decision because he sincerely believed the views expressed in the preface to *Pygmalion*: that in early twentieth-century England, it is extremely ill-advised to speak in a way that will limit your social and professional opportunities. Henry Higgins, inspired by his belief in political equality—but perhaps also by the humiliations that he saw his Irish family members endure—wants to see people speak in a way that will help them to succeed in class- and accent-obsessed England.

Of course, such conjecture is risky. Other than the Higgins surname, there are few, if any, indications in the play that Higgins's family is definitively Irish. If they are, they would seem to be Anglo-Irish, given that Higgins's brother is an Anglican vicar.[16] But if the Higgins family is indeed Anglo-Irish, it makes Henry's excessive devotion to his London-based mother interesting, for two reasons. First, a strong Anglo-Irish mother in London with her artistic, bachelor son not only recalls Shaw himself, but also his contemporaries Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats. Second, Shaw makes clear that Henry's devotion to his mother is the reason for the man's "confirmed" bachelorhood, which is so central to the play's plot.[17] As many commentators have noted, marrying late is prevalent among

13. The remark was made by English parliamentarian Nathaniel Wraxall. Fintan O'Toole, *A Traitor's Kiss: A Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998), p. 206.

14. See, for example, "George Bernard Shaw's First Visit to America (1928 Fox Movietone newsreel), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40VegR6uaTI ; "George Bernard Shaw Says to Abolish the Constitution,"1931 Fox Movietone newsreel, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R7jLo_JANY.

15. See, for example, "George Bernard Shaw Giving a Speech at a Dinner in Honour of Albert Einstein," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TItoITM_RM.

16. It is also possible that Henry's Irish ancestry may be exclusively on his father's side, and his brother may be a Protestant clergyman because of family roots other than those provided by the Higgins branch of the family.

17. Recently, Fintan O'Toole provocatively suggested that "the confirmed bachelor" Higgins is probably a closeted homosexual, given his interest in "dressing Eliza" and his private collection of Japanese kimonos. Fintan O'Toole, "Shaw Was an Anarchist: Where is all the Chaos?" *Irish Times*, 14 May 2011.

Irish males.[18] Higgins was presumably born and raised in England; but the tendency toward late marriage was also common in the Irish diaspora, as extensive anecdotal reports have suggested and as sociologists have verified.[19]

Higgins's Irish "foreignness" is not only signaled by his surname, his bachelorhood, and his laments over the English inability to speak their own language properly; his Irishness is also present in his disgust over the fact that the English have a class system based on a set of arbitrary, learned manners, and—what is worse—that they are nonetheless not very good at performing those manners. After the party at which Eliza passes herself off so successfully as a "toff," Higgins complains to Pickering that many of the English aristocrats were poorly mannered, concluding "the silly people don't know their own silly business" (*P* 49). Higgins himself, we might note, never bothers to behave in a mannerly way. This is partially out of conviction—that is, it is an expression of his staunch democratic principles—and partially because, in the words of Pickering, he has "never been broken in properly to the social routine" (*P* 49), which may be another clue that Higgins's family is Irish, or, at least, not typically English.

Higgins's "Irish" disregard for polite English manners strongly recalls the Irish character Dora Delaney, from Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* (1911). In this earlier work, we gather that Dora is Irish (despite her occasional use of London slang) from her surname and her reference to Carrickmines in South County Dublin.[20] Both Higgins and Delaney exhibit flagrantly "low" manners, which not only provide comic relief in each play but also imply a criticism of the unjust English class system. Both characters are determined to treat all equally; as Henry says, "I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl" (*P* 66) and vice versa. Higgins's antisnobbery, his sermons on equality, and his attempts to get working-class people to "pass" as middle- or upper-class are all a much more deliberate attack on the inequalities rife in English society than Dora's.[21] In fact, Higgins's campaign on

18. See, for example, Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile, 2009), p. 103; C.S. Lewis, as quoted in Peter Milward, "What Lewis Has Meant for Me" in *C.S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends and Colleagues*, ed. Harry Lee Poe and Rebecca Whitten Poe (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), e-book.

19. As it concerns Higgins's possible Irishness, it should be noted that, although Irish males in England married significantly later than their English counterparts in 1851, reflecting "a general postponement of marriage by migrants during the famine years," over the ensuing decades, the "demographic behaviour" of the Irish in England "slowly became like that of the host population." See Lynn Hillen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), pp. 153, 138.

20. Bernard Shaw, *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet / Fanny's First Play* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 131.

21. For an important article on the notion of "passing" in *Pygmalion*, see Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja, "Undoing Identities in Two Irish Shaw Plays: *John Bull's Other Island* and *Pygmalion*," *Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 30, 1 (2010), 108–32. Bohman-Kalaja argues that *Pygmalion* is an Irish

behalf of equality is underwritten by what is arguably an "Irish" anger at the English class system: there is a subversive, destructive mischief in his suggestion that Clara should try the "new small talk" (*P* 39) at her next three at-homes.

Notably, Henry's mother—the only other Higgins in the play—generally behaves in an elegant, that is to say, "English," fashion throughout *Pygmalion*. Despite this, there are two hints that Mrs. Higgins comes from an Irish background, and they both relate to her manners. First, she exhibits what could be construed as an "Irish" fieriness of temper and "freedom of manner" when she says that she would have thrown the fire irons at Henry and not the slippers if she had been in Eliza's position.[22] Shaw's Irish female characters, including Nora from *John Bull's Other Island*, and Teresa Driscoll and Mrs. O'Flaherty from *O'Flaherty, V.C.*, also have such volatile tempers. Mrs. Higgins may also be betraying a possible Anglo-Irishness when she expresses distaste for the English habit of talking about their "insides" (*P* 35); an identical sentiment is voiced by the Anglo-Irish Lady Naylor in a memorable scene in Elizabeth Bowen's 1929 novel *The Last September*.[23] In spite of these impulsive outbursts, Mrs. Higgins has obviously decided to conform, in the main, to London social manners, whereas her son, like others in England from marginalized cultural backgrounds, has decided to rebel against the prevailing "artificial" manners of the English middle- and upper-classes.[24] Indeed, Higgins swears frequently—often with an Irish taste for alliteration.[25]

He is also in small ways rather slovenly, and throws his body onto sofas informally and inelegantly. Exaggerated depictions of such "low" manners and lack of cleanliness were associated negatively with the Irish on the London stage and in the English press for centuries; since Shaw strongly indicates that Higgins's outrageous behavior is harmless, his portrayal of the English fear of such "Irish" manners suggests that the English leisure classes are unnecessarily hide-bound and strict in such matters. Given the possible Anglo-Irishness of the Higgins family, we might recall that even an aristocratic Anglo-Irish woman like Elizabeth Bowen was

play, but she regards Eliza and not Higgins as the character who is "Irish-by-association." Bohman-Kalaja, 120.

22. Maria Edgeworth, *Ormond* (1817; Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), p. 5.

23. Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (1929; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 134.

24. For Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths in Britain rejecting English manners and "proper" speech in favor of cultural distinctiveness (as the children of Jewish and Irish families did in earlier decades), see Errol Lawrence, "In the Abundance of Water the Fool is Thirsty: Sociology and Black 'Pathology'," in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. The Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2005), especially pp. 93–139, 108–09, 120–29. It should be noted that Lawrence sums up the research regarding this phenomenon without always agreeing with it.

25. For the Irish use of alliteration when insulting others, especially in the works of Swift and Synge, see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*: *The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 187.

criticized for exhibiting such unmannerly "Irish" traits by her English friends. After visiting Bowen's home in North Cork, Virginia Woolf noted in her diary, "One can see, after Bowen's Court, how ramshackle & half squalid the Irish life is."[26]

Other—arguably more concrete—pieces of evidence from the text suggest that Higgins is of Irish descent. First, throughout the play, Higgins shows that Ireland is never far from his thoughts. When describing his own ability to tell where people are from based on their speech, he contrasts it with Pickering's ability to "spot an Irishman" (*P* 8), when he could have said, for example, a Scotsman or a Liverpudlian. When he suggests that Freddie is beneath Eliza as a suitor, he says he wants to see her marry "the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland" (*P* 70). Additionally, Higgins speaks of "the English" in the play as though he himself were not an Englishman. For example, he proclaims that "the English will keep [Eliza] in the gutter" (*P* 8) as long as she speaks in a Cockney accent. Likewise, he shows an outsider's eye for the comedy value inherent in many supposedly august English place names when he laughs at the name of the estate where Mrs. Eynsford Hill grew up, "Largelady Park" (*P* 7)—the mocking of "posh" English names being a durable tradition among Irish writers.[27] These verbal indications that Higgins is not English are probably what led—or, at least, enabled—Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (the first actor to play Higgins) to attempt to play him with a Scottish accent, before he was stopped from doing so by Shaw himself.[28]

A final hint from the text that Higgins is Irish is Pickering's description of one of Higgins's ideas as "very clever but not sound sense" (*P* 20). This is essentially the identical complaint made by the Englishman Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island* about the incisive analysis provided by his Irish business partner Doyle and the mystic Keegan—analysis that Broadbent repeatedly dismisses as "blarney," "tommy rot," and "Irish exaggeration," or which he mistakes for examples of Irish humor (*JBOI* 83, 86, 158). "Very clever but not sound sense" was also a frequent (and unjust) complaint regarding the braver ideas voiced by Irish thinkers such as Wilde and Shaw. Like the characters Doyle and Keegan, they had to put up with English commentators describing their radical insights as "Irish exaggeration" or Irish comic perversity. Higgins, who desires to see England adopt a more rational alphabet and abandon its artificial manners, is likewise dismissed by English people who surround him as a monomaniacal eccentric.

There is one other piece of evidence from Shaw's pen indicating that Higgins is not simply an Englishman. In a letter to the actress Ellen Terry from

26. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* vol. 4, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, with Andrew McNellie (New York: Harcourt, 1982), p. 210.

27. See, for example, Brendan Behan, "The Big House," *The Complete Plays* (New York: Grove, 1978), p. 361; Brian Friel, *The Home Place* (London: Faber, 2005), p. 16.

28. Conolly, Introduction, *Pygmalion*, p. xxi.

1912, Shaw describes the role of Higgins as "essentially an English part of a certain type."[29] The inclusion of the qualifier "essentially" is noteworthy, and the word itself is ambiguous. As the Oxford English Dictionary avers, "essentially" not only means "in essence," but, since the seventeenth-century, often means "substantially" or "in marked or eminent degree"—which carries the corollary of "not entirely." Shaw's remark to Terry suggests that Higgins is both truly an Englishman—that is, in his very "essence"—but also implies that there is another cultural influence complicating his straightforward Englishness. What keeps Higgins from being unequivocally English, Shaw suggests, is the fact that he is a member of the Irish diaspora.

Shaw, of course, had a problematic relationship with the very idea of diasporic Irishness. He often spoke negatively about the children of the Irish diaspora. He was regularly scathing about "American Gaels," as well as "Clan na Gael Irishmen" from Liverpool, Glasgow, and London.[30] He stated on occasion that the British and American children of Irish immigrants were not "real Irishmen," and, in one of his articles for the American press, he even called them "sham Irish."[31] He teased devotees of the Irish-American republican activist, John Devoy, by suggesting that Devoy's surname was not actually Irish.[32] In *John Bull's Other Island*, the Shavian mouthpiece Larry Doyle, says that the Glasgow-born Tim Haffigan is not Irish "at all," despite being the son of Irish parents (*JBOI* 78). Similarly, the daughters of Mrs. Farrell from *Press Cuttings* and Count O'Dowda from *Fanny's First Play* are presented as unequivocally English, and Hector Malone's son in *Man and Superman* as simply American.

Shaw's repeated dismissal of the Irishness of those born and raised outside of Ireland is clearly related to his "climatological" view of Irish identity, best expressed in *John Bull's Other Island*. In that play and its preface, Shaw defined an Irish person as anybody touched by Ireland's unique climate. He even hinted that those who live there for a few years begin to show Irish characteristics. Shaw's climatological view was in some ways a ground-breaking and admirably inclusive concept, because it privileged residence in Ireland over exclusionary "racial" considerations.[33] However, the positive aspects of this climatological

29. Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters, 1911–1925*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 111.

30. For Shaw's dismissive remarks regarding "American Gaels," see *The Matter with Ireland*, pp. 64, 66–67, 68, 89, 100–101. For his negative opinions of "Clan na Gael Irishmen" from Britain, *The Matter with Ireland*, pp. 63, 64, 67, 257. See also Shaw's letter quoted in Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green Is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 122.

31. Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, pp. 62, 64; 68.

32. Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, p. 62.

33. See David Clare, "Bernard Shaw's Irish Characters and the Rise of Reverse Snobbery," in *The European Avant-Garde: Text and Image*, ed. Selena Daly and Monica Insinga (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), pp. 138–51.

view aside, Shaw repeatedly contradicted his own seemingly watertight theory, and admitted the durability of Irishness beyond the shores of Ireland. In essays and interviews, he occasionally recognized the importance of the "Irish blood" of those born or living outside Ireland.[34] He argued for the inclusion of Eugene O'Neill and T. E. Lawrence in the Irish Academy of Letters, and he forged a strong friendship—based partially on a mutual Irishness—with the American boxer, Gene Tunney.[35] His championing of Lawrence and O'Neill is especially interesting, given his climatological theory, as neither of these men ever visited the land of their ancestors.

Other, perhaps less obvious, instances of Shaw suggesting the durability of Irishness beyond the island of Ireland can also be cited. The characters Hector Malone, Larry Doyle, Sir Patrick Cullen, and Mrs. Farrell all have markedly Irish personalities, despite living outside of Ireland for many years. Likewise, in the futuristic play *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*—part of the 1918 *Back to Methuselah* cycle—the Irish leave their native land to stir up revolutions across the colonized world, and, despite remaining outside of Ireland for generations, remain Irish in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. The "Elderly Gentleman" character in the play is very recognizably a Stage Englishman, despite the fact that his countrymen have been based in "dear old British Baghdad" for hundreds of years, where—at least according to Shaw's climatological theory—the hot, arid climate would presumably have altered the English national character.[36]

The clearest expressions of Shaw's belief that Irishness persists in the diaspora are found in his catalogue of English and American characters of Irish descent, who, he suggests, derive their power—and some of their weaknesses—from their Irish ancestry and cultural backgrounds. The prime example of this is Henry Higgins, but there are a number of other characters of this type from Shaw's ouevre. One is the American naval officer, Captain Kearney, from the play *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900). According to Shaw's stage directions, aspects of the Captain's personality are the result of the "old world" blood coursing through his veins, including—presumably—his Irish blood, given the name "Kearney."[37] The forcefulness of the Captain's personality is best exemplified by his wittily threatening letter to those who have taken Sir Hallam and Lady Cecily hostage. The letter recalls the darker pronouncements of Shavian Irish characters such as Keegan, Doyle, Cullen, and O'Flaherty: it is marked by realism laced

34. Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, pp. 201, 231, 286–87, 296. See also Bernard Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays with an Apology,* vol. 2 (New York: Brentano's, 1906), p. 324.

35. Jay R. Tunney, *The Prizefighter and the Playwright: Gene Tunney and Bernard Shaw* (Tonawanda: Firefly, 2010).

36. Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* (1921: London: Penguin, 1990), p. 194.

37. Bernard Shaw, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion,* in *Three Plays for Puritans* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 319.

with grim humor, and is free of the idealistic, sentimental cant indulged in by many of Shaw's English characters.

John Bull's Other Island and Shaw's other plays featuring Irish characters show the playwright's fondness for reversing old stereotypes. In *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, Shaw subverts old notions of English civility versus Irish barbarism by making the Irish-American Kearney more cultured than the English sailor, Drinkwater. Kearney regards Drinkwater's reading material as exceedingly low-brow, agreeing with the chaplain that his books should be burnt and counseling the Cockney that he would "be better without that sort of reading."[38] Social class is another factor in this contrast, but—given Kearney's own occasional use of "low" idioms—his class background does not appear to be much higher than Drinkwater's. Kearney's remaining "Irish" trait is his preference for "natural" manners over English, aristocratic reserve. Kearney says he does not mind people using bad language when provoked, because it shows they have "flesh and blood"—that is, it proves that they are human.[39]

Another Shaw character who demonstrates "Irish" qualities, despite being born and raised outside of Ireland, is the English boxer Cashel Byron from the 1901 play, *The Admirable Bashville*, the stage version of Shaw's juvenile novel *Cashel Byron's Profession*.[40] The prizefighter's first name is clearly a reference to the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary, and indicates the man's physical and psychological strength. Byron, whose Irish heritage presumably comes from the de Courcy branch of his family, possesses a number of traits that Shaw associated with Irishness.[41] The boxer recalls Larry Doyle and Sir Patrick Cullen by being both "learned" and streetwise. He repeatedly punctures English sentimentality, scorning English romantic notions about "duty" and love of one's mother.[42] And his occasionally low manners, like those of Henry Higgins and Dora Delaney, act as a force for democratic change in the play; his aristocratic love interest

38. Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, p. 329.

39. Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, p. 328. Kearney's American upbringing would also help to explain this preference for bluntness, as Americans were generally thought to be very straightforward.

40. The novel was written in 1882 and rejected by numerous publishers. It was then published serially in a socialist magazine, *To-Day*, between April 1885 and December 1886, and was finally published in book form together with *The Admirable Bashville* in 1901, after Shaw had established himself as a playwright.

41. In the play, we are given surnames from both sides of Byron's family tree. Other than de Courcy, which is a celebrated Irish surname of Norman origin, the surnames are all deeply English. One possible exception is FitzAlgernon, which, as Barney Rosset has half-hinted, could conceivably be Anglo-Irish, given its "Fitz" prefix. Barney Rosset, *Shaw of Dublin: The Formative Years* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), p. 147.

42. Shaw, *The Admirable Bashville* in *Selected Short Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 11, 12, 37. Just as the character of Private O'Flaherty prefers the dangers of life at the Front to living with his mother, Byron prefers prizefighting and even prison to reuniting with his mother.

Lydia begins to use the street slang she has learned from him. Byron also invites comparison to Higgins by being passionately articulate in his disparagement of English, aristocratic "snobbery" and condescension.[43]

After one of Byron's fights, a sportswriter ascribes a clever strategy used by the boxer to "colonial smartness," a reference to the years Byron spent in Australia, but also presumably to Byron's Irish background.[44] This line makes explicit Byron's "foreignness" in England, which is further signaled in the original novel during the scene in which Byron fights a Cockney called Teddy. Having been knocked to the floor, Teddy exclaims, "Be a Englishman [sic]; and don't hit a man when he's down."[45] Both the novel and the play provide a number of clues that the English-born Byron is not exactly English; clearly, this "foreignness" is related not only to the time he spent living abroad, but also to his Irish heritage.

One particularly intriguing Irish diasporic character from Shaw's dramatic canon is "Boss" Mangan from *Heartbreak House* (1919). Mangan is an Englishman of Irish stock, whose shrewdness in business and politics is much greater than that of the "mere English" who surround him. The contrast between Mangan and his associates recalls the one set up by Shaw between the Irishman Doyle and the English "duffer" Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island* (*JBOI* 78), and between the Irishman Hector Malone and various, impoverished, English aristocrats in *Man and Superman*.

Mangan possesses two weaknesses that Shaw associated with Irishness. The first is that he "drank too much formerly."[46] When Shaw spoke of the Irish weakness for alcohol, it was usually in relation to his own family members.[47] He once famously stated that, "I am a teetotaler because my family has already paid the Shaw debt to the distilling industry so munificently as to leave me no further obligation."[48] Mangan's second such weakness is that he is excessively materialistic due to an irrationally heightened "dread . . . of being poor."[49] This obsessive materialism is a trait Shaw gave to other Irish characters, including Teresa Driscoll and Mrs. O'Flaherty from *O'Flaherty, V.C.* and some of the townspeople of Rosscullen in *John Bull's Other Island*. Shaw usually suggested

43. Shaw, *The Admirable Bashville*, p. 23.

44. Shaw, *The Admirable Bashville*, p. 18.

45. Bernard Shaw, *Cashel Byron's Profession* (New York: Brentano's, 1904), p. 165.

46. Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House* (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 99.

47. See: Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 2–3, 53; Daniel Dervin, *Bernard Shaw: A Psychological Study* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), p. 112.

48. As quoted in Hesketh Pearson, *G.B.S.: A Full Length Portrait* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942), p. 49.

49. Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, p. 102.

that Irish poverty sharpened the wits of those who endured it.[50] However, he clearly views an excessive materialism as one, possible, negative side effect of that early deprivation. During the course of the play, Shaw signals Mangan's hybrid "Irish-English" identity through the character's speech. In the second act, Mangan employs the Hiberno-English adjective "cute," meaning acute, sharp-witted, clever, and shrewd.[51] Then, a few lines later, he uses the English expression "off my chump."[52] Likewise, toward the end of the play, Mangan says "jolly well" in the manner of an English gentleman, and, shortly thereafter, uses the phrase "fine talk" in the same Hiberno-English fashion as it is employed by Private O'Flaherty in *O'Flaherty, V.C.*[53]

"Snobby" O'Brien Price from Shaw's 1905 play *Major Barbara* is an Irish diasporic character who mirrors Mangan in combining positive and negative Shavian Irish traits. Like the admirable Irish figures in Shaw's other plays, "Snobby" is a thinker who possesses an ultra-realistic view of society and its workings. In particular, he is much less naive about laissez-faire capitalism and the Salvation Army than the rest of the play's characters, except perhaps Andrew Undershaft. That said, despite Snobby' s "sharp" intellect, he is held back by his "Irish" weaknesses: he "drink[s] something cruel" when he gets the chance, and the struggle to survive has resulted in his being "capable of anything . . . except honesty or altruistic considerations of any kind."[54] Like "Boss" Mangan, he has become selfish and deceitful in his pursuit of gain, or at least out of his horror of poverty. A further link between "Snobby" and Shaw's other Irish characters relates to his family background: because "Snobby's" middle name is O'Brien, it is probable

50. Shaw's thinking on the bracing effects of early, Irish poverty is discussed at length in Clare, "Bernard Shaw's Irish Characters."

51. Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, p. 97; Eric Patridge, Tom Dalzell, and Terry Victor, *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 181. Although this use of "cute" is known throughout the British Isles, it is most popular by far in Ireland. In *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1803), Maria Edgeworth suggests that the expression is of Irish origin, and, as various scholars have pointed out, it has remained current in Ireland in expressions like "country cute" (used conspicuously in James Joyce's "The Dead") and "cute hoor," often applied today to corrupt politicians. See Maria Edgeworth, *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802: Dublin: UCD Press, 2006), p. 68; James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914; London: Penguin, 1956), p. 213; Bernard Share, *Slanguage: A Dictionary of Irish Slang* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997), p. 139; Patridge et al., *The Concise New Partridge of Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English,* p. 181; Terence Patrick Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012), p. 76.

52. Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, p. 97.

53. Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, pp. 144; 145. The expression "fine talk" is used in the same Hiberno-English manner in other Irish works of the time, including J. M. Synge's *The Aran Islands* (1907) and Winifred Letts's poem "For Sixpence" (1913). See J. M. Synge, *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2008), p. 359; W. M. Letts, *Songs From Leinster* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1914), p. 41.

54. Bernard Shaw, *Major Barbara* (1907: New York: Penguin, 1978), pp. 75, 76, 75.

that his formidable, fearsome mother—who we never meet—is another Shavian Irish woman with a fiery temper.

Shaw's disparate handling of figures who bear Irish names but who were evidently not Irish by birth indicates that he was ambivalent about the notion of second- and third-generation Irishness. Shaw usually had thoroughly considered views on the subjects he tackled in his prefaces and plays; thus, his contradictory treatment of the diasporic Irish is unusual for him, but perhaps not surprising. Many, or perhaps most, Irish people today seem to hold such contradictory views regarding the diaspora, as the actor and cultural ambassador Gabriel Byrne recently discussed in a widely-debated radio interview on Dublin's Today FM.[55] Contemporary Irish critics and cultural commentators readily recognize the Irishness of certain members of the diaspora—such as Martin McDonagh or Shane McGowan—but they generally find the supposed Irish identities of others, such as the conservative Fox News presenters Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, or the producers of Hollywood films like *Far and Away* and *Leap Year*, difficult if not impossible to imagine.

In the end, although Shaw failed to conceive of an overarching theory regarding the diasporic Irish, his instinct to assess the Irishness of people in the diaspora on a case-by-case basis is sound. His most substantial, and also most subtle, portrait of such a person is Henry Higgins, an Englishman of Irish descent, whose Irish background Shaw sees as having helped to give him his "sane" ideas regarding language and social class. As Shaw puts it in the preface to *John Bull's Other Island*, "England cannot do without its Irish . . . today because it cannot do without at least a little sanity" (*JBOI* 10). Henry Higgins is Shaw's tribute to the many Irish people who have brought fresh perspectives and dynamic, revolutionary energy to the new countries which they, and their families, have gradually learned to call home.

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55. For a transcript of this widely discussed interview about "The Gathering 2013," as well as discussions of the public debate that ensued in its aftermath, see "Come Gather 'Round People Wherever You Roam," http://www.broadsheet.ie/2012/11/05/come-gather-round-people-wherever-you-roam/. Byrne harshly criticized the sentimentality and the crass commercialism of the project, saying that the organizers of the event "have to understand that the bridge between the diaspora and the people of Ireland is broken. . . . And unless you understand what it is that the diaspora feel about Ireland and the fact that, once your people have emigrated, you don't really care where they're gone to, unless they're your kids, then emigration takes on a very, very different emotional sense for you."