

George Bernard Shaw

Author, Playwright (1856–1950)

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote more than 60 plays during his lifetime and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

Synopsis

George Bernard Shaw was born July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland. In 1876 he moved to London, where he wrote regularly but struggled financially. In 1895, he became a theater critic for the *Saturday Review* and began writing plays of his own. His

play *Pygmalion* was later made into a film twice, and the screenplay he wrote for the first version of it won an Oscar. During his lifetime, he wrote more than 60 plays and won many other awards, among them the Nobel Prize.

Early Years

Playwright George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 26, 1856. The third child, Shaw's early education took the form of tutoring sessions provided by his clerical uncle.

Early on, Shaw explored the worlds of the arts (music, art, literature) under his mother's guidance and through regular visits to the National Gallery of Ireland. In 1872, Shaw's mother left her husband and took Shaw's two sisters to London, and four years later Shaw followed (his younger sister had died in the meantime), deciding to become a writer. Shaw struggled financially, and his mother essentially supported him while he spent time in the British Museum reading room, working on his first novels.

The Writing Life Begins

Unfortunately, despite the time he spent writing them, his novels were dismal failures, widely rejected by publishers. Shaw soon turned his attention to politics and the activities of the British intelligentsia, joining the Fabian Society in 1884. The Fabian Society was a socialist group whose goal was nothing short of the transformation of England through a more vibrant political and intellectual base, and Shaw became heavily involved, even editing a famous tract the group published (*Fabian Essays in Socialism*, 1889).

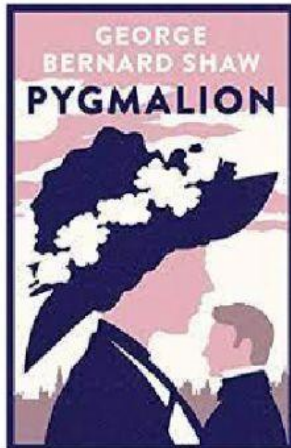
The year after he joined the Fabian Society, Shaw landed some writing work in the form of book reviews and art, music and theater criticism, and in 1895 he was brought aboard the *Saturday Review* as its theater critic. It was at this point that Shaw began writing plays of his own.

The Dramatist

Shaw's first plays were published in volumes titled "Plays Unpleasant" (containing *Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*) and "Plays Pleasant" (which had *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell*). The plays were filled with what would become Shaw's signature wit, accompanied by healthy doses of social criticism, which stemmed from his Fabian Society learnings. These plays would not go on to be his best remembered, or those for which he had high regard, but they laid the groundwork for the oversized career to come.

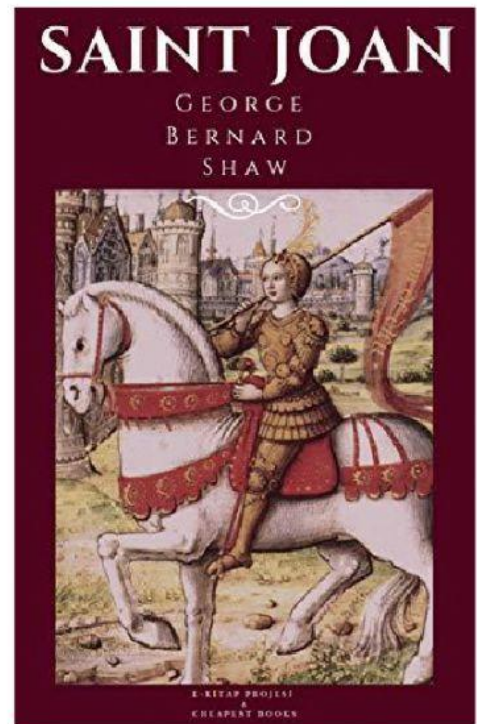
The Literary Giant

Toward the end of the 19th century, beginning with *Caesar and Cleopatra* (written in 1898), Shaw's writing came into its own, the product of a mature writer hitting on all cylinders. In 1903, Shaw wrote *Man and Superman*, whose third act, "Don Juan in Hell," achieved a status larger than the play itself and is often staged as a separate play entirely. While Shaw would write plays for the next 50 years, the plays written in the 20 years after *Man and Superman* would become foundational plays in his oeuvre. Works such as *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *Pygmalion* (1912), *Androcles and the*



Lion (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923) all firmly established Shaw as a leading dramatist of his time. In 1925, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Pygmalion, one of Shaw's most famous plays, was adapted to the big screen in 1938, earning Shaw an Academy Award for writing the screenplay. *Pygmalion* went on to further fame when it was adapted into a musical and became a hit, first on the Broadway stage (1956) with Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews, and later on the screen (1964) with Harrison and Audrey Hepburn.



Shaw died in 1950 at age 94 while working on yet another play.

Choose the correct option. There may be more than one right answer.

1 George Bernard Shaw lived in the ... century / ies.

18th 19th 20th

2 He had two

siblings brothers sisters

3 He didn't attend school.

True False Not stated

4 He learned about the arts

from his mother
at the National College of Arts
at the National Gallery of Ireland

5 Shaw's mother walked out on his father on account of domestic violence.

True False Not stated

6 He moved to London at the age of

18 20 22

7 He had money problems.

True False Not stated

8 He started writing in the ... reading room.

Tate Gallery British Museum British National Library

9 He couldn't get his ... published.

novels plays reviews

10 He became active in politics.

True False Not stated

11 After he got a job as a stage critic, he started writing plays.

True False Not stated

12 His first plays were published in ... volumes.

two five seven

13 His most renowned plays were written in the ... century / ies.

18th 19th 20th

14 Several of his plays were made into films.

True False Not stated

15 He won a Nobel Prize and an Academy Award.

True False Not stated

16 He left a work unfinished when he died.

True False Not stated

