



Three Plays for Puritans

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (Editor), Michael Billington (Introduction)

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Shaw believed that theatre audiences of the 1890s deserved more than the hollow spectacle and sham he saw displayed on the London stage. But he also recognized that people wanted to be entertained while educated, and to see purpose mixed with pleasure. In these three plays of ideas, Shaw employed traditional dramatic forms - Victorian melodrama, the history play and the adventure story - to turn received wisdom upside down. Set during the American War of Independence, *The Devil's Disciple* exposes fake Puritanism and piety, while *Caesar and Cleopatra*, a cheeky riposte to Shakespeare, redefines heroism in the character of the ageing Roman leader. And in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, an expedition in Morocco is saved from disaster by a lady explorer's skilful manipulation of the truth.

Three Plays for Puritans Details

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From Reader Review Three Plays for Puritans for online ebook

Michael Meeuwis says

There's too much Shaw in print, basically: the older plays from "Plays Political," for example, should exist only in ancient editions in university libraries where unfortunate MA students should read them. These plays, from I guess the late-middle of Shaw's career, are excellent--"Caesar and Cleopatra," in particular, is unlike anything I've read before. These are, in other words, actual plays, rather than polemics in dialogue form. I can't say what any of these plays is "about"--and, in light of what comes later in Shaw's work, that's a very good thing.

David Sarkies says

Better than Shakespeare?

15 January 2011

The one thing that stands out with this collection of plays is Shaw's introduction where he theorises on whether it is possible to be better than Shakespeare. Now, Shakespeare is undoubtedly a literary master, though there is some debate as to whether Shakespeare is actually the author of many of his plays (though it should be noted that he did borrow a lot of his ideas for his plays from other sources, such as Plutarch). This is not the discussion here, though there are many who would consider suggesting that anybody is better than Shakespeare is tantamount to blasphemy. Personally I am not willing to throw much into the debate beyond the questions of whether Shaw is a good playwright (he is) and whether he is better than Shakespeare (doubtful).

Anyway, the three plays in this collection are The Devil's Disciple (A Melodrama), Caesar and Cleopatra (A History) and Captain Brassbound's Conversion (An Adventure). The Devil's Disciple reminded me a lot of The Crucible and sometimes I wonder whether Arthur Miller stole his idea from Shaw, though I find this doubtful in that The Crucible was written during the red terror of the 1950's and the action in the play reflects that. What is interesting in The Devil's Disciple is the role reversals that Shaw loves in his play. In this play the outcast, Dudgeon sacrifices himself in a Christ-like manner, while the parson Anderson shows himself to be the unloving coward. I guess in the end it shows us that we should never prejudge a person, and further we should be willing to accept that somebody will change for the better.

Caesar and Cleopatra is what Shaw was referring to when he was suggesting that it was possible to be better than Shakespeare. This play is sort of a prequel to the Shakespearian plays Julius Caesar and Anthony and Cleopatra. It brings in two of the characters from the later plays and appears to try to tie the Shakespearian plays together into a trilogy. The play is set in Alexandria during Caesar's conquest of Egypt, and much of it is an interplay between a very young Cleopatra and Julius Caesar. There are also echoes in the play of the latter tragedy that is to arise between Cleopatra and Mark Antony.

The final play, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, is set in the deserts of Morocco and is about a missionary that travels into the Moroccan interior where he meets with some bandits, and after an interplay, the bandit chief, Captain Brassbound, is convicted of his sin and repents.

Thorir2007 says

At least one of the three plays in this volume is a masterpiece. It is the one that made G.B. Shaw famous. It is called "The Devil's Disciple." The action takes place in New Hampshire during the Revolutionary War. It shows Loyalists, Royalists, Puritans, priests, British generals, et al - the way they really were. It is NOT about the War - it's about people. Amazingly enough (coming as it does from a radical atheist), the play is thoroughly Christian in spirit. It premiered here in the States, in 1897, and was an instant success.

Stef Rozitis says

I loved this when I was a teenager. For some reason I thought I was being naughty by reading it

Raully says

It seems to me that of all the forms of literature, plays age the worst.

Manab says

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Goddess Of Blah says

All 3 plays in this collection are extremely witty. Much more superior to GBS's more famous plays such as Pygmalion (better known as My Fair Lady).

And as with all GBS's plays there's brilliant social, political and moral observations, all dispensed in a comical witty manner. And a hint of romance which is never seen through (i.e. the couple decide it's better not to be together).

Play 1: The Devil's Disciple:

Synopsis: Set in Colonial America (Websterbridge, New Hampshire) during the Revolutionary era, the play tells the story of Richard Dudgeon, a local outcast and self-proclaimed "Devil's disciple". The Play begins with Dick (Richard Dudgeon) returning to his childhood home to hear the reading of his father's will, much to his family's dismay. Dick's mother is puritanically inclined and disgusted by Dick's behaviour who plays up to this naughty boy stereotype.

The twist in the story is that Dick sacrifices himself in a Christ-like gesture despite his professed Internal allegiance.

The character who appeals the most to the audience is (Johnny). He has a rapier wit and

Play 2: Caesar and Cleopatra

¹¹¹ See also the discussion of the relationship between the law of the land and the law of the church in the section on the *ius ecclesiastico*.

FTATATEETA is my favourite character in this play. She's a dynamo lady and you don't want to mess with her.

ETTA AND ALEXANDRA (1991, GENEVIEVE)

CONTINUATION

Keep your hands off our men, mistress; or I will have you pitched into the harbor, though you were as strong as ten men. (To his men) To your posts; march! (He returns with his men the way they came.)

FTATATEETA (looking malignantly after him).

We shall see whom Isis loves best: her servant Ftataeteeta or a dog of a Roman.

SENTINEL (to Apollodorus, with a wave of his pilum towards the palace). Pass in there; and keep your distance. (Turning to Ftataeteeta) Come within a yard of me, you old crocodile; and I will give you this (the pilum) in your jaws

Play 3: Captain Brassbound's Conversion

A intrepid gentlewoman (very ladylike but witty and adventurous) and her very Correct brother-inlaw set out in an adventure that takes them across Morocco. It's only due to the lady's cunning that they escape danger. Captain Brassbound and his crew discover that sweetness and light is a far more powerful weapon than brute strength.

It is quite useless to declare that all men are born free if you deny that they are born good. Guarantee a man's goodness and his liberty will take care of itself. To guarantee his freedom on condition that you approve of his moral character is formally to abolish all freedom whatsoever, as every man's liberty is at the mercy of a moral indictment which any fool can trump up against everyone who violates custom, whether as a prophet or as a rascal.

Max says

I only read one of the plays, and even that one wasn't that great. I get the feeling I'm not a big Shaw fan, even if he does write some clever commentaries on the world.
