

LANGUAGE CORNER: Ask George ! September 2008.

Shaw on Shaw.

Shaw's Irishness often surfaces in his puns & paradoxes... Thus in *The New York Times* of 1950, he almost outshines James Joyce when he writes "a drama critic is a man who leaves no turn unstoned". Otherwise, he is more British than the British, in one of his famous Prefaces: "money is indeed the most important thing in the world; and all sound and successful personal and national morality should have this fact for its basis".

Here for instance, is his own, most egocentric, description of himself suggested to Frank Harris, as a possible way of presentation: Shaw was full not only of Ibsen, but of Wagner, of Beethoven, of Goethe, and, curiously, of John Bunyan. The English way of being great by flashes: Shakespeare's way, Ruskin's way, Chesterton's way could barely disguise incoherence from Irishness. His native pride in being Irish persists in spite of his whole adult career in England and his preference for English and Scottish friends.

Then: **Joyce** distorts words; **Wilde** plays with them. **Shaw**? He merely **defines** them. In his own, fairly didactic, way:

*When a man wants to murder a tiger, he calls it **sport**; when the tiger wants to murder him, he calls it **ferocity**. The distinction between crime and justice is no greater.

*Live in contact with **dreams** and you will get something of their charm: live in contact with **facts** and you will get something of their brutality. I wish that I could find a country to live in where the facts were not brutal and the dreams not unreal.

*What really **flatters** a man is that you think him worth flattering.

*A **learned** man is an idler who kills time with study.

Then, he winds up with a bash at the Bible, of course:

*Do not love your neighbour as yourself. If you are on good terms with yourself it is an impertinence; if on bad, an injury.

*Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.

Of all the Irish writers, Shaw explains the most: no wonder he even insisted on explaining his own first name George out of legal existence in his will... for being too ... British: he simply forbade everybody to call him GEORGE after his death!

ends