

## Shaw's view of *Heartbreak House*

ST JOHN ERVINE

From St John Ervine, 'Note on *Heartbreak House*' (copy of a BBC Third Programme talk script sent by Ervine to Ivo L. Currall; London: Currall Collection, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, n.d.). One of Shaw's very late works, the puppet play, *Shakes versus Shav*, supports Ervine's remarks here about the special regard that Shaw had for *Heartbreak House*. In the course of the play, in response to a challenge from Shakes, Shav conjures up a tableau from *Heartbreak House* of 'Captain Shotover seated, as in Millais' picture called *North-West Passage*, with a young woman of virginal beauty', and exclaims: 'Behold my Lear' (*Collected Plays*, vol. v, p. 12).

His attitude to *Heartbreak House* was entirely different from his attitude to the rest of his work. He would discuss any other play at length, but *Heartbreak House* very remarkably silenced him, not because he felt dubious about it, but because it stirred a reverence in him which he had never felt for anything else he had written. I say this with some diffidence lest I should be misunderstood. I shall have failed in my purpose if I make you feel that he was vain about the play in any foolish fashion. In his heart, he was a humble man, vain only on platforms and in the presence of people who expected him to show off. There was no such mood in him when he thought of *Heartbreak House*. It affected him profoundly because he felt that it had been inspired as nothing else of his had been.

## A Crisis

LAWRENCE LANGNER

From Lawrence Langner, *GBS and the Lunatic* (London: Hutchinson, 1964) pp. 29–30. Langner's association with Shaw began in 1920 when the New York Theatre Guild obtained the rights to stage the world première of *Heartbreak*