



Too True to Be Good: A Political Extravaganza

"A Collection of Stage Sermons by
a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature"

By Bernard Shaw

SYNOPSIS: Nothing is what it seems ...

Act I



An upper-class home. We meet a sickly microbe, an upper-class patient, an overbearing mother, and a peculiar nurse. The nurse allows in her partner, a robber, who loves to talk. Instead of stealing the patient's pearls, they decide to kidnap the patient and she happily assents.

Act II



A military fort in a remote location. The nurse masquerades as a countess and the rich patient as an island local. We meet low- and high-ranking military characters. When the group find themselves under attack, it is the common army private who takes command and saves the day.

Act III



Where are we? All the characters converge, and engage in philosophical discussions about science, religion, feminism, anti-war, classism, and politics. The robber (who is secretly an ordained preacher), concludes that "... we have outgrown our religion, outgrown our political system, outgrown our own strength of mind and character." He is left preaching on his own as all the characters slip away. To where they are going ... is up to you.

Set Design by Sue LePage

TRANSFORMATIONAL THEATRE

In 'transformational theatre,' set and costume pieces are transformed and re-imagined to present different perspectives and locations. Pay attention to how set and costume design show transformational theatre at work!

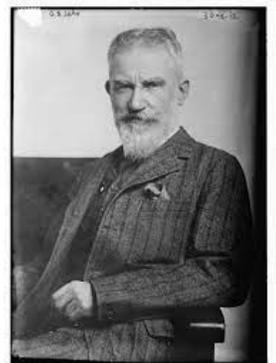
THE AUTHOR

Meet Bernard Shaw – playwright, critic, and social reformer (1856-1950).

He was a well-known Irish writer of short stories, essays, and plays that explored gender, the British class system, medicine, and politics. Shaw firmly believed in Socialism. He wrote: "Socialism means equal rights and opportunities for all."

Shaw was ahead of his time in many ways. He wrote about women's issues and inequality between men and women. He was a vegetarian and an animal-rights activist. He was a pacifist who spoke out against war during WWI. An avid socialist, Shaw used his plays to advocate for the rights of those in society who did not have a voice.

Although his controversial views frequently got him into trouble and some opinions failed to stand the test of time, Shaw set a new standard for intelligent and provocative theatre.



BERNARD SHAW

ABOUT THE PLAY

Shaw is famous for writing funny, socially conscious plays. He intentionally inverted the usual view of things to provoke audiences to examine and question their personal beliefs as well as values within society. *Too True to Be Good* is a prime example of this dramatic device, called inversion, where characters live in a 'topsy-turvy world.' For instance:

1. The title is a reversal of the adage, 'too good to be true'
2. The microbe is sick because of the patient
3. The nurse turns out to be a thief
4. A Military Colonel would rather paint watercolours than command
5. A Military Private quits the army whenever he is promoted so he can re-enlist as a Private and maintain his control
6. A mother learns that sacrificing herself for her children has left her alone in the world
7. The privileged, upper-class patient desires to work and have purpose in her life
8. A robber is an ordained preacher. His father is an atheist

Shaw wrote this play in 1932, during the Depression, and as a result of the horrors and losses of WWI. In *Too True to Be Good*, "Shaw's point isn't merely that money buys unhappiness: it's that humankind has lost all compass. Life in the aftermath of a world war is a hopeless muddle, but no one - not governments nor armies, rich nor poor, young nor old - has the insight or the courage to reorganize society along more meaningful lines".

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/sep/08/too-true-to-be-good>

What do you think? Has anything changed?

FUN FACTS

Shaw based the character of Private Meeks, (a low-ranking officer who makes all the decisions and has all the control), on his friend T.E. Lawrence, more famously known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'.

The Microbe character gives voice to Shaw's refusal to accept the theory that germs cause disease. Throughout his life, Shaw insisted that sanitation, ventilation, sunshine and life-energy could both prevent and cure disease. He further satirizes the doctor who admits he cures no disease while blaming the microbe. Germ theory was really well established in the scientific community by the end of Shaw's lifetime (1950) and it's clear that Shaw was what we might now term as "vaccine hesitant," which even in his day, put him at odds with fairly well-established medical information.



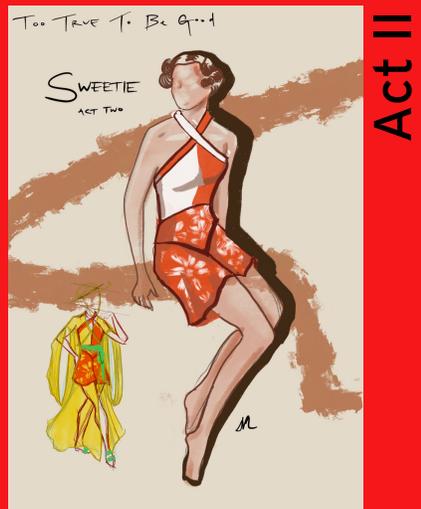
T. E. Lawrence, 1918

Too True to Be Good is described as an 'allegory': a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

Act I



Act II



Act III



Costume Design by
Joyce Padua

SHAW
FESTIVAL 60