

WHAT IS THE ISS?

The International Shaw Society, "the ISS," was founded in 2004 for the purpose of keeping George Bernard Shaw talking, his favorite thing, even though he's been dead since 1950. We think Shaw has much to say to our world, and in a way that is rare for its sanity, humanity, and civilizing good humor.

What keeps a dead author alive? While alive, Shaw was of the opinion that it was "sedulous self-advertisement" that kept him going and that the only bad publicity was an obituary (unless you wrote it yourself). But Shaw's afterlife on earth depends on theater impresarios like David Staller who keep Shaw's characters going, on Shaw Societies such as the long-standing ones in the U.K., Ireland, Japan, India, and the U.S. that keep Shaw himself talking and being discussed, and of course on books and Internet citations. But as the longstanding societies are mostly local in their effect and orientation, a group of Shavians (scholars, theater artists, and non-academics) decided in 2004 to form the International Shaw Society, with the object of spreading the Shavian word more broadly and more inclusively. Likely to meet anywhere in the world and global in its online reach, the ISS now has members in thirteen countries, on five continents, and grows apace. About half academics and half not.

The acronym "ISS" emphasizes Shaw's continuing presence, his "issness" in the contemporary world if only as a talkative spirit with very relevant things to say, and the suggestion of a hiss on "ISS" evokes Shaw's portrayal of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (in *Back to Methuselah*) as a friend to human beings in encouraging the species to grow and learn, rather than to continue stuck in the old, stagnant, often self-destructive ways. The Serpent says to Adam and Eve "you see things; and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were: and I say 'Why not?'" Interestingly, a few years after Shaw's death, Jack Kennedy in his campaigning for the American presidency sometimes used this quote, in an abbreviated form: "I see things and say, why not?" And what was seen by Shaw was that the possibilities for growth in an evolving, maturing-but-not-mature species would not be realized unless we said "why not" to the change that might help us mature. The Shavian voice, urging Homo sapiens to grow up, has never been more needed. Growing up, in fact, is probably what Shaw had in mind when he urged evolving to Homo super or "the Superman." Desperate metaphors for desperate times! Which will always be with us until we do grow up. When Science Fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, hopefully, entitled one of his novels *Childhood's End*, it was Shaw who inspired that. Except that Shaw thought that growing up was lots more fun than Clarke did, and the ISS invites you to join in the fun of seeing and reading Shaw's plays and discussing the author and his works. The homepage of the ISS is www.shawsociety.org, where you'll find a link to a membership application and listing of membership benefits. Come one, come all.

--- R. F. Dietrich, ISS Founding President