

G. B. Shaw Was a Social Reformer: An Analysis with Reference to his Plays

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw was a tireless crusader for social justice and righteousness. He was a propagandist for the intellectual enlightenment of the people. He was a zealous missionary. Social reform was the mission of his life. He tried to liberate his age from humbug mental sloth, social apathy, superstition, sentimentalism, collective selfishness and all the static ideas which have not been consciously subjected to the tests of real life and honest thought.

G.B. Shaw is the father of revolutionary playwrights who dared to create an atmosphere for discussions and ideas. For Shaw the social reforms became a theme for creative writers. Shaw's Sense of life was historic and in the drama, he found the only literary genre which could satisfy his demand for life and art. He never bothered to achieve greatness of art; rather he utilized his art as a medium to transmit his ideas to the world. Shaw was a Shavian persona. He invented himself in much the same way as he invented vital characters, Mrs. Warren, Candida, Lady Cicely, Saint Joan, John Tames, Under shaft, Lisa etc. He knew that in the words of repressed and conventionalized responses, of dead moral reflexes, a measure of solvent anger was crucial to raise the temperature of perception. Shaw wanted strong reactions to himself and to his art.

Key Words: Social issues like marriage, love, prostitution, an exposure to the psychology of Romanticism, sexual discrimination, hypocrisy, class division, poverty

INTRODUCTION

Shaw's conviction is that the theater can be a place of truth if the playwright knows enough about the two essentials which make drama vital human circumstances and the craft of the theatre. Shaw was more

aggressively intelligent than other artists. His literary preoccupation does not separate him from life. Shaw was a born rebel and iconoclast who was out to destroy old and accepted conventions in order to make

reform for new and fresh ideas. Shaw's works are rationalism and critical rebellion. He was a social reformer but his socialism is not of the emotional kind but a rational one. "Major Barbra" together with "Man and Superman" and "John Bull's other Island" forms part of a trilogy of philosophical comedies which deal with the brute facts of sex, nationalism and poverty. In "Major Barbra", the Salvation Army heroine finds that

In her work for the poor, she is forced to accept assistance from both a whisky magnet and her millionaire father Undershafts, who has created himself an ideal little society. In Pygmalion Shaw has focused on the problem of education. To educate is to give new life to those who receive the education. In Shaw's play Pygmalion Higgins is Pygmalion and Galatea is Eliza Doolittle, an uneducated girl who sells flowers in a London street. Professor Higgins keeps the flower girl for six months in his laboratory. She is well trained and becomes a perfect and refined lady of London. The experiment of Higgins has succeeded and Eliza Doolittle can pass for a duchess. Thus Higgins is the creator of a new Eliza but he does not marry his creation. Eliza shows no inclination to marry Professor Higgins. The Professor also does

not like to marry her. He neglects her after the experiment is over. Professor Higgins is quite unsentimental and unromantic in his approach to Eliza Doolittle. Eliza also throws slippers of Professor Higgins at his face and goes out of his house in anger. Eliza easily passes as a Duchess and she is loved by Freddy, a handsome Youngman and marries him.

Thus in his Arms and the Man Shaw has shattered the romantic notions of love and war. In Man and Superman Shaw has shown that it is the woman, not the man who is the courter and the chaser. It is the woman who chases her man and ultimately marries him. Thus Shaw is an anti-romantic and iconoclast.

CONCLUSION

Shaw portrays the real pictures of society, family and government through his plays Candida, Arms and the Man, Mrs. Warren's Profession, The Widowers' Houses, Major Barbara, Saint Joan, Pygmalion, Men and Supermen, The Apple Cart etc His points of view about women's rights, Ireland's faults, the required reform of phonetics, the exploitation of the poor from the capitalists and many others also very important for which he fought continuously, discovered his witty mind and his up-to-date humor. His

works in music and arts is still astute and fresh. His dramas are still showed in different countries and in different languages. This consistency in time and problematic makes him a mastermind of the British Literature. The Modern Theatre would feel the absence of Shaw and his

valuable contribution in the British Literature. He wanted that his audiences not merely to be entertained but to think learn and draw conclusions. That is why his theatre is called ‘the theatre of ideas’ in which the stage is used as means to attack evils of institutions or expose hypocrisy.

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