

Love and Marriage Issues Portrayed in the Early Plays of G. B Shaw

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw appeared on the literary scene when a great change took place in English drama with the arrival of Ibsen on the English stage. Shaw, well known for his hawk-eyed observation, took notice of the new changes and most effectively expressed them through his creative and critical works. In this way, he began his career as an exponent of realism. He became the first English dramatist to use the stage as a platform for social propaganda. Shaw strongly felt that the preoccupation of a dramatist was with the conflict between human feelings and circumstances. Shaw strongly felt that the preoccupation of a dramatist was with the conflict between human feelings and circumstances. According to Shaw every social question was furnishing material for drama. He was predominantly a socialist who believed in equality as the possible basis of social organization. Shaw was a great rationalist. Shaw's early plays are classified:--"Plays Unpleasant" *Widower's Houses* (1892), *The Philanderer*(1893), *Mrs. Warren's Profession*(1893-94), "Plays Pleasant" *Arms and the Man*(1894), *Candida* (1894-95), *You Never Can Tell*(1895-96) and "Three Plays for Puritans" *The Devil's Disciple*(1896-97), *Caesar and Cleopatra*(1898, *Captain Brass bound's Conversion*(1899). The main objective of these plays was consideration of some significant social problems. In most of these early plays, Shaw, the social protagonist was at his best. He was concerned mainly with such social problems as slum landlordism, capitalism, prostitution, jealousy, marriage, love and puritanical hypocrisy which he treated most realistically and satirically with wit and humour. He dealt with the contemporary social problems not as a dramatist but as a socialist. The pen proved undoubtedly to be mightier than sword in Shaw's case.

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

INTRODUCTION

Four of Shaw's early plays *The Philanderer*, *Arms and the Man*, *Candida* and *You Can Never*

Tell deal with social problems of love and marriage. *The Philanderer* is a satire on marriage as an institution involving

economic slavery. It dramatizes grotesque sexual compacts made between men and women under marriage laws. It is also a satire on people's fake intellectual craze. Shaw's purpose in the play is to show that no woman is the property of a man. She belongs to herself and nobody else. The

well-knit sub-plot concerned with Dr. Paramour emanates the best humour of the play. The depiction of the conflict between passion and reason makes the play dramatic and more interesting.

Conceived as an anti-romantic comedy, *Arms and the Man* shatters romantic idealization of love and war. Shaw strips war of its heroism and love of its romantic glamour through the creation of a chocolate-cream soldier. *Arms and the Man* is important for illustrating the changes effected in the technique of play writing, especially the replacement of direct experience by indirect narration. Shaw fills the play with lighthearted banter, whimsicality and humour.

Candida dramatizes the failure of a husband to understand his own life through the theme of the traditional triangle of love. The play has considerable artistic merit. Shaw artfully conveys his penchant for social satire through the story of a careless husband and impetuous lover. The play is a marvelous combination of dramatic situation and suspense with brilliant dialogue and social criticism. For the first time, Shaw is able to combine theme and technique without overemphasizing either.

Like Pinero's *The Weaker Sex*, Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* dramatizes conversion from intellectual pretensions to the realization of the biological needs of love and passion. Though dealing with love and passion the play is totally free from the sentimentality. Shaw's greatness as a dramatist lies in the Shavian outlook. Unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, Shaw is clear in his thinking, steadfast in his tastes and firm in

his opinions. It is this unconventional, original approach to the problems of the contemporary society that distinguishes Shaw from the other dramatists. It is noteworthy that certain social problems that Shaw presents in his early plays, receive greater attention in his later plays. In *Arms and the Man* romantic love is contrasted with the practical love of a man of sense. In *You Never Can Tell*, Valentine, the poor man, falls in love with the lovely Gloria at first sight. Shaw is undoubtedly a dramatic artist.

This can easily be perceived in the early plays of Shaw, which deal with the social evils. Any other dramatist working on such social evils as slum landlordism, prostitution and puritanical hypocrisy would have betrayed himself as a dramatic artist, depressing us with the naked exposure of such evils. But the dramatic artists in Shaw intersperse his action with highly exhilarating scenes. The serious themes are dealt with a light-hearted vein.

Even from the point of characterization, the early plays of Shaw reveal his artistic skill. Characters like Mrs. Warren, Bluntschli, Candida, Marchbanks, Valentine, Gloria, Caesar, Dudgeon and lady Cicely are essentially convincing and human. His characters exist not merely as his mouthpiece but he has something very serious and earnest to say through them. Regarding plot construction too, Shaw's early plays reveal his dramatic powers. The plays like Mrs. Warren's *Profession* and *Candida* show how good Shaw is, in unifying a play into an organic whole. Shaw's critics shower special praise on the sub-plot of *The Philanderer* for its structural

excellence. Shaw succeeds fairly well in his attempt to achieve dramatic conflict in most of the plays.

CONCLUSION:

Shaw's early plays are appealing to us by virtue of their art of characterization, brilliant dialogue, animating prose and their sparkling wit and humour. Shaw was above

all a dramatic critic who wrote about the stage, worked at the stage and thought intensely about it and translated life as he observed it into stage terms. Like Socrates, Shaw was all-virtuous, all-knowing and wise. He is undoubtedly a champion of the highest form of literature, oriented towards ethical purpose and a cherished life.

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