CHAPTER III
PROBLEM PLAYS OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

By common consensus, George Bernard Shaw is considered as a writer who not only himself wrote a number of 'problem' plays in English but also popularized considerably those of Henrik Ibsen, generally known as the innovator of this dramatic genre. Both Ibsen and Shaw made it their business to destroy romanticism by laying bare the realities of their contemporary life. Ibsen made a monumental contribution and Shaw professed for New Drama by writing *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. However, later on, Shaw, for his own part, did not endorse all of Ibsen's views. He began even to prefer his own plays to Ibsen's in some respects. In fact, Ibsen lacked Shaw's gift for comedy and interest in expressing ideas. Moreover, the intellectual structure, found in most of Shaw's important plays, is also absent in Ibsen's.

As a dramatist, Shaw was influenced by his study of Wagner. But he expanded and moulded the influence according to his own

---

1This masterpiece of Shaw in the field of literary criticism was written as a lecture to the Fabian Society. In this, Shaw showed rare profundity in examination of Ibsen's problem plays in particular and other works in general.


different temperament and colder intellectualism. United in
the creative instinct and the questioning processes of the
intellect, The Perfect Wagnerite stands as an immortal tribute
from an artist to another artist. Influenced thus by both
Ibsen and Wagner, Shaw could recognize and analyze both the
dramatic and musical facets of a performance. In reality,
he was engaged in producing dramatic criticism when the English
drama began to emerge from the puerility of the fifties.

Shaw was born in an age which was marked by 'uncertainty
and transition' on the one hand, and 'a prodigious increase
in wealth-producing power' on the other. Before the Reform
Bill of 1832, British 'democracy' had been 'notoriously
corrupt, absurdly unrepresentative, and hopelessly reactionary'.

4 Shaw began his brilliant series of articles on music in
The World, which have since been collected in three volumes,
etitled Music in London, 1890-94. But since he was not allowed
to sign his articles with his name, he invented a pseudonym,
Corno di Bassetto.

5 But Shaw admits that the theatre nearly killed him. For
over three years, he sat in the seat of the critical mighty and
filled his eyes and ears with bad, mad, and mediocre plays..." James Huneker, "A Word on the 'Dramatic Opinions and Essays' of
Bernard Shaw", Dramatic Opinions and Essays with an Apology, 1


7 Henry George, Progress and Poverty (London: J.M. Dent, 1880),
p. 7.

8 "It was tacitly assumed that if a man was poor, it was
due either to his own fault or to inexorable economic laws - and
in either case, he was unfit to vote". Carlton J.H. Hayes, History
When a large section of the middle class won the franchise after this Bill, it became content to enjoy the spoils and make terms with the gentry. In the related fields of manners, morals, and religion also, the British compromise exhibited genius. Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published when Shaw was three, and when he came to London, clergymen were still arguing hotly against the idea that man is descended from a monkey. Darwin's work affected the thought of the people, and modified the outlook of both the scientists and the thinkers of the age. It opened not only a view of man's past but that of his future also.

Shaw's favourite authors\textsuperscript{11} left indelible impression on him. He derived a sense of 'practical purpose' from his readings of Shelley, Darwin, J.S. Mill, Karl Marx and Henry George.\textsuperscript{12} After reading a French translation of Marx's *Das Capital*, he

---

\textsuperscript{9}Darwin does not appear to have ever said so; but in 1876, this was still regarded as the basic assertion of Darwinism.


\textsuperscript{11}Shaw’s favourite authors were Bunyan, Goethe, Blake and Shelley, all idealists who believed that there was something in man which reached upwards towards God.

developed a belief that all forms of capital should be nationalised. His faith in the hope for future in a classless society through gradual reforms, and not by revolution, grew from the influence of Morris and Marx.

In 1879, Lecky took Shaw to the Istitucial Society\(^\text{13}\) which 'spent a great deal of time and energy in discussing Mill's essay, *On Liberty*.\(^\text{14}\) Shaw studied the leading and most representative works\(^\text{13}\) of the day. Gradually, he joined the Dialectical Society, the New Shakespeare Society, the Browning Society and the Shelley Society. Therefore, Shaw daily haunted the reading room of the British Museum in the eighteen eighties, and studied music, literature, economics and society. In modern sense, 'socialism in England was unborn'\(^\text{16}\) at that time. But the depression of the eighteen resulted in a 'revival of socialist agitation',\(^\text{17}\) and Shaw became a socialist. Henry

\(^{13}\)The word, 'Istitucial', means 'seeking for the truth. The Society was founded in imitation of a more famous one, the Dialectical Society.

\(^{14}\)Irving, op.cit., p. 87.

\(^{15}\)Oswald Spengler and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Nietzsche and Bergson, Croce and Inge, Lenin and Trotsky, Tagore and Gandhi were Shaw's familiar authors.


George had 'opened his eyes to the importance of economics'.

It was as if he had placed a large club in Shaw's hands, and then pointed out exactly who deserved hitting.

Through Sidney Webb, Shaw met H.R. Hyndman who had launched a society called the Democratic Federation. On Hyndman's advice, Shaw read Karl Marx's *Capital*, and announced his 'complete conversion by it'. Later, he noted that his last novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, was 'pure Marx'. Shaw, no doubt, claimed that he never threw Marx over, but soon he saw that Marx's labour theory of value was an untenable abstraction because the value of commodity was not the value of the labour that went into it but it was purely artificial value based on 'demand'.

Robert Owen had set up 'Co-operative villages' to demonstrate that society need not be founded on man's exploitation of man. Malthus pointed out in his *Essay on the Principle...*
of Population that increased prosperity leads to increased population, and that the population increase tends to outstrip the prosperity. The Count Claude de Saint-Simon stated that the highest rewards of the society should go to its workers, not to the idlers and aristocrats. Through his Principles of Political Economy, Mill advanced his opinion that 'society was governed by the rigid laws of production but there was no law of distribution.' The nearest thing in Shaw's socialism was the Saint-Simonian assertion that every body should work. The interest Shaw had in the social and political issues stated above, had 'the force of a religious conversion'.

Attracted by its name and its Treat called Why are the Many Poor?, Shaw joined the Fabian Society in 1884. He

23 Wilson, op.cit., p. 61.
24 Ibid., p. 66.
25 Ibid., p. 38.
26 Shaw, Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 67.
27 The aim of the Fabian Society was 'the total reconstruction of society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities'. (Wilson, op.cit., p. 65) The Fabians were practical socialists who wanted socialism to become as politically respectable as Liberalism and 'agreed to give up the delightful ease of revolutionary heroics and take to the hard work of practical reform on ordinary parliamentary lines'. Edmund Wilson, op.cit., p. 139.
always lectured on very controversial politics and religion,
and secured 'perfect freedom of speech'. Seeing the danger
of capitalism, Shaw felt a moral need to work for a future
society consistent with his sense of justice. In *The Intelligent
Woman's Guide*, he made a comprehensive effort to analyse the
capitalist society and argue the case for socialism, dividing
the society into two hostile classes - 'with large appetites
and no dinners at one extreme, and large dinners and no
appetites at the other'. Shaw worked out the distinctive
British brand of socialism known as Fabianism, which was, in
fact, a protest against social inequality. Like Proudhon,
Shaw accepted the idea of property as theft and called for
economic equality.

Shaw's socialism was 'ethical'. His belief in humanity
was not faith in the common man but in the gentleman who was
considered a 'synthesis of the democrat and the aristocrat,

29 Wilson, op. cit., p. 168.
31 J. Ramsay MacDonald, a former Fabian and sometime Prime
Minister of Great Britain, noted, "After the Bible, this, in my
estimation, is humanity's most important book". A Henderson, op. cit.,
p. 347.
32 A capitalist is not a gentleman, because his ideal is to
sell dear and buy cheap. A proletarian is not a gentleman, because
he has no value and his fate is the only real tragedy in life. The
capitalist idea is to get more than one gives. The socialist idea
is to give more than one gets. And, this is the core of Shavian
p. 38.
the follower and the leader'. 33 To Shaw, socialism was "equality of income and nothing else". 'Society', said Shaw, 'is like a machine designed to work smoothly with the oil of equality, into the bearings of which some malignant demon keeps pouring the sand of inequality'. 34 He laid down the principle of evolutionary socialism in *The Transition to Social Democracy*. The publication of *Fabian Essays* was the epochal work which revolutionized the opinion of the British public toward socialism. 35 His lectures and addresses, delivered after he resigned from the executive committee of the Fabians, electrified the intellect and stimulated the imagination of sympathetic listeners.

As the cardinal virtue in the Shavian scale was responsibility, Shaw attacked every creed on the ground of irresponsibility. His thinking was many-sided and his views were all 'firmly based on a Baconian faith in human control'. 36 As a socialist, Shaw believed that the necessary step in the liberation of women was 'the right to work'. 37 For this experience, he actually worked

---

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 61.
36 Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p. 66.
with women in committees and on platforms, and valued their energy and ability. His hatred of idleness and poverty was the basic element in his political and economic thinking. 39

It was felt, at the end of the nineteenth century, that free thought had inherited the shallow optimistic psychology of the Enlightenment. Shaw, in a way, favoured the psychology of the romanticists. He 'destroyed the antithesis of intellect and emotion' by declaring that 'thought is a passion'. 39 Love, in the sense of a close relationship based on sexual need, played no part in Shaw's life. 40 The universal emotions, like love, romance, sentiment, sexual passion, patriotism and family solidarity, left him cold. They found in him 'an unyielding foe and a relentless satirist'. 41

To Shaw, theatre was primarily a vehicle of ideas and a 'house of correction', 42 and to dramatize was to philosophize'. Comedy, to him, had no other justification than its classical

38 Ibid., p. 193.
39 Bentley, Bernard Shaw, p. 73.
40 Pearson, op.cit., p. 113.
41 Henderson, op.cit., p. 761.
42 Of. "To Archer, the theatre was an enchanted palace; to Walkley, an amusement booth; to Shaw, a house of correction", ibid., p. 410.
duty of 'chastening morals by ridicule'. His own plays aimed at educating as well as entertaining the audience. But he had to create an audience who could understand and appreciate his plays, and the actors and the actresses who could understand and act them.

The appearance of realistic technique and style is the first phase of modernism in drama. The advent of modernity is equated with the rise of realistic drama and stage production under the leadership of Ibsen, Zola, Shaw, Antoine and Stanislavsky. Shaw professed for New Drama in order to induce 'not voluptuous reverie but intellectual interest, not romantic rhapsody but human concern.

Shaw expressed his determination to accept problem as the normal material of drama, and only in the problem play, he saw 'any real drama, because drama is no mere setting up of the camera to nature: it is the presentation in parable of the conflict between Man's will and his environment: in a word,

43 'If I make you laugh at yourself, remember that my business as a classic writer of comedies is 'to chasten morals with ridicule'. G.d. Shaw, The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw (London: Odhams, n.d.), p. V. Hereafter cited as The Complete Plays.


Indeed, this is an old and new theory of drama, which is as old as the Greek's, and as new as Ibsen's. They had characterized their main purpose as the contradiction between effort and capacity, between will and possibility, the tragedy, and, at the same time, comedy of the individual and of mankind.

Shaw mainly criticized the pre-Ibsenite drama of the followers of Eugene Scribe. He made his polemics against the 'well-made play'. He inflicted assault on all other drama but defended the drama of discussion. However, he was not averse to attacking Shakespeare, but he did it with a purpose. Shaw appreciated the 'problem' plays of Shakespeare as they held the mirror up to nature, pursued a scientific method in studies of character and society, and accepted his permanence.

46 Ibid.
47 Shaw explained, "Formerly you had in what was called a well-made play - an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and unraveling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright". G.B. Shaw, "Quintessence of Ibsenism", Major critical essays (London: Constable, 1932), p.133.
49 Ibid., p. 17.
he had a poor view of Shakespeare's borrowed plots and range of reflections. However, Shaw admitted Shakespeare's overall superiority in 'manner and art'.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, Shaw began his own dramatic career by faithfully holding the mirror up to nature,\textsuperscript{31} and regarded the romantic imagination as 'the most unoriginative, uncreative faculty in the world'.\textsuperscript{32}

The production of Ibsen's \textit{A Doll's House} proved that reformation could be effected to make the theatre the most inspiring moral force of the age. It marked the beginning of New Drama and its performance started the public into thought. The audience demanded a native drama which would arise from the new models and the new ideas filtering in from Ibsen. Shaw himself felt that English playwrights should deal with contemporary social, political and moral problems. He considered Ibsen not as the father of external realism but of discussion drama or the 'play of ideas'.\textsuperscript{33} Shaw's Ibsen turned on the footlights to illuminate the people's private problems.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30}Ivor Brown, op.cit., p. 53.
\item \textsuperscript{31}DTM, II, p. 237.
\item \textsuperscript{32}DTM, III, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{34}M. V. Routh, \textit{English Literature and Ideas in the Twentieth Century} (New York: Longmans, 1950), p. 34.
\end{itemize}
his part, Shaw proposed a drama of ideas which meant 'the substitution of a forensic technique of reparation, disillusion, and penetration through ideals to the truth, with a free use of all the rhetorical and lyrical arts of the orator, the preacher, the pleader, and the rhapsodist'.

Ibsen's influence encouraged the writing of problem plays throughout Europe. In England, George Bernard Shaw brought the problem play to its intellectual peak, both with his plays and with their long and witty prefaces. He declared that problem play\(^5\) was a serious play and real drama was only there because it presented a problem of life.

Shaw stated in a symposium on the problem play that 'the material of the dramatist is always some conflict of human feeling with circumstances; so that, since institutions are

---


\(^6\)To the unlettered the term probably suggests propaganda and little else. To academic critics it has almost become a term to cover modern drama in general. The modern age, we are told, has abandoned the classic norms of tragedy and comedy to put in their place the problem play which is wholly devoted to ephemeral social questions like votes for women and prison conditions. Some writers assume that the problem play has a thesis, a solution to its problems. Others find the justification of the word 'problem' in the fact that the play ends on a question mark". Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p. 117.
circumstances, every social question furnishes material for drama'.

Furthermore, 'every social question, arising as it must from a conflict between human feeling and circumstances, affords material for drama'.

Shaw emphasized the social utility in problem plays which provide the audience a diet of ideas relating to both the issues of genuine public importance and the tangles of private and unimportant sexual intrigues, and serve 'as a means of correction'.

The purpose of drama, to Shaw, is to teach. He insisted that art should never be anything else but didactic. He considered the theatre as 'a most powerful instrument for teaching the nation how and what to think and feel.'

Shaw was the pioneer of the 'intellectual drama' in Britain. To him, discussion of the problems of life in the plays was 'the crucial technical innovation which accompanied

---


38 G. B. Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, II, p. 22.

39 'This would be a very good thing if the theatre took itself seriously as a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armory against despair and dulness, and a temple of the Ascent of Man'. G. B. Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, Vol. I (London, 1948), pp. VI-VII.

the changes in outlook'. He used this term to define the new dramaturgic element that distinguished modern realism. He noted about this element, 'We have plays, including some of my own, which begin with discussion and end with action, and others in which the discussion interpenetrates the action from the beginning to the end'. Since a sympathetic interest in the common man had brought into the theatre the vigorous and colourful prose of common speech, the discussion in Shaw's plays rose to eloquence. Details of settings in problem plays became decisive and playwrights began to count upon the stage settings to convey the conditions of life. Soliloquies, asides and songs became obsolete in the realistic theatre, and the realistic and intellectual drama attained a high degree of concentration by organic means.

A brief discussion of Shaw's plays is given below with a view to showing that in his hands problem play became both


63 The term 'problem play' was applied in a derogatory sense by Sidney Grundy for the intellectual plays of the eighteen eighties. He criticised the problem plays in his article "Marching to Our Doom" which was published in *The Theatre* in April, 1896.
a vehicle of ideas and a distinct form of dramatic art. 64

WIDOWERS' HOUSES:

Widowers' Houses constitutes the first play in the Shawian volume called Plays Unpleasant which consists of Shaw's first three experiments in drama; namely, Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer, and Mrs. Warren's Profession. The dramatic power of the unpleasant plays is used to 'force the spectator to face unpleasant facts'. 65 All the three of them deal with the 'social horrors' and 'the crimes of society'. As skeletal diagrams of the burning issues of the contemporary society, they are more revealing as guides to the underlying assumptions of Shaw's sociology. To use the playwright's favourite metaphors, they are 'Shavian surgical operations performed without the benefit of the usual laughing gas', 'ruthless exposes of social plague spots', and exhibit 'the bourgeoisie, after a century and a half of complacent vaunting of its own probity... turning bitterly on itself with accusations of hideous sexual and commercial corruption'. 66 They are not unformed and tentative

64 G. B. Shaw, "Preface to Plays Pleasant (1898)", Arms and The Man (Calcutta : Longman, 1963), p. VII.

65 G. B. Shaw, Plays Unpleasant (Penguin, 1980), p. 23. Pref. 'Mainly About Myself'.

pieces, but in them, the private property is inevitably antisocial.

An unpleasant play, as Shaw himself suggested, was a 'blue book' play. It dealt with an immediate social problem. The subject matter of these unpleasant plays submitted to the audience what was going on in actual life of that time, and that being 'unpleasant' to the majority of the people justified the title. Thus, the unpleasant plays were, in all particulars, the faithful reflex of a sordid and un pitying age. However, in each of the three unpleasant plays, the characters are for the most part controlled by the hand of a puppet-master. True to the Shavian principle of dramatic art, these plays are didactic, and written with a purpose.

Shaw stated that he had 'perversely distorted' Widowers' Houses into 'a grotesque realistic exposure of slum-landlordism, municipal jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between them and the pleasant people with independent incomes who imagine

---

that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives'. And, these may be said to be the themes of the play. Written with reformatory interest, Shaw gives us a grim and disillusionizing picture of the prevailing conditions of the society. The play deals with 'a burning social question', and is 'deliberately intended to induce people to vote on the progressive side at the next County Council election in London'. However, it seemed that to mention rackrent and slums on the stage was almost a great breach of good taste. But Shaw presented in this play how the middle class and the gentry fatten 'on the poverty of the slum as flies fatten on filth'.

The plot of *Wigmores' Houses* was contrived fromzigier's *La Peinture vorge* (The Golden Welt) which treated a similar theme. It presents a situation of the matching of the wealthy daughter of 'a self-made man' who derives his income from 'the rental of a very extensive real estate in London', with a scantily endowed younger member of an aristocratic

---

75. Ibid., p. 30.
family. A man with a great deal of suspicious pride, Sartorius, the girl's father, is concerned that Blanche, his daughter, should be wholly accepted by the young man's family. He desires that a letter should be written to the young man Harry Trench's aunt, Lady Maxeale.

Sartorius has educated and refined his daughter on his income derived from miserable tenements. When Mr. Trench learns the source from which his future father-in-law's money comes, he rejects the offer of a dowry, though Blanche was immediately accepted by Trench's aristocratic family, and says that he and his wife will live on his own private income of seven hundred pounds. Since Trench refuses to accept the tainted money and give the grounds of his objection, Blanche refuses to agree and the engagement is broken off. Later, when Trench explains the position to Blanche's father, he learns that his own income comes from a mortgage on some of the property which his father owns. He is, therefore, his prospective father-in-law's employer, and the latter is compelled to extract rents in order to pay the interest on the mortgage. Harry Trench is devastated and disillusioned to discover that not only his own money but all the money of society also is tainted.

---

76 *Widowers' Houses*, p. 66.
He himself is a tenement squeezer.

To effect a reconciliation in the last act, Blanche has to be informed of the extra-personal grounds of Trench's objection. A meeting is held under the auspices of Lickcheese, former rent-collector for Sartorius and currently devoted to municipal jocery. In order to swindle the public, Trench is called in to take a share of the risks and the profits in a scheme. Though he seems to have no alternative, his participation is undecided when Lickcheese proposes, "why not Dr. Trench marry Miss Blanche, and settle the whole affair that way? ... I know Miss Blanche : she has her father's eye for business. Explain this joke to her; and she'll make it up with Dr. Trench. Why not have a bit of romance in business when it costs nothing" 77

Trench refuses to 'have the relation between Miss Sartorius and himself made part of a bargain', 78 but he permits himself to be prompted for meeting her. She catches him on the verge of kissing her portrait, and after a brief conversation, they are passionately reconciled. The syndicate returns soon —

77 *Widowers' Houses*, p. 92.
78 Ibid., p. 93.
'Liokcheese : (on Trench's left, in a low voice)

Any news for us, Dr. Trench?'
Trench : (to Sertorius, on his right) I 'll stand

in, compensation or no compensation'.

Thus, the romantic comedy ends with the
'unpleasant' knowledge that the two young
lovers are sealing the mutual economic
interests of their respective social classes.

In the final act, the owner of the slum-property is having
trouble with the authorities. So he is anxious to dispose of
it in return for shares in a company, which will then be able
to claim handsome compensation when the area is taken over
by the London County Council. Dr. Trench at first refuses to
take part in this deal, but when the others threaten to pay
back his mortgage, thereby reducing his income by more than
half, he gives way and resumes his engagement with the daughter.
The result is a good piece of business for him, and ruin for
the unfortunate tenants. It is these poor working-people and
their homes to which the title of the play refers, though none
of them ever appears on the stage.

79Ibid., p. 96.
The characters in *Widowers' Houses* are mostly shown as hypocrites and humbugs. Trench is an ignorant sentimentalist. Blanche Sartorius is a designing minx with a touch of insane unrestraint. Corkane is a humourless and unimaginative English gentleman. These characters are 'more active, first of all, in the most obvious fashion'.

They make decisions which bear significantly upon the course of events, but they remained 'too surprising to be acceptable' for a number of years. These characters are not conventional, so they display a psychological behaviour.

Shaw presented in his characters the people he had observed in his intimate social relationships or seen in the street, and not those who had been 'manufactured in Scribe's factory'.

Thus, they have 'a long and interesting ancestry'. Sartorius and Lickcheese, for instance, are derived respectively from Casby, the owner of Bleeding Heart Yard, in Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, and Pancks, his rent collector.

---


81 Ibid.

82 St. John Ervine, op.cit. p. 247.

83 A.C. Ward, op.cit., p. 100.

84 St. John Ervine, op.cit., p. 243.
Blanche is the first example of Shaw's subtle characterization. She is a vital and energetic girl with spirit enough to resent the source of her income. But she transfers her wrath to her father's prey, hating 'those dirty, drunken, disreputable people who live like pigs'. Overcome by her inherited brutality, she can attack her maid. Her humanity is revolted by the effects of her father's exploitation but she overlooks the causes. Being too human, she defends herself against this knowledge with loathing and misdirected hatred. Her idealistic fiancé, Trench, is out from the same cloth. He raises objection to receiving a dowry derived from such a source, but his pride is quickly laid low when he discovers that his own fortune is founded on an identical dunghill. Later, when the dismissed rent collector Lickscheese acquires a fortune by imitating his employer Sartorius, and becomes his partner, Trench is not above joining both of them in a plan to extort money from the municipality when it wants to build a street in the slums. Capping the irony, Trench marries Blanche.

Shaw wants to present Blanche as 'a type of the modern middle-class English woman' who will be averse to the poor

83 Widowers' Houses, p. 86.
wretches in their tenement houses, and in a fit of temper, she can 'use brutal violence to her own dependents'.

Sartorius is, in fine, distinctly an exceptional and 'superior specimen of the middle-class man whose business it is to deal directly with the poor'. Shaw has made him a rather favourable specimen of his class. Since he grinds his money remorselessly out of the poor, he has been denounced as a monstrous libel on the middle and upper class, but his argument as to the impossibility of his acting otherwise under our social system has not been answered. Sartorius may be a bad landlord but 'he is not in the least a bad man'.

---

87 Ibid.
88 The Complete Prefaces, p. 707
89 Ibid., p. 709.
In this play, the problem of middle-class exploitation of the poor in slums\(^90\) has been discussed by the characters. The play shows how a 'respectable facade may hide a devouring Mammonism'.\(^91\) When Trench makes his embarrassed refusal of Sartorius' money, the older man easily overwhelms him with the standard middle-class defences that the poor are naturally improvident, and improvements will be wasted on slum-dwellers.

---

\(^90\) At the end of the nineteenth century, the borough of St. Pancras contained a quarter of a million of the population of London. The culture of that quarter million may be inferred from the fact that there was not a single bookshop in the entire borough. It contained clusters of houses of ill-fame. It was cheerfully corrupt politically... At that time, women were not on those public bodies (committees); and women's special needs were therefore not thought of'. (Shaw: An Autobiography (Weintraub), p. 238) "Huge tracts of land were in the hands of aristocrats who had acquired them by grant or purchase in earlier centuries. Most of these distinguished 'head landlords' had let out their holdings on ninety-nine-year leases to middlemen who in turn sublet them, so they had no direct control of their property. At the end of the chain were the 'house knockers', men who turned single-family homes designed for six or seven people into tenements holding sixty or seventy, with a family or more in every room". (Louis Crompton, Shaw the Dramatist, (London, 1971), p. 3.) Moreover, Shaw bases the play on the bald facts contained in The Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes of 1845, which presented a comprehensive survey of living conditions in the poorer sections of Europe's largest city (Shaw: An Autobiography, p.258)

\(^91\) Louis Crompton, op.cit., p. 3.
"when people are very poor, you cannot help them, no matter how much you may sympathise with them". 92 To these arguments Trench's friend Cokane adds the two cliches of laissez faire economics, declaring that 'rent must be paid', and ascribing the suffering of the poor to the 'increase of the population'. Shaw makes a point here that under the free enterprise system there is literally no way for a man to escape 'tainted money'. He wants us to see the futility of mere sympathy and good feelings apart from economic knowledge and effective action. Lickcheese, the impoverished rent-collector, begins by begging Sartorius to 'have some feeling for the poor'. 93 But later he, too, grows rich at the expense of the poor men. The lover's quarrel between Trench and Sartorius' daughter is patched up because the financial relations between the two men make it desirable. Lickcheese approves the match on the ground that 'a bit of romance' 94 will cost nothing and be highly gratifying.

Along with the social disgrace of ruthless oppression of the poor by financier slum-landlords, Widowers' House deals

92 Widowers' House, p. 71.
93 Ibid., p. 62.
94 Ibid., p. 92.
with an apparently ineradicable human vice. Despite much social legislation, the evils it exposed, are still active in London and elsewhere. In discussing this topic, Shaw was not merely a theorist; he had been a rent-collector in his Dublin boyhood. He presented an exposure of social iniquity masked by hypocrisy and inflicted a 'daunting attack upon middle-class society'.

The Victorian bourgeois considered private property and the domestic hearth as the very foundations of social morality. Shaw considers the first as antisocial and the second not less potential than the first. Social inequality led by the capricious distribution of nature's bounty is tolerated, Shaw maintains, because of the corruption of our social morality by, what he calls, the gambling spirit. The result of the pre-emption of land and natural resources by the favoured few is the squalor of our city and rural proletariat. But Shaw does not give his

95 Charged by Archer with total ignorance of rack-rented slums, Shaw wrote to him, 'Here am I, who have collected slum rents weekly with these hands, and for four and a half years been behind the scenes of the middle-class landowners'...

96 Ivor Brown, op.cit., p. 28.

97 Archibald Henderson, op.cit., pp. 424 and 327.

98 As against socialism, the gambling spirit urges man to allow no rival to come between his private individual powers and step-mother Earth, but rather to secure some acres of her and take his chance of getting diamonds instead of cabbages'. G.B. Shaw, Essays in Fabian Socialism, (London, 1949), p. 4.

---
own Fabian solutions to the problems in this play.

Shaw's dialogues in this play have a curious inner perfection of form, and they approach music. They have attracted the attention of the critics like Max Beerbohm, G. K. Chesterton, Edmund Wilson and Jacques Barzun. Shaw is intensely aware of the fine threads of response which stretch between human beings. His talent lies 'not merely for conversation but also for dramaturgy'. When Trench asks Sartorius for his daughter's hand, the stage-instructions read —

'SARTORIUS (condescending to Trench's humility from the mere instinct to seize an advantage, and yet deferring to Lady Roxdale's relative)'. These instructions are not meant for actors because they cannot be conveyed to an audience. They have been written because Shaw was actually present at the discussion between Trench and Sartorius. He was aware of all the fluctuations of their feelings towards one another. Thus, Shaw enters every situation and every character

99 Shaw is a poet of polemics, as Einstein seems to have felt when he compared the movement of Shavian dialogue to Mozart's music. Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker, p. 146.

100 Ibid., p. 151.

101 Widowers' Houses, p. 43.
in turn, and gives the dialogues continual flashes of authenticity. He moves with perfect ease and precision in dialogues.

In a brief conversation between Trench and Cokane, Cokane is established as a snobbish and self-assertive busybody. There is a situation in which Sartorius, with his daughter, proceeds to bully the Waiter and Cokane. Cokane asks Trench loudly, "By the way, Harry, I have often meant to ask you: is Lady Roxdale your mother's sister or your father's?" A few moments later, Sartorius and Cokane introduce themselves. Trench and Blanche try to conceal the fact that they already know one another. The scene that follows epocizes the Shavian idea that woman is always the pursuer. Trench is nervous and he cannot bring himself to say the words:

"TRENCH: (stammering) I only thought. (He stops and looks at her piteously. She hesitates a moment, and then puts her hand into his with calculated impulsiveness. He snatches her into his arms with a cry of relief) Dear Blanche! I thought I never should have said it. .... ."

102 Ibid., p. 34.
BLANCHE: (indignantly trying to break loose from him) I didn't help you out with it.\textsuperscript{103}

The dialogue illustrates here that in certain situations of life, people do not get words to express themselves, but what they want to say is already said by means of gestures and broken sentences. This technique of dialogue is realistic, effective and like a living conversation. Shaw is at home in creating such dialogues in his plays. Lickcheese returns as a prosperous slum landlord to warn Sartorius about the intention of the London County Council, which would build a new street across his property, he suggests that if Sartorius puts the slums into good repair, he can get larger compensation. Trunch puts the matter pungently:

"Well, it appears that the dirtier a place is, the more rent you get, and the decenter it is, the more compensation you get. So we're to give up dirt and go in for decency." \textsuperscript{104}

Lickcheese does not disagree, on the contrary, he says:

"There's no doubt that the vest-rises has legal power to play old Harry with slum properties, and spoil the house-knocking game if they please..." \textsuperscript{105}

The above dialogues have clarity and precision. They are so effective that they produce the desired effect very convincingly.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Widowers' House}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 89.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
The following dialogue from the reconciliation scene, at the end of the play, reveals that Trench, as a lover, does not behave 'realistically', but he usually behaves convincingly. He expresses himself in clear language:

"BLANCHE : well ? So you have come back here ? You have had the meanness to come into this house again ? ... What a poor spirited creature you must be ! why don't you go ? ... TRENCH : I hear someone coming ..."106

The above dialogues show that no man would behave like that, and it is doubtful whether a woman would do, but Shaw's men and women behave like it, and it convinces when handled by him. This 'guarantees' Shaw's mastery of the dialogue-writing.107

There are flashes of wit, satire and humour in the very style of the dialogue written in this play. The art of inversion has heightened the effect of speeches. The first inversion is that of Blanche's response. She does not give up all for love

106Ibid., pp. 94-95.

107'Shaw had asked Archer why he did not write a play. Archer replied that he could construct a play but could not write dialogue. 'I can write dialogue by the thousand yards', said Shaw, 'but construction means nothing to me. So you go ahead with your construction and I'll guarantee the dialogue : thus the collaboration (for writing Widowers' Houses) began'. C. Archer, William Archer : Life, Work and Friendship (London, 1931), pp. 136-137 and 172-178.
and marry Trench penniless. The other inversion is that Trench, finding that his own unearned income is derived from the same source as his prospective father-in-law's, reverses his disdainful gesture, makes love again to the lady. This provides Shaw with the happy ending of English melodrama. Colloquialism of his prose-style is found opening the gates to his humour and eloquence. It is people with no sense of humour who find him a 'mass of contradictions'.

The Shavian joke - the Shavian reversal - consists in Blanche's refusal to be poor in order to preserve her innocence and this is the hub of this play. Shaw chose irony as his weapon and kept close to bald facts. His wit and humour add new meanings to the experiences and make the ideas and intellect soaked in passion.

In a nutshell, the action of *Widowers' Houses* presents

---


109 "The title was suggested by the passages in the Gospels against the destruction of widow's houses: Matthew, xxiii, 14; Mark, xii, 38-40; Luke, xx- 46-47". (Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 527)

"Christ's scathing condemnation of men who 'devour widows' houses' and at the same time go clothed in the 'long clothing' of respectability, as Sartorius does, was a favourite text for Christian Socialist sermons ... Ruskin uses the phrase 'widows' houses' repeatedly in his social criticism. Stewart Headlam uses it in *Christian Socialism* (Fabian Society Tract. No. 42). (Louis Crompton, op.cit., p. 3).
the ordinary middle-class life of the day. From the analysis of the theme, characterization and style, the play emerges simply as a 'workmanlike problem play'. It is a shocking exposure of the drain pipes of the then society and transcript of reality as well. It is an ironic comedy of the profit system wherein humour possesses a bouncing vitality which is rare in modern English drama, with the creation of this play Shaw injected into the drama a seriousness that it had not had before, and that it has not had since. The amorous advances of Blanche and her ungovernable temper had astounded the audience. The characters in the play make decisions which further significantly the course of events. When Shaw wrote the first act of the play in 1883, his opinions and judgments were fully mature. But since the third act was written in haste seven years after the first and the second acts, the mood of writing is different at the end of the play. A kind of inconsistency has, therefore, crept in the play. It moves with vigour through the first two acts but stumbles to a lame conclusion in the third. However, on the question of the slums, this earliest play of Shaw 'is still up to date'. It did

111 Ibid., p. 104.
112 The Complete Prefaces, p. 714.
not attain absolute perfection on account of disrupted unity of conception, but it 'does make a significant contribution to the theatre'.

Despite its faults, it has immense vitality, and it still seizes the attention of audiences wherever it is produced. Critics attacked it as a piece of Ibsenism, but the first two acts were already written before Shaw had either seen or read an Ibsen play.

THE PHILANDERER

The Philanderer, the second play included in Plays Unpleasant, is an 'attack on the Ibsen cult and feminine emancipation', but it is not an attack on Ibsen as a radical & realistic dramatist, as a few drama critics have interpreted. It is only incidental that it is a 'satire on the Ibsenites the egg-head, psychopathic pinkos and parlor socialists of the 'Ibsen Club'. It is, in some degree,

---

114 The Complete Prefaces, p. 704.
116 This satire on Ibsen's women left Shaw the victim of cross-fire. The opponents of Ibsen knew that Shaw was really a supporter of Ibsen's ideas, while his friends were distressed that he, Ibsen's foremost interpreter in England, should mock him. (Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 396. Also, Martin Lamm, op.cit., p. 259).
117 The Ibsenites were people who admired Ibsen as a great epic poet and psychological dramatist, but were in no sense committed to the ideologies, used by Ibsen with telling effect in the new drama of social revolt. (Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 396).
written to pour ridicule upon the cult of the 'womanly woman' that has been opposed to the suffrage movement. Shaw himself has noted that he wrote this play for the Independent Theatre when the discussion about Ibsenism, 'the New woman', and the like, was at its height. It was written as criticism of a special phase of modern organization and its purpose was 'to make people roughly uncomfortable while entertaining them artistically'. However, the human nature in it is still in the latest fashion.

The Philanderer is an exceedingly 'unpleasant' play. It is a distinctly topical comedy pivoted on the Ibsen controversy. It was written when the ideal of the 'womanly woman' still prevailed in English society but the best women were breaking loose from it while the worst women were aping them. The types symbolised in Grace Tranfield, the self-respecting advanced woman; and the tragic Julia Craven, the unhappy victim of a sexual attractiveness.

The play presents the initial situation which stems clearly from the contemporary farce. Charteris is visiting one woman


120 *The Philanderer* in *Plays Unpleasant* (Penguin, 1980), p. 98. (Prefatory Note by G.B. Shaw) (All references to this book are of this edition only).
Grace Tranfield when another woman Julia Craven breaks in on him in a jealous rage. "Julia, the Devil," he cries. Though Julia has not the official position of wife, she exhibits the 'humours' of an outraged wife. The scene in the first act, in which Julia invades Grace's home and rails at her is based on the encounter between Jenny Patterson and Florence Farr. The second and the third acts are superior to the first act. The good scenes in the play are those in which Dr. Paramore is horrified by discovering that his great cure for liver complaints has been exposed by other doctors as totally ineffective. This is the first of Shaw's attacks on doctors, and especially on those of them who profess to be scientists when they discover that a dog, after it has been vivisected, suffers some disability. But the scene in which Dr. Paramore is horrified is not sufficient to save the play from dullness and triviality.

*The Philanderer* is 'easily readable' and has its own 'documentary value' for those interested in Shaw's early dramatic life and his early dramatic characters. Charterie is

---

121 *The Philanderer*, p. 105.
122 St. John Ervine, op. cit., p. 145.
123 Ivor Brown, op. cit., p. 76.
a very exceptional character. He makes an impression of being a fantastically honest man. In one of his talks with the discarded Julia, he says, "I confess I am either something more or something less than a gentleman, you used to give me the benefit of doubt". Charteris's honesty in his philandering is morally superior to the code of the conventional gentleman in such matters. Again, the match between Dr. Paramore and Julia, which is so much against her natural inclination, is engineered by Charteris to free himself from her persecutioner. Charteris is a creation of Mr. Shaw's admirable and un-shrincking honesty; he is a projection of himself. With regard to Grace Transfield, a modern audience may be inclined to think that Shaw has been a little sentimental. Just as Julia is a first sketch for Ann, Grace

124 The Philanderer, p. 167.
125 "Charteris is unquestionably a portrait study in which Shaw was his own model". (A. Henderson, op.cit., pp. 529-30)
"In The Philanderer, Shaw's naturalism is based not on official blue books, but on his own experiences with his first mistresses, the tempestuous Mrs. Jenny Patterson and Florence Farr, the actress, who supplanted her. The latter had challenged him to 'expose his soul'. (Stanley Winsten, Jesting Humble & The Life of Bernard Shaw, London, 1956), p. 83)
"Leonard Charteris, the Philanderer, is obviously George Bernard Shaw himself, and an inept figure, called Joseph Cuthberton, is admitted by him to have been modelled on Clement Scott, who, however, must have had far more to him than appears in Cuthberton". (St. John Ervine, op.cit., pp. 164-65 & 250-51)
is a preliminary study for the superior woman the dramatist afterwards drew. The effect of love on Julia Crane is worse. Though she professes advanced ideals, she behaves with the jealousy of a child, who has lost a favourite toy, when Charteris, disgusted with her scenes-making turns to another woman.

Shaw may be satirizing theatrical standards of conduct in Julia. He contrasts her, the Victorian 'womanly woman', with the self-sufficient Grace Trenchfield, who scorns Julia's tactics. Grace is all too aware that the indulgence and even much of the chivalry men show to women is really a kind of insult because it implies that in male eyes women are not responsible, self-respecting adults. Grace says to Charteris, "No woman is the property of a man. A woman belongs to herself and to nobody else". Later on, she says again, "Yes, Leonard; but I'm an advanced woman. I'm what my father calls the New woman". It suggests that Grace, in particular, and all new women, in general, donot like to lose their self-respect.

Craven is presented as an admirable philistine who is wholly un-critical of the values of the society in which he

---

126 The Philanderer, p. 103.
127 Ibid., p. 141.
lives. He has, moreover, no ego of his own, but he is determined to pick up moral credit where he may. He plays in turn the sportsman-like loser in love, the doomed patient and righteous vegetarian. Cuthbertson, on the other hand, is a self-conscious defender of the theatrical virtues of 'manliness' and 'womanliness', who prides himself on living 'among scenes of suffering nobly endured and sacrifices willingly rendered' in the theatre. Despite his failure to come to any workable domestic arrangement with his wife, he champions against Charteris's liberalism and he is the ideal of indissoluble marriage.

The Philanderer is a ruthless exposure of the 'womanly woman' and 'critical examination of amorous emotions'. The play satirizes a medical researcher also who is bent on proving the existence of a new disease he believes he has discovered. Charteris is enough of a philosopher to ask whether he is not himself as guilty of causing pain as Paramore. He says that he is an intelligent man who learns from his experiments, while Paramore is a merely stupid one.

The comedy of the play is based upon sexual intrigue and its surroundings of subterfuge rather than upon the joys and

---

sorrows of courtship. Marriage and libertinism are both unsatisfactory antagonistic possibilities in the play. Marriage is an institution which society has outgrown but not modified, and which 'advanced' individuals are therefore forced to evade. Moreover, the scene with which the play opens, the atmosphere in which it proceeds, and the marriage with which it ends, are, for the intellectually and artistically conscious classes in modern society, typical; and it will hardly be denied that they are unpleasant.

The Philanderer contains a number of sparkling and immensely refreshing dialogue through which runs a genuine exhilarating spirit of comedy. In one of his last interviews with Julia, Charteris exclaims, "Oh, what I have learnt from you! from you! who could learn nothing from me! I made a fool of you; and you brought me wisdom; I broke your heart; and you brought me joy! I made you curse your womanhood; and you revealed my manhood to me; blessings for ever and ever on my Julia's name!" The dialogue is fresh and sparklingly bright but it has been used in a situation which produces comic effect also.

---

129 Martin Reisel, op. cit., p. 232.
131 Ibid.
132 The Philanderer, pp. 169-70.
Charteris is the conventional irresponsible and volatile hero of farcical comedy in the guise of a radical Isanist thinker, and much of the comedy comes, conventionally enough, from the inability of the other characters to cope with him. What is not conventional is that the fantastic atmosphere of moral irresponsibility in which Charteris flourishes exists in the play in order to be judged unsatisfactory.

As the play was written in haste, it is singularly lacking in vivacity and wit. The kind of comedy extracted from the situations which expose the wretched Julia, is not the kind to make one laugh. However, there are passages throughout the dialogue which provide enjoyment with their wit and humour. Here is a brief conversation between Charteris and Julia which elucidates the use of wit and humour in the dialogues of this play:

"CHARTERIS: I accuse you of stealing letters of mine.
JULIA: rising - Yes, nice letters!
CHARTERIS: Of breaking your solemn promises not to do it again; of spending hours aye, days! piecing together the contents of my waste-paper basket in your search for more letters.....
JULIA: I was justified in reading your letters. Our perfect confidence in one another gave me the right to do it".133

133 The Philanderer, p. 109.
Grace Tranfield refuses to marry the philanderer with perfect wit and accuracy. Charteris's wit and penchant for comic anticlimax make the play more like later Shaw than either of the other plays in the 'unpleasant' cycle. The delicate irony in the satiric treatment of the retired soldier, Craven, and the drama critic, Cuthbertson, also produces similar effect, when we compare Shaw's treatment of them with the crude guyng of Cokeane in Widowers' Houses.

The Philanderer lacks the seriousness which the playwright was bringing to his work as a Fabian. It has, moreover, turned out to be a 'combination of mechanical farce with realistic faith' which is quite disgusting. So critics have considered this play as 'a retrogressive step in Shaw's career as a dramatist'. But certain scenes in this play are marked by nervous strength and comic irony. Shaw has classed the play as 'unpleasant' but Charteris is not passionless or unscrupulous. The play suffers from 'the more topical the play the more it dates', but 'the human nature' displayed in it still retains

134 St. John Ervins, op.cit., p. 231 (from Shaw's letter about the play to Ellen Terry).
135 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 115.
136 The Philanderer, p. 98. (Preferatory Note).
'the latest fashion'. The language is based on the style of a conversation. This has made the play both readable and actable. The burning issues raised in this play and the manner in which they have been discussed by the characters are different from those in the first unpleasant play The Widow's House.

MRS. WARKEN'S PROFESSION

Widow's House and The Philanderer presented before the audience 'a grotesque realistic exposure of rack-rent and slum-landlordism', and 'a satire on sexual attitudes and relations based on Shaw's own early experiences' respectively. In Mrs. Warken's Profession, the third 'unpleasant' play, Shaw returned to his stark presentation of social evil with a picture of prostitution as the result not of sinfulness but of poverty. In this play, he has gone straight at the fact, as Mrs. Warken herself puts it, that 'the only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her'. The play is, therefore, 'no mere theorem, but a play of instincts and temperaments in conflict with each other and with a flinty social problem that

---

137 Ibid.

138 G. B. Shaw, Mrs. Warken's Profession in Plays Unpleasant, (Penguin, 1980), p. 231. (All references to this book are of this edition only).
never yields an inch to mere sentiment'.

**MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION** is an 'entirely moral play, written with no other intent than to expose a grave social evil', the idea for the plot of which was taken from a story by Maupassant, which was told by Shaw's woman-friend. Dwelling upon the effectiveness of the play, Shaw wrote that 'a really good performance would keep its audience out of the hands of women of the street for a fortnight at least'. He was

---


141 "The germ idea, contained in a French novel, *Yvette* by Maupassant, was suggested by Janet Achurch to Shaw who resolved to work out the truth about the mother in the story. The following autumn, while on a visit to Beatrice Webb, Shaw received from her the suggestion that he put on the stage a 'real modern emancipated woman' who may be recognized in Vivie Warren. Janet Achurch dramatized the French novel along the original romantic lines, in a play called *Mrs. Warren's Daughter*. The name first given to Shaw's play was *Mrs. Jarman's Profession*. (Archibald Henderson, *op.cit.*, p. 330)

"Shaw denies such an earlier title in a letter to Golding Bright (19 Nov. 1894). The real title is *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. The name Jarman never came into my head ..." (Advice to a Young Critic, p. 9. Quoted by R. Reisel, *op.cit.*, p. 143).

convinced that no normal woman would endure the life of a prostitute if she could sell her labour at a fair wage in a decent occupation instead of selling her person in a degrading one.

When the play opens, an intelligent and charming girl named Vivie is about to become engaged to a young man, Frank. In the meantime, she discovers that her mother has been a prostitute, and, at the age of forty-five, she is still the proprietor of several brothels, with a principal establishment in Brussels and branches in various capitals. Mrs. Warren has been able to give her daughter a first class education, including a full university course, with the profits from her flourishing business. She is prepared to bestow a fine dowry also on her daughter. When the young girl, Vivie, learns the whole story, she resolutely refuses all further financial support, and takes a job in an office.

The technique of the construction of the plot of this play is based on Ibsen's. The whole action is determined by past events which are gradually revealed through the characters. The nemesis of the play lies in Mrs. Warren's mysterious past. Vivie also has clear intelligence and strong will like an Ibsen heroine. She is 'a typical Shaw heroine - commonsensible, unsentimental and business-like'. 143 She has grown in respectable

---

143 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 116.
ignorance of her mother’s means of livelihood. When the play opens, she is a very practical young woman of high attainment at Cambridge. She looks forward to a professional career, and is engaged to Frank Gardner. When Mrs. Warren appears with her friends, Vivie questions her mother and discovers her ‘profession’. She sympathizes with her mother when the latter describes her early life. Sir George Crofts, a partner in the business and friend of Mrs. Warren, falls in love with Vivie. Even though there is a chance that he may be Vivie’s father, he proposes marriage with her. When Vivie expresses her scorn for him, he retaliates by revealing that the Rev. Samuel Gardner may be her father and her fiancé Frank Gardner, her half-brother. Despising her mother as a ‘conventional woman at heart’, and rejecting the case and wealth she might enjoy, Vivie turns from her mother. She makes up her mind to make her own honest living like a modern woman.

Shaw wrote this play to discuss the problem that prostitution is brought about ‘not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them

\[144\] *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, p. 286.
are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together'. Moreover, it presents 'economic and social crimes': idleness, parasitism, exploitation, and the cultivated sentimentalism that keep people from dealing with these. It deals with 'the effect of economics on human lives' and 'asks what happens when human wages come under this law (of supply and demand), and the commodity in excess happens to be women'. In fine, the play is a serious treatment of a variety of things, including capitalism and 'the wrongs of ... society which in effect left (Kitty Warren) with no alternative course of action',

145 Ibid., p. 181 (Preface).
146 Louis Crompton, op.cit., p. 10.
147 For two trenchant essays on the conditions which form the background of Shaw's play, the following reference material may be seen: (i) H. Bendy, "The Position of Women in Industry", National Review, XXIII, (August 1894), pp. 806-814; and (ii) Lady Emilia Likel, "The Industrial Position of Women", Fortnightly Review, LX, (Oct. 1893), pp. 499-508. (Louis Crompton, op.cit., p. 7)
child relationships' and 'conventional' thinking habits', and even good and evil in the 'morality play' sense. Shaw's thesis in the play is that 'wide-scale enforced prostitution follows grinding poverty and underpayment of women as surely as night follows day'. Though Shaw has shown that 'the institution in question is an economic phenomenon, produced by our under-payment and ill-treatment of women who try to earn an honest living', the play, written on a 'social subject of tremendous force', is a work of amazing vigour and extra-ordinary power.

In Mrs Warren's Profession, Shaw has used his art 'to expose the real roots of prostitution' and revealed that prostitution was 'really an economic phenomenon produced by an underpayment of honest women so degrading, and an overpayment of whores so luxurious, that a poor woman of any attractiveness actually owed it to her self-respect to sell


133 Mrs Warren's Profession in The Complete Prefaces, p. 33.

134 Shaw; An Autobiography (Weintraub), pp. 277-78.

135 Ibid., p. 279.
herself in the streets rather than toil miserably'. Thus, the play is sternly realistic, with its 'remorseless logic and iron framework of fact', and Shaw's 'social determinism is here 'absolute'.

Characters in this play also act in unison with values in which they genuinely believe and which are made to seem plausible. They try to live up to their own values, and usually defend them forcefully also. In the person of Mrs. Warren, prostitution has been presented as a matter of economics and business organization, and not of elegant and heedless sexual folly. Mrs Warren is 'much worse than a prostitute'. She is an organism of prostitution - a woman who owns and manages brothels in every big city in Europe and is proud of it. She is, certainly, 'the product of her environment', and this is why, beginning by sympathizing with her mother, Vivie ends by despising her and abandoning her as 'a conventional woman at heart'. But she also says,

---

136 Ibid., p. 280.
138 Martin Reisel, op.cit., p. 147.
139 Shaw's Letter of 4 Nov. 1893, Advice to a Young Critic, p. 41; reprinted in Martin Reisel, op.cit., p. 147.
140 Mrs Warren's Profession, p. 286.
"The hypocrisy of the world makes me sick'.\textsuperscript{161} and 'I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. What's the use in such hypocrisy'?\textsuperscript{162} However, she is not free from hypocrisy herself. In her first private talk with Vivie, she states that 'respectability',\textsuperscript{163} is the most important thing in her scale of values. By the end of the conversation, it is clear that for her, respectability is not based on what one does but on how well one deceives society, on what one might call 'keeping face'. Vivie also, at the end of the play, remarks, 'If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another'.\textsuperscript{164}

Mrs Warren 'neither languishes nor tempts',\textsuperscript{165} because she has become 'a prostitute to live, not to die'. In the second act, she tells her whole story. In order to secure her daughter's future she has provided her with the best education that England can give. She is unable to see that she has really done anything wrong. She states: 'I always

\textsuperscript{161}Ibid., p. 249.
\textsuperscript{162}Ibid., p. 231.
\textsuperscript{163}Ibid., p. 230.
\textsuperscript{164}Ibid., p. 286.
\textsuperscript{165}Martin Meisel, op.cit., p. 147.
wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work, ... I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I was a leper. 

But she is hardly a sympathetic person because she is now engaged in exploiting other girls' 'good looks'. Consequently, her horrified daughter, Vivie, separates from her and renounces all love in favour of an independent life as a statistician.

What brings the action to the turning point is that Vivie, from the beginning and until the end of act II, resents her mother as long as she excludes Vivie from the secrets of her private life. But when Mrs Warren explains the impoverishment of her girlhood which forced her into prostitution, Vivie not only sympathizes with her mother but rejoices in her fortitude also. 'My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England', Vivie remarks. They are thus reconciled, and remain so until Crofts blunders out that Kitty Warren is still in the business. Vivie is sickened by this knowledge and the tenuous bond between the mother and daughter is severed; and the play moves toward its conclusion.

Vivie is a 'modern un-romantic hard-working young woman' whose announcement that she means to lead an independent

166 Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 283.
167 Ibid., p. 231.
existence as a self-supporting business woman discomfits Mrs Warren so much that she utters the vulgar parental retort, 'Do you know who you’re speaking to?' a blunder which allows Vivie to make the pointed counter query, 'No, who are you? What are you?' But despite Mrs Warren’s temporary discomfiture, it is, in the end, Vivie who is the more shaken of the two because Mrs Warren had turned to prostitution as the more self-respecting alternative. Vivie’s revolt 'represents Shaw’s rational rejection of capitalism'.

She cuts off her mother only when she learns that, now when wealthy, Mrs. Warren is still managing and expanding the business. The scene in which Vivie discovers her mother’s profession, and her mother defends it, is pitiless and poignant. This is a very powerful situation in the play.

Mrs Warren and Vivie are not completely contracted characters. Vivie emphasizes her relationship with her mother. She is equally practical, equally sober, energetic and equally interested in money. However, they can have nothing in common because they have grown up in different social circles. By

---

168 Mrs Warren’s Profession, p. 243.
169 Ibid.

Sir George Crofts in this play is right from his own point of view in the sense that his actions are based on values in which he himself believes, and which he defends with considerable force and effectiveness in the scene with Vivie in act III. He is also one who insists on no pretenses. Although he is a man with a title, he does not pretend to enjoy the pleasures of his class. Even Vivie admires him for being strong-minded enough to enjoy himself in his own way, instead of living the usual shooting, hunting, dining-out, tailoring, loafing life of his set. He thinks of himself as devoid of the ties of society: 'When I say a thing, I mean it; when I feel a sentiment, I feel it in earnest; and what I value, I pay hard money for.' But what he says later-belies this kind of openness. Since he has the knowledge of how it works, he becomes the chief expositor for the system. The audience learns the truth about the 'respectable' society through the confronting conversation between Vivie and Sir George Crofts.

171 Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 286.
172 Ibid., p. 283.
173 Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 261.
Frank's father, Reverend Samuel Gardner, is so blatantly a sham that his pathetic efforts at honesty are merely comical. He pretends to write his own sermons but buys them instead. He does not want Kitty Warren, a whore, to come to his house but he is implicated in a past affair with her. He upbraids his son for being a wastrel but cannot remember what he did in his drunkenness the night before. He, thus, works to maintain respectability but cannot even gain the respect of his son. The essence of Sam Gardner is dramatized by means of the garden image in act I as he arrives at the garden gate to speak to his son. When Frank tells him to come inside, the Reverend Samuel Gardner replies, "No Sir; not until I know whose garden I am entering". 174 This shows that Reverend Gardner knows the value of gardens in establishing one's respectability.

Frank Gardner is 'among the most wonderful of Shaw's young men'. 175 He becomes one of those gracious lovers who are generally not characteristic of Shaw. While he may like Vivie for the person that she is, he also likes her mother's financial condition. His duplicity is best seen when he realizes


that Vivie will not touch her mother's tainted money. He says to Praed, 'I can't marry her now'. When Praed asks him, 'Was that what you were going to marry on', Frank confesses, 'What else? I have not any money, nor the smallest turn for making it'.

His endeavour to create doubt on the facts of the relationship, as stated by Crofts, is undertaken merely for Vivie's sake. She also announces that she is not affected by the revelation but her denial is not consistent with the despair and disgust she evinces when it is made. Frank's magnificent acceptance of the situation amounts to a romantic gesture in face of Vivie's realistic grasp of it.

On Vivie's repudiation of her mother's money, other ways of getting rich would have served her. But since Mrs Warren is 'a leader in this special business, the brother-and-sister-lover relationship makes the most interesting psychological problem of the play'. Vivie wants respect for her mother, but Frank gives her respectability, she sees him in a different light and asks him not to make fun of her mother.

The scene, thus, dramatizes, in miniature, how the hypocrisy of society functions, as well as the difference between Vivie and her mother.

---

176 Mrs Warren's Profession, p. 277.
177 H.C. Duffin, op.cit., p. 67.
In brief, the characters in *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, despite the exceptional source of Mrs Warren’s wealth, come close to such persons as we may still see about. Within the frame of its particular thesis, the play gets universal characteristics. The characters are given enough life to colour the contention and infuse it with human warmth. Praed is the single character in the play who is not accounted for. He reminds Crofts that he has never had anything to do with ‘that side of Mrs Warren’s life’.

Shaw was intellectually capable of conceiving such characters as Vivie and her mother. He composed the brilliant, artistic and dramatic dialogue that follows Mrs Warren’s tearful enquiry:

“Have I no rights over you as your mother?"178

VIVIE: Are you my mother?
MRS WARREN: (appalled) Am I your mother?
Oh, Vivie!
VIVIE: Then where are our relatives? My father? Our family friends? You claim the right of a mother; the right to call me fool and child; to speak to me as no woman in authority over me at college dare speak to me; to dictate my way of life; ........
MRS WARREN: (distracted, throwing herself on her knees) Oh no, no. Stop, stop. I am your mother. I swear it. Oh, you can’t mean to turn on me my own child! It’s not natural. You believe me, don’t you? Say You believe me.

---

178 *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, p. 244.
VIVIE: who was my father?

MRS. WARREN: You don't know what you're asking. I can't tell you.

VIVIE: (determinedly) Oh, yes you can, if you like. I have a right to know. . . . 179

This passage of dialogue still sounds shocking. The words and sentiments of this passage would have shattered the parents in the eighteen nineties. Since we are more sophisticated now, we can listen to this dialogue 'with little more than mild discomfort'. The play marches convincingly from revelation to revelation with ease and assurance by virtue of Shawian dialogue. Mrs. Warren's Profession is the first play in which the modern, independent-minded woman appears. Vivie is entirely unromantic, and would be remarkably unattractive to the mass of men, in life. She is a woman who is almost certain to live in perpetual virginity: 'Now once for all, mother, you want a daughter, and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband.' 180 This dialogue is forceful, purposeful and very clear.

Comic relief sparkling with wit and humour, which, "Wigwara! Houses" and "The Philanderer" lacked, is provided by the reverends Samuel Gardner and his rakish son Frank in Mrs. Warren's Profession. Here is an elucidating example:

179 Ibid.

180 Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 284.
REV. S: I have not seen her at Church since she came.
FRANK: Of course not; she’s a third wrangler.
    Ever so intellectual. Took a higher degree than you did; so why should she go to
    hear you preach?
REV. S: Don’t be disrespectful, sir.
FRANK: Oh, it doesn’t matter: nobody here—
    Rev. S: What you actually said was that since I
    had neither brains nor money, I’d better turn my
    good looks to account by marrying somebody with
    both. Well, look here, Miss Warren has brains: you
    can’t deny that.
FRANK: Brains are not everything.
REV. S: No, of course not; there’s the money—
    FRANK: [Interrupting him hastily] I was not thinking
    of money sir. I was speaking of higher things.
    REV. S: Well, nobody wants you to marry her. Anyhow
    she has what amounts to a high Cambridge
    degree; and she seems to have as much money
    as she wants.
FRANK: I don’t care a rap about that.
REV. S: But I do, sir.
FRANK: Well, nobody wants you to marry her. Anyhow
    she has what amounts to a high Cambridge
    degree; and she seems to have as much money
    as she wants.
REV. S: [Sinking into a feeble vein of humour]: I greatly
    doubt whether she has as much money as you
    will want.
FRANK: Oh, come: I haven’t been so very extravagant.

In a nutshell, Mrs Warren is always trying to assert her
authority with Vivie. The major scene of the play is a clash
of wills between the mother and the daughter. Able to take
care of herself, Vivie retaliates by bullying her mother to
the point of tears. This sort of dramatic situation brings
forth Shawian wit, satire, irony and humour. The two long
scenes between Vivie and Mrs Warren are 'emotional playwriting'
such as England had not seen for a couple of centuries. 182 Shaw

combined the themes of prostitution and incest in order to make quite a rational point. But both themes have a resonance far beyond the bounds of intellect.

The critics, who have disliked the subject matter of the play, have attacked its artistic quality. As the theme of the play is rooted in current attitudes, it has lost some of its timely significance, but it remains a vivid comment on the social evil. The profits of Mrs Warren's profession are 'shared not only by Mrs Warren and Sir George Crofts, but by the landlords of their houses, the news-papers which advertise them, the restaurants which cater for them, and, in short, all the trades to which they are good customers... '

From the analysis of the 'unpleasant' plays it becomes obvious that Shaw's attacks upon modern capitalist society both in Widowers' Houses and Mrs Warren's Profession are the immediate fruits of his socialism and economic studies. Shaw was dissatisfied with the existing social order but he was not indebted to Ibsen for this. In intellectual strategy, the three unpleasant plays are essentially alike but the tone of The Philanderer is different. In each play, the characters view the social structure as if it were permanent. However,

183 Mrs Warren's Profession, p. 208 (Preface).
184 Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 399.
the implicit frame of reference for the paradoxical justifications and insoluble dilemmas of the characters is the necessity of social transformation. Shaw's conscious effort, in these plays, seems to eliminate all explicit solution and resolution. Socialism is the almost unnamed alternative to the seemingly insoluble state of affairs. The three plays are, thus, realistic pictures of the evils of the existing middle-class society.

The retrospective distinction of Shaw's early plays into 'Pleasant' and 'Unpleasant' makes a change in the playwright's conception of himself. Therefore, this classification is made peculiarly significant. It is noteworthy that in all cases the social 'crimes' of the Unpleasant Plays are paralleled among the human 'follies' of the Pleasant Plays. Shaw prepares the readers of his unpleasant plays for the second volume containing plays which deal less with the 'crimes of society' and more with its 'romantic follies' and with 'the struggles of individuals against those follies'.185 However, both the 'pleasant' and the 'unpleasant' plays are joined at the base when it is noted that 'the tragedy and the comedy of life lie in the consequences', which are sometimes 'terrible' but sometimes 'ludicrous', 'of our persistent attempts to found

---

185Play Unpleasant, p. 27. (Preface: Mainly About Myself).
our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imagination by our half satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history'.\textsuperscript{186} There is merely a shift of the playwright's attention from social crime to romantic folly and from the public institution to the private imagination like an easy shift from effect to cause. Shaw's change in emphasis was founded on his faith in the power of mind to shape reality and this led him eventually into imaginative projection of ultimate ideas from 'social concern to human'.\textsuperscript{187} Seen from a different point of view, both pleasant and unpleasant plays are part of Shaw's attack on the theatre to destroy it as a refuge from the comic and tragic consequences of importing its unreality into life. Shaw was not satisfied with 'fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty and cupidity'.\textsuperscript{188} This dissatisfaction ultimately resulted in a modification of Shaw's strategy of replacing the theatre of romantic convention with a drama which systematically questioned accepted ideals and institutions of contemporary life.

\textsuperscript{186} G.B. Shaw, \textit{Arms and The Man} (London: Longman, 1963), p. XX. (Preface to \textit{Plays Pleasant}, 1908). (All references to this book are of this edition only).
\textsuperscript{187} A. Reisel, op.cit., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Arms and The Man}, p. XX. Pref.
Arms and The Man, the first play in the Shawian volume Playa Pleasant, and Shaw's 'dramatic breakthrough', 189 deals with life at large and human nature as it presents itself through all economic and social phases. It is 'the comedy of youthful romance' 190 and disillusion with a serious purpose. Seen in a different light, it is a 'study of the psychology of the military profession' 191 and directed against the false romanticism of war. A serious purpose of stripping war of its glamour lies behind its humour that matters most. Shaw also has claimed that he has 'struck to the routine of war as described by real warriors' 192 and that 'the dramatic effect produced by the shock which these realities give to the notions of romantic young ladies and fierce civilians is not burlesque, but legitimate comedy'. 193

The play opens in Bulgaria, in 1885, in the bed-chamber of Raine Petkoff, whose fiancé, Sergius Saranoff, has just

189 Colin Wilson, op. cit., p. 119.

190 It was subtitled 'A Romantic Comedy' on its first programme, and 'An Anti-Romantic Comedy' in subsequent publications, evidently because original audiences had tended to enjoy the fun and miss the serious concerns.

191 Archibald Henderson, op. cit., p. 338.


193 Ibid.
been hero of a victory over the Servians. A fleeing Servian captain enters into Raina's bedroom. Though she is alarmed at first, very soon she decides to maintain the refinement of the Petkoff family, and not to betray her guest. The intruder is Captain Bluntschli who is not only prosaic but completely fagged out also. He is a Swiss mercenary and glad to be rescued. He carries chocolate instead of cartridges. Raina offers him a box of bonbons because his chocolate is all gone. He falls asleep on Raina's bed. When the war is over, he returns and, with swift and amusing tangle, takes Raina for his own. The haughty maid-servant Louka ensnares the pompous 'hero' Sergius. Louka is relinquished by the servant Nicola as a bride to become a wealthy patron of the shop he plans to open.

'With its surprises, suspense, and touches of poetry', the first act of this play constitutes one of the best 'expositions' in the modern theatre. The play opens in an atmosphere of military melodrama. The dashing officer of cavalry goes off to death in an attitude. The lovely heroine is left in tearful rapture. Amidst the brass band, the noise of guns and the red fire, Bluntschli comes, and tells the army-adoring Raina that she is a humbug. After a moment's

194 H.V. Routh, op.cit., p. 36.
reflection, she appears to agree with him.

The substance of this play is its realistic and common-sense attitude toward militarism and war, which, in the theatre, before Shaw, had worn the cloak of glory. The title of the play is drawn, sardonically, from the first line of Vergil's *Aenid* 'Arms and the man I sing'. Shaw has written a success story of the working class. Bluntschli, son of a hotel-owner, makes good. Raine will keep her husband secure in the sense of his triumph in matrimony.

The play discusses the problems of war and marriage. These problems are interwoven throughout the play. Although war is evil and stupid, and marriage is good and desirable, both had become wrapped in romantic illusions which lead to disastrous wars and unhappy marriages. Concerned with love and heroism, the play shows war to be humdrum because romantic allure has been spun around it. Shaw knows that the most important man in the army is the supply-man. His final thrust of satire comes through the servant Nicola, who has kept out of the army and who, at the end, willingly gives up a wife to get a customer.

To a playgoer, this play has for dramatic essence...
a 'collision of romantic illusion with prosaic reality'. \(^\text{196}\)

Romanticism is deflated in the person of the Bulgarian hero Sergius whose cavalry charge would have been fatal if the enemy’s artillery had not been supplied with the wrong ammunition, as well as in the character of his fiancée Raina who adopts romantic verbiage because it is supposed to be proper. Ultimately, they both shed their nonsense and let their natural instinct lead them where it will. Raina is led into the arms of her pragmatic chocolate soldier, and Sergius, into the clutches of her maid Louka, who is the first of Shaw’s mighty huntresses. The play, thus, pricks two bubbles simultaneously - the 'romance' of arms and the 'romance' of love. The play is a success because of its impressive ideas and because 'Bluntschi picks up the play and walks off with it'. \(^\text{197}\)

\textit{Arms and The Man} has a merit of successful characterization. Bluntschi, who is an unheroic but practical man, regards war as his profession and accepts the rank of an officer because it is better paid. It is pointless for him to carry bullets. So his ammunition pouches are full of chocolate. When peace concludes, the play is set in the Serbian war against Bulgaria.

\(^{196}\)Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 536.

\(^{197}\)A.C. Ward, op.cit., p. 100.
in 1883. Bluntschli cheats his opponent in the exchange of prisoners, and thus gives complete defeat to that distinguished and gallant Bulgarian officer, Sergius, for the hand of the fair Raina. Bluntschli, a son of Swiss hotel proprietor, is thoroughly at home in all practical matters. He is a real soldier who takes things without sentimentality. He disarms the audience by his calm business-like attitude but he never takes anything seriously:

"RAINA. How did you find me out?"
"BLUNTSCHLI. [Promptly] Instinct, dear young lady. Instinct, and experience of the world."
"RAINA. [Wonderingly] Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?"
"BLUNTSCHLI- You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously".198

The grandiloquent idealist, Raina, feels herself unmasked. This little exchange of words might well indicate the relation between Shaw and his audience also.

Bluntschli is 'not a conventional stage soldier'. He suffers from want of food and sleep; his nerves go to pieces after three days under fire, ending in the horrors of a rout and pursuit; he has 'found by experience that it is more important to have a few bits of chocolate to eat in the field than cartridges for his revolver'.199

198 *Arms and The Man*, p. 57.
199 "Preface to Plays Pleasant", *Arms and The Man*, p. XVII.
Raina is a young woman who has romantic ideas about love and war. She is filled with joy to hear of her beloved's victory in the war. She holds Sergius's picture with the devotion of a priestess. From her talk with Bluntschli she comes to realise that she has given wrong values to things. She is a 'sentimental' girl. She is a liar. When Bluntschli accuses her of being a liar, she tries outrage innocence, and then suddenly laughs and admits it. In contrast to Raina, Bluntschli is more intelligent and self-critical. As he marches off at the end of the play, Sergius says, 'What a man! Is he a man?' The conventional hero acknowledges the supremacy of the new Shavian hero. Like Raina, Sergius is also very romantic in his attitude to love and war in the beginning. But, ultimately, he is disillusioned. He is in his world of dreams as long as he tries to win the hand of Raina. But as soon as he comes in contact with the youthful feminine beauty of Laura, his romantic spell breaks. Then he is dragged down to the world of reality. His romanticism is shown to be absurd beside Bluntschli's realistic eye-to-business. For the sake of dramatic tension, he has to be a worthy antagonist. Therefore, he is given a degree of intelligence and wry self-consciousness.

---

200 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 120.
201 Arms and The Man, p. 82.
Major Petkoff, who is one of the richest men in Bulgaria, is "greatly pleased with the military rank which the war has thrust on him as a man of consequence in his own". His patriotism has "pulled him through the war, but he is glad to be home again". His wife Catherine is proudly conscious of her riches and social position. She is a snobbish, fashionable lady who is fond of imitating Western fashions. She dominates her husband, rules over the servants and looks after her daughter with motherly care and affection. Nicola is the man-servant in Major Petkoff's house. He pretends to be engaged to Louka. He has no illusion about love and marriage. He is a typical servant and prudent man of the world. When, by the drift of circumstances, Louka's marriage with Sergius becomes almost a certainty, Nicola promptly declares, "I beg your pardon, Sir. There is a mistake. Louka is not engaged to me".

He is intelligent and respectful. Intellectually, the play sets aside 'the facile way taken by Sergius and Raina', and establishes the clear, actual view of things as they are voiced by Nicola and Alluntschli. In fine, Shaw's drama is, ultimately, the drama of the intelligent man in the world of the less intelligent, and every detail in

---

203 Ibid., p. 27.
204 Ibid., p. 76.
205 H.C. Duffin, op.cit., p. 34.
the play is engineered to bring out the contrast. It appeals to the romanticism of the audience while it flatters its intelligence because the hero's intelligence and realism are emphasized by contrasting him with less intelligent and realistic characters.

The play is full of dramatic dialogues in which the characters explode romantic illusions and blunt the edge of speeches intended to wound. When Louka says, 'You have the soul of a servant, Nicola', Nicola, instead of using the stale rhetoric of the traditional servant, replies complacently, 'Yes, that's the secret of success in service'. Sergius, inclined to a little philandering with Louka, asks her if she knows what the higher love is, to which she replies in astonishment, 'No, Sir', and is informed that it is a 'very fatiguing thing to keep up for length of time. One feels the need of some relief after it'. Shaw is one of those philosophers who concentrate their attention upon the seamy side of life. His satire is directed against humanity in general, and English humanity, in particular. His Saranoff and Bluntschli and Rains and Louka have their prototypes, and the 'most wonderful

206 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 121.
208 Ibid.
character of all, perhaps, is the said Louka'. A decisive turn in the action has been brought about by the following intelligent dialogue:

"BLUNTSCHLI: I can't help it. When you strike that noble attitude and speak in that thrilling voice, I admire you; but I find it impossible to believe a single word you say.

RAINAI: (Superbly) Captain Bluntschli!

BLUNTSCHLI: (unmoved) Yes?

RAINAI: (standing over him, as if she could not believe her senses) Do you mean what you said just now? Do you know what you said just now?

BLUNTSCHLI: I do.

RAINAI: (gasping) I! I! I! I! I! I! I! How did you find me out?"?

With this last query, Rainai passes over for ever from Sergius's world to Bluntschli. Here action has been carried by words alone, Shaw used to remark that his plays were all words just as Raphael's paintings were all paint. The fact that Bluntschli conquers by words gains its peculiar force from a context in which the opposite was to be expected.

Arms and The Man combines with wit, humour and charm a laugh-provoking satire on the stir and contagion and muddle-headedness of war. It quite decapitates the militarist in us and leaves us complacently and thoroughly amused. It also deftly substitutes feminine for military arms. The irreverent and bouncing wit of Shaw and his 'machine-gun fire of

---


210 Arms and The Man, p. 37.
challenging ideas' appeal to a number of his audiences. The 'comedy arises, of course, from the collision of the knowledge of the Swiss with the illusion of the Bulgarians'. The first act is a genuinely fantastic comedy, sparkling and delightful because, in it, Shaw knocks the stuffing out of war and contrasts a romantic girl's ideal of battle and its heroic raptures, with the sordid reality of a professional soldier. Shaw has seized with inimitable humour upon the commonplace and ludicrous aspects of warfare.

In the second act, we find that all is changed. The romantic girl is romantic no longer. Sergius the sublime has no sort of belief in his own sublimity. He sets to analyse himself for the entertainment of the maid-servant. Petkoff and his wife are cheap and grotesque. In the third act also, there are some patches of comedy.

A brilliant example of Shavian paradox is that Bluntschli carries chocolate in the battle-field instead of cartridges. Sergius satirises the rules of warfare when he says, 'I won the battle the wrong way when our worthy Russian generals were losing it the right way'. A little later, he gives out the flashes of Shavian wit in his words, 'Soldiering, my dear madam, is the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when

---

212 Arms and The Man, p. 31.
you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms'. Shaw ridicules the essential hypocrisy underlying human nature and the result is humorous. Sergius, for instance, tells Louka that his figure is made of 'the half-dozen Sergiuses who keep popping in and out of' his beautiful body. Louka's reply to Sergius's question is witty, 'Well, you see, Sir, since you say you are half a dozen different gentlemen all at once, I should have a great deal to look after'. Shaw's paradoxes, thus, border on anti-climax, and the effect produced is that of pure fun.

What made Arms and The Man successful on the stage is its treatment of romanticism. It is 'an old-fashioned romance, with all the new-fangled Shavian ingenuities'. Bluntschli, the realistic and hard-headed captain, disillusions Raina and Saranoff of their romanticism, but ultimately, he himself

---

213 Ibid., p. 33.
214 Ibid., p. 37.
213 Ibid., p. 38.
becomes a victim of love and romance. It was the superficial anti-romanticism of the play that led Shaw's critics to accuse him of poking fun at his audience. Bluntschli is a realist; he also admits to being a man of 'incurably romantic disposition'.

To Raina, he is 'the chocolate cream soldier', and to Sergius, an 'invaluable man'. At the same time, Sergius, too, is a romantic militarist and fraud.

The play is hung, as it were, 'on the cunningly told tale of the lost coat with the photograph in its pockets'. Keeping the focus on the hints, incidents and accidents related to this tale, the plan of this play can be traced out. This little tale of the coat and the photograph 'gives the work its continuity and shape'.

"BLUNTSCHLI. Yes, that's the coat I mean... Do you suppose I am the sort of fellow a young girl falls in love with? Why, look at our ages! I'm thirty-four; I don't suppose the young lady is much over seventeen..."

In the scene, depicted by the dialogue cited above, 'plot and theme reach completion together, and the play of thesis and anti-thesis ends in synthesis'.

217 Arne and The Man, p. 78.
218 Ibid., p. 46.
220 Ibid., p. 298.
221 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
Arms and The Man explodes the conventions of war and romance and replaces them with a more common-sensical view of war and women. Like Widowers' Houses, the controlling action of Arms and The Man is the disillusioning of a central figure with current ideals, and this establishes a link between an unpleasant play and a pleasant one. So far the technique of Arms and The Man is concerned, there is a 'Scribe in Shaw', and there is a 'counter-Scribe in Shaw', and what makes the play dramatic is 'the interaction of the two.'

CANDIDA

Candida, the successor to Arms and The Man and the second play in the volume called Plays Pleasant, is considered the 'most perfect piece' from the technical stand-points because it 'meets all the classic tests and has achieved international vogue'. The play is 'serious and artistic' and a 'true drama' that would genuinely 'move' an audience. The creation of this play 'marks an important point' in Shaw's dramatic

223 Ibid., p. 297.
224 Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 343.
226 Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 343.
career. Aside from a few comments on socialism and corruption in government, it is free, for the most part, from any really revolutionary ideas unlike major plays of Shaw.

_**Candida** is a little domestic drama, scarcely more than a 'scene from private life'_.

Conventionally, such plays were based on the triangle composed of a romantic wife, a seemingly prosaic husband, and a seemingly poetic lover. But, in this play, instead of joining Eugene in sublime adultery and transcendent sin, Candida 'pitches in her picture of the home, the onions, and the tradesmen, and the cooing of the big baby Morell' which reminds Eugene that she will be fifty when he is thirty-five, and sends him about his business, out into the night.

The plot of _Candida_ is very commonplace. Candida is tempted by a young and romantic poet Marchbanks to give up her engrossed and relatively prosaic husband Morell. Marchbanks claims that he can understand and appreciate Candida, while Morell, the husband, cannot. In the moment of crisis, sanctioned

---


228 In a classification of Shaw's plays according to genre foundations, _Candida _and _The Doctor's Dilemma _fall under Domestic comedy .... Domestic ties and romantic longings were the subject matter of Domestic Comedy". M. Meisel, op.cit., p. 224. Also, Archibald Henderson, op.cit., p. 343.

domesticity wins out over lawless romance. But the inner action indicates that Shaw has given the first of his parables on the artist’s relation to ordinary life.230 Candida is torn between her love for her husband and her affection for a young man. A dramatic tension has been concentrated on the big scene at the end of the play, where Candida is compelled to choose between the two men. In spite of Candida’s seeming improbable action of asking if she is to be put up for auction the play has such characters who express themselves freely.

The Reverend James Morell is a clergyman in a church of England. When the play opens, he is working on his will with his secretary, Miss Proserpine Garnett. When Morell’s curate, the Reverend Alexander Mill, arrives, Morell tells him that Mrs Morell is returning that morning with their two children from a three-week absence. Mill, in turn, states that he has just met Mr. Burgess, Morell’s father-in-law, on his way to visit. Morell expresses surprise because he had no calls from Burgess for the last three years. Since Eugene Marchbanks, an impeccuous young poet, accompanies with Candida, she has had no trouble in returning home. Marchbanks staggers Morell by

---

230 The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go bare-foot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art”. John Tanner in Shaw’s Man and Superman, (Penguin, 1980), p. 61.

Later in The Doctor’s Dilemma, Shaw based one of his best plays on the problem whether it is better to keep alive a great artist who is at the same time a scoundrel, or to let him die in order to keep alive a good man who has no genius.
proclaiming that he loves Candida. Morell tries to brush 
aside the declaration by calling it calf-love, but Marchbanks 
discourages Morell's appeals. However, both Morell and Candida 
decline that Marchbanks should stay for lunch.

The second act begins with Marchbank's discussion on love 
with Miss Garnett. Then Burgess and Miss Garnett discuss their 
superiority. Marchbanks is horrified to learn that Candida 
would fill the oil lamps and do other menial work; and insists 
that she should not soil her hands. Apparently unaware of 
what has gone before between Marchbanks and Morell, Candida 
agonizes Morell with her unconsciously meaningful remarks 
about Marchbanks. Morell orders Miss Garnett to send a cable 
that he has changed his mind and he would address the group of 
organizers of a socialist meeting, but he declares that 
Candida and Marchbanks would remain behind together at the 
house while Miss Garnett, Mill and Burgess would attend the 
meeting.

When the third act opens, Marchbanks is reading poetry to 
Candida by the fire-side in the late evening. Anxious to know 
what has passed between his wife and Marchbanks, in his absence, 
Morell mis-interprets Marchbank's flowery phrases, and fears 
the worst. The argument between the two breaks out afresh, and 
Candida returns just as Marchbanks excitedly demands of Morell 
that he let his wife choose between them. The final scene of 
the play shows us the extraordinary spectacle of a wife
choosing between her husband and a very young man when the audience has no reason to suppose she does not love her husband. The point of the scene is an intellectual one. This shows how much the successful husband depends on his wife.

Candida 'adopts her husband as a grown-up baby', but she is 'tempted also by the poet's need'. She acts like a super woman. Thus, the play turns into the story of Marchbank's love for a 'practical, clear-headed, and sympathetic woman' like Candida, who has been married some years to a 'hard-working, socialist clergyman' like Morell.

The play discusses the problems of love and marriage.

It is Morell's relation to Eugene that constitutes the 'major problem of this play'. Morell emerges as the typical Shaw hero when he tells his father-in-law to give him 'a good scoundrelly reason for wanting to be friends' with him. But as soon as Candida returns from a journey with Eugene, Eugene takes the first opportunity to tell Morell that he is in love with Candida. At first, Morell tells Eugene that he is making a fool of himself but Eugene's reaction is violent. Eugene

---

231 H.V. Routh, op.cit., p. 36.
233 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 134.
234 G.B. Shaw, Candida (Calcutta: Longman, 1964), p. 18. (All references to this book are of this edition only).
can shake Morell's confidence. Morell recognises Eugene's worth and can see in him 'promise of higher powers than I can ever pretend to' but Eugene fails to recognise Morell's, when all this is taken into account, the meaning of the play grows to be exactly reverse of what appears on the surface, and the 'secret in the poet's heart' becomes Eugene's sudden recognition of his own selfishness and immaturity.

In *Candida*, the conflict is not between Morell as a socialist and Burgess as a capitalist. It is 'between Morell as a social bourgeois husband and Eugene Marchbanks as a youthful poet'. 235 But in truth, there is no genuine conflict between Marchbanks and Morell. The poet is purposely given out eighteen years. He merely precipitates the clarification of the relationship between Morell and Candida. Through his irruption into their lives they achieve frankness and understanding. Although the final playful comment - 'they do not know the secret in the poet's heart' 236 - has caused endless discussion about the meaning of the play, it can be discerned easily that the moment Candida realizes that Morell needs her help most, her love returns undivided to him. She has always loved him, even if she knows that this love arises


236 *Candida*, p. 81.
partly from his need of her to play the part of his mother. The poet disappears into the night with secret, which consists, according to Shaw's explanation, of his contempt for the stale and insipid happiness enjoyed by the other two. Shaw, thus, turned his direct attention to marriage, in this play, but with no direct intention of exposing or reforming it, because Candida's reasonings for remaining with her husband have nothing to do with the sanctity of marriage or with woman's dependence upon her husband for protection and strength. Shaw's primary interest remained characterization, chiefly, of the complete woman Candida who knows that all men are children and that happy women are mothers to them. 237

_Candida_ may also be a penetrating psychological observation upon the emotional reverberations in the souls of three clearly imagined, exquisitely realized characters. Marchbank exclaims, 'Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about'? 238 with these words Shaw 'found his special place in the history of English drama'. 239

238_Candida_, p. 29.
239M.V. Routh, op.cit., p. 36.
Candida has a vigour of characterization and a truth of situation that one rarely finds in Shaw. He confounded his critics by showing them how well he could create characters when he had a mind to. Candida is certainly the New Woman in the home. She is so 'new' that she is really 'old' and 'eternal' even to the point of slicing onions and staying with her husband. Everything that Ibsen's Nora had to acquire through the painful process of disillusionment is simply Candida's birthright. She settles the issue by deciding that it is the successful preacher Morell who needs her most and that she is too old for Marchbanks. It is no simple-minded woman who would voice the instinctive fact that wifehood is a form of motherhood and that the best guarantee of happiness is to be needed.

The name 'Candida' is made from the adjective 'candid' which means 'frank' or 'truthful'. Shaw's aim was to be frank and truthful concerning everything he wrote about just as it was Candida's aim in her dealings with her husband and their young friend, the poet. However, Shaw pointed out that the name 'Candida' was borrowed from an Italian lady he never met. 240

---

In motive, Candida is the anti-thesis of the conventional foolishly romantic wife of Domestic Comedy, who is tempted by romance and held back by duty and respectability. She is a practical realist with no illusions about herself, her husband or her post-lover. She is 'drawn from life'.\textsuperscript{241} She has a great admiration for intense emotion and poetic sensibility. Though Shaw's intellect is against her, his emotions are for her.\textsuperscript{242} She is a self-possessed woman who, as in many homes, subtly runs the household while appearing subservient to her husband.

The Reverend James Mayor Morell is another excellent role. He is the hearty Christian Socialist Clergyman who is the popular speaker always in demand. He is a fearless man who is happy and secure in his important position until untoward events are brought about by Marchbanks. Initially, Morell is presented as a man of 'magnetic personality' and ostensible strength but in the course of the play Eugene's absurd prediction that he shall shake Morell to his foundations comes true. In the end, it is Morell's prosaic dependence and Eugene's exalted independence which are made manifest. Morell cannot do without 'the woman'. Without Candida, he would be utterly miserable.

\textsuperscript{241} Archbald Henderson, op.cit., p. 544.

\textsuperscript{242} Eric dentley, "On Making a Dramatist", Modern Drama, p. 303.
Shaw was the model for Marchbanks, although he vehemently denied his identity with the poet. Shaw's deep interest in Shelley as a poet-reformer was lifelong. It is more than possible that Eugene Marchbanks owed something to the volatile younger Shelley. The romantic poet lover Marchbanks is presented in this play as a 'hopeless idealist' because he has been worshiping a woman 'hopelessly inferior in physical and spiritual distinction to the beautiful youth'. So, Tennessee Williams remarks that 'in the first place, such a creature could not exist - not even in the mad-house.' Though Marchbanks is a poorly drawn character, he is always 'an effective stage-role'. His 'final exit is a magnificent piece of action'. Shaw fails to make us believe in his poetry, but he does make us believe in his pain and his nobility.

Like a genuine poet, Marchbanks is incorruptibly sincere. Living in a world of emotions, and understanding them, he is strong where others are weak. His ideas mature in the course of the play as they come to be tempered with understanding. The crux of his growth to maturity comes in his renunciation of Candida. He learns that his view of her is romanticized.

---

243 Audrey Williamson, op.cit., p. 117.


Since that love is not for him. Thus, Shaw's portrait of Marchbanks as a young man 'depicts him as the seer who is socially inept to a ludicrous degree'. The poet is not an eagle, but an albatross, and the albatross, however pathetic, is a comic character. In the final scene, however, his character becomes potentially heroic.

Caught in the author's keen insight and amused outlook, the minor characters of this play also make rich contribution to its story. Lexy Mill is a naive curate. Burgess is described as 'a vulgar, ignorant, guzzling man, offensive, and contemptuous to people whose labour is cheap, respectful to wealth and rank, and quite sincere and without rancor or envy in both attitudes'. Marchbanks at once observes that Morell's typist, Prosperpine Garnett, who is abrupt but sensitive, is in love with Morell.

Candida makes it clear how far Shaw has progressed since An Unsocial Socialist, written a decade earlier. The social reformer has become a secondary character in this play. Dialogue also marks a change from earlier plays. Eugene's strength in argument can shake the confidence of Morell. Burgess, a strong-minded business man, has been crou-beaten by Morell.

---

who knows his own mind and his power of speech-making :-

"MORELL. (with weary calm) I don't believe you. 
BURGESS. (rising threateningly) Don't say that to me again, James Major Morell. 
MORELL. (unmoved). I'll say it just as often as may be necessary to convince you that it's true. I don't believe you. 
BURGESS (collapsing into an abyss of wounded feeling) Oh, well, if you're determined to be unfriendly, I suppose I'd better go..."248

It is this trick that makes Shaw such a good dramatist. It is almost a kind of wish-fulfilment. Shaw's heroes think of all clever things and say them at the same time.

At a time, Morell begins by laughing patronisingly at what he considers a case of Marchbank's calf-love. He feels sure of Candida. The dialogue between Morell and Marchbanks is one of the truest and most spirited Shaw has written. It is magnificent. Morell begins rapidly to realise that Marchbank's love is something more serious than he expected. So, with an attitude of brotherly forbearance, he proceeds to crush the poet with lofty reproaches :-

"MORELL. Marchbanks; some devil is putting these words into your mouth. It is easy-terribly easy-to shake a man's faith in himself. To take advantage of that to break a man's spirit is devil's work, Take care of what you are doing. Take care.

248 Candida, pp. 16-17.
(ruthlessly) I know. I'm doing it on purpose. I told you I should stagger you.

MORELL (with noble tenderness) Eugene: listen to me. Some day, I hope and trust, you will be a happy man like me..."240

Audiences have much more preferred to delight in the high comedy of Candide, its amusing situations, and the witty, sparkling dialogues which are uniformly consistent throughout this play.

Shaw laughs out of the theatre its romantic falsities and its prudery with his wit and humour. The great root and source of his laughter in this play is the clash of the points of view. The element of unexpectedness is another cause of laughter. His use of paradoxes and epigrams is a contributory cause of wit and laughter. Since humour is a product of emotions and wit springs from mind, Shaw is more witty than humorous.

In the last act, Morell and Marchoanks confront Candide together and demand that she should choose between them. Her husband offers her his strength for her protection, his honesty of purpose for her surety, his industry for her living—

240 Candide, p. 29.
"CANDIDA. (quite quietly) And you, Eugene? What do you offer?
MARCHHANKS. My weakness. My desolation.
My heart’s need.
CANDIDA. (impressed) That’s a good bid, Eugene. Now I know how to make my choice....
CANDIDA. (significantly) I give myself to the weaker of the two."

As Eugene divines Candida’s meaning at once, his face whitens like steel in a furnace, but Morell bows his head with calm of collapse because he fails to make out the witty statement. And, the play ends with an explanation from Candida as to why Morell is weak and Eugene strong.

No one who has read the play has failed to wonder what was the secret in the poet’s heart. In a letter dated March 8, 1920, Shaw explains the secret in his own way, "The secret is very obvious after all provided you know what a poet is... To Eugene, the stronger of the two, the daily routine of it is nursery slavery, swaddling clothes, mere happiness instead of exaltation an atmosphere in which great poetry dies. To choose it would be like Swinburne choosing Putney. When Candida brings him squarely face to face with it, his heaven rolls up like a scroll, and he goes out proudly into the majestic and beautiful kingdom of the starry night."

250 Candida, p. 77.
only his way of looking at it; and "everybody who buys the book may fit it with an ending to suit his own taste". 252

Critics have also advanced a number of reasons to explain why Shaw subtitled *Candida* a 'Mystery'. Louis Crompton, for instance, emphasizes the relationship between *Candida* and the Reverend Morell, and proposes that 'the mystery celebrated in the play is, of course, the sacrament of marriage. But, what makes marriage sacred in Shaw's eyes is not the legal tie or sexual purity but the nature of the life the couple lead together'. 253 Maurice Valency writes, 'possibly he (Shaw) saw in the Candida situation an analogy to a play about Mary, Joseph, and their unruly son'. 254

In the final moments of the play, Marchbanks finds his role in life and goes into the night to fulfill it. He is revealed to have, unexpectedly, more maturity than Morell. He speaks at the end 'with a ring of a man's voice', while Morell embraces his wife Candida 'with boyish ingenuousness'. He shows more strength in deciding to do without Candida. But even at the end of the play, Marchbank's triumph is not final.

252 *Ibid.*.


and clear-cut.

*Candida* is an actable play with great roles in Candida and Morell and a favourite role in Marchbanks. It is a play which gives an audience highly comic scenes on the one hand, and yet moments of highly serious insights on the other. It is a popular play by Shaw because it is put together in masterly form and with respect for a uniformity that is often lacking in some of his other works.

MAJOR BARBARA

*Major Barbara*, Shaw's 'controversial', 'complex and difficult' play, anticipates, with remarkable prescience, the coming of a welfare state by enlightened capitalists. It presents the early twentieth-century upper class British consciousness which was threatened by a growing awareness of the rift between its 'espoused ideals and morals and its actions'. It exhibits the playwright's 'wide range of mechanism for reconciliation and self-justification'.

236 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 170.
**Major Barbara** is Shaw's first play which deals with a religious topic, and presents a conflict between the religious and the economic outlooks on life, making the economic point of view, finally, victorious. Beneath its surface gaiety, act one of the play 'tellingly satirizes upper class British religion and morality'. As its subject is salvation of society and human soul, the play preaches a sermon also.

**Major Barbara**, a powerful and impressive 'Marxian play', has been called the most widely misunderstood of all Shaw's plays, because, the playwright, in his prefaceary 'First Aid to Critics', explained his purpose and roused the critics. Shaw's preface to **Major Barbara** is presented as an explanation of the play, but what the playwright states about the play in it does not 'necessarily represent his whole view of it'. However, the play reveals a dominant influence of the playwright's economic studies.

In many ways similar to **Mrs. Warren's Profession**, **Major Barbara** is concerned in a direct way with money. In the masterly opening scene, Lady Britomart summons Stephen to discuss the family's money problem with him. She says that his sisters'...

---


261 Shaw told Henderson that 'perhaps a more suitable title for this play, would have been Andrew Undershaft's Profession in the line of Isabel Byron's Profession. All exhibit in an almost blinding glare the impact of economics upon profession'. Archibald Henderson, op. cit., p. 303.
impending marriages require her to find a way of increasing the family income. It is this necessity that moves the events of the play.

Critics have expounded the structure of the plot of the play as the movement from a Shavian hell to heaven, from sin to salvation.²⁶² Cusin's realization that intellect is irresponsibly ineffectual unless actuated by power is the central discovery which the plot of Major Barbara makes possible. The central question of the plot is - 'who shall succeed Andrew undershaft as director of Undershaft and Lazarus, munitions makers'?²⁶³

When the play opens, Lady Britomart's two daughters' engagement to young men without money has compelled her to ask her husband to call upon her in order that she may persuade him to make a suitable provision for them. Sarah, a very ordinary society girl, is engaged to Charles Loax. The other daughter, Barbara, already a prominent officer in the salvation Army, is engaged to Cusine, a professor of Greek. Undershaft and his daughters have not seen each other for a long time, and when they meet in the first act, each tries to convert


the other. Of all Undershaft's family, Barbara alone interests him. They both have religious nature, but the beliefs of each are poles asunder. A bargain is made: he will visit her Salvation Army Shelter, if she will afterwards visit his gun-manufactory.

The second act, which is laid at her headquarters, is undoubtedly the best in the play. Bill Walker, a bullying sort of ruffian, turns up to recover 'his girl'. He is furious because the Army has converted his girl, and she has deserted him for a Salvation Army Sergeant who used to be a heavy-weight boxer. When one of the Salvation lasses tells him that she has gone away, he hits her in the mouth. This blow brings about his own conversion because Jenny Hill does not oppose it, and Major Barbara makes his shame more and more uncomfortable. He makes a last attempt to buy his freedom for a sovereign, which, he hopes, will be reparation for having hit a woman soldier of the Army in the face. But Barbara refuses to accept the money; 'No, the Army is not to be bought. We want your soul, and we'll take nothing else'.264 Barbara's father, all the while, watches the saving process with grim sympathy.

Now, the Chief Army Officer, Mrs. Gaines, arrives. She announces that Lord Saxmundham has promised to give the Army five thousand

pounds, and wishes if as much the sum can be collected in other ways. Undershaft immediately offers to give this sum.

Money is of so vital importance to the Army that the shelter will have to be closed if funds are not forthcoming.

Barbara wants her father to give up manufacturing the means of death. She is terribly shocked to see that the power of the Army rests ultimately on the support of its worst enemies. But Cusine exclaims with excited irony, 'the millennium will be inaugurated by the unselfishness of Undershaft and Dodger.

O, be joyful'. The Army marches off but Barbara is left alone. In her agony, she has torn off the Army's emblems from her collar. She is quite certain that a crusade which draws its strength from the evil it wishes to destroy, cannot put the world straight. This is a criticism which hits all the churches and all charitable institutions in so far they hope to do this. In act two, Undershaft tells his son that he and Lazarus are really the people who govern England, and decide the questions of war and peace. In act three, he explains to Cusine that he is a fool if he accepts the partnership in the hope of power, since he and Lazarus are really the people who govern England, and decide the questions.

265 Ibid., p. 108.
of war and peace. In act three, he explains to Cusins that he is a fool if he accepts the partnership in the hope of power, since he and Lazarus are, in fact, absolutely powerless. In both cases, he is talking big.

In the third and last act, Barbara and her family visit the town of Perivale St. Andrews, they find it a clean and fine place where everybody is well-fed and well-clad. Instead of being pervaded with a spirit of equality and independence, the whole place is honey combed with snobishness and petty oppression. Now, Barbara will spend her life in fighting this spirit. She returns to the army determined to attack first the evils of poverty and to let religion follow in the second place. Compared to the first two acts, the third act is weak because Barbara's conversion is much less impressive and psychological than the loss of her old religion.

Major Barbara is the first play in which the religious passion has been really presented. But it is by no means a study of spiritual conflict between materialism impersonated by Undershaft and the Salvation piety impersonated by Barbara. By making his heroine, Major Barbara, a daughter of the armaments manufacturer millionaire, Shaw is able to discuss religious problems from an economic point of view. Undershaft's social beliefs are set out in long and eloquent speeches in the last act. His beliefs are built round the theme that
poverty is the worst of all crimes. Therefore, it is quite pointless to try to convert a poor criminal by religious means. 'It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other. I will undertake to convert West Ham to Mahometanism on the same terms.'

The real way to put an end to crime and to convert the criminal is to give him a decent wage.

In *Major Barbara*, Shaw maintains the cold-sober argument that all moral problems have their source in economics. The munitions magnate Andrew Undershaft is the real benefactor of mankind. He builds the good society with the well-paid, well-housed, and well-entertained employees of his factory. Moreover, he is perfectly willing to sell his dynamite for peaceful purposes or for the eradication of injustice. The play makes a suggestion of the problem that 'tainted money' is so widespread that it cannot be escaped anywhere. In a corrupted social order, everything is defiled by the same pitch, and there is no chance for individual salvation except in the cleansing of society. Major Barbara approaches this conclusion when she discovers that her benevolent organization receives money from distillers and munitions-makers like her father.

266 *Major Barbara*, p. 142.
Major Barbara raises the central issue of modern aesthetics as squarely as any piece of writing can. The question is whether art is to be regarded as autonomous and sui generis, or as a form of science or knowledge. In this play, the focus is on a conflict between Undershaft, a multimillionaire capitalist manufacturer of munitions, and his daughter Barbara, a major in the Salvation Army. The battle is short and decisive. Undershaft merely has to show Barbara that he can buy the Army's good graces for the price of a donation.

The apparent victory of Undershaft's survival of the fittest capitalism seemed to undermine Shaw's socialist principles and creative evolutionism. G.K. Chesterton, for example, in 1909, described the play's philosophy as 'materialistic pessimism'. However, the contemporary critics, who focus on Major Barbara as a Shawian masterpiece, tend to interpret it positively. They see the play as pointing the way toward an ideal or at least as depicting the victory of good over evil. Joseph Frank compares it to Dante's Divine Comedy; he claims that Undershaft, Cusins, and Barbara - the superman elite move toward a social paradise, a 'heavenly city', represented in the drama by Undershaft's model factory town Perivale St. Andrews.267 Anthony Abbott calls the final act an intellectual debate on the theme

of realism versus idealism: Barbara stands for idealism, Undershaft for realism, Cusina — the hero of the play — for a happy blend of the two. Bellow Watson refuses Chesterton’s 'materialistic pessimism' and claims that Barbara epitomizes the female principle which will lead to and bear the superman. Martin Meisel shows how Major Barbara is rooted in the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama: Undershaft is the 'designing heavy' who robs Barbara, the innocent heroine, of her faith and ideologically seduces her. Like the traditional heroine of melodrama, Barbara is saved in the end, but Meisel claims that she calls up her own reserves of strength to save herself as much as she is saved by Cusina.

There seems to be general agreement on the brilliance of its comedy, characterization, and dialogue. Barbara is another of Shaw’s engaging females who are vital, intelligent, relatively liberated, but in the long run, subservient to the superior male vision and will to something better, or at least, stronger. Through Barbara, Shaw challenges religionists to test the 'opium of the people' on people not in need of an opiate; but

---


270 Martin Meisel, op. cit., pp. 297-98.
Barbara's solution can not be seen as completely acceptable at the psychological level because it is still based on lack of self-knowledge and narrow personal needs. Barbara has Lady Britomart's genius for leadership and mothering, with none of her class limitations. 271 She has not only thrown away aristocratic prejudices but also demonstrated the family independence of mind by joining the Salvation Army. She is little concerned with mere propriety and good form. She identifies herself with the religious spirit of the race very intensely.

The character of Lady Britomart was drawn from a real person. It is a well-known fact that Shaw based Adolphus Cusine, his professor of Greek, on Gilbert Murray, but it is less well-known that he based Lady Britomart on Murray's real-life mother-in-law, Lady Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle. 272 Lady Britomart is an avowed believer in free speech and a democratic franchise. But every speech which she speaks shows her native aristocratic spirit and natural masterfulness at odds with these ideals. She announces that her children are her friends and equals but in reality treats

271 Louis Crompton, op.cit., p. 108.
272 Shaw jokingly told Murray in a letter that he was at work on a play to be called Murray's Mother-in-law. K.F. Rattray, Bernard Shaw: A chronicle, (Luton, 1951), p. 161.
them like kinder-garten children who are unable to take care of themselves. She is both wilful and domineering. Her vision is circumscribed by her conventional morality and her belief in the divine right of the aristocracy to rule the country.

Cusine is an academic, cloistered, sympathetic, sceptical, ironic and super-civilized liberal. When he is brought face to face with the details of armament-making, he tells Undershaft, 'There is an abyss of moral horror between me and your accursed aerial battleships'. He is a poet and Greek scholar.

Assuming Barbara to be 'a woman of the people, he falls in love with her at a street corner. He is as naturally idealistic as Barbara, but he is too self-critical. He has too much sense of humour to be a convinced salvationist. He admits that he joined the salvation Army to worship Barbara, but his true allegiance is to Dionysus. The core of the play is contained in its final scene the long argument between Cusine and Undershaft. Cusine is a sophisticated intellectual. Barbara's obvious religious genius attracts him. Unlike Undershaft, he intends to change the world. The play ends with Undershaft's challenge to Cusine but no strong note of hope that Cusine will succeed. Cusine chooses the 'reality and power' of the factory of death, even if it means losing Barbara.

273 Major Barbara, p. 136.
Undershaft is the wealthy manufacturer of munitions in 
_Major Barbara_. He considers poverty to be a cause of general
degradation, of breeding despair of mind and disease of body
in the slums and squalor of a penurious society. He opines
that instead of being commended as a stimulant of the spiritual
life and a passport to heaven, poverty should be seen as a curse.
The Preface of the play makes it clear that Shaw appreciates
Undershaft's point of view. He states that 'In the millionaire
Undershaft I have represented a man who has become intellectually
and spiritually as well as practically conscious of the
irresistible natural truth which we all abhor and repudiate :
to wit, that the greatest of our evils, and the worst of our
crimes is poverty, and that our first duty, to which every
other consideration should be sacrificed, is not to be poor'. 274
In the play itself, Undershaft states his gospel which is
twofold. He tells Cusins in act two that his religion is 'that
there are two things necessary to Salvation ... money and gun
powder'. 273 He is the man who, having grasped the fact that
poverty is a crime, knows that what society offered him the
alternative of poverty or a lucrative trade in death and
destruction, it offered him, not a choice between opulent

274 _Major Barbara_, p. 15. (Preface: The Gospel of St. Andrew
Undershaft).
273 _Major Barbara_, p. 93.
villainy and humble virtue, but between energetic enterprise and cowardly infamy.

The first act of the play is in part concerned with the economic problems of the rich; the second, with the economic problems of the poor, and in both cases, the money comes from Undershaft. The settings of all three acts draw one's attention to the importance of money. The Salvation Army Shelter in act two, is a symbol of the fruits of poverty, while the aristocratic opulence of Wilton Crescent and the bourgeois amenity of Perivale St. Andrews reveal the advantages of money. Undershaft himself points to the contrast between the cannon works and the shelter: 'I see no darkness here, no dreadfulness. In your Salvation Shelter, I saw poverty, misery, cold and hunger.'

Here, Undershaft justifies the superiority of his kind of salvation over that of the Salvation Army. His speeches, which follow this statement, proclaim the importance of money; and 'the sinfulness of poverty, charity', says he, 'keeps the poor poor'.

As an employer of the new type, Undershaft demands good work for which he provides good wages, good conditions, and good

---

276 *Major Barbara*, pp. 18-19 (Preface).
277 Ibid., p. 141.
homes. His men, he says, can nourish their minds and souls if they choose to, because their stomachs have been made reasonably full and their habitations made fit for civilized people. He has created round his factories the model town of Perivale St. Andrews 'almost smokeless, beautifully sited, and beautiful in itself'. That is his answer to Major Barbara with her talk of a common brotherhood for the children of one Father who is in Heaven. While she doles out bread and soup to keep the destitute from death's door she is more likely to perpetuate misery by her well-meant alleviation of distress.

Counterpoised in his benign aspect as a model employer, implacable foe of poverty, and social catalyst, benefactor and death merchant, Undershaw provides his employees with economic security in a thriving town. It involves a paradox that Undershaw may dwell in heaven, but his celestial city sits on the brink of hell because he is 'what we call the wicked rich one', and to be wealthy is with him a point of honour 'for which I am prepared to kill at the risk of my own life'.

---

278 Major Barbara, pp. 128-29.
279 Ibid., p. 19 (Preface).
280 Ibid.
The minor characters serve both to act out the message of the play and to provide much of the humour. They are divided into two classes - rich and poor. The poor class is represented by the rascals and reprobates who frequent Darwara's Salvation Army Shelter. Of these, the most typical are Snobby Price and Rummy Mutchens. Both of them feign a desire for spiritual sustenance and, testify to their conversion to Christianity in return for free meals. The most pathetic is Peter Shirley, who, at forty-five, has been thrown out of work because he has a streak of gray in his hair. A disciple of Thomas Paine, he swallows his pride to accept a free meal only when he is starving. By far, the meanest and funniest is Bill Walker, who comes to the shelter to his girl friend because she deserted him when she was converted.

The idle rich are represented by Undershaft's wife, son, younger daughter, and the latter's suitor. Lady Britomart and her son Stephen reek of conventional morality. A typical domineering mother, Lady Britomart adores her husband's immorality, but does not hesitate to capitalize on it, accepting his money to ensure her children's comfortable place in society. Stephen, though cowed at first by his mother, declares his independence toward the end of the play, and is rewarded with a career in journalism by his amused father. Charles Lomax, Sarah's suitor, demonstrates the utter frivolity and vacuity
of the rich. Although these are stock characters, they are vigorous and funny.

The speeches and dialogues of the play give not only effective reading but plenty of intellectual pleasure on the stage also. Shaw has written this first play with religious passion for its theme, and has made it equally interesting both for the reading room and the theatre. This is the triumph that Shaw has attained by virtue of his witty and humorous dialogues. Shaw's success in creating thoroughly delightful characters and speeches is the key to the success of Major Barbara. Without the relief of the humour which each and every character provides through dialogues, the moralizing and preaching would be tedious. Shaw converted his audience to his brand of ideas by using such a dramatic dialogue. Some parts of the play have become so amusing that it becomes difficult to take the theme seriously. But Shaw is able to acquaint the audience with serious ideas inspite of wit and satire.

When Undershaft comes to pay a visit to his children, he and Barbara exchange invitations. He is to go to her Salvation Army Shelter; she is to visit his cannon factory. Barbara warns him, and the dialogue adopts itself to her need —
"JARUTRA. Take care. It may end in your giving up the cannon for the sake of the Salvation Army.

UNDERSHAFT. Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of the cannon? BARBARA. I will take my chance of that.

UNDERSHAFT. And I will take my chance of the other." 281

It sounds like an unlikely contingency, but it is precisely what does happen. And why it happened is the subject of the play.

Undershaft's central point that poverty is the greatest crime has been conveyed with a telling effect through the dialogue:

"UNDERSHAFT. I save their souls just as I saved yours. BARBARA. (revolted) You saved my soul! What do you mean? UNDERSHAFT. I fed you and clothed you and housed you..." 282

Major Barbara is 'splendidly alive' with Shavian wit and humour. With its blending of pathos and humour, the second act of the play has become one of the best that Shaw has written. Barbara stands beside Candida as Shaw's most appealing woman.

There is broad humour in his treatment of her. She leans over the big bass drum for a tender kiss. There is practical common-sense behind her social rebellion. There is a staunch and vigorous will behind her devout religion. Her various qualities blend to form a rounded and charming creature. There is a 'vein of poetry' in Mr. Shaw, amongst all else that he is or chooses to be in Major Barbara', and it touches Barbara herself with beauty.

281 Major Barbara, p. 72.
282 Ibid., p. 141.
The play has vivid portraits and well-directed shafts of satire. Ultimately, Barbara accepts her father's fortune that she may get her hands upon the gear of the world. Her last speech presents her religion with wit and intellect:

"I have got rid of the bride of bread. I have got rid of the bride of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake; the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank." 283 This fine speech comes at the end of other speeches which are long and emphatic. So, after the audience has listened already to too many torrents of words, the actress may not be able to create its full effect on them. But, this remains a beautiful instance of Shavian dialogue which is intelligent as well as witty.

Charles Lomax, who is nearly brainless, is shocked by the nature of Andrew Undershaft's factory, and his behaviour as well as speeches turn to be humorous. When Barbara is shaken to the heart's core, in despair, she throws up her commission. But her father restores her sense of proportion. The dialogue which both the father and the daughter make is capable of producing tragi-comic irony.

283 Major Barbara, p. 152.
Undershaft's description of seven deadly sins and of poverty as 'the worst of crimes' contains one of the best expositions of the capitalist point of view ever written. The play makes an improvement because Barbara is an affecting person and because the munition-maker Andrew Undershaft is a superb character.

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA

The Doctor's Dilemma, which is considered as 'the best and worst' of Shaw's plays and 'borders on the tragedy of untimely death, of jealousy, and the quest of beauty in an age of false values', 284 is a great deal of hilarious and delightful satire on doctors and poor criticism upon the artistic temperament and the place of the artist in society. It is preoccupied with the relation of the artist to common life, and is rooted in the apparently remote comedy of unconsummated adultery. Shaw presented the artist as a lover in Candida, but he presents him as a husband in this play. Since the artist is an alien creature in Candida, the idea of happy domesticity functions there. In this play, he is presented as an ordinary citizen in order to put emphasis on the artist in ordinary life and to raise questions.

284H. V. Reuth, op. cit., p. 37.
The play is subtitled 'A Tragedy'. However, 'tragedy' and 'comedy' are deprived of their ancient antonym/meaning in this play. Shaw calls this play a tragedy because "its theme that of a man of genius who is not also a man of honour - is the most tragic theme to people who can understand its importance. Even the comedy which runs concurrently with it: the comedy of the medical profession as at present organized in England, is a tragic comedy, with death conducting the orchestra. Yet the play is funnier than most farces. The tragedy of Dubedat is not his death out his life; nevertheless his death, a purely poetic one, would once have seemed wholly incompatible with laughter'.

The plot of The Doctor's Dilemma consists of a complicated story which draws 'laughter in which there are tears'. The first act occurs in Ridgeon's consulting-room. Five doctors call on Sir Colenso Ridgeon to congratulate him on his knighthood. They talk out of egoistic exuberance. A woman is waiting to see Ridgeon while they are absorbed in talking about remedies and discoveries. Since the sanatorium is full, she is told that her husband cannot be admitted for the treatment of his consumption. When some of the patient's drawings are displayed,

Ridgeon makes an endeavour to admit him but he shows his extreme liking for Jennifer Dubedat herself. She is asked to bring her husband to a dinner to discuss the case with other doctors.

The second act presents the five doctors and Mrs. Dubedat sitting over coffee and cigarettes. All are charmed with the young artist and his wife who go off after getting assurance from Ridgeon to undertake his cure. The doctors discuss the artist and come to know that he has tried to borrow money from three of them. In the meantime, one maid appears there and introduces herself as the legal wife of Louis Dubedat. Blenkineop reluctantly confesses that his own lungs also are touched. Now, Ridgeon decides to save Blenkineop, and Dubedat is handed over to the mercy of Sir Ralph Bloomfield Sonnington.

Act three of the play shows Sir Ralph, Sir Patrick, Cutler Walpole, and Ridgeon visiting Dubedat's studio. Dubedat is consumed in doing his best. Here also, he makes an attempt to borrow money from Ridgeon. The fourth act shows the death of Dubedat who dies in a pose upon his wife. She turns to the doctors who have let her husband die because he was unworthy. But his last picture is painted on his wife's mind, and this is the climax of the play. Then, in the last act, Ridgeon and Jennifer meet at an exhibition of Dubedat's pictures. He admits that he killed Dubedat. She is shocked to know that he
has been in love with her all the time. But she says, 'you an elderly man'! At this reply, he staggers back and cries, 'O, Dubedat, thou art avenged!' A moment later, it is revealed to him that she has married again as per her late husband's wish. The play comes to an end with Ridgeon's last exclamation, "Then I have committed a complete disinterested murder".  

The most striking thing about the play is that it is not about Shaw's central theme of evolution. Ridgeon is in love with Dubedat's wife. So he condemns him to death. Although he dies exclaiming, 'I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez and Rembrandt', he could scarcely be described as a 'higher evolutionary type'. That Ridgeon fails to get Jennifer in the end - 'makes the play more 'unpleasant' than any of the three 'unpleasant plays'.  

The problem discussed in this play is - which is the more valuable life that of an amoral artist of indisputably great quality in his craft or that of a mediocre doctor who is a

286 G. B. Shaw, The Doctor's Dilemma (Bombay: Longman, 1973), p. 175. (All references are made to this edition only).
287 Ibid., p. 178.
288 Ibid., p. 164.
289 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 200.
Ridgeway expresses his dilemma, 'Ah, that beats me. That's the experimental test. Still, it's a dilemma. It's a dilemma. You see there's a complication we haven't mentioned'. Then the following conversation takes place:

"SIR PATRICK. What's that ?
RIDGEON. Well, if I let Blenkineep die, at least nobody can say I did it because I wanted to marry his widow.
SIR PATRICK. Eh! What's that ?
RIDGEON. Now if I let Dubedat die, I'll marry his widow".290

The problem is merely stated. It is not solved. Sir Colenso Ridgeon is allowed to save the common-place doctor and sacrifice the unscrupulous artist for a wholly irrelevant reason. Since Ridgeon wanted to marry the artist's wife after killing him, on moral principle, he is guilty of murder.

In the conversation of the doctors, Shaw satirizes the stupidity and the cupidity of the medical profession. Dubedat, the man of art, is balanced against the doctors, the men of science. A rascal in his living, Dubedat proves himself as artist in his dying. And, the play continues popular partly because the layman's awe of doctors makes him ready to laugh at them, and partly because of more intrinsic merits contained in its story, "coherence of its argument, the cut-and-thrust

290 The Doctor's Dilemma, p. 128.
dialogue, the sharply defined characterization, and the stinging wit with which Shaw pricks the medical profession'.

To say that Shaw's characters are all fictitious is untenable because his unusual characters are solidly founded on fact. The two principal characters in *The Doctor's Dilemma*—Sir Colenso Ridgeon and Louis Dubedat—are faithful to men Shaw had known with some intimacy. Sir Almroth Wright and Dr. Edward Aveling were the originals from whom Shaw derived Colenso and Dubedat. Dubedat is amoral and unscrupulous with money and women. He is a gifted and devoted artist. His destiny is ultimately decided through his relation with his wife. He is constructed on the old formula of 'the artistic temperament'. He is an artist with a tuberculous lung on which the medical experiments are to be made. Commenting upon the character of Dubedat, J.L. Wiesenthal states that he lacks 'ordinary human morals'. He has developed this attribute from a respect for his work. He is a brute in his total lack of consideration for others. The doctor 'kills the young...

---

291 Shaw entertained the liveliest admiration for Sir Almroth Wright, a distinguished scientific investigator as well as able medical practitioner at St. Mary's Hospital. Many tributes to him may be found in the twenty-second volume of Shaw's Collected Works. A. Henderson, op.cit., p. 607.

292 Dubedat was apparently based upon Edward Aveling, a dedicated socialist who was nevertheless completely unscrupulous about women and money. C. Wilson, op.cit., p. 200.

293 J.L. Wiesenthal, op.cit., p. 110.
artist for the sake of the lovely wife', Jennifer Dubedat, who is extravagantly devoted to her husband.
Jennifer passionately idealizes Dubedat. She considers his carelessness with money and women as his superiority to ordinary life. On the other hand, he exploits her attractiveness to coax money out of interested men. But he does not understand that people reprobate his blackmailing practices. Even when he is invited to see the doctors, he 'touchea' each of them for a loan. He gaily claims himself to be a disciple of Bernard Shaw. Thus, he is a particular kind of non-moral artist to whom the words 'right' and 'wrong', as ordinarily understood, have no meaning.

Jennifer Dubedat has sought out Sir Colenso Ridgeon. With great difficulty, she secures his promise to undertake the cure of her husband's consumption. Ridgeon consents out of his profound admiration for her. But his consent places him in a dilemma because the morally irreproachable Mr. Blenkinsop has also a tuberculous lung. Which is to be saved - the good Blenkinsop, who is a social failure, or the bad Dubedat, who paints good pictures? He decides in favour of Dubedat. But a fresh complication arises when he finds that Jennifer's whole life consists in the worship of Dubedat. So

---

Ibid., p. 116. (Shaw's letter to Arnold Daly.).
he changes his mind and Dubedat is killed because he is handed over to old B.B., who does not know the difference between a vaccine and an anti-toxin. Dubedat dies with his head on Jennifer's breast. Since he hates widows, she must promise to marry again. He also gives a plain hint that he understands Sir Colenso's game. Jennifer coldly dismisses Sir Colenso from the death chamber because she also understands him. Sir Colenso meets Jennifer in the last scene to open her eyes to the truth about her dead hero but he fails utterly, and finds his own eyes opened as to what he has done. The secret of his love for her pops out. She mocks at the idea of love in this 'elderly gentleman'. Besides, in deference to her hero's dying injunction, she has already married again. When the curtain falls, the audience is left wondering who is Jennifer's second husband.

Beside the splendour of the dead artist, Ridgeon seems old and absurd, and his actions seem 'mean and envious'. Jennifer was aware of the facts about her husband. So she has already remarried and Ridgeon cannot even buy any pictures. The lover, as usual, has been defeated by the husband.\(^{295}\) The play, thus, presents a conflict which exists between a doctor's profession

\(^{295}\) M. Reisel, op.cit., p. 239.
and his passion.

Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington is at once typical and individual. He is not simply a caricature. He has his own air of sympathetic concern and his soothing courtesy of absent. He hovers over his patient and listens to the anxieties of his wife. But the character of Sir Cutler Walpole is introduced in the play as one of the prosperous wielders of the knife. He has made a discovery of a small and useless attachment of the human interior called the nuciform sac. 296 He says that people are safer without this nuciform sac which may be both harmless and a menace. So it is better to get rid of it. Moreover, it could be removed without danger to the person and with great personal advantage to Sir Cutler. Thus, Cutler Walpole is a caricature of the hard-headed type of surgeon. J.B. inspires confidence and holds together a fashionable practice by blandishment and his own natural buoyancy. The poor but honest

296 There was a historical background to the ridicule of Sir Cutler and his nuciform sac. King Edward the Seventh had been extremely ill with gastric pains before his coronation; this distress was diagnosed as inflammation of the vermiform appendix, which is not usually described with the adjective meaning worm-shaped. The royal appendix was successfully removed with the publicity which so August an occasion made inevitable. This species of sac and its operative treatment were in the news and soon in the vogue®. Ivor Brown, op.cit., p. 116.
Slenkineop is almost too worthy an individual to engage real sympathy.

The absorbing story of the play is enriched with Shawian dialogue, wit and humour. Ridgeon’s dilemma is complicated by his having taken a great fancy to the artist’s wife. Sir Patrick Cullen is his principal adviser. He is an old-fashioned doctor whose speech is shrewd and kindly, and in whom moral work has become at last a kind of intellectual power: "Well, sometimes a man knows best; and sometimes he knows worst. You’d much better cure them both". and, later, "To me, it’s a plain choice between a man and a lot of pictures". 297

Shaw is at his best with the clash of egos between the successful doctors:

"WALPOLE... Sir Patrick: how are you? I sent you a paper lately about a little thing I invented: a new saw for shoulder blades.

SIR PATRICK. (meditatively) Yes: I got it. It’s a good saw: a useful, handy instrument.

WALPOLE (confidently) I know you’d see its points.

SIR PATRICK. Yes, I remember that saw sixty-five years ago.

WALPOLE. What?

SIR PATRICK. It was called a cabinet maker’s jimmy then.

WALPOLE = Get out! Nonsense!...

RIDGEON = Never mind him, Walpole, He’s jealous”. 298

297 The Doctor’s Dilemma, p. 129.

298 Ibid., p. 94.
Shaw turns the audience's laughter against himself by having Dubedat attempt to justify his conduct on the ground that he is a disciple of Bernard Shaw, 'the most advanced man now living'.

Of several doctors in the play, old Sir Patrick has no faith in physicians. Each of the others has his pet nostrum or treatment. Dr. Walpole diagnoses every case as blood poison and prescribes for removal of the nuciform sac. B.8. curses all by vaccination, though Ridgeon warns him: 'inoculate in the positive phase and you cure; inoculate in the negative phase and you kill'. Thus 'salt of Shavian wit' is 'showered richly' here, 'over the characters and the dialogue'.

From the theatrical point of view, the play is 'the culmination of Shaw's career as a playwright'. It is 'a return to the well-made play of earlier days', because its first act has all talk and 'the remaining four acts follow a line of straight dramatic development'. Despite its certain shortcoming, the play is among the best and most entertaining of Shaw's plays. Its first act is considered to be a fine specimen of the playwright's skill in maintaining dramatic

299 Ivor Brown, op.cit., p. 128.
300 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 198.
301 Ibid.
interest by conversation alone. But the play suffers from
its long preface which overstates Shaw's animus against
the medical profession. It shows 'a retreat from the
intellectualism of Major Barbara, but the structure of the
play is similar'. Excluding, the fifth act, the play
might be regarded as Shaw's 'most skilfully constructed
drama, without a waste word in it'. Thus, The Doctor's
Dilemma is a 'thoroughly Shavian play' which is
'stimulating and diverting for the most part, occasionally
distressing'.

302 Martin Lamm, Modern Drama, p. 277.
304 The Doctor's Dilemma is the title of a story by Miss
Hesba Stratton, who has been kind enough to allow the author
to use it for his tragedy ... The story of this title appeared
in a collection published by Hodder and Stoughton, Warwick
Square, London ... The leading idea of the play, embodied in
the title, was suggested to Shaw by a visit to Sir Almroth
Wright, at St. Mary's Hospital'. Archbald Henderson, op.cit.,
p. 607.
305 James Agate, assembled, The English Dramatic Critic,
p. 264.
A.B. Walkey, The Times, 21 Nov., 1906; reprinted in Drama
and Life (1907) also by A.d. Walkey.
GETTING MARRIED

Getting Married 'stages' the institution of marriage as The Doctor's Dilemma does that of medical profession. Shaw has created a modern play in the form of Getting Married because here his purpose is to 'furnish, discuss, and evolve ideas' through dialogue and 'a good deal of conversation'.

It is a 'play of ideas' which shows the playwright as a 'consummate dialectician and a master of speech'. Shaw is here out to prove that he could make a play out of the 'materials of a debate', and he has succeeded in making it a 'discussion play' like Misalliance because 'the talk is as good as ever'. Here, discussion interpenetrates the whole play. The play is 'full of incident' but it is essentially 'a discussion and nothing else'. It is a 'long conversation' which is 'interesting to people who like good conversation and are not terrified by hearing ideas discussed'.

306 Commenting upon the difference between a modern and an old-fashioned play, Shaw said that among many other things "a play with a discussion is a modern play. A play with only an emotional situation is an old-fashioned one". Archibald Henderson, op.cit., pp. 613-14.


308 Ibid.

309 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 211.


The technical novelty of the play is that the debate proceeds continuously and the play has the technical virtue of the Greek form. Since it is all talk, it has 'a minimum of plot'. It stands out from most of Shaw's other works because of its 'lack of dependence on plot, which gives it an apparent, superficial formlessness'.

The play takes place in the Bishop's palace on the morning of the Bishop's daughter's marriage. The green grocer, William Collins, is hired for the ceremony as butler. With the arrival of the guests, the fun is growing fast. But the bride and the bridegroom are missing. A pamphlet on the marriage laws has been sent to them, and the result is that they are going through them, locked up in their individual rooms. They refuse to get up and dress until they have read that document to the last word. There follows a discussion in which everyone tries to suggest how the marriage contract could be improved, but they fail to resolve an agreement. When the bride and the groom-to-be present themselves on the scene, they refuse to...

312 The customary division into acts and scenes has been discarded, and a return made to unity of time and place as observed in the ancient Greek drama. G.B. Shaw quoted in A. Henderson, op. cit., 610.

313 J.L. Wisenthal, op. cit., p. 127.
encounter the horrors of the marriage laws. The whole company site as a committee and discusses the laws to draw up a form of private contract. The mayor's wife goes into a trance and speaks with the voice of the 'Eternal Feminine'. Then the play comes to an end as the young couple inform that they have married after all.

The play discusses the problems of marriage and divorce. Shaw wants to introduce the 'wider vision of the poet-philosopher', and woman as an instrument of evolution, searching for a father for the superman'. Mrs. George's following lines in the play mark the theme of the play:—

"When all the stars sang in your ears and all the winds swept you into the heart of heaven, were you deaf? Were you dull? Was I no more to you than a bone to a dog?"

Being a 'genuine discussion of marriage and divorce', it has been constructed as an animated conversation upon our marriage laws and customs, which naturally involves a discussion of sex and human needs. The trend of the argument on practical

---

314 Colin Wilson, op.cit., p. 212.
315 G. J. Shaw, Getting Married, The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw, (Odhams, London, 1932), p. 583. (All the references to this play are to this edition only).
reforms is very clear in the preface to the play — "...divorce is not the destruction of marriage but the first condition of its maintenance", 318 therefore, 'make it as easy as cheap, as private as marriage', 319 'sexual relations between men and women will not be decent and honourable until women are economically independent', 320 as a first step, 'place the work of a wife and mother on the same footing as other work'. 321

There are various types of characters in this play. Hotchkiss is one of the most intelligent characters in the play. He is a self-declared snob and young man about town. He loathes the whole marriage morality of the middle classes. He despises 'all this domestic purity business', and regards it as narrow, selfish, wife-grabbing vulgarity. He is in love with Mrs. George. But he is a man of honour also because he says that when once he crosses the threshold of her husband's house and breaks bread with him, the marriage bond will bind him like steel. He says, "To disbelieve in marriage is easy; to love a married woman is easy; but to betray a comrade, to

318 The Complete Prefaces, p. 33.
319 Ibid., p. 43.
320 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
be disloyal to a host, to break the covenant of bread and salt, is impossible'. 322 Thus, the passion in Hotch-kiss is represented in terms of extravagant farce. The scene of love making between Hotchkiss and Mrs. George is also 'too funny to be serious, and too serious to be funny'. 323

Alfred Bridgenorth is the Bishop of Chelsea who is 'always interested in himself, and generally rather well-pleased with himself'. 324 Happily married, he, nevertheless, has sympathy with his young sister-in-law when she says that she really needs several husbands for different occasions, and ends by concluding that it is a mistake to get married, but a much bigger mistake not to get married'. 325 Alice Bridgenorth is the wife of the Bishop of Chelsea. She is a 'quiet, happy-looking woman of about fifty, placid, gentle and humorous, with delicate features and fine grey hair'. 326 She is supervising the arrangements for the wedding reception of her sixth and last daughter, Edith Bridgenorth.

General Boxer Bridgenorth is the Bishop's brother and in

322 Getting Married, p. 388.
323 Desmond McCarthy, op.cit., p. 159.
324 Getting Married, p. 355.
325 Ibid., p. 357.
326 Ibid., p. 346.
love with the Bishop's sister-in-law Lesbia Grantham. He is a fine-looking man of about fifty, ignorant, stupid, and prejudiced, 'having been carefully trained to be so', but he has 'much natural simplicity and dignity of character'. He is constantly shocked by the conversation on the subject of marriage and English womanhood. He continues to pursue Lesbia in hope of eventually marrying her.

Edith Bridgenorth is the sixth and youngest daughter of the Bishop of Chelsea. She is about to be married to Cecil Sykes. Leo Bridgenorth is very young, pretty, restless, selfish wife of Reginald Bridgenorth, whom she has persuaded to give her grounds for divorce because she wishes to marry St. John Hotchkiss. When she meets Reginald again at the wedding of her niece Edith, she says that she wants him as well as Hotchkiss. In fact, she could do with several husbands; she says, 'one for everyday, one for concerts and theatres, a great austere saint, and a blithering idiot of a boy'.

Reginald Bridgenorth is the eldest brother of the Bishop of Chelsea. Hardened and tough physically, hasty and boyish in manner and speech, he has not developed intellectually since

---

327 Getting Married, p. 347.
328 Ibid., p. 355.
his school days. Late in life, he has married Leo, a pretty, shallow girl, thirty years younger than himself, and when she tells him that she has fallen in love with a much younger man, he agrees to give her grounds for divorce. Husband and wife are reconciled at the marriage ceremony of Edith.

William Collins is an elderly green-grocer who is the friend of Alice Bridgenoth. He has helped her arrange the wedding receptions of five daughters, and, now, is busy with the preparations for the wedding of the sixth, Edith. Mrs. George is the sister-in-law of William Collins. She is a fine figure of woman but so susceptible that she constantly left her husband for other men, only to find they did not want her, and so came back home. As she is the Mayress of the borough, she comes in the wedding ceremony and indulges in a number of antics, which include going into trance also. She also reveals that she is the Incognito Appassionate who has been writing love-letters to the Bishop of Chelsea, arranging to meet him in heaven.

Lesbia Grantham would very much like to have children, but, she says, 'If I am to be a mother, I really cannot have

329 Ibid., p. 532.
330 Getting Married, p. 574.
a man bothering me to be a wife at the same time'. She refuses to marry General Bridgenorth each time he proposes on the grounds that she is not a marrying woman.

Soames, ordained now as Father Anthony, runs the business side of the Bishop's work. Cecil Sykes is the fiancé of Edith Bridgenorth. He is a militant social worker. As he has a mother and several sisters dependent on him, he feels he ought not to marry. But, ultimately, Edith and Cecil withdraw quietly and get married in the usual way in an empty church, leaving the future to look after itself.

Dialogue, in this play, has been used to convey the ideas directly on the stage. Therefore, it has been made superlatively interesting and attractive for the audience. A number of characters sit round and talk in the dialogue, befitting them. The Bishop points out to Leo that a man is like a phonograph with half-a-dozen records. You soon get tired of them all; and yet you have to sit at table whilst he reels them off to every new visitor. In the end, you have to be content with his common humanity ... marry whom you please; at the end of a month he'll be beginning over again. 332

---

331 Getting Married, p. 551.
332 Getting Married, p. 557.
Humour is added by an older divorced couple and by abortive proposals for new contracts. Shaw has remarked that 'humour is a divine attribute'. Naturally, he likes creating humour in his plays. Hotchkiss will not betray his host because some force of deeper seriousness is gradually dawning upon him. 'Neither shall I be able to steel George's wife'. Collins also uses wit in his speech: 'She's born wife and mother, mean. That's why my children all ran away from home'.

Getting Married seems to suggest Meredith's proposed septennial contract. Critics might declare that the 'grievances and difficulties pointed out' in the play and its preface 'have been removed by recent legislation'. But the fact remains that 'in most marriages, the couples, being ignorant of the law, do not realize the risks they are running'.

---

333 Ibid., p. 381.
334 Ibid., p. 388.
335 Ibid., p. 348.
336 George Meredith had suggested a system of lease hold marriage, the period of contract to be seven years. At the end of that time, parties to the contract, if they found it unsatisfactory, could terminate the engagement and make a fresh one. Jt. Hohn Ervins, op.cit., p. 422.
337 Getting Married, Postscript 1933, p. 44.
From the analysis of Shaw's problem plays it is now obvious that his plays are not the reproductions of popular melodrama and farce. Like Shakespeare, Shaw creates a singular and distinct form of artistic and dramatic expression out of what he takes from others. Being one of the masters of English prose, and 'firm not to cease from mental fight', he makes discussion both incandescent and exciting throughout his work. He holds the view that the discussion is 'the crucial technical innovation which accompanies the changes in outlook'. He wrote Getting Married in which the discussion embodies the sole action and dramatic movement of the play. He made his problem plays 'discussion plays' in which 'people sit in their chairs and talk everything over'. He displays that psychological conflicts can also be conveyed with great force through discussion and argument.

Shaw uses the stage as a pulpit from which he expounds his opinions. His characters in problem plays, represent various social and moral points of view, and action in these plays often takes the form of a debate and discussion. In the first plays, he executes the discussion by means of actions

---

339 Ibid.
of the characters on the stage but it forms the whole play in his later plays. Unlike Ibsen, he likes to give answers to the problems only because he has a strongly marked sense of purpose and he wants to teach through his plays. His problem plays draw the attention of the audience to the conflict between social and individual morality and discuss it with subtle psychology as well as sparkling and witty dialogues. Therefore, they appeal to the social and moral conscience of the audience.

Envisaging drama from social point of view, Shaw maintains that 'social questions are produced by the conflict of human institutions with human feeling'. He further asserts that 'every social question furnishes material for drama'. So, ideas are propounded by provoking discussion, and this makes Shaw credited for contributing more active characters in his problem plays.

When taken in chronological order, Shaw's problem plays appear to evolve in the matter of technical construction. If Widowers' Houses is a little close to the old-fashioned 'well-made' play, Getting Married is a radical departure from


341 Ibid.
Candida, which is also, in many respects, a 'well-made' play. In *Widowers' Houses*, the disillusion of Trench leaves him 'morally beggared' to such an extent that, in the end, he stands in with the thieves in their plan to defraud the County Council. But in *Arms and the Man*, the disillusion of Raina is an education to something better, a truer and healthier perception of reality. This is due to Shaw's change in emphasis which is founded on his faith in the power of mind to shape reality.

Shaw has a sense of every conceivable point of view. He can juxtapose all the points of view into one long sentence which climbs up parallelism and antithesis to a climax, and then sinks with the finality of a conclusion. He is a genuine dramatist in the sense that he brings his matter home to the eyes and ears with wit and humour. His talent is both for conversation and dramaturgy. His intellect and his passions are identical of the sort we find in an artist-philosopher. Therefore, he has made his plays equally interesting for the reading room as well as the theatre. This is the triumph that Shaw has attained by virtue of his witty and humorous dialogues, and thoroughly delightful characters. His problem plays give intellectual delight to both the readers and theatre-goers. Naturally, they leave their impression on the thoughts of the audience. This is the reason for which Shaw's plays came to
influence the playwrights in Hindi literature, and a number of plays were written on his model to present the intellectual discussion of the social and political problems of the age.