



SOCIAL REALISM IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW SELECT PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

The present research work is an attempt to testify the selected plays of George Bernard Shaw to reveal the use of social realism, social problems and human relationship etc. It has in itself its own significance as a reading in literature and literary criticism on one hand and on the other hand it will deliver certain comparative literary insights of the selected playwrights in the context of social realism used by GB Shaw. The plays dealing with social realism are *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, *The Philanderer*, *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, and *You Never Can Tell* etc., Shaw's plays are essentially scholarly plays. The plays tackle some social sensitive affairs with Shaw's sense of humour. Social realism shows gender discrimination, feeling of loneliness, harshness, sexism, unbearable condition of life, destruction of families, racism, and class differentiation. He claims that the plays have a specific determination or exposing social evils. He also presented a social philosophy which is of much value and importance to the society. This study also reveals that Shaw's socialist viewpoint and penetrating wit show through in his journalism, economic and political tracts, and his many plays.

The term "social realism" is a term that derives from Russian inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist societyⁱ. Social Realism, also recognized as Socio-Realism, is an inventive movement spoken in the visual and other realist arts, which portrays social and racial inequality, economic poverty, through factual pictures of life's struggles; often depicting working activities as heroicⁱⁱ. In England it was George Eliot, who familiarised this term social realism. She used realism in her novels. Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Harold Pinter and John Galsworthy used realism in their plays.

George Bernard Shaw (G B Shaw), the Irish playwright, is the key funder to the Fabian Society. G B Shaw was a revolutionary writer and speaker who comprised many subjects that his peers had not yet ventured to embrace. He is considered to be the best and most noteworthy playwright since William Shakespeareⁱⁱⁱ. His life and career were attentive mainly on social reform. Most of the plays of G.B. Shaw are realistic or the problem plays. It is a type of play that apples to dynamic and thoughtful minds. It can make some influence on human progress. Drama at its best is an experience of the imagination not only for the writer, the producer and the actors but also for the audience. The writer of the play creates characters and places them in situations that are interesting and in some way relevant to general human experience. The actor tries to live for a short time as another person and enters in to the feelings and thoughts of character that is imagined. Shaw uses drama to propagate his ideas and expound his theories. He creates the world of his own ideas which rarely corresponds to reality. It was also found in theatre, realism recognized itself as an important practice in the theatre in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the work of Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and others; and it



remains a standard agreement of film and television drama. In his plays, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Arms and the Man* and *Pygmalion* social realism is presented in its different aspects

George Bernard Shaw, an enthusiastic socialist, he wrote many plays, brochures and speeches for the Fabian Society. He became a gifted orator in the continuance of its causes, which included gaining equal rights for women and men, alleviating abuses of the working class, rescinding private proprietorship of productive land, and encouraging well lifestyles. For a tiny time he was dynamic in local politics, serving on the London County Council. George Bernard Shaw writings discourse prevalent social problems, but have a vein of funniness which makes their stark themes more pleasant. Topics which engaged Shaw's courtesy included education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege. To accomplish, it is clear that Shaw aims at deriding the conventions of his own society. To achieve this aim, he uses some unexpected dramatic devices to reverse the usual relations of things and people. Then, he sets all back to its natural position. Thus, he presents a new entertaining conception of the world. The current research tries to examine these dramatic devices and show how they help in establishing Shaw's revolutionary considerations. The first person who made Fabian society famous was George Bernard Shaw by editing *the Fabian Essay* (1889). As stated before, in social realism, there is insisting on the reality of society even if it is ugly reality. The artist in this school picture the reality of society as it is not as it should be. Here, George Bernard Shaw depicts this reality about class and gender differentiation in his play^{iv}.

Shaw was greatly overwhelmed with Ibsen's new drama of social realism. In 1891 he wrote an article on the subject entitled *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Shaw hated the sentimental romance being offered to London spectators in contemporary plays. He advocated instead that greater responsiveness be paid to Ibsen and his inventions. Shaw valued the way the stage could convert a platform for the communication of ideas: through his own plays he pursued to meet audiences with issues of social and political importance. He intended to stimulate not only the hearts, but also the minds of London's theatre-goers. One of the major inventions of Shavian play was the unusually large role he gave to thought and debate-but thought brightened with a love of wit and contradiction. His illustration of the conflict between idealism and realism was reevaluated in *A Doll's House* (1879) reflecting his proclamation in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891). In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* idealism and realism were presented as consecutive stages of a dialectic of developing consciousness.

In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), the playwright confirmed his idea about humanity's need of social reformation because, "social progress takes effect from side to side the replacement of old institutions by new ones; and since every institution encompasses the recognition of the duty of conforming to it, progress must involve the refutation of an reputable duty at every step" (Shaw, 1913, p. 28). To achieve the goal of a utopian society based on human equivalence, the powerful social establishments and institutions that had crushed powerless people in the society – mostly women, middle-class and working-class people, who had potential for leading progress, must be criticized and replaced with new ones. Shaw, who was dynamic Socialist and Feminist, attempted to educate women about the fundamentals of socialism in his *The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928).

Four of Shaw's primary plays – *The Philanderer*, *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, and *You Never Can Tell* – deal with the social issues of love and marriage. *The Philanderer* is a satire on marriage as an institution connecting economic slavery. *Candida* (1895) a play of Shaw owes much to Ibsen's influence and it is a thoughtful comedy and deals with a social problem in a serious spirit. *Candida* play is a play in the tradition of realism dealing with a problem-social, moral, political, and philosophical. The Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen founded this kind of drama in Europe, and Bernard Shaw in England followed suit.

Arms and the Man (1894)^v is another play of Bernard Shaw that reveals perfectly the elements of realism. In this play, Shaw attacks warmly the romantic notions of war and love. He has implemented realistic



approach in portraying every day activities which were common those days. Here Shaw attacks the social idiocies of society in order to bring a positive change for which he received criticism. Shaw discards romanticism in order to hold realism. Finally, he succeeds in his attempt to exhibit the idea of the realist outdoing the idealist. Thus, *Arms and the Man* is successful in spreading the ideas of social realism and ultimately, realism conquers over idealism.

One of the most significant aspects of social realism is sexism or gender perception disused in *Pygmalion*. Here Shaw demonstrated the condition of women in the early 1900's. He believes that social transparency is not enough response to the condition of society, if poor women cannot be rid of sexual license and step into society as wife, mother or friend. Shaw wants us to picture the conditions in which women are victims and beautification. But many women know they serve as possessions or chattels for men. Occasionally women dress up, in order to attract men's attention, since that would be the only way to attach oneself to a man is to be a chattel, and both of them are to blame somehow⁵. Hence, in the play the social

agent's 'self' and his/her individual and social relations are constructed by mainly the discourses of class and education. As the play proceeds, the interdependent relation between education discourse and other discourses like class and marriage is revealed.

Arms and the Man and *Pygmalion* social realism is presented in its different aspects. *Pygmalion* depicts many diverse aspects such as the hypocrisy of the upper class in Britain, class differentiation, and gender discrimination. Among all of these topics, Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion* expresses the way women are treated in society in terms of social realism. The aim of this paper is to study sexism or gender discrimination in Shaw's *Pygmalion* and to find out the results of it in women's lives^{vi}.

It is noteworthy that certain social problems that Shaw presents in his early plays, receive greater attention in his later plays. The callousness of Dr. Paramore in *The Philanderer* is exhibited in greater measure in *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

In *Candida* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* the making of a realist involves a salutary demonstration of circumstance, this being necessary for the realization of the will. In this sense only is prosaic speech antipathetic to rhetoric. For those who have achieved realism there is no conflict. The audience does not see March banks and Brassbound after the epiphanies of their conversions, but it does see Lady Cicely as available to both modes.

George Bernard Shaw's play addresses the old idea of the individual's capability to advance through society. Shaw seems to use his characters to demonstrate the necessity of human evolution. his plays also addresses "middle class morality" and upper-class superficiality, the social ills of nineteenth century England and induces the idea that all people are worthy of respect and dignity, from the wealthy nobleman to the beggar on the street corner. Eliza has a very strong character and she does her best to stand up to patronizing Higgins.

Shaw's play, it is argued, suggests that an education disproportionate with socio-cultural factors could probably empower the marginal social subjects but it would also displace them, rather than truly promote them, socially. To improve the intellectual consciousness of his people and to progress their social condition, Shaw dramatized the relation between sexes, the individual and society, and the problems of integrity, marriage, and religion^{vii}.

Shaw is a restless socialist who searches for a way to demonstrate the dark side of the society, and to do so he follows Ibsen's critical views on social issues by virtue of stage. Suleiman asserts (2010)^{viii}:

He regards the stage as a proper place to teach people since the previous Victorian playwrights said nothing about the bleak world the audience lived in. He admires Henrik Ibsen's plays since they touch greatness by sparking political and philosophical debate. Using the stage as a forum to cross-examine society, Ibsen shows Shaw how theater could serve ideal thoughts. (p. 11)



He is a writer who wastes no time to show his disagreement on social and political conventions and becomes a meticulous observer of society and its problems. His plays focus on the socio-political aspects of life. He is much concerned about the injustice, discrimination, starvation and destitution, which have covered the whole world like a fare well shroud.

Furthermore, many critics focus on Shaw's socialist ideas, and research how these emerge in his plays: what institutions does he attack, what ideals does he try to destroy, his opinion on society in general and what he wants to alter. *Charles Carpenter* (1969) for example, focuses on what Shaw aimed for ethically, on his dramatic methods and how these strategies emerge in the plays. Furthermore, Carpenter also explains Shaw's concepts in his Plays *Unpleasant* (1898) and *Plays Pleasant* (1898), and investigates how Shaw applied his ideas in the different plays. However, there is more to Shaw than his Socialism.

Conclusion

Shaw's social realism aims not at the correct appraisal of the existing social condition, but at the exposure of the misunderstanding on which this social condition rests. It may seem unsuitable to judge Shaw's realism from the common standards of life. The setting of the play too appears to the full presence of realism in the play *Arms and the Man*. It is a general opinion of the literary world that Shaw is more of a thinker, a social reformer, a propagandist, and a literary humourist than a dramatic artist. In a way, Shaw himself has created this imprint. He once said,

"I am no ordinary playwright. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation was gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion on sexual and social matters. I have no other incentive to write plays as I am not dependent on it for my livelihood".^{ix,x}

Apart from the significance of the themes to modern society, the plays have substantial dramatic interest as plays themselves. For Shaw, the way in which a theme is treated is very important. He seems to be as much anxious with the artistic treatment of a social problem as its seriousness. Even if the themes are out-dated, Shaw's early plays are attractive to us by virtue of their art of characterization, brilliant discussion, and animating prose and, above all, their glittering wit and an.

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