The "Devil of a Childhood" and the Creation of "Mother-Woman": An Analysis of G B Shaw's Portrayal of Woman Characters

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 2

Month: June

Year: 2024

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Impact Factor: 3.025

Citation:
Marx, T., and S. Ravindranathan. "The 'Devil of a Childhood' and the Creation of 'Mother-Woman': An Analysis of G B Shaw's Portrayal of Woman Characters." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities,* vol. 11, no. S2, 2024, pp. 83–92.

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12606237

T. Marx
Professor, Department of English
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9327-5533

S. Ravindranathan
Professor Emeritus (Formerly), Department of English
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University
Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract
The literary world of George Bernard Shaw accorded a prominent role to women. Shaw, from a psychological standpoint, was an almost quintessential embodiment of a shy individual grappling with an inferiority complex. Shaw's tumultuous upbringing, dubbed a "devil of a childhood," coupled with his family dynamics and the prevailing social conditions of his time, undoubtedly played a pivotal role in shaping his perceptions of women. His innate sense of inferiority and androgynous nature must have exerted a considerable influence on his ideas concerning women. Transcending the conventional portrayals, Shaw accorded women an elevated status, depicting them as figures commanding respect and admiration. This distinct perspective, the paper contends, emanated from Shaw's own insecurities and his propensity to blur the boundaries of gender norms.

Keywords: Androgyny, Alienation, Mother-Woman, Social Mobility and Gender Fluidity.

Introduction

Bernard Shaw's portrayal of women in his plays holds a significant place in the literary realm, showcasing his profound respect and admiration for women. As Bertrand Russell astutely observed, "Shaw, considered psychologically, was an almost perfect example of the shy man with an inferiority complex", and this unique trait undoubtedly influenced his perception and depiction of women. Shaw's formative years were marked by what he termed a "devil of a childhood," shaped by the complexities of his family dynamics and the prevailing social conditions of his time. These formative experiences likely played a pivotal role in shaping his conceptualization of womanhood, imbuing it with a depth and nuance that resonated across his works. The interplay between Shaw's inferiority complex and his androgynous nature must have had a profound impact on his ideas and portrayals of women. This duality, a delicate balance between the masculine and feminine, enabled him to perceive and capture the multifaceted nature of womanhood with remarkable insight and sensitivity.

In his plays, Shaw honoured women not merely as objects of love but as human worthy of profound respect and, at times, even a sense of awe. His female characters were imbued with strength, intelligence, and agency, challenging the prevailing stereotypes of the time and elevating the perception of women to a realm of empowerment and equality. Through his master storytelling, Shaw illuminated the complexities of the female psyche, exploring the depth of their emotions, the breadth of their intellect, and the resilience of their spirits. His works celebrated the inherent power and grace of women, inviting audiences to confront their own preconceptions and embrace a more enlightened and egalitarian view of gender dynamics.

Traumatic Childhood

Shaw's personal experiences, coupled with his unique psychological makeup, sculpted his artistic voice and enabled him to craft narratives that resonated with profundity and authenticity. His portrayal of women stood as a testament to his ability to transcend societal norms and embrace the inherent worth and dignity of the feminine spirit, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape and inspiring generations to come. From his father, Shaw inherited his sense of humour and anti-climactic style, while from his mother, he derived his fertile imagination. Shaw's family was dominated by his mother's influence. He disapproved of his mother's intimate relationship with her voice teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, not only because of its impropriety but also because it constantly reminded him of the lingering uncertainty surrounding his paternity. As Stephen Grecco astutely observes, "that he might have been the son of George Vandeleur Lee and not George Carr Shaw haunted him throughout his life. Hence, the twin themes of doubtful parentage and of hatred of mothers and motherhood became important leitmotifs which pervaded his life and works." (Grecco 95)

Unquestionably, the woman who exerted the profoundest influence upon Shaw's life was his own mother. While admiring her abilities and masculine traits from childhood, he also suffered from her emotional coldness and lack of domesticity: "Under all the circumstances it says a great deal for my mother's humanity that she did not hate her children. She did not hate anybody, nor love anybody... She did not concern herself much about us; for she had never been taught that mothering is a science... In short, my mother was, from the technical point of view of a modern welfare worker, neither a mother, nor a wife, and could be classed only a Bohemian anarchist with lady-like habits." (Shaw *Sixteen Self-Sketches* 13)

Shaw unequivocally declares his mother to be "the worst in the world," yet paradoxically admits that he "would not have changed her for any other mother in existence." Shaw's mother naturally became the archetypal woman figure in his plays. Given his familial circumstances, it is unsurprising that Shaw's plays frequently feature rebellious children attempting to educate their parents or liberate themselves from parental constraints. The alienation of children from their parents emerges as a central theme woven throughout Shaw's literary oeuvre.

Evidently, one does not find a peaceful domestic environment in the world portrayed by Shaw. Instead, one encounters only dominant mothers and rebellious children. Almost all the mothers in Shaw's plays are either overbearing towards or indifferent to their children and families. Mrs. Warren in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is "largely modelled after Shaw's own mother, who, like Kitty Warren, struggled to raise herself and her family's social standing through questionable means." (Grecco 95) Mrs. Warren is quite domineering and a matter-of-fact woman. When she realizes that reconciliation with her daughter is impossible, she resolves to continue her way of life without any regret.

Shaw characterizes Mrs. Warren through stage directions, dialogue, and character-interaction. The stage direction introducing her is quite revealing: "Mrs. Warren is between 43 and 50, formerly

pretty, showily dressed in a brilliant hat and a gay blouse fitting tightly over her bust and flanked by fashionable sleeves. Rather spoilt and domineering, and decidedly vulgar, but, on the whole, a genial and a fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman." (*Plays* 64)

One can understand her perspective on life from Vivie Warren's own statement: "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." (*Plays* 77) Unwilling to lose her daughter forever, Mrs. Warren attempts a compromise. To impress upon Vivie that she has changed, she meets her in a different costume, as the stage direction reveals: "She has done her best to make herself matronly and dignified. The brilliant hat is replaced by a sober bonnet, and the gay blouse covered by a costly black silk mantle. She is pitiably anxious and ill at ease evidently panic-stricken." (*Plays* 88) However, the change in Mrs. Warren is only superficial, as her confrontation with Vivie fails to produce any desirable result. Defiantly, she declares: "From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I'll do wrong and nothing but wrong. And I'll prosper on it." (*Plays* 92) If one understands Mrs. Warren's dilemma throughout the play, which is revealed through stage directions and dialogue, one begins to admire her when she refuses to shake hands with VIVIE at the end. The hostile behaviour intensifies the character interaction:

VIVIE (kindly) Wont you shake hands?

MRS WARREN (after looking at her fircely for a moment with a savage impulse to strike her) No thank you, Good bye. (*Plays* 92)

Catherine Petkoff of *Arms and the Man* and Mrs. Whitefield of *Man and Superman* are imprecisely drawn characters. They are intelligent enough to see through the hypocritical behaviour of their daughters, though dominant enough to command them. However, the notable point is that no cordiality exists between the daughters and mothers. When Major Petkoff praises Raina for always appearing at the right moment, Catherine retorts that Raina 'listens for it,' which is an abominable habit. Catherine's attitude towards her daughters can be seen through a stage direction: Mrs. Whitefield's role in the play is revealed through a stage direction: "Catherine (looking after her, her fingers (itching) Oh, if you were only ten years younger!" (*Plays* 108)

Shaw's brief character sketch of Mrs. Whitefield, immediately after an elaborate description of Ann Whitefield, suggests Mrs. Whitefield's trivial role in the play. This is further revealed in the interaction between Mrs. Whitefield and Ann. Mrs. Whitefield is quite aware of Ann's pseudo-sense of duty, and she declares that she will have nothing to do with it. She sounds more pathetic when she informs Tanner of her plight: "I don't know why it is that other people's children are so nice to me, and that my own have so little consideration for me. It's no wonder I don't seem able to care for Ann and Rhoda as I do for you and Tavy and Violet." (*Plays* 400) She hates Ann so much that she, along with King Henry IV, would have prayed: "Oh that it could be proved/ That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged / In cradle-clothes our children where they lay."

Sublimation of Subjective Experiences

The women protagonists, Mrs. Clandon from the play *You Never Can Tell* and Lady Britomart from *Major Barbara*, share remarkable similarities with Shaw's own mother, who lived apart from her husband. Their interactions with their estranged spouses are not driven by a desire for reconciliation but rather by the need to resolve matters concerning the futures of their children. The strained and antagonistic relationships portrayed between Mrs. Clandon and Lady Britomart with their respective spouses mirror the irreconcilable rift that existed between George Bernard Shaw's parents. This rift was so profound that no member of the Shaw family attended the funeral of George Carr Shaw, Shaw's father, a striking testament to the enduring estrangement within the family dynamics. Mrs. Clandon, who does not even bear her husband's surname Crampton, portrays herself as a modern, twentieth-century woman. The stage directions in *You Never Can Tell* suggest that Mrs. Clandon and her daughter Gloria bear characteristic traits reminiscent of Shaw's mother

and sister Lucy. Gloria, having instantly fallen in love with Valentine, feels ashamed and accuses her mother of failing to raise her properly. Lady Britomart is another example of a domineering mother figure in Shaw's works. Her bullying has reduced her son Stephen to an imbecile. The analysis of the diverse female characters in Shaw's plays offers a nuanced exploration of womanhood, reflecting the playwright's progressive views on gender roles and societal norms. Shaw skilfully crafts compelling heroines who challenge traditional stereotypes, evoking sympathy for even the most complex and flawed individuals.

Even in his portrayal of authoritative women like Mrs. Dudgeon, Shaw highlights the inequalities of the time, particularly the unequal laws that denied women the right to property. Despite their assertive natures, these characters reveal a vulnerability that humanizes them, inviting empathy from the audience. Shaw's heroines often embody a nurturing, maternal quality that contrasts with his own mother's and the typical Shavian mothers' lack of such traits. Mrs. Higgins, an authoritative figure, in *Pygmalion*, finds herself unable to effectively manage her son Higgins' erratic and unpredictable behaviour, despite the absence of animosity between them. Higgins perceives his mother as the embodiment of a lovable woman, which contributes to his decision to remain a bachelor. The manifestation of the Oedipus complex, as exemplified by Higgins' character, can be attributed to Shaw's own psychological tendencies and personal experiences, reflecting a deeper, underlying dynamic within the playwright's psyche. The dynamics between mother and son, characterized by a lack of harmony despite the absence of hatred, stem from Higgins' disorderly conduct, which his mother struggles to contend with. Ultimately, Higgins' perception of his mother as the epitome of a desirable woman leads him to eschew matrimony, reflecting the Oedipus complex that Shaw himself seemed to exhibit. Characters like Vivie Warren, Raina, and even the formidable Candida exhibit fleeting moments of motherly affection, revealing a softer side beneath their resolute exteriors. Even a character like Vivie Warren, known for her no-nonsense demeanour, exhibits a brief moment of motherly affection towards Frank. This is exemplified by the scene where Frank nestles "against her like a weary child" and Vivie "rocking him like a nurse," underscoring the maternal instinct within Vivie. Similarly, Raina displays traces of motherliness when she compassionately aids Bluntschli, despite not knowing his identity. The maternal image is further reinforced when Bluntschli threatens to weep if scolded, and Raina refers to him as "the poor darling" who is "worn out." These instances suggest that Shaw imbued his heroines with a nurturing, maternal essence that contrasted with the apparent lack of such qualities in his own mother and the mothers he portrayed.

Candida, in *Candida* serves as one of the most prominent examples of Shaw's 'mother-women,' her maternal qualities consistently portrayed through her gentle demeanour and nurturing presence. Her ability to guide and support the emotionally vulnerable characters, such as Marchbanks, exemplifies her maternal nature, culminating in her selfless choice to remain with the weaker Morell, stripping him of his pride and forcing him to acknowledge her multifaceted role in his life. Elsie Adams convincingly explains the complexity of character in Candida and how Shaw achieves it: "Shaw's greatest portraits of women are complex and do not belong to a single type. Candida... is portrayed as a seductress, planning to initiate Marchbanks into a knowledge of "What love really is"; at the same time, her primary instinct is for mothering the phrases "silly boy" or "my boy" punctuate her speech to both Morrell and Marchbanks. And in the comparison Candida to "the Virgin of the Assumption over her hearth" and the reverence both men have for her, she can be seen as a Shaw Madonna, in a play which he called "The Mother Play". The interfacing of types in such a complex portrayal adds depth and texture to Candida and the play." (20)

The act of kneeling down beside Candida is a kinetic expression that evokes a boyish quality in both Morell and Marchbanks, as a response to Candida's predominant maternal nature. Although

Lady Cicely's influence as a 'mother-woman' may not be as profoundly rooted as Candida's, it holds a universal presence. The authorial introduction is quite telling: "A woman of great vitality and humanity, who begins a casual acquaintance at the point usually attained by the English people after thirty years' acquaintance when they are capable of reaching it all" (*Plays* 301) Being a mother woman, Lady Cicely is convinced that "all men are children in the nursery." (*Plays*. p. 307) And she treats them so!

Other characters, like Lady Cicely and Nora Reilly, also exhibit maternal influences, guiding and nurturing those around them with a gentle yet commanding presence. In the play *John Bull's Other Island*, Nora Reilly is portrayed as a young woman whose sense of self-respect does not permit her to pursue romantic endeavours in an audacious manner. However, she possesses nurturing qualities, which are revealed when Broadbent, perhaps under the influence of alcohol, behaves romantically towards her. Rather than reacting with anger, "She takes his arm with motherly solicitude and urges him gently towards the path." (*Plays* 424) Similarly, even Joan, who rejects her femininity, is not devoid of maternal traits. She exhibits a motherly demeanour particularly towards the Dauphin, referring to him affectionately as "Charlie" and treating him like a child, as evident in her statement, "Thou poor child, thou hast never prayed in thy life. I must teach thee from the beginning."

Despite their varying circumstances and attitudes, both Nora Reilly and Joan possess an inherent nurturing nature, which manifests in their interactions with the male characters, revealing their capacity for maternal care and guidance. Even the seemingly unwomanly Joan and the comical Queen Jemima display maternal moments, revealing the pervasive nature of this archetype in Shaw's works. Critics have analysed Shaw's female characters through various lenses, recognizing their capabilities, passions, independence, and pursuit of agency. However, the maternal quality remains a common thread, transcending categories and reflecting the playwright's nuanced understanding of womanhood. Eric Bentley tags them as "capable unromantic women" "passionate women", "newer new women" and "the girl heroines." (115) Nethercot has discoursed Shavian heroines as "womanly woman" "the pursuing women," "the mother women," "the New women," "the younger generation" and "the manly woman." (77-126) Elsie Adams views the female characters depicted by Shaw as variations or manifestations of fundamental literary archetypes: "temptress, mother, goddess." (18) However, the various categories suggested by the critics are often intersecting. Shaw's heroines can be broadly divided into "pursuing women" and "independent women," reflecting his own complex views on gender dynamics and socio-economic philosophies.

The biological drive for creation takes on a philosophical dimension in Shaw's worldview, according to his Life Force theory. In the process of evolution, woman emerges as the primary agent of pursuit, profoundly influencing the trajectory of the human species and deeply engrossed in its future. Meanwhile, man's role appears fleeting, prompting a directed focus toward intellectual and social endeavours. Driven by a fear of abandonment, woman maintains man's domesticity through feigned interest in his pursuits. While ordinary men succumb to this entanglement, the philosopher, embodying a distinct liberation, transcends to fulfil his ordained role as dictated by the Life Force.

Shaw's philosophical stance is often linked to his androgynous disposition. Intimately acquainted with women who were either fiercely independent actresses or trapped in unhappy marriages, Shaw's experiences undoubtedly shaped his theoretical framework. It is plausible that Shaw gravitated towards women of agency and competence, evident in his dalliances with married women. The most paradoxical incident was his unconsummated marriage with Charlotte Payne-Townshend.

Contemporary sociological conditions likely convinced Shaw of the need for women to take the initiative in love affairs, as marriage was often the only option available to them then. Shaw

believed that economic independence was needed to make relations between men and women honourable. Hence, his antipathy towards the institution of marriage, which made women inferior. He fought against male arrogance and wanted women independent enough to obtain divorce on demand. Shaw also wanted to remove romance from sex, expressing, "Sex was-sex. 'Woman, lovely woman' did not exist women was the female of the species as man was the male, This ruthless cutting away of romantic illusion exposed many lies that marriage is essentially a matter of love that chastity is a moral issue; that sexual constancy is a moral issue; that sexual attraction is founded on love, that sexual constancy is normal for women but abnormal for men..." (Peters 199)

The First World War served as a catalyst for a profound shift, heralding a new era of emancipation for women. The indispensable contribution of female labour during this period rendered it increasingly untenable for England to continue denying women their rightful entitlements. This pivotal juncture paved the way for the recognition of women's rights, a watershed moment in the annals of social progress. Suffrage, though granted grudgingly, symbolized women's social mobility. The enhanced educational avenues and increased opportunities have empowered women to advance and gain recognition in society. Shaw championed women who were self-sufficient and not deemed socially, economically, or intellectually inferior to men. However, the Shavian notion of womanhood encapsulates a paradoxical essence. To fulfil her Life Force duty, she must pursue men while depending on them biologically. Yet Shaw wanted women independent of men socially and economically. His plays characterize both types convincingly, as Barbara Bellow Watson observes, "Shaw's portrayal of women shows a great attention to their real characteristics, even to the non-sexual details of their outward appearance. Shaw's stage directions, especially those for his earlier plays, bear out Archibald Henderson's observation that 'In feminine details-name, dress, hat, gown, ribands, costume illustrative of character- Shaw was more meticulous and sensitive to nuances than many women'." (17)

The Shavian pursuing women are daring, taking sexual initiative and achieving goals. Blanche in *Widowers' Houses* is the first such heroine, introduced with emphatic stage directions highlighting her vitality and lack of refinement. Her strong-mindedness prompts her father's worried aside: "Now if I fight it out with her, no more comfort for months. And if I give in now; 1 shall have to give in always" (*Plays* 21) Significantly, Blanche begins the conversation with Dr. Trench and encourages his proposal through physical tactics more persuasive than words. Her pursuit succeeds by getting Trench crushed into accepting her and profiting from slum landlordism – the Life Force in action. Trench is crushed into becoming her bread-winner and incidentally her father's business partner, Alan S. Downer fairly summarizes the character of Blanche in a brief statement: "The sweet young thing hauls her maid about the stage by the hair of her head, takes the initiative in the love scenes, and finally seduces the hero into accepting the profits of slum landlordism." (13) What he has not said is that it is the Life Force in action.

Raina in *Arms and the Man* is a refined version of the pursuing Blanche, replacing crudeness with Victorian propriety and hypocrisy. Raina's conscious beauty and romantic nature are highlighted. She helps the fugitive Bluntschli escape while betrothed to Sergius, then chooses to marry Bluntschli – both discarding romantic poses adopted from Byron and Pushkin.

Shaw's portrayal of Cleopatra in his play presents her as a pursuing woman, although she prefers the term "new woman." Unlike Shakespeare's depiction, Shaw's Cleopatra does not employ techniques to ensnare Caesar, who is immune to such ploys due to his intellectual prowess. Instead, she attempts to impress him with her newfound grandeur acquired under his tutelage, utilizing tactics like hosting grand dinners and appearing in mourning attire upon his departure. However, her core nature remains unchanged, as evidenced by her act of vengeance in murdering Pothinus.

In *Man and Superman*, Ann Whitefield embodies the culmination of the pursuing woman archetype, though she employs subtle and controlled methods. Shaw's introductory stage direction hints at her complex nature, and Tanner, her chosen victim, fails to recognize her intentions. Ann's statement, "There's no such thing as a willing man when you really go for him," (*Plays* 399) destroys the illusion of mutual love, and Shaw's letter to Josephine Preston Peabody confirms her role as the "Mother Woman," endowed with "enormous fascination" for breeding men: "Ann is the Mother Woman. She is not an artist aiming at the production of poems and romances like Octavius, or at the formulation of a philosophy of life, like Tanner. She is not a moralist, like Ramsden, nor a sensualist like nobody in the play. She is a breeder of men specialized by Nature to that end and endowed with enormous fascination for it, and all the twaddling little minor moralities that stand between her and her purposes, for instance, that she mu not be a naughty girt and tell fibs, and that she must not be what you… call 'bestial'- all become the merest impertinences." (Shaw Collected Letters 474-475).

In *Major Barbara*, the biological theme takes a backseat, and the characters become symbolic. Barbara's introduction is brief, emphasizing her energetic nature and Salvation Army uniform over physical descriptions. She represents an intellectual woman rather than a pursuing one, and her attempt to convert Undershaft ultimately leads to her own transformation and domestication. Critics offer varying interpretations of Barbara, Joseph Frank suggesting that she can transform "the factory of death into a city of life" or Margery Morgan viewing her as a "Christ figure." However, the ease with which she sheds her uniform contradicts these notions, aligning more with W T Jewkes' analysis of her as "an escapist with child-like enthusiasm" and a lack of firm convictions.

The play marks a shift where the biological theme is superseded by an intellectual structure, and the pursuing woman no longer holds sway. Men and women have become socially and economically equal, and the difference between the sexes is minimized, paving the way for women of intellectual independence like Vivie Warren. Vivie is introduced as an attractive, sensible, highly educated, and confident young woman, embodying Shaw's concept of the independent woman through her business-like dress and chatelaine with pen and knife. "She is an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly educated young, middle-class English woman. Age 22. Prompt, strong, confident, self-possessed. Plain business-like dress, but not dowdy. She wears a chatelaine at her belt, with a fountain pen and a paper knife among its pendants." (*Plays* 62) Her masculinity is further emphasized by her preferences for hard chairs, smoking, a strong handshake, and drinking. While she could sympathize with her mother's circumstances, Vivie is disillusioned by Mrs. Warren's continued involvement in the profession and her reliance on that income. Her decision to sever ties with her mother and pursue an independent life without romance marks the thematic end of the play, albeit with an anti-climactic twist typical of Shaw.

In the characterization of Vivie, Shaw provides her with a complexity by suggesting traits of an institutionalized child. During their initial encounter, Vivie informs Praed: "I hardly know my mother. Since I was a child I have lived in England, at school or college, or with people paid to take charge of me. I have been boarded out all my life. My mother has lived in Brussels or Vienna and never let me go to her. " (*Plays* 64) Wasserman astutely analyses Vivie's character from a psychological perspective, stating that "Even though he was not familiar with psychoanalysis and could not possibly have known of recent studies of the correlation between institutional children and the recurrence of specific personality traits, Shaw nevertheless was able to instinctively sense the effects of institutional life upon Vivie's character." (72) Nethercot's assertion that Vivie is "a pragmatic materialist" and Valli Rao's "Blakean interpretation of Vivie" shed light on the complexity of Vivie's character.

Shaw's independent women thrive and improve themselves against adversity. Eliza, a flower girl, meets Higgins with the intention of learning proper pronunciation to start a flower shop. Being intelligent, she not only acquires pronunciation skills but also manners and a sense of independence. Shaw effectively depicts the contrast between Eliza's initial and transformed positions through stage directions and her style of speech. Shaw's introduction of Eliza is quite picturesque, with her speech style revealing her social standing as a flower girl, and the directions highlighting her poverty:

THE FLOWER GIRL (picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket) Theres menners fyer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad. (She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady's right. She is not at all an attractive person. She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly older. She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. (*Plays* 716)

While Eliza is grateful to Higgins for teaching her phonetics, she is equally thankful to Pickering for treating her like a lady. She has now acquired refined sensibilities and a sense of independence. She conveys her feelings after her transformation to Pickering in a refined manner, indicative of her change: "apart from the things anyone can pick up the dressing and the proper way of speaking and so on, the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady. and always will." (*Plays* 746-747)

Humiliated by Higgins' lack of appreciation for her transformation into a lady, Eliza declares her ability to thrive without him. Her education is complete, and she has acquired intellectual independence, symbolically marked by her hurling slippers at Higgins. Critics like Joseph Woodkrutch, attempting to justify the title, argue that Higgins should marry Eliza. The very controversy surrounding whether Eliza should marry Higgins or Freddy bears testimony to Shaw's masterful characterization. It is not crucial whether Eliza marries Higgins or Freddy; what matters is that she has acquired a sense of independence, as Sonja aptly summarizes Eliza's character: "In Eliza, Shaw created a modern, energetic and enterprising woman, intelligent and receptive, eager to learn and be educated for a career of her own. She intends to be an independent woman, not only a mere appendix to a man, but his companion and loving wife Thus she becomes one of Shaw's most successful stage characters, combining some of the best qualities of an Unwomanly Woman with a Womanly Woman's emotional temperament and sensibility." (147)

Joan is a saint who meets a martyr's fate. In portraying Joan, Shaw makes no reference to her feminine charms. She is attired in red, an "able-bodied country girl of 17 or 18." Her first words in the play shock Captain Robert, as she claims to convey God's instructions to him: "Captain, you are to provide me with a horse, armour, and soldiers, and send me to the Dauphin. Those are your orders from my Lord." Shaw meticulously crafts Joan's character, skilfully integrating coincidences in the guise of miracles, yet preserving Joan's innocence regarding them. The sole miracle she attributes to herself is the elevation of the Dauphin to the throne of France. While Joan aids the French army and her "voices" are revered, even feared, once victory is secured, she becomes redundant, and her "voices" are labelled as blasphemous. When Joan is arrested, the French offer no assistance. In her trial by the Ecclesiastical court, she is pronounced guilty. To secure her life, Joan agrees to apologize and accept guilt, hoping for freedom. But upon learning that she will be imprisoned until death, she prefers to be burnt at the stake. Shaw imbues her love of nature with such vibrancy that one cannot help but compare her to Shelley or Keats. Joan is burnt at the stake. She appears again in the epilogue, canonized. But her tone is sadder: "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long,

O Lord, how long?" (*Plays* 1009) In her frustration and diminishing belief in humanity's capacity for learning, Joan parallels King Magnus. As an iconoclast, she diverges in her sentiments and actions, aspiring to enhance a society that values freedom and tolerates diverse religions. Her penchant for independent thought, exemplified by her attire—always in men's clothing—and disinterest in conventional feminine pursuits, is perceived as sacrilegious by others: "I am a soldier: I do not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman. I do not care for the things women care for. They dream of lovers and money. I dream of leading a charge and placing the big guns." (*Plays* 977)

There is a predominance of the animus in Joan, and she possesses the traits of a Shavian Genius. She could be called a Woman-Genius, a manifestation of the Shavian Life Force. She overcomes her sense of loneliness, braving ordinary human instincts: "Do not think you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone. France is alone, and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God?... my loneliness shall be my strength too...." (*Plays* 989)

Conclusion

The pursuit of the intellectual woman reaches its apex in Ann Whitefield, while Saint Joan embodies the ultimate fulfilment of the self-sacrificing woman striving for the betterment of the world. Though Ann seeks a mate to produce a superior being, Joan willingly surrenders herself for a greater cause. Despite the broad categorization of Shavian women, pigeonholing them would be an injustice, for they are distinctly individualistic and sharply delineated. Barbara, for instance, defies classification as either a pursuer or an independent woman. Even among those who belong to a defined category, there is a remarkable variety in their behaviour, ideological presentation, thus underscoring their fundamental individuality. The unifying element among all Shavian women is their vitality – they are bold, decisive, unwavering in their resolutions, and bravely confront reality. Shaw's masterful use of paradox, anti-climax, and character interplay imbues these women with a richness of individuality and complexity. Their multidimensionality transcends simplistic categorization, a testament to Shaw's nuanced portrayal of women characters.

References

1. Adams, Elsie. "Feminism and Female Stereotypes in Shaw, *Shaw Review*. XVII, No. 1 (January 1974)
2. Bentley, Eric. *Bernard Shaw* London, Methuen, 1967
3. Crompton, Louis *Shaw the Dramatist: A Study of the Intellectual Background of the Major plays* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971.
4. Downer, Alan S. "Shaw's First Play. in Norman Rosenblood, ed., *Seven Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971)
5. Frank, Joseph "Major Barbara: Shaw's Divine Comedy." *PMLA* Vol. 71 (1956), 61-74
6. Grecco, Stephen, "Vivie Warren's Profession: A new Look at Mrs. Warren's Profession," *Shaw Review*, X, No. 3 (Septemper 1967)
7. Jewkes W T "The Faust Theme in Major Barbara" *Shaw Review* XXI (1978) 80-91
8. Lorichs, Sonja. *The Unwomanly Woman in Bernard Shaw's Drama and Her Social and Political Background* (Uppsala Universitetsbiblioteket, 1973)
9. Marlie P Wasserman "Vivie Warren: A Psychological Study." *Shaw Review*, XV. No. 2 (May 1972)
10. Morgan, Margery M "Shaw, Yeats, Nietzsche, and the Religion of Arts" *A Quarterly of Drama and the Art of Theatre* 1 (1966) 24-34.
11. Nethercot, Arthur H. *Men and Supermen: The Shavian Portrait Gallery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1954), pp. 77-126.

12. Peters, Margot "As Lonely as God." in Michael Holroyd, ed., *The Genius of Shaw: A Symposium* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979
13. Shaw, George Bernard. *Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1898-1910*, ed. Dan H. Laurence London Max Reinhardt, 1972
14. Shaw, George Bernard. *Sixteen Self-Sketches* London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1949
15. Shaw, George Bernard. *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw*. London, Paul Hamlyn Limited, 1965.
16. Valli Rao, "Vivie Warren in the Blakean World of Experience," *Shaw Review*, XXII, No. 3 (September 1979), 124-127.
17. Watson, Barbara Bellow *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964).