

The Idea of Philandering in G.B. Shaw's

The Philanderer

Submitted By

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The Philanderer

is one of the high-end plays which was submitted by Bernard Shaw. The play is attractive, vivid and honest. The play presented two layers of upper-class society and middle-income people. Also, the play discussed marriage with love and marriage without love, and the purpose of the play is not only to entertain but to raise awareness about social problems and at the same time criticizing of capitalist behavior. The play dealt with the gradual evolution in human rights.

Life of G. B. Shaw

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on 26 July 1856¹. His father, George Carr Shaw (1814-1885), was a civil servant; his mother, Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw née Gurly (1830-1913) was a professional singer. Shaw had two sisters, Lucinda Frances, and Elinor Agnes.¹

As a child, Shaw briefly attended the Methodist grammar school: Wesley College, before moving to a private school near Dalkey and then transferring to Dublin's Central Model School.² He ended his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. When his mother left home and followed her voice teacher, Shaw was almost sixteen years old. His sisters accompanied their mother,³ but Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, first as a reluctant pupil, then as a clerk in a state office. He worked efficiently, albeit discontentedly, for several years. In 1876, Shaw joined his mother's London household who provided him with his expenses while he frequented the public libraries and the British Museum reading-room, where he studied earnestly and began writing novels.⁴ His first novels were rejected, until 1885, when he became self-supporting as a critic of the arts.⁵

Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the *Fabian Society*,⁶ a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means.

during the course of his political activities, he met Charlotte Payne Townshend, an Irish heiress and fellow Fabian. They married in 1898. However, at Charlotte's insistence, the marriage was never consummated, though Shaw had a number of affairs with married women.⁷

After that, the Shaws moved into a house, now called *Shaw's Corner*, at Ayot St. Lawrence, a small village in Hertfordshire, England. This was to be their home for the remainder of their lives, although they also maintained a residence at 29 Fitzroy Square in London.

Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1890s. By the end of the decade, he became an established playwright. He wrote sixty-three plays, and his output as a novelist, critic, pamphleteer, an essayist and a private correspondent was prodigious. He is known to have written more than 250000 letters.⁸ Shaw founded the *London School of Economic and Political Science* in 1895 with funding provided by private philanthropy, including a bequest of £ 20000 from Henry Hunt Hutchinson to the *Fabian Society*. In 1925, Shaw was awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature for his contributions to literature. He was also awarded an Oscar in 1938 for his work on the film *Pygmalion*.⁹

Another important thing that Shaw was used to enjoying during his later years was attending the grounds at Shaw's Corner. At the age of 91, he joined the Interplanetary Society for the last three years of his life. Shaw died at the age of 94,¹⁰ of renal failure precipitated by a fall from a ladder while pruning a tree in the garden of his house. His ashes, mixed with those of his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, were scattered along footpaths and around the statue of Saint Joan in their garden.

Influences on *The Philanderer* (1893)

Alongside *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *The Philanderer* is one of the three plays Shaw published as *Plays Unpleasant* in 1898. The volume was written to raise awareness of social problems and to criticize the capitalist behaviour towards marriage. The influence of the Naturalist anti-melodrama theatre movement is evident by Shaw's constant reference to Ibsen in the play itself.¹¹

Shaw is one of the rare few dramatists who have realized their childhood dreams. His active sex life began late in his thirties and might have ended fairly early with his "white" marriage to a woman somewhat his senior. He might have viewed his passions ideally, but in his peculiar way, he actually felt them. Here, Shaw's artistic ambitions go beyond emotional autobiography. He transforms his experience into another in his early attempts both to crack the London theatre's commercial-comedy market, and to update its back word-looking moves. Charteris, the Philanderer, a Shaw-like title-character, is as un-heroic as the male lead that a comedy can get. Tired of dallying with hyperemotional, husband-hungry Julia Craven — the elder daughter of a rich army officer—he has turned his attention to a more soignée widow.¹²

The Philanderer is usually approached simply as an amateurish, rough, flawed version of *Man and Superman* (1903). *The Philanderer* is professedly the study of a male-flirt. The defect of the play seems most clearly to exhibit Shaw's own main defect: the want of any real experience in life, which prevents him from moving on the side for which theatre mainly exists: that of the human action.¹³

Shaw would repeatedly hear this charge that he was heartless, cold-blooded, inhumane, unrealistic, merely delighting in paradoxical writing. But in his "Author's Apology" (1902) for *Mrs. Warren's profession*, he pointed out that his plays seemed paradoxical and inhumane not in relation to real life, but only in relation to the sentimental, romantic, idealized theatrical notion of human behaviour that "do[es] not exist off the stage."¹⁴

The world of the play is that of the middle and upper-middle class. The opening presents a light scene of love-making between Grace and Charteris: two intelligent people. This scene appears to be one of a very sophisticated high type of comedy, with an emphasis on verbal wit. As scene of sharp contrast that seems almost farcical on account of its total reversal of the expected male-female role of pursuer and pursued, as a this scene approaches its climax, it is interrupted by the entrance of Craven and Cuthberson, two long-lost friends.

The *Ibsenite* realist, Charteris, is now surrounded by: i.(a romantic idealist, Julia, who believes in the ideal of the "depth of feeling" as the guarantee for her to be a special human being with a "soul"; and ii.) a military idealist, Craven, who sees society as one large barracks, and sees the observing of social conventions and proprieties as equivalent to that of "following orders." ¹⁵

Summary of the Play

Act I

The play begins when a lady and a gentleman are making love to one another in the drawing-room of a flat in Ashly Gardens in the Victorian district of London. It is night, the room is not a perfect square, the fireplace is on the right, a small round table, further forward on the same side, with a chair beside it.

The lady, Grace Tranfield, is about 32, slight of build, delicate of feature, and sensitive in expression. She, clad in evening dress, has just now given up to the emotion of the moment, but her well-closed mouth, proudly set brows, firm chin, and elegant carriage show plenty of determination and self-respect. The gentleman, Leonard Charteris, is a few years older, and is unconventionally but smartly dressed in a velvet jacket and cashmere trousers. He seems to be a man of justice. His enthusiasm — at which he himself is laughing — and his clever, imaginative, humorous ways, contrast strongly with the sincere tenderness and dignified quietness of the woman.

Act II

Next day at noon, in the library of the *Ibsen Club*, Cuthbertson is seated on the easy chair at the revolving bookstand, reading the "Daily Graphic". Dr. Paramore is on the divan on the right hand recess, reading the "British medical Journal." He is young, not consciously unhappy, nor intentionally insincere, and is highly self-satisfied intellectually. Paramore is a scientific idealist who generally perceives other human beings in the same way that he views microbes in his laboratory. Interestingly, though he is in many ways a sentimental and probably an atheist, he still believes in the sentimental ideal of romantic love.

Sylvia Craven is sitting in the middle of the settee before the fire. She is reading a volume of Ibsen. She is a girl of eighteen, small and trim. Sylvia is actually a "closet idealist." Her ardent feminism may well be just another ideal, for she still defines herself as an "unwomanly woman " rather than as an individual human being. To her mind, being treated as a "man," means that she is accepted as a human being.

Paramore is in love with Julia, but does not think he has a chance. With the entrance of Craven and exit of Paramore, the two men-fathers both (Craven to Julia, Cuthbertson to Grace) exchange a "man to man" talk. By adopting the familiar attitude of male cynicism, they briefly enter into the world of the realist, without realizing what they are doing. Although both of them believe absolutely in the romantic ideal of the institution of marriage, Craven confides to Cuthbertson: "well, Jo, I may as well make a clean breast of it – everybody knew it. I married for money." ¹⁶ This moment is complicated by the fact that Cuthbertson married the woman with whom Craven was in love, but it is still the only moment in the play where those two characters let the masks fall away. It is also the only scene in which they are together onstage alone. When Charteris enters, he explains his dilemma frankly to Craven and Cuthbertson, hoping for some advice from the two "men of the world. " Suddenly, the two assume the typical role of fathers again, and both are shocked when they find out that Charteris wants to talk "man to man" about the communications he has received from both Grace and Julia since he saw them in act I.

Julia arrives, and Cuthbertson and Craven go to lunch, while Julia finds a pretense to lag behind. Once again, the play approaches farcical dimensions as Charteris tries frantically to get out of the clutches of Julia, upsetting all our theatrical expectations of male-female role models.

The scene culminates in a line spoken by almost every heroine of nineteenth-century melodrama, but now it is the man who protests: "unhand me, Julia. If you don't let me go, I'll scream for help." ¹⁷ Sylvia and Charteris are subsequently left alone. They are at ease with each other, and for once Charteris can have a "man to man" talk with someone. Julia is convinced that Charteris's advanced theories about male-female relationships and his objections to romantic love are due to the fact that he

simply has not yet found the right woman — a woman, like her, of sincerity and depth of feeling. But no matter who the woman may be, Charteris appears to be uncompromising in his refusal to act upon romantic, sentimental, and idealized assumptions as if they were real. The point is not that he is heartless, cruel, or unfeeling, for he does have emotions, and he does love Grace. The point is that he refuses to make "intellect" subservient to his "emotions". Accordingly, he refuses to become a character in a popular sentimental drama. Ironically, the more Grace refuses to marry Charteris, the more he is attracted to her; i.e. to the "newness" in her attitude. The second act of the play ends with the posing of the paradox that a true marriage is possible only between people who do not love each other.

Act III

This act begins on a note of gloom with a discussion of Craven's supposed terminal illness: "Paramore's Disease."¹⁸ Grace seems to be out of the picture as a mate for Charteris, which somewhat increases Julia's chances. But Paramore is suddenly much more attractive to Julia now that Grace has shown an interest in him. Moreover, it is not at all certain that Grace will not change her mind about Charteris's proposal. At the end of this act, she insists upon going to Paramore's house to see what will happen in the end .

Act VI

In this act, Julia is overtaken by a bitter dramatic clash of feelings, as we see in the following exchange.

Paramore: *as it is, I can only admire you, and feel how pleasant it is to have you here.*

Julia (bitterly): *And pet me, and say pretty things to me; I wonder you don't offer me a saucer of milk at once..... you seem to regard me very much as if I were a Persian cat.... Cat you are you-all alike, every one of you. Even my father only makes a pet of me.*¹⁹

This is not an act on Julia's part, even though she is toying with the idea of marrying Paramore. As the act progresses, one can see that she is a slave to her feelings or passions, and this is not a noble or wonderful thing. Julia has a recognition comparable to Ibsen's *Nora's*, but she undergoes the further recognition that she can do nothing about it. Paramore himself talks his way through every cliché of romantic love. Unlike Charteris, he fervently believes in all of them. Thus, he earnestly tells her: *believe me: it is not merely your beauty that attracts me: I know other beautiful women. It is your heart, your sincerity, your sterling reality, your great gifts of character....*²⁰ However, his words only further Julia's recognition of how foolish she is when she gives herself over her own emotions.

With the arrival of Craven, Julia and Charteris are left alone in their last confrontation; and here, the theme of the play unfolds. Ultimately, our understanding of Charteris turns out to be an ironic one. One may wonder if his uncompromising refusal to sink to Julia's level has in fact made him sink just as low since his advanced ideas have become just another set of ideals. As a result, the ending of the play is very serious and tragic.

Because *The Philanderer's* ending is by far its most challenging moment, it should not be pushed aside or allowed to "take care of itself" in any production. It demands clear choices by the actors, and a distinct point of view on the part of the director. The audience must take this conclusion seriously, and not just as mere Shavian perversity or paradox. To be part of satisfying theatrical experience, it must present a clear challenge to audience members, the one that they will actually confront once they are outside the theatre. So the ending of the play is neither happy nor funny, neither a paradox nor a "cop-out" on Shaw's show: *The Philanderer* and the unmaking of Shavian drama.²¹

The Play

The Philanderer posits two antithetical approaches to the modern institution of marriage: marriage with love, and marriage without love. Each choice produces unpleasant or even disastrous consequences; and both are found to be insufficient. Therefore, the play does not produce a reconciliation in the end, and this play like *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and *Pygmalion*, is not structurally a comedy. It does

not bring order out of chaos, nor does it reconcile the two-opposites. The synthesis must be provided by the audience. However, the original final act of the play did provide the only possible synthesis: love without marriage.²²

Shaw in *The Philanderer* — as in all his other plays — shatters or at least shows disregard to the popular theatrical conventions of his time. Accordingly, Shaw's major plays are the very apotheosis of the nineteenth-century dramatic technique and the popular performance tradition.²³

Charteris and Julia are the two characters who represent the dialectical extremes of human personality. Charteris "feels" only "intellectually," whereas Julia "thinks" only "feelingly". So, these two figures represent the conflict expressed in a number of different ways in the literature, such as the tension between *Apollo* and *Dionysus*; *Logos* in conflict with *Eros*; the *Ethical Man* versus the *Aesthetic Man*, the struggle between the *Ego* and the *Id*. Any one of these approaches could be fruitful when applied to *The Philanderer*.

The Philanderer shows that marriage is in reality a simple property relationship, devised as a means of effectively propagating the species to the idealist notion of a sacred or holy institution through which man and woman find their ultimate happiness as human beings. Similarly, because it was unpleasant, or even terrifying, to face the inevitable reality of death, the idealists invented the notion of an afterlife, and so on, and so forth.

Shaw's very rare type of character is that of the realist, the man or woman who dares to put the mask away, looks at reality squarely in the face, and calls things by their proper names. A realist is by nature an ironist: one who is incapable of not seeing anything un-ironically. Indeed, this is the tragedy of the ironist. The true realist must be able to preserve an ironic understanding of even his own sense of irony. In fact, he can even turn it into yet another ideal, which truly makes him one man in a thousand. By contrast, the idealist is incapable of an ironic understanding of life.³¹ Therefore, an idealist will wage wars in order to end wars, and build bombs to preserve the peace. It is important not to view these categories as permanent classifications or static conditions. Shaw is presenting an evolutionary principle of human society wherein the realists and idealists

are not so much opposites as the ideologies that are at different levels of development.²⁴

It is important to note that the realist, after ripping away the mask from a given ideal, will eventually substitute another ideal for the one he has just destroyed. Progress does obtain, however, because, as Shaw writes in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, "every new ideal is less of an illusion than the one it has supplanted."²⁵

Now this model of Realism versus Idealism fits certain plays by Ibsen very well, but not all of them. Accordingly, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is much more valuable for understanding Shaw's plays than it is in understanding Ibsen himself.³⁴ Realists such as: Charteris, Grace, Sylvia, and Idealists, such as: Julia, Paramore, Cuthbertson, Craven are modeled on the *Portrait of Idealist* in Shaw's critical book: *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*²⁶

In the play, Cuthbertson's marriage is absolutely wretched to the effect that he is now separated from his wife; still, he defends marriage as an institution to the end. Craven, who was in love with the woman whom Cuthbertson married, gave her up, thereby sacrificing what he considered his happiness for the romantic ideal of doing what was best for her. Eventually, he married not for love, but for money. Grace, a widow, was an Idealist when she married, but the experience of marriage made her a realist. Like Charteris, she has turned the mask off the institution, and now sees marriage not as the fulfillment of human personality through love, but as a conventional social arrangement and property relationship. This means that marriage is not the correct arrangement or relationship for one person who loves another, because it will degrade them both as human beings.²⁷

In addition, Julia herself believes fervently in the romantic ideal of marriage and the sentimental ideal of deep, intense feeling as the ultimate proof of a sincere, noble, and higher form of being. The proper mode for the Idealist is comedy, for the Realist Tragedy. And the Realist-Idealist extremes of character that are linked to the central action of this play may partially explain the seeming incongruity of its structure.

The play takes a specific form of struggle between passion, intellect, and characters. The action of the play is an attempt to reconcile this opposition. The plot forces the characters into a series of choices: Charteris decides to reject Julia, Grace decides to reject Paramore, Julia decides to reject Charteris, Julia decides to marry Paramore. Each decision alters the previous set of circumstances as well as the characters' understanding of them. It complicates the next decision that has to be made. For example, Julia's final decision to marry Paramore is determined by a causal chain of the prior decisive actions in the play.²⁸

Moreover, Shaw allows himself to explore the basis of his understanding of life and human relationships much more honestly than he would in his later plays wherein his ideas about creative evolution had ossified into an orthodoxy. It is itself a human, dramatic tragedy to see Shaw "the realist" thus transform himself into as much of an "idealist" as any such character in his plays.²⁹ In fact, Shaw's ideas become empty and mean nothing because he invests nothing of himself in his work. His devastating wit and incredible intellect become an insulation that ultimately turns against him when one begins to realize that he is clever enough to build convincing arguments for absolutely anything. Shaw's saint and soldier, Greek professor, and munitions-maker can all convince us with equal dexterity that their vision of the world is right. As *Don Juan* himself admits in a Shaw play: *Yes, it is mere talk.... Nothing but words which I or anyone else can turn inside out like a glove.*³⁰

The play remains dark and unpleasant because its purpose is not to entertain its audience as the traditional Victorian Theatre was supposed to be but instead raises awareness of social problems and serves as criticism of capitalist behaviour, despite all its wit and humour. It questions the possibility of a progressive human evolution in a way that can remind one of Ibsen's words:

*Everyone wants their own special revolutions, always in external things. What is really needed is a revolution of the human being.*³¹

Conclusion

The Philanderer is a live and attractive play precisely because of its roughness, its hardness, and its sincerity. Its complex, problematic nature makes it both profound and heartfelt. But, this earlier play does not contain the deep dramatic symbolism of *Saint Joan*. The conclusion of the play is close to tragic. It is the equivalent, from a reverse angle, of Ibsen's *Nora's* returning to *Torvald*, not out of a concession to audience tests and idealism, but because she realizes that her romantic sentimentality is not an illusion or something that she can disown. Instead, she realizes that what she is at is the very core of her being, and that although **it would be theoretically wonderful to be liberated.**³² Perdent, she cannot live without an equally sentimental Torvald- just as Julia requires a Paramore for her own emotional survival for his part, the advanced Ibsenite philosopher, Leonard Charteris-Shaw's Gregers Werle, a distant cousin of Brand and Rubek – has actually not progressed one step from Jack Horner or any other Restoration rake. As for the new woman Grace Tranfield hardly a flattering portrait, especially when, toward the end of the play, she approaches self-loathing. A glimmer of hope seems to be presented in the uncorrupted Sylvia, but that may be only because she has not yet been tainted by the cynicism of worldly experience.³³

NOTES

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الملخص:

هي واحدة من المسرحيات الراقية التي قدمها برناتشو، وهي مسرحية جذابة وحية وصادقة . فدمت المسرحية طبقتين من المجتمع الطبقة العليا والوسطى اي ذوي الدخل المتوسط ناقشت المسرحية الزواج مع الحب والزواج بدون حب والغرض من المسرحية ليس للترفيه فقط وانما زيادة الوعي بالمشاكل الاجتماعية وهي في نفس الوقت انتقاد للسلوك الرسمالي على الرغم من ان الطرفه والفكاهة لا تخلو منها. وتناولت المسرحية التطور التدريجي في حقوق الانسان.