



The Philosophy of Re-rooting Citizenship and Identity in Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*: A Controversial Issue

Asst. Prof. Dr. Azeez Jasim Mohammed^{1*} 

¹ Imam Jaafar Al-Sadiq University (IJSU), College of Education

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*Corresponding Author Email:
azizjasim@ijsu.edu.iq

ABSTRACT

The controversy over the man-woman social roles is central to most of Bernard Shaw's plays. In his *Saint Joan*, the main focus is this covert issue as it reveals the identity of Saint Joan, herself whether a French or an English saint. The religious title, Saint, which is usually confined to man is an important question raised for discussion in Shaw's play. The Deconstructive approach is applied to this text to show how the logocentric term of the binary opposition, represented by man as the centre of sermons, kicking woman outside the centre, has been reversed by George Bernard Shaw. If John as a male national name is in the centre of the discussion, Joan as a female is reversed by it to reflect the equality and to re-root citizenship. Finally, the research finds that women feel responsible to spread religion, exactly like men. Though she struggles and sacrifices herself, but finally she achieves her aim as a new woman, who defends herself and identity in an unwomanly way.

فلسفة إعادة ترسيخ المواطنة والهوية

في مسرحية القديسة جان لبرنارد شو: قضية مثيرة للجدل

أ.م.د. عزيز جاسم محمد⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ جامعة الإمام جعفر الصادق (IJSU)، كلية التربية

الملخص

تُعد فكرة الجدل حول الأدوار الاجتماعية للمرأة والرجل محوراً رئيسياً في معظم مسرحيات جورج برناردشو. ركزت معظم الدراسات الاهتمام الرئيسي في مسرحيته "القديسة جون" على هذه القضية ولكن الخفي منها هو الربط بينها وبين إعادة ترسيخ الهوية والمواطنة. تكشف الدراسة الحالية عن مدى اهتمام الكاتب في ترسيخ هوية القديسة جون نفسها من خلال كونها قديسة فرنسية أم إنجليزية. هل اللقب الديني "قديسة"، والذي عادةً ما يُخصص للرجال، يمكن منحه للنساء الفرنسيات؟ وهو السؤال المهم والذي يطرح للنقاش في مسرحيته. تم تطبيق منهجية النظرية التفكيكية على هذا النص لإظهار كيف أن المصطلح المركزي للمتناقضات الثنائية يتم قلبه في هذه المسرحية ويتم استبدال الأدوار وتثبيت جذور الهوية. إذا كان الاسم "جون" هو اسم مخصص للرجال وهو محور للنقاش فإن الاسم "جوان" يعكس المساواة ويعيد تجذير المواطنة. توصل الكاتب في نهاية المطاف إلى أن الفرد يكافح ويضحى بنفسه في سبيل تحقيق هدفه وتحقيق هويته بالضبط كما فعلت جوان في هذه المسرحية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جورج برناردشو، التفكيكية، العادات الدينية، التجذير، القديسة جوان.

Introduction

Man dominated the world for the past centuries and he had been categorized as superior to woman. Although woman followed and obeyed the word of God just as man did, but she had been denied the privilege of spreading it. Man is allowed to do whatever expected to serve the wishes of God as far as the worshipping of God is concerned, yet woman is restricted to performing some of the same task. But, it should be kept in mind that both men and women believed in a superior being to explain the existence of life, otherwise even clerics, who do not equate women with men in their task and privilege of spreading the word of God would not follow the recommendations of God. Historically, the 15th and 16th centuries witnessed the wane of the feudalism and the rise of Capitalism. “Marx’s explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism delineates an intervening period, neither feudal nor capitalist characterized by the prevalence of independent peasant cultivators” (Katz, 266). Good example to this argument is what Scott Hendrix says: “The Reformation of the sixteenth century was the attempt by theologians, preachers, and political leaders to make European culture more Christian than it had been” (561). The deconstruction of the concept of Home and identity takes the heroine to the diasporic dislocation and accusation of heresy as being from different nationality. In this context, Joan as a French woman was in the dilemma of being a woman on one hand who was restricted to some codes of conducts, and belonged to another nationality rather than the clergymen on the other.

Craftsmanship units, however, were transformed into manufactories. In this period, the discovery of new territories, invention of gunpowder and establishment of machinery industries and press brought about changes in attitude and culture. The knowledge that was confined to a few learned scholars was made available to men regardless of their nationalities. In general, it can be said that at this time there began a period of science, which represented new ideas, and offered new worldviews in all fields of science and culture. But Hendrix asserts

that: “[John] Calvin began his work later in the process of re-Christianization. His mentality remained a missionary one-to make Geneva, France, and the rest of Europe more Christian than they had been” (571).

In the Renaissance, women had only two options in life: married life or the life of a nun. The system of dowry was a part of marriage system even if a woman married a cleric. The high expenses of dowry compelled some families to marry off only one of their daughters. The rest were sent to a convent as nuns, in which case dowries for nuns were considerably smaller. This tradition is shown in *Major Barbara* when Lady Britomart feels that father must be aware of his responsibilities to prepare dowries for his daughters. The degraded status of women in the Renaissance might have led to the founding of the Salvation Army in 1865 in the United Kingdom by William Booth and his wife Catherine. The Army played an important role in providing the poor, especially women, with shelter and food. But the problem is that once a woman married, she was expected to take care of home, bear and raise children, and maintain a decorous and chaste appearance so as to bring honour to both families - her father's and her husband's. Both Candida and Lady Britomart are examples of this case. They are brave enough to rebel against their indifferent husbands.

Feudalism witnessed many economic bonds and one of the characteristics of Renaissance was that man became free from these natural economic bonds that ruled the period of feudalism. Consequently, with the reduction of the stress of these economic bonds, man turned to reduce his tyranny against woman and became a man of a good habit in relation to other people. Therefore, at least in her fantasy and dream, woman considers herself as a free woman in relation to others. Experience of woman as a social entity with specific goal and wish grew during Renaissance in relation to the life and practice in technical and social areas, which brought her a relative degree of awareness. She learned that in order to reach her goals in the society, first, she needed freedom and security. But, the reality of life

along with the industrial growth and accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the poverty of many and the personal and social crises put her in a situation in which she and her desires were shackled.

At Shaw's time, religious conviction was waning because of the new discoveries in science. Shaw mocked at the religious events of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries religiosity as they were full of homilies and sermons. Even then the belief in witches persisted well into Shaw's time in varying degrees. The series of events from the 1692-3, widely known as the Salem Witch Trials, played a remarkable role in harassing the women of that time as well as warning them of any similar action in the future. Shaw's play of the 1923, *Saint Joan*, uses this witch hunting episode to reflect on his contemporary situation. The dramatist depicts the woman's abilities to develop into a belligerent charismatic woman. There is a type of women, Shaw presents, who is neither traditional nor composite; this is the contemporary figure of the emancipated woman that rejected the typical "female" roles. It is very recently called the 'Woman's lib freak'. This type is derived from a *Punch* cartoon of 1880, which graphically depicts the late nineteenth-century version of this woman: she wears a white shirt and tie and a simply cut suit (resembling a man's), and wears her hair short, or severely pulled back. The title "Man or Woman? - A Toss Up" makes the editorial comment (Adams 21). In an attempt to deconstruct the opposition of gender, the playwright presents Joan to the spectators to toss up whether being a man or a woman. Regarding Derrida's views on the matter of gender relations, he challenges the hierarchical opposition (such as man/woman) and stimulates the reversal of the opposition and the subversion of the hegemony. He thinks that the hierarchical oppositions must be deconstructed through reversal rather than denial. Deconstruction is the critique of the hierarchical oppositions. To deconstruct an opposition is to show that it is not natural but a construction, that is to say produced by discourses that rely on it, and to show also that it is a construction in a work of deconstruction that does not destroy it but gives it a different structure. In such a case, the woman surpasses

the man in all aspects of life. The church felt threatened by such deviant conduct of women and as a reaction, it threatened them with punishment. This struggle continues up to the time of Shaw, when he decided to write *Saint Joan* as a response to the discrimination of women by the church. The message of his play is to denunciate being a decoration in the house. On the contrary, the woman had to play her role hand by hand with the man equally to liberate their country. The playwright creates a woman of miracle out of Joan. Joan is able to draw the attention of women from her fans after her heroic disposal. Joan defeats the English armies by a divine power and her defiance, which lies in her transformation of manner from womanly into unwomanly. She represents France in her actions, though Waltonen thinks that “France does not win battles because of its military power or strategy, but because a woman uses the powers of evil to defeat the God-fearing English” (188).

In this context, Bernard Shaw calls for woman’s shifting code of conducts from womanly into unwomanly ones. The aim of this paper is to deliver the idea of searching for identity by the woman herself and rejecting the plight of the downtrodden and the Cultural dislocation of the natives. This can be shown through the terms used by the English clergymen to accuse Joan of witchcraft though they know that a woman of that age was unable to defend herself and identity regardless of her nationality. The matter is not related to a religious viewpoint insofar as categorizing her as a French woman and this cannot give her the right to hear voices from God. “Dodges approach highlighted the importance of studying empires comparatively as well as deconstructing archival documents, following the lead of postcolonial scholarship on the subcontinent in particular” (Bashkin, 218). The main focus in this paper is to show to what extent the dramatist look at the woman as a woman of her own identity and a national of France who intends to liberate her country. The question which can be raised here is that: What makes the church stake Joan in England? And this can lead to the

assumption that if Joan was a woman of English national then she would be backed up before staking as there maybe re-enactment of law for the nationals.

From the literary point of view, *Saint Joan*, *Major Barbara* and *Candida* are Shaw's greatest religious plays, where women in these plays take different roles. Joan turns into a warrior to liberate her country, obeying the voices she received and sacrificing her life for the sake of it. Candida, on the other hand, teaches a moral lesson to her indifferent husband, a clergyman who is supposed to be a guardian of morality. Major Barbara, Mrs. Baines and Lady Britomart draw Undershaft's attention to his responsibilities as a father and a man of power. Major Barbara and Mrs. Baines struggle for the continuance of the Salvation Army. Lady Britomart suffers taking care of her children after being left alone by her husband. Women in these plays exhibit courage and dynamism for their home and country. In fact, Shaw seems to question in his three plays whether woman is born as a woman or she becomes so. It is answered later on by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273).

Joan asserts the power of her gender and she becomes like a man, not because she likes it, but to prove that woman can do without man. Efforts have been done to turn Joan back into her petticoat. By wearing her petticoat, she would be thought of as a woman and all the charges against her will die out. After wearing the petticoat, Joan will drop fight as fighting needs to cross-dress as men. Shaw believes that if petticoats are put on a man one gets a woman; or, conversely, if petticoats are taken off a woman, one has a man. Therefore, Joan's antagonists try to put petticoats on her to make her a woman. Bluebeard asserts: "You will find the petticoats tripping you up after leaving them off for so long" (Shaw, Plays 986). The Inquisitor reminds: "...Now as to this matter of the man's dress. For the last time, will you put off that impudent attire, and dress as becomes your sex?" D'estivet confirms: "in spite of our most earnest remonstrances and entreaties, she

will not change them even to receive the sacrament” (Shaw, Plays 997). The Archbishop threatens:

Take this as your last warning. If you perish through setting your private judgment above the instructions of your spiritual directors, the Church disowns you, and leaves you to whatever fate your presumption may bring upon you. The Bastard has told you that if you persist in setting up your military conceit above the counsels of your commanders.”

(Shaw, Plays 989)

It seems that the antagonists try more than once to weaken her defence. In any case, it is the unwomanliness, which makes her a radical woman, taking into account that if she returns back to her womanly manners, she will be easily recognized as woman and will lose her privileges that she gained through her career. The injustice of the matter is that after failing in all the attempts, they find no way but to put Joan to the stake as a warning to frighten the women, who consider her as an ideal and put an end to her ambitions. In fact, Shaw’s frequent use of the refrain “why can’t a woman be more like a man?” in his play *Pygmalion*, comes to correlate with his assertion that “a woman is a person exactly like myself” (Shaw, 1927: 174).

For all of that, she has been tortured by different kinds of atrocities to make her behave like a normal woman. The clerics try to eradicate any type of religious ambition, habitual by women. The Archbishop wants to see Joan staked after she is hailed by people as saviour. The irony is that she is requited by being put to the stake for liberating her country. She has been burnt not because of committing a judicial crime, but because of her men’s clothes, her riding horseback, wearing the armour and flourishing the sword, which are reserved for man. The play seems to be written as a reaction to the religious and political historical sequence of events in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the early 15th century, Julian of Norwich asked “just because I am a woman, must I therefore

believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God?" (qtd. in Walters 7). In this respect, a question may be posed whether a woman can harmonize her domestic duties with the religious duties? The answer seems to be illustrated in an argument between Joan and Chaplain about the priority of domestic or religious duties for the woman.

JOAN. ...I am no shepherd lass, though I have helped with the sheep like anyone else. I will do a lady's work in the house--spin or weave--against any woman in Rouen.

THE CHAPLAIN. If you are so clever at woman's work why do you not stay at home and do it?

JOAN. There are plenty of other women to do it; but there is nobody to do my work. (Shaw, Plays: 996)

Women in the 16th century were not allowed to speak in the church. There were repeated injunction against any woman, who spoke out or asked awkward questions about the church. Saint Paul asserts: "let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak" (qtd in Walters, 9). Thus, when the church speaks, woman should keep silence. The case is the same as to court. Shaw says: "[I]t is not for [woman] to question the court: it is for [church] to question [her]" (Shaw, Plays 995).

Dress code and duality code are all arbitrarily determined. Woman is considered to be physically weak but Joan proves the opposite and she justifies her superiority to man in terms of clothes: "If I were to dress as a woman they would think of me as a woman; and then what would become of me? If I dress as a soldier they think of me as a soldier, and I can live with them as I do at home with my brothers" (Shaw, Plays 998). The man – woman relationship is compared to trousers – petticoats relationship, both are not the signs of gender. Not any of them reserved for a particular sex. Thus the idea trouser – petticoat is projected as mere clothes, but not markers of gender. Joan in *Saint Joan* takes the petticoats off and wears

trousers the way that makes her appear exactly like Shaw [man]. In the same way, Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) in which Orlando as a man takes on a woman's clothes to appear exactly as Woolf [woman]. In both genres, the two authors project the equality of sex by implying that "in order to change from the female to the male role [and vice versa], [a person] merely has to wear different clothes" (Parkes, 167-8). Hence, both Shaw and Woolf believe that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 273). Woman challenges the reality by becoming like a man. *Saint Joan's* divine mission is entrusted to a woman instead of a man. Thus, the Dauphin amazingly interrogates why God speaks to Joan and not to him as a Dauphin. The church is afraid that there may be supports for Joan in her divine mission. Such disciplinary case will make a gash and split in the pro-Church. Joan is not only admired by Shaw for being like him but also most women of her time admire the resistant nature in her. They also admire a woman and "her wearing of men's clothes" (Shaw, Prefaces 606).

To approach Joan and her circumstances, we can contrast her with another Joan, who met a similar doom. The series of events in Joan of Arc and Shaw's *Saint Joan* are correlated with a slight modification at the end of each play. Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was staked for her 'insubordination and heterodoxy'. Shaw's Joan, however, is staked after claiming "the gravity of two very horrible and blasphemous crimes, which she does not deny. First, she has intercourse with evil spirits, and is therefore a sorceress. Second, she wears men's clothes, which is indecent, unnatural, and abominable" (Shaw, Plays 997). The first charge is justified by her belief in God and her ability to act what the voices have ordered her. Her justification for the second charge is that if she wears as a woman they will think of her as a woman and as weak. In such a case, Joan subverts patriarchy and asserts that woman, by appearing man-like, counters the ideology of being fashioned from man's rib. Betty Friedan asserts:

In our Occidental view of life, woman, fashioned from man's rib, can at the most strive unsuccessfully to imitate man's superior powers and higher vocations. The basic theme of the initiatory cult, however, is that women, by virtue of their ability to make children, hold the secret of life. Man's role is uncertain, undefined, and perhaps unnecessary. (133)

Shaw points out in his preface to the play that: "it is hardly surprising that she was judicially burnt, ostensibly for a number of capital crimes which we no longer punish as such, but essentially for what we call unwomanly and insufferable presumption" (Shaw, Prefaces 604). The playwright resents of burning her under the pretext of 'intercourse with evil spirits' and behaving in an unwomanly manner. In any case, Joan does not disclaim her femininity for feeling it is a disgrace, but for having a chance to prove woman's abilities by taking up the man's role. Her speech clarifies her intentions as to behave in an unwomanly manner:

I will never take a husband. A man in Toul took an action against me for breach of promise; but I never promised him. 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 of money. I dream of leading a charge, and of placing the big guns. You soldiers do not know how to use the big guns: you think you can win battles with a great noise and smoke (Shaw, Plays: 977).

During the second half of the 16th century, religious tension was strong and remained till the beginning of the 17th century. The Catholic – Protestant tension continued for thirty years and spanned between 1618 and 1648. There are some standpoints which differentiate between the Catholic and the Protestant like sainthood, where the Catholic believed that saints are a special group of holy people, who are venerated and they may act as intercessors between God and Man and may be invoked in prayer and the church has the authority to make saints. Thus, the authority of Pope is affirmed by the Catholic and they believed that

confessing sins to God through priests and then through Jesus, taking the priest as a medium between God and Jesus. The Protestant believed that anyone, who believes in Jesus as saviour is a saint and they denied the Pope while they think that confessing of sins to God is through Jesus only.

Joan's condemnation of wearing men's clothes and behaving in a deviant way is more than showing disrespect to the church. Joan is similar to most of Shaw's heroines. "Like Barbara, Joan has charisma: she attracts and inspires people. Like Eliza, the heroine in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, who transcends class distinctions: she thinks everyone is equal before God. Like Vivie, she denies femininity: never dreaming of a happy marriage, womanly dresses, or romantic love, she defines herself as a soldier" (Morikawa, 232-3).

In his argument, the playwright discusses three ideologies that feminist caters. First, woman is a woman and man is a man. There is watertight compartmentalization between the area of women's duties and the area of man's duties, the exclusiveness of the domains of action determined for men and women. Second, the military affairs are male dominated and woman is not allowed to take part in it and exclusively belong to male domain. Third, the Church is superior to everybody and decides on the matter of conduct and action. It is patriarchy that defends and perpetuates the male. The dramatist asserts the woman's need for financial independence since it can achieve self-realization. Woman faces a problem that she has limited duties in religion and society. Women are expected to "dream of lovers, and of money" (Shaw, Plays: 977). In his preface to *Saint Joan*, Shaw asserts that: "It is not necessary to wear trousers and smoke big cigar to live a man's life anymore than it is necessary to wear petticoats to live a woman's" (Shaw, Prefaces: 613-4). Hence, it is necessary at this point to pose some questions: is Joan hated because of being charismatic woman? It is clear when Joan herself exclaims: "Why do all these courtiers and knights and churchmen hate me? What have I done to them? Why do they not love me?"

(Shaw, Plays 985) The probable answers are: first, she may spread the idea of divine missions by being victorious. Her victory paves the way to other women to take advantage of the opportunity and behave like her. Second, they feel that she not only defeats the English Army, but also stands against the church wishes by turning herself into man-like. Third, she is proud and insists on being an extraordinary woman. The clerics feel marginalized as she proudly asserts: “I have set them right when they were doing all sorts of stupid things: I have crowned Charles and made him a real king; and all the honours he is handing out have gone to them” (Shaw, Plays 985).

Conclusion

It has been observed that Joan is the ‘other’ because of both, her gender and nationality. The clerics and male warriors harassed her since she is a woman and French but their claim for superior strength and morality is challenged. Witches are magical women in a sense that their magic lies behind their violation of woman code, her energy into the exclusively male domain and her power, which enables her ability to charm. Shaw wants to establish her superior morality and great patriotism, and that no timid woman having moral strength. Hence, she is a saint in the true sense in terms superior to the traditional saints, who are unworldly withdrawn. She serves her society, her country and people and, does far more religious and moral duties. By putting her in the tradition of woman saints, the dramatist succeeds to justify the sainthood of Joan. The playwright makes it clear that a woman sometimes is torn between being a woman and a foreigner at the same time. Joan finally succeeds in re-rooting her identity and imposing herself as a woman of her time.

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