A Dialectic of Victorian Ideals in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Candida*

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Abstract

During the Victorian Era, English society experienced societal changes as they adjusted to an industrialized economy, considered the role of women in the home, and tried to reconcile faith with new scientific discoveries that led to conflicting ideals. George Bernard Shaw, who began writing towards the end of the Victorian period satirized ideals that Victorian society held dear, like the glorification of female virtue and the domestic sphere. Shaw, with his iconic wit and iconoclastic themes, subverts Victorian ideals of femininity in his dramatic works. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Candida,* characters and ideals react against each other in a dialectical pattern. Both Vivie and Candida embody and reject aspects of the female Victorian ideal, demonstrating Shaw's subversion of those idealistic tropes.

Against the Grain: Anti-Victorian Idealism in Shaw's Treatment of Women

Introduction to Shaw and the Victorian Era

George Bernard Shaw's proclivity to play on the ideals and conventions of Victorianism earn him a place as one of the best-known authors and critics of the Victorian Era. He began writing during the late Victorian Era, which gained notoriety for its decadence and the degradation of many Victorian values. Victoria's heir, Edward, Prince of Wales, became an example of such degenerate behavior by carrying on scandalous behavior while shirking royal duties (Greenblatt 1030). The "Woman Question," which Shaw would address in his plays, was fiercely debated, and a new female type, the New Woman, held a place of prominence in the literature of this period. The movement of first-wave feminism resonated with Shaw's own progressive beliefs, although his sometimes "equivocal" attitudes towards feminist goals meant "Shaw was perhaps not always quite as useful for feminism as feminism was for Shaw" (Hadfield 215). Shaw was at least a little useful, evidenced by quotes such as: "If we have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot; because they have never seen one anywhere else" (Shaw, *Quintessence* 21). Shaw's writing across the genres often addressed contemporary issues so specifically that "it could be argued that the times in which [Shaw] lived can be better understood through the lens of Shaw" (Kent, "Preface" xxiv).

Brief Biography

Shaw was born in Dublin to "two quite amiable people who finally separated in the friendliest fashion" (Greenblatt 1780). At age 15, Shaw's mother set out for London to pursue a

career in the opera. Meanwhile, Shaw worked for his father, first as clerk, then a cashier, until Shaw left for London in pursuit a writing career five years later (Reddy). From the hours spent in the Reading Room of the British Museum and the friendship with journalist William Archer, Shaw adopted socialism and joined the Fabian Society, which committed itself to slow and steady political reforms (Greenblatt 1781). His involvement in the Fabian Society led to a lecture series, which became *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and his socialist leanings cropped up in his dramatic works. Shaw originally planned to be a novelist, not a dramatist or essayist. However, his friendship with Archer led him to a career in journalism, during which he wrote shrewd and witty criticisms of art, music, and drama (1781). In addition to holding many literary opinions, Shaw was also a socialist, pacifist, atheist, member of the Fabian society, vegetarian, devoted wearer of woolen garments, and staunchly opposed to cannibalism (1782). Strongly opinionated on these and other social issues of the age, he made clear that he not writing out of self-expression, but in order to convert the nation to his perspective (Shaw, *Autobiography* 49). Like his dramatic criticism, Shaw's discussion-based plays highlighted ideas and philosophies, eliciting loud and lively debate.

Plays Unpleasant, Shaw's first and most controversial volume of plays, was published in 1898 and addressed the morality of prostitution and adultery and faced severe backlash from the English Censor; consequently, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was unable to be performed for four long years (Shaw, *Quintessence* 14). The second volume, *Plays Pleasant,* grouped together happily-ending comedies, including *Candida*, which gained fame after its New York City performance in 1904. By the end of his career, Shaw wrote more than fifty plays which were produced on stage and printed in books (to circumvent the censorship of ideas on stage). Shaw

made it his goal to "incarnate the Zeitgeist" of the Victorian Age in his writing (Kent, "Preface" xvii), and, due to his wide range of works, active involvement in dramatic culture, and the multiplicity of viewpoints he could represent in his works, he did.

Shaw's Anti-Idealism

***Anti-Idealism in The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.** In 1890, Shaw put his experience in dramatic criticism to use for the Fabian Society and spoke about playwright Henrik Ibsen, while other members spoke on Emil Zola, Gothic architecture, and contemporary Socialist novels (Shaw, *Quintessence* vii). Shaw used "provocative terms" and incited "lively debate" to offer an exposition of the content, not the aesthetics, of Ibsen's work (viii). Shaw compiled his speech into a small book, organizing it into chapters describing two kinds of moral pioneers, Ideals and Idealists, the Womanly Woman (as she appears in Ibsen's works), short analyses of 12 Ibsen plays, an exposition of their morals, and an appendix of a decent length. Ibsen's writing and philosophies so influenced Shaw's writings that the Shavian tradition of drama only works if one sees "Shaw in continuum with Ibsen as restoring seriousness to dramatic literature, engaging the issues people confront when they come into conflict with organized society" (Bertolini 350). Shaw engages such issues—socialism, religion, gender roles—and challenges the conventional ideals that inform those issues.

Shaw's distaste for Victorian ideals becomes most evident in chapter two of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* as he describes Ideals and Idealists. Shaw describes an Ideal as a "fancy picture" created by the minority of a population to mask a disillusioning reality (Shaw, *Quintessence* 12). Idealism is "the policy of forcing individuals to act on the assumption that all ideals are real, and to recognize and accept such action as standard moral conduct, absolutely

valid under all circumstances, contrary conduct [of which is…] punished as immoral" (12). As an example, Shaw claims that out of 1,000 Englishmen, only 299 "domestic failures" will hold to the ideal of marriage and promote it in their literature, orations, sermons, and private discussions. These people "will far outdo the 700 who comfortably accept marriage as a matter of course, never dreaming of calling it an 'institution,' much less a holy and beautiful one, and being pretty plainly of opinion that idealism is a crackbrained fuss about nothing. The idealists, hurt by this, will retort by calling them Philistines" (12). Of the 1,000, one man is left: "the man who is strong enough to face the truth that the idealists are shirking" (12). This man, like Shaw, will acknowledge that the ideal of marriage is a failure for many people, its historical basis is false, natural attraction is simply no good, and society might accept the social benefits of marriage, but discard the rest. The Philistines will think he is crazy, but the Idealist will be terrified "at the rending of the beautiful veil they and their poets have woven to hide the unbearable face of the truth" (12). Shaw's plays rend the veil and expose what he sees to be the hidden truth.

Shaw's anti-idealist philosophy sharply contrasts with Victorian literary conventions, in which "there was a continuing belief that the ideal was achievable through the real" (Reed 4). Shaw claims to see through these sham ideals as they appeared in popular art, morality, and heroics (Shaw, "Preface" 7). He "understands life differently from the average respectable man," and, as a result, he enjoyed himself more than those who cling to ideals (8-9). Given that he had no taste for the art of popular culture nor the same worldview as the respectable Victorian, he did not try to delight his reader, but to convert them to his point of view (Shaw, *Autobiography* 49). At the same time, Shaw asserts "that the playwright must not assume that he views life from 'an absolutely right point of view'" (Bertolini 351). These two claims demonstrate Shaw's

paradoxical nature: a playwright who persistently championed his own beliefs while holding on to epistemological humility.

Censorship

Today, many inclinations of the Victorian Era, such as the tendency to treat sex as taboo, seem prudish. The government censored taboo subjects in plays by passing the Licensing Act of 1737, which required theater managers to submit scripts to Lord Chamberlain's office for approval (Kent, "Censorship" 199). Plays could be denied approval for their representation of politics, gender, class, race, sexuality, or any number of topics. The rigid control over performances led Shaw to observe that if the English novel was the crowning glory of all literature, then English Drama was its disgrace. Upon publishing *Widowers' Houses*, Shaw admits, "I had not achieved a success; but I had provoked an uproar; and the sensation was so agreeable I resolved to do it again" (Shaw, "Preface" 14). And he did—twice. *Philanderers* made it past the censor's desk, but *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was barred from production. Only two prior plays had been denied: Percy Bysse Shelley's *The Cenci* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

Discussion Plays

Shaw channeled his anti-idealism into writing didactic plays, instead of purely aesthetic ones. In contrast, Oscar Wilde, an Irish contemporary of Shaw, espouses his view of art as primarily aesthetic in the first two sentences of his "Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," saying, "The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim" (Wilde 1732). He continues: "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style" (1732). These aphorisms decry didactic writing and express a sentiment antithetical to Shaw, who voraciously pronounced his opinions at every opportunity.

However, Shaw and Wilde agree that morality is inherent to art. Wilde writes, "Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art" (1732). Vice and virtue are central to Shaw's sharp wit and scathing social criticism. He plays with the accepted morals of the day and teases those who are prudish or puritanical. Shaw is more similar to Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, whose play *A Doll's House* follows a pattern of exposition, situation, and discussion, than Wilde. Though the critics protest "that discussions are not dramatic, and that art should not be didactic," Shaw claims that a serious playwright understands that the discussion of a play is the center of the play and the primary test of the playwright's powers (Crane 880). Shaw's only critique of Ibsen's otherwise clever technique was that by situating the discussion at the end, it was almost a regular French drama. Shaw's works, whether by preface or exposition, introduce the discussion early in the play so the drama is framed by the issues discussed.

Shaw's discussion plays follow a dialectic pattern in which social issues and ideals react against each other. David Korhaber claims that the banter in Shaw's dialogues encourages the intellectual pursuit, always keeping philosophical ideas "as a matter of perpetual development and debate and never allowing them to coalesce into fixed doctrine" (312). His dialogues and debates form a dialectic of ideas and ideals that push back against each other. Although Shaw's strong opinions are evident in his work, he allows his characters to converse and to each appear right from their individual points of view, which guards against the philosophic certainty and the appearance of propaganda.

Women and Victorian Literary Conventions

John R. Reed's *Victorian Conventions* provides a solid starting point for examining the literary conventions of the Victorian Era. By examining fiction writing from that time, Reed

notes that Victorian literature is often idealistic and "exhibits predictable combinations of attributes which result in conventional types" (Reed 5). And, while Victorian literature is not composed exclusively of moral works, Victorian writers did recognize that "fidelity to moral ideals was also important" and connected these ideals with their aesthetic ones (6-7). Writers would often associate virtue with goodness and beauty, in contrast to vice with evil and ugliness.

Women's roles, both in Victorian life and literature, were portrayed as inherently related to morality, whether by their literal description or by their failure to conform as being morally wrong. Female characters in Victorian literature are frequently portrayed using conventions of women as saints, the Fallen Woman, the redeemed Magdalene, destructive women, and the New Woman. The first three invoke religious language and sentiment. Saint-like women might be characterized as a Madonna-figure (Candida from Shaw's play *Candida*), an angel (Coventry Patmore's poem, "Angel in the House"), or simply virtuously good (Reed 37-38). The Fallen Woman, because of sexual impropriety or sexual violation, is thought to have "fallen" from the grace of God and is established as impure or a temptress. Similarly, the Magdalene character has also been touched by scandal and alludes to the biblical story of Mary Magdalene, traditionally believed to have been redeemed from the act of prostitution. Reed claims that this figure is particularly attractive because her redemption demonstrates virtuosity, while her history as a Fallen Woman establishes her as sexually attractive (73). The destructive woman, who is morally corrupt, is motivated by pride, vanity, or sexual passion (44). This type alludes to Potiphar's wife, portrayed as a seductress, intent on destroying men, from the Genesis narrative. In sharp contrast to the first three types, the New Woman was "educated, physically fit, rationally dressed, and independently minded. She smoked, sought career opportunities, and demanded an

end to a gendered double standard" (Hadfield 215). Central to these four female types is their virtue—moral and sexual—as well as their place in the domestic world.

Dialectic Method

The German philosopher Johann Fichte coined the terms thesis, antithesis, and synthesis to describe George Hegel's Abstract-Negative-Concrete theory (Fichte 63; Schnitker and Emmons). Thus, the thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure is commonly referred to as Hegelian Dialecticism (Schnitker and Emmons). Within the dialectal process, the thesis is a state of activity that currently exists and is opposed by conflict-driven activity; this is the antithesis (Breazeale 249). As long as only two concepts—thesis and antithesis—exist, they can only be known in relation to the other (250). A synthesis of the two must exist in order that each state of activity might be appropriated, or "posited within oneself" (250). This terminology is used to describe the dialectal method, a mode of discourse in which two opposing sides come together to establish the truth by forming a third side that synthesizes the first two. The dialectic process, when applied to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Candida*, reveals the conflict between and synthesis of feminine ideals in the Victorian Era.

Mrs. Warren's Profession

Summary

Mrs. Warren's Profession, which was not able to be performed for four years after its publication due to censorship, caused an uproar for its treatment of gender roles, prostitution, and anti-capitalism. At the start of the play, Mrs. Kitty Warren, a successful brothel owner, returns to her daughter after years of sending her to boarding schools to be cared for by others. She is surprised to discover her daughter Vivie is an independent, well-educated woman who refuses

men's assistance and decries prostitution's capitalist nature. The men—Praed, Crofts, Reverend Gardner, and Gardner's son, Frankie—are shown to be weak, corrupt, morally hypocritical, and effeminate in their dealings with Kitty and Vivie Warren. The mother and daughter, after tension and disagreement, come to a point of mutual understanding; however, Vivie eventually leaves her mother and suitor, Frankie, for an actuarial career and a room of her own.

The dialectic process implies that ideas are generated and that those ideas grow over time. Similarly, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* depicts the evolution of the modern woman. The Victorian Woman is the starting point. She is kind and gentle, self-sacrificing and pure of heart. She belongs to the private sphere of home and hearth, separate from men, their duties, and the outside world. Mrs. Warren is the "fallen woman." Choosing prostitution as the way to a better life, Mrs. Warren is the pragmatic business woman who capitalizes on the systematic exploitation of impoverished Victorian women. A New Woman is found in Vivie, Mrs. Warren's daughter. The effects of Victorian womanhood and the results of her mother's trade lead to Vivie merging aspects of the two, while pushing back against them as well.

Thesis: Victorian Feminine Ideal

The Victorian ideal of a woman can be typified as the "angel in the house." The poem of the same name paints two separate spheres for Victorian manhood and womanhood, defining Victorian woman as what a man is not. The poem describes womankind as "the best half of creation's best" (Patmore line 29). Here, the word "half" establishes a dichotomy between man and woman. The word "creation" evokes celestial connotations, implicating that such a division is natural and instituted by God. Patmore's use of the word "best" creates an imbalance between men and women. This superlative is complimentary; however, it further idealizes women and

separates the spheres of male and female roles in Victorian society. Similarly, John Ruskin introduces the roles of men and women as "their separate characters" (Ruskin 661). The elevation of women in Patmore's poem entails that a woman must uphold all of the virtuous qualities that mankind has established for her. In that case, if a woman were to not fulfill her duties as "angel in the house," she would degrade her womanhood.

Similarly, Ruskin, author of "Of Queens' Gardens," sets forth the Victorian ideal of womanly intelligence, hospitality, and goodness. He writes that a woman's wisdom is "not for self-development but for self-renunciation" (Ruskin 662). Ruskin suggests that, instead of improving herself, a woman is to sacrifice her desires for other people, presumably not other women, who should also be self-sacrificing. Thus, the "angel in the house" must sacrifice to the desires of men. He adds, "The woman's intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (661). Ruskin does not deny female intelligence but suggests that it is intended for a different use than man's, which is "speculation and invention" (661). The female character is to keep house, ordering and arranging her little realm in which her husband guards her: "This is the true nature of home – it is a place of Peace" (661). Ruskin's word choices—"peace," "sweet ordering," "home"—connote a life of simple domesticity (661). Ruskin delineates the role of a Victorian female: to cultivate and beautify a home in which she is protected by all outside threats and forces.

The Victorian woman is also characterized by her virtue, especially through the avenues of morality, chastity, and frigidity. Virtue in its simplest sense denotes the "conformity to a standard of right," which Ruskin describes as being "enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise" (662). During the Victorian Era, virtue came to refer to female

chastity as well. The conflation of the two definitions, one meaning "morally good" and the other meaning "sexually inactive," implies that one could only be virtuous by refraining from any sort of sexual activity outside of marriage. Likewise, popular medical thought in Britain "persisted in viewing the genteel woman as devoid of sexual appetite," and even the esteemed gynecologist Dr. William Acton declared that any woman able to achieve an orgasm with her husband was a whore (Laurence 41). The Victorian misrepresentation of the female sex drive contributed to the subjugation of prostitutes and fallen women.

Antithesis: Mrs. Warren as the Fallen Woman

Establishing the "angel in the house" as the thesis reveals that its antithesis is the fallen woman. The term "fallen" denotes the view that a sexually immoral woman has fallen away from the grace of God. Similarly, Mrs. Warren has fallen from the grace of society by becoming a prostitute. Mrs. Warren opposes the ideals of Victorian womanhood because the society that created those ideals is the same one that would have driven her to death if she had not worked as a prostitute. Mrs. Warren relates to Vivie how she and her sisters lived in poverty, which forced them into the darkest of working positions. Her half-sisters chose respectable paths: one married a government worker and kept his house on a small stipend, while the other died from poison in a whitelead factory (Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* 1804,1805). Mrs. Warren tries to support herself similarly, until her sister introduces her to prostitution, an easier and supposedly less degrading means of income. Mrs. Warren defends her choice to Vivie, saying, "If people arrange the world that way for women, there's no good pretending it's arranged the other way" (1807). It is essential to note that Mrs. Warren rejects Victorian societal ideals by becoming a prostitute in the same way that the Hegelian antithesis conflicts with the thesis. The antithesis is also defined

by the thesis, because without it, the antithesis has nothing to react against. Therefore, one can see that Mrs. Warren is inextricably linked to Victorianism because that is the society which forced her into that occupation.

Mrs. Warren's illicit connections to men show how she relies upon them; even though she reacts against conventional roles for Victorian women, she retains qualities of such a woman. When Crofts approaches Vivie to help her carry the chairs, Mrs. Warren calls out to her "patronizingly" to accept his help in setting up the chairs (Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* 1789). Mrs. Warren's dependence on men is further demonstrated by her business partnership with Crofts, who claims, "There are not many men who would have stood by her as I have" (1814). He offers her help and advice, he even advances money to her to support her houses and care for Vivie. Later, Praed and Crofts hold a small conversation in which Crofts admits that he could very well be Vivie's father. She is not the "genteel woman…devoid of sexual appetite" (Laurence 41). Crofts' relationship with Mrs. Warren imitates a marriage by providing financial support, emotional comfort, and sexual satisfaction without the legal contract. The relationship between Crofts and Mrs. Warren indicates that she regards female virtue as superfluous, but still craves the fulfillment of relationships with men. It also demonstrates that oftentimes the antithesis (fallen woman) contains parts of the thesis ("angel in the house").

The stereotypical female-ness of Mrs. Warren's profession contrasts with the role that she has played in her daughter's life—that of the "absent father." She works abroad, providing a comfortable income for Vivie, but is not present in Vivie's life. Mrs. Warren has exited the domestic sphere reserved for women and immersed herself in the public provider and protector role. The stage directions preceding Mrs. Warren's confession state that "her affectations of

motherly authority and conventional manners [are] gone" (Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* 1804). The word "affectations" indicates that Mrs. Warren's motherliness is as illegitimate as the birth of her daughter. Mrs. Warren tries to reclaim the role of mother but finds herself ill-suited for the task.

Synthesis: Vivie Warren as the New Woman

The dialectic method suggests qualities of the thesis and antithesis shape the synthesis; likewise, Vivie's character is produced by both Victorian culture and her mother, Mrs. Warren. The Victorian model for motherhood suggests a woman wholly occupied with her children and their happiness; Mrs. Warren abandons that role, playing the role of an absentee parent—typically the father—instead. As a result, Vivie has never lived under the nurturing care of a mother, and she questions Mrs. Warren's maternal authority. In Act 2, Mrs. Warren sits down with Vivie for the evening and begins a conversation, making assumptions about Vivie's life and questioning the answers that she receives. To Mrs. Warren's distaste, Vivie responds indifferently, turning the conversation on its head to question Mrs. Warren: "I know nothing about you. What is that way of life which you invite me to share with you and sir George Crofts, pray?" (Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* 1802). As their discourse continues, Mrs. Warren "wildly" exclaims, "What kind of woman are you?" (1803). These parallel questions denote the source of Vivie's apathy and Mrs. Warren's inability to move Vivie: neither recognize the kind of woman that the other is. Vivie knows and treats her mother as an acquaintance; Mrs. Warren knows Vivie to the same depth, but places filial expectations upon her. The greatest divide lies not in the lack of knowledge of each other, but in the vast difference between the types of women they have become. Mrs. Warren never held the mantle of domestic mother, yet she

expects Vivie to respond to her with intimacy. Vivie, now a strikingly independent and opinionated woman, does not have the upbringing to expect maternal affection or to cater to it. She responds the way that the system raised her: to question authority and trust herself.

A synthesis of two ideals rejects the previous theses and antitheses, as did the New Woman of the Victorian Era. The New Woman embraces intellectual pursuits and independence of men. New Women tended to support woman's rights and to champion socialism, seeing capitalism as an oppressive structure (Ledger 5). While the New Woman emerged toward the end of the Victorian Era, she followed the footsteps of women from the previous century, such as Mary Wollstonecraft. In Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, she wishes to persuade women "to endeavour to acquire strength, both mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness" (Wollstonecraft 18). Wollstonecraft notes that the qualities which commend the "angel in the house" do not encourage intellectual or physical capabilities in women. Going one step further, Shaw suggests in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* that rebellion, and the evolution of a new woman was inevitable, saying, "Woman, if she dares to face the fact that she is being [mistreated] must either loathe herself or else rebel" (128). In this case, the mistreatment occurs when a woman is relegated to the role of the "angel in the house" without choice or against her will.

The opening scene introduces Vivie as a New Woman as she asserts her independence to Praed. As they sit down, Praed comments, "Oh do let me take that hard chair. I like hard chairs," to which Vivie responds, "So do I. Sit down, Mr. Praed" (Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* 1784). This interaction signifies Vivie rejecting both male provision and the supposition that a

woman ought to be treated with more comfort than a man. Their following conversation demonstrates the dissonance of their internal philosophies. Vivie explains the process of preparing for and placing in the tripos to Praed, and he responds, "What a monstrous, wicked, rascally system! I knew it! I felt at once that it meant destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful" (1786). Praed's comment reveals him to be a stereotypical Victorian male. Firstly, Praed views beauty as quintessential to womanhood; secondly, he believes that a system that destroys the beauty of womanhood is evil; finally, he places his opinions of Vivie's experience above her, without letting her respond first. Vivie continues to reveal her deviation from the Victorian norm by responding that she so enjoyed her studies that she plans on taking up a job as an actuary. Her career field is, even today, dominated by men and intellectually rigorous. She specifically asserts her independence in her mannerisms and speech towards Praed. In a general sense, she asserts her independence by choosing a conventionally male job and undergoing a grueling studying process.

Vivie appears not only to spurn feminine pursuits and attitudes, but also to acquire conventionally masculine ones. She makes a clean break with her mother's form of femininity by rejecting men and romantic attachments and adopting a conventionally male emotional detachedness. In contrast to Vivie, Frank provides emotional support and comfort in their relationship, offering to hide like "babes in the woods" with Vivie after she learns that Mrs. Warren is a brothel keeper (1812). Vivie allows Frank's actions to continue, until the final act. Retreating to her friend's chambers, she physically distances herself from the attention of Frank, Praed, and Crofts, who have all displayed interest in her. There, she announces to Frank and Praed: "If we three are to remain friends, I must be treated as a woman of business, permanently

single [*To* FRANK.] and permanently unromantic [*To* PRAED.]" (1822). She neatly severs ties with two men, without so much as batting an eyelash. Her coldness is the opposite of the ideal Victorian woman whose nurturing qualities ought to placate men instead of opposing them. Vivie demonstrates non-sexualized masculinity that contrasts with the femininity of the "angel in the house" and her mother.

Whereas Victorian society objects to prostitution from a moral and religious background, Vivie, a New Woman, opposes prostitution for its capitalistic practices. In this way, Vivie contrasts with Mrs. Warren, who does not object to prostitution but decries the type of society that allows it to be the best option for impoverished women. As the synthesis of thesis and antithesis, Vivie shares some similarities, such as objecting to prostitution. However, the reasoning behind her objection is deeply different. Although Shaw shares Vivie's socialist leanings, he allows both Mrs. Warren and Vivie to express their points of view without privileging one above the other. Instead, Shaw highlights the truth that both women share.

Conclusion

Hegel's dialectical method provides a framework to understand how Mrs. Warren is the reaction against the conventional female in the Victorian Era, and how Vivie reacts against both. The first type is the idealized "angel in the house," perfect in virtue and domesticity. In comparison, Mrs. Warren, the fallen woman, appears crude and vulgar as she perpetuates a business considered to degrade and undervalue women. Vivie arrives on scene full of dominant energy, lacking the submissiveness of the "angel in the house" and scorning her mother's perpetuation of capitalistic exploitation. Hegel's dialectical method provides a framework to understand how Mrs. Warren is the reaction against the conventional female in the Victorian Era,

and how Vivie reacts against both. This triad of female types in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* represent the evolution of women's roles in the Victorian age.

Candida

Summary

Candida, which features a female character more similar to the Victorian ideal, faced much less opposition than *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. After the harsh treatment of *Plays Unpleasant* by the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner, Shaw "turned his hand to writing the comedies of *Plays Pleasant* that, while still undermining much of modern morality, are infinitely more pleasing, more charming, more popular than the earlier three" (Kent, "Censorship" 202-203). Of the three *Plays Pleasant*, the comedic romance, *Candida*, was an easy success. After a vacation in the city, Candida returns to her home and her husband, the Reverend James Morrell, with the starry-eyed poet, Eugene Marchbanks, in tow. Morrell, a Christian Socialist, has just resolved an argument with Burgess, Candida's father, who uses exploitative capitalistic strategies. As Candida leaves to arrange lunch, Marchbanks nervously confesses to Morrell his love for Candida and his unwillingness that she should soil her hands with work. In the third act, tension between Marchbanks and Morrell reaches a breaking point—Candida must choose between them. After Morell shows his weakness, Candida chooses him, the "weaker of the two," sending Eugene into the night air with a single, chaste kiss.

In *Candida,* the titular character represents the synthesis of an idealized Victorian mother and wife, the thesis, and the New Woman, the antithesis. A good Victorian mother, like Candida, takes her place at the hearth, carefully arranges the domestic sphere, and is wholly absorbed by her children. Her virtue is conveyed through imagery of the Madonna which compares Candida

with the Virgin Mary, who is venerated by the Catholic church for her holiness as the mother of Jesus. The New Woman, like Vivie Warren, spurns dependence on men, usually pursuing careers and financial independence instead of marriage and motherhood. Candida synthesizes the wholesome and nurturing nature of an ideal mother with the New Woman's attitude of dominating her husband. At the same time, she directs her motherliness towards her husband and admirer, thus exerting a more powerful role. In the end, she rejects the advances of Marchbanks and remains faithful to her marriage, which is in contrast to the typical New Woman character.

Thesis: Victorian Ideal of Motherhood and Madonna

In the Victorian Era, women were expected to marry and depend upon men. Since few avenues of respectable employment were open to any woman, much less of the upper class, marriage was the goal of women and their crowning achievement. Many Victorian authors, such as Thackeray, believed in the ideal of a love-filled marriage, a happy home, and sweet children (Calder 27). Candida is depicted as a type of Patmore's "angel in the house" by her well-kept home and divine characterization. Candida is introduced to the audience as a model wife by Shaw's description of Morrell's study: "the room of a good housekeeper, vanquished, as far as the table is concerned, by an untidy man, but elsewhere mistress of the situation" (Shaw, *Candida* 5). Morrell praises Candida to Lexy, the curate, saying, "Ah, my boy, get married—get married to a good woman; and then you'll understand. That's a foretaste of what will be best in the Kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth. […] Get a wife like my Candida; and you'll always be in arrear with your repayment" (9). Candida has not yet arrived on the scene and already her virtues of domesticity and excellence are established. Her first words upon arrival bring peace as she urges her father and husband to make up, and Shaw observes, "A wise-hearted

observer, looking at her, would at once guess that whoever had placed the Virgin of the Assumption over her hearth did so because he fancied some spiritual resemblance between them" (19). Candida is affectionate and well-built, glowing in the radiance of youth and motherhood.

The Victorian view of women and motherhood often focuses on women's youthfulness and innocence, at times desexualizing them. According to Theresa Mangum, the Victorian feminine ideal was "implicitly rooted in representations of virginal youth or youthful motherhood" (Mangum 178). Candida's youthful motherhood is finally and firmly established by the numerous references to the Madonna throughout the play. In the opening description of Morrell's study ("the room of a good housekeeper"), one finds above the mantelpiece a large reproduction of Titian's "Assumption of the Virgin" (Shaw, *Candida* 5). Marchbanks, in particular, associates Candida with the Virgin Mary, a model of motherhood and holy virtue. In the third act, he reads her his sonnet about an angel to her, then exclaims, "Candida, Candida, Candida, Candida, Candida. I must say that now, because you have put me on my honor and truth; and I never think or feel Mrs. Morell: it is always Candida. […] Don't you feel that every time is a prayer to you?" (60). His reverent adoration imitates how Catholic Christians pray to Mary, seeing her as having close access to her son, whom they believe to be their savior. By likening Candida's name to a prayer, Marchbanks equates Candida with being a saint.

Antithesis: The New Woman

In many ways, the New Woman is antithetical to the Victorian ideal of motherhood. Whereas the ideal mother played into the gendered role assigned her, the New Woman "sought career opportunities and demanded an end to a gendered double standard" (Hadfield 215). She

was "educated, physically fit, rationally dressed, and independently minded" (215). The New Woman sought agency and change in ways that a mother, catering to the demands of children and husband, rarely can. Shaw, in particular, associates the physicality of his New Women with the fitness of their minds (216). His character Candida is "well built, well nourished, […] now quite at her best" and her visage signifies "largeness of mind and dignity of character to ennoble her cunning in the affections" (Shaw, *Candida* 19). Candida's behavior, scrubbing boots and cutting onions, throughout the play confirms this interpretation. She actively works in the home, signifying her nurturing and wholesome character.

New Women valued their independence, and despite her marriage to Morrell, Candida exercises a fair amount of it. The play commences with Morrell working in his home, the domestic sphere usually relegated to Victorian women. Candida returns to the home from outside sphere, where she has taken a vacation. Morrell's placement within the domestic sphere and Candida's outside of it subverts the Victorian ideal of a woman remaining at home while the husband attends to sphere of work and business, as Ruskin describes in "Of Queens' Gardens." Shaw constructs one of the final scenes in such a way that Candida has the agency to choose between husband and suitor:

> MORRELL: We have agreed—he and I—that you shall choose between us now. I await your decision.
> CANDIDA (slowly recoiling a step, her heart hardened by his rhetoric in spite of the sincere feeling behind it). Oh! I am to choose, am I? I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other.
> MORELL (firmly). Quite. You must choose definitely.
> MARCHBANKS (anxiously). Morell: you don't understand. She means that she belongs to herself. (Shaw, *Candida* 75)

Morell still views Candida as inherently dependent upon one of the two men; Marchbanks calls him to realize Candida's independence of them both.

Synthesis: Candida as Un-idealized Wife and Mother

The synthesis of the Victorian ideal and the New Woman reveals the unidealized Candida—"the Candida of the onions and scrubbing brush, the Candida who prefers the poker to Marchbanks' sonnets, who has no interest in Titian, who is good at putting off collectors"—as mother and wife, capable and assertive, prevailing over home, husband, and a handsome young man alike (Adler 52). The Hegelian synthesis is both a product of the thesis and antithesis, while rejecting aspects of each as well. Likewise, Candida is maternal, yet she exercises that influence over grown men, not children. She is angelic and guards her virtue, but also allows imprudent relationships with men to develop. Marchbanks recognizes Candida's maternal disposition and remarks, "It is she who wants somebody to protect, to help, to work for—somebody to give her children to protect, to help and to work for. Some grown up man who has become as a little child again" (Shaw, *Candida* 66). Shaw plays up that effect, having Candida call Marchbanks and Morrell "wonderful boy," "my silly boy," and "poor boy" (50, 49, 53) At times, she is almost contemptible towards them, saying, "Two MEN! Do you call that a man? (To Eugene) You bad boy!" (67). While on the surface, the three seem to be participating in a love triangle, Candida's motherly condescension desexualizes a large part of their interactions.

While Candida does not flaunt her sensuality lasciviously, like Mrs. Warren in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, she does allow room for impropriety by bringing Marchbanks, who is in the throes of puppy-dog love, home with her. At her invitation, he sprawls across the rug with his head on her knees, and she says, "I'm sure you feel a great grown up wicked deceiver—quite proud of yourself, aren't you?" (Shaw, *Candida* 60). Her teasing acknowledges their immodesty; however, the tone of her conversation is touched with "wise-hearted maternal humor" (60). The

maternal touch, however, is never quite enough to make her relationship with Marchbanks appropriate. Candida wonders to Morell if Eugene will forgive her "for abandoning him to the bad women for the sake of [her] goodness—[her] purity," saying, "Ah, James, how little you understand me, to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity! I would give them both to poor Eugene as willingly as I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there were nothing else to restrain me" (51). Candida's desire to love and nurture Marchbanks confirms her virtue in the sense that she desires good things for Marchbanks while preserving her own purity.

Marchbanks recognizes that Candida is more than the Victorian ideal, and yet he idealizes her into an airy abstraction of reality. He says to Morrell, "A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom, and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching?" (Shaw, *Candida* 30). His ideal is for Candida "to be idle, selfish and useless: that is to be beautiful and free and happy" (45). Ironically, Marchbanks would feed Candida with more metaphors, musings, and poetic ponderings. At every turn, he tries to relieve Candida of her domestic labors, whether filling the lamps with wax, brushing boots, or cutting onions. Marchbanks sees through the veneer of Victorian ideals, but not his own.

Candida does not need to be rescued from her domestic sphere, only the recognition of her place and power in it. As in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, "'it is the man who is the doll' in a marriage, and the woman who wields an absolute power over him in his own home" (Hadfield 218). Adler observes that, like Gina in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, Candida "shields her husband from unpleasantness, caters to his whims, yet expects him to share in the manual labor" (Adler

53). Candida does not usurp power to wield over her husband; the play shows that she already possesses that power.

Conclusion

Shaw, with his iconic wit and iconoclastic themes, subverts Victorian ideals of femininity in his dramatic works. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Candida* both follow a dialectic pattern as characters and ideals react against each other. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Vivie's character is born from the conflict between a society ordered by restrictive gender roles and her mother's opposition to them. While formed by those experiences, Vivie embodies a different female type—the New Woman. In *Candida*, both the Victorian ideal and the anti-Victorian ideal (the New Woman) find their synthesis in Candida. She embraces her physicality like the New Woman and her virtue like the Victorian woman; she knows the strength with which she supports her husband, and chooses him, in his weakness, anyways. Both Vivie and Candida run contrary to traditional Victorian types of women and demonstrate Shaw's subversion of those tropes.

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