

Whilst our sex is decided at birth, our gender is much more about society's views of masculinity and femininity. In the play, Goldsmith makes us laugh at the way men and women, as fathers, mothers, lovers, young and old, rich and poor behave but in doing so he also raises important questions about society. Consider the presentation of the differing relationships between Kate and her father and Tony and his mother; consider the powerlessness of women and their consequent need for men with money; and just why does Mrs. Hardcastle feel the need to keep hold of the jewels? In Act II, Mrs. Hardcastle fakes sophistication with Hastings but, through Goldsmith's use of dramatic irony, we recognise her falseness.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the question of each gender's role in society often centers on power. In the Victorian world of this play, men have greater influence than women. Men make the political decisions for their families, while women work around the house, quietly taking care of the children.

Men are valued for their intellect and judgment, while women are attractive to men for their beauty and chastity. However, Wilde raises interesting questions about gender roles in *The Importance of Being Earnest* by putting women (like Lady Bracknell) in positions of power and by showing that men (i.e., Jack and Algernon) can be irresponsible and bad at decision-making.

In *Earnest*, figures like Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen, and Cecily reverse gender role stereotypes by exercising power and control over the opposite sex.

Although the female characters in *Earnest* exercise power briefly, they also conform to many female stereotypes—ultimately ensuring that the play upholds traditional gender roles instead of challenging or changing them.

Lady Bracknell also comments on education "education produces no effect" this shows that she is still a woman of Victorian society as women at the time wouldn't of had as many right to education as men would have done, this is rather ironic as she is playing out a male role. Moreover Lady Bracknell makes a remark on voting an politics "oh they count as Tories they dine with us or come in the evening" this shows off her masculinity as women at the time did not have the right to vote, this makes her seem as though she is putting on a facade; pretending to know of politics, and to exercise her power, again this creates comedy as women had very little power, so it is completely absurd. Gender and role reversal also creates comedy through more characters that just Lady Bracknell. When Algernon proposes to Cecily and she replies with "we have been engaged for the past three months" Cecily then proceeds to tell him; Algernon completely complaisant in this part of the act, about their fantasy love affair, whilst he was in London entirely unaware of the situation. This creates comedy because again it is a female dominating a male character and announcing their engagement, when it is traditionally a man's role to propose, and the absurdity and unlikelihood of the situation. Gwendolen illustrates that men posses many female traits "and certainly once a man begins to...

When we read this play, we see that the dramatist portrays each character to depict the hypocrisy of the contemporary Victorian society. Wilde deals with the inconsistency of nature of men here. None of the male characters are serious in life or earnest in nature. There is lack of moral values in each character. The characters contradict themselves most of the time.

Wilde creates Lady Bracknell to represent society during the 1900's. Her tone is always earnest: she is arrogant and she speaks in commands, judgements, and pronouncements. She is always serious and authoritative, being the adult figure in the play; she imposes the rules and authority. However much of what she says is ridiculous, hypocritical, or self-contradictory. Lady Bracknell contradicts herself when she wonders about the possibility of Algernon and Cecily getting married and she does not agree with mercenary marriages, but she herself married into the same situation. "But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind."

Wilde has presented Lady Bracknell talking about the position of men. She says, in her talk with Gwendolyn house is the proper place for man. In the late 19th century women had reached to the point of giving their traditional place to men, and taking the professional position of men. This bit of conversation reveals women have also begun to move freely in the occupational world. Wilde pokes gentle fun at this side of feminist move. Wilde used Miss Prism as an awakened woman who serves as a governess of Cecily, and writes novels. Perhaps Wilde too wanted to see the limitations of the movement of feministically. The feministically awake and educated women had to cling to the mere job of governess. They had to write fictions. Except this pursuit and jobs of governess those feminist women got nothing significant.

In the play, Cecily and Gwendolyn discuss, changing gender roles in their conversation about male domesticity, indicating their belief that "home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man". Marriage, however, remained most woman's primary goals and occupation. Arranged marriages had been on the decline since the late eighteenth century but were not unknown among the Victorian era's upper classes.

The status of the nineteenth century's educated women remained grim, however, with few occupational outlets, other than teaching. Miss Prism, Cecily's governess, combines two common female occupations, teaching and novel writing, another activity at which women flourished. Prism's confusion between a baby and a manuscript pokes fun at changing ideas about parenthood and child rearing. The misplaced baby symbolized what critics saw as a confusion of gender roles, when women entered the traditionally

masculine world of the mind. The plight of orphaned baby Jack illustrates the destabilization of family ties, which in his case are sequentially lost, invented, changed and discovered.

"The Importance of Being Earnest" was written by the famous Irish author Oscar Wilde. The play represents Wilde's late Victorian view of the aristocracy, marriage, wit and social life during the early 1900's. His characters are typical Victorian snobs who are arrogant, overly proper, formal and concerned with money. The women are portrayed as sheltered, uneducated, and some as dominating figures over the men in their lives. There is no sense of identity for Cecily and Gwendolen, the only woman within the play that clearly stands out is the Governess, Lady Bracknell.

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Sexism or gender differentiation and class differentiation in George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man

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Abstract: Before surveying the gender differentiation and class discrimination in Arms and the Man, it will be useful to know something about the Victorian period in England, in which the play was written by George Bernard Shaw. In this period, people live in harsh condition and modernism arrived in England. Working classes tried to develop their social class and condition, but the outstanding idea of that time was: each person who was born in social class can't change his or her class. There were many differences between high and low class of society. For example, the theater was only belonged to the educated people and common people were not allowed to go to the theater or a person from low class can't marry to one from high class. Here George Bernard Shaw as an active member of Fabian society, destroys all of these convictions and

insists on the equality of people's income and right especially equality of man and woman in society. The aim of this paper is to study class and gender differentiation in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Arms and the man* and find the disadvantages of these differences in society.

Keywords: Class Differentiation, Gender Differentiation, George Bernard Shaw, Drama

1. Introduction

One of the reasons for surveying George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* is that, the play backs to Victorian period that is very important in history of England because in Victorian period England was in the terrible creative conditions. Modernism arrived there, and persons faced to contradiction of old and new beliefs. They lived in harsh conditions. The theater was only belonged to the educated people. Therefore, the artists reflected unbearable condition of life, destructions of families, harshness, and racism in their works, and social realism created to show society in harsh manner and exhibit ugly reality. Social realism is a movement against the romanticism, and classism that exhibits reality as it is without any change. Social realism shows gender discrimination, feeling of loneliness, harshness, sexism, unbearable condition of life, destruction of families, racism, and class differentiation. Class difference, gender difference, brutality, and harshness are more visible than other in this period therefore, the writers and artist depict these conditions in their works. Among them, George Bernard Shaw was the great one who pictures these condition in his plays for he believes that drama is the best way for showing the reality of society and creating change in it. George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin and joined to the Fabian society after visiting Henrik Ibsen who was the pioneer of realism in theater. Fabian society was the powerful group of British social theorists during the period of 1880s to 1920s which was founded formally on January 4, 1884 with R. Pease as secretary. The vital aim of Fabian was controlling the social and economic conditions of society by methods of propaganda and organization and equality of income. The first person who made Fabian society famous was George Bernard Shaw by editing the *Fabian Essay* (1889). As mentioned before, in social realism, there is insisting on the reality of society even if it is ugly reality. The artist in this school picture the reality of society as it is not as it should be. Here, George Bernard Shaw depicts this reality about class and gender differentiation in his play. George Bernard Shaw shows how women are treated in society and how class differences limited people to develop. In *Arms and the Man*, class struggle is shown by introducing of play different characters. As a free thinker, George Bernard Shaw supports women's right, equality of income, sharing private property, and change in voting system. Critics, writers, and International Journal of Literature and Arts 2014; 2(1): 6-9 theatre goers recognized him as intelligent and humorous writer. George Bernard Shaw depicts how wealthy men behave with women. For these people there is no difference between high and low class of women. He portrays higher classes that control and role over the lower classes through power, fear, and custom. George Bernard Shaw's ideas about feminism, sexual morality, and classes make the core

of this play.

3. Gender Differentiation

In reading a George Bernard Shaw's play, *Arms and the Man*, one should pay attention to difference between characters of social class and gender or sexes. George Bernard Shaw pictures gender role in characters, Louka, Catherine, Sergius, and other. There is masculinity in Louka's character while annoying Nicola. She reveals her control through her interaction with Sergius. Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. In first act of the play, Raina is threaded by Bluntschli who runs and escapes from soldiers. He threatens a defenseless woman with his gun and allows her to hide him behind the curtain.

Raina: Who's there? Who's there? Who is that?

A man's voice: (in the darkness, suddenly, but threatening)

Sh-sh! Don't call out or you'll be shot. Be good; and no harm will happen to you.

Remember. If you raise your voice my pistol will go off.

Raina: Yes.

Man: Well, I don't intend to get killed if I can help it.

Do you understand that?

Raina: I suppose not.

Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death.

Man: All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can, and kill as many of the enemy as we can (Act I, 10).

Nicola is a principle male servant of Petkoff household and Louka is beautiful maid and Nicola's fiancée. Nicola has his ambitions and wants to be a businessman. When he realized that Sergius has romantic desire to Louka, he decided to have Louka as a customer rather than a wife. So he encourages her to engage with Sergius. "Louka: I believe you would rather be my servant than my husband. You make me more out of me. Oh, I know that soul of yours. I must believe in my own way. [Sergius comes in. he checks himself a moment on seeing Louka; then goes to the stove]. Nicola: oh, sir, thank you kindly. I was speaking to this foolish girl about her habit of running up here to the library whenever she gets a chance, to look at the books. That's the worst of her education sir: it gives her habit above her station. Louka: without looking at Sergius, begins to arrange the papers on the table. Sergius: looks at her sleeve and says shall I cure it? Louka: you can't cure it now. Sergius: quite sure? [He makes a movement as if to take her in his arms](Act III, 61).

George Bernard Shaw believes Nicola used Louka as an object for gaining his wish as Bluntschli who used Raina as an object to save himself. Here, Shaw illustrates the condition of women in society and the way they are behaved by men. Nicola is satisfied for achieving a customer like Louka in his business rather than worry about his fiancée. He is ready to separate from Louka and encourage her to do it only for his ambitions. On the other side, Sergius prefers Louka to Raina when noticed Raina's hidden secret of chocolate cream soldier. He announced his

engagement with Louka who is a lady like Raina now. Again, Shaw says that "Sergius utilized Louka as a mean for understanding Raina's secret when Raina was in the way of going out of house.

The structure of act II is more serious. Mr. Sergius tries to make love with Raina but she leaves the room and Louka enters. She tells Raina secret to him without saying the name of his rival. Sergius tries to understand it while he accidentally bruises Louka's arm. He apologizes but Louka asks him to kiss her arm.

Sergius: who is my rival?

Louka: A gentleman has no right to hurt a woman under any circumstances. I beg your pardon.

Sergius: That sort of apology may satisfy a lady. Of what use is it to a servant?

Louka: No, I want my hurt made well (Act II, 41).

Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. It can be understood of servants's conversation.

Nicola: Be warned in time, Louka: mend your manners. I know the mistress. She is so grand that she never dreams that any servant could dare to be disrespectful to her; but if once suspects that you are defying her, out you go.

Louka: I do defy her. I will defy her. What do I care for her?

Nicola: If you quarrel with the family, I never can marry you. It's the same as if you quarrelled with me!

Louka: You take her part against Jlle, do you? (Act II, 25).

George Bernard Shaw further shows the vulgarity and impoliteness of the Petkoff towards women when Raina explains that Bulgarians of good standing people in our position wash their really hands nearly every day or the time, Petkoff blames his wife's chronic sore throat on washing her neck every day. "Catherine: Oh, my usual sore throats; that are all. Petkoff: [with conviction] that comes from washing your neck everyday. I have often told you so" (Act II, 38). His lecture on the foolishness of frequent bathing is a sign from George Bernard Shaw that how wealthy men behave with women. For these people there is no difference between high and low class of women.

4. Conclusion

It is important to read carefully the play, *Arms and the Man* because it shows how much situations can affect life, thought, and behaviors of individuals of society which reflects in literature of that era. Many of writers in these period, posed women as victims or decoration, but George Bernard Shaw created intelligent, brilliant, and forceful female characters in control of their own destinies despite the social forces of that time in which he was writing. Sean O'Casey in his book *A whisper about George Bernard Shaw* writes "Shaw's main fight, armed with all his logical art and wit, was to force forward a system of thought that would, in the longer short run, evolve a sane and sensible life for all" (O'Casey, 1899: 42). What makes George Bernard Shaw as great playwright refers to his attention to reality of society. During his writing, he pictures reality of society as it is. He chooses drama as a vehicle for showing the reality. He follows the main idea of Fabian Society that

is equally of people and income. On the whole, in George Bernard Shaw's view both man and woman have their own private imagination. Both are born equal. It is completely natural that people have positive and negative qualities. So, in his view people are equal and there are no class differences in society.