

The Problems of Victorian Society in G B Shaw's *Candida*

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ABSTRACT

Candida, a comic play by G B Shaw is one of the most acclaimed plays of G. B Shaw where he expresses what he is famous in i.e. the society and its people with his usual way of story-telling. It is a classic play in terms of economy and adherence of time and place. It is Shaw's best constructed play where he observes every detail minutely. The play, in Shaw's words, "is a play of Ideas, and is not written merely for the sake of amusement. Instead it is a very high degree of social satire". The character of the lady Candida had exploded the myth of the lady. And thus to the Victorians this lady was "paragon of virtue". Though it is not as great as other plays of G. B Shaw, still it is very popular. It has huge fan following despite being not great. Let us take a look at the play as a typical Victorian play.

Keywords: *Politics, Society, Modern, Play Of Ideas, Passionate, Romance, Youth, Comedy, Morality, Idealism, Social Satire*

Candida is a comic drama by the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw. It was written in 1894 and first published in 1898. G. B Shaw was a Nobel Prize and Oscar-winning Irish playwright, critic and socialist whose influence on Western theatre, culture and politics can be noticed from 1880s to his death in 1950. Shaw's greatest gift was for the modern drama. Appreciating Shaw, Louis Cazamian says that:

"Shaw was an entertainer, but with no loss of dignity...

His thoughts were logical and serious, he fights not
for himself but for his idealism. He brings to light
the social problems and try to solve it by his works"

Candida's central characters are clergyman James Morell, his wife Candida and a youthful poet, Eugene Marchbanks, who tries to win Candida's love. The play questions Victorian beliefs of love and marriage, asking what a woman really desires from her husband. The priest is a Christian Socialist, allowing Shaw to unite political issues of the society of his time into the

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story. Shaw himself has revealed that, “*Candida* is a play of ideas. It is not written for the sake of mere amusement. It produces a very high degree of social satire”

Many critics were of the opinion that, “It is a comedy of purposeful fun. This play is eternally youthful and joyous in which Shaw revives the ideas and makes fun”

The play is set in the northeast town of London in the month of October. The play centers around *Candida*. Shaw presents her by saying that, “She is a woman of 33; well built, well nourished, at her best, with the double charm of youth and motherhood”. Moreover, “She is a loving woman who inspires love in others”

She is the wife of a famous clergyman, the Reverend James MavorMorell, who is a Christian Socialist, popular in the Church of England, but *Candida* is responsible for much of his success. For Morell we can say that, “Morell is foggy and delusive and has poor intellect and understanding”

The play opens with *Candida*'s return to home from a trip to London with Eugene Marchbanks, a young poet who wants to rescue her from what he believes to be her dull family life. Marchbanks has been described by Morell, “He is a strange, shy youth of 18, slight effeminate with delicate childish voice”

However, as soon as Marchbanks comes closer to *Candida*, he falls in love with her and believes she deserves something more than just satisfaction from her husband. He considers her divine and his love eternal. In his view, it is quite improper and shameful for *Candida* to have to attend to irrelevant household tasks. Morell believes *Candida* needs his care and protection, but the truth is quite the contrary.

Marchbank seriously loves her. The duo involved in an argument on *Candida* while she was not at home. Marchbank threatens Morell to leave her and on the other hand Morell thinks that *Candida* is unfaithful to him and will go with Marchbanks. The argument was getting serious. Marchbanks tells Morell that, “I loved her so that I wanted nothing more than the happiness of being in such love”

However, the angry Morell asks him to leave the house right away. Marchbanks was going and at the door he finds *Candida*. She invites him in the house again and requests him to take lunch.

However, after that *Candida* come to know about their argument and try to settle it calmly by having all of them in the room. Morell speaks out boldly to his wife:

“Eugene declares that you are in love with him...”

He is the poet, who sees everything, and I am the

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poor parson who understands nothing.

That foolish boy claimed that you belong to him and not to me" (*Candida*, pg.)

And he also adds that, "We agreed- I and he- that you shall choose between us now". Morell breaks down: his eyes and throat fill with tears. He becomes like a wounded animal. He cannot speak. Now *Candida* knows everything. She says that, "I give myself to the weaker of the two"

By saying this she touches and holds the hand and goes to the arms of Morell by smiling towards Marchbanks. Now Morell becomes emotional and at the same time relaxed because his wife eventually chooses him over Marchbanks. He says that, "You are my wife, my mother, my sister; you are the sum total of all loving care to me"

However, *Candida* advises Marchbanks to repeat two sentences that she is saying whenever he thinks of her. The two sentences are, "When I am thirty, she will be forty five. When I am sixty, she will be seventy-five" (*Candida*, pg). To which he replies that, "In a hundred years, we shall be the same age. I have a better secret in my heart"

Thus, finally at the night he leaves. Both the husband and the wife hug him but they do not know the secret of which Marchbanks was talking.

The secret actually is that Marchbanks, the poet now comes to understand the life in better way, he knows the society, its people, the double-standard, the treachery, he now understands his own self better. He has self-realization; he becomes better person by this experience. Thus, this is the secret of which he was talking about.

Thus, the play is a wonderful satire on society where people cheat each other in the name of love. It has some comic elements where the 18 year old man falls in love with the 33 years lady. The deal between the two lovers is also a comic one, and the final speech of Marchbanks even provides some comic effect. Thus, this play has everything: love, emotion, comedy, secret, satire etc. So, it is one of the most wonderful plays ever written in English literature.

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