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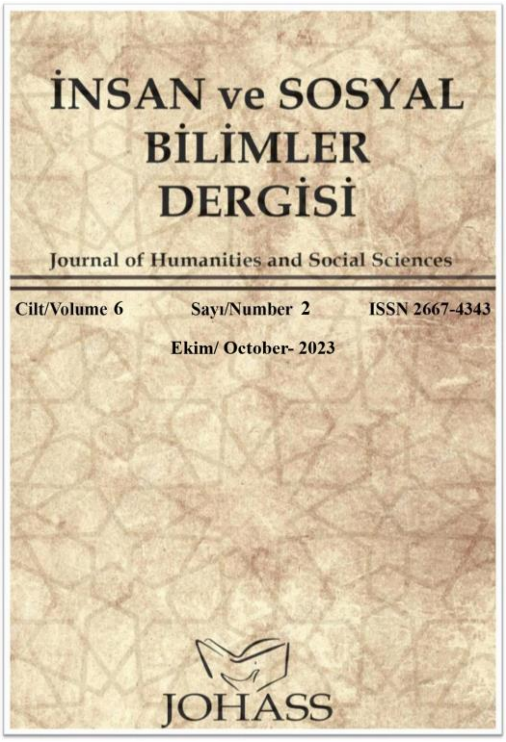

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A Feminist Analysis of George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession:* The Concept of the "New Woman"*

*This article is the revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the Akdeniz 9th International Conference on Social Sciences, held on 1-2 April, 2023 in Adana.

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A Feminist Analysis of George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*: The Concept of the "New Woman"[*]

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Abstract

Mrs. Warren's Profession was written in 1893 by the Irish critic and dramatist George Bernard Shaw, who introduced social realism to the British stage. First performed in 1902 in London, the text is a social critique satirizing the stereotypical Victorian norms. Reflecting Shaw's feminist ideals, the play also contributed to the development of the feminist movement. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* introduces the "New Woman" type who rebels against the stereotyped female representations and male-centered conventions of the nineteenth century. The play mainly revolves around a controversial taboo topic, prostitution. Shaw dramatizes this profession through the two untraditional female characters. Kitty Warren is an audacious woman running a brothel to provide her daughter with better life and education standards and Vivie is a highly-educated and independent woman who expostulates her mother for her profession. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* stresses that it is the social, economic and moral ills of the society that lead women to choose this profession. This paper, from a feminist lens, links these two non-conformist characters to navigate the ways through which the concept of the "New Woman" is represented. This paper also investigates how these characters protest against the stereotypical female roles imposed on them to gain an autonomous identity within society. Thus, this study, through these two female characters, reveals how this play dethrones the myth of the "Angel in the House," the ideal Victorian woman, and sheds light on the modern feminism.

Keywords: *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, The "New Woman" concept, "Angel in the House," feminism, female representation

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Introduction

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), a pioneering Irish playwright, literary critic and socialist who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1925, is known as the father of modern drama. Inspired by the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, Shaw contributed to the Western stage with more than sixty plays including *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Pygmalion* (1913), and five novels, including *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882-83) and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). "Shaw, as a nineteenth-century writer for whom social distinction, especially the position between the rich and the poor, was the greatest problem in society, was well placed to draw such an issue into his plays. Shaw created female characters with various economic and social backgrounds, from the lower and the middle, to the upper classes" (Ahmad, 2018, p. 23). Shaw followed Ibsenist ideas, which he specified in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891); he embodied social consciousness and cultural and political issues in his plays to raise the awareness of the audience and expounded his views in the prefaces to his works. In this sense, his works often bear the features of didactic plays.

Mrs. Warren's Profession is a contemporary satire, filled with unusual characters, mirroring Shaw's moral, socialist, cultural and feminist views. In his article "Mr. Bernard Shaw as a Social Critic," William Mackintire Salter defines the play as "one of the most impressive, one of the most moral plays" (1908, p. 452). In his 1897 letter to actress Ellen Terry, Shaw posed his views about the play: "It's much my best play; but it makes my blood run cold: I can hardly bear the most appalling bits of it. Ah, when I wrote that, I had some nerve" (Shaw, 1897, as cited in John, 1949, p. 193).

The play takes place in the countryside town in the south of Haslemere, in the Southern Surrey, in the Victorian England. Besides the themes of women rights, poverty, moral corruption, and social, economic and gender-based disparities, the play mainly centres on a controversial taboo topic, prostitution. Shaw dramatizes this profession via the two untraditional female characters. Kitty Warren is an audacious woman who was once a prostitute, and is now running a chain of brothels at different locations in Europe to provide her daughter with better social and academic standards. Her daughter Vivie is a Cambridge-educated and independent 22-year-old woman. Upon graduating from university with honours in Mathematics, she returns home to become acquainted with her mother, whom she barely knows. It is a shocking moment for Vivie when she finds out the secret about her mother's profession; she expostulates her for her choices in life. The play revolves around

intergenerational dialogues as well as gradually distorted relationships between these two women. Throughout the play, Mrs. Warren tries to come to terms with her daughter with the aim of justifying, for which she condemns the economic disparities and hypocrisy as well as the reasons for her choosing this life. Vivie's complex feelings and unsteady reactions towards her mother create a complicated allegory within the play from time to time.

Written in 1893, in the early period of Shaw's career, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was first published in 1898 in the two-volume edition of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant,* the third play in the *Unpleasant* volume. The performance of the play created chaos among the public and in the press due to its theme. "The play was originally banned by the Lord Chamberlain in 1893" (*A Noise Within*, 2017-18, p. 16) due to its theme. In 1902, it was "first performed at The New Lyric Club, a private theatre space in London. [In 1905, the play had] its first public performance in New York. This performance was interrrupted by poliçe because the play was considered indecent" (*A Noise Within,* 2017-18, 7). The denunciations of the play were harsh and provocative; it often received critical attention from moralistic and misogynist perspectives. In "The Author's Apology," preceding the play, Bernard Shaw satirically expresses his views regarding the chaos and the repercussions after the first night of the play in London: "*Mrs. Warren's Profession* has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theatre critics clean out of the practice of their profession" (Shaw, 1894, p. 5). With respect to the critics' reactions against his characters, Shaw (1894) replies:

> I declare that the real secret of the cynicism and inhumanity of which shallower critics accuse me is the unexpectedness with my characters behave like human beings, instead of conforming to the romantic logic of the stage. . . Because I have thrown this logic ruthlessly overboard, I am accused of ignoring, not state logic, but, of all things, human feeling. (p. 19)

As mentioned in John Corbin's "Introduction" to Shaw's "Apology," entitled "The Tyranny of Police and Press," the play was explicitly described in the *New York Herald* as an "an insult to decency" since it "defends immorality," "glorifies debauchery," and "pictures children and parents living in calm observance of most unholy relation" (1905, p. 7). *St. James' Gazette* defined the play as "grossly unsuitable for stage treatment" and "wholly evil" (as cited in Laurence, 1970-74, p. 255). In his "Apology,"[2] Shaw addresses his readers not to

[2] *Shaw's "The Author's Apology" in Mrs. Warren's Profession will be cited as "Apology" hereafter.*

justify himself or apologize for writing on an offensive topic that created such a state of chaos, but to clarify what he really intended to show with the characters he artfully crafted.

Bernard Shaw, instead of blaming Mrs. Warren, for her occupational decision, accuses the Victorian society and its social, moral, and economic rottenness that led women to choose prostitution as a profession:

Though it is quite natural and RIGHT for Mrs Warren to choose what is, according to her lights, the least immoral alternative, it is none the less infamous of society to offer such alternatives. For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality. The man who cannot see that starvation, overwork, dirt, and disease are as anti-social prostitution—that they are the vices and crimes of a nation, and not merely its misfortunes—is (to put it as politely as possible) a hopelessly Private Person (Shaw, 1894, p. 23).

In his "Apology," Shaw emphasizes that "The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to me man that can afford to be good to her" (p. 64) and in his *Everybody's Political What's What?* Shaw (1944) reiterates that prostitution is "an economic phenomenon produced by an underpayment of honest women so degrading" (p. 196). Thus, the social, financial and commercial inequalities in the Victorian system, prioritizing men and excluding women, hoisted some women to revolt against the system, which propelled the feminist movement and paved the way for the rise of the "New Woman."

Method

In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the Socialist playwright George Bernard Shaw delves into the economic roots of prostitution and lays the blame on the capitalist system of the Victorian society. This article, through a feminism lens, introduces a critical aspect in which two non-conformist female characters, Vivie and Kitty, represent the "New Woman" concept. By closely analysing the text, it is argued that these two characters reject the stereotypical female roles imposed on them by the male-centered society, and struggle for a self-sufficient and an autonomous way of life in order to survive and gain an identity within the Victorian community. In this aspect, this article investigates how the "New Woman" type in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* dethrones the myth of the "Angel in the House," the ideal Victorian woman, by both making a turning point in the late Victorian feminism and shedding light on the modern feminism.

From "Angel in the House" to the "New Woman"

Throughout history, the evolutional progress of women within society has commonly been a struggle. The historical archives abound with women activists who protested traditional gender roles and male-dominated practices, and fought for voting rights and equality in pursuit of gaining social rights, such as equal pay and job opportunities, as well as a respectable and independent status in the social, academic, professional and political realms of society. In fact, the efforts of the feminists date back to the medieval period. Poets and writers, such as Margery Kempe and Christine de Pisan from the fourteenth century, and Aphra Behn from the seventeenth, who are considered among the early feminists, laid the groundwork for modern feminism. Behn, for example, was a middle-class woman who earned her living by her writing like a man.

In the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft's ground-breaking work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) had a substantial impact on advocates for women's rights; her arguments were ahead of her time. Subsequently, the UK women's suffragette movement created a great change towards women's gaining liberation and a new identity in the early twentieth century; suffragette campaigning started in Boston in the 1860s and continued up to the British campaigning in the 1920s. Despite such pioneer feminists who resisted the practices of female classification, labelling them as mother, daughter, prostitute, and mistress, women who seek independence and self-sufficiency through their work have always been seen less favourably and faced more disadvantages than their male rivals throughout history. The male has been privileged, while the female has been imprisoned according to the patriarchal codes.

With regard to female oppression and the representation of femininity, the French writer, theorist and feminist Simone de Beauvoir, in her 1949 book, *The Second Sex*, a detailed agenda of the feminist theory, suggests that "our societies are patriarchal and a woman must break the bonds in order to be herself as a human being" (1973, p. 125). As De Beauvoir also puts it:

> Women's legal status remained almost unchanged from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the nineteenth, but in the privileged classes her actual situation did improve. The Italian Renaissance was an individualistic epoch favourable for the emergence of strong personalities, regardless of sex. Women were powerful sovereigns, military fighters and leaders, artists, writers, and musicians. . . In later centuries the same

> license marked those women of rank or fortune who could escape the harsh common morality of the times. (Beauvoir, 1973, p. 136)

As inferred from Beauvoir's arguments, women's status depends on their social classes as well as the existing conditions of that period. Victorian society was the epitome of male-favouritism, limiting women socially, financially, and intellectually. Victorian values confined women to the house, the domestic space. Under the shadow of the patriarchal power, the ideal Victorian female figure is compelled to marry and take care of her husband and children; she is deprived of voting and financial rights as well as the control of their earnings and property.

The "Angel in the House" concept represents the stereotypical image of the Victorian woman; it was adapted from the British poet Coventry Patmore's narrative poem of the same name, first published in 1854. The poem depicts the ideal Victorian wife who is expected to raise her children and please her husband: "Man must be please; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best / she flings herself" (Patmore, 1-4). Similarly, British modernist and feminist author Virginia Woolf describes the "Angel in the House":

> [as] immensely sympathetic, immensely charming, utterly selfish. . . She sacrificed herself daily. . .Above all. . .she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great face. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. (Woolf, 1942, as cited in Barrett, 1979, p. 59)

Woolf also expresses how she killed her own "Angel" by saying "it was she [the Angel in the House] who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her" (Woolf, 1942, as cited in Barrett, 1979, p. 59). Emerging in the late nineteenth century, which had an important influence on the twentieth century, the concept of the "New Woman" refers to liberal women looking for radical changes, equality, and recognition in society. It was the Irish writer Sarah Grand who first used this term. In her "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," Grand suggests that the "[New Woman] proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and proscribed the remedy" (1894, p. 271).

The idea of the "Angel in the House" can be associated with a 1909 anti- suffrage postcard, St. Valentine's Greeting—Woman's sphere is in the HOME. The image portraying a young woman, knitting at "HOME" can be seen in Figure 1:

Figure 1

St. Valentine's Greeting—Women's Sphere is in the HOME (1909)[3]

From the feminist perspective, the "New Woman" represents the feminist ideals of the *fin-de-siècle*, as the opposite of the Victorian "Angel in the House." American author Winnifred Cooley, in *The New Womanhood*, suggests that "[t]he new woman seeks only to be a free individual" (1940, p. 40). Cooley also elaborates on the paradox of this concept by exemplifying it with types of women from history:

> [t]he term 'new woman' is luminous with meaning; yet it is a paradox; for the advanced woman, the woman who does things, who strives not only to be, but to act, is not new, but more numerous than ever before. She has appeared at intervals throughout all time, in the guise of an inspired warrior, a brilliant orator, or organizer, a Greek poetess, a scholar, or a queen. The new woman is only the old woman with new opportunities! Women of the past were so limited by physical burdens and suppressed by public opinion that the wonder is there are so many beacon lights. (Cooley, 1940, pp. 15-16)

With regard to Bernard Shaw's depiction of the "New Women" on the stage, Barbara Watson, in *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman*, also puts it: "The New Women of

[3] *See the anti-suffrage illustration, St. Valentine's Greeting"—"Woman's sphere is in the HOME (1909). Courtesy of Catherine H. Palczewski. I am very grateful to Catherine H. Palczewski for sending me a high-resolution copy of this image, and giving permission to use it.*

Shaw's creation are all ultra-feminine feminists" (1964, pp. 178-179). Thus, contrary to the stereotypical "Angel in the House" images in the Victorian period, Kitty and her daughter Vivie Warren, although they are from different social classes in society, represent the "New Woman" type, who stand as feminist, independent and strong figures with masculine qualities. Therefore, it would be good to explore the text from a feminist perspective.

A Feminist Analysis of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw's two female characters, Mrs. Warren and Vivie, act as the representatives of the "New Woman" concept;" they are intelligent, audacious, and wise characters. Rejecting to conform to the traditional roles of women, these characters earn their own money in a male-centered coterie and struggle to be self-sufficient within the rotten social, economic and moral values of the Victorian society.

Vivie Warren is a wise, well-educated and ambitious woman of twenty-two, who has been brought up away from her mother and in boarding schools. The narrative voice complimentarily depicts her traits: "She is an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly-educated young middle-class Englishwoman. Age 22. Prompt, strong, confident, self-possessed" (I, p. 31). As Alkan notes, "When compared to conventional female type who is considered weak of intelligence to understand the complexities of public affairs in Victorian period, Vivie who has graduated from Cambridge, and knows mathematics very well represents the 'New Woman' type" (2021, p. 602). Vivie comes to visit her mother whom she little knows. At first, Vivie appreciates her mother's choices, saying "My dear mother, you are a wonderful woman. . .you are stronger than all England. And are you really and truly not one wee bit doubtful. . .or. . .or. . .ashamed?" (II, p. 64) and then Mrs. Warren defends herself from a more holistic perspective encompassing all women who have to choose such ways; she confesses the rotten social and economic conditions as well as the hypocritical manners of the British society:

> it's only good manners to be ashamed of it; it's expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel. . . I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. What's the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world the way for women, there's no good pretending that it's arranged the other way. I never was a bit ashamed, really. (II, p. 65)

Mrs. Warren reveals to her daughter that it was the conditions for working women that compelled them to do this job. She scorns the traditional public attitude of pretending that

women are honored and respected. The dramatic reason for Mrs. Warren's defending herself is the hypocrisy of the society. Therefore, she thinks there is nothing for her to be ashamed of. And that she rejects to apologize for this situation.

As an independent woman striving against the patriarchal system, Kitty also questions her daughter's lack of self-respect and expresses her reproachful feelings about it:

> How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery? And what's a woman worth. . .what's life worth. . .without self-respect? Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first-rate education, when other women that had just as good opportunities are in the gutter? Because I always knew how to respect myself and control myself. (II, p. 64)

This is Kitty's response to her daughter's lack of respect for her occupation. Her response is satirical as being a prostitute is associated with the lack of self-respect in society. Thus, she indicates that her perception of self-respect is equal to her social and economical independence; so she expresses that she is more advantageous than other women because she is an independent woman.

The crisis of mother-daughter relation appears when Vivie discovers the truth about her mother's highy profitable occupation. Upon Vivie's returning home, Mrs. Warren finds herself in a compelling battle with her daughter to advocate her life choices:

> Do you think I was brought up like you? able to pick and choose my own way of life? Do you think I did what I did because I liked it, or thought it right, or wouldn't rather have gone to college and been a lady if I'd had the chance? . . . Would you like to know what my circumstances were? (II, p. 60)

Mrs. Warren begs Vivie not to judge her for her decision and tries to excuse herself by telling about the circumstances she was in. She implies that she was forced to do so. She also emphasizes that she has provided her with economical support so that she could attend a college and find an opportunity to choose an occupation for herself. However, Vivie has no tolerance for her mother's excuses; her reaction is an epitome of the cleavage between them. She uncompromisingly disregards her mother's self-expressions: "[p]eople are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them" (II, pp. 60-61). Vivie's "New Woman" image mirrors her insubordinate insight into the male-controlled circumstances. As one of the few

highly-educated women in Victorian society, Vivie is a powerful and self-confident female figure, eagerly entering into her career in the field of finance in London.

Even though Vivie is described as attractive, she is remarkably masculine in terms of her appearance and lifestyle. The narrator celebrates her modern style: "Plain business-like dress, but not dowdy. She wears a chatelaine at her belt, with a fountain pen and a paper knife among its pendants" (I.p. 31). The word "fountain pen" signifies her "new womanhood" as it is associated with a cultivated woman. Praed also praises her merits at face: "I declare you are the most splendidly courageous woman I ever met" (IV, p. 88). Unconventionally, she is praised by a male figure and defined as a "courageous woman." Vivie also talks about masculine activities she is planning to do in the future: "I shall set up chambers in the City, and work at actuarial calculations and conveyancing. . . I shall do some law, with one eye on the Stock Exchange all the time" (I, p. 35). In this way, she challenges to the male-dominant working conditions. Vivie's masculine way also manifests itself in her manners and lifestyle. In Act I, in a private dialogue with Praed, she affirms: "I like working and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it" (I, p. 35). The image of Vivie with "cigar," "whisky" and a "detective story" represent the qualities of a masculine young woman. In this regard, J. Ellen Gainor asserts the portrayal of "New Woman" as follows: "The New Woman was noted for independence of spirit and action; [Vivie] refused to conform to the conventional, male determined code of feminine behavior. . . This personal adventurousness manifested itself externally in such unwomanly activities as cigaterrte smoking" (1991, p. 15). Here, Vivie is depicted not only a modern and independent woman with masculne qualities, but also a woman who can balance her work life and social life.

Vivie is aware of the current patriarchal situation, yet she is also angry at women who yield to the male oppression, showing no pity towards them. Cognizant of her capacity in the patriarchal society, she accuses other women and their view of life. The way Vivie perceives the world is also echoed in her future plans. Since she has no intention to find a husband, she rejects the marriage proposals of Frank Gardner, a 20-year-old handsome and foppish man who wants to marry a rich woman, and George Crofts, a wealthy aristocrat and the co-owner of brothels with Mrs. Warren. Thus, Vivie prefers her individual and social independence over marriage and rejects them.

As an unconventional woman, challenging the established female roles, Vivie cries out against her mother: "Mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a

mother, and I don't want a husband. I have spared neither Frank nor myself in sending him about his business" (IV, p. 95). Mrs. Warren also mirrors the "New Woman" image. "[She] is between 40 and 50, formerly pretty, showily dressed in a brilliant hat and a gay blouse fitting tightly over her bust and flanked by fashionable sleeves" (I, p. 37). Thus, she is quite modern in appearance.

However, when Vivie finds out that she is still running her business as a brothel proprietor, she does not accept it and declares her independence to her mother: "From now on, I go on my way in my own business and among my own friends. And you will go yours" (IV, p. 92). She blames her through empathy: "You are a conventional mother at heart. That is why I am bidding you good-bye now" (IV, p. 96). The dialogues between the mother and her daughter distort their relationships.

Gladys Margaret Crane, in her article, draws attention to Shaw's brilliantly crafting character conflicts: "The genious of Shaw is his creation of character conflict which meshes perfectly with his conflict of ideas" (1983, p. 30). With regard to generational incompatibilities between mothers and daughters, De Beauvoir (1949) comments on the mutual complex relationship between a mother and a daughter:

> [t]he mother's attitude towards her grown-up daughter is most ambivalent. . .in her daughter she finds a double. The double is a dubious personage, who assassinates [her] original. . . Thus, in becoming a woman the daughter condemns her mother to death. (p. 559)

About the mother-daughter conflict, Beauvoir suggests that the relationship between a mother and a daughter is inseperable; it displays mutual complicated dynamics, which leads to an ambivalent situation. A daughter might find her double self in her mother, yet she denies taking her as a role mother.

This can be seen in Act IV when Vivie likens herself to her mother: "I am my mother's daughter. I am like you; I must have work, and must make more money than I spend. But my work is not your work, and my way not your way. We must part" (IV, p. 95). This is Vivie's justification to express why they should part. Mrs. Warren, in order to defend herself, reacts against the injustice that occurred:

> Oh, the injustice of it, the injustice, the injustice! I always wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work, and I was slave-driven until I cursed the day I ever heard of honest work. I was a good mother, and because I made my daughter a good woman

she turns me out as if I was a leper. Oh, if I only had my life to live over again! (IV, p. 96)

Mrs. Warren also questions herself as to why she did not choose to be an ordinary labourer. Such dialogues between Mrs. Warren and her daughter reveal the dilemma between their different viewpoints and life choices. Therefore, through the vivid characters and the intriguing dialogues between her two female characters, Shaw brings to light the reasons why working-class women, brought up in poverty and deprivation, choose prostitution as an occupation in the late nineteenth century.

Discussion and Results

Mrs. Warren's Profession is a prominent play in terms of encouraging women and feminist ideals, and revealing the moral, social and economic ills of the Victorian era. Introducing the "New Woman" type to the British stage via the two untraditional characters: Mrs. Warren, a former prostitute and a powerful brothel-owner, and her daughter Vivie, a highly-educated and independent young woman who chooses her independence over marriage and domestic life. The play stands out as a ground-breaking work with its witty dialogues and striking themes in satirically responding to and critiquing the cultural, social, feminist, and economical concerns of the time. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* Shaw touches upon a wide range of themes including "economic, social, and moral problems such as women's rights, poverty, laboring class education, marriage, religion, political issues, health care and class privilege in a controversial and realistic way" (Yatağan, 2016, 278). "According to the social reformer Shaw, it was one of the most important tasks of the modern dramatist to put such uncomfortable subjects in the public pillory" (Dierkes-Thrun, 2006, p. 293).

The Victorian period was an era that undervalued women in the society in which they lived. Produced in this epoch, the play is a satirical critique problematizing and challenging the system favouring male privilege and encouraging female objectification at social, cultural, and feminist levels. Inspired by the plays of Henrik Ibsen, such *A Doll's House*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* exposes the double standards faced by women, underpinning the norms of the Victorian society and reinforcing male favouritism. However, his dramatic techniques were different from Ibsen's. "Whereas Ibsen had probed the inner lives and problems of his characters in plays suffused with a Scandinavian air of gloom, Shaw turned his characters into witty spokespersons for his social and political views" (Klaus et al., 1995, p. 43).

In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, I would argue that although Vivie and Kitty belong to different social classes and maintain a different life-style, both of them represent the "New Woman" type from different angles, challenging the Victorian gender norms and traditions. Vivie is an educated and a self-respected woman working outside the home; she refuses to accept marriage proposals from Frank and Crofts or take care of her mother. In that sense, Vivie acts as an indomitable woman and a quasi-suffragist. Likewise, Mrs. Warren is portrayed as a single and independent mother who has undergone many hardships to become a prosperous businesswoman even though she feels motherly protection towards her daughter and sticking to some certain traditions, such as suggesting some suitors for her. Thus, Mrs. Warren courageously conducts her profession, and strives to survive in the society she lives in. Therefore, these two women can be considered Shaw's most untraditional female characters since they abandon their family duties, earn their lives by working and reject to become "domestic angels" in the "Victorian houses."

Shaw stands out as a proponent of the newly-emerging feminist ideals and the individual, social and economic liberation of women, which predate the modern feminist and suffragette practices. For Shaw, one of the most crucial problems of the nineteenth century was "the position between the rich and the poor" (Ahmad, 2018, p. 23). In fact, what Shaw criticizes is the capitalist system that favours wealthy men, and suggests that "rich men without conviction are more dangerous in modern society than poor women without chastity" (Klaus et al, 1995, p. 646). Dorothy A. Hadfield draws attention to how Shaw perfectly focuses on women's issues, and notes that "perhaps no one wrote mor for and about women than George Bernard Shaw, whose advanced views on the 'woman question' earned him significant notice as an ardent champion of early feminism" (Hadfield, 2010, p. 112). Therefore, analysing the text and exploring Shaw's two female characters from the feminist perspective would paradigmatically open up alternative paths for contemporary criticism since the play offers the ideal reader a vast source with a wide range of possibilities of interpretation.

Mrs Warren's Profession play leads to a confrontation between the polar features, such as "conventional" and "unconventional," "new" and "old," and "educated" and "uneducated." Revolving around two female characters from differen social classes, the play merges at one point: the "New Woman," who resists male-centred traditions outside the domestic and patriarchal space. In this sense, Shaw presents the concept of the "New Woman" via these two characters to the British theatre, dismissing the "Angel in the House."

What makes the play distinctive and challenging is that it draws the readers into becoming conscious about the moral and social issues. Throughout the play, it is shown that moral corruption and hypocrisy as well as economic and social inequalities provide women with limited alternatives to survive within society. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is a play ahead of its time, passing beyond the limits of Victorian patriarchy and de-conventionalizing the female representation.

Viewed through the critical light of feminist criticism, I would argue that Shaw wisely unfolds the Victorian period by problematizing and displacing the female representation to raise a high level of awareness and consciousness among Victorian society, and illuminates the modernist period to come. In this context, Shaw's work promotes the concept of the "New Woman" not in the Victorian, but also in the Modernist canon. It performs an important function in redefining and replacing women's status in society. Blanche Lane defines the new woman as "an evolution from all previous types, and represents in her fullest growth the nineteenth century phase of womankind. . .not an abnormal excrescence of the social structure" (1896, p. 124). Even though the "New Woman" concept is mainly connected with the years 1890-1920, it can perennially be rearticulated and rediscovered in line with today's progressive developments of modern feminism. Doubtlessly, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* remains a unique work and appears to be igniting fresh debates, shedding light on the contemporary criticism for the modern and postmodern readers. In this sense, the "New Woman" type introduced by Shaw to the British stage can be anticipated as the herald of modern feminism.

Recommendations

Doubtlessly, women's statue in society is among the foremost themes in George Bernard Shaw's plays. George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* should be read from the feminist perspective. Analysing Shaw's play in the light of contemporary feminist theories paves the way for navigating the ways through which the concept of the "New Woman" is represented through the two female characters of the play, Kitty Warren and Vivie Warren. It is argues that these two characters rebel against the stereotypical female roles imposed on them and dethrone the myth of the ideal Victorian woman, "Angel in the House." They seek for their social and financial independence to gain an identity in the Victorian society. Although the play was written more than a hundred and thirty years ago, at the time

when such issues were regarded as taboo, it addresses to the controversial issues of contemporary feminism and modernism.

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