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## Who Philanders in G. B. Shaw's *The Philanderer*?

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### **ABSTRACT**

Shaw's second play of the plays Unpleasant, *The Philanderer*, is a challenge to answer the question: Why women have to abide by Laws? It's an attempt seemingly to distinguish between modern feminism and antecedents. It's a woman's transformation from womanliness to unwomanliness. It is also an attempt to let the woman aware of the philanderers' traps and to deal with them consciously. This paper focuses on the concept that the philandering is, so called, a game which is not reserved to one part of human sex. In some cases philandering may bring about a new horizon which is different from the far-famed one. In other words, the overmuch male's philandering makes of a woman as unwomanly one to keep protecting herself from the traps of philanderers. Whereas the female's philandering may bring a man about as a philosopher and thinker like the case of G. B. Shaw. It seems necessary in this study to pose the question; who philanders? A man or a woman?

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*Each of us has not only the bird and fish in him, but also – and how much more strongly! – The savage, the barbarian, the hunter and slayer, the warrior, the murder, the thief, the coward, and the fanatic*

George Bernard Shaw (*qtd. in Laurence 1961: 18*).

Shaw's second play of the plays Unpleasant, *The Philanderer*, is a critique of the notion that women necessarily have unwomanly behaviour insofar as to decide between 'nature' and 'nurture'. Therefore, the play "had been [considered as] one of Shaw's most directly autobiographical plays" (Holroyd 2006: 363). It is worth noting that as soon as Cardullo (2012) criticises the neglecting of Shaw's *The Philanderer*, he says:

Dealing with the serious literary and academic criticism of *The Philanderer* is a swift and easy task, because very little exists. Pick up any number of the full-length critical books on Shaw, and you will find that either they do not even mention the play or it is written off in a few sentences or even phrases (138).

In the realm of theory, the 17<sup>th</sup> century insisted on the secular feminism whereas the necessity for woman's self-assertiveness was widely spread. Women at that time were ambitious to let others accept them as 'unfeminine'. "However, historians have suggested that there was a gradual reduction in the scope of their concerns; by the 1680s, they were confining themselves to 'womanly' matters" (Walters 16). Henceforth, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a continuation of the issue. It was best known as the 'Amazons of the pen' that witnessed a type of radical feminists like Mary Astell<sup>2</sup>. In her first book of 1694 *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* she "urge[s] other women to take themselves seriously: they must learn to think for themselves, work to develop their own minds and skills, rather than always deferring to masculine judgement" (Walters 27). Therefore, the play is a series of events that criticizes "the subjection of women to men under antiquated marriage laws" (Brown 25). In more senses than one, Shaw in cooperation with Ibsen pertly intends to say that women should repudiate their womanliness to achieve unwomanliness to avoid the perilous joys of love in a modern age.

Thus, this study concentrates on the notion that the woman needs to behave nurtured rather than natural. There also should be a need for eradicating the notion of patriarch domination to let the woman have self-confidence and face philanderers bravely. The overmuch patriarchy, indeed, makes of a woman as an easy prey of philandering. Moreover, in a long argument, Shaw expanded the idea that the widow should be equated with the single woman in a society. However, Hegel's viewpoint of woman's belonging to mere herself is the main reason behind supporting the woman's personality in a society.

### **Who philanders? A Man or a woman?**

As a matter of fact, Shaw was a bachelor at the time of writing *The Philanderer* therefore his opinion about marriage is different in his play *Man and Superman*. In fact, *Man and superman* reveals his experiences of marriage while in *the Philanderer* he does not have any. He states about love "as a practical factor in society, is still a mere appetite" (Shaw 1913: 34). He expected that "When one is young, one marries out of mere curiosity, just to see what it's like" (Shaw 1965: 29). Besides he did not believe of virginity as he thought that woman might have not married for love but for money. Brustein (1970) indicates: "Shaw's Platonism undoubtedly dictates his opinion in these matters, but he is much less simplistic than he appears" (186). However, the idea of marrying for money is certainly true in the case of Grace and Craven. Both of their marriage took place for money. Craven confessed: "everybody knew it. I married for money" (Shaw 1965: 41). Regarding virginity and woman as a philanderer, when Charteris asked Grace whether her love to him was the first love affair, astonished she answers: "Have you forgotten that I am a widow? Do you think I married Tranfield for money" (Shaw 1965: 29)? It seems to me that Shaw makes Grace philandering when she returns to say: "I never was in love with Tranfield, though I only found that out when I fell in love with you" (ibid). It is an attempt seemingly to show that philandering, in some cases, is not reserved to a man. As it is the way of defending oneself. When a man philanders it is mere for his own enjoyment and lust but the woman's philandering is to defend and protect herself. Shaw in this situation is understood as an anti – feminist while it looks different as it is an evidence to be an arch – feminist. The exact definition of the philanderer is not necessarily to give a negative meaning. On the contrary, especially with Grace and Julia, it gives a positive meaning so as to arm themselves from the real negative philandering. Morgan (1972), however, provides a comprehensive background study in

*The Shavian Playground: An Exploration of the Art of George Bernard Shaw*. She says: "The Philanderer dealt with sex – with the power game of sex that was played in the society of the 1890's, and the vanity, deception and concealed vulnerability of men and women to one another" (Morgan 123).

As an indisputable proof, Shaw confessed in a letter to Frank Harries that he was a prey of philandering: "I had no love affairs. Sometimes women got interested in me; and I was gallant in the old-fashioned Irish way, implying as a matter of course that I adored them; but there was nothing in it on my side" (Laurence 1988: 189). In the same letter he again turned to give an evidence of having been a victim of philandering. It was his sorrow for losing his virginity after being raped by Jenny Patterson<sup>3</sup>. That is why *The Philanderer* reveals the tone of criticising the sex out of marriage. He was against making love with the married woman. It is true with his autobiographical experience when he starts writing *The Philanderer* where his hatred to illegal sex was revealed. But amazingly he returned to confess that he was "a born philanderer" (ibid). By all means "[a] philanderer is a man who is strongly attracted by women. He flirts with them, falls in love with them, makes them fall in love with him, but will not commit himself to any permanent relation with them..." (Holroyd 1988: 92).

It should be borne in mind that Shaw's debt to Ibsen flows in *The Philanderer* which is the banishment of degrading the widow woman. Grace is Shaw's advanced and 'New Woman' who will never marry a man she loves too much. As it would give him a terrible advantage over her and she should be utterly in his power (Shaw 1965: 46). By turning to the role of the widow woman, Shaw gives her the right to love and decide her future by her own. Grace, as Shaw's example of a widow woman, defied all vows of being isolated and ignored just because of belonging to a former matrimonial life. She loved Charteris and broke him off when she felt it was a must. Accordingly, she achieved her role in a society as a widow. It is clear that she does not want to be possessed by anyone. She has her own feelings and no one has the right to interfere with her private affairs or to use her as a property. The woman's belongings are just for her and no one else even her husband has the right to possess it. It's farcical to know that Charlotte Bronte's husband banished his wife's personality and identity by owning the copyright

of her novels. In broader terms, Hegel goes so far to link the origins of marriage with property. He insists that “The husband is master and manager, not a property owner as against the other members of the family” (Arthur 39). The woman is the owner of herself and no one has the right to possess her. Shaw, on behalf of Hegel reveals it via Grace. As an advanced woman, Grace’s answer to Charteris’ interrogation whether Julia belongs to him or by all means he is expected to be her owner? Grace frankly replies “No woman is the property of a man. A woman belongs to herself and to nobody else” (Shaw 1965: 30).

It is a well known fact that the woman was accused of being irrational that Shaw rejected such impugnation against her. A woman of advanced views “regarded marriage as a degrading bargain, by which a woman sold herself to a man for the social status of a wife and the right to be supported and pensioned in old age out of his income” (Shaw 1965: 32). It seems that Shaw tries to put the blame on the woman’s shoulders by turning the man out into a philanderer. Charteris proclaimed: “what I received, I paid” (ibid) to show that he is forced to be a philanderer as “[he] had to be content with a charming philander, which taught [him] a great deal, and brought [him] some hours of exquisite happiness” (ibid). But Shaw again comes to say that the woman as passionate is the victim of her feelings and it is not she who is responsible for turning out the man into a philanderer. Since she is afraid of philandering, Julia, however, has a lack of confidence in the man’s sincerity.

**JULIA.** ...I was never sure of you for a moment. I trembled whenever a letter came from you, lest it should contain some stab for me. I dreaded your visits almost as much as I longed for them. I was your plaything, not your companion ... Oh, there was such suffering in my happiness that I hardly knew joy from pain.... Better for me if I had never met you! (ibid)

The woman, however, has been changed suddenly from passionate into radical so as to defend herself and love. Julia rebels against the classical role of a woman and unwomanly addressed Charteris: “I don’t care what I do, or who hears me. I’ll not bear it. She shall not have my place with you—” (Shaw 1965: 31). She obviously needs respects and never make fool of her. “I am a most unhappy and injured woman; but I am not the fool you take me to be” (ibid). In the first act, Shaw’s woman revealed her insides. One time she behaves in a radical, liberal and existential like Julia. Other time she turns to an erotic angelic woman in a way seemingly to

impose her existence. Grace was an example of the womanly woman who was silent except for some reactions to defend herself from Julia's repeated rushes. But suddenly, the angelic woman transferred into a radical then to erotic. Ceasing to struggle and speaking with the most pathetic dignity in an attempt seemingly to draw Charteris sympathy, Julia says "... Oh, there is no need to be violent....That is worthy of you!—to use brute force—to humiliate me before her! (She breaks down and bursts into tears)" (Shaw 1965: 31-2). It seems to me that there are no any far differences among the liberal, radical, existential and socialist feminism. In other words, it is so difficult to have one example that is applied exactly on any of the previous mentioned feminist theories specially when referring to morality. I agree with Susan F. Parsons who argues:

It has, first of all, been intriguing that the shift from liberal to radical and socialist feminisms has been paralleled by developments within moral philosophy generally and this process reveals many of the same concerns and disillusionments with liberal morality in particular (Parsons 69).

When the woman is in love, she behaves as a slave to her feelings. She begged Charteris by throwing herself at his feet begging him not to be cruel with her. Being a passionate woman, Julia, begged Grace to break off with her lover and leave him for her. In the realm of the criticism of the woman's desire to conquer by stooping, Shaw insisted that a woman should behave unwomanly so that she could get her right by herself and not by stooping. Another example of a woman who dislikes 'stooping to conquer' is Grace.

**GRACE.** How I hate to be a woman when I see, by you, what wretched childish creatures we are!... I understand now why Charteris has no respect for women....I love him. And I have refused his offer to marry me.... because I will not give myself to any man who has learnt how to treat women from you and your like. I can do without his love, but not without his respect....Run to him and beg him to have mercy on you and take you back (Shaw 1965: 52).

Shaw held an argument about the womanly and unwomanly woman in an attempt seemingly to show that the womanly woman would be a victim of philandering easily unless

repudiating her womanliness. Shaw called for supporting the unwomanly features as her liberation lies behind them. He gives two examples of women; the first example is Grace as an unwomanly woman while the second one is Julia as a womanly woman. Shaw clarifies the differences between womanly and unwomanly women as he pretends that he womanly woman is always put in the bottom. She is unable to defend herself or to keep body and soul combination. Charteris as Shaw's mouthpiece argues:

**CHARTERIS.** There's a quarrel—a scandal...always a woman at the bottom of it. Well, we knew this when we founded the club; but we noticed that the woman at the bottom of it was always a womanly woman. The unwomanly women who work for their living and know how to take care of themselves never give any trouble. So we simply said we wouldn't have any womanly women; and when one gets smuggled in she has to take care not to behave in a womanly way (Shaw 1965: 37).

On one hand, Craven was not satisfied with the idea of transferring his daughter into unwomanly woman. He says: "What! Join a club where there's some scoundrel who guaranteed my daughter to be an unwomanly woman! If I weren't an invalid, I'd kick him" (ibid). He also says: "I don't like to see women smoking" (Shaw 1965: 40). On the other hand, Cuthbertson agreed with him "Neither do I. There's not a room in this club where I can enjoy a pipe quietly without a woman coming in and beginning to roll a cigarette. It's a disgusting habit in a woman: it's not natural to her sex" (ibid). But it looks amazing that it is natural to him to 'enjoy a pipe quietly'! while he does not like to see women smoking.

**CUTHBERTSON.** ...of course the usual tone of the club is low, because the women smoke and earn their own living and all that; but still there's nothing actually to complain of. And it's convenient, certainly (Shaw 1965: 41).

There is no question that the second wave feminism issue of using the woman as an object and never be treated as a subject is derived from Shaw's *The Philanderer*. Shaw bravely established Ibsenic Club where women are treated as subject. This argument takes also the reader back to Simone de Beauvoir's issue "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 273). Beauvoir insists that gender is not something 'natural' but rather artificially 'constructed' by cultural and social norms. This idea is applicable to the Ibsenic Club that transferring the

womanly woman into unwomanly one. The Ibsenic Club, indeed, encouraged the unwomanliness and it had put many rules to prevent women from being treated as a weak sex. When Cuthbertson offers Julia his hand to take her down, she replies: No, really: you know it's against the rules of the club to coddle women in any way. Whoever is nearest to the door goes first. Shaw's feminist views of the man and woman as one sex is revealed in Cuthbertson when he says: Come, gentlemen: let us go to lunch in the Ibsen fashion—the unsexed fashion (Shaw 1965: 43).

Admittedly, Shaw challenges the social rules those restrict the woman as to wait for the man to make a proposal. In this play, as in *Widowers' Houses*, both Julia and Grace propose for Charteris. There is a disclosure scene in which Shaw tries to disclose the hidden traditional behaviours where both of the two women's fathers ashamed hidden their faces between their hands when they heard that their daughters defy the cultural and social norms. Charteris boldly asked Cuthbertson: "Has Grace never mentioned to you that she wants to marry me?" Cuthbertson indignantly replies: "She has mentioned that you want to marry her" (Shaw 1965: 41). He turns to Craven: "you're concerned in this. Julia wants to marry me too" (ibid). Craven turns away sulkily; then suddenly fires up and turns on Charteris "How dare you tell me my daughter wants to marry you. Who are you, pray, that she should have any such ambition" (Shaw 1965: 42)? It seems unbelievable to the two traditional fathers that a woman may behave unwomanly and decide her own life freely. Shaw insists on his desire to liberate woman by achieving her unwomanliness. The two fathers are shocked and left murmuring to each other.

**CRAVEN.** (*in angry bewilderment*). Cuthbertson: did you ever hear anything like this?

**CUTHBERTSON.** Never! Never! (ibid).

Shaw tore up the masks and disclosed what was hidden to defy the social traditional conventions. Shaw made Charteris read the letters those were sent to him by his two lovers in the presence of their fathers to show that the woman is not attached to anyone. Moreover, she has the full right to express freely her feelings with whom she is in love.

**CHARTERIS.** Oh, bother? Come, don't behave like a couple of conventional old fathers: this is a serious affair. Look at these letters (producing a letter and a letter-card.)

This (showing the card) is from Grace—by the way, Cuthbertson, I wish you'd ask her not to write on letter-cards: the blue colour makes it so easy for Julia to pick the bits out of my waste paper basket and piece them together (ibid).

Finally, Shaw portrays his long sought portrait of a woman and gives her all the characteristics of a 'New Woman'. After all, she is ready to take her role successfully in the society. On the opposite, Shaw tears the portrait of the old woman up and instead he hangs up his new one of the 'New Woman'. Craven, by all means, proves to be an old fashioned man with all his old ideas those belong to the old defeated woman.

**CRAVEN.** Charteris: no woman writes such letters to a man unless he has made advances to her.

**CHARTERIS** (mournfully). How little you know the world, Colonel! The New Woman is not like that. (Shaw 1965: 43)

In short, *The Philanderer* is a discursive act on the widow woman, the platonic and virgin love. The main solution to banish exploitation of women is the unwomanliness. Women are divorced, being philandered and lost their virginity after man's pursuing. Hence her unwomanliness is the final solution for her liberation from the clutches of philandering. As a radical insisting on the patriarch domination, man seeks virginity in the woman despite he is not virgin. Grace and Charteris ask each other whether their love affair was the first one. A woman answered that she was a widow and the man confidently said 'no'. In both cases, they were in search of virginity despite there was no any reference to their platonic love.

To conclude, without achieving their unwomanliness, women are easily hunted by the traps of the philanderers. It looks that Shaw, in the end of the play, reaches his aims by fulfilling and bringing about the kind of women that he seeks. Both Grace and Julia finally unified to support their sex against the philanderer when they dared to ring the bells of unwomanliness. At the time when Julia regreted to be a worthless woman as she was not brave enough to kill Charteris, Grace took her in her arms and unwomanly requested her not to "make a hero of a philanderer" (Shaw 1965: 61). Shaw's real woman is the one who can behave unwomanly to

defend her future and not to be fool. The man and woman are equal and each has no right to use the other as a doll or neglect their feelings. Charteris walked over Julia but Grace as a woman did not only walk over Charteris but also walked over Julia too.

The very fact is that the two big problems that Charteris faces are Grace and Julia. Hardly can he completely win the heart of one or break free off the other. But fairly sure let's say that he does believe it is all credited to Henrik Ibsen who brings about the unwomanliness inside the women. From the above argument, it is clear that there is no one sex that should be accused of philandering. It seems injustice to refer to one particular sex as philandering since, as we have seen, both sexes philander for oneself sake.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> *The Philanderer* (A topical comedy of four acts in the Early Eighteen – Nineties). Copyright performance: March 30, 1898, at the Bijou Theatre, Bayswater, London. First presented: February 20, 1905, by the New Stage Club at the Crippleyate Institute, Londodn. First presented in public: February 5, 1907, by J. E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville Barker at the Court Theatre, London (Innes xxii).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Astell (12 November 1666 – 11 May 1731) was one of the earliest true feminists, perhaps the first English writer to explore and assert ideas about women which we can still recognize and respond to. She was radical only in her perception of the way women's lives were restricted by convention, and their minds left undeveloped and untrained. Her father, a Newcastle coal merchant, died when she was 12 years old. In her late teens, Astell fell into a deep depression, writing poems about her lonely misery, and the fact that, for all her intellectual self-confidence, she could not envisage any tolerable future for herself (Walters 26).

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Jenny Patterson was 12 years Shaw's senior. Shaw, in his letter to Frank Harries on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1930 confessed that: "I escaped seduction until I was 29, when an enterprising widow, one of my mother's pupils, appealed successfully to my curiosity. If you want to know what it was like, read *The Philanderer*, and cast her for the part of Julia, and me for that of Charteris" (Laurence 1988: 189). He alluded to her in the play when Charteris says: "At first it flattered

me—delighted me—that was how Julia got me, because she was the first woman who had the pluck to make me a declaration” (Shaw 1965: 30).

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