

## FROM MRS WARREN'S PROFESSION TO PRESS CUTTINGS: THE WOMAN QUESTION IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S PLAYS\*

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### Abstract

George Bernard Shaw, who introduced social realism to the British stage, is considered to be the most significant playwright of the Victorian era. In his plays, he challenged the typical Victorian representation of female characters and introduced a new woman type who stands as a powerful and independent figure. Shaw's female characters can be analysed in line with the suffragette movement, the fight given by British women to gain their right to vote. In this regard, Shaw's play *Mrs Warren's Profession* exemplifies a female character who can be considered as an advocate for female liberation and power. On the other hand, his play *Press Cuttings*, which was specifically written to support the suffragette movement, neither exemplifies the new woman image presented by Shaw in his plays nor contributes to the suffragette movement. Hence, this study aims to discuss the theme of the rights of women and to focus on George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *Press Cuttings* by means of Shaw's involvement in and support for the suffragette movement from the Victorian to the Edwardian era.

**Keywords:** George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Press Cuttings*, suffragette movement, women's rights.

## MRS WARREN'S PROFESSION'DAN PRESS CUTTINGS'E: GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'UN OYUNLARINDA KADIN SORUSU

### Öz

Sosyal gerçekçiliği Britanya sahnesine taşıyan George Bernard Shaw Viktorya döneminin en önemli oyun yazarı olarak bilinmektedir. Oyunlarında geleneksel Viktorya dönemi kadın imajına meydan okuyan Shaw, bağımsız ve güçlü tasvir edilen yeni bir kadın imajını sahneye taşımıştır. Shaw'un kadın karakterleri Britanyalı kadınların oy hakkı için savaş verdiği süfraj hareketi çerçevesinde incelenebilir. Bu bağlamda Shaw'un *Mrs Warren's Profession* adlı oyununun kadın özgürlüğünü savunan bir kadın karakteri örneklendirdiği belirtilebilir. Öte yandan süfraj hareketini desteklemek amacıyla yazdığı *Press Cuttings* oyunu ne Shaw'un ortaya koyduğu yeni kadın imajını örneklendirebilir ne de gerçek anlamda süfraj hareketini destekler. Bu çerçevede bu çalışma George Bernard Shaw'un oyunlarındaki kadın hakları temasını incelemeyi ve Shaw'un *Mrs Warren's Profession* ve *Press Cuttings* adlı oyunlarına Shaw'un Viktorya döneminden Edward dönemine kadar olan süreçte oy hakkı için verilen mücadeledeki rolü açısından odaklanmayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Press Cuttings*, süfraj hareketi, kadın hakları.

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## INTRODUCTION

While the novel was the dominant genre throughout the Victorian era, George Bernard Shaw left his mark on modern drama as a Victorian dramatist. Shaw, the Nobel Prize winner, critic and playwright, has produced numerous works comprising the years from the Victorian era to Interwar years. Influenced by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, Shaw adopted socialism and realism in his plays. Hence, he challenged the Victorian stage, which was mainly dominated by the musical comedies and melodramas for the entertainment of the theatregoers. The political and social ideas reflected in his plays required a certain intellectual stimulation that enabled him to leave a mark on Western theatre. In line with his involvement in the Fabian society and socialist ideas, Shaw not only witnessed the suffragette movement in Britain, but also supported the women struggle. In this regard, he presented challenging female characters that question the stereotypical woman images in the Victorian era. Among his numerous plays, *Mrs Warren's Profession*<sup>1</sup> brings the story of a prostitute, later brothel-owner, onto the stage. Both female characters of the play, Mrs. Warren who is a brothel-owner and her daughter Vivien who is a Cambridge graduate, criticise the role of woman in the Victorian society. Thus, Shaw's representation of woman foreshadows the upcoming suffragette movement for the support of women rights. Seven years after *Mrs Warren's Profession* made its premiere, as the suffragette movement gained momentum, Shaw staged *Press Cuttings* which is a farcical comedy about the suffragette movement. This time Shaw overtly supports women's struggle to gain the right to vote. In terms of its theme, the play reflects the progress achieved by women who can raise their voice to gain certain rights. Structurally, however, it fails to follow social realism Shaw adopted in his career as a political activist. In other words, it can be argued that Shaw sacrifices his style, which made him one of the most significant playwrights of the modern era, for the sake of the theme of this play. Hence, this study aims to discuss the theme of the rights of women as reflected in *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *Press Cuttings* and to analyse Shaw's selected plays discussing Shaw's involvement in and support for the suffragette movement from the Victorian to the Edwardian era.

### George Bernard Shaw and the Victorian Era

It can be argued that certain social, economic and political developments in the Victorian era, such as the improvement in the transportation system and gaining power to have price riots, draw more people to theatres. Nevertheless, as opposed to the significant role undertaken by the novel genre as a way of criticizing the social, political and economic problems of the Victorian era, theatre remained just as a way of an entertainment in the Victorian era. Hence, especially the early Victorian era was dominated by melodramas which employed stereotypical characters and consisted short scenes accompanied by music. Along with the popularity of melodramas, the sophisticated technology of the late Victorian drama contributed to the development of sensation drama staged with elaborated set designs with the help of machinery of the era. Nevertheless, the most noteworthy names, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and John Millington Synge, would change the Victorian theatre only at the late years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It would be particularly with these names that the social problems and the criticism of the Victorian society and ideals would be carried to the stage. Considering the overall condition of Victorian drama, it can be argued that Shaw can be named as a much-needed playwright in such a controversial and changing period to bring certain importance and role to the drama of the age. In this regard, Shaw's plays carry a much debated subject of the period: the woman question. In this regard, his plays question the role and rights of women along with proposing a new woman type which would carry out the suffragette movement at the turn of the century. Although it is possible to observe the woman

<sup>1</sup> Following the original version, the abbreviation 'Mrs.' in the title of this play will be written without the period as *Mrs Warren's Profession* whereas the character from the play will be referred as Mrs. Warren.

type who "[...] exist as individuals, quite apart from their sexual role" (Watson 1964: 17) as reflected by Shaw in most of his works, this study will only analyse the two female characters from the play *Mrs Warren's Profession* who are depicted out of the stereotypical representation of women as either Mary or Eve. Nevertheless, the discussion of Shaw's female characters, who are "more articulate, more expressive, and more elegant" (1964: 21) according to Watson, require a certain establishment of the suffragette movement in which women took the risk of being imprisoned for the sake of gaining the right to vote.

In line with Shaw's discussion of a new woman type in his plays, compared to the stereotypical images promoted by the Victorian society, it is significant to touch upon the suffragette movement and the idea that these women intended to defend. The term "suffragette" is generally associated with group of upper and middle class women who defended their right to vote in public elections as Kent suggests: "Almost all of them came from respectable, middle-class, Dissenting or Evangelical families. For women of their time, they were unusually well educated, though not necessarily formally so, and they tended to espouse a Liberal or Radical philosophy. Members of their family were very often politically active and were even political and social 'insiders'" (1990: 18). The suffragette movement is not limited to the United Kingdom in terms of affections and influence of the movement; nevertheless, the discussion of the suffragette movement in this study will be limited to the Shaw's involvement in the movement and his plays' influence on the woman question. The movement can be traced back to 1865 to John Stuart Mill and his introduction of the idea of the rights of women to vote. Beginning with 1867, significant women began to form unions and societies to follow up Mill's idea. While "Votes for Women" was the main slogan for the movement, the problem was in fact deeper when the social conditions of the Victorian society were considered. Hence, suffragists were also criticised for their manners and somehow superficial approach. In this regard, Kent argues that "Within the last few years, historians such as Olive Banks, Les Garner, and Brian Harrison have acknowledged that the suffrage campaign went beyond the strictly political, but they have not adequately analyzed the primary connections between sexual issues and the demand for the vote" (1990: 3). As they fought for a political right, the social aspect of woman was merely ignored. It can be argued that the upper class women who involved in this fight ignored the needs and problems of the lower-middle class and the working class women. This is once again pointed out by Kent:

*The individuals presented here belong overwhelmingly to the middle classes. Despite the contributions made to suffrage by working-class women, middle-class women constituted the vast majority of suffragists. As Jill Liddington and Jill Norris have demonstrated, working-class feminists often advanced an agenda quite different from that of the feminists discussed here; their demands centered on work-related issues such as equal pay. (1990: 16)*

Accordingly, the idea of feminism, and the economic and social liberation of woman, from time to time, were discussed separate from the suffragette movement which defended a political right. These issues complicated the discussion of the suffragette movement in line with the social problems derived from the ideas and conditions of the Victorian society.

A part of the criticism towards suffragists arouse from the extreme ways they prefer to protest. Especially after 1905, which can be named as the third phase of the movement, suffragists began using military tactics such as chaining themselves to railings, setting places in fire, conducting raids on Parliament and going for a hunger strike, to get the attention of politicians. It was not just men who opposed the suffragette movement, but females who were in favour of a milder approach also involved in anti-feminist protests at that time. Delap points out the criticism of the certain groups: "Some anti-feminists, then, attempted to construct a more 'modern' position for their beliefs" (2005: 387). She further highlights the complicated understanding of feminism observed in the Edwardian Britain as juxtaposed to the suffragette movement:

[...] it is clear that Edwardian debates about gender went considerably further than a liberal feminist claim to political rights countered by an anti-feminist evocation of 'separate spheres'. Edwardian anti-feminists explored ideas of complementarity of the genders, representing a more dynamic version of separate spheres, one less suffocating and narrow. Edwardian anti-feminists were also more willing to think about a diversity of roles for women than the 'separate spheres' discourse would suggest. (2005: 398)

However, more significantly and different from other feminist movements or protests of the time, the suffragists also took advantage of theatre to make their voices heard by wider public and to get their support. This way, suffragists introduced almost a new genre to Edwardian theatre which Hirshfield names as "[...] the suffrage play, a genre that flourished briefly between 1907 and 1913, [which] remains today a valuable reflection of the attitudes and tactics of movement activists as they sought to enlist public sympathy and commitment to the cause of a democratized franchise" (1987: 1). The militant attitudes of the movement were carried to the stage with a play written by an American-born actress Elizabeth Robins. Thus, "*Votes for Women* was the first and last of its type to be presented on a London stage" (Hirshfield 1987: 2) produced by the Vedrenne-Barker management in 1907. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Hirshfield, "[b]ecause of the widespread public distaste for 'fanatical' suffragism, the play was greeted coldly, not only by critics but by matinee audiences as well, which tended to identify with the 'constitutional' methods of moderate suffragists" (1987: 2). Hirshfield further adds: "*Robins' drama succeeded, however, in one important respect. It awakened activists to the possibility of utilizing theatre as a form of propaganda, and it thus inspired a subspecies of drama that figured importantly as a weapon in the struggle for the vote: the one-act playlet*" (1987: 2). A year later than Robins' suffragette play, the Women Writers' Suffrage League and the Actresses' Franchise League were founded bearing similar aims: to educate women and to promote the suffragette movement. The Actresses' Franchise League further played a significant role for preparing a one-act play to be staged at the end of suffragette meetings. The suffragette themes were also carried to the stage in London as a way of fund-raising. Rather than reflecting an artistic quality or introducing a modern technique, the suffragette plays were mainly issue-based plays and had a particular aim. They reflected the primary intentions of the suffragists to the stage as a direct way to reach audience from different social and economic backgrounds. In this regard, the plays' topics were taken from everyday life of women which classifies these plays as realistic. In line with their theme and aim, they were written and staged by mainly female cast. All these characteristics of this genre made it only popular during the suffragette movement, roughly until 1914. Since the aim of this study is to discuss Shaw's attitude towards the suffragette movement within the context of the liberation of women, suffragette plays written as a propaganda will not be discussed in detail in this study. Nevertheless, the general characteristics of the genre, as summed up above, will enable a comparison of these plays and of Shaw's to highlight the fact that Shaw's talent introduces more complex woman characters that contributed to the formation of modern woman type who is socially and economically independent beyond the political aim of the suffragists.

For suffragists theatre was turned into a promotion tool and a way to reach a wider public regarding their fight to gain the right to vote; meanwhile Shaw promoted a woman type in her plays, who is "*woman incarnate*" (Watson 1964: 150), that depicts independent woman who stands as equal of man. Nevertheless, when the aim of the suffragette movement is compared to Shaw and his depiction of a new woman type, this complicates Shaw's stand regarding the movement. According to Lady Chance, "[t]he Women's Movement is in fact a great Moral Movement. It means the lifting up of woman to be the equal of man in the eyes of the whole nation" (qtd. in Kent 1990: 217). Nevertheless, Lady Chance's perspective does not match with how Shaw perceives suffragists' political agenda compared with his socialist ideas. In fact, Shaw's personal statements and correspondents with the movement's leaders also indicate Shaw's position. Similar to the stand of

his two plays selected to be analysed in this study, *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *The Press Cutting*, Shaw reflects two different opinions on the subject. On the one hand, Shaw's statements reflect that he is not an explicit supporter of the suffragette movement; on the other hand, his writings contribute to the woman struggle. Watson, in this regard, classifies Shaw's contribution in three different kinds of support:

*[F]irst, he successfully fought to have women's suffrage included in the Basis of the Fabian Society. [...] Second, he wrote occasionally to reprove the government for its worst excesses in dealing with the suffragists. Third, and most importantly, he was constantly creating dramatic images of women whose ability was combined with great personal charm. The New Women of Shaw's creation are all ultra-feminine feminists. (1964: 178-179)*

Hence, Shaw reflected his support for the liberation of women as a playwright and an intellectual. In this respect, it can be further argued that he supported the idea itself, that women should have equal rights, instead of supporting the actions and protests of the suffragists. Accordingly, McFadden argues that

*[s]uch tactics were both the products of the women's desperation in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds and an expression of the middle class individualism, adventurism, and political irresponsibility of many of the leaders of the movement. Shaw could not countenance such political methods, and as a dedicated artist he could scarcely approve of the deliberate desecration of works of art. (1976: 284)*

Shaw further differentiated ideas and actions in a newspaper interview in 1906: "*The suffrage is nothing to me, [...] I have no opinion on the subject. I'm not a woman; I've got the suffrage. [...] Of course, if I were a woman, I'd simply refuse to speak to any man or do anything for men until I'd got the vote. I'd make my husband's life a burden, and everybody miserable generally*" (qtd in Watson 1964: 179). Shaw's own words points out his point of view that "*[...] women should always remain firmly in control of their own movement*" (McFadden 1976: 285). Moreover, through his statement, Shaw implicitly directed suffragists to continue their acts to get what they desire. Nevertheless, he did not consider himself a part of the movement. In another piece published on *The Times*, at the same year, Shaw, this time, suggests that the government needs to employ extra police force in the Parliament upon suffragists' protest of walking into the House of Commons. His statements on *The Times* once again signal his suspicions regarding the movement and their militant tactics. Thus, these two specific examples taken from Shaw's own words lay out the contradiction Shaw bears in terms of supporting the suffragette movement.

Generally speaking, Shaw's correspondences with various newspapers and suffragists indicate his reluctance to be an active member of the movement as indicated by McFadden as well: "*He was always a firm proponent of it, and in many of his plays gave overt support to the Suffragettes [...]. Yet his relationship with many of the leading English Suffragettes was an uneasy, and often openly tempestuous one*" (1976: 278). Partly, he believed that women suffragists did not have enough experience in politics to defend their rights in a political arena. Moreover, Shaw, as a socialist, reflected some doubts regarding the role of women and their right to vote within the capitalist system, since it is the whole system that should be evaluated regarding the woman's position in the society. Thus, it can be argued that Shaw did not believe that just gaining the right to vote would improve the social position of women in general. In the meantime, Shaw hoped that women could introduce a change in the society beyond a political agenda. Shaw's views on the social position of women were stated by him as follows:

*Now if the race is to survive every woman must have her man and every man his woman: two to the unit. But though the woman has to bear all the labor of childbirth and to nourish and protect the human infant . . . her man is to her more than a mere fertilizer. He must be a fighter who can protect her against rape, and her helpless children against robbery by strange fighters [...]. (qtd. in Watson 1964: 192)*

Thus, Shaw highlights the social roles of both sexes in which women, along with men, are uploaded with certain roles and rights before gaining political rights. The significance Shaw uploads to the social roles of women becomes apparent at the break out of the First World War. He points out women, who wish to have political power through their fight to gain the right to vote, as responsible for not exercising their power on men. In his letter to Mrs. Patrick in 1914 he argues that “[a]nd now that they have settled the fact that their stupid fighting can’t settle anything, and produces nothing but a perpetual Waterloo that nobody wins, why don’t the women rise up and say ‘We have the trouble of making these men; and if you don’t stop killing them we shall refuse to make any more.’ But alas, the women are just as idiotic as the men” (qtd in Watson 1964: 191). As can be understood from his opinion, Shaw already believes in the fact that women have a significant social position and a certain power over men even before having the right to vote. Yet, it is a matter of exercising the power. In this regard, it is apparent that the woman question is a far more complex question than suffragists’ military acts to get the right to vote. Therefore, Shaw defends this complexity along with reflecting his women characters in such complex nature and position in the society. In line with where Shaw stands in terms of the suffragette movement, Holroyd argues that “Shaw believed himself to be ‘as sound a Feminist as Mary Wollstonecraft.’ At heart a suffragist he was on friendly terms with Mrs. Fawcett but also remained a good ally to Mrs. Pankhurst until their opposing attitudes to the war drove them apart” (1979: 24). McFadden, on the other hand, touches upon the complexity of Shaw’s position as follows: “As an ‘artist-philosopher’ who had much to say about ‘the woman question,’ Shaw could not afford to be oblivious of either the practical political activities or the theoretical ideas of the Suffragettes” (1976: 289). Subsequently, Shaw’s ‘artist-philosopher’ side enables him to create literary works such as *Mrs Warren’s Profession* in which he carries a social problem, the woman question, onto the stage. Beyond delivering a pure political message as suffragists aimed to achieve, the play leads the audience to question moral and philosophical conditions of Victorian women, as intended to be discussed in this study.<sup>2</sup>

### Representation of Women on the Stage

As McFadden clearly points out, as quoted above, Shaw only affords to be a part of “the theoretical ideas of the Suffragettes” through his play *Press Cuttings* written in 1909. Subtitled as “A Topical Sketch Compiled from the Editorial and Correspondence Columns of the Daily Papers,” the play was written “[a]t the request of the popular actor Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, whose wife was president of the AFL” (Hirshfield 1987: 4). As a productive playwright, Shaw has produced plays in different genres. Hence, this play is not his first time writing a piece of comedy. Nevertheless, the significance, or more appropriately lack of significance when compared with his other plays, of this play comes from its themes rather than its genre. It can be said that Shaw departs from his familiar style, which is focusing on social issues from a socialist perspective mainly, with this play. Shaw puts onto the stage a farcical comedy that does not particularly represent his stand on the woman question. Thus, rather than carrying his views on feminism and women rights onto the stage, the play ridicules campaigns and arguments against the suffragists. Hirshfield also underlines this stating that “[t]he object of Shaw’s satire was as much the military mind as it was the anti-suffrage posture of contemporary politicians” (1987: 4).

The play, however, first could not get a license to be staged publicly “because of its political references” (Purdum 1966: 226). The play, beyond depicting an overt support of the suffragists, “satirized the anti-suffrage attitudes of such conspicuous public figures as the Liberal Prime Minister

<sup>2</sup> Shaw’s stand regarding the suffragette movement might be traced back to his idea of ‘man’s philosophical progression’ which was developed as inspired by Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, since Shaw’s theory of Life Force is mostly applicable to his other plays, the influence of Nietzsche and his philosophy will not be included in this study. For further detail on the literary reception of Nietzschean ideas in Shaw’s drama see Kornhaber (2009).

*Asquith, the Conservative opposition leader Balfour, and the ever popular General Mitchener*" (Hirshfield 1987: 4). The censorship office laid down the condition that "*General Mitchener was re-named General Bones, and Mr Balsquith renamed Mr Johnson*" (Purdom 1966: 226). As a result, the play made its premium as a private performance at the Court Theatre on 9 July 1909 (Purdom 1966: 227). Although Shaw argues that "[i]t is very harmless, just an ordinary skit without a single suffragette in the whole play" (qtd in Hirshfield 1987: 4), *Press Cuttings* was staged as a part of the suffragette campaign. What Shaw argues also points out the shortcoming of the play as a suffragette play. Compared to other topical plays written to support the movement, Shaw's play lacks the direct message of the suffragette movement. The play neither depicts a suffragette introducing the movement nor delivers a didactic message delivering the main aim of the suffragette movement. Hence, it can be argued that the play has shortcoming both as a suffragette play and as a play by Bernard Shaw.

The play takes place in General Mitchener's room at the War Office between the General, his orderly, the Prime Minister Balsquith, the office charwoman Mrs. Farrell, and the women from the Anti-suffragette deputation, Lady Corinthia and Mrs. Banger. It is a timeline when martial law was proclaimed and General Sandstone resigned because of his plan to create a male-only zone within a two miles' radius of Westminster. Since so many suffragists are out there protesting, Balsquith only manages to come to the office safely in disguise of a suffragist. The events in the play are further shaped by the visit of two ladies from the Anti-suffragette deputation. First, they criticise males for not adequately fighting against the suffragists. Later, they argue that what women need is not the right to vote but to be included in the army, simply because, according to their argument, the great military leaders are in fact women disguised as men. Such perspective eventually leads General Mitchener to be in favour of the suffragists to gain right to vote. Moreover, it is hinted that the government is cracking also to give support to the movement. Shaw's one-act sketch ends, as appropriate for comedy, with celebration of marriage.

The play differs from other suffragette plays for not only lacking a direct message supporting the movement. On the contrary, military tactics of the suffragists are mentioned in the play as if reflecting the voice of anti-suffragists and anti-feminists who disapprove such military tactics. Moreover, General Mitchener does not agree to support the suffragists not because he does not believe in the movement and in the rights of women, but he is fooled by the ladies. Hence, it can be claimed that Shaw makes ridicule of both sides, men and women, and suffragists and anti-suffragists. Nevertheless, Shaw manages to introduce a woman character who defends the rights of women more fiercely than suffragists without consulting extreme ways. In this regard, Mrs. Farrell, who is defined as "*a lean, highly respectable Irish charwoman of about fifty*" (1095), is quite an outspoken woman. It can be argued that she exemplifies where Shaw stands in terms of supporting the suffragists and questioning the woman question. She is presented as not interested in the suffragette movement since she already suffered enough as a woman in the society. Hence, when she defends herself and other women against the General, she does not defend a political right only. Contrary, she manages to acknowledge the significant role women play in the society through the risks they take. When Mitchener warns Mrs. Farrell that she needs to bear with men and their language because they risk their lives in battlefields to protect them, Mrs. Farrell dares him with the greater risks women take in life. She reminds him that giving birth to a child is the greatest risk: "*Would you put up with bad language from me because Ive risked me life eight times in childbed?*" (1096). Mrs. Farrell further defends women stating that "*I wouldnt compare risks run to bear livoin people into the world to risks run to blow dtem out of it. A mother's risk is jooty: a soldier's is nothin but divilmint*" (1096). Even if they do not have the right to vote, thus political power, Mrs. Farrell reminds Mitchener the real power women have, which is the power to reproduce. Thus, Mrs. Farrell represents the power which Shaw attributes to women when he criticized their inaction in the face of the First World War. She represents the significance of women, and her

position that is not restricted by political rights. Meanwhile, Mrs. Farrell highlights that the social importance and position of women cannot be recognized solely by giving the rights to vote. Echoing Shaw and his stand in the matter, she draws attention to a wider problem regarding the woman question.

On the one hand, the play merely satirizes the military tactics of the suffragettes and the reaction they get from the officials. On the other hand, towards the end of the play Balsquith comments on how meaningless for women to gain the right to vote in fact: "After all, I don't suppose votes for women will make much difference. It hasn't in the other countries in which it has been tried" (1100). Mitchener also assures Balsquith's opinion: "I never supposed it would make any difference" (1100). This conversation can be interpreted as outspoken words of Shaw's stand towards suffragette movement. Moreover, this also indicates why Shaw focuses more on his women characters, whom he depicts as "new woman" as underlined above, rather than sticking on the futile campaign for women to gain the right to vote. Thus, even in a play written to support the movement, Shaw does not hesitate to criticise the movement and to reflect his own views. In this regard, Mrs. Farrell gains even more significance for representing Shaw's new woman type. She is not a representative of upper or upper-middle class woman who is after political power. As a realist and a woman who suffers socially within the Victorian society, Mrs. Farrell is after respect for her power and struggle as a woman, even as a working woman. Thus, she also points out the need to improve the conditions of women from different classes in the society. Her needs from the society exceed what can be achieved with the right to vote. Hence, this is what Shaw hints beyond the farcical story of suffragette movement. Nevertheless, since his new woman type character is not on the foreground, *The Press Cuttings* is merely known as a farcical play about the suffragette movement. Moreover, the play fails to contribute to the progress that is expected to be observed in the Victorian era in all fields, neither as a play by George Bernard Shaw as the great dramatist of the era, nor as an artistic play that explains and supports the real cause of the suffragette movement.

This stand regarding *The Press Cuttings* can be explained more explicitly when compared with Shaw's another play *Mrs Warren's Profession*. It can be even further claimed that *Mrs Warren's Profession* is even more effective in terms of supporting women and feminist ideas for introducing a former prostitute and her struggle to survive as a woman onto the stage. The play was written by Shaw in 1893 as the third play of a series grouped as "Plays Unpleasant" along with *Widower's Houses* and *The Philanderer*. Because the play focuses on prostitution, it was originally banned by the Lord Chamberlain as happened in *The Press Cuttings*. While the play was first staged in 1902 at a members-only club, the first public performance could not take place until 1925. Although prostitution, for the Lord Chamberlain, seemed to be the forbidden topic to be staged in public, the image of the new woman, which Shaw would favour in most of his plays, has made the play quite a popular one since the play gets frequent revivals all around the world. Eventually, more than the suffragette movement, Vivie, representing the new woman type who prefers her independence over marriage, represents progress in terms of rights of women in the late Victorian era.

The play takes place at a cottage after Vivie returns to home upon her graduation from Cambridge. Vivie's mother, Mrs. Warren, arranges suitors for Vivie to meet there. As Vivie meets with Mr. Praed, friend of her mother's, Sir George Crofts, her mother's business partner, Frank Gardner and his father, the course of the play reveals the background story of Mrs. Warren. Not seeing her mother very much while growing up, Vivie terrifies once she learns that the money she has enjoyed comes from her mother working first as a prostitute and later as a brothel owner. Mrs. Warren sincerely shares her life story with her daughter trying to explain the conditions that forced her to choose such path. Nevertheless, the play ends as Vivie rejects her mother and her money and decides not to marry and to earn her own money.

Most of the critics have commented on Vivie and analysed her as a representative of new woman type. Pudom, in this respect, claims that Vivie "[...] represent[s] the passion for conscience, for work, for a cause, for God" (1966: 128). Greco underlines Vivie's qualities that transcend traditional woman type for the Victorian society: "*Vivie is still one of a distinctly masculine girl in both outlook and appearance, who cares little for convention and unabashedly flaunts her anti-feminine pos-ture*" (1967: 94). Laurence further points out Vivie as a forerunner female type for Shaw: "[...] Shaw in his play had created his first significant woman, Vivie Warren, defying Victorian pretensions, strong, determined, and apart, as all Shaw's great women will be [...]" (2004: 43). Vivie is praised for her ability to survive on her own. Not seeing her mother frequently, not knowing the concept of family, Vivie grew up in boarding schools which taught her to stand on her own feet. Her background implicitly gave her the strength to reject marriage proposals in a society in which women's sole responsibility is to be a good wife and a mother in exchange with the opportunity to live her own life. Meanwhile, Vivie's act of rejecting her mother is at the same time questionable when Mrs. Warren's story is considered from the perspective of female solidarity.

Mrs. Warren tells a highly familiar story regarding the fate of most of the unlucky females of the Victorian era. Thus, Mrs. Warren narrates how she survived with a widow mother and a sister who run away. She was working as a waitress working "*fourteen hours a day serving drinks and washing glasses for four shillings a week*" (II.76). It was there that she met with her lost sister by chance witnessing that she is financially in a much better situation. It is through her sister Lizzie that she gets into the business of prostitution with the dream of saving enough money for a house in Brussels. Eventually she turns herself into a business woman who is aware of the social conditions of the era and the possibility of her survival. Laying out the truth regarding the Victorian society, Mrs. Warren justifies her decision to Vivie: "*Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shopgirls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely*" (II.76). At first Vivie understands her mother's conditions and accepts them. She can develop an understanding on her mother's victimization by the society. However, once she learns that Mrs. Warren is still in the business, she immediately rejects her money and has an attitude against her. As opposed to her story, Vivie underlines the importance of having a choice to her mother:

*Everybody has some choice, mother. The poorest girl alive may not be able to choose between being Queen of England or Principal of Newnham; but she can choose between ragpicking and flowerselling, according to her taste. People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I dont 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 cant find them, make them. (II.75)*

Mrs. Warren tries to persuade Vivie that she continued her business to have a certain economic power because she wants Vivie to have a respectable position in the society as a female. She aims to convince Vivie that she made her own circumstances to achieve certain power. Nevertheless, Vivie still does not listen to her mother and her reasons behind her acts. In other words, Vivie rejects benefits from the social abuses of the Victorian hypocrisy.

Through such mother-daughter relationship, Shaw presents a highly complicated case regarding the rights of women. Marker also argues that

*Assuredly, Mrs. Warren's Profession is an "unpleasant" play and hence also a "problem" play, in the sense that it is serious rather than frivolous in intent, is again concerned with social corruption (in this case prostitution), and is determined to fasten the blame for such vice not on the individual (the brothel madam) but on a (male, capitalistic) social system that fosters it. (1998: 115)*

Beyond an ethical problem, the play lays out a social one. This complicated case, to a certain extent, provides more progress on the woman question by provoking the readers and/or the audience to think about the position and rights of women in the Victorian society. Vivie is surely a

strong woman, her estrangement from the social realities of the era can be likened her to the suffragettes who are unaware of the working class women's problems and obsessed with the right to vote, as if this would explain the woman question and solve the problems women experience in the society. Vivie enjoys the opportunities provided by her mother without questioning. She is depicted brave enough to disregard the comfort her mother's money can buy. Although this can be considered as a step towards her awareness, this does not mean that she will manage to overcome the social system established among Victorians. She derives herself to a loneliness because of her decision by rejecting both the comfort of her mother's money and her potential suitors. Yet, this isolation makes it unclear for the audience and/or the readers whether she can manage to reform the society or not.

Mrs. Warren, on the other hand, is a much more outspoken character reminding Mrs. Farrell. Although her position is not approved by the society, she can proudly say that as an employer she is fairer than the society: *"None of our girls were ever treated as I was treated in the scullery of that temperance place, or at the Waterloo bar, or at home"* (II.76). Hence, she depicts herself believing in sisterhood and supporting women who suffer in the Victorian society. She looks after her girls for not to be abused by the Victorian society and so-called Victorian ideals. As can be observed in her conversation with her daughter throughout the play, Mrs. Warren, indicating the fact that she is a keen observer of the Victorian society, is frank regarding the social problems of the society, especially regarding women. She reveals the grim reality of the society frankly to Vivie: *"The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to he. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she cant expect it: why should she?"* (II.77). While Vivie criticizes her mother because of her profession, Mrs. Warren can criticize the Victorian society through marriage institution. Thus, her criticism stands as a significant point on questioning women rights which is presented as a deeper and more significant issue compared to the right to vote. Ironically enough, on the other hand, Mrs. Warren's mere intent as she reunites with her daughter is to introduce her with a possible suitor for marriage. Upon spending her money for Vivien's education, Mrs. Warren concludes that now it is time for Vivien to find an appropriate husband for her to be able to suspend her life in comfort and wealth. Eventually, Mrs. Warren cannot fight with the system and the society on her own. Yet, the stand of these two women, Mrs. Warren and Vivien, is powerful enough to affect the readers and/or the audience to think about the woman question. In this respect, *Mrs Warren's Profession* not only influences the movement towards gaining women rights through its problematic themes and female characters, but also marks Shaw's career by defining his social realist theatre.

## CONCLUSION

Rather than being considered a Victorian name only, George Bernard Shaw left his mark on modern drama through his social realist plays. In his plays that touch upon social problems of his era, his female characters mainly draw attention from the critics. The new woman type he created in his plays challenge the stereotypical female characters of the Victorian era. His play, *Mrs Warren's Profession* is clearly the best example to both Shaw's theatre and his new woman type. Hence, this play, on its own, highlights Shaw's views on women while exemplifying his contributions to theatre as a socialist. However, when studied together with *The Press Cuttings*, a later play by Shaw, it is possible to observe Shaw's contribution to the women's rights. Shaw's plays, in terms of their artistic quality, indicate the progress in theatre during the late Victorian era as opposed to the significance of the novel genre. His female characters, on the other hand, portray the progress the society needs to achieve in terms of the woman question. Consequently, Shaw's female characters through the depiction of independent female characters who fight for their position in the society rather than a political right, to a certain extent, contribute to establishment of feminism more than the suffragette movement. One particular proof can be provided through the revivals his plays get as opposed to the suffragette plays. This, once again, indicates Shaw's, and his plays', significance for the modern era. From such perspective, Shaw's *Press Cuttings* fails to contribute to the women's fight for their social positions in the society compared to *Mrs Warren's Profession* which marks its significance both by exemplifying the new woman type and Shaw's socialist ideas as inspired by Ibsen and realism.

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