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**UN/ASHAMED: A BOURDIEUAN READING OF SHAW'S
MRS WARREN'S PROFESSION (1898) AND PINERO'S THE
SECOND MRS TANQUERAY (1894)**

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ABSTRACT

As Bourdieu argues we cannot think of authors or their work as if they exist in a vacuum. They are a part of the social, cultural, ideological, historical structure; not only a part but also a product, a result of structures that gave birth to them. As an impoverished Anglo-Irish immigrant economically dependent on his mother socially, economically, politically and culturally Shaw was an outsider. This paper aims to read *Mrs Warren's Profession* from a Bourdieuan point of view. To do that this paper takes Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* as a representative of conventional West End play. Pinero's play has a significant role in the composition of *Mrs Warren's Profession* since Shaw in many different occasions related the idea of writing *Mrs Warren's Profession* as a reaction against the social hypocrisy and shallowness presented in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Habitus, Doxa, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*

**UN/ASHAMED: SHAW'UN MRS WARREN'S PROFESSION
(1898) VE PINERO'NUN THE SECOND MRS TANQUERAY
(1894) ADLI OYUNLARININ BOURDIEUCU BİR OKUMASI**

ÖZ

Bourdieu'nün de belirttiği gibi yazarları veya onların eserlerini sanki bir boşlukta var olmuşlar gibi ele alamayız. Sosyal, kültürel, ideolojik, tarihsel yapıların birer

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parçasıdır bunlar; yalnızca bir parçası değil aynı zamanda da onları doğuran yapıların bir ürünü ve sonucudurlar aynı zamanda. Annesine bağımlı fakir düşmüş Anglo-İrlandalı bir göçmen olarak, zamanının birçok farklı yazarının aksine toplumsal, ekonomik, siyasi ve kültürel açılardan Shaw sistemin dışında kalmış bir figürdür. Bütün bunların ışığında bu çalışma Shaw'un *Mrs Warren's Profession* adlı oyununu Bourdieucu bir yaklaşımla ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken de dönemin popüler geleneksel tiyatro anlayışını yansıtan bir Batı Yakası oyununu Arthur Winego Pinero'nun *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* adlı oyununu da mercek altına alır. Pinero'nun oyunu Shaw'un *Mrs Warren's Profession* adlı eserini yazmasında çok büyük etkiye sahip olması dolayısıyla yazarın sıkça atıfta bulunduğu ve bir bakıma kendi tiyatro anlayışını kurmada karşıt örnek olarak aldığı bir eserdir. Shaw oyunu Pinero'nun eserindeki ikiyüzlülüğü ve yüzeyselliği sert bir şekilde eleştirmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bourdieu, Habitus, Doxa, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*

READING SHAW AND PINERO THROUGH BOURDIEU

Shaw's activities as a critique and playwright in the late 1880s and during the 1890s were a campaign against the conventional plays and theatres of the late Victorian London. As a professed iconoclast Shaw criticized the hypocrisy, injustice, and selfishness of the society in his writings and public addresses. And as the unsigned notice on *Daily Telegraph* unapprovingly observes Shaw blended the public speaking with drama (1892, p. 41). The theatres of the time tended to stage musical melodramas which conform to the social and moral conventions of its times and society (Berst, 1998, p. 59). There was almost nothing to challenge the boundaries of these social conventions on the social problems of the period such as prostitution, working class housing, imperialism, family and many more burning problems of the late Victorian era. Shaw had been writing novels for more than ten years, when he was finally summoned to submit a full play to the Independent Theatre. As in the *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw took this summons as an opportunity to attack the commercial West End theatres and created a play much against the tastes of the playgoers of the early 1890s. Unlike its West End counterparts which offer an idealized life where all young women are angels in love with kind and gentle young man; or villains from hell enjoying their vicious attitudes just for the sake of vice, Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* (1891), invites viewers to face the harsh realities of slum housing and the responsibility of middle classes in the issue.

Shaw's second play deals with less working class issues but more with middle-class social conventions, especially on the question of the relationship between man and woman. The fictional Ibsen Club is the setting where culturally and politically aspiring New Men and New Women come to terms with their limitations and die hard habits that they find very difficult to let go. Although they profess to be radical Ibsenites on gender relations,

trying to erase the difference between man and woman, seeing everyone as fellow human beings; when it comes to romantic crisis they fall back on old ways and claim the rights of a wronged woman. Shaw's early plays with their mounted attack on the social and moral values of the Victorian society, and the dramatic conventions of the commercial West End theatres are a series of attacks of the periphery against the centre.

Commenting on the tension and conflict between the centre and the periphery Wacquant gives a brief description of Bourdieu's hold on the issue stating that due to their status in the field, agents are led to act in certain patterns. While those who occupy dominant positions tend to preserve current capital distribution, those in subaltern positions tend to develop subversive strategies (Wacquant, 2007, p. 64). Within this context, to replace the "rule" with "strategy" is to reactivate the time, the rhythm of time, orientation and non-repeatability (Bourdieu qtd. in Calhoun, 2007, p. 95). Although people tend to think literary or artistic masterpieces as the achievements of a single person, glorifying these people making them super heroic geniuses, Bourdieu puts emphasis on supports, patronage, outer influence and help and most importantly the effect of the social and cultural environment on the artist-writer (1993, p. 29). Shaw's habitus, the structured structure helped him create his work. In quite radically different circumstances, for instance if he had been born as a Sentinelese, he would not have written the plays he had written, nor would he have thought of any of the ideas that he so craftily expressed in his work.

Mrs Warren's Profession is a birthchild of Bernard Shaw the playwright. The play was not written in a vacuum devoid of any historical, economical, ideological or personal investment. Born in Dublin in 1856 Shaw came from a declining, impoverished branch of an aristocratic Protestant family whose ancestors came to Ireland in the seventeenth century. Shaw defines this as worse than coming from a poor family; then at least you would not have to pretend to be aristocratic and high class when you really did not have the means to do so (Peters, 1996, p. 4). The eldest of three children, Shaw had two younger sisters. His Father was at his forties when he got married and his mother would only find out that she had married a drunkard at her wedding night, a blow that she would never recover and eventually she would as most of the biographers suggest fill that emotional space, erotic, amorous spot with a music teacher Vandeleur Lee, when Shaw was still around seven (Holroyd, 1988, pp. 22-23). Lee would become a part of the family filling the space which cannot be maintained by Shaw's father. When Vandeleur Lee moved to London, Shaw's mother would not hesitate to follow him leaving Shaw behind with his father. At the age of sixteen it was a terrible blow to Shaw's pride and ego, being left behind (Peters, 1996, pp. 36-37). Not being recognized as an entity to be saved. So, we can say that Shaw was brought up in a house with little

economic capital but plenty of cultural capital, music was the atmosphere and opera and singing were in the air.

A Bourdieuan reading of this habitus requires the introduction the concept of “capital” which holds a key role in Bourdieu’s theory. Let us start with standard definitions of the capital. *The Merriam-Webster English Dictionary* defines capital as

- (1): a stock of accumulated goods especially at a specified time and in contrast to income received during a specified period *also*: the value of these accumulated goods
- (2): accumulated goods devoted to the production of other goods
- (3): accumulated possessions calculated to bring in income set *capital* and land and labor to work— G.B. Shaw

This is the general definition we all have in mind when we talk about *Das Kapital*, capitalism, economics and politics. Capital is used to account for most human activity. What is it that motivates people to work hard? The obvious answer from a capitalist perspective is to accumulate goods and possessions. With the same logic people would generally assume that communist regimes failed because when it is no longer an option to accumulate goods and possessions, people just did not see any point in working hard or suffer pains to obtain new skills or invent new things. Though very useful to explain most social activities extending the concept to cover many other fields of activity, Bourdieu provides us with a very useful concept. For Bourdieu we cannot dismiss other forms of exchanges which does not derive any economic profit as disinterested. All social exchanges involve a certain interest and thus encourages investment. For instance, from a purely economic point of view it would be totally illogical to treat someone to an expensive dinner at a posh restaurant, but people do it every day, and these are not people you would consider less intelligent or more generous than the average. In Bourdieu’s terms these people who buy expensive presents to their friends, pay millions of dollars for a painting transubstantiate their economic capital into other forms of capital. Buying a dinner for your friend you exchange your economic capital into social capital, or when you spare your money and time for a night at the opera you invest in cultural capital. Or vice versa, people may sometimes convert their cultural, social, sexual, intellectual or any other kind of capital into economic or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 46-47).

Due to the lack of economic capital again, Shaw could not pursue the education expected from a gentleman of his social status. Instead Shaw compensated for this disadvantage investing his most valuable resource, his time and intellect in cultural pursuits going to art galleries, libraries and

teaching himself the piano. In 1874 at the age of eighteen two years after his mother had left for London, Shaw followed her mother's footsteps and moved to London leaving his father behind with the bitter feeling of being left alone (Holroyd, 1988, pp. 32-60).

According to Bourdieu the one who makes living only through writing needs outer resources. These supports help build a cultural field independent of economics and politics. Without these patrons who do not care about economic profits we cannot imagine the formation of liberalizing movements (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 257). Within this context Shaw's patron was his mother Lucinda Elisabeth (Gurly) Shaw who set him free in his radical attempts to revolutionize the London stage. From the age of 18 until Shaw finally became financially independent at the age of 42, from 1874 till 1898, Shaw's mother was the breadwinner of the family while Shaw was trying his hand in novel writing, spending his days at the British Museum reading room from early in the morning till night, speaking at union meetings, attending political rallies, making intellectual and politically engaged friends, writing plays and criticism.¹ The impact of this patronage on Shaw's writing and its determining capacities is worth pursuing as a research question.

When in London, Shaw was not very much interested in accumulating economic capital either, he left this side of capital accumulating to his mother. He invested himself in artistic, intellectual and political capital. Shaw would feel himself economically secure enough to get married only at the age of forty two, some twenty-four years after he settled in London. What motivated Shaw to play his stakes at the cultural capital instead of economic capital? Habitus. As Bourdieu calls it the "habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure" (1984, p. 170). Shaw was structured by the family and social environment that he was born in. His mother's profession especially played a crucial role in the formation of that environment for Shaw. In a way investing in cultural capital was a serious investment for Bernard Shaw as he instinctually knew that this was the best way to gain his mother's recognition, being invested in the cultural and artistic field herself. One of Shaw's most popular plays today, the third play in the Shaw corpus *Mrs Warren's Profession* strongly deals with matters directly traceable in Shaw's own personal history in his search for recognition in the political, artistic, intellectual and professional fields: The

¹ Although Shaw had jobs from time to time like the one he had at the Edison telephone company from November 1879 to June 1880, less than seven months, Shaw came to the conclusion that with his intellectual, political and artistic pursuits at hand he could not afford to spend his time working at manual jobs. He notes "My mother worked for my living instead of preaching that it was my duty to work for hers" (Shaw qtd. in Holroyd, 1988, p. 80).

recognition of mother, recognizing the mother, being recognized by the mother, misrecognitions, search for independence through recognition.

Seeing *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* Shaw was tempted to write his third play *Mrs Warren's Profession* (Holroyd, 1988, p. 291). Holroyd argues that Shaw wants to create a Post-Pinero theatre. Shaw's criticism of Pinero's play rests on the idea that the relation between a step daughter and step mother who find themselves in conflicting roles as ex-mistress and fiancée to the same man. Shaw blames Pinero for resorting to easy dramatic devices and choosing his characters from the stock characters of the late Victorian stage. Shaw felt an urge to rewrite this story from a different perspective, bringing into the story "the higher dramatic gift of sympathy with character—of the power of seeing the World from the point of view of others instead of merely describing or judging them from one's point of view in terms of the conventional system of morals [...]" (Shaw qtd. in Holroyd, 1988, p. 293).

What happens in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* that Shaw protests so passionately? Pinero's play opens at a living room scene in an upper class bachelor's small party for his best friends. Aubrey at the age of forty-five is about to make his second marriage. His first marriage as his friends relate while he is out attending business was not a successful one, his first wife was an extremely cold woman who could not warm to life or her own marriage, she died very young leaving a daughter behind which she left for the monastery's caretaking instead of the father. Aubrey Tanqueray, at the eve of his marriage knows for certain that his best friends will not approve of his bride to be and he announces that he will understand if they do not want to see him again after the bond. He is about to enter into the "social Dead Sea" (Pinero, 1894/2008, p. 67) marrying a woman with a past, who had three serious relations, which makes her "everybody's property" (ibid., p. 66) thus not worthy of marrying a respectable man from the society. As for Paula, the woman with a past, her main motivation for getting married a man much older than her is to earn respectability, in Bourdieuean terms she wants to transubstantiate her erotic capital in pleasing men into symbolic capital, investing her good looks and sexual appeal into matrimony to earn social respectability. She openly declares this expectation and in her projection of the future they will have together, the first thing she mentions and her major concern "And on each side of us was the nicest set imaginable—you know the dearest, the sort of men and women that can't be imitated" (p. 78). Her dream of a nice table includes social recognition, not social suicide. On the other hand, *Mrs Warren's Profession* is more realistic about what she sacrificed and what she could expect in life. Even her own daughter would not see her fit to associate with. When Crofts reminds Kitty of the issue, she does not object to that.

Yet their marriage will prove one spectacular social suicide. None of the neighbours in Surrey would want to associate themselves with a woman of an unspeakable past. And the saddest part is, though Aubrey has invested so much in Paula, making her his wife he cannot break himself from the doxa, neither could Paula herself. According to Shaw the dramatic potential of the story was sacrificed to conforming to the moral conventions of the Victorian period. Let me quote that part again: “sympathy with character—of the power of seeing the World from the point of view of others instead of merely describing or judging them from one’s point of view in terms of the conventional system of morals” (Shaw qtd. in Holroyd, 1988, p. 293). In that, social conventions are a major setback before the art of dramatic representation as they will not allow the artist represent characters in their own subjectivity. Maton gives a quite useful definition of Bourdieu’s habitus which can shed light on our reading of Pintero’s and Shaw’s fallen woman characters Paula and Kitty. For Bourdieu (2008): “habitus focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (pp. 51-52). Within this framework the agent has to make choices from seemingly endless options. In fact, the options are not as endless as they seem at first sight. These are usually determined by the agent’s social position, circumstances, disposition, age, sex, briefly his or her accumulated personal history.

When we look at *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and *Mrs Warren’s Profession* from such a perspective we directly see that although the title characters of both plays resemble each other with their “unspeakable” pasts, in Shaw’s play the character carries within her her history. It is this history which shapes her present circumstances and creates her character, and how she made certain choices to act in certain ways and not others is fully discussed and justified in the play. Challenged by her daughter Vivie, Kitty gives a quite realistic, convincing and comprehensive account of all the “variety of possible forks in that path” (Maton, 2008, pp. 51-52). Kitty justifies her choices stating that she was not as lucky as Vivie as she had no family to give her the opportunities presented to Vivie by hers. Mrs Warren explains Vivie that they were four sisters, all illegitimate from two different fathers. She was from the same father with Liz, and they both had good looks. The other two sisters were not as pretty and did not do as well as them in life. Though they tried to lead honourable lives, one working at the whitelead factory, other marrying a laborer, they ended up miserable. The first one died of lead poisoning, the second had to suffer a drunkard as a husband. Within that social system, young girls from working class families are not given the opportunity to lead a respectable life. The price they had to pay for such an idea is far too dear; to be killed at the factory, or to lead a miserable life in poverty (Shaw, 1898, p. 248).

The choices visible to Kitty were thus put by Shaw and Kitty's experiences have helped shape her vision. Of her other three sisters who came from similar circumstances her half sisters who have less becoming looks had very grim circumstances, one died of lead poisoning while the other suffered a drunk husband in poverty. The third sister with better looks transsubstantiate her symbolic capital, her virtue, selling her body in exchange of economic capital. Kitty has no regrets about the path she took; as she discloses, her other alternatives were either grim poverty or loss of health, maybe life.

As for Paula in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, she simply sees herself through her critiques' eyes and we are given no clue to as how she made her decisions which creates her present disposition. She wants to change her field from the field of fun-loving, bohemian, hedonistic libertine circles to that of social respectability; but neither her habitus, nor her social or symbolic capital was enough to afford a recognition to her in these circles. The field would not allow her to move freely within their midst as an equal agent, or inferior agent in any ways. According to Bourdieu's formulation "[habitus) (capital)] + field = practice" (1993, p. 101). Practice in any form of action in the end is an outcome of habituscapital and the impact of the field on that combination. Contrary to Kitty's account of her habitus, the disclosure of the circumstances that shaped the structure of her behaviour, the predictable pattern of choices that she would make; Paula's fallenness sounds almost ontological as if her character was not formed by history, by the variety of choices visible to her, as if she was thus despite her circumstances. There are silences in the play which neglects to ask the questions very close at hand. For instance, she implies that she was betrayed, deceived by her former relations with a promise to marry, that her heart was broken by her former lovers and that she has no strength to bear a similar blow. On the other hand, this point which has direct relevance to her fall, her loss of symbolic capital in Aubrey's circles is not investigated. Neither Paula, nor Aubrey, nor any of the other friends of the couple seem to question the responsibility of Paula's former lovers or the society. In his introduction to the *Mrs Warren's Profession* "The Author's Apology" Shaw is quite eloquent about the matter at hand stating that "as long as poverty makes virtue hideous and the spare pocket-money of rich bachelordom makes vice dazzling, their daily hand-to-hand fight against prostitution with prayer and persuasion [...] will be a losing one" (1898, pp. 183-184).

Shaw does not attempt to evaluate Kitty's circumstances in her personal history. Therefore, he neither criticizes nor judges single individuals, not only in this particular play but we can say that in all his writings Shaw sees people as a product of the historical accumulation. Therefore, Shaw assesses the individual Mrs Warren's case within a larger social context inviting a Bourdeian reading of his play. According to Bourdieu:

The social world is accumulated history [...] Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its “incorporated,” embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15)

As opposed to Pinero who chooses to punish his Paula at the end of his play and conform to the doxa, quite heterodoxically and paying the price for that Shaw does not condemn Kitty as he is expected to do. Instead he sees Kitty as an outcome of accumulated history who appropriates her different forms of capital to take part in the game of existence, to gain any kind of social recognition. Kitty’s capital is of an embodied one, which she inherited from her parents, a sexual appeal that helps her get a considerable amount of compensation in exchange of sexual favours.

As a good girl open for development, Shaw’s Vivie mouths some trite opinions on free will, that people, individuals themselves are responsible for their choices and they must account for and take their punishments without much protest for their transgressions. When she first challenges Kitty she says:

VIVIE. 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 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. (Shaw, 1898, p. 246)

Upon hearing Kitty’s case and reasoning Vivie cannot help but glorify her for taking bold steps to change her circumstances, survival instinct justifies anything, any form of practice. Bourdieu further elaborates on his concept of capital stating that it is not just simply a chance game where everything is possible and that stakes are the same for everyone “It is what makes the games of society—not least, the economic game—something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle” (1986, p. 26).

To understand the notion stated here in this expression we can still use Shaw’s Kitty to illustrate the sociological idea here. In Kitty’s case her “*vis insita*, the force inscribed in objective or subjective structure” is the physical complexion she was born with which appeals to the sexual appetite of the opposite sex, she does not have to do anything to gain it, she has inherited that as a part of her genetic heritage.

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu provides us with a very useful critical tool to approach this “conventional system of morals” Shaw as a dramatic artist who call himself an iconoclast is passionate about. In Bourdieuan terms what Shaw does with this particular play is to attack the “doxa” which Pinero does not have any problem with. So doxa can be summarized as an unquestioning attitude towards “actions and practice in traditional social organizations where the near perfect corespondence between the social structures and mental structures, between the objective order and the subjective organizing principles, make the natural and social World” (Deer, 2008, p. 122). As Deer argues “doxa allows the socially arbitrary nature of power relations (e.g. classifications, values, categorizations and so on) that have produced the doxa itself to continue to be misrecognized and as such to be reproduced in a self-reinforcing manner” (2008, p. 122). For Shaw, Pinero’s play reinforces the doxa, the unquestioned idea that within the field of sexual morals woman is the sole responsible party and that the social context which created the situation is nowhere to be seen within this problematic. The fact that Shaw’s play gives such a realistic, deep and well-rounded analysis of a burning social problem is due to the writer’s commitment to the dramatic and literary methodology of Henrik Ibsen. As Innes suggests *Mrs Warren’s Profession* carries the features of Naturalist theatre (2000, pp. 212-214) which attempts to integrate a “revolutionary scientific approach” (p. 46) to their subjects.

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