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COMPARE AND CONTRAST: A CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE CHARACTERS OF RAINA
AND LOUKA IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S PLAY ARMS AND THE MAN

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ABSTRACT

The idealistic notion of love and war was the most popular subject with the 19th century dramatists. With this trend it is evident that the society also prevails the idealistic view on love and war as literature is the mirror of society and society reflects in the pages of the popular works. From most of the chapters of the literatures we inspire our beliefs and ideas and very technically our author merges us into the world of fancy to dominate over our imagination and leads us to motivate our life according to their opinions. The romantic heroine Raina of Shaw's anti-romantic play Arms and the Man is an ideal example to show the social structure of the aristocratic families of that age, who takes an idealistic view of love and war studying Byron and Pushkin as well. But Shaw breaks the notion with the character of Louka whom Shaw represents as a foil to Raina to represent the reality on the theme of love and war. Shaw allowed Louka to speak his (Shaw's) mind about the reality of love and marriage as the social institution for the world to be peopled. This paper will conduct a comparative study and investigate the contrast through the characters of Raina and Louka in their treatment of war, love and marriage and ultimately shows the supremacy of Louka who is Shaw's mouthpiece over the heroine Raina with whom at the end Shaw breaks the convention of the then literature and created his 'new drama.'

Keywords: Realistic, Idealistic, War, Love, George Bernard Shaw, Anti-romantic.

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INTRODUCTION

Compare means similarities between two objects. The comparison tells what they have in common. 'Contrast' is dragged from the Latin term 'Contra' which means 'Against'. When two things are in contrast we explain ways in which they are different. Contrast represents in between two objects what goes out and what goes in.

A foil is a character who contrasts with another character (usually the protagonist) in order to highlight particular qualities of the other character.

In some cases, a subplot can be used as a foil to the main plot. This is especially true in the case of metafiction and the "story within a story" motif. The word foil comes from the old practice of backing gems with foil in order to make them shine more brightly.

A foil usually either differs dramatically or is extremely similar but with a key difference setting them apart. The concept of a foil is also more widely applied to any comparison that is made to contrast a difference between two things. Thomas F. Gieryn places these uses of literary foils into three categories, which Tamara A. P. Metz explains as: those that emphasize the heightened contrast (this is different because ...), those that operate by exclusion (this is not X because...), and those that assign blame ("due to the slow decision-making procedures of government...").

Hence, we are going to compare and contrast the characters of Raina and Louka as Shaw represents in his masterpiece to depict the ideas of the age. According to Ramji Lal¹ 'Arms and the Man' is a revolutionary play in which the protagonist is an anti-hero. Shaw wrote this play in order to attack what he regarded as false notions of heroism in war and also false notion about love. The play is anti-romantic in its treatment of heroism in war and also in the treatment of the passion of love. Shaw's aim was to destroy illusions and to compel his audiences to face realities.

Literature review

A.C. Ward² says, 'The romantic view of war is based on the idealistic notion that, men fight because they are heroes and that the soldier who takes the biggest risk wins the greatest glory and the greatest hero'. Again A.C.Ward³ puts that the realities of love and marriage became one of the most themes in Shaw's plays throughout the remainder of his lifelong. He thought of marriage not as a means of satisfying the personal desires of individual men and women, nor as a means of strengthening families but as the means of bringing to birth a new and better generation. In 'Arms and the Man' and often elsewhere he laughed at this and other solemnities, but behind the humours of the relationships of Raina, Sergius, Bluntschili lay the memories of Shaw's own childhood in a home shadowed by the failure of his own parents. According to Arup Kumar, the title and the sub-title of the play hint at the realistic approach of the dramatist. In his preface to 'plays present' Shaw Frankly States that the title of Arms and the Man originates from the English rendering by Dryden of Virgil's phrase in 'Aenied', 'Arma Virumque Cano'. The English rendering of the phrase is 'Arms and the Man I sing'. But Shaw's play does not celebrate the praise of arms and the man of arms. On the contrary, it is a vigorous caricature of the fictitious morals of war and romantic soldiering. G.K. Chesterton observes that Arms and the Man is the play which is built on bathos not on pathos.

Discussion

While studying 'Arms and the Man' we are introduced to the romantic heroine Raina who represents the idealistic view of war and love which was the common illusion of the aristocratic society of the 19th century. These are mere caricatures of the authors like Byron and Pushkin. Raina is very much class-conscious. She takes pride on her noble birth and uses wherever it can be placed to take the opportunity of family position. This is the true picture of the society which differentiates strictly among the classes. Very intellectually the upper classes maintain their dignity in every way as Raina informs Bluntschili that they are most aristocratic family in Bulgaria as they visit the opera every month and they have the only library in Bulgaria.

The aristocratic view established by stating the fact that civilized people don't return the victims or the poor who seek shelter towards them. The idea that the aristocratic people are the only symbol of civilization and only they prevail civilized customs which is pre-dominant in the society.

Louka, the maid servant of the Petkoff's is also class-conscious as well as Nicola. But, Louka the pretty as well as witty maid is not agree to spend rest of her life in serving the upper class. Here we get the true picture Darwin 'theory 'Survival for Existence'. If the lower classes will not attain their betterment by rebel or by their labour they must be suppressed by the upper classes.

Sergius while flirting with Louka reminds her of the social position where from she belongs. This attitude of Sergius reminds us that we can't forget the false egotism in the treatment of inferior classes inspite

of how much we are enamoured by their beauty or their wit or the labour they offered to us. Louka is a realist. She nor do possess the idealistic view of love neither is abandoned by the harsh reality. In treatment of both the female characters Louka surpasses Raina as the centre of attraction while placing their ideas and logic in justifying love. Eventually the characters are juxtaposed against each-other where one is dominated by the view of love and war and other keeps an entirely realistic view of life.

According to A.C. Ward, unlike Nicola, Louka does not consider herself inferior to the upper class characters in the play. She does not have the 'soul of a servant' that characterizes Nicola, but instead possesses a pride and sense of dignity that is missing in the older servant. She considered herself as Raina's equal in competing for Sergius's hand. But, she is very aware of the reality of her social situation. Her little acts of rebellion-flouting convention by openly smoking a cigarette, carrying a visitor's card in her blouse rather than on a salver, her careless manner and her pronounced swagger- are deliberate reactions to this.

All her actions are motivated by her aspiration to rise to a better position in society. We can never say for certain if Louka is truly attracted to Sergius or simply to the better future that he represents. There is no doubt that she is a calculation manipulative social climber.

In the first act it is clear that Raina conveys the idea that death is a kind of reward that all soldiers want. This is the idea which we get from the literatures that glorifies war. But, Shaw breaks the notion while reviewing his idea through Bluntschili that every soldiers are afraid to death. Soldiers and knights are not extinct from normal human race. We bully young soldiers to satisfy our hunger of nationalism but they are the fresh lives with red bloods who struggle in front of death as far as they can. The anti-romantic idea of Shaw is exposed here. He has not tried to glorify war but exposed the harsh reality and nakedness of murdering the youths in the name of the bloody sport, war.

Raina: Some soldiers, I know, are afraid to die.

Bluntschili: All of them, dear lady all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can. (Act-1)

There is the idea of 'higher love' which Sergius and Raina conveys for each other without sharing the spiritual bonding. Raina's illusion of higher love is the principal subject in Shaw. Through her, Shaw wanted to expose the hollowness of love. The passion of love for higher classes is merely the illusion that is an obvious social deed to create a new generation. The fatigueness of Sergius in higher love immediately shifts his heart to Raina which is clear as daylight that there was no spiritual bonding between the people who are about to marry.

Mothers like Catherine always wants a suitable husband for their daughters and can go to any corner to chase their daughter to act according to their would be husband's wish. Husband hunting for their daughters is the most favourite occupation of the 19th century mothers. The social security is the only object of marriage irrespective of love and choice. The idea of higher love dominates over Raina's mind.

Sergius: Dearest; all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like knight in the tournament with his lady looking at him.

Raina; Ah you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. Sergius: I think we have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.

But Sergius the apostle of 'higher love' is tired to carry the load of 'higher love' and eventually flirts with the clever Louka. Louka the clever, opportunist, realist, has not left a single chance to entrap Sergius. Louka silently injects the poison of bankruptcy in Sergius while Sergius is trying to make love with Louka in the stableyard which is a suitable rendezvous to flirt. She swiftly reports the conversation between mother and daughter which she learns by eavesdropping. Through Louka Shaw investigates the proper behavior or the qualities of a perfect gentleman. It is obvious that the gentlemen are like moving toyshops who shifts their love and opinion from one to another. Their hearts are like their opinions which always finds alter. To define a gentleman is very tough. Every moment they changes their mind and its tough for the inferior people in which way they are right or wrong. According to the situation they justify the odds in favor of them. Louka's cunning

information about Raina's love to Bluntschili equalizes the gentle folks as Sergius is making love to Louka at Raina's back furtively.

Louka : Gentlefolk are all alike : you making love to me behind Miss. Raina;s back, and she doing the same behind yours.

Here, we must need to add the act of Bluntschili's snatching off Raina's cloak from her which Raina needed to cover her half-veiled body. Here, Raina also raises the question of gentility. Both the heroines encountered with their suitors about the illustrations of gentility.

The reminder of Sergius of Louka's origin as she is made up of common clay and essentially and basically she is a servant signifies the hypocrisy of upper class who can use the labour class for their pleasure and buy their service at a lowest cost to satisfy their upper class status. But, Shavian explanations are always ready to break the convention. Shaw made Louka to reply that all the human community is made up of the same clay as the servants are. For the lower classes marriage must be a security in the society. Louka's turning down of the proposal of Nicola is the best example to settle the rule. The revolutionary spirit is dominant over here where Louka wants to break the convention and entraps Sergius to rule over her.

Louka: You were born to be servant .I was not, when you set up your shop you will only be every bodies servant instead of somebody's servant.

Louka is a highly intelligent girl with a sharp mind. She uses observation when it could be handled as a weapon. Sergius finds Louka more attractive and witty than the romantic idealistic Raina. The realistic view of Louka and the idealistic view of Raina made the both female characters as a contrast to each-other. When it comes to real heroism that is progressive and is a positive step towards equality , it is the climbing down the social ladder by Sergius , by taking Louka as his betrothed, that shows true heroism. On the other hand, the romantic Raina shatters her idealism of 'higher love' and abandons Sergius to marry her 'chocolate cream soldier' Bluntschili.

Conclusion

Shaw in 'Arms and the Man' has placed two heroines as a foil to each-other. There are so many aspects in which they differs but instead of their difference in birth, physicality ,position in society , wit , sense and vision of life essentially they are women who are similarly controlled with their Id , Ego, and Superego. They want their absolute possession over their husbands, they finds the better people as per their needs. But they are completely different by birth, by their instinct and by their vision of life. The setting of the two characters also signifies the upper-class picture and lower-class picture of the society. The presentation of the class difference is very artistically presented in the play. The difference between the women irrespective of class is the main findings in this paper.

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