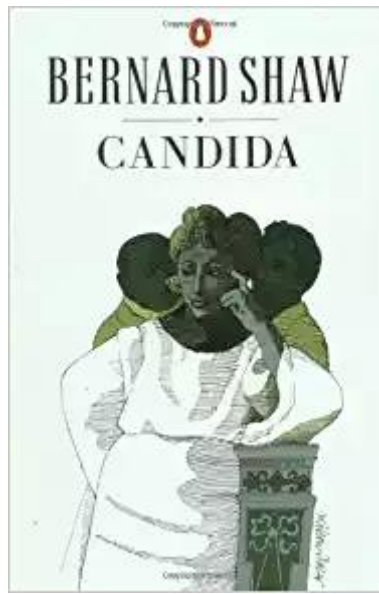


## Candida – A Contradictory Love Triangle

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### Abstract

Shaw, a multipronged genius, treats any social problem irrespective of its nature in a unique style. Though, the problem of love and marriage is a conventional topic for discussion, he looks at it in a different perspective, in the sense that he creates conflict in the characters to ventilate his critical ideas to the audience in a dramatic way with his sharp sense of wit and humour to captivate their minds. In the present paper, the traditional love triangle is dealt with excruciating conflict to evoke tension and bewilderment and thereby providing unexpected turn of events beyond the expectation of theatre-goers. In this process, the play *Candida*, which is set for exposing contradictory love triangle, justifies Shaw's view of anti-romantic disposition in true sense of the term in a realistic vein. To elucidate this, the play is studied and analyzed to attest Shaw's concept of an advanced woman to establish that the playwright is abreast of his times.

**Keywords:** Shaw, multi-pronged genius, social problem, love and marriage, perspective, conflict, ideas, wit and humor, turn of events, anti-romantic, advanced woman.

### Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that Shaw is endowed with hyper intellectual sensibility and exuberant wit and humor. A study of Shaw's early plays reveals his dramatic powers in the earlier stages of development. His reputation as a dramatist before 1900 is based mostly on the originality of his themes. The influence of Ibsen, particularly in "Unpleasant Plays" is apparent. The early plays also show that Shaw is profoundly swayed by contemporary native dramatists like Gilbert and Pinero. Shaw's greatness as a dramatist also lies in the Shavian outlook which characterizes every play that he

has written. Like Gilbert, Shaw gives his plays a typical personal touch. There is a Shavian touch in each of his plays, so much so that one can easily know that it is a play of Shaw that he has read even without being told about it.

In *Candida*, Shaw introduces “A stale situation in an entirely different way”, contrary to the conventional theme the eternal love triangle. It is considered to be one of the best anti-romantic plays that Shaw has written to profess the nature of an advanced woman. In the play, *Candida*, the heroin, plays a pivotal role in judging the true lover of her life, that has been complicated by two vying gentlemen, namely Morel, her husband, and Marchbanks a poet.

### **Analysis of the Play**

As the play opens, Mr. Morel is seen talking to his father-in-law, Burgess, who has come to him after a long time. While they are conversing seriously, Candida arrives from the station, accompanied by Marchbanks. Since she finds the house untidy, she busies herself to set it right. When Morel and Marchbanks are alone, Marchbanks tries to draw Morel into a queer discussion. Morel, who is a Christian socialist argues with Marchbanks skillfully, but he cannot expect the passion that Marchbanks entertains for his wife in his heart. Marchbanks, expecting unhappiness in Candida’s marital relationship, argues with Morel by expressing his displeasure over it. He says:

Happy : Your marriage, you think that: You believe that.

Marchbanks, later turns dramatically and demands Morel to come to a settlement regarding his undisclosed love for Candida. He says:

I must speak to you. There is something that must be settled between us.

(Act I, P.540)

After having much mental conflict, Marchbanks comes out with the truth that he has fallen in love with Candida. He says:

I love your wife.

(Act I, P.540)

Petrified by Marchbanks’ love for Candida, Morel tells him that it has become a common feature for everyone to love Candida. Morel says:

... Everybody loves her: they can’t help it. I like it.

(Act I, P.541)

As it becomes irresistible, Marchbanks once again expresses his deep sense of love for Candida, consequent upon this, Morel indignantly shouts at Marchbanks for his senseless observation. He says:

... You little sniveling cowardly whelp. Go, before you frighten yourself into a fit.

(Act I, P.544)

When Morel and Burgess are talking, Candida enters and complains that Morel has not taken care of any household work. Even the brush that is used for cleaning the lamps is being used for black leading. Marchbanks, who is present sitting on the sofa, incoherently expresses the horror that has haunted his heart. Candida tries to pacify him by entrusting the cleaning work to Marchbanks, besides asking him to present a scrubbing brush. Marchbanks bursts out poetically:

No, not a scrubbing brush, but boat: a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world. Where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the south

wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot: to carry us up into the sky. Where the lamps are stars, and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day.  
(Act I, P.558)

As Morel and Candida are left alone, Candida complains against Prossy suspecting her love for Morel. Candida says:

... Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and to peel potatoes and abase herself in all manner of ways for six Shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? She's in love with you, James: that's the reason.  
(Act II, P.563)

Even Candida spontaneously expresses her fondness for Marchbanks who appears to her sincere in showering love and affection on her. She says:

... I have grown fonder and fonder of him all the time I was away... though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love with me?  
(Act II, P.564)

Since Candida entertains the idea that Morel has not been confident of her, she provokes Morel, by telling that Marchbanks is right in understanding every one irrespective of their nature. She says:

He is always right. He understands you; he understands me; he understands Prossy; and you, you understand nothing.  
(Act II, P.565)

As Candida and Marchbanks are enjoying the absence of everybody in the room, Marchbanks reads out some poems thinking that Candida is listening, suddenly finds her disinterest and asks her several questions. In course of their talk, Candida attempts to drag the interest of Marchbanks towards her. In reply to one of her questions, Marchbanks being induced by over powering love for her, musically sings:

Candida, Candida, Candida, Candida, Candida. I must say that now, because you have put me on my honour and truth; and I never think or feel Mrs. Morel: it is always Candida.  
(Act III, P.575)

On Candida's leaving to enter the kitchen, Marchbanks again picks altercation with Morel, regarding his genuine love for her. Marchbanks even goes to the extent of pointing that real Morel has hidden somewhere and he poignantly appeals to him that Morel is not fit to be the husband of Candida. He says:

I don't mean the Reverend James Movor Morel, moralist and windbag. I mean the real man that the Reverend James must have hidden somewhere inside his black coat; the man that Candida loved.  
(Act III, P.577)

Responding to Morel's utterance in calling Marchbanks a beggar, seeking her favour, Marchbanks poetically says:

She offered me all I chose to ask for; her Shawl, her wings, the wreath of stars on her head, the lilies in her hand, the crescent moon beneath her feet-  
(Act III, P.579)

Through Marchbanks, Shaw expresses his conception of virgin Mary Morel, who is haunted by suspicion on what has gone on between Candida and Marchbanks in his absence, he asks Marchbanks to explain clearly: He asks:

Eugene: if that is not a heartless lie- if you have a spark of human feeling left in you – will you tell me what has happened during my absence?

(Act III, P.580)

Marchbanks tells openly without having a streak of fear in his heart. He says:

What happened: Why, the flaming sword – well, in plain prose, I loved her so exquisitely that I wanted nothing more than the happiness of being in such love. And before I had time to come down from the highest summits, you came in.

(Act III, P.580)

Morel, being convinced that nothing has gone between Candida and Marchbanks, understands that nothing has been settled. He says:

So, it is still unsettled. Still the misery of doubt.

(Act III, P.580)

Marchbanks expressing his happiness over Candida's nature, advises Morel enigmatically to choose different paths by leaving Candida alone, in order to seek a worthy man for her. He says:

... I am the happiest of men. I desire nothing now but her happiness. let us both give her up. Why should she have to choose between a wretched little nervous disease like me, and pig-headed person like you? Let us go on a pilgrimage, you to the east and I to the west, in search of a worthy lover for her: Some beautiful archangel with purple wings-

(Act III, P.580)

Morel, being stung by Marchbanks' suggestion, speaks eloquently about the safety and care of his wife and children. Then Marchbanks sharply reacting to his pathetic appeal, Commands Morel to ask her to choose between them. He says:

Oh, you fool, you fool, you triple fool: I am the man, Morel: I am the man. You don't understand what a woman is. Send for her, Morel: Send for her and let her choose between-

(Act III, P.580)

After having heated argument as to how to initiate the key discussion of choosing between the two, Morel confesses his innocence when Candida opines that a poet sees everything. Morel says:

Eugene was right, as you told me a few hours after, he is always right. He said nothing that you did not say far better yourself. He is the poet who sees everything; and I am the poor person who, understand nothing.

(Act III, P.589)

As it becomes inevitable not to hide the secret any longer, Morel tells Candida to choose between them. He says :

..... I will not go about tortured with doubts and suspicions. I will not live with you keep a secret from you... we have agreed – he and I – that you shall choose between us now. I await your decision.

(Act III, P.590)

Stunned by Morel's request, Candida throws herself for auction and asks them to offer their bidding. She says:

... And pray, my lords and masters, what have you to offer for my choice? I am up for auction, it seems. What do you bid, James?

(Act III, P.590)

Having moved by her appeal to offer their bidding, Morel with much humility says:

I have nothing to offer you by my strength for your defense, my honesty for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman.

Candida: And you, Eugene? What do you offer?

Marchbanks: My weakness. My desolation. My heart's need.

(Act III, P.591)

After listening to their bidding, Candida looks curiously from one to the other, as if weighing them, gives her choice cryptically. She says:

I give myself to the weaker of the two.

(Act III, P.591)

Here, Clark rightly observes "... Shaw attempts to shatter the ideals of the 'Sanctity of the family' and shows a weak man and a strong man – each at first appearing to be the reverse – with a woman between them. The woman finally clings to the weaker, as he needs her most, not, Shaw implies, because she happens to be his wife".

Sensing the sense of her observation, Marchbanks understands that he is lost. On the other hand, Morel droops down with sorrow at the outset, later when Candida says James is the weaker, and then he recovers from the shock and feels happy. Asking them to come close to her, Candida grows stranger. Candida says:

Let us sit and talk comfortably over it like three friends ... you remember what you told me about yourself, Eugene: how nobody has cared for you since your old nurse died: how those clever fashionable sisters and successful brothers of yours were your mother's and father's pets: ... always lonely, and nearly always disliked and misunderstood.

(Act III, P.592)

In an attempt to justify Morel's weakness, Candida says:

.... We go once a fortnight to see his parents ... Ask me what it costs to be James's motherland three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one .... When there is money to give, he gives it : When there is money to refuse. I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him. ... I make him master here, though he does not know it and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so.

(Act III, P.592)

Sahai aptly comments: “Shaw believed that the wife’s decision to live with the husband was the real solution to the problem. It may be recalled here that Candida is anti-Ibsen in the sense that the wife knowing well the weakness and hollowness of Morel’s love prefers to stay back... it shows Shaw’s striving to find out his own way out of *A Doll’s House and Ghosts*.” However, at the end since everything goes out of his hands, to express his innate love for Candida, Marchbanks tells Morel that he has filled her heart with his happiness. He says:

I no longer desire happiness: Life is nobler than that. Parson James: I give you my happiness with both hands: I love you because you have filled the heart of the woman I loved. Good bye.

(Act III, P.594)

It is worth to note Ervine’s comment who says “Shaw himself saw that he had turned the tables on Ibsen by showing that it was the man, not the woman, who was the doll in the house. Marchbanks surprisingly rushes out by expressing that he has a better secret in his heart. He says:

... But I have a better secret than that in my heart. Let me go now. The night outside grows impatient.

(Act III, P.594)

We can surmise that the poet might have realized that his love towards Candida is not earnest, since Morel has filled her heart with happiness. Sahai says “This poetic character, modeled on Shelley, finds the world too distasteful and selfish and walks out with the realization of the hard fact that winning the heart and love of a married woman was impossible.

## Conclusion

It is inferred from the above analysis that Shaw has invested his artistic sensibility in molding Candida, the protagonist of the play an advanced woman with a difference. Obviously, her impression and attitude towards Marchbanks would delude the audience that she would go with him deserting James Morel. Ironically, she turns the tables and decides to continue her life with James, her husband the weaker of the two. Of course, the plot of the play is structured in such a way that audience would be misled by her way of thinking. Surprisingly, Shaw with his view of modern woman induces the theatergoers to ponder over his concept of love and marriage which is improvised with much deftness and dexterity. Above all, the play really glorifies the true love of a wife for a husband who is endowed with an impeccable faith in his wife. That is why, the play is considered to be an iconic replica of true love that can pass the test of time with its perennial appeal.

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 18:10 October 2018

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*Candida* – A Contradictory Love Triangle