

---

# Anti-Capitalist Sentiments in George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Njong Divine

Higher Teacher Training College-Bertoua, The University of Bertoua, Bertoua, The Republic of Cameroon

**Email address:**

[njong\\_zec@yahoo.com](mailto:njong_zec@yahoo.com)

**To cite this article:**

Njong Divine. Anti-Capitalist Sentiments in George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 10, No. 5, 2022, pp. 311-320. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20221005.17

**Received:** August 15, 2022; **Accepted:** September 22, 2022; **Published:** October 21, 2022

---

**Abstract:** George Bernard Shaw is a great admirer of Henrik Ibsen and a great apostle of the so-called Ibsenism. The theme of discussion in the Ibsen's plays inspired Shaw who suggested that Ibsen's plays provided a technical novelty and signalled a new beginning out of the well made play of Eugene Scribe. Shaw expressed his recognition of Ibsen's genius in The Quintessence of Ibsenism and championed the introduction of Ibsen to the English public. The purpose of this research endeavour entitled Anti-Capitalist Sentiments in George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is to show the disgruntlement of Ibsen and Shaw with the practice of conventional politics. The study investigates the political perspectives of the authors and seeks to examine how the playwrights condemned the political systems in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The political vision of the authors is therefore of prime interest to this study which is based on the assumption that *A Doll's House* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* are platforms for the anti-capitalist views of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. According to the authors, the poor systems of government in Victorian England and in Norway hinder man's progress and destroy man's freedom. They therefore share in the Marxist ideology that governments are machineries of exploitation of the masses and the Marxist belief that capitalism is based on the exploitation of workers by the owners of capital. In other words, the chapter will look at the poor notions of democracy and capitalism as obstacles on the road to self-fulfilment and self-realisation. The study postulates that for Ibsen and Shaw, no meaningful change is possible in a capitalist society.

**Keywords:** Anti-Capitalist, Conventional Politics, Marxist, Victorian, Disgruntlement, Governments, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe

---

## 1. Introduction

The practice of politics in the world has hardly ever been envisaged in isolation to the well-being of the economy. This is because politics and economics have always shared a very close bond, and in every civilisation around the world, the performance of the economy is always one of the key political battlegrounds. It is clear that many economic issues are inherently political because they lend themselves to different opinions and are, consequently, inseparable. Yadollah Dadgar in "Economics and Politics" intimates that "the link between economics and politics is readily straightforward since economics deals with the allocation of resources by firms, households, and governments and politics provides an understanding of the impact of political institutions on different societies" [7]. According to Dadgar, a considerable number of economic problems are

intermingled with politics as well [7]. It is in this regard that this study intends to probe into the financial and economic lives of the characters in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* in order to attain a fuller understanding of the authors' political vision. In the two plays, the authors frown at capitalism and see it as a nursery of the evil that obliges proletarian women to sell or refuse themselves in order to earn a living. According to them, capitalism is the real criminal and guilty party responsible for the plight of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and not individual villains as popular opinion holds. Both Ibsen and Shaw never studied economics in depth but their investment activities, interactions and observation talents enabled them to capture European modernity in its transition from Christian ethos to the secular values of capitalism.

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

In order to fully examine the political visions of the authors as seen in *A Doll's House* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the Marxist approach is deemed relevant in this study. Marxism is both the theory and the political practice derived from the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The theory encompasses different forms of politics and thought such as those of communist parties and communist states, as well as academic research across many fields. The various forms of Marxism share an attention to the material conditions of people's lives and social relations among people; a belief that people's consciousness of the conditions of their lives reflects these material conditions and relations; an understanding of material conditions and social relations as historically malleable; a view of history according to which class struggle, the evolving conflict between classes with opposing interests, structures each historical period and drives historical change.

Marxism will therefore facilitate the understanding of Ibsenian and Shavian attitudes towards capitalism. Shaw was significantly influenced by Marxist's ideas and after reading Karl Marx's *Capital*, he said, "Marx opened my eyes to the facts of history and civilisation... [and] provided me with a purpose and a mission in life". Although he did not agree with Marx's belief in violence, he shared the former's views about the cruelty of a capitalist society.

Since the plays of Ibsen and Shaw address the struggle of women in a male-oriented society, Marxist feminism will be very necessary in showing how the women in these plays struggle to assert their identities and personalities. Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminist theory which focuses on the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women. Marxist feminism states that capitalism, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women's oppression. Marxist feminists see gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is class oppression and women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression which is maintained (like racism) because it serves the interests of capitalists and the ruling class. Marxist Feminists have extended traditional Marxist analysis by looking at domestic labour as well as wage work in order to support their position.

## 3. Victorian Socialism and Capitalism

The socialist groups that developed in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sprang from a sense of social indignation and all tended inevitably to be intensely class conscious and hence veered towards revolutionary action. The poor workers under Marx and Engel sought to overthrow the capitalists and the capitalists in turn took their stand to crush all socialist movements. The tension between capitalism and socialism in the Victorian society was, thus, inevitable. Ibsen and Shaw were to take the middle path in their attempt to synthesise

these conflicting ideas. Like Marx, both writers reject capitalism. However, they reject the class wars and strikes. To them, those who swallow Marxism fully are possessed by the need for war. Their socialism does not entertain war and violence and they opt for a gradual and warless revolution of their societies. As can be seen in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, the authors prefer a peaceful and gradual Fabian method in place of war and violence as suggested in Marxism.

To Marx, socialism can only successfully overthrow capitalism if the workers of the world unite and use violence to take control of the production and distribution of goods. To conventional socialists, violent revolt is the only way to socialism. In Bernard Shaw: *The Lure of Fantasy 1918-1951*, Michael Holroyd quotes Shaw as having stated that "Socialism is a plan for securing equal rights and opportunities for all in a perfectly constitutional manner through democratic institution" [9]. Ibsen shared the same view as Shaw.

As far as socialism is concerned, both Ibsen and Shaw have the desire for economic change and readjustment within the existing framework. They combine the passionate desire to improve the lot of the poor with a high respect for the constitution, the law and stability of the society. They believe that socialism can only be achieved through a peaceful means and a slow process of evolution, rather than a fast process of revolution and bloodshed. According to James Alexander in his *Shaw's Controversial Socialism*, the Shavian social policy is based on "permeation" and "gradualness" suggesting a more practical solution which might act as an alternative to the revolutionary socialism of Marx [3]. Therefore, Ibsen and Shaw share the view that meaningful change cannot be arrived at through strikes and violence as the conventional socialists suggested. This brings to mind Mahatma Gandhi, the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement. Although Gandhi was not the originator of the principle of non-violence, he was the first to apply it in the political field on a large scale. He explains his philosophy and way of life in his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Here, Gandhi states that "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind" and that "there are many causes that I am prepared to die for but no causes that I am prepared to kill for" [8]. In applying these principles, Gandhi did not balk from taking them to their most logical extremes in envisioning a world where even government, police and armies were nonviolent. In their political and social plays, Ibsen and Shaw think the same and, like Gandhi, they are not passive. They promote a peaceful confrontation of injustice.

To Ibsen, socialism and the socialist state will be achieved slowly with perseverance and insistence. According to M. C. Bradbrook in *Ibsen, The Norwegian: A Revaluation*, Ibsen's life falls within the development of modern Democracy in Norway, taking place in the century from the adoption of the constitution in 1814 to the implementation of full voting rights for women in 1913 [5]. He states that, at the time, two political issues were burning. These were issues related to the

long struggle for women's rights and the relationship between political representation and political leadership, embodied in the struggle between the king and the parliament. Summarily, Ibsen has a conflicting view of this subject because while he supported a broadening political participation, he also favoured the aristocratic political leadership.

Irving Howe writes in "Bernard Shaw's Anti-Capitalism" that unlike the great Marxists, Shaw was fundamentally alien to the democratic and equalitarian spirit that has inspired all genuine socialist movements [10]. Ibsen was also as alien to democracy as Shaw and their conception of socialism was thoroughly bureaucratic and they were ready to borrow from every non-capitalist theory so long as it was not committed to a belief in the independent historical role of the masses. That is why Shaw could admire Stalin but could never appreciate the democratic idealism which was the underpinning of Marx's and Lenin's life-work.

However, as already mentioned, Ibsen, like Shaw, was never a lover of conventional democracy. He had a very uneasy relationship to politicians and party politics. In one of his first letters to Brandes as indicated in *Letters and Speeches*, Ibsen deplors the unification of Italy and the establishment of Rome as the capital of Italy. He writes: "Rome was the only place in Italy protected from politics; the only place enjoying true freedom, freedom from the political tyranny of liberty for every politician emerging down there, an artist will perish" [11]. Later, however, Ibsen formulated a more positive view of democracy, under the heading of "nobility".

In his speech to workers in Trondheim, he assessed the social and political situation in Norway, which, in his view, had made great progress. But he saw significant deficiencies when it came to freedom of belief and expression. About "nobility", Ibsen said: "An element of nobility must be introduced into our political life, our government, our representation and our press.... What I have in mind is the nobility of character, the nobility of mind and will" [11]. Ibsen concluded by saying that it was women and workers, who have not been harmed by the pressure of parties who had to advance this nobility of the mind. Coming from such a political background, it would not be long for Ibsen to betray his stand on the system of governments.

Shaw was also a socialist who believed that common sense would inevitably lead people to realise that a more humane and equitable form of wealth distribution than capitalism would result in the peaceful adoption of a form of socialist democracy. His main criticism of capitalism was the "waste" of human and material resources in a system in which growth through the constant increase of consumption was the engine for the increase in material wealth. The political plays of Ibsen and Shaw expose the authors' wisdom as well as Nature's way of teaching us that, if the human race does not "grow up" very soon, we will be another failed experiment of natural selection and will never succeed in solving our problems.

It is interesting to note that Shaw has been taken in by

almost everything else but not by capitalism. He succumbed to Nietzscheism, Lamarckism, vegetarianism, imperialism, fascism, Stalinism, anti-vivisectionism and Fabianism but he knew how the internal social workings of capitalist society were rotten and never stopped saying so. As a result, his magnificently composed pamphlets, polemics and prefaces are full of some of the most eloquent and effective anti-capitalist agitations of our times.

#### 4. Capitalism in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* argues against prostitution by demonstrating it is merely another form of capitalist exploitation like the factory or scullery. The play argues against the legitimisation of prostitution as a career by demonstrating that prostitution is simply another form of exploitation like the slave conditions of the factory or scullery. Through his characters, Shaw illustrates how the societal attitude toward virtue ensures poor women remain poor or forces them to engage in disreputable activities to survive. According to Shaw, Capitalism is responsible for Mrs. Warren's prostitution and he considers it another way of capitalist exploitation.

In the play, the aristocratic Crofts attempts to justify his involvement in prostitution by arguing that it is a profitable business like any other: "And do you expect me to turn my back on 35 per cent when all the rest are pocketing what they can, like sensible men? No such fool!" [2]. Although men like Crofts may profit from the slavery of women, the term prostitution is never mentioned: "In the class of people I can introduce you to, no lady or gentleman would so far forget themselves as to discuss my business affairs or your mother's" [2].

The Reverend Samuel Gardner illustrates the hypocrisy of the church regarding wealth and virtue and its similarity to the callous business world. The Reverend himself has purchased the services of Mrs. Warren and even fathered her daughter; yet, he is shocked to learn she has been invited to his house: "I never gave such an invitation. I never thought of such a thing" [2]. Other guests are invited due to their social standing, while Mrs. Warren, despite her wealth, is undesirable because of her profession.

According to Shaw, prostitution as a career keeps women in a double-bind; they will achieve wealth without virtue, therefore, no legitimate social standing or acceptance. The value placed on virtue actually keeps women poor by limiting their choices to marriage or positions where they are overworked, underpaid and undervalued. Shaw also argues that if prostitution continues to be seen as simply a delightful vice or temptation and not as a consequence of capitalism, the true nature of the profession and its effects on women will remain hidden and unchanged.

In *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Crofts does not hold the admiration of the dramatist because he represents the worst of capitalism and the corruption of contracted marriages.

Vivie's character, on the other hand, is a response to the restrictive regulations regarding dramatic works that deal with the issue of prostitution. Through her character, Shaw approaches the issue as a problem to be thought of without sentiment or romance.

Like Crofts, Vivie is not a sympathetic character. However, she holds Shaw's admiration because she is the opposite of what would be expected and accepted in a Victorian dramatic work. Shaw observed that drama was "flaccid in its sentimentality" [2] and in opposition created a character that appears cold and rational. Vivie does not strive for the same goals that women of similar beauty and education would be expected to pursue. She has no interest in marriage or romance, preferring business and the single life.

Vivie forces the audience to think about the problem of prostitution because she does not react in the typical fashion. Her cold and harsh attitude is an attempt by Shaw to dispense with the pathos of dramatic works which he claims "we do not believe: we make-believe" [2]. Crofts and Vivie present two uncomfortable aspects to the problem; Crofts and capitalism represent the cause of prostitution and the exploitation of women, while Vivie offers an atypical response that evokes thought and analysis rather than sentimentality and sympathy.

Initially, Mrs. Warren's Profession appears to support prostitution as a viable alternative for poor women. Mrs. Warren has chosen a path that has elevated her economic standing and paved the way for a better life for her daughter Vivie. A poignant moment in the play is when Mrs. Warren discloses the source of her income to her daughter. Her honesty brings the two of them closer together and inspires some admiration from Vivie: "My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England" [2].

When Vivie asks her mother if she would have advised her to go to work in the factory or the Waterloo Bar, Mrs. Warren defends her choice:

*How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery? And what's a woman worth? What's life worth? without self-respect! Where would we be now if we'd minded the clergyman's foolishness? Scrubbing floors for one and sixpence a day and nothing to look forward to but the workhouse infirmary.* [2].

Mrs. Warren equates self-respect with economic independence even if it is through disreputable actions. Despite the apparent rationality behind her argument, Shaw's goal is to demonstrate that prostitution is no less exploitative than other professions available to poor women. Through his characters, the shared complicity between commerce and religion to keep women from achieving wealth and virtue except through marriage or social standing is laid bare.

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* debuted at approximately the same time as Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* and it certainly bears the same stamp of late-19th century feminism. Vivie, to a certain extent, represents the image of the "New Woman", a new image that essentially came into existence in the 1880's. A new woman is interested in her own education, personal freedom and employment and one

who is generally uninterested in the traditional ideal of marriage and children. Shaw is among the few writers who portray the "New Woman" as a positive figure (as opposed to a danger to society). Indeed, more than anything else, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* stands as a condemnation of society at large, with several of its characters portrayed with negative connotations. Crofts, Shaw's representation of a high-society gentleman, is shown as the "most brutal type" and shows himself to be completely lacking in morality throughout the play. Even Mrs. Warren, the sacrificial mother, is described as a "domineering" and "vulgar" "blackguard." In this, Shaw demonstrates his political views.

Shaw, who was a Socialist, uses *Mrs. Warren's Profession* both as a defense of women and as a condemnation of Capitalism as a whole. In his view, it is only people like Crofts, the monied upper classes, who benefit from Capitalism, while the poor, like Mrs. Warren, must trade dignity and morality for success. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is to an extent, Shaw's image of what the undesirable effects of Capitalism force people to go to; forcing them into hypocrisy and into hurting the ones they love. Not even Vivie, the image of a good and modern woman, is left untainted by the smear of Capitalism. Thus, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* sounds Shaw's call for both social and political revolution.

When Shaw completed *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in 1893, it was censored for eight years. When it was finally produced on the London stage in 1902, the public was outraged by its controversial content. Reviewers overwhelmingly condemned the play as immoral, citing its focus on prostitution and incest. Talking about this in the preface to the play, Shaw in the following excerpt notes that:

*Mrs. Warren's Profession has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theatre critics clean out of the practice of their profession. No author who has ever known the exultation of sending the Press into an hysterical tumult of protest, of moral panic, of involuntary and frantic confession of sin, of a horror of conscience in which the power of distinguishing between the work of art on the stage and the real life of the spectator is confused and overwhelmed, will ever care for the stereotyped compliments which every successful farce or melodrama elicits from the newspapers.* [2].

Today, however, the play is applauded for its astute view of the corruption at the heart of Victorian society. Mrs. Warren, forced by the economic realities of nineteenth century London, becomes a prostitute and later runs several successful brothels. Her poverty forces her into prostitution, which wealthy men pay for. "Good" society rejects her but overlooks, as Crofts points out, the corruption involved in the upper class's acquisition of its own wealth. Through her characterisation, Shaw exposes the corruption and hypocrisy of the "genteel" class. He also explores the personal consequences of such a profession as Mrs. Warren struggles to gain the respect and love of her daughter after she discovers the truth about her mother. Modern audiences

admire the play's artistry as well as its subject since, as Shaw notes in his *An Author's Apology*, "Mrs. Warren's defence of herself and indictment of society is the thing that most needs saying" [13]. Both Mrs. Warren and Vivie explore the possibilities and the impediments for the New Woman at the end of the nineteenth century, which was at the heart of the debates among many of Shaw's contemporaries.

#### 4.1. *Capitalism and Poverty*

According to Shaw, capitalism causes poverty which again leads to societal ills like prostitution and even corruption. The women we find in our societies and especially in Cameroon today selling sex for money would definitely have embraced more acceptable professions if capitalism offered them better choices. Today, in Cameroon like in other parts of the world, there are several Mrs. Warrens, even in classrooms in the universities. They need education like Mrs. Warren's daughter and are mostly left with no choice than to sell sex to the fortunate beneficiaries of the capitalist society. Shaw seems to be saying in his play that rather than insulting such business people as prostitutes, society should examine the situation that leads to such practices and, especially, stamp out capitalism.

As long as capitalism and the likes of Crofts continue to dehumanise these women and impoverish them, they will continue to use the only free capital they have to achieve education and earn a living. Prostitution was seen by many young British women as their only option for survival. As Shaw explains in his "Author's Apology" to the play, many women during this time:

*Remain so poor, so dependent, so well aware that the drudgeries of such honest work ... are likely enough to lead them eventually to lung disease, premature death, and domestic desertion or brutality" that they would often choose the life of a prostitute over a more virtuous path, since both "lead to the same end, in poverty and overwork [13].*

Young Kitty Warren found herself in a traditional position for a woman in Victorian England. She and her three sisters struggled to break out of the stranglehold of poverty, but there were few options afforded to them. One sister died of lead poisoning as a result of her work in a factory, and another married an alcoholic. After her sister Liz disappeared, Kitty took on a series of jobs that wore out her health and her looks for other people's profit. When Liz reappeared, dressed in fur with money in her pocket, she convinced her sister to help her run a brothel, a business that would place Kitty in both a traditional and non-traditional role.

The traditional role that Mrs. Warren felt compelled to adopt, ironically, affords her the opportunity to gain independence in her patriarchal world. Mrs. Warren notes this irony when she advises Vivie that, "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 her" [2]. As she becomes a successful businesswoman by exploiting the image of the female as a sexual object, she gains a position in society typically held exclusively by men. She also has the ability to raise her daughter by herself and provides her with

an education, thereby granting Vivie opportunities that she herself never enjoyed.

After Mrs. Warren explains the circumstances involved in her decision to enter into prostitution, Vivie celebrates her mother as a role model, insisting that she is "a wonderful woman stronger than all England" [2]. Mrs. Warren's continued involvement in her profession, however, ultimately destroys her relationship with Vivie, who claims that her mother's inability to give up her comfortable life proves that she, after all, is only "a conventional woman at heart" [2].

#### 4.2. *Vivie: The New Woman in a Capitalist World*

Shaw presents Vivie as a model of the New Woman who refuses to adopt any conventionality. Her rejection of traditional notions of femininity emerges immediately at the beginning of the play when she meets Praed and addresses him "sharply," which "daunts" him. He is also surprised by her firm handshake and her physical ease at rearranging furniture. When Mrs. Warren suggests Crofts' help Vivie with the chairs, she "almost pitch [es] two into his arms" [2]. Vivie's independent spirit surfaces in her displeasure over her mother's making arrangements that concern her without her permission. She is clearly a woman in control of her own life and destiny.

In his presentation of Vivie, Shaw illustrates the fact that women who strive for success in a capitalist system must adopt a more masculine attitude. Vivie does so and declares to Praed that she does not care for beauty and romance, which bore her, and instead focuses on "working and getting paid for it". She enjoys "a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a ... good detective story" [2].

Shaw, however, warns against destructive behaviours suggests in the pursuit of success in a capitalist society. The New Woman must not be overtaken by emotion and family love to the extent of refusing herself. Shaw prescribes that for her to succeed and complete independence, she must recognise the importance and power of money. Vivie understands and faithfully follows these rules to the point where she sometimes appears quite heartless. Stanley Weintraub in his article on Shaw in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* insists that Vivie is a "cold-blooded creature unlikely to look sentimentally for very long at daughterly duty or economic rationalizations" [16].

Vivie displays a rather mercenary sentiment when she admits that she would not have put so much effort into winning prizes at school if she had known how so much work would gain her so little money. She also judges harshly any weaknesses she detects in others, as she does in Praed, who expresses an anxiety to please her when they first meet. Her severest judgment, however, is leveled against her mother. She mistrusts her motives, insisting that her mother "has rather a trick of taking me by surprise-to see how I behave myself when she's away" [2]. She employs every means necessary to ensure that her mother gains no power over her, as she illustrates when she assumes that her mother has secrets and admits that she will use that advantage over her if necessary.

When Vivie demands the truth from her mother, we notice the uneasiness and sensitivity surrounding the whole subject and this reveals the difficulty a woman faces as she struggles to maintain her independence. Initially, she rejects any daughterly duty to her mother as she coldly assesses Mrs. Warren's chosen profession, insisting that her mother has no right to determine Vivie's future. Her lack of sympathy prompts her mother to declare, "my God, what sort of woman are you?" to which Vivie replies, "the sort the world is mostly made of, I should hope. Otherwise I don't understand how it gets its business done" [2]. Vivie's response and attitude further reveal her as a new woman who must stubbornly seek answers to the questions that plague her identity. Like Nora in *A Doll's House*, Vivie is ready to clash with family if questions regarding her identity are not well addressed.

As her mother describes the difficulties that drove her into prostitution, Vivie admits, "you were certainly quite justified-from the business point of view" [2]. When Mrs. Warren pleads her case, Vivie cannot help but be deeply moved by the suffering she has endured, which causes Vivie to express a true daughterly devotion for her "dear old mother" [2]. That devotion is short-lived, though, when Vivie discovers that her mother is still actively involved in her profession.

In their final scene together, Vivie displays a difficult combination of sympathy and steeliness as she determines that she will never see her mother again. This brings to mind the case of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* who, like Vivie, closes the door on her husband and children in search for a better life. It must be noted that the circumstances that culminate in Nora's decision are not very different from Vivie's in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Apart from being a patriarchal society, Nora's society is also one of capitalism with the men in control of power and money. Under such circumstances, Nora cannot make a life of her own and is forced to close the door on such a society to search for selfhood.

In Vivie's case, she initially displays a cool indifference to Mrs. Warren's affectionate intentions toward her, recognising the ironic situation she finds herself in. Vivie insists that, even though her mother's money would afford her a measure of independence, she acknowledges that if she took it "and devoted the rest of [her] life to spending it fashionably", she "might be as worthless and vicious as the silliest woman could possibly want to be". Yet when her mother entreats her to do her "duty as a daughter", she becomes "jarred and antagonised by the echo of the slums in her mother's voice" [2]. In an act of stoic self-preservation, Vivie ultimately determines that she must leave her mother because of Mrs. Warren's "conventional" devotion to her comfortable life and live alone as an independent woman.

In his article on the play entitled "Propaganda and Art in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*", Charles A. Berst argues that Vivie struggles "to make her intellectual talents and instinct for independence meaningful and remunerative in a man's world" [4]. As a result, "she is set upon by forces that seek to

push her back into the more conventional role of womanhood" [4]. One of those forces is her mother, who has had to endure harsher constraints as she fought for survival in the staunchly patriarchal system of Victorian England. In his penetrating study of these two complex women in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw illuminates the difficulties inherent in a woman's pursuit of selfhood in a capitalist society.

The situation in *Mrs Warren's Profession* brings to mind Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* [17]. In both plays, society is presented as corrupt, and morally innocent individuals are out of place. The situations of the two plays are remarkably similar, both built around confrontation between a bad mother and an innocent daughter. In both plays, the mother lives on the Continent and the daughter in England and, in both, the daughters know little about their mothers and, indeed, harbour illusions about them. Both daughters confront the danger of becoming like their mothers, and both withdraw from the precipice after a brief period of confusion. Capitalism characterises both plays and society as a whole is presented as corrupt. "I will have no one in my house about whom there is any scandal", asserts Lady Windermere, but when we meet her guests, it is clear that they are all immoral, from Cecil Graham, to Dumbly, to Lady Plymdale and the other [17].

Shaw's intention is to reveal that the guilt for prostitution lies more upon society than upon immoral women. In the preface Shaw emphasises that Mrs. Warren's girlhood choice was between wretched poverty without prostitution or comfort and luxuries with it. The blame for the fact that she is offered such squalid alternatives falls squarely onto society: "Though it is quite natural and right for Mrs Warren to choose what is, according to her lights, the least immoral alternative, it is nonetheless infamous of society to offer such alternatives. For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality" [2]. For Shaw, the real real immorality is not sex trade but the poverty that compels a woman to take that path. Referring to this in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, Shaw notes that, "The word 'Prostitution' should either not be used at all, or else applied impartially to all persons who do things for money that they would not do if they had assured means of livelihood" [14].

In the play, the society which brooks Sir George Crofts is clearly the villain. It is the society of the well-to-do which derives its luxuries from the suppressed lower classes and maintains its self-respect because it does not bother about the poor. The cure is implicit and obvious: change the society, raise the standard of living of the lower classes to give them greater freedom and opportunity; in short, turn to socialism.

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* shows the world how women are being exploited through capitalism. Shaw's discussion of the issues involved in prostitution is both relevant and revealing and one can easily imagine why the play was banned. It shows the hypocrisy of Victorian men's attitudes to women and the struggle of women to survive independently in life without resorting to desperate measures.

Mrs Warren may be a lady of the night but she is also a fine businesswoman and has the independence and financial security that other women get through marrying well. Shaw suggests that marrying for money is not in any way better than being a prostitute and intimates that capitalism represents a regular incentive for women which obliges them to engage into sex trade in or out of marriage.

As a socialist, Shaw takes advantage of prostitution in the Victorian society to condemn capitalism. Talking about this in *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Destroying Ideals: The Early Plays*, Charles Carpenter comments that "Prostitution in Mrs. Warren's Profession represents an ultimate example of the bartering of human lives and destinies that the capitalist ethic condones" [6]. It is through examining the cruel conditions of life in a capitalist society that Shaw exposes the twists and turns of prostitution and its biased judgement on the oppressed and discriminated proletarian women in the Victorian society. Cultures that treat women as commodities and condemn them as prostitutes without raising a finger on the men that make prostitution possible are condemned in this play which seeks to readjust the biased perspectives on women.

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* discloses the fact that prostitution is caused by the shameful and worsening employment conditions of women under capitalism in almost all parts of the world today. Although the play scandalised Victorians and Europeans in general, the relevance and urgency of the subject in contemporary society is obvious. Although there has been significant changes in the situation of the woman in most parts of the world today, capitalism continues to breed poverty and hypocrisy and the subject keeps boiling. When Shaw understood Vivie's choice of prostitution and suggested that prostitution was the only rational profession for a poor young woman because the alternatives were hunger, inhumane work and early death, he was attacking the cause of the problem and not the problem itself. Through Mrs. Warren, Shaw drives home the idea that whoring is not really so very different from capitalist marriages.

## 5. Capitalist Patriarchy in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Although capitalism was still an obscure reality when Ibsen was growing up, the looming author quickly noticed its demerits and strains and concentrated a good amount of his artistic attention on it. The recurring theme of wealth and the lack and abundance of it gives his plays a capitalist outlook. In the article "Strains and Conflicts in Ibsen's *A Doll's House: A Reification of the Drama within the Modern Nuclear Family*" Salah Uddin Al Faruque tries to defend Helmer, Nora's husband, by blaming the capitalist economic system. In his revelation, the sustainability of conjugal happiness depends on a dialectically transformed relationship between husband and wife. He thinks that this conjugal happiness can be swept up with the infection of avarice, materialism and a possessive mentality which are offered by capitalism.

However, the writer of the article ignored the truth, which Ibsen revealed in his plays, that capitalism and modernism are associated with overtones of patriarchy.

In *A Doll's House*, Nora's husband, Torvald's sees her as an object represented in the forms of a doll and an animal. This can be seen in the play when he refers to her as his "little lark" and "my squirrel" [1]. This conversion to an animal identity can be seen as an attempt to "underscore her inability to understand the ethical issues faced by human beings" [15]. Here, Ibsen insinuates that capitalist patriarchy has undermined the worth of women while simultaneously functioning as a result of their existence.

A common theme found in *A Doll's House*, is the exploitation of the weak and the poor by the strong and the rich, and an obsession with material possession. The characters in the play are all affected by the lack or acquisition of money, and their entire lives and way of thinking are based upon it. Therefore, from a Marxist perspective, Ibsen blames the patriarchy in *A Doll's House* on capitalism. The theme pervades much of the play and can be seen from each of the main character's perspectives.

Nora's way of thinking and her outlook on life are both completely dominated by her material wealth and financial conditions. For example, when the play begins Nora is just returning home from a shopping trip. She enters the apartment with an "armload of packages" and is followed by a boy carrying a Christmas tree [1]. Nora then tells Helene, one of their maids, to hide the tree so the kids won't see it until it's been decorated. When Torvald enters, she asks him for money so she can "hang the bills in gilt paper" as Christmas tree decorations [1]. The tree symbolises her obsession with money because she does not want anyone to see it until it had been decorated to show off their newfound wealth. Previously, she made the decorations by hand, spending an entire day on the project. Doing the same now would be "thinking poor" in her mind, so she spends excessive amounts of money on presents and decorates the tree with it because now they can afford to "let themselves go a bit" [1]. Now that Nora belongs to a higher social class, she practically, throws money away. She tells the tree delivery boy to keep the change from the crown she gave him, paying him twice what he asks. Despite the fact that Torvald's promotion will not yield results for another three months, she insists that "we can borrow until then" when previously she and Torvald saved every penny they could in order to get by, and they both worked odd jobs in order to supplement their income [1].

Nora becomes more selfish as well, claiming that if something were to happen to Torvald after they had borrowed money, "it just wouldn't matter" because the people they borrowed from are strangers [1]. Now that they belong to a higher social class, her responsibility has flown out the door and she cares only about her own interests. She does not care what would happen to the "strangers" she borrowed from, because she concentrates only on what she can extract from other people. Also, when her friend Kristine comes over, the first thing she mentions is her husband's new

job, claiming that she feels “so light and happy” because they now “have stacks of money and not a care in the world” [1]. When the wiser Kristine answers that it would be nice “to have enough for the necessities” [1]. Nora insists that that is not enough—she repeats that she wants “stacks and stacks of money” [1]. After she tells Kristine she borrowed the money for the trip to Italy and tells her about all the “hard work” she did in order to pay it off, she says her worries “don’t matter anymore because now I’m free!” [1]. She equates freedom with the acquisition of wealth, saying that having money is the only way she can be “carefree and happy” [1]. As already mentioned, such materialism and selfishness, according to Ibsen and Shaw, are offered by capitalism.

By the end of the play, however, she realizes that even if she is able to be free of her debts, she is still financially enslaved to her husband because, as a woman, she is completely dependent on him. She refers to leaving him as “closing out their accounts” and in doing so “she renounces not only her marital vows but also her financial dependence because she has discovered that personal and human freedom are not measured in economic terms” [1]. Nora’s entire outlook on life changes with a change in her economic conditions, thereby demonstrating the Marxist belief that people’s thoughts are a product of their financial situations.

Torvald is much more careful with money, but he too bases his outlook on life and relationships solely on money and the status it earns him. When he hears Nora return from shopping, he asks if “his little spendthrift has been out throwing money around again,” saying that they “really can’t go squandering” [1]. Nora claims that, since Torvald will be making “piles and piles of money” from now on, they can borrow until his raise comes through, but he is adamant in his reply that they should “never borrow” and have no debt because “something of freedom is lost from a home that’s founded on borrowing and debt” [1]. Torvald, too, equates money with freedom and refuses to give up that freedom by borrowing money. He too then mentions that it is “a wonderful feeling” to know that “one’s got a safe secure job with a comfortable salary”, similar to Nora’s claim that she’s now “carefree and happy” because of it [1].

Torvald cares not only about money, but about his social status as well. When he finds out that Nora borrowed money from Krogstad with a forged signature, his “love” for her is completely erased, and he says she’s “ruined all his happiness” [1]. He cares only about his reputation, because “it’s got to seem like everything is the same between us-to the outside world, at least” [1]. All that matters to him is “saving the bits and pieces, the appearance” [1]. However, once Krogstad gives them the note and says he will not tell anyone about it, he is suddenly, magically able to love her again, because no one will know. He still cares only about himself, however, claiming “I’m saved, I’m saved! Oh, and you too” [1]. Nora is only an afterthought when it comes to his reputation. Their relationship is ruined because he continues to believe in money and social status as the source of happiness, while Nora comes to realise that money is not that important.

### 5.1. Capitalism and Family Life

The influence of capitalism can also be seen in both Kristine and Krogstad as well. Kristine sacrificed her love for Krogstad and married another man because “his prospects seemed hopeless back then” and she had to be able to take care of her mother and brothers [1]. Although their relationship was revived in the end, it almost failed “simply for money” [1]. Once she comes back to Krogstad, she still refuses to give up the job she took from him, because she has to look out for herself. She justifies this by telling Nora that in her situation, she has to do anything to survive even if it means to be selfish. She says “you have to live, and so you grow selfish” [1]. This is a Marxist attitude because her entire life and well-being are defined and guided by the economic situation at the time of her decisions. Krogstad committed a crime in order to support his family, and when his job was threatened he tried to save it by every means possible, even through blackmail, saying he would fight for it “like life itself” if need be [1]. Krogstad tells Nora that “it was your husband who forced me to revert to my old ways,” but in reality, it is really his financial situation that makes him blackmail Nora, just as it was the reason he committed a crime in the past [1].

The Helmer’s maid, Anna-Marie, is also an advocate of the capitalistic perspective of life. In order to survive, she abandons home and child with no remorse. When Nora asks how she was able to abandon her child to the mercy of strangers, she replies that “a girl who’s poor and who’s gotten in trouble” has no other choice, and that her daughter “has written to me both when she was confirmed and when she was married” [1]. Anna-Marie’s entire life as well as her way of thinking has been determined by her financial situation. Her relationship with her daughter is jeopardized and she interprets it in economic terms. She is drowned in the capitalist mindset and “accepts her alienation from her child as if it were natural, given the circumstances of class and money” [1]. She cannot afford to be upset about leaving her only child, because she had no other choice. She had to give up a relationship with someone she loved, just as Kristine had to give up her love for Krogstad. Anna-Marie’s situation exemplifies that “in the marketplace [women] were a labour force expecting subsistence wages” [1].

According to Marx in *Wage Labour and Capital*, Marxism includes the belief that capitalism is based on the exploitation of workers by the owners of capital [12]. Anna-Marie may not have been exploited *directly* by the rich, but she is forced to live a substandard life because she is poor, and unlike Nora, she does not challenge the laws of class and society but accepts her situation. She does not realise that social class and society’s laws were created by other people “and thus are capable of imperfection and susceptible to change”, [1]. So all she can expect is to be poor her entire life, and for her financial conditions to remain stagnant.

The problems that Nora, Anna-Marie and Kristine face are intensified by their gender. Ibsen’s play is considered by many to be a feminist work although he said in a speech once

that Nora was supposed to represent the Everyman, and that he had not been trying to address the issue of women's rights, critics argue that the presence of feminism in the play is inherent and "justifiable whatever Ibsen's intention and in spite of his speech," [15].

Nora is depicted until the end of the play as a helpless, dimwitted fool who wastes her husband's hard earned money. She is Torvald's plaything, his burden and responsibility. In *Ibsen's Women*, Templeton describes their marriage as "a pan-cultural ideal... a relation of superior and inferior in which the wife is a creature of little intellectual and moral capacity, whose right and proper station is subordination to her husband" [15]. Her "womanly helplessness" was attractive to Torvald, because he had to be in control. When they get the Bond back from Krogstad and Torvald "forgives her," he says that "to a man there is something sweet and satisfying in forgiving his wife," because it seems as if his forgiveness "had made her doubly his own; he has given her a new life, and she has in a way become both wife and child to him" [1]. She was an object, his property, to whom he deigned to give life; but only for his own pleasure. During the first act, he never calls her by name; he calls her his "squirrel," a "spendthrift," and a "featherbrain," among other things. Her entire identity is determined by these nicknames; while she is "his squirrel" she is innocent, childish, obedient, and completely dependent on him. When he finally addresses her by name, in Act Three, her behaviour is entirely different as she becomes serious, determined, and willful. She is his "doll-wife," playing the game of marriage. She tells Torvald in the end, "You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you, or pretended to" [1]. All of it is a role that Nora has been taught to play by society, the behaviour expected of all women of the time. The woman is seen here as weaker than the man and is basically dependent on the latter for survival. Such notions of patriarchy are components of capitalism which Ibsen indicts.

The role reserved for Nora by her capitalistic society is merely a mask, one that she cannot live with in the end. Superficially, she is entirely obedient to her husband but, deeply, she yearns for recognition and a love that Torvald is not willing to give. She is expected to be content with the life she has, although it is not in any way fair or equal. When she expresses her hope that Torvald would have taken the blame for her crime upon himself, Torvald says that "no man would ever forsake his honour for the one he loves," and Nora replies that "millions of women have done just that" [1].

## 5.2. Nora's Rebellion

Nora's rebellion is so shocking to the audience that Ibsen "was accused of a kind of godless androgyny; women, in refusing to be compliant, were refusing to be women" [1]. Ibsen was even forced to change this ending in order for it to be performed. Obedience was the main trait that defined women; it was what separated them from men. When she decides to leave, Torvald claims that she is insane, because

her "most sacred duties were to her husband and her children," and "before all else she was a wife and mother" [1]. So in leaving, she is in a sense denying the purpose of her existence. Women had no other role or function in society.

Kristine broke free from this traditional role by chance, because her husband dies. Had he lived, she would have been stuck in the same situation as Nora for the rest of her life. Even so, she is still dependent on men in order to live. When her father died, she was forced to marry a man she did not love in order to provide for her mother and younger brothers. She was not able to get a job at that point, because she was young and unmarried; so the only option she had was marriage. After her husband dies and she goes to visit Nora, she says "I feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore" [1]. Her entire life up until this point revolves around men; the purpose of her existence is to please her husband and take care of her brothers. When this is no longer necessary, her life loses its meaning. She comes to Nora because she is looking for work, and that can only be obtained through Torvald. When he gives her a job, he feels in control of her even outside the office.

When Torvald and Nora return from the party in Act III and Kristine is there waiting, he says "you really ought to embroider, it's much more becoming. Let me show you...in the case of knitting, that can never be anything but ungraceful" [1]. He presumes to instruct her on something that is traditionally women's work and a hobby, as if she were doing it for him. He insults her taste and her work as if it is his right and his duty to correct not only his own wife but any woman that he sees doing something "wrong".

When Nora dismisses herself from home and walks away, we notice a woman who departs not only from family but from society. She is seeking to plug her independence and that of her entire gender from the powerful grips of family and society. She rubbishes gender based considerations and announces freedom and respect for all irrespective of background, age or gender. She is the voice of the voiceless, uncredited and undervalued workers of the world seeking to topple capitalist convictions. Like Shaw in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*, Ibsen in *A Doll's House* criticises capitalism as reflected in the Marxist belief that "human thought is a product of the individual's social and economic conditions, their relationships with others are often undermined by those conditions, and that the weak or less-fortunate are always exploited by the richer bourgeoisie" [12].

It is important to note, however, that the cruelty of that society is not simply economic, although that is the most obvious manifestation of what happens to outsiders, as we learn through Krogstad's situation. There is an important emotional component to their distress as well, for the isolation they must endure can leave them unable to create for themselves a meaningful relationship, to derive human significance from their interactions with others. Those of whom society disapproves or who do not have a secure middle-class status are thus frozen out, literally frozen in that they have to fight for a subsistence, but also figuratively frozen by the impossibility of realising a rich

social existence. Kristine's experience here is important because when we first meet her, she has what Nora chooses at the end of the play-independence from any immediate social responsibility-and she finds in it no satisfying living purpose. She wants to get back into the society. Her experience on the fringes has taught her that she must, if possible, live her life in society.

## 6. Conclusion

Ibsen's ridicule of capitalist patriarchy in *A Doll's House* is clear and Shaw's condemnation of capitalism in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is obvious. Both authors are unanimous on the fact that capitalism is a poor system of government which does not lead to progress. For Ibsen and for Shaw, Capitalism is a system of government that impoverishes the masses and encourages societal ills like sexism, racism, classism, and patriarchy. It is unrealistic, counterproductive and frustrates the lives of the working class. Consequently, for both authors, it should therefore be modified in favour of a more social friendly political system. Ibsen, like Shaw, would certainly not have any problem with capitalism if it takes away poverty and misery for all. Their problem is not with capitalism per se but with the way it is practiced and its divisive results for the society. Nora's troubles and Mrs. Warren's woes in *A Doll's House* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* respectively are all as a result of the capitalist mindset. While it is clear in the two texts that the authors do not seek a complete eradication of capitalism in favour of socialism, it is obvious that they advocate a synthetic approach in the political system. The middle way for them is a kind of social capitalism that would not enrich and empower a selected few while others languish in poverty and hardship. Ibsen's motivation for the disappearance of Nora at the end of *A Doll's House* is because Nora can only embody the problem, and not the solution. Shaw's decision to ensure Mrs. Warren's survival in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in spite of the "dirty" profession is also because she epitomises the problem but not the solution. The solution, for both authors, is a thorough revival of the practice of capitalism in order to avoid societal ills like inequality, exploitation and discrimination. Nora, Mrs. Warren and Vivie can therefore be seen as emissaries of the revival solicited by Ibsen and Shaw who seek to topple the capitalists who oblige them to live in an unfair, unbalanced and unjust society.

## References

- [1] Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House in Forms of Literature*, A Writer's Collection. Ed, Jacqueline Costello and Army Turker. New York: Random House, 1959.
- [2] Shaw, George Bernard. *Mrs Warren's Profession*. Edited by L. W. Conolly. Toronto: Broadview press Ltd, 2005.
- [3] Alexander, James. *Shaw's Controversial Socialism*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2009.
- [4] Berst, Charles A. *Pygmalion, Shaw's Spin on Myth and Cinderella*. NY: Twayne, 1995.
- [5] Bradbrook, M. C. *Ibsen, the Norwegian: A Revaluation*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.
- [6] Carpenter, Charles. *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Destroying Ideals: The Early Plays*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- [7] Dadgar, Yadollah. *Public Sector Economics*. Mufid University fourth edition, 2018.
- [8] Gandhi, Mahatma. 1869-1948. *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- [9] Holroyd, Michael. *Bernard Shaw: The Lure of Fantasy 1918-1951*. NY: Random House, 1991.
- [10] Howe, Irving. *Bernard Shaw's Anti-Capitalism*. *New International*, vol. 14 no. 1, January 1948. <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/howe/1948/01/shaw.htm>.
- [11] Ibsen, Henrik. *Letters and Speeches*. Ed. and trans. Evert Sprinchorn. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- [12] Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Wage-labor and Capital*. Vancouver: Whitehead Estate, 1919.
- [13] Shaw, George Bernard. *Mrs Warren's Profession with the Author's Apology*. Washington: Watchmaker Publishing, 1902.
- [14] *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*. London: Constable and Co, 1932.
- [15] Templeton, Joan. *Ibsen's Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- [16] Weintraub, Stanley. "George Bernard Shaw," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 10. *Modern British Dramatists 1900 – 1945*. ed, Stanley Weintraub, Gale. Gale Research, 1982.
- [17] Wilde, Oscar, and Charles Shannon. *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play About a Good Woman*. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893.