

George Bernard Shaw

He lived a very long life and had a strong influence on British drama for over fifty years.

He was born in Dublin in 1856 and he belonged to an upper-class family in steady decline for his father's alcoholism. He had to work when he was young, but then he moved to London with his mother and became a music, art, and theatre critic in periodicals. In his theatre he was influenced by the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. He believed in social reform (in fact he criticised ~~so~~ society in his plays, just like Ibsen), which was the same aim the "John Galsworthy" he had gained had.

In 1898 he married Charlotte Payne Townsend, a rich Irish woman who had the money he needed to devote himself completely to his writing. He got international fame.

He presented contradictory aspects: he was

the idler of the bourgeoisie he had always ridiculed, he shared middle-class style of life, he was socialist but liked totalitarian leaders like Mussolini and Hitler. In 1925 he won the "Nobel Prize" for literature and he died in 1950.

Mrs Warren's Profession (1894)

It's one of the "Plays Unpleasant". It was written in 1894 but it wasn't accepted by the official Censor. So it was produced in 1902 in a private theatre because there the Censor's authorisation wasn't required. We can find many of Shaw's theatre characteristics in it:

- the use of dialogue to develop a thesis. Mrs Warren is a very determined woman who always knows what to say. Shaw uses Anne's attention to build his thesis about prostitution using her objections; the thesis of this play is the absurdity of the condemnation of prostitution by Victorian society. Shaw criticizes the hypocrisy of his society that condemns prostitution but has created it and needs it;

- the social denance which is preferred to the dramatic art: the characters show a good rhetorical ability but they don't have the warmth of real human beings;
 - Irony is used to make the message more incisive for non-intellectual audience
- All these characteristics make Shaw's theatre a theatre of ideas, not of manners or actions. His dramatic prose is vigorous and witty.

Pygmalion (1912)

Even if this play was written later than "Mrs Warren's Profession", it presents some typical aspects of Victorian society. We can analyse them through the irony present in the play by Shaw. The incongruous clothes worn by Eliza at the beginning, the vernacular English she used to speak opposed to her exaggerated language at the end of the play make the reader smile and laugh. She is the only round character who has an evolution

throughout the play.

His evolution consists on her improvements to become a refined woman and leads her in her social ascent. And for the social ascent is necessary to speak good English (RP).

How interferes in the story with the descriptive stage directions: he puts his comments in them and he influences the readers' opinions.

After Shaw's death his popularity declined, but nowadays he has been revived.

Even if the atmosphere is happier in "Pygmalion" is happier than in "Mrs Warren's Profession", in both the plays we can find the figures of super-women who make success in their life.

It's an influence of Nietzsche's philosophy.