

BERNARD SHAW AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

Tagayeva Tamara Bahadirovna

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Department of English language and literature

Amanova Shoira Majitovna

Master of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract. The achievements of George Bernard Shaw as a dramatic critic are examined in this article, emphasizing his significant influence on the conversation around contemporary theater. Shaw used his position to question accepted conventions and spark discussion on the artistic and social aspects of drama, approaching theatrical criticism as a reformer as much as an observer. Shaw addressed more general societal concerns like class, morality, and creative integrity while criticizing the technical and thematic aspects of plays through his analysis of theatrical productions of his era. A pillar of literary criticism, his evaluations were distinguished by their wit, depth of thought, and acute awareness of dramatic structure.

Keywords: dramatic criticism, the theater, playwrights, mere entertainment, drama's characters, capitalism.

Introduction.

George Bernard Shaw, a literary giant of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, remains a towering figure in the world of drama and criticism. Renowned not only for his plays but also for his incisive intellect and sharp wit, Shaw carved a unique space for himself as a dramatic critic. His critiques were far more than mere evaluations of theatrical performances; they were comprehensive commentaries on the social, political, and artistic currents of his time. Shaw approached drama with an analytical rigor, blending his profound understanding of literature with a fervent desire to reform society. Through his work as a critic, he challenged conventional norms, dismantled artistic pretensions, and championed the cause of intellectual honesty in the theater. This article delves into Shaw's legacy as a dramatic critic, exploring how his sharp observations and unapologetic views shaped the landscape of modern drama and criticism. Only three and a half years of George Bernard Shaw's life were spent in the field of professional criticism. His name is most strongly associated with the English modern dramatic movement. Bernard Shaw's sharp humor, sharp mind, and unreserved criticism of the theater of his day were hallmarks of his career as a theatrical critic. Shaw's contributions to dramatic criticism had a lasting impact on the theater scene of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, starting with his early years as a freelance

reviewer and continuing with his later years as a well-known voice in London's literary and theatrical circles. When Shaw started writing theater reviews for magazines like *The Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Saturday Review* in the middle of the 1880s, he entered the field of dramatic criticism.

His evaluations immediately became known for being witty, perceptive, and prepared to question the current quo. Shaw used his position as a critic to participate in more extensive conversations regarding the nature and function of theater rather than merely critiquing specific plays or productions. Shaw's support of realism in theater was among his most important contributions. Shaw thought that theater should tackle current social issues and depict life's truths. He was an early supporter of Henrik Ibsen's plays, which greatly influenced Shaw's own dramatic writing since they were realistic and socially sensitive. Shaw aimed to promote realism in theater and inspire writers to explore taboo topics and question social mores through his reviews. Scholar Bernard Dukore notes Shaw's impact in promoting realism and challenging conventions: "Shaw's work as a playwright and critic was fundamental in redirecting English theater away from escapist melodrama and towards a socially conscious realism. His admiration for Ibsen was profound and served as a basis for his own advocacy of theater as a medium for social change." [1] The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen had already influenced the English drama into a new stage of growth before George Bernard Shaw began his career as a dramatist. Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, the romantic legacy of Elizabethan theater, which dominated the English stage for over three centuries, started to wane. "Shaw was an early and ardent supporter of Henrik Ibsen, whose plays were instrumental in the development of realism in theatre. He judged that a dramatic critic learns as much from having been a dramatic author as Shakespeare or Pinero from having been actors. It was his chief distinction to have touched life at many points; unlike many contemporary dramatic critics, he had not specialized to such an extent as to lose his character as man and citizen, and become a mere playgoer. Archibald Henderson recognized him in his writing: My real aim", Shaw asserted in reference to his work on the "Saturday Review", is to widen the horizon of the critic, whose habit at present is to bring a large experience of stage life to bear on a scanty fruitful criticism of the drama must bring a wide and practical knowledge of real life to bear on the stage" [2]. Shaw acknowledged Ibsen's innovative use of play, which rejected traditional psychology theory in favor of examining intricate social and psychological issues. Shaw promoted Ibsen's work's significance in the development of theater and assisted in introducing it to English-speaking audiences through his reviews and articles. Shaw criticized Victorian theater's sentimental and melodramatic inclinations, which frequently glossed over challenging social realities and portrayed idealized depictions of life. Shaw writes in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*: "In Ibsen's plays, there is no sentimental or superficial

treatment of life. He doesn't avoid painful truths but confronts them, examining the complexities of human nature and society with an unflinching eye.”[3]

Shaw challenged playwrights to address the intricacies of life and society on stage by advocating for a more truthful and realistic depiction of human experience in his reviews. Shaw analyzed plays not only for their artistic value but also for their social and political ramifications, applying academic rigor to his criticism. He addressed societal issues and advocated for progressive change through his evaluations. Shaw's critiques pushed both playwrights and viewers to regard theater as a mirror of their surroundings rather than as a means of escape. Shaw's wit and humor were among his most distinctive traits as a reviewer. "Shaw wielded his wit and insight with a purpose, using the theater as a tool for social critique rather than simply entertainment. His reviews were as much about urging societal change as they were about the plays themselves." [4] He frequently used clever wordplay, scathing sarcasm, and dry wit in his evaluations. Shaw was able to inject comedy into even the most serious topics, and his evaluations were both thought-provoking and enjoyable to read. One may retort in Shaw's own words: "In all the life that has energy enough to be interesting to me, subjective volition, passion, will make intellect the merest tool". [5] It is significant of much that, to Shaw, the play is not the thing, but its thought, its purpose, its feeling, its execution. Shaw, arguably the most important English-language playwright after Shakespeare, produced an immense *oeuvre*, of which at least half a dozen plays remain part of the world repertoire. ... Academically unfashionable, of limited influence even in areas such as Irish drama and British political theatre where influence might be expected, Shaw's unique and unmistakable plays keep escaping from the safely dated category of period piece to which they have often been consigned. [6]

Because of his prolific production, command of language, and in-depth examination of human nature, George Bernard Shaw was sometimes likened to Shakespeare. Shaw's writing is renowned for its comedy, social satire, and profound comprehension of the human condition, much like Shakespeare's classics, his plays, such "Pygmalion" and "Man and Superman," are praised for their nuanced characters and provocative issues. Furthermore, Shaw's impact was not limited to the stage. Shaw was unquestionably a great character in English literature, but it is crucial to remember that drawing direct comparisons between him and Shakespeare is arbitrary and debatable.

Shaw promoted his own ideas through play. The themes of life energy and creative growth are reflected in his works. Shaw takes straightforward tales and brilliantly develops them. Shaw's drama contains a thorough stage description that includes details about the people, furnishings, and other elements. Shaw's plays are occasionally regarded as intentional comedy. Because he didn't create tragedies, some critics believe he was not a dramatist at all. The harsh facts of life were far away from

him. He also had a sense of humor. Christopher Innes comments on Shaw's divergence from traditional tragedy: "Shaw's avoidance of traditional tragedy led some critics to label his work as lacking the seriousness associated with true drama. However, his intentional comedy was a calculated choice, allowing him to probe social issues in ways that tragedy might obscure." [7] He penned numerous comedic plays that portrayed the ridiculousness of contemporary life. In general, there are several categories into which play falls. For instance, they are realistic, satirical, and idealistic.

Shaw made an effort to portray societal issues in particular in his plays. He brought Dickens, Moliere, and Shakespearean models and ideas. He expanded on the ideas from his own approach. No one's shadowy history is exploited, no one's heart is crushed romantically, no one is murdered, no one is seduced, no one is accused of a crime, and no one is physically abused in his plays. "The drama I dream of is one in which no one's heart is broken for love, in which no villain is pursued by retribution, in which no innocent person suffers, but in which, nonetheless, the human struggle is made real." [8] Shaw was constantly thinking about the universals and unities of things. He made an effort to examine women's issues in twentieth-century literature.

Shakespeare is also criticized by Bernard Shaw using his own methodology. He criticized Shakespeare's plays for lacking heroism. They are not cognizant of themselves. He closely examined his own characters as the heir of diplomatic originality by displaying the frailties of Shakespeare's characters. His plays don't have traditional heroes and villains. "Shakespeare's characters act unconsciously and automatically... There is no real heroism in his heroes, no genuine moral or intellectual struggle. They are more in love with fate than with freedom of choice." [9]

Shaw's works consistently depict characters' current social and political issues. His plays reveal psychological, social, and physical thinking. His ability to use the theater as a forum for social criticism was one of his major accomplishments as a critic. He did not hesitate to address contentious issues like feminism, capitalism, class inequality, and the place of the artist in society. He supported up-and-coming playwrights and avant-garde theatrical styles. Shaw was not hesitant to provide criticism, but his critiques were always helpful. He provided directors and playwrights with incisive criticism that pointed out both their work's advantages and disadvantages. Shaw's objective was to promote artistic development and brilliance in theater, not to destroy. He took an intellectually rigorous approach to his work as a critic, thoroughly examining the plays' themes, characters, and messages. His reviews were well-crafted analyses that demonstrated his deep understanding of philosophy, literature, and social issues rather than being merely opinions. Michael Holroyd, a prominent Shaw biographer, notes: "Shaw's criticism was driven not by a desire to disparage but by a constructive intent to foster growth in theater. His critiques went beyond superficial analysis, examining the philosophical and social underpinnings of

the works.”[10]

Shaw’s legacy as a critic is perhaps best encapsulated in his own words:” The critic’s job is to see what is on the stage, not to see what is in the mirror”[11]. Shaw steadfastly upheld the principles of impartiality and intellectual honesty throughout his career, refusing to let prejudice or public opinion influence him. His critiques were driven by an unwavering search for the truth and a strong conviction in the transformational potential of art. Shaw's unflinching integrity and uncompromising intelligence were a beacon of light in an era of sensationalism and superficiality, encouraging generations of critics to follow in his footsteps. Shaw's approach to critique was distinguished by a special fusion of social conscience and literary sophistication. He considered the theater to be a potent medium for social criticism and cultural commentary in addition to being a place for amusement. Shaw addressed the important concerns of his day through his reviews, opposing the status quo and promoting progressive change. In his writings, Shaw explicitly states that the theater should serve as more than just a venue for enjoyment, but as a medium for societal reflection:“The theater remains not a diversion from reality but a means to make people face it... To entertain alone is insufficient; we must also educate, provoke, and reform.”[12]

His evaluations were both entertaining and educational, drawing readers in and stimulating thought in equal measure because to his keen humor and insightful analysis. Shaw's support of fresh voices and avant-garde theatrical styles is among his most enduring contributions as a critic. Shaw supported the work of up-and-coming playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov, acknowledging their creative brilliance and working to bring them to the attention of the world at a period when traditional, commercial theater dominated the English-speaking world. Shaw contributed to expanding the frontiers of theatrical expression and the horizons of British audiences by increasing the status of these visionary artists. Shaw's influence as a critic, however, went much beyond his advocacy of particular playwrights; it radically altered how theater was viewed and comprehended.

Shaw's evaluations raised the conversation about the art form by urging viewers to think critically about the plays they saw and its larger social and political ramifications. His focus on the value of ideas over show and content over spectacle upended preconceived conceptions about what theater might and ought to be, opening the door for a more socially conscious and intellectually demanding approach to theatrical criticism. Shaw’s reviews often challenged audiences to look beyond mere entertainment, urging them to confront social issues through theater:“Drama is an invitation to examine our own institutions and values. To ignore this is to diminish its power... Theater must be provocative, or it fails its purpose.”[13]

Shaw was a ruthless critic but he criticized in a most charming and pleasant manner. He attacked institutions, which are not sensitive, in preference to people who are: and when he did criticize individuals, he added sugar to the pill, so that they could swallow it without making a wry face. He could not only take the attacks of his enemies with good humour but by means of his wit was able to turn them to his own advantage. In his personal life, Shaw was a man of simple habits, who shunned luxury of every kind, and for whom the best recreation was work. His tastes were simple. He did not require the stimulants which other men take in order to endure life or to forget their worries: he was a vegetarian, a total abstainer and non-smoker. He never played games, and his exercises were limited to walking and swimming[14].

In British literature, Bernard Shaw is regarded as the most influential dramatist. When he first started writing drama, theater managers and reviewers took note of his inventive, humorous plays that eschewed the romantic norms of the day and had a sardonic sense of humor. His plays addressed a wide range of contentious issues, including prostitution, gender discrimination, false morality, political beliefs, and socioeconomic strata divisions. Literary scholars have also noted that social, economic, and political issues are interwoven in his plays, particularly his intense disapproval of the harsh unfairness and inequality that capitalism at the time he lived in inflicted on the majority of people.

Shaw's talent for writing and speaking out about social issues that still affect society fifty years after his passing. His opinions on women's rights, Ireland's shortcomings, the need for linguistic reform, the capitalists' exploitation of the poor, and many other crucial issues for which he campaigned nonstop reveal his sharp mind and contemporary humor. His writings for music and art critics remain insightful and current. His plays are still performed in a variety of languages and nations. He is considered a maestro of British literature because of his consistency in time and his problems.

Shaw's influence as a critic, however, went much beyond his advocacy of particular playwrights; it radically altered how theater was viewed and comprehended. Shaw's evaluations raised the conversation about the art form by urging viewers to think critically about the plays they saw and its larger social and political ramifications. He emphasized: "I AM not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as under stood in England to-day with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters." [15]

George Bernard Shaw's position in contemporary dramatic art should be clear

from this declaration of faith. Ironically, though, he is regarded as one of the most skeptics of his era. This is partially because comedy typically just serves to entertain and touches on the lighter aspects of life. However, there is a type of comedy that makes people laugh while crying; it eats away at the soul like acid, leaving scars that are frequently deeper than those caused by the sad version.

Being such a genius, he was able to create a new dramatic genre that employs comedy and irony to advance important ideas about social and moral structures while transforming melodramatic traditions. His ability to deftly combine the dramatic, the humorous, and the socially corrective is what gives his plays their flavor. The majority of his plays blend a lot of paradoxes and satirical overtones with the realities of the Victorian era's lower or middle class, as well as a lack of morality or magnificent morality. For a while, Shaw's drama's characters were criticized for being unrealistic and lacking in vigor and passion.

For a long time, the feminist movement and others have been interested in his description of strong women who are also independent in their lives. The philosophical, religious, and psychoanalytical ideas that pervade Shaw's plays have long been seen as mirroring his personal issues. Shaw has made a significant contribution to both British and international theater, regardless of the opinions of those who have criticized his work. Reversion and inversion, quick and unexpected turns of wise and astute dialogue, sudden changes in the situations and characters' attitudes, conflicts between the appearance and the essence of various things and phenomena, the effective use of ironic aphorisms, and sharp paradoxes are some of the techniques that contribute to the ironic and humorous effect in his "drama of ideas." Scholar Christopher Innes notes Shaw's distinct use of these elements: "Shaw's 'drama of ideas' stands out for its sharp wit, paradox, and irony. His ability to turn dialogue into a weapon for social critique allowed him to engage with serious issues in a way that was as entertaining as it was intellectually provocative." [16]

George Bernard Shaw's impact as a theatrical critic was equal to that of his play-writing accomplishments. He was able to criticize the theater not just as an art form but also as a potent instrument for social reflection and change because of his keen humor, rigorous intellect, and deep awareness of social realities. Shaw argued for a play that addressed moral, political, and social issues in his critical works, which questioned the accepted conventions of theater in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Conclusion.

As a result of his criticisms, plays that tackled contemporary topics like class inequality, women's rights, and the hypocrisy of societal institutions replaced melodramatic, escapist shows. Shaw sometimes used his criticism to encourage other playwrights to approach their work with a similar sense of purpose since he felt that theater should be instructive rather than merely entertaining. His sharp criticism went

beyond just analyzing individual plays; it also raised concerns about the larger role of theater in society and emphasized its potential as a tool for social change. Bernard Shaw laid the groundwork for contemporary drama with his extensive critical literature, impacting succeeding generations of playwrights and critics. His legacy lives on as a testament to the power of criticism to not only evaluate a piece of art but also to stimulate fresh ideas for advancement in the arts and society.

References.

- Bernard Dukore, *Bernard Shaw on Theater* (New York: Applause Books, 1996), 33.
- George Bernard Shaw. *His life and works. A critical biography* (Authorized) Archibald Henderson. p262
- George Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 7.
- Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Authorized Biography* (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 243.
- George Bernard Shaw. *His life and works. A critical biography* (Authorized) Archibald Henderson. p267
- "Shaw, Bernard," in **The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance**, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55.
- Bernard Shaw, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), xiv.
- Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. Edwin Wilson (New York: Applause, 2011), 82.
- Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (London: Vintage, 1998), 202.
- Shaw, George Bernard. *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*. 2 vols. London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906.
- Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol. 2 (London: Constable, 1932), 113.
- Bernard Shaw, *Shaw on Theatre* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 114.
- Vishwanath Bite, "George Bernard Shaw's Art of Characterization," **Literature Today**, October 6, 2021, <https://literaturetoday.com/george-bernard-shaws-art-of-characterization..>
- George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1926–1950*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 47.
- Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83.