

A NOISE WITHIN PRESENTS

Mrs. Warren's Profession

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



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Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

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A Noise Within's study guides include:

- General information about the play (characters, synopsis, timeline, and more)
- Playwright biography and literary analysis
- Historical content of the play
- Scholarly articles
- Production information (costumes, lights, direction, etc.)
- Suggested classroom activities
- Related resources (videos, books, etc.)
- Discussion themes
- Background on verse and prose (for Shakespeare's plays)

Our study guides allow you to review and share information with students to enhance both lesson plans and pupils' theatrical experience and appreciation. They are designed to let you extrapolate articles and other information that best align with your own curricula and pedagogic goals.

More information? It would be our pleasure. We're here to make your students' learning experience as rewarding and memorable as it can be!

All the best,

Alicia Green
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



Pictured: Donnla Hughes, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2016. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

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CHARACTER MAP

The character descriptions below are based on Shaw's stage direction found in the script for *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

MRS. KITTY WARREN

Vivie's mother. Seen first as spoilt, domineering, and somewhat vulgar, but eventually revealed as a smart if somewhat manipulative mother and business woman.

VIVIE WARREN

Mrs. Warren's daughter. An attractive, sensible, able, strong, highly educated member of the young English middle class.

REV SAMUEL GARDNER

Frank Gardner's father. A clergyman who clamorously asserts himself as a father and a clergyman without being able to command respect in either capacity.

FRANK GARDNER

Rev Gardner's son and Vivie's romantic interest. A pleasant, pretty, smartly dressed young gentleman who is cleverly good-for-nothing... with agreeably disrespectful manners.

SIR GEORGE CROFTS

Mrs. Warren's business partner. A gentlemanly combination of the most brutal types of city-man, sporting man, and man about town.

MR. PRAED

Mrs. Warren's friend. Something of an artist about him. Very amiable with considerate manners.

SYNOPSIS

Vivie Warren's mother is a madam who runs a high-end prostitution ring. While the play is not quite as controversial as it may once have been (arrests are unlikely at our production!), it is still rather shocking. We meet Vivie Warren, newly graduated from university, who is eager to embark on a career in finance. Having been raised mostly in boarding schools, Vivie is determined to find out why her mother is so secretive about her life and her business matters—Vivie doesn't know the source of her mother's income, or even the name of her own father. Vivie has made friends with Frank, a young man who lives nearby and wants to marry her. When Frank's father, a clergyman, and Mrs. Warren meet by surprise, they realize they have met long ago, under very different circumstances. Frank's father tells Mrs. Warren that he will not allow his son to marry Vivie, because of Mrs. Warren's shameful past. In the second act, Vivie and her mother have a lively conversation in which Mrs. Warren

reveals that she took to prostitution in order to escape a life of poverty and to provide for Vivie. Mrs. Warren (and Shaw) argues that society gives women little choice but to either slave to their death or choose less socially acceptable ways of earning a living. Mrs. Warren asks: "Why shouldn't I have done it? The house in Brussels was real high class; a much better place for a woman to be in than the factory where Anne Jane got poisoned. None of our girls were ever treated as I was treated in the scullery of that temperance place, or at the Waterloo bar, or at home. Would you have had me stay in them and become a worn-out old drudge before I was forty?" Deeply moved, Vivie accepts her mother's choices and calls her "stronger than all England." But this newfound respect is short lived. When Vivie later learns that her mother is still running her very profitable business her shock and refusal to accept this is what leads to a final showdown—theatrical fireworks between mother and daughter. ■

SETTINGS

ACT I Summer afternoon in a cottage garden on the eastern slope of a hill a little south of Haslemere in Surrey.

ACT II Inside the cottage after nightfall.

ACT III In the Rectory Garden next morning, with the sun shining from a cloudless sky.

ACT IV An office at the top of the New Stone Buildings, Honoria Fraser's chambers.

Used with permission and edited from The Shaw Theatre Festival. Christensen, Rod, Joanna Falck, and Amanda Tripp. *Connections Shaw Festival Study Guide*. Shaw Festival Theatre. 2008. Print.



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**



An acclaimed dramatist, critic and social reformer, George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin where he grew up in an atmosphere of genteel poverty. He attended four schools and was tutored by a clerical uncle, but left his formal education at the age of fifteen. Early on, Shaw developed a wide knowledge of music, art, and literature. In 1876 he moved to London, where he spent his afternoons in the British Museum, and his evenings pursuing his informal education in the form of attending lectures and debates. Shaw declared himself a socialist in 1882 and joined the Fabian Society—a British socialist group. He soon distinguished himself as a fluent and effective public speaker as well as an incisive and irreverent critic of music, art, and drama.

Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced privately in 1892 for the members of the Independent Theatre Society. Shaw achieved his first commercial success with the American premiere of *The Devil's Disciple*, the income from which enabled him to quit his job as a drama critic and to make his living solely as a playwright.

In 1898, he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress whom he had met through friends from the Fabian Society.

Harley Granville-Barker, a young actor-manager, helped to advance Shaw's popularity in London with his famous repertory experiment at the Royal Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907. Of the "thousand performances" of this repertory venture, over 700 were of plays by Shaw, including the premieres of *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *Man and Superman* (1905), *Major Barbara* (1905), and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). Shaw's best-known play, *Pygmalion*, was first performed in 1913. Two generations later, it attained even greater fame as the musical *My Fair Lady*.

During World War I, Shaw's anti-war speeches as well as a controversial pamphlet he published entitled "Common Sense About the War" made him very unpopular as a public figure. In *Heartbreak House* (performed 1920) Shaw exposed, in a country-house setting on the eve of the war, the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for the carnage of World War I. Next came *Back to Methuselah* and *Saint Joan* (1923), acclaim for which led Shaw to a Nobel Prize in Literature for 1925. Shaw continued to write plays and essays until his death in 1950 at the age of 94. ■

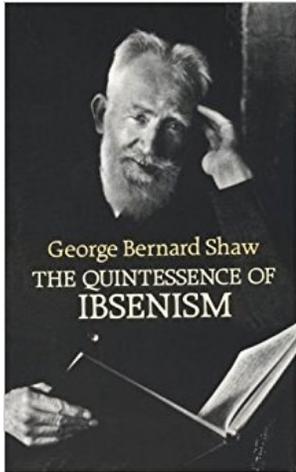
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TIMELINE OF **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S** LIFE

- 1856**—George Bernard Shaw is born on July 26. He is the son of George Carr Shaw—a gentleman and corn merchant—and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw—a leading amateur mezzo-soprano and concert performer.
- 1867-71**—Shaw attends school in Dublin before leaving at fifteen to work at a firm of land agents.
- 1876**—Shaw moves to London.
- 1876-82**—Shaw writes five novels and works occasionally in London as a music critic.
- 1884**—Shaw joins the recently established Fabian Society, and becomes one of its leading members. He regularly lectures at numerous venues on socialism.
- 1885-87**—Shaw becomes a regular book-reviewer for the Pall Mall Gazette, and writes music and art criticism for various periodicals.
- 1892**—Shaw's first publicly performed play, *Widowers' Houses*, is presented by the Independent Theatre Company.
- 1892-1900**—Shaw completes all seven of the plays in the *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* group and his *Three Plays for Puritans*.
- 1898**—Shaw marries Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a wealthy Irish heiress and supporter of socialist causes.
- 1902**—*Mrs. Warren's Profession* is first performed at The New Lyric Club, a private theatre space in London
- 1905**—*Mrs. Warren's Profession* has its first public performance in New York. This performance was interrupted by police because the play was considered indecent.
- 1914**—The first English production of *Pygmalion* opens—it had premiered in German in Vienna in 1913.
- 1920**—Shaw completes his five-play cycle on evolutionary themes entitled *Back to Methuselah*.
- 1923**—Shaw completes *Saint Joan*, which is first presented in December by the Theater Guild at the Garrick Theater in New York.
- 1925**—Shaw is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1943**—Shaw's wife, Charlotte, dies after suffering complications from a chronic bone disease.
- 1950**—Shaw dies on November 2 after suffering an injury and subsequent illness from a fall.
- 1956**—Lerner and Loewe's musical *My Fair Lady*, an adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, opens and runs for more than nine years.

Gibbs, A.M. "A Chronology of Shaw's Life." *Shaw Society*. Web.

SHAW AND IBSEN



Ibsenism is a term that refers to the writing style of Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen was writing at the end of the 19th century when formulaic melodramas were the trend. The writers that were having work produced when Ibsen began writing tended to follow the “Well-Made-Play” model of playwrighting. This model of playwrighting was predictable in that it emphasized a very clear formula for a successful and cathartic play. While plays that followed this model were often hits among audiences, they tended to be more surface-level type entertainment. In his work, Ibsen took the formula of the

“Well-Made-Play,” and turned it on its head, subverting what had become the playwrighting norm.

Shaw admired Ibsen and Ibsen’s work. In an essay entitled “The Quintessence of Ibsenism” Shaw analyzes Ibsen’s work to explore how Ibsen’s recurring trope of a character standing up to hypocrisy in Norwegian society can be used to examine problems inherent in other societies as well.

Book Cover taken from: http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/991388.The_Quintessence_of_Ibsenism

SHAW’S IDEALS AS PRESENTED IN “THE QUINTESSENCE OF IBSENISM”

As a playwright and social critic, Shaw’s intentions were to unmask the folly of idealism as well as to push for a transition towards socialism through gradual reforms. To serve this purpose, Shaw uses his plays to examine the power of the human will in three distinct ways:

1. Human will as the driving force behind all our actions.
2. Human intellect as the force that directs our will towards certain goals.
3. Human thought and ideas as the force that creates our will.

“WHEREAS IBSEN WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH MORALITY, I SEE MORALITY NOT ONLY TO ‘DO RIGHT’, BUT TO DISCOVER WHAT IS RIGHT.”

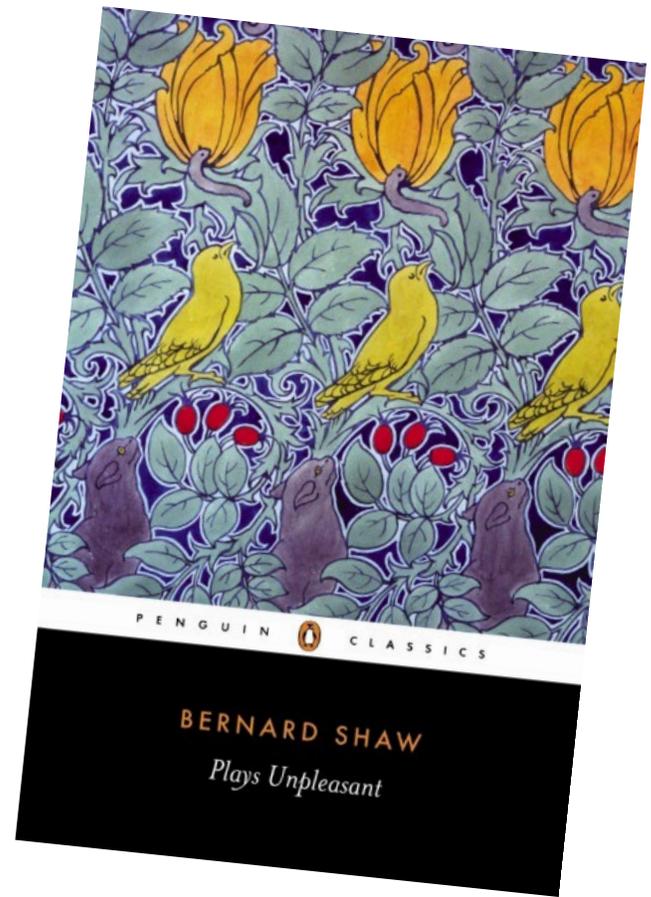
Shaw clearly aims to destroy ideals, to cultivate intellect and to implant ideas. “I am going to pick up where Ibsen left off writing plays of ideas, but I will do it through comedy.” Shaw’s highest belief was that the sole purpose of the dramatist is to teach, to say something to the audience which would challenge their ideals, give them new ideas, and motivate their will.

PLAYS UNPLEASANT

Shaw's *Plays Unpleasant* consists of a volume of three plays, including *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *The Philanderer* and *Widowers' Houses*. As to why Shaw labeled the plays in this volume "Unpleasant," he says:

"The reason is obvious: their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts. No doubt all plays which deal sincerely with humanity must wound the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter. But here we are confronted, not only with the comedy and tragedy of individual character and destiny, but with those social horrors which arise from the fact that the average homebred Englishman, however honorable and good-natured he may be in his private capacity, is, as a citizen, a wretched creature who, whilst clamoring for a gratuitous millennium, will shut his eyes to the most villainous abuses if the remedy threatens to add another penny in the pound to the rates and taxes which he has to be half cheated, half coerced into paying.

In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, I have gone straight at the fact that, as Mrs. Warren puts it, '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.' There are certain questions on which I am, like most Socialists, an extreme Individualist. I believe that any society which desires to found itself on a high standard of integrity of character in its units should organize itself in such a fashion as to make it possible for all men and all women to maintain themselves in reasonable comfort by their industry without selling their affections and their convictions. At present we not only condemn women as a sex to attach themselves to breadwinners, licitly or illicitly, on pain of heavy privation and disadvantage; but we have great prostitute classes of men: for instance, the playwrights and journalists, to whom I myself belong, not to mention the legions of lawyers, doctors, clergymen, and platform politicians who are daily using their highest faculties to belie their real



sentiments; a sin compared to which that of a woman who sells the use of her person for a few hours is too venial to be worth mentioning; for rich men without conviction are more dangerous in modern society than poor women without chastity. Hardly a pleasant subject, this!

My first three plays, *Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* were what people call realistic. They were dramatic pictures of middle class society from the point of view of a Socialist who regards the basis of that society as thoroughly rotten economically and morally... All three plays were criticism of a special phase, the capitalist phase, of modern social organization, and their purpose was to make people thoroughly uncomfortable whilst entertaining them artistically." ■

Christensen, Rod, Joanna Falck, and Amanda Tripp. *Connections Shaw Festival Study Guide*. Shaw Festival Theatre. 2008. Print.

SHAW: **SHOCK AND CULTURE**

(from Shaw's preface to *Plays Unpleasant*)

"I had no taste for what is called popular art, no respect for popular morality, no belief in popular religion, no admiration for popular heroics. As an Irish- man I could pretend to patriotism neither for the country that I had abandoned nor the country that had ruined it. As a humane person, I detested violence and slaughter, whether in war, sport, or the butcher's yard. I was a Socialist, detesting our anarchical scramble for money, and believing in equality as the only possible permanent basis of social organization, discipline, subordination, good manners, and selection of fit persons for high functions. Fashionable life, open on indulgent terms to unencumbered 'brilliant' persons, I could not endure, even if I had not feared its demoralizing effect on a character which required looking after as much as my own. I was neither a skeptic nor a cynic in these matters: I simply understood life differently from the average respectable man [...] Judge then, how impossible it was for me to write fiction that should delight the public."

Shaw holds the British public accountable for prostitution; not the prostitutes themselves.

(Excerpt from *Mrs. Warren's Profession*)

Mrs. Warren's Profession places the protagonist's [Mrs. Warren's] decision to become a prostitute in the context of the appalling conditions for working class women in Victorian England. Faced with ill health, poverty, and marital servitude on the one hand, and opportunities for financial independence, dignity, and self-worth on the other, Kitty Warren follows her sister into a successful career in prostitution. Shaw's fierce social criticism in this play is driven not by conventional morality, but by anger at the hypocrisy that allows society to condemn prostitution while condoning the discrimination against women that makes prostitution inevitable. ■

Christensen, Rod, Joanna Falck, and Amanda Tripp. *Connections Shaw Festival Study Guide*. Shaw Festival Theatre. 2008. Print.

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION'S CONTROVERSIAL US OPENING

Days before *Mrs. Warren's Profession* premiered in New York in 1905, the *New York Times* released an article entitled "Anthony Comstock Will Not See Shaw's Play!" In his interview with the *New York Times*, Anthony Comstock, an American social reformer and an ardent supporter of Victorian era decency, discusses why he will not attend the first public performance of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*:

ANTHONY COMSTOCK WILL NOT SEE SHAW'S PLAY!

ARNOLD DALY. *New York Times* (Oct 25, 1905)

Anthony Comstock, Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, will not accept Arnold Daly's invitation to attend a rehearsal of the George Bernard Shaw play, "Mrs. Warren's Profession," which is to be put on at the Garrick next week.

"Why should I?" asked Comstock yesterday afternoon. "It is not my purpose to advertise Mr. Daly or the works of Mr. Shaw. In writing him regarding the play, I desired to impress upon him the fact that there are laws dealing with those who present plays which are in contravention of the moral of the community and offensive to public decency. If, in defiance of warning, he persists in producing the play and the play proves to be what I am informed it is, then he will have no excuse to offer, and his punishment will be much more severe."

"Have you read the play?" Mr. Comstock was asked.

"I have not. I have received a number of letters

bearing upon the proposed production, however, from people who have read the book, and they tell me that it is quite impossible. Mr. Shaw convicts himself out of his own mouth. His description of the character of the play, if I had no other guide, would convince me that it was unfit for presentation."

"Would you mind saying if men of letters wrote you regarding the play?"

"Whether they were of letters or not is not essential. They are men of morality and decency, which is to the point [...] The society did its full duty when they write the letter of warning to Mr. Daly. If the play is put on it is up to the police, and I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. McAdoo will take proper steps. I am perfectly aware that the trend of the stage is toward the indecent [...] When a man puts on an indecent, corrupting play, the law says that he is supposed to have intended to corrupt the public morals [...] From what I have heard of 'Mrs. Warren's Profession' it is [...] reprehensible."

Mrs. Warren's Profession opened on October 30, 1905 at the Garrick Theatre. The performance was interrupted by police who arrested the actors and producers for performing this "indecent" play. ■

Daly, Arnold. "Anthony Comstock Will Not See Shaw's Play!" *New York Times*. 25 Oct. 1905. Proquest. Web.

PROSTITUTION: A MORAL OR SOCIAL PROBLEM?

Prostitution was rampant in Victorian England and was a major social concern.

Some estimates put the number of prostitutes in Victorian London at about 80,000, while the respected medical journal, *The Lancet*, estimated in 1857 that one in sixty houses in London was a brothel and one in every sixteen females was a prostitute ... There was as much disagreement about the causes of prostitution as there was about the numbers of prostitutes, and there were many debates and arguments about what to do to alleviate the problem. For perhaps a majority of Victorian social reformers, prostitution was a moral issue.

Where prostitution was believed to be a moral problem and prostitutes were believed to be "fallen" or "corrupt," the appropriate response was believed to be punishment. For Shaw, however, punishment, succor, and legal intervention were ineffective ways of dealing with prostitution. It was necessary, he argued, to identify and respond to the root causes of prostitution, causes that had much more to do with economics than with morality. Victorian social reformers identified many causes of prostitution – moral turpitude, alcohol, seduction, sexual abuse, poverty – but for Shaw the "fundamental condition of the existence of this traffic is that society must be so organized that a large class of women are

more highly paid and better treated as prostitutes than they would be as respectable women." Responsibility for prostitution in Shaw's view, lay not with any segment of society – and certainly not with the prostitutes themselves – but with society: "ladies and gentlemen, clergymen, bishops, judges, Members of Parliament, highly connected ladies leading society in Cathedral towns, peers and peeresses, and pillars of solid middle-class Parliament." The connection between such people and prostitution was that they supported and profited from "industrial enterprises which employ women and girls... [on] wages which are insufficient to support them." Not all young working-class women were "saved from the streets" by husbands or parents.

There are always orphans and widows and girls from the country and abroad who have no families and no husbands; and these must submit to the blackest misery that a slum garret and an income of from eighteen pence to a shilling (about \$7-10 today) a day can bring to a lonely, despised, shabby, dirty, underfed woman, or else add to their wages by prostitution. ■

Christensen, Rod, Joanna Falck, and Amanda Tripp. *Connections Shaw Festival Study Guide*. Shaw Festival Theatre.2008. Print.

THEMES IN *MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION*

THE "NEW WOMAN"

Shaw wrote *Mrs. Warren's Profession* towards the end of the Victorian era when English society was on the brink of a significant social change in regard to its definition of gender roles. In the play, Vivie Warren embodies many traits of the New Woman ideal—the kind of woman who no longer conforms to Victorian ideals of gender norms.

However, during this time, individuals did not often identify themselves as New Women, and when they were so identified by others, the term seems usually to have been freighted with disparaging meanings, although these meanings were different, or contradictory, even while cohering as a symbol of "disorder and rebellion." The term "New Woman" was a way of naming, and thus controlling, a range of ongoing disruptions in the social understanding of gender. That is why the New Woman seemed to be, and in one sense actually was, more an element of discourse than a real person or group of people. Commentators in the 1890s often noted this fact, labeling the New Woman a "figment of the journalistic imagination" and "a product oftener met with in the novels of the day than in ordinary life."

On the whole, the New Woman was treated with contempt or fear because in various incarnations, whether in discourse or "real" life, she reopened for discussion some deeply held assumptions about what it meant to be a man or a woman. One version of the New Woman defied traditional codes of female beauty, smoking cigarettes and dressing in simple and "manly" fashion which seemed to complement her discontented mouth and a nose "too large for feminine beauty" but indicative of intelligence. New Women were often perceived to be masculine in other ways, too, sometimes devoting

themselves to a profession or business in preference to the bearing and bringing up of children. This abrogation of a woman's supposed highest duty was perhaps the chief illustration of what one writer described as the New Woman's "restlessness and discontent with the existing order of things." Sometimes the New Woman was perceived to be freer in her dealings with men than customs allowed, and at other times she was seen as a cold and "apparently sexless" creature who rejected out of hand all relations with men. In these varied forms, the New Woman was consistently a symbol of upheaval, threatening to dissolve the boundaries of gender and disrupt the maternal activities which nature was thought to have ordained for women.

Vivie Warren seems to be Shaw's response to the New Woman. Modern ideas about women were circulating among the Fabian Society—a socialist party of which Shaw was a member—who were complaining that in law, a wife was nothing more than her husband's property. Thus, Shaw introduced the new "Unwomanly Woman" character-type in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, not only to satirize the old Victorian beliefs, but to introduce such timely topics as educational opportunities and careers for women, women's liberation and rejection of the "old school ways." However, while expressing sympathy for women in the impending "struggle between the sexes," Shaw actually contributed to the pattern of ridicule and caricature that was prevalent in the Victorian era—a pattern that would likely only be reversed when women began writing plays of their own.

Edited from: www.learn.gold.ac.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=29191

THEMES IN *MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION* CONTINUED...

VICTORIAN IDEALS: THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN

The Ideal Husband

Protector: The husband was expected to create a safe and prosperous home for his wife where he would be the champion of her virtue.

Authoritative: The husband had the ultimate power to establish the rules of the home.

"Father Knows Best": The husband commanded unquestioned reign of his home, wife, and children.

The Ideal wife

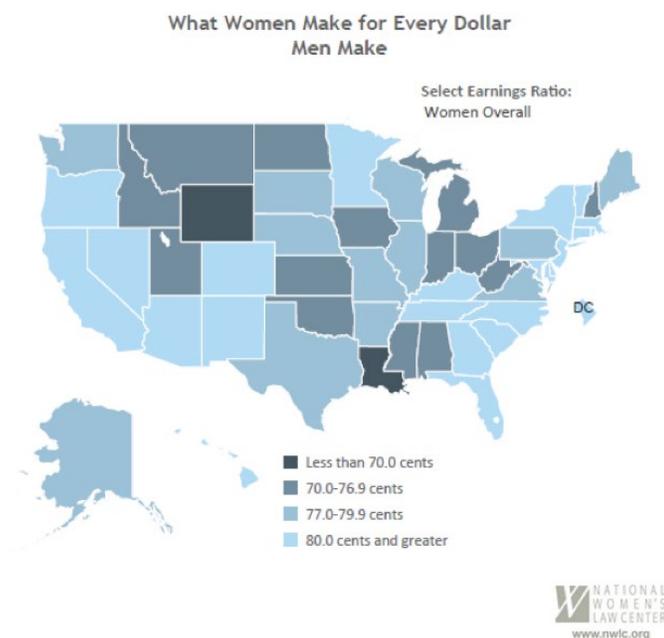
Righteous: Women were expected to be more moral and devout than men.

Pure: During the Victorian Era, women were expected to maintain a pureness of body and mind.

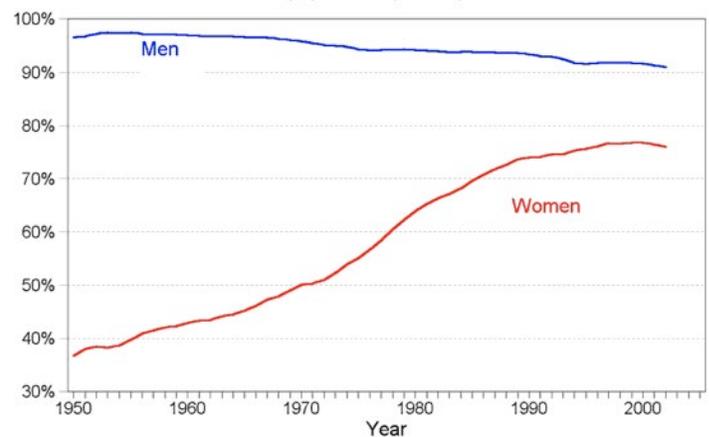
Submissive: Victorian women were expected to simply accept and obey what men said and did.

Domestic: Women were expected to look after the home.

Have the goals of the Modern Woman been achieved?



Labor force participation rates by gender (25-54)



SENTIMENTALITY AND PRACTICALITY

Although Mrs. Warren is considered wily and calculating by most characters in the play, she continues to embody some of the sentimentality stereotypical of women in Victorian society. While her profession is the antithesis of how a "proper" woman should behave, the fact that she hides her work from her daughter shows Mrs. Warren's attachment to archaic Victorian values at some level—it is important to Mrs. Warren that Vivie thinks her mother is proper according to society's standards. In contrast, Vivie demonstrates herself to be practical; her mother's duplicitous life disgusts and angers her. When she is faced with Vivie's coldness, the apparently shrewd Mrs. Warren shows her sentimental side—she is ultimately weakened by Vivie's steadfast practicality.

PRIVILEGE AND AGENCY

The Victorian Era was a time of great gender inequity—men dominated the professional world while women were seen as homemakers. It was significantly more difficult for a woman to enter the professional sphere than it was for a man, and any woman who did was often looked down upon as she appeared to be flouting her primary responsibilities to her family and to society. In the world of the play, Mrs. Warren enters one of the only professional fields that was available to women at the time in an attempt to make a living as an independent woman. Even though her profession is one that is often associated with the objectification and degradation of women, Mrs. Warren is able to achieve financial independence through her work. What is important to note is that Mrs. Warren's male business partners are admired for their wealth and shrewdness, while

THEMES IN MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION CONTINUED...

Mrs. Warren, herself, is condemned and ostracized by both society and her daughter for her involvement in brothels—she does not have the same level of agency and privilege that her male counterparts do.

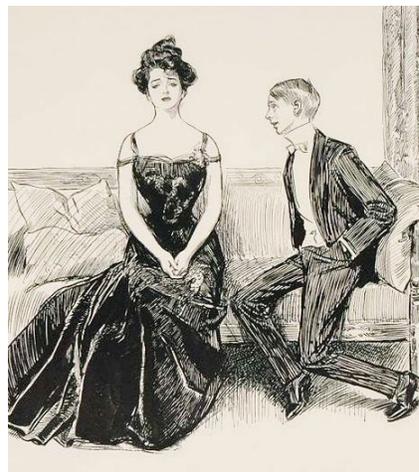
COMMODIFICATION OF LOVE

What constitutes commerce? Prostitution is often scorned or considered shameful because it is a commodification of sex. However, using the same logic, the institution of marriage—especially as it was in the Victorian era—can be considered a commodification of love. An actual marriage contract fails to include the realities and tradeoffs that are implicit within marriage. The husband, particularly in the Victorian era pays for his wife in many ways: the husband was expected to provide his wife and family with funds while the wife was expected to obey and serve her husband in return. Mrs. Warren points out that neither prostitution nor marriage at that time is particularly enjoyable for women—women simply turn to these two institutions as a means to survive.



SECRETS

In the Victorian era, appearance was everything: maintaining appearances and conforming to society's strict gender roles and rules of conduct were of the utmost importance. The importance placed on the maintenance of a proper outward appearance inevitably made way for the creation of layers and layers of secrets. Mrs. Warren hides two critical pieces of information from Vivie: first, the truth of her profession and then, the identity of Vivie's father. Even when Mrs. Warren decides to reveal her true profession to Vivie, she chooses to leave out the fact that she still runs a brothel. Mrs. Warren only entered the prostitution business out of necessity, and she is confident that Vivie will understand her decision was a practicality—and Vivie does understand, to an extent. What Vivie cannot understand or sympathize with is that her mother is still involved in prostitution. It is this part of the secret—Mrs. Warren's continuing involvement in the business— that ultimately shatters the relationship between Vivie and Mrs. Warren.



MORALITY AND IMMORALITY

In order to understand how the concepts of morality and immorality factor into *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, it is important to understand how Shaw viewed morality. In his essay, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," Shaw states that

immorality "implies conduct, mischievous or not, which does not conform to current ideals." In his definition of immorality, Shaw conveys that morality, like immorality, is changeable. Society decides what is moral and immoral at any given time: what is considered immoral now might be considered moral in the future. Vivie herself, in Act Four, states that "fashionable morality is all a pretense." The word "fashionable" here implies that morality is also arbitrary and superfluous.

- In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw presents some moral debates that challenge both his characters and the audience to examine the idea of morality:
 - Mrs. Warren chooses her profession as a way out of poverty, and as her business grows, so do her earnings.
 - She puts her money to good use by providing an education for her daughter, Vivie.
 - Mrs. Warren's actions seem admirable until Vivie realizes what her mother continues to do for a living.
 - Vivie is faced with a serious moral dilemma: to accept or reject her mother's choices. ■

Modernism and Drama: Shaw, Marriage, and the New Woman." *Learn.gold*. Goldsmiths University of London, 16 Aug. 2011. Web.
Bleak Expectations: The Impossibility of Morality and the Foolishness of Altruism in *Mrs Warren's Profession*." *Noor Hemani*. Web.

DIRECTOR MICHAEL MICHETTI ON *MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION*

As I read George Bernard Shaw's brilliant *Mrs. Warren's Profession* today, 124 years after it was written, I am shocked by how modern his arguments still sound regarding feminist issues and income inequality. When it was first produced, however, audiences and critics were shocked for very different reasons.

The play was originally banned by the Lord Chamberlain in 1893 and not performed until nine years later, and then only in a private club. When it was eventually produced in New York City in 1905, a critic wrote that "It glorifies debauchery," and the entire company was arrested for "offending public decency."

But the play wasn't considered scandalous because of lewd scenes or vulgar language. In fact, the play is so circumspect about its subject matter that the words "prostitute" and "brothel" are never uttered in the play, only very vaguely implied. On the contrary, audiences and critics of the period were offended because the title

character isn't reviled or punished for her profession.

There are things in this play that I *do* find offensive. I find the circumstances that limit a woman's choices to a life of poverty or a life of prostitution offensive. I find Crofts' justification of Capitalism at the expense of those who are disenfranchised in society offensive. Shaw posits that the *real* immorality in the sex trade is the poverty that forces women into it. His play indicts a system in which prostitution is the only financially viable option for women.

Unfortunately, issues of gender parity and income inequality have not been resolved in the last 124 years. We are still struggling to dismantle systemic discrimination and unconscious bias. But until we have evolved enough that these topics are no longer relevant, we can be thankful for revivals of Shaw's remarkably modern play to help remind us of how much work there is still to do. ■

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION GLOSSARY

Purgatory: In the Roman Catholic belief system, a space or condition in which the soul is housed while it is cleansed of venial sins prior to entrance into heaven.

Third Wrangler: Wrangler is the designation bestowed upon those mathematics students at Cambridge who achieved a first-class honors degree (the highest distinction upon graduation). By being distinguished as a wrangler, Vivie earned the distinction of being the third highest ranked student in her graduating class.

£50: Using the value of the British pound in 1900, £50 equals approximately \$5,600 USD today.

Newham: Founded in 1871, one of two colleges for women at Cambridge University. The other, Girton, was founded in 1869.

Mathematical Tripos: "Tripos" is the name of the honors course at Cambridge University.

Chambers: Law offices.

Actuarial calculations: Vivie will work as an actuary, a mathematical analyst who calculates insurance risks and premiums.

Chancery Lane: A street in West London that houses an abundance of legal offices, featured prominently in literary works concerning the English legal system.

Greenhorn: A novice, one who is inexperienced.

Countenance: Composure.

Perjury: The making of false allegations under oath.

Pater: Father (informal), from Latin.

Mint: Prior to 1968, the Royal Mint, the official manufacturer of British coinage, was in London's East End, a working-class area.

Waterloo Bridge: Originally constructed in 1817, the Waterloo Bridge connects Waterloo (on the south bank of the Thames) with Victoria Embankment. The original was torn down in 1836 and replaced with the existing structure.

Scullery: A dishwashing room connected to a kitchen.

Temperance restaurant: A restaurant that does not serve alcohol.

Sovereign: A gold British coin valued at approximately one pound.

Winchester: At the turn of the century, this town, approximately sixty-five miles southwest of London, had a population of nearly 21,000. Winchester is home to a famous cathedral built in the late 1600s.

Impetuous: Impulsive, rash.

Attitudinizing: Posing for effect.

Prig: A fussy person; one who exaggerates propriety.

Freemasonry: A secret brotherhood.

Archbishop of Canterbury: The chief bishop of the Church of England and the worldwide figurehead of the Anglican Church.

Ecclesiastical Commissioners: A group of politicians, judges, and Anglican ministers who managed property and business affairs for the Church of England.

M.P.: Member of Parliament.

Farthing: Withdrawn from circulation in 1961, this was the smallest unit of British currency and was valued at $\frac{1}{4}$ a penny.

Philistine: One who expresses ambivalence or hostility to the value of arts and culture.

Facer: An unexpected dilemma. ■

"Mrs. Warren's Profession Glossary." *McCarter Theatre*. Web.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **RESEARCH**

Pre-Show Research: These discussion questions and activities will help students develop an understanding of the historical, social and gender attitudes from the Victorian Era.

IN CONTEXT:

George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Warren's Profession

To prepare your students for *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and to deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the life, work, and influence of George Bernard Shaw, have your students research the following topics, either in groups or individually:

George Bernard Shaw:

- Childhood, Family, and Education
- Early Career, 1871-1890 (Overview)
- Later Career 1825-1950 (Overview)
- Shaw as Critic
- Shaw as Novelist
- Shaw and Society/Politics (Overview)
- The Fabian Society
- Shaw and Henrik Ibsen

The Victorian Era

- Rights and status of women in England, mid- to late-nineteenth century
- The "New Woman," c. 1890s
- Prostitution in England, mid- to late-nineteenth century
- The Lord Chamberlain, Stage Licensing Act, and Theatre Censorship in England
- Other major dramatic works by Shaw:
 - Arms and the Man
 - Candida
 - Man and Superman
 - Major Barbara
 - Pygmalion
 - Heartbreak House
 - Saint Joan

Pre-Show Project

- Have your students read *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (available online via Project Gutenberg) and ask them to take notes on any reference pertaining to period (such as locations, business names, specific social norms) as well as how each character is defined by the dramatist (what other characters say about each character, what characters say about themselves, and what actions the character takes). Shaw's stage directions are rife with details on character and even costume, and his dialogue is full of information. Discuss how this attention to detail further reveals the themes of *The Modern Woman* and roles in Victorian society.
- Have students plan a production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Divide students into production team groups and have them sit down for a production/design meeting. How would they design a set for the production considering Shaw's stage directions and the action of the play? Have students articulate why they would make each of their design choices.
- Have students conduct online research about costume renderings from "Fashion Past and Present," "Edwardian Fashion," "Edwardian Era," and "late-Victorian Fashion" and have them design costumes for each of the major characters. Have students consider what clues a character's costume gives the audience about the character. Have students articulate why they made their design decisions. Create a "costume museum" for the sharing of their renderings.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES**

Secret Allies And Enemies

This activity will help students explore secrecy through physicalization.

- Have students walk in the space as themselves. As they walk, instruct them to silently pick a person in the group who is their enemy. The students should not let anyone know who their enemy is. As they walk throughout the space, their goal is to stay as far away from their enemy as possible.
- After a moment, have students silently select a different person in the group to be their enemy. Again, students should not let anyone know who their enemy is. Their goal now, is to keep their ally in between them and their enemy at all times while staying as far away from their enemy as possible, and while not letting anyone know who their enemy is or who their ally is.
- Advanced level: Have students silently pick a third person in the group to be their role model. Students should follow this person as closely as they can, without letting them know that they are their role model. While following their role model, students should also try to keep their ally in between them and their enemy while staying as far from their enemy as possible.
- Discussion: How was this activity? Was it easy? Was it difficult? What was easy or difficult about it? How did it feel to keep those secrets? Were you successful at keeping who your enemy, ally, and role model were secret?

Spectrum

- In this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore how they feel about various issues and themes related to *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.
- Set up the space so that one side of the space represents "strongly agree" and the other end represents "strongly disagree." space represents a spectrum of opinions between the two extremes with the center point representing a "neutral" opinion.
- Read out a list of statements related to themes present in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

Examples:

- Equality has been achieved for women.
- It is easier for men to enter the professional world than women.
- Education is a privilege.
- Quality education should be accessible to all.
- Secrecy can be good.
- Privilege can be bought.
- It is easier for everyone to obtain an education now than it was in 1893 when *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was written.
- Men and women should always be paid equally for equal work.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PLAY IN PRODUCTION

1. After reading *Mrs. Warren's Profession* either aloud as a class or individually, ask your students to brainstorm a list of themes central to the play.
2. Ask your students if they find an intellectual or personal connection (either in relationship to their own experience, to someone that they know, or to events occurring in the current socio-political or global sphere) to any of the themes of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Have them write/journal about one theme with which they personally connect. If appropriate, students may volunteer to share their thematic connection with the rest of the class for purposes of discussion.
3. Ask your students to recall and make connections to other plays or works of literature they have read or studied with themes like those of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Compare and contrast the way these themes function in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and in other works.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Select one of the following quotes and write a position paper in which you argue for or against Shaw's point of view. Be sure to include examples from the play and explain your argument in relation to relevant issues that exist in society today.
 - a. "Don't think for a moment I set myself above you in any way. You attacked me with the conventional authority of a mother: I defended myself with the conventional superiority of a respectable woman." – Vivie Warren
 - b. "Well, of course, dearie, it's only good manners to be ashamed of it: it's expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel." –Mrs. Warren
 - c. "And what's a woman worth? What's life worth? Without self-respect! Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first-rate education, when other women that had just as good opportunities are in the gutter?" –Mrs. Warren
 - d. "I know that your mother is an unmarried woman, I do not respect her the less on that account. I respect her more." –Mr. Praed
2. The year is 1905. Write an editorial for a newspaper in which you present society's reaction to the new "Unwomanly Woman" and her revolutionary and evolutionary role.
3. Shaw's comedy was intended to highlight the fact that because of Victorian gender ideals, women at the turn of the century could only make a living through marriage or through prostitution. How does Shaw make this argument in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*? Considering the social and professional progress that women have made you think his message is still relevant?
4. Looking at such production elements as acting, set design, costumes, and overall staging, write a review of A Noise Within's production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* answering three questions drama critics address in their reviews:
What were they trying to do?
How well did they do it?
Was it worth doing?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Life of George Bernard Shaw/Power Point -

https://prezi.com/zbhpmend_cid/george-bernard-shaw-timeline/

Cooper, Suzanne Fagence. *Victorian Woman*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2001.

Holroyd, Michael. *The Genius of Shaw*. New York: Hodder, 1979.

Pearsall, Ronald. *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality*. London: The History Press, 2003.

Ross, Ellen, ed. *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty 1860-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

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Plays Unpleasant. New York: Penguin, 1982.

Mrs. Warren's Profession. Edited by L.W. Conolly. Toronto: Broadview Press Ltd, 2005.

Weintraub, Rodelle. *Fabian Feminist, Bernard Shaw and Woman*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977.

Wisenthal, J.L. *Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism and Related Writings*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Guthrie Theater Study Guide: <http://www.guthrietheater.org/sites/default/files/mrswarren.pdf>.

Shaw Theatre Festival Study Guide: http://www.shawfest.com/assets/08PDF/Mrs_Warrens_Study_Guide.pdf

ABOUT THEATRE ARTS: **KEY THEATRICAL TERMS**

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

Although playhouses in the past could sometimes be rowdy, participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance today. Shouting out (or even whispering) can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within's* performance of *The Maids*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

blocking: The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

character: The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

conflict: The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

dramatic irony: A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

genre: Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

motivation: The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

props: Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

proscenium stage: There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

set: The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

setting: The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

stage areas: The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

theme: The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

thrust stage: A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

A NOISE WITHIN produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 25 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 15,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ■

STUDY GUIDES

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: www.anoisewithin.org. The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, The Common Core, and 21st Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within's artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

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