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Can Raina Petkoff Of Arms And The Man By Shaw Be Called A Seasoned Miranda Of The Tempest By Shakespeare?

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Abstract: The world of English language and Literature has been blessed with multifarious writers and scholars across the globe and centuries since the advent of the language. Some had been consequential in their times and context while the work of others transcends beyond their age and era. William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw though not contemporaries yet are compared always for their content and its treatment; specially their character portrayals and themes. In this paper, it is analyzed that Shakespeare through Miranda in *The Tempest* proposes chaste and emotional love while Shaw has represented pragmatic love through Raina in *Arms and The Man*.

Index Terms – William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Miranda, Raina Petkoff

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare (baptised 26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the Father of English drama. **George Bernard Shaw** (baptised 26 July 1856 – 2 November 1950), popularly known as Bernard Shaw, was an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist.

The ages they lived in: The conventional belief that any and every writing is a product of its time and every writer is a mirror of the society is validated in the case of Shakespeare and Shaw. Through their wit and treatment of content, they both highlighted the issues pertaining to society without sacrificing the entertainment quotient. The edge in their writings and the worth of their contents was all derived from their context; but in such a way that it transcends time and territories. Shakespeare's era or popularly known as the Elizabethan Era in England was the time of peace, prosperity and flourishing art in all forms in a patriarchal society. The Elizabethans were very clear about their expectations from their males and females where men were the decision makers and women were the weaker sex to be protected and taken care of by their male counterparts. In such a scenario, the master dramatist was able to create extremely powerful women characters *aka* 'Heroines' where most of his audience was males. Conversely, Shaw was writing in a time when the role and future of women in the active society was begun to be realized and accepted universally. It was the time of transition from agrarian societies to industrial ones where women weren't necessarily house bound. Their identity and thought process was undergoing a drastic change and they no longer needed a man to be their mouthpiece.

Their take on love:

Shakespeare uses love as a recurrent theme in his writings which is a force of nature, earthy and sometimes uneasy. It is a complicated emotion full of human follies and he mixes all kinds- courtly love, compassionate love, sexual love or unrequited love- skilfully in his writings.

As opposed to the traditional fairyland opinion of love, Shaw believed in the realistic side of this emotion. He considers romantic love as an illusion and farce and wants the young people in love to look at it pragmatically so that their love bond can add to the bettering of human race.

Miranda: Chaste and Naïve: The Tempest

Miranda is a motherless, fifteen-year-old daughter of the usurped duke of Milan, Prospero, who has technically lived all her life in an isolated island. She is the only female character in the drama serving multiple purposes by her being. She is forced by the circumstances to live on this uninhabited island along with her father and their half human monstrous slave, Caliban. All her life she had never encountered any other living soul, leave aside a human, than these two. Hence, her reactions when she first spots the handsome young prince of Naples, Ferdinand are of wonder and amazement. On being introduced to him by her own father, her outburst is very revealing of her naivety, as

“What is’t? A spirit?..... But ‘tis a spirit.” (Act I, Scene 2)

and on being ridiculed by her father for her simplicity she adds on,

“I might call him a thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble.”

She, most definitely, is instantly attracted towards Ferdinand and does not disapprove of the advances made by him. Not only that, she does not refrain from supporting the young man by pleading in his favour against her very own father despite the fact that she has always been an obedient daughter. What is the most striking thing is her admission in straight terms in front of her father where she says,

“....I have no ambition to see a goodlier man.”

Her grit and determination to see her future with Ferdinand makes her protest against her father mildly who is showing a lot of opposition to the match. Her instant attraction and emotional connect with the young prince were both noble and naïve.

Later in the drama, in Act III Scene 1, unconcerned of his title she plainly asks him if he loves her to which he happily replies that he does. In very straight forward and bold terms, Miranda proposes marriage to Ferdinand and declares

“I’m your wife if you will marry me. If not, I’ll die your servant”.

There is seen no bashful coyness or hesitation in her any time but only plainness and naivety in her dealing with Ferdinand who she loves with all her tender heart.

Raina: Idealism turned to Pragmatism: Arms and the Man

Raina Petkoff is a twenty-three-year-old Bulgarian woman who idealistically believes herself to be in love with Sergius, a war hero, to whom she is engaged. Her mother Catherine and father Major Paul Petkoff are a prime source of all idealization in her young heart. She idolizes her fiancé, Sergius, who has an extreme sense of patriotism in his heart and is a celebrated soldier in addition to being infatuated with her. Her idea of romance is very much induced in her by her parents and she talks of both love and war in heroic terms shutting the eye completely to the realistic side of both.

Her romantic ideals seem to shatter pretty soon after her encounter with Captain Bluntschli popularly called as ‘Chocolate soldier’. In addition, a series of shocks and learning experiences, such as seeing Sergius with his arm around Louka, move her away from idealism and seeing the light of realism. Bluntschli is a Swiss, a professional soldier fighting for the Serbs who climbs up a water pipe and onto a balcony of Raina to escape capture. He implores Raina to hide him and, in due course of time, helps her to see past her romantic ideals and acknowledge its futility.

Bluntschli, who she thought “*incapable of any noble sentiments*”, goes on to break all her age-old conventional beliefs and she eventually sees the light of the day and falls for him (though affianced to Sergius) who shows no interest in her, apparently. He isn’t ashamed of his unheroic actions, contrary to the expectation of Raina, as he survives and saves his life which is more important than any ideal in the world. He is a practical man and makes Raina see beyond the futile and absurd projection of ‘higher love’ by her parents and Sergius. Raina is an example of an epitome of transition from ‘fairy tale romance’ to ‘real, complicated and multifaceted love’.

Miranda versus Raina:

In *The Tempest* when Miranda is accepted by Ferdinand, she has tearful eyes and, on his imploring, “*Why are you crying?*” she naively answers “*At my unworthiness*”.

She has no idea that for Ferdinand, how precious is her chaste love, who has been in the company of many women, unlike Miranda, and found them all faulty. Her romantic ideals force her to be subservient to Ferdinand, not because he is a prince but because he is the love interest. Pointless to remind that she is merely fifteen years of age devoid of any human company. The similar instance could be seen in *Arms and the Man* in the opening scene where Raina is appreciating the night sky and thinking of Sergius in high terms and calling him, “*My Hero! My Hero!*”

The information about his historic charge on Serbian artillery fills her with awe and she feels that she has been a ‘*prosaic little coward*’ in her doubts about Sergius’ heroism and is unworthy of him. Both tend to be hyperbolic in their praises of their lovers while belittling their own selves.

A close study of both the heroines reveals that their journeys begin as one where both have highly idolized romantic notions of love, for different reasons, but the learning does occur in Raina’s case. Miranda’s naivety and innocence are borne out of her life situations where she has no exposure to human society other than her father and hence remains uncorrupted. Whereas, Raina’s idealism is induced in her primarily because of parental and societal influence which incidentally proves to be superficial. She sees the light of the day that there is a theory of love and then there is a practical, real side to it which is lived in the actual world. Also, at twenty-three it isn’t absurd to expect her to be a better version of Miranda in due course of time, especially when she is in the company of pragmatic Bluntschli and not romantic Ferdinand. She learns to disabuse herself of her impossible ideals, ideals which have no relation to real life, and thus becomes a fit partner for the practical, professional, middle-class Bluntschli.

It is an undeniable fact that with age, and maturity of mind and body, come more realistic expectations when romantic notions can be discarded as irrelevant and impractical. The same happens in the case of Miranda and Raina: age and context they are in matters. Fifteen will take time to be twenty-three.

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