



Research Paper

## Candida: Not Your Stereotype Feminist

Rudrika Khajuria\*,

Department of English, Jammu University  
Corresponding Author: Rudrika Khajuria\*,

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**ABSTRACT:** *G. B. Shaw's famous heroine Candida has been studied as both a feminist as well as an anti-feminist woman. The present paper attempts to establish her identity as a Postfeminist woman who reclaims the dignity of the housewife as a feminist and redefines the meaning of the term homemaker from a prisoner enslaved in a 'concentration camp' to a woman who is not afraid of exercising her choice even if it puts her on a pedestal against the stereotypical image of a feminist who must venture out into the stormy world. The three main characters, Morell, Marchbanks and Candida are delineated as representatives of three different feminist concepts – Patriarchy, Feminism and Postfeminism. The paper highlights the postfeminist concepts of choiceoisie and New Traditionalism while also defining their limitations.*

**Keywords:** *Choiceoisie, Domesticity, New Traditionalism, Patriarchy, Postfeminism*

One of the most highly revered English dramatists of nineteenth century, George Bernard Shaw ruled the English theatre for more than sixty years. Moving ahead of the artificiality of late Victorian drama, the fundamental aim of Shaw's plays was to reform the society by highlighting its falsity. The impressive array of women characters in his plays foregrounds his reputation as a male feminist at a time when the feminist movement was still in its infancy. An avid advocate of women suffrage and a firm believer of gender equality, Shaw was of the opinion that "a woman is really only a man in petticoats, or if you like, that a man is a woman without petticoats" (qtd. in Pharand 198). Most of his plays are female centric with strong, independent, domineering and rebellious protagonists who defy patriarchy and seek emancipation in their own individual way.

### According To C. B. Purdom:

the variety of Shaw's women characters is astonishing, all impelled by passion of one kind or another: from Blanche in *Widowers' House*, and Julia in *The Philanderer*, to Oritnthia in *The Apple Cart* – there are abundant examples of the passion of love, but as different from each other as women could be. Vivie in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Major Barbara, Lina in *Misalliance* . . . and Saint Joan, represent another kind of passion, the passion for conscience, for work, for a cause, for God . . . There are . . . other women such as Mrs. Warren . . . Lady Britomart . . . [etc.]who belong to the world and Candida who belongs to herself. Such a gallery of remarkable women does not exist in the works of any other modern dramatist.(Jain 2-3)

The gender history of Victorian age can be construed in two ways: as an impregnable patriarchal society aggrandizing the power and prerogative of men or as an era that witnessed the women's challenge to such a society which eventually led to the emergence of the New Woman. During Victorian age, the ideology of 'separate spheres' was quite predominant. While men were supposed to work, socialize, and earn for the family, women ought to be pure, submissive, and were supposed to look after their husband and children. Consequently, the period witnessed a growing identification of women with the domestic sphere. In 1851, the publication of Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel In The House* helped to further the ideal of the domestic angel, the gentle, obsequious and submissive wife dedicated to a life of domiciliary care. It was the transformation of Britain into an industrial nation that led to some radical changes in the English society. The expansion of women's employment during industrialization questioned the conventional notion of women being the inferior sex. This further led to the emergence of a new feminist ideal, the New Woman, at the fin de siècle or turn of the century. Free spirited, liberated, educated, employed and exercising a new found freedom and choice in marital and sexual matters, the New Woman threatened the prevailing ideas about the ideal Victorian womanhood. At a time when authors and critics like Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) highlighted the need to kill the phantom named "The

Angel In The House” and were interested in the portrayal of the New Woman, Shaw in his play *Candida* by presenting his protagonist as “drawn both from the timeless myth of the Virgin Mary and from the turn-of-the-century type of the New Woman” (Finney 202) delineates the concept of New Traditionalism with his focus on “the domestic sphere . . . as a domain of female autonomy and independence” (Genz and Brabon 52).

Postfeminism dares to challenge the homogenised and stereotyped victim status of women that was the basis of Second wave feminism. It challenges the very social construct where women are considered weak, inferior and victimized. Strains of Postfeminist ideology can be traced in Shaw’s plays as he too advocated “a theory that demands the destruction of sexual identity” (Jain 31). Contrary to the popular belief that men pursue and master women, Shaw proposed that it is not men but women who are the pursuer and men the pursued (Man and Superman). In *Candida*, Shaw has completely restructured the dynamics of husband wife relationship by depicting an intelligent and strong-willed wife who is the real ‘master’ of the house. The conventional and stereotype image of the husband as the protector, provider and guardian of his wife is shattered. Conversely, it is the wife who gives comfort, strength, support and security to her husband and in the end rescues him by shattering his illusions regarding his exaggerated idea of his own importance. The present chapter seeks to critique the play along a tripartite division in which Morell is taken to represent Patriarchy, Eugene as representing Feminism, and *Candida* as representing Postfeminism.

Reverend James Mavor Morell is an apotheosis of masculine vanity, ego, chauvinism, and mendacity. He idealizes *Candida* as a typical “angel in the house” wife, the ideal of Victorian womanhood commemorated by Coventry Patmore in his poem of that title, and firmly believes that “Man must be pleased; but him to please/ is woman’s pleasure” (Patmore 109). His life primarily follows a prescribed order. From his demanding schedule of sermonizing sessions to his sense of social rectitude, he is so lost in his own world that he becomes “too blind to see to what extent he is separated from his wife morally and intellectually” (Crompton 36). As a Reverend and a lecturer of Christian Socialism, a job that is mostly concerned with salvation as a panacea for all social problems like poverty, his vocation demands of him to project himself as a model citizen of the society and therefore, he needs *Candida* to fulfil the duty of ‘angel in the house’ for his family. Morell believes that as a man his only duty is to work and provide for his family’s comfort and welfare and as a woman his wife must play the role of a moral, submissive, domestic paragon. For him, *Candida* is the ideal wife and mother, ceaselessly selfless and loyal to him and a source of his emotional support. While *Candida* works hard every day to ensure a comfortable existence for him within the four walls of their home, he considers her work as her duty, something that she is bound to do as his wife and as a woman and never acknowledges the hard work she puts into their marriage. According to Ellen Ecker Dolgin:

Morell idolizes his wife, but does he really see fully the woman he is married to? As in the case of Torvald and many other male characters in fiction and drama, Morell is so absorbed by his work and pressing speaking engagements that he doesn’t really notice how smoothly his life runs because of *Candida*. His need of her is unquestioned and as normal to him as the devotion of those in his parish or his audience. (40)

His hypocrisy is further revealed when *Candida* brings into light the fact that Miss Proserpine Garnett, Morell’s secretary, is herself underpaid. Miss Garnett not only receives low wages from her employer, Mr Morell, but is also used as a domestic help. She not only does her assigned work as a secretary but also cleans plates and peels potatoes for just “six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office” (27). His own contribution towards housework is minimal which becomes evident when *Candida* complains that he had not been taking care of the house in her absence. Also, when Eugene mocks Morell for letting his wife do all the menial chores, *Candida* ironically remarks, “He cleans the boots, Eugene” (25), hinting that it is the only housework that he does. This clearly reveals Morell’s hypocrisy, “The dual standard of values enunciated and favoured by man becomes evident when one scans the gulf between what Morell, in *Candida*, professes and preaches and what he practises” (Dhingra 124). While he pretends to stand up for women’s rights, he himself exploits his woman employee. There is an intrinsic contradiction between Morell’s Christian ardour and his preposterous exploitation of a woman’s sagacity and affection, his spiritual ascendancy that mesmerizes his women parishioners and his contemptible parasitism.

Apparently unconventional, Morell is the most conventional of men. In Act 2, when *Candida* confesses her growing fondness for Eugene, Morell becomes suspicious of her feelings and tries to convince her of his trust in her. However, instead of expressing his confidence in her love for him, he tells *Candida* that he has full faith in her “goodness” and “purity” (28).

**Morell.** . . You know that I have perfect confidence in you, *Candida*.

**Candida.** You vain thing! Are you so sure of your irresistible attractions?

**Morell. Candida:** you are shocking me. I never thought of my attractions. I thought of your goodness, of your purity. That is what I confide in. (172)

He fails to recognize Candida's love and devotion for him and begins to doubt her of infidelity. His lack of trust in Candida becomes evident at the very beginning of the play. Had he full faith in Candida's love for him, he would not have been perturbed by Eugene's confession of his love for Candida in the very first place. However, ever since Eugene's confession, Morell's confidence is weakened. He is a man who is willing to do anything in order to keep his marriage going because he knows that it brings him immense comfort and bliss. He is not hesitant to lie to Candida in order to keep her besides him. He tries to hide Eugene's feelings from her because he is afraid to lose her. He wants to have total control over her and tries to filter what she should know and what she shouldn't. Instead of having faith in his wife, he puts her fidelity to test by leaving her alone in Marchbanks' company in Act 3. Due to his suspicion regarding Candida's infidelity, Morell becomes upset and cancels his lecture at the Guild of St. Matthew. However, he soon changes his decision and decides to go and persuades everyone to accompany him except for Candida and Eugene. He does this for two reasons- firstly, to satisfy his ego and to prove Eugene that he is not afraid of him and secondly, to put his wife to test and check her devotion towards him. Although in a great heroic act he leaves his wife alone with Eugene, his lack of trust in his marital relationship becomes apparent when soon after arriving home from his meeting he asks him, "Have you anything to tell me?" (35). He is eager to know what had transpired between him and Candida during his absence. Eugene's poetic account of his time spent in Candida's company causes excruciating pain to him and he appeals to Eugene to end his torture and asks, "You approached the gate of Heaven at last?" (36).

Later when Eugene confronts him, for the first time in his life Morell is forced to contemplate his relationship with Candida, however, he fails to assess his own frailty. Eugene's pertinacity impels him to question the truth in Eugene's averments - the truth regarding his preaching, his Socialism and his love for his wife - but instead of accepting his own fault, Morell counters Eugene's attack with his expertise as an orator. And when his verbal adroitness fails to inveigle Eugene, Morell resorts to his physical prowess, grabs Eugene by his collar and orders him to get out of the house, in an attempt to silence the voice of his adversary, which highlights the silencing of the feminist voice by a patriarch.

Morell's biggest illusion, again a result of his patriarchal mind-set, is his belief that he is the master of his house. He not only holds an exaggerated notion of his ability as a Socialist and religious preacher but also as a husband. He believes that he is the protector and guardian of his wife and that she cannot do without his guidance and support. He fears that if he gives her up, she would not have anyone to protect her, to help her, to work for her, and to father her children. The auction scene in Act 3 further establishes Morell's identity as a male-chauvinist and a misogynist. The excruciating torture of uncertainty regarding the status of his marital relationship with Candida compels him to settle the matter, once and for all, by ordering Candida to resign herself either to him or Eugene, "...you shall choose between us now. I await your decision" (44). Morell believes that as a woman, Candida cannot support herself alone and must belong to someone. She must have a man in her life who can look after her, care for her, protect her, and provide for her. And when Candida asks him to offer his bid for her, instead of offering his love and devotion to his wife he proudly declares, "I have nothing to offer to you but my strength for your defence, my honesty for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman" (44).

He loves her not so much for who she is but for the manner in which she cares for him, pampers him, and protects him from the unpleasant experiences of life. Morell's "love for Candida is not the love of one being for another being, but merely a form of self-love" (Hamon 93). Though he pretends to support her in every step of the way, in reality he wants to completely possess and dominate her. As Arnott puts it, "Morell loves Candida and idolizes the married state. In the course of the play, however, he is gradually brought to realize that he is a parasite feeding upon his wife's endeavors" (390).

Contrary to Morell's confident and entrancing personality, Eugene Marchbanks is "a strange, shy youth of eighteen, slight, effeminate, with a delicate childish voice, and a hunted tormented expression" (11). He is rather diffident, nervous and bashful, and struggles to meet strangers. A homeless poet, though a descendent of an aristocratic family, he is taken in by the Morells. Eugene is at once a poet who dwells in the world of romance and a rebel who stands up against established norms and customs. As William Storm observes, Eugene's character is marked by an "alternation between cringing away from situations and diving in head-first" (87). While Morell represents Patriarchy, Eugene stands for the conventional perception of Feminism. In his view, Candida is a victim of her husband's hypocrisy and tyranny and he wishes to liberate her from the shackles and restraints that bind her to him.

Eugene's feminist sensibilities promptly find their succinct articulation in his antagonism of Morell and all that Morell stands for. When Morell begins his disquisition on his marital rapture and blessedness, Eugene does not listen with either Lexy's contentment or Prossy's exasperated jealousy, instead he rebukes him severely, calling him a "windbag" (36) and threatens to "stagger" (14) him for making mockery of the life of a woman with a "great soul" (16). When it comes to confronting and challenging Morell, Eugene's reticence and

naiveté is no hindrance and he succeeds in his purpose because after their altercation in Act 1, Morell is certainly “enraged and half-shaken in his self-estimate” (Evans 71). Fomented by what he contemplates as the oppression of a beautiful woman by a callous husband, Eugene gives as good as he receives, and Morell finds himself shellacked even as a debater.

As a true feminist, Eugene stands up for Candida’s rights and speaks out against the discriminatory treatment that is meted out to her by her husband. He claims that Candida has sacrificed herself in order to tend to Morell’s needs, who in fact does not have “one thought—one sense—in common with her” (15). In his opinion, it is unjust and sexist on Morell’s part to leave all the household responsibilities on his wife’s shoulder who has to endure the drudgery of household chores. He is horrified by the very thought of Candida doing the menial domestic chores like scrubbing floors, filling lamps, or chopping onions, etc. He goes an extra mile in expressing his protest against the vexatious household chores coerced upon her. In fact, whenever he finds Candida performing her chores, he offers his help and requests that she must “hand over all the rough work” (24) to him. He criticizes Morell for allowing Candida to do all the household chores while he himself is busy preaching sermons: “With you to preach the sermons and your wife to scrub” (25). Eugene believes that though Morell cherishes his happy married life and adores his wife immensely, he does not understand her at all. He is inconsiderate towards her needs and desires and treats her no different than the enthusiastic women parishioners who flock his church on Sunday mornings. He shatters his vain illusion regarding his excellence as a preacher by telling him that he merely possesses “the gift of the gab” (16) and simply excites people with his fine eloquence, instead of inspiring them with his noble ideas. Candida suffers in his company because he always indulges in his spells of moralizing and preaching.

Is it like this for her here always? A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom; and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman’s soul can live on your talent for preaching? (16)

While Eugene stands out as the upholder of womanhood by criticizing Morell for his egoistic nature and his selfish attitude towards Candida, he also stands as a poet lost in the world of romance, oblivious of Candida’s true nature. He posits himself on the ultimate romantic aesthetics in opposition to Morell’s rigid Victorian moeurs entrenched by social and religious customs. He idealizes her as Virgin Mary who offers him commiseration for his “queerness” (13) and his trepidatious soul and helps him gain equanimity. Being a poet, he indulges in his fanciful flights of imagination and professes that when a man loves a woman he wishes her to be “idle, selfish and useless” (25), and to not have to toil all day long. Instead of a scrubbing brush, he desires to gift her with “a tiny shallop to sail away” (24) from the world of reality to a world of make-believe. Being a young eighteen year old boy, deprived of love from his own mother, when Candida shows affection towards him, he begins to idolize her. Candida always addresses Eugene as her “poor boy” (10), “great baby” (13), “dear boy” (14), etc. and indulges in baby-talk with him. Marchbanks however misinterprets it as a sign of Candida’s greater affection for him than Morell. He misconstrues Candida’s motherly affection and endearments as her disenfranchised passion for romance that gratifies his romantic perception of the ideal inamorata, “and I never think or feel Mrs Morell: it is always Candida” (34). Candida’s irresistible pulchritude and vivaciousness formulate his vision of her as a woman who desires romance and to be free from all worldly conventions. A fantasist, he envisions himself as the knight in shining armour, a figure straight out of a romantic saga, yearning to rescue the belle incarcerated in a dreary marriage. He is certain in his conviction that Candida is disgruntled with what Morell claims is a “happy marriage” (14) and therefore the strong desire to rescue her from her prosaic quotidian existence. He fails to understand how a woman like Candida can love Morell who is not bothered about anything besides his Socialism. “Tell me: Is it really and truly possible for a woman to love him?” (20). It is only towards the end that he realizes that the woman whom he cosseted and envisioned as the earthly incarnation of Titan’s Virgin is in fact an affectionate woman inclined towards domesticity, for whom her family and her home is the kernel of her happy life.

Eugene’s head-on confrontation and altercation with Morell, in a way, encapsulates the essence of the feminist struggle against patriarchy. However, it becomes apparent that Eugene’s feminist struggle is only limited to Candida. When Morell informs him how Miss Prossy helps him with the chores, Eugene interjects, “Do you think every woman is as coarsegrained as Miss Garnett?” (23). Although he is the first one to stand up against the ‘injustice’ done to Candida in terms of the rough and vulgar labour that she is ‘forced’ to execute in the kitchen, when the same treatment is meted out to Miss Prossy it is absolutely unobjectionable to him. Thus, to a large extent, his image as a defender of Candida’s rights is influenced by his love for her rather than his belief in feminism. Candida, a postfeminist, on the other hand, does not wage a war against the patriarchal authority characterized by her husband. Instead, she being fully aware of her independent quiddity makes him aware of it in her own way.

Candida may be delineated as a postfeminist woman who exercises her ‘choice’ according to her own will and decides for herself how she wants to spend her life and with whom. She understands Morell inside out

and is aware of his ego, weakness and pretence. She is aware of his patriarchal mind-set, his need to be cared for like a baby, and the real reason for his popularity and she makes her choice in full awareness of these facts.

Shaw in his essay, "The Womanly Woman" expressed the view that "the domestic career is no more natural to all women than the military career is natural to all men" (Major Critical Essays 38). While in his other plays like *Major Barbara* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw presents professional women like Barbara who is a Major of the Salvation Army and Vivie who plans to become an actuarial accountant, in *Candida* he highlights that section of women who take delight in domesticity and whose lives revolve around their homes and families. Postfeminism offers women the choice to enjoy domesticity and establish domestic life as a realm of independence in contrast to its earlier association with drudgery and passivity. The association between second wave feminism and domesticity was obstreperous. Since the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, a notion emerged among the feminists that "an investment in the domestic [is] antithetical to the ideals of feminism" (qtd. in Genz and Brabon 59). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan referred to domesticity as the "comfortable concentration camp" that rendered women helpless and powerless. Thus, the hearth and home became a site oppugnant to the feminist ideology, in the process presenting the housewife as "the feminist's other". (Genz and Brabon 59). The Postfeminist concept of New Traditionalism however challenges the generalization of domestic realm as a site of toil, incarceration, and oppression, a view fostered by second wave feminism's assessment of domesticity. It lays stress on the renaissance of traditional values in order to ennoble the role of women through homemaking and motherhood. According to this ideology, the embrace of domesticity does not nullify a woman's position as a feminist. Elspeth Probyn in her seminal work, "New Traditionalism and Postfeminism: TV does the Home", asserts that "new traditionalism has become synonymous with a new age of 'choiceoisie' and it is precisely this ideology of choice that articulates new traditionalism and postfeminism" (152). In a postfeminist context, choiceoisie refers to the possibility of making a free choice between home or career or a family or a thriving job. While critics like Susan Douglas criticise the concept of 'choiceoisie' claiming that it results in female narcissism unregulated and unconcerned from political aims and concepts, Sarah Projansky adopts a somewhat propitious attitude and claims that with the emergence of the concept of choiceoisie "women are at least understood not only to make choices, but also to have a right to do so" (Projansky 120). According to Stephanie Genz:

domestic femininity comes to be seen as a site of undecidability, of meaning in question whereby the figure of the housewife is inscribed with multifarious significations, vacillating between patriarchal scripts of enforced domesticity and postfeminist re-appropriations that acknowledge agency and self-determination. (60)

In *Candida*, the protagonist chooses to perform household chores. *Candida* takes pleasure in doing her household chores and in looking after her family. She does not shirk work and willingly scrubs the floor, fills the lamps, and slices onions. She is often criticised as a woman who stays dependent on her husband at a time when women were demanding equal job opportunities and equality in public sphere. However in this play, Shaw shows that "the scrubbing brush is not an emblem of *Candida's* servitude, but of her freely willed vocation" (Crompton 44). If *Candida* despised doing the chores and was treated like a domestic slave by Morell, she could have escaped this state by selecting Eugene who presents before her the picture of an idyll life where the marble floors are washed by rain and dried by sun, carpets are cleaned by wind, and where stars serve the purpose of lamps and thus preclude women from the task of filling the lamps with paraffin every day. Although Eugene is horrified by the thought of *Candida* doing menial domestic chores, *Candida* assesses his opinion on her domestic life as his "poetic horrors" (24), and not once tries to justify his viewpoint. In fact *Candida* seems to mock Eugene's idea of a romantic and idyll life, free from toil and labour, when she says, "Wouldn't you like to present me with a nice new one [brush], with an ivory back inlaid with mother-of-pearl?" (24). She is not the typical 'angel in the house', a docile and tractable wife selflessly devoted to her children and husband. She is a modern emancipated woman with an unconventional attitude towards marriage – one who does not consider domestic life as a constraint on women's freedom, rather an opportunity for them to assert their power. Even *Candida's* father, Mr. Burgess, the shrewd Capitalist, who is proud of "his diplomatic cunning" (40) recognizes *Candida's* power/position as a domestic paragon when he says, "The ouseaint worth living in since you left it, Candy. I wish youd come round and give the gurl a talkin to" (11).

The latter part of Act 3, generally referred to as the auction scene or choosing scene, further establishes her as a strong and independent woman not only deciding her own fate but also that of two important men in her life. When Morell tells *Candida* that she must choose between him and Eugene, *Candida* replies, "Oh! I am to choose, am I? I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other" (44). What *Candida* means is that Morell cannot force her to choose between the two of them, for she also has a third option – the option of walking out alone. Eugene understands this when he says, "Morell: you don't understand. She means that she belongs to herself" (44). *Candida* ironically addresses both Morell and Eugene as "my lords" (44), and asks them to bid for her. After the two men offer their bids, she takes a brief pause and declares her decision in a very composed manner – "I give myself to the weaker of the two"(45) and while Morell misinterprets her decision,

the poet discerns the meaning at once - "Oh, I feel I'm lost. He cannot bear the burden" (45). Candida then sits down comfortably in an easy chair while Morell sits in a children's chair and Eugene in a visitor's chair, the picture emphasizing Candida's power, Morell's weakness, and Eugene's visitor status. She then explains how Morell, the weaker of the two, needs her and is dependent on her, unlike Eugene who "has learnt to live without happiness" (46). Candida chooses Morell not out of conventionality, but because it is her 'choice'. She understands his weakness, his child-like need for constant love and attention and his ego which makes him believe that he is the 'master' of their house and despite everything she chooses Morell even though she has the option of going out with the young romantic, Eugene. Candida chooses Morell because she loves him. According to Augustin Hamon, "She resigns herself to this appearance of choice, to this conventionality of possession, because she knows that her husband does not understand that if she is with him it is because she loves him" (92). In Act 2, she clearly tells Morell that he should have faith in her love for him, for if it comes to an end, she would care little for his sermons, thereby clearly denoting her love for him. At the same time, Candida is a woman guided by pragmatism. She understands that Morell will not be able to live without her and also compared to Eugene, he can ensure a better future for her and her children. The relationship not only provides love but also convenience to both the partners.

Candida never seeks to emancipate herself, she is already an emancipated woman. As Augustin Hamon notes, "She has no need, like Nora, to go away in order to obtain freedom, for she has already freed herself, by discarding social conventions and religious, worldly and other prejudices" (87). It is the men, Morell and Eugene, who live in a world of illusions and thus need to be emancipated. Morell lives in the illusion that he is the protector, provider and guardian of his wife but Candida makes him realize his emotional dependence on her. By choosing Morell over Eugene, she makes him realize that he is the weaker of the two. Morell finally acknowledges this fact in the end when he says, "It's all true, every word. What I am you have made me with the labor of your hands and the love of your heart. You are my wife, my mother, my sisters: you are the sum of all loving care to me" (46). She enlightens him with the truth that, contrary to his belief, it is she who provides comfort, strength and security to him. Similarly she helps Eugene by shattering his illusion about romantic love. Eugene dwells in the world of romance and fine poetry. He idolizes Candida as a woman with "wreath of stars on her head, the lilies in her hand, and the crescent moon beneath her feet" (37) but Candida makes him realise that she is an ordinary woman whose feet would not be beautiful walking barefoot on Hackney road. When Candida declares her preference for domestic life, she helps Eugene realize that as a poet he cannot be bound within the four walls of her home and must venture out into the world. Once he is freed from his illusions, Eugene ventures into the night, "the true realm of the poet" (Crompton 43). In a letter to the Rugby boys, Shaw explained the secret in Eugene's heart:

. . . What business has a man with the great destiny of a poet with the small beer of domestic cuddling and petting at the apron-string of some dear nice woman? Morell cannot do without it: it is the making of him; without it he would be utterly miserable and perhaps go to the devil. To Eugene, the stronger of the two, the daily routine of it is nursery slavery, swaddling clothes, mere happiness instead of exaltation—an atmosphere in which great poetry dies. To choose it would be like Swinburne choosing Putney. When Candida brings him squarely face to face with it, his heaven rolls up like a scroll; and he goes out proudly into the majestic and beautiful kingdom of the starry night. (Crompton 43)

Though economically dependent on Morell, Candida is independent in every other aspect. Unlike Morell and Eugene, she lives in the world of reality – she is aware of Eugene's romantic idealism and Morell's weaknesses. Throughout the course of the play we do not find Morell telling Candida, even once, to do the chores. In fact they have a maid servant, Maria and even Prossy helps with the housework, still we find Candida actively working. In Act 1, soon after her entry she sets to the task of cleaning, "I suppose you are too much of a poet to know the state a woman finds her house in when she's been away for three weeks" (13). Similarly, despite Morell's flaws she chooses him because she loves him and has no qualms about supporting her husband. The choosing scene between Morell, Eugene and Candida demonstrates an unconventional love triangle between two men and a woman with the woman being the one who makes the choice instead of being chosen. With conviction in her power and authority, she chooses Morell who needs her love and support thereby taking up the conventional male role of the protector of the family. The playwright presents the settlement of the love triangle as a result of free will and choice, not an unfortunate situation for women to fight the ideals of womanliness entrenched by patriarchy. In a postfeminist context, choice refers to the possibility of making a free choice between home and career. By choosing to stay with Morell within the four walls of her home instead of going out with Eugene who represents absolute freedom from domestic labour and therefore a future possibility of a career, Candida posits her position as an emancipated, postfeminist woman.

Besides Candida, the only other female character in the play is Morell's secretary, Miss Proserpine Garnet, an efficient short hand typist. Miss Prossy's name evokes the myth of Proserpine and her rape by Pluto. However, Ellen Gainor observes that in *Candida*, "Prossy and many other women are magnetized by Morell, and so the guilt of rape and sexual aggression is transformed into Proserpine's undeclared but ardent attraction

to him” (qtd. in Innes 95-96). While in the case of *Candida*, we have a married woman loved by a single man, in *Prossy*’s case we have a single woman in love with a married man. Moreover, the character of Miss Proserpine Garnett foregrounds the limitations of the concept of New Traditionalism and choiceoisie. Although new traditionalism and choiceoisie ensued a re-evaluation and subsequent veneration of the housewife and directed the way for the housewife to be a feminist rather than the anti-feminist figure presented by the second wave, the concept has its limitations. It is elitist as “only middle class mothers who have some non-work means of support (i.e., a working husband/partner)” can make such a choice between family and work (Projansky 79). Both *Candida* and *Prossy* are empowered women in their own distinct ways. By reversing the position of the mythological figure, Proserpine, Shaw affirms the “young woman’s new found mobility” (Dolgin 40). *Prossy* is a professional who earlier worked at a city office and is now employed as Mr. Morell’s secretary. As such, she is financially independent and representative of the New Woman. *Candida*, on the other hand, though a housewife and as Naomi Black states “economically... remains dependent” (qtd. in Dukore 308), she is nonetheless an empowered woman who claims her individuality and the right to choose how to live. However, while *Candida* has the opportunity to make a choice between domesticity and work, *Prossy* doesn’t. An unmarried woman from a lower middle class, she does not have the opportunity of being a housewife which *Candida* by virtue of belonging to the progressive middle class can certainly afford.

The dialogue between *Candida* and the two men at the end of the play demonstrates how the prosaic Victorian and romantic paragon of womanliness is undermined by *Candida*’s cognizance of the conventional female role and her unfettered conviction to contemplate the role as a choice that she can make upon her free will. She establishes an unorthodox and heterogeneous concept of femininity that presents female sexuality and gender roles as a choice for a woman rather than a curtailment or duration. She exemplifies the Postfeminist concept of ‘choiceoisie’ by choosing to stay with Morell at home. The play depicts a woman who can and does make choices. Moreover, the narrative relies on those choices, allowing the story to eventually culminate. Certainly the choice made by *Candida* is relatively typical: motherhood and husband-wife relationship remain the source of happy ending but even in making this choice she subverts the conventional perception of domesticity being synonymous with passivity and acquiescence. In a society where a woman’s devotion to domestic life is considered inferior to the position of a husband who provides social and economic support to the family, *Candida* offers a new way of looking at the homemaker not as her husband’s domestic slave trapped in a concentration camp but as one who provides strength, support and security to her husband. Sangeeta Jain categorizes *Candida* as a saving woman who “saves the dignity of invisible homemaker” (Jain 109). By embracing her preference for domesticity and rejecting the sham of Victorian morality and romantic idealism, *Candida* presents herself as a Postfeminist woman who is not afraid of exercising her choice even if it means rejecting the stereotype image of a feminist who must move out of the confines of her home in order to ascertain her emancipation.

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