

Man and Superman: As tragi – Comic Love Chase

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ABSTRACT:

This Research Paper aims to highlight the elements of tragi – comic love amongst to characters in George Bernard Shaw's Man and Superman. Shaw portrays conventional courtship turned on its head. Traditionally, the woman is hunted and submits to the man. In this play, man is hunted by a relentless woman. Shaw believed that normally women like Ann Whitefield pursue their intended husbands with such persistence and subtlety that they lead the men to think themselves as the pursuers.

KEY WORDS:

Love; comic; sex; artist; creator; relationship

INTRODUCTION:

Shaw provides, among other things, the details relating to the genesis of Man and Superman, and an exegesis of his current philosophy and of certain dominant ideas in the play. Shaw dismisses current romantic plays as "childish" and insists that they are quite devoid of interest and have been "forced to deal almost exclusively with cases of sexual attraction, and yet forbidden to exhibit the incidents of that attraction or even to discuss its nature". Man and Superman tells the story of two rivals: John Tanner (a wealthy, politically-minded intellectual who values his freedom) and Ann Whitefield (a charming, scheming hypocritical young woman who wants Tanner as a husband).

Once Tanner realizes that Miss Whitefield is hunting for a spouse (and that he is the only target), he attempts to flee, only to find out that his attraction to Ann is too overwhelming to escape.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN – EMPHASIS ON MOTHERHOOD:

In man and superman Shaw has expressed his views on a variety of subjects, but he has expressed most fully, clearly and emphatically on the relationship between the sexes. His views are enunciated in the preface and further developed and illustrated in the body of the play itself. It is the maternal aspect of motherhood which he emphasises. Woman for him is the incarnation of female principle at the work in the universe. "Sexually woman is nature's contrivance for the perpetuation of the human race", man is women's contrivance for fulfilling nature's behest in the most economical way. Moved by the blind fury of creation, woman becomes the pursuer and man the perused – she the hunter and he the hunted – and the whole world is seen as strewn with the gins, traps and snares set up by women to trap the most desirable male into becoming the father and bread winner. Woman's instinctive cunning makes her permit man to glorify her and to weave round sex relationship a halo of romance. As a matter of fact, sexual love is neither romantic nor there is anything divine about it. It is merely a bit for the capture of man by woman. The life force is a vast cosmic

urge, it manifests itself most violently as the instinct of procreation in woman, but even man is unable to resist it and ultimately succumbs to it. All this brought out by the speeches of Jack Tanner, Shaw's mouthpiece in the hell-scene and at other places as well as by the unconventional behaviour of Ann Whitefield.

THE SPIDER - FLY RELATIONSHIP:

In the very beginning of the play, Tanner tells Octavius, "vitality in a woman is the blind fury of creation because they have a purpose which is not their own purpose but that of the whole universe, a man is nothing to them but an instrument of that purpose". This doctrine was with passionate intensity for many years after Man and Superman promulgated it. It was considered degrading to woman that they should be represented as taking the initiative in love relationship; and equally degrading to men that they should be relegated to what seemed little better than the status of a bee or a fly, helpless in the clutches of the spider-women. However the doctrine has become quietly absorbed into the general current of contemporary ideas and does no longer startle and surprise or give offence. It is now generally recognized that women have strong love likings and when moved by strong passion they do take initiative in matter of sex, "every woman may not be Ana Whitefield, but Ann is everywoman".

WOMEN AND MEN OF GENIUS:

Tanner goes on to speak of the perpetual battle between the creator man – the artist and thinker – and the creator – woman, the mother and home maker. The long speech during which Tanner explain to Octavius,

"The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go bare – foot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art," is an exposition of the instinctive conflict between the mother – woman and man of genius. The genuine artist, inventor, adventure, etc. is bound by the law of his nature to sacrifice everyone and everything to his primary function, which is to create new men. In the large of that creative urge, he is as ruthless as the woman, as dangerous to her as she to him, and as horrible fascinating. "of all human struggle there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman and it is all the deadlier because in your romanticist can't they love one another". The woman wants to convert the artist into suitable bread – winner and husband, but the artist urged on by the laws of his own being, is ready to sacrifice the woman to his own art. Thus, there is a clash between the two and the result is often very tragic. Shaw was the first to deal with this truth in dramatic literature and to expose the germs of tragedy inherent in it.

ANN TANNER RELATIONSHIP – AN ILLUSTRATION OF SHAW'S THESIS:

The dramatist has illustrated his thesis on love and sex – relationship through the character and behaviour of Ann, a young woman of exceptional vitality. He has called her a 'vital genius', for the life force works within her with more than normal violence and makes her pursue the marked down victim with such courage and determination. In the first act, Tanner's endeavour to keep his conversation with Ann on the philosophic plane fails to distract her from her purpose of drawing him into her coils. He is at one and the

same time repelled and fascinated. When he cries almost in despair, “I never feel safe with you; there is a devilish charm – or no, not a charm, a suitable interest”. She laughs in triumph but, as always evades moral responsibility for attracting him, this of securing the most desirable man to father her children. She is as various as Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, and is a live figure on stage as well as Shaw’s embodiment of the cosmic feminine principle. “For years women in general detest her or rather to detest her who created her.” But it is through her, that he has torn away the veil off the temple of the female mystery and shown her in her true colours.

THE RESULTING COMEDY:

Ann is able to call up all the wiles that most men find irresistible in a woman; in the pursuit of her purpose she is ruthless. She stops at nothing. She is audacious and impudent. She is a liar and a hypocrite. She is unconventional and shameless. She is a temptress. But she is all this in the pursuit of the aim and objective of her being. Motherhood is the supreme goal of her being, and for that purpose she must marry, and marry the most desirable male. Notice how she passes by Octavius who loves and adores her. He is not biologically as desirable as Tanner. “The poetic temperament is barren – the life force passes it by”. Her ordained function is to be a mother and for Ann as a ‘perfectly lady like’ young woman that means becoming a wife, but not simply a wife, nor even the wife of Octavius who adores and at length proposes to her. As a young woman, who is not only perfectly ladylike but also the human channel of the evolutionary progress towards a higher creation, she has willy nilly to impose herself as wife upon

the one man to whom her instinct, or the life force drives her as the sole fit instrument of her destiny. The result is the comic spectacle of a man hunted through all Europe by a woman, till the unwilling male is at last tracked down in Spain.

ANN AND TANNER, INSTRUMENT OF THE LIFE FORCE:

Tanner yields at last, because as his incarnation Don Juan explains in the dream episode, he cannot help it. The life force, which wills that the offspring of two particular people shall be born is stronger even than his impulse to serve mankind in ways to which he had to dedicate himself. Tanner loves Ann in the sense of feeling this irresistible urge; at the same time he despises her. She is a bully and a liar and by ‘unscrupulously using her personal fascinations to make men give her what she wants’, she is also ‘something for which there is no polite name’. He knows that she will think his aspirations and efforts to reform society absurd, and thwart him, to the extent she dares, in the interests of the family. Above all, Ann is a hypocrite but from an ultimate point of view that is unimportant. Both Ann and Tanner in submitting to their attraction for each other become servants of the will of the world. They are instruments towards creating the superior race of the future – the superman.

SHAW’S OBJECTION TO MARRIAGE:

Just as Shaw is against romantic love, he is also against the institution of marriage. The institution of marriage which compels two people, who have nothing in common save mutual sex – attraction, to spend their lives together is stupid and from the conception

that the child is the sole end of marriage, it is absurd to make it binding. Moreover, the fact that marriage is binding make men and women who know that they will have to spend the rest of their lives together, choose their mates for irrelevant reasons – affection, respect or self - interest. Such is the moral of this serious comedy, a comedy which keeps many people laughing who would not laugh, perhaps if they really understood its drift. It is rather odd that dramatist never again returned to the theme that in selective breeding or ‘eugenics’ lay all hope for the future of mankind.

CONCLUSION:

The main story of Man and Superman can be simply summarised as a love chase; comic because of the laughable in it; the tragic because it ends in the capitulation of Tanner and also because the romantic lover Octavius is left to sob. But the play is much more. It is the exposition of the Shavian ideas on love, marriage, creative evolution and life force.

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