
Shaw Shows Society's Contribution to Prostitution

Shaw implicates society as a whole in the business of prostitution by exposing the underlying socio-economic conditions that serve to exploit the poor and render 'immoral' occupations like prostitution as viable options for lower class women to break out of the poverty cycle. Moreover, the capitalist economic system enables those of a higher social class to benefit (mostly monetarily) from the business of prostitution, as they are seemingly in control of the lower social classes who engage in prostitution, while maintaining a facade of respectability. Additionally, Shaw implicates society as a whole by showing that its perception of prostitution is flawed and is merely based on the higher social classes' bias against prostitution and the stereotypes of the working class.

Shaw implicates society as a whole by showing how the capitalist economic system provides the underlying conditions for prostitution as well as perpetuating it. In order to profit off the working class, the upper echelons of society tend to exploit lower class workers. Shaw clearly highlights the exploitation of the working class through the characterisation of Mrs Warren as a representative voice of the working class, and structurally through Mrs Warren's confrontation with Vivie. Mrs Warren justifies prostitution by stating, "Do you think I was brought up like you? able to pick and choose my own way of life? Do you think I did what I did because I liked it, or thought it right, or wouldn't rather have gone to college and been a lady if I'd had the chance?". Shaw's use of diction is extremely effective here as repetition of the words "choose" and "chance" serve to highlight the fact that prostitutes are simply forced to enter prostitution as since the word "choose" implies that one can pick out something from two or more alternatives, the fact that Mrs Warren had no choice shows that lower class women do not have any other alternatives to break out of the poverty cycle other than prostitution. Unlike those of a higher social class, lower class women are unable to pursue higher education due to their financial constraints and hence, they are exploited by the upper classes as their lack of education has prevented them from pursuing their own ambitions in life. Moreover, through the numerous rhetorical questions Mrs Warren has asked Vivie, we can see that Mrs Warren is infuriated by society's perception of prostitutes being immoral as not only has society contributed to the underlying factors for prostitution but they judge all prostitutes by a common yardstick, as being immoral, although prostitutes were forced into entering prostitution due to their circumstances. Society themselves have (through the capitalist economic system) denied lower class women of many opportunities to improve their socio-economic status, resulting in numerous working class women to resort to prostitution in order to not only improve their socio-economic status but to also be free from the exploitation of the upper class. Hence, Shaw uses the character of Mrs Warren to highlight the irony of society's prejudice towards prostitutes as they themselves have caused the underlying conditions for prostitution. The upper classes' exploitation of lower class

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women is evident from the treatment of lower class blue-collar workers. Mrs Warren's half sisters are representatives of the lower class blue-collar workers. They are described as "starved looking, hard working, honest poor creatures". Shaw's use of diction is extremely effective here as the word "starved" literally implies that blue-collar workers were dying of hunger. This showcases the poor working conditions that blue-collar workers faced and that they could not even meet their basic needs. We can also interpret the word "starved" metaphorically. Since blue-collar workers were unable to meet their basic needs, we can infer that they were deprived of a sustainable salary, like how a starved person is deprived of food. The heartbreaking image of hard working lower class women being on the verge of death serves to emphasize the cruelty of the higher classes who put profit ahead of the well-being of their workers. Similarly, the word "creatures" shows that the lower class workers were dehumanized by the upper echelons of society and that they were completely subordinate to the higher classes. Hence, this serves to accentuate the mistreatment of lower class workers as their superiors viewed them as subhuman and as a result refused to provide them with basic human necessities. Thus, the capitalist economy is responsible for creating the underlying factors of prostitution as the upper classes exploit the lower classes for monetary gain and hence, they pay their workers starvation wages to increase their profit, which then causes the lower class workers to be ensnared in the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the fact that "honest" and "hard working" blue-collar workers were unable to elevate their socio-economic status and at the mercy of their superiors, shows that these 'moral' and honest jobs are detrimental to the welfare of blue-collar workers even though they were deemed as socially acceptable. Hence, lower class women were afraid of being perceived as immoral by society and had no choice but to enter these blue-collar occupations. Therefore, society is implicated in the business of prostitution as women who want to break out of the poverty cycle have no means to do so due to the capitalist economic system and have to resort to prostitution.

Moreover, Shaw implicates every part of society in prostitution by showing how privileged classes benefit in different ways from prostitution while maintaining a facade of respectability. Crofts, a member from the upper echelon of society, states that "If you're going to pick and choose your acquaintances on moral principles, you'd better clear out of this country, unless you want to cut yourself out of all decent society." This is Crofts' justification to Vivie for the way he makes his living, by operating brothels. He responds that the majority of the upper class in the country have acquired their wealth through morally questionable means. The irony here is that "decent" society is morally corrupt and that the only people who might exercise Vivie's morals are those who suffer in the lowest ranks of society, like the lower class women who choose to engage in blue-collar jobs. Through Shaw's use of diction, it is evident that "honest" and "hard working" blue-collar workers were unable to elevate their financial status and were under the complete control of their superiors. Thus, this shows that these moral occupations are detrimental to the welfare of blue-collar workers, even though they were deemed as socially acceptable. The majority of working class women choose to enter the blue-collar job market as

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they are afraid of being judged as immoral by society, since that would have certain social implications. The irony of Croft's statement is not lost on Vivie as she begins to question the double standards that the upper classes have for prostitutes, as these so-called respectable members of society attained their wealth through immoral means. Moreover, members of the upper class still use money that is obtained from prostitution to sustain their lifestyle, even if it is unintended. Vivie's scholarship to study at Newham was sponsored by Croft's brother, who ran a factory which paid its female workers starvation wages. Although it's not directly stated, when Croft's asks Vivie how else these orphaned female workers could financially support themselves, it is implied that these women have turned to prostitution in order to provide themselves with basic necessities as there were no other job opportunities available to them. Hence, the workers in Croft's brother's firm are essentially prostitutes as without the money they had earned from prostitution, they would have likely starved to death and been unable to work in that firm. Therefore, Vivie herself is implicated in the prostitution industry as her scholarship came at the expense of the prostitutes working in Croft's brother's firm. She had indirectly benefitted off the prostitution industry that she had completely disregarded and deemed as immoral. As Vivie is representative of upper class women, we can see that upper class women are "just as bad as" those who are directly involved in the prostitution industry and this proves that the upper echelons of society indirectly benefit from the prostitution industry. However, the privileged classes are not deemed as immoral as they manage to cover up their involvement in the prostitution industry. Crofts himself states that the "class of people" he would introduce Vivie to would not "so far forget themselves as to discuss my business affairs". Through Shaw's use of diction, it is evident that the "class of people" Crofts is referring to are the upper classes of society. The fact that they would not "so far forget themselves" implies that the majority of the higher classes of society are directly involved in the prostitution industry. The words "forget themselves" implies that the upper classes of society would not question Croft's business endeavours, lest they reveal that they too profit off of the prostitution industry and consequently lose their facade of respectability. This not only serves to highlight the hypocrisy of the upper classes of society as they demean prostitutes but yet profit off of the prostitution industry, but also shows that the upper classes of society cover up their shady involvement in the prostitution industry in order to preserve their reputation in society. Additionally, society "doesn't ask any inconvenient questions". Shaw's use of diction through the words "doesn't ask" shows that society does not even suspect that the so-called respectable upper classes are involved in such an immoral industry as they truly believe that higher classes are morally superior. This further enables the privileged classes to maintain their facade of respectability as society does not even suspect that they are involved in these immoral activities. Hence, they can openly condemn the prostitution industry without facing any repercussions. Therefore, Shaw implicates every part of society in prostitution by showing how the upper classes benefit in numerous ways from prostitution all while maintaining a facade of respectability.

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Finally, Shaw implicates society as a whole by showing that its perceptions of prostitutes are flawed and based on the privileged classes' prejudices and stereotypes of the working class. This is seen through the characterization of Vivie. Vivie is essentially an upper class woman who has pursued higher education and hence, she finds many viable job options that would grant her the socio-economic status she deserves. Hence, unlike Mrs Warren, Vivie has numerous job prospects and was not confined to working in blue-collar occupations. Therefore, we can assume that Vivie's initial view on prostitution is that of the upper classes in society. Vivie dismisses Mrs Warren's argument that her circumstances necessitated turning to prostitution but Vivie dismisses this 'excuse' by stating that "People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they cant find them, make them." This explains Vivie's naive view on prostitution as she believes that one's circumstances do not matter and that even with unfortunate circumstances, members of the lower class can still pursue their dreams without being involved in prostitution. She assumes that blue-collar workers are unable to achieve success simply because they are unambitious or lazy. However, she fails to realise that lower class women do not have the same opportunities as her because due to their lack of higher education, they are exploited by the upper classes. Her mind changes, however, after Mrs Warren describes her struggle to survive in contrast to the privileges Vivie has been granted. Vivie's original opinion, therefore, seems narrow-minded and naive. Vivie's rationale was that of many people in the upper echelons of society and was seen as a sort of justification for discriminating against prostitutes. Since the upper classes have not experienced what being a lower class woman entails, they do not understand the limitations that lower class women face in terms of job prospects and therefore, they assume that these women choose to enter prostitution and the fact that these women would choose to 'sell' their bodies instead of making a living from a normal desk job makes them immoral as they lack basic self-respect. Society then takes on the view of prostitution being immoral as during the Victorian Era, society viewed the higher classes as the epitome of moral standards and since the upper classes were biased against these so-called immoral prostitutes, society was as well. Shaw highlights the absurdity of society's perception of prostitutes through the characterisation of Mrs Warren. Here, Mrs Warren is speaking on the behalf of prostitutes and hence, we can assume that most prostitutes hold this opinion of themselves. Mrs Warren believes that prostitution is not immoral but rather, the newfound independence of prostitutes gives them self-respect. Mrs Warren asks Vivie, "And what's a woman worth? what's life worth? without self-respect!" Through the use of exclamation marks, Shaw highlights Mrs Warren's indignance to the belief that prostitution is degrading and immoral as she believes that for a lower class woman, prostitution provides them with self-respect and makes their life meaningful. Additionally, her rhetorical question of "what's life worth?", enables the reader to fully empathize with Mrs Warren as rhetorical questions are directed at the reader, thus gaining their attention and makes them ponder over certain themes in the novel. In this case, the reader questions what the true meaning of life is and whether prostitution, as per society's belief, is

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degrading and immoral. Surely, if an occupation can provide a lower class woman with a sustainable income and prevents her from working in a mundane blue-collar job under the exploitation of the upper class, it cannot be seen as a degrading job as the opportunity to earn a decent living to fulfill one's true ambitions in life and to be free from the exploitation and control of others would give one's life purpose and meaning. Thus, Shaw is openly criticizing society's prejudiced view against prostitution. Moreover, Mrs Warren's answer is ironic because, according to conventional ideas of morality, being a prostitute indicates a lack of self-respect. However, to Mrs Warren, independence is equal to self-respect and the only way for her to achieve that independence was through prostitution, as if she had engaged in any other blue-collar occupation, her life would be under control of the upper class and she would be unable to earn enough to fulfill her life's ambitions. Therefore, we can assume that lower class women who became prostitutes had self-respect as they believed that prostitution was not immoral but was vital in providing them with some semblance of self-worth that gave them control over their own lives. Hence, Shaw implicates society as a whole by showing that its perceptions of prostitutes are flawed and unjustified.

Overall, Shaw implicates society as a whole in the business of prostitution by showing that the capitalist economic system exploits the poor and renders 'immoral' occupations like prostitution to be viewed as viable options for lower class women who wish to break out of the poverty cycle and have control over their own lives. Moreover, the capitalist economic system enables those of a higher social class to benefit (mostly monetarily) from the business of prostitution, as they are seemingly in control of the lower-class women who engage in prostitution, while maintaining a facade of respectability. Additionally, Shaw implicates society as a whole by showing that its perception of prostitution is flawed and is merely based on the higher social classes' bias against prostitution and the stereotypes of the working class.

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