Candida
The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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Cover photo: Anne Newhall (left) and Donald Sage MacKay in Candida, 2007.
Candida

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The Reverend James Morell, a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England, is working in his drawing room. His morning is enlivened by a procession of visitors, some welcome, some not so much. First, is his secretary, Miss Prospeprine Garnett, who is arranging his usual busy schedule of lectures. Next is the Reverend Alexander Mill (“Lexy”), Morell’s curate, followed soon by Mr. Burgess, Morell’s father-in-law. Finally, Candida, Morell’s pretty and witty wife enters, followed closely by Eugene Marchbanks, a strange and insecure poet of eighteen years who has become a frequent guest in the Morell household.

Finally, Morell and Marchbanks find themselves quite alone. Marchbanks tells Morell that he is in love with Candida and means to take her away from what he sees as a plain, unhappy marriage. At first, Morell patronizes him and refuses to take him seriously. As the conversation becomes more heated, Marchbanks’s words begin to strike home. Marchbanks is about to leave when Candida enters and convinces him to come and help her set the table for lunch. Marchbanks feels he has won a great victory, and Morell is left alone, with his confidence in the security of his marriage badly shaken.

That afternoon Morell and Marchbanks are again in the drawing room when Marchbanks is horrified to learn that Candida is filling and trimming lamps. He chastises Morell for allowing his wife’s delicate fingers to be sullied by such work. Morell is again angered, almost to the point of violence. When Candida enters, Marchbanks contrasts the filling of dirty lamps with poetic visions of the romantic places he would like to take her where the lamps are stars, “and don’t have to be filled with paraffin oil every day.” Ever practical, she leads him off to the kitchen to slice onions.

Candida soon reenters to find her husband alone. Concerned about his worn appearance, she urges him to stop working and sit and talk with her. She tells him that the women who attend his lectures aren’t really moved by what he says. They simply come to look at him because they, like her, are in love with him.

However, she feels sorry that poor, young Eugene has never had the love that her husband is accustomed to. She is concerned for how Eugene will ever learn about love; and, gradually, Morell realizes that he would be foolish to simply take his wife’s love for granted. He is in a state bordering on mental agony when Marchbanks enters. Finally, Morell leaves for a lecture he has agreed to, leaving Marchbanks alone with Candida for the evening.

While Morell is gone, Marchbanks recites poetry to Candida by firelight. She, however, is deep in thought and largely oblivious to him. Finally, she tells him to put his poetry aside and come and talk to her. Morell returns from his lecture to find Marchbanks on his knees in front of Candida with his arms clasped on her lap. Unembarrassed, Candida leaves to take care of household business. Morell and Marchbanks argue again, about the young poet’s feelings for Candida and about their very differing views on romance, marriage, and life.

When Candida reenters, the two men tell Candida of the arguments they have been having and tell her they want her to choose between the two of them. “I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other,” she responds, and asks what each will bid for her. Morell finally breaks down and weeps but responds to her request with practicality, offering strength, honesty, industry, and dignity. Marchbanks is ever the poet, offering his “heart’s need.”

Candida will, of course, make her own decision, but, before she is finished, she hopes to teach these two men something. She is, after all, her own woman—and, if choose she must, it will be on her terms, not theirs.
Characters: *Candida*

**Miss Proserpine Garnett:** The Reverend Morell’s secretary, Miss Garnett isn’t always civil in her manner; however, she is sensitive, affectionate, and devoted to Morell. Efficiency is her strong suit.

**The Reverend James Mavor Morell:** A Christian Socialist clergyman, Morell is a popular lecturer and an able clergyman and is able to say what he likes to whom he likes, although always with tact. He is enthusiastic, self-confident and generally pleased with himself. He feels he has the perfect relationship with his wife, Candida.

**The Reverend Alexander Mill:** Morell’s curate, Mill is a conceited, well-intentioned, immature young novice.

**Mr. Burgess:** Candida’s father, Burgess is a businessman whose practices tend to be determined by economic necessity. He and Morell do not get along well, and he seems unaware of his own coarseness.

**Candida:** Morell’s wife, Candida is able to manage people quite nicely by engaging their affection. She does so frankly and instinctively, almost without scruple. She is well aware of her sexual attractiveness and is clever enough to make the most of it for her own ends. Her actions also suggest a largeness of mind and dignity of character.

**Eugene Marchbanks:** A painfully shy youth, Marchbanks is miserably irresolute and hardly knows where to stand or what to do. Sensitive in the extreme, his confidence seems to be found only in the poetry he writes, although he can sometimes be petulant and willful.
About the Playwright: George Bernard Shaw
By Daniel Frezza
From Insights, 2007

After the first performance of Arms and the Man, the vigorous applause quieted as the author stepped forward to speak. Suddenly a man booed. “My dear fellow,” Shaw replied, “I quite agree with you but what are we two against so many?” The poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, who was present that night of April 21, 1894, later wrote: “From that moment Bernard Shaw became the most formidable man in modern letters, and even the most drunken of medical students knew it” (The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats [New York, Collier, 1965], 187). Yeats correctly understood Shaw’s importance but he overestimated the playgoing public. When Shaw read his newest play, Candida, to actor-manager Charles Wyndham early in 1895, the latter said the public wouldn’t be ready for it for twenty-five years (St. John Ervine, Bernard Shaw: His Life, Works and Friends [New York, William Morrow 1956], 339). Wyndham’s opinion reflected that of the majority of producers and playgoers of the day. Shaw’s plays (five to date) were of a type new to English theatre. As he put it: “Every subject struck my mind at an angle that produced reflections new to my audience” (G. B. Shaw, Sixteen Self Sketches [London, Constable, 1949], 57). It turned out Wyndham was too pessimistic; Candida was produced successfully in London in 1904 (Ervine, 342).

We think of Shaw mainly as a playwright, but early on he pursued many other ways of satisfying a strong need to express his opinions and ideas. After his basic schooling, he educated himself by a habit of voracious reading; attending galleries, concerts and plays; and by and associating with people who knew about topics that interested him: politics, economics, socialism, art, music, opera, theater—to name a few. Throughout his long life (1856–1950) he was a prodigious letter writer. In his twenties, with considerable effort, he transformed himself into an accomplished public speaker so that he could help promote social and cultural change. By 1889, at age thirty-three, and thirteen years after leaving his native Dublin, Shaw had gained considerable celebrity in the political, intellectual, and cultural world of London. He had published two novels and written three more. He wrote hundreds of contributions to periodicals in the form of book reviews and art, music, and theatre criticism. He was in demand as a lecturer (A. M. Gibbs, Bernard Shaw: A Life [Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2005], 137). He had even tried writing a play in collaboration with his friend and fellow drama critic, William Archer. Shaw felt he had a talent for writing dialogue but not for plot construction; Archer felt he was good at plots and provided Shaw with one. After writing two acts Shaw had used up all of Archer’s plot and asked for more. Archer replied that his plot was an organic whole and he couldn’t add to it. There the matter rested (Charles Archer, William Archer: Life, Work and Friendships [New Haven, Yale University Press, 1931], 136).

Around 1887, through Archer, Shaw became acquainted with, then deeply influenced by, the plays of Henrik Ibsen. The Norwegian playwright’s work was a focal point of heated debate about the social role of the theatre and the moral and religious foundations of society itself. Ibsen spoke to Shaw’s reforming instincts. In 1891 Shaw published the first book on Ibsen in English, The Quintessence of Ibsenism. He saw in Ibsen “the possibility of a type of drama that engaged seriously and imaginatively with moral and philosophical issues in ways that presented a sharp contrast to the great majority of the theatrical entertainments that made up the staple diet of the late-nineteenth-century theater” (Gibbs, 153). Archer, a translator of Ibsen, met the Norwegian author in 1887 and observed: “He is essentially a kindred spirit with Shaw—a
paradoxist, a sort of Devil’s advocate, who goes about picking holes in every ‘well-known fact’” (Archer, 156).

Then as now, in London’s West End as on Broadway, it was difficult to have plays produced if they were unusual or dealt with serious subjects. However, there was enough interest in such work to induce a few people to form small companies performing in parts of London equivalent to New York’s off-Broadway. One was J. T. Grein’s Independent Theatre, which opened in 1891 with Ibsen’s Ghosts (in Archer’s translation). Grein’s venture was successful beyond expectation. Walking with Shaw one autumn evening in 1892, Grein complained of the lack of new British playwrights for his theatre. Shaw replied that he was a new British playwright and that he had a play ready; Grein accepted it on the spot. That summer, after several unsuccessful earlier attempts, Shaw had at last completed the comedy begun with Archer in 1884. He completely refashioned it into an anti-romantic comedy about marriage, money, social position, and coming to terms with being a slum landlord. Widower’s Houses, Shaw’s first play, opened on December 9, 1892 for only two performances. The hope that it might be taken up by some commercial manager for public production went unfulfilled. Once started, Shaw never stopped writing plays. The next performance of any of them was the 1894 Arms and the Man—in the West End this time. Even so, it took about ten years more before Shaw was a solidly established playwright.

America was discovering Shaw in this period and helping to advance his career. Richard Mansfield starred in Arms and the Man in New York just months after its London premiere. In 1897 he premiered The Devil’s Disciple. He toured both plays for many years and the royalties significantly boosted Shaw’s income (Archibald Henderson, Bernard Shaw Playboy and Prophet [New York, D. Appleton, 1932], 363-5). Anna Morgan directed an amateur production of Candida in Chicago in 1899. Archer saw a performance and wrote approvingly to Shaw who gave Morgan permission to produce any of his plays, and in 1901 she did Caesar and Cleopatra (Henderson, 397–8). Arnold Daly’s 1903 production of Candida ran for over 150 performances. He then toured it, revived it in the 1904–05 season, and toured it again. Later that fall Daly authorized two other touring companies. At the close of the 1904–05 season, Candida had been seen in many of the principal cities of the U.S. (Henderson, 407–410). Daly had a successful five-month run of You Never Can Tell early in 1905, then in October had a succès de scandale with Mrs. Warren’s Profession, which was closed for indecency during its New Haven tryout. The mayor of New York threatened to arrest Daly if he opened the play there. Daly courageously did so, and he and his company were duly arrested (Ervine, 347–8).

Instrumental in turning the tide of Shaw’s fame in England was the remarkable enterprise of John E. Vedrenne and Harley Granville-Barker who took over management of the Royal Court Theater, London in fall 1904. That first season they produced a range of classical and contemporary plays, including five by Shaw (Candida among them). John Bull’s Other Island was so popular that King Edward VII commanded a special performance. It was reported that he laughed so hard he broke his chair (Ervine, 346). In May 1905 The London Stage Society produced Shaw’s first masterpiece, Man and Superman, which later entered the Court repertoire (Henderson, 432). When the Vedrenne-Barker partnership ended after two-and-a-half years, the Court Theatre had given 988 performances, 701 of them were of eleven plays by Shaw (Ervine, 347). By 1907, in his fifty-first year, Shaw had established himself first and foremost as a playwright.
About the Playwright: George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw is perhaps one of the most prolific writers of the modern era. Though he is best known as a playwright, Shaw was also a respected critic, journalist, novelist, and essayist. A noted social reformer, Shaw wrote plays which dramatized social commentaries, and in 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his achievements. Today, his works are studied in literature classes worldwide and are considered classics of modern drama.

Born July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland, Shaw was given a Protestant upbringing by his father, a civil servant, and his mother, a music teacher and a vocalist. Through his mother, Shaw gained an appreciation for classical music that he later credited as the base interest which led to his eventual successes.

The young Shaw disliked organized education; at age fourteen, he decided the whole schooling system was valueless and promptly dropped out. But he had a passion for learning, so Shaw gave himself an informal education. He read voraciously, and he frequented the National Gallery of Dublin, where he studied art and history.

At age twenty, Shaw made the trip to London to begin a literary career. He made a name for himself as a music critic, and soon he was writing criticisms of art, literature, and drama. By 1890, Shaw had been published in nearly every major London publication, including The Pall Mall Gazette and Saturday Review. During this time, he also wrote five novels, published mainly in socialist papers, which were never as successful as his plays and essays.

By this time, Shaw was an active member of the socialist movement. He had read Marx’s Das Kapital, and by 1884 he had joined the Fabian Society, an influential group dedicated to establishing a socialist democracy in Britain. As a Fabian, Shaw learned to articulate his ideas and philosophies. He quickly became a spokesman for the Fabians and their ideals. This gave him his first opportunity to express his beliefs in a public forum, and brought his name to the public as his writing never had.

Shaw was greatly impressed by Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen’s plays represented a social realism that Shaw hadn’t known was possible. For the first time, Shaw saw that the stage could become a platform for the communication of ideas. He despised the sentimental melodrama being produced in London theatres, and so he began writing plays of his own.

In 1898, Shaw published his first six plays together in a volume titled Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, which included the play You Never Can Tell. The plays were produced to great critical acclaim by independent and experimental theatres in London. Several plays followed, including such classics as Man and Superman, Major Barbara, and Pygmalion. Soon Shaw’s plays were being published and produced on both sides of the Atlantic.

With each play, Shaw began to place more emphasis on social commentary and less emphasis on story or plot. That’s not to say that Shaw’s plays were not good theatre; to the contrary, Shaw was a master of wordplay, paradox, and character, and audiences were entertained by his works even more than they were enlightened. But entertainment was not Shaw’s intent. To him, the world was an imperfect place desperately in need of change, and theatre was his forum for presenting the evils he saw to the public.

Whether the cause was ending poverty, reorganizing government, or removing sexual stigmas and limitations, Shaw sought to confront audiences with issues of social and political importance.

Not everyone embraced Shaw’s work as great theatre. His many critics argued that art was a means of communicating human experience, and not a forum to teach or preach. Shaw’s plays, they contended, were seriously flawed because of their wordiness, their excessive argument, and their
lack of interesting story.

“Primarily, they are not plays,” one critic wrote. “They are tracts in dramatic forms.” But Shaw strongly disagreed, arguing that “social criticism is the most important function of all art,” and that “literature should imitate life so that we might act on it rather than on some misinterpretation of life.”

After winning the Nobel Prize, Shaw continued to write plays until his death in 1950. His later works never enjoyed wide success. Still, Shaw stands as one of the great playwrights of the modern era. For better or worse, he changed the way the world viewed drama and theatre. With plays like Rent, Chicago, and Angels in America, Shaw’s influence on modern theatre continues to be felt.
Bernard Shaw Versus Candida

By Ace G. Pilkington and Olga G. Pilkington

From Insights, 2007

Bernard Shaw is often thought of as the author of plays of ideas or even propaganda plays where the preaching and the laughing are inextricably mixed. However, the actual writing of the plays and the plays themselves are far more complex than either the popular impressions or Bernard Shaw’s explanations would suggest. The distinguished playwright and critic J. B. Priestley wrote, “Out of his own passion for ideas, his intellectual delight in discussion, the masterly debating style he forged for himself, a brisk good-humour that came naturally to him . . . and a tough knock-about sense of the Theatre, he created a new type of drama” (The Art of the Dramatist [London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1957], 49). Candida, which, according to some accounts, was Shaw’s favorite play (Allan Chappelow, Shaw the Villager and Human Being: A Biographical Symposium [New York: Macmillan, 1962], 201), is certainly a prototype of that new drama, but it was built from many more observations, occupations, and obsessions than are in Priestley’s catalogue.

Shaw, who often referred to Candida as “the Mother play,” connects it to “a few weeks in Florence, where I occupied myself with the religious art of the Middle Ages” and “a very remarkable collection of the works of our British ‘pre-Raphaelite’ painters” in Birmingham (Complete Plays with Prefaces [New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963], volume III, 109-110). Indeed, as Louis Crompton argues in Shaw the Dramatist, “Shaw conceived of Candida as a Hegelian drama, showing the conflicts of two systems of ideals, each inadequate in itself, but both having a claim to our interest and respect” ([Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969], 31). Or as Shaw put it, “To distil the quintessential drama from pre-Raphaelitism . . . it must be shewn at its best in conflict with the first broken, nervous, stumbling attempts to formulate its own revolt against itself as it develops into something higher” (Complete Plays with Prefaces, volume III, 111). That revolt (or at least that strong difference of opinion) involved, for instance, admirers of William Morris as far removed from each other as Bernard Shaw, who “admired the social revolutionary” and William Butler Yeats, who “deplored Morris’s political interests and was attracted exclusively by ‘the idle singer of an empty day’” (Crompton, 33). In the play, of course, Yeats (with a plentiful admixture of Shelley) becomes Marchbanks, while Morrell is closer to Shaw’s basic beliefs. However, no Shaw plan is ever so schematic. Marchbanks is arguably the most frequent speaker of Shavianisms, and Candida also speaks a set of necessary truths.

Of course, there were many other influences on and elements in the play. Ibsen’s A Doll’s House had served as a catalyst in several senses. Ibsen’s vision of Nora as the doll in the house of her husband led to Shaw’s presentation of Morrell as the doll in Candida’s house (Michael Holroyd, Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love [New York: Random House, 1988], 315). The three-way struggle among Marchbanks, Morrell, and Candida has a sense of realism about it that leads naturally (along with Shaw’s anti-romantic principles) to a refusal to follow the normal plot lines usually laid down for such plays. Candida is not resolved romantically, idealistically, or even naturalistically. Even those people who believe that Candida made the right choice may have problems with her reasons for doing so. What sort of romantic triangle ends with the would-be lover sympathizing with the husband? Perhaps some of this complexity and some of Shaw’s insights come from yet another of his sources of inspiration.

With financing from Henry Irving, Charles Charrington staged a production of A Doll’s House “to bring out his wife [Janet Achurch] as a great actress” (Stephen Winsten, Jesting Apostle: The Private Life of Bernard Shaw [New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957], 76). Shaw, who was no stranger to unconventional relationships, was besotted with her. As he describes it, “I found
myself suddenly magnetized, irradiated, transported, fired, rejuvenated, bewitched” (cited in Winsten, 77). He wrote “a sequel to A Doll’s House which Archer read and begged him not to publish because it was” (Winsten, 77) so bad. Having failed with a comedy, Shaw tried to write Janet Achurch a tragedy, but he was compelled to give it up because, he said, “he could write nothing beautiful enough for her, and that he could no longer allow himself to be in love with her because ‘nobody short of an archangel with purple and gold wings shall henceforth be allowed to approach you” (Winsten, 77).

Clearly, Bernard Shaw did manage to create a play that was, at least in part, a homage to his infatuation. Marchbanks suggests that he and Morrell go to the ends of the Earth to find a worthier lover for Candida than either of them, “some beautiful archangel with purple wings” (Complete Plays with Prefaces, volume III, 256). “The rivalry between Marchbanks and Morrell over Morrell’s wife Candida carries echoes from several of Shaw’s three-cornered affairs . . . but was intended as an interpretation of the current drama between himself and the Charringtons. . . . In Candida herself he had written a part at which Janet would excel. Its success, he hoped, would nerve her to separate her interests from Charrington’s, emerging from domesticity as an independent actress of genius” (Holroyd, 315).

However, the play and its early productions seem to have escaped its creator’s control. In Margot Peters’ words, “Candida does not change, as Shaw believed Janet must” (cited in Holroyd, 315). Shaw insisted that Janet Achurch should play Candida, but he could not enforce his casting, and he paid a price for his loyalty. Richard Mansfield, who was to make Shaw famous in America, accepted the play and started rehearsals, but then he cancelled the production. He had many reasons for his action but certainly one of the strongest was, as he wrote to Shaw, “I couldn’t have made love to your Candida [Janet Achurch] if I had taken ether” (cited in St. John Ervine, Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends, [New York: William Morrow & Company, 1956], 340).

In an irony that is positively Shavian (and which almost suggests that the play was writing the playwright and not the other way round), Shaw came to reject Janet Achurch, saying, when at long last he saw her play Candida, that she “wasn’t the right woman for it at all” (Holroyd, 383). Like Marchbanks, Shaw found himself sympathizing with the despised husband, asking Janet Achurch, “How is he . . . to be got out of your clutches: that is what I want to know?” (cited in Holroyd, 380). Bernard Shaw, of course, could claim that he had already provided a sufficient justification (if not perhaps an explanation) for all these complexities in his preface to the play. Speaking of “the distant light of the new age,” he said, “Discernible at first only by the eyes of the man of genius, it must be focussed by him on the speculum of a work of art. . . . The artist himself has no other way of making himself conscious of the ray: it is by a blind instinct that he keeps on building up his masterpieces until their pinnacles catch the glint of the unrisen sun” (Complete Plays with Prefaces, volume III, 111). Or to quote Pippin, “They say the whole is greater/ Than the sum of the parts it’s made of” (Roger O. Hirson [New York: Avon Books, 1977], 95). And finally, in a reminiscence of Falstaff, Shaw is not only debatable in himself but the cause of debate in other men—and women.