Chapter One

Female Position in the Androcentric Society

I. Historical Approaches

A group without a history is like a man without a memory: we need that memory not only to learn from its precious experience but also to contain how some of its earlier success was achieved. In women's history, the question is not "Why were women invisible to history?" but "Why was the history of women so useful in popular historical thought?" (Burstein 2) The popularity has brought out unexpected and meaningful consequences. For centuries, women struggled against those who tried to put them at home as unpaid and under-valued domestic workers. Hence, the study of the past is vital to understand the role and the situation of women. No one writes the history of men from the Old Stone Age to the twentieth century, but women have, in different situations and circumstances, faced many problems and responded to them in various ways. Women's history is a history to challenge the established truths. The notion that "a woman's place is in the home" implies "men going out to work and women staying at home" stemming from a long tradition (Beddoe 3). Within the family, the wife was to be the core of the home, the perfect wife, the perfect mother and the perfect lady. It means that "hers was the private domain: her husband's the public" (Beddoe 23).

The young girl would be educated in her role of "service to the male until she developed" (Beddoe 24). St. Joan lived in 1412-1413, in the medieval age "the lady of the upper classes was important," because in the ideal of chivalry she was the adored one (Postan 27). The superior position of the medieval lady was in "her importance as a wife" (Postan 32). In order to admire the medieval lady's importance as a wife we must observe her in her home, as revealed to us not "in

romances but in records, and consider what manner of life she led, and what domestic responsibilities she bore" (Postan 33). In order to observe the medieval lady at home we must bear in mind that in the Middle Ages the 'home' means a much wider sphere than at many later ages. Throughout the period, social and physical conditions of life, with frequent wars and slow communications, inevitably threw "a great deal of responsibility on ladies as representatives of absent husbands" (Postan 34).

Later, in the Victorian Ages (1837-1901), "the Perfect Lady"[1] was an important model for an innocent child. Throughout the Victorian period, the Perfect Lady is an ideal of femininity. Most of all, she understood the fact that she was inferior to men. The proper sphere of the Perfect Lady was, of course, the home. As Ruskin wrote:

> This is the true nature of home---it is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; … And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head, the glow-worm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot, but home is wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far for those who else were homeless. (Ruskin 108-9)

The ideal of the dependent woman, confined to "the domestic circle", was described in the writings of Ruskin, who regarded the home as "a sanctuary" (Lerner 176). The outside world is an evil one, full of destruction and fight. The industrialized Britain, full with its filthy air, was marred with poverty, crime and disease. Hence,

[1] "It is the stereotypes as the nineteenth-century Perfect Lady. The image, the Perfect Lady, was depicted as idle. Her husband's new prosperity, earned in the wicked outside world, enabled him to support an idle wife. She depended upon servants to run her household---to shop, cook and clean. She was mother only at set times of the day while a nurse and governess carried on the full-time role of child-rearing. The Perfect Lady was, as Lorna Duffin labels her, 'the conspicuous consumptive," qtd in Duffin, L. "The Conspicuous consumptive: woman as invalid." Ed. S. Delamont and L. Duffin. *The Nineteenth Century Woman*. London: Croom Helm, 1978. 46-47. .

within the home the male was submitted to the docile wife, who must be wholly pure and innocence. Hence, if the outside world was dark, discordant and vicious, it means that “the angel in the home brought light and harmony to the secure home world” (Beddoe 25). In addition to her physical disabilities the Perfect Lady was an intellectual one. It is not necessary that she be smart: actually, cleverness is the most “undesirable and unfeminine characteristic” (Beddoe 27). Later the transformation of the Perfect Lady into the Victorian Lady, as Susan P. Casteras in “The Female in Victorian Art” points out, was that of “the Victorian afflicted with Aestheticism” (Casteras 189). Adopting every fed with ease, such as “aesthetic dress and an intense absorption with beautiful flowers and the concept of beauty itself” (Casteras 189). In fact, the Victorian lady, the aesthetic female, escaped from reality into fantasy and was “linked with female indolence and insatiable sexual desires” (Casteras 191).

The growth of this class meant the presence of increasing numbers of women, married or unmarried, whose pattern of life was different from that of women in the past. This group of middle-class women who, discontent with their fate as described for the Perfect Lady, sought to redefine women’s social position. This group provided “the overwhelming majority of feminists or New Women” (Beddoe 30). The contemporary stereotyped image was unlike its predecessor, because it meant that “the title Perfect Lady infers approval, respect and even reverence, the epithet New Women denotes disapproval and ridicule” (Beddoe 30).

With the rising issue of “New Woman,” during the Victorian time, remained many different identities, such as “a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet,” as Shaw’s England is poised to unleash signs of women who aspired to, and in some certain ways, fulfilled the roles

and positions of the society, exclusive to men (Ledger 1). On the other hand, it means that the New Woman was shown as "unladylike" (Beddoe30). There was a deep-rooted and uncertain male hatred shown towards the New Woman. What of the real-life New Women? Who were they and what did they want? They sought education, economic independence and equal legal and political rights.

The new images being expressed on the woman's role; the 'Woman Question' was an increasing preoccupation of the late Victorian society. Mrs Ward saw these views as suitable for promoting women to decline their 'natural' roles as supportive wife and mother, and she felt moral chaos would be "the outcome of any merging of the gender roles" (Hogan and Bradstock 95). Three broad problems appeared, which were mainly named by contemporaries as part of the "woman question" (Helsinger xi). First there was the problem of "nothing to do", the fact that many women, expected to live as ladies in a domestic environment, found their lives compelling and hopeless with no opportunity to display and develop their talents. Second, middle-class women's economic situation was unsafe, since they were most often rely on the earnings of their husbands and fathers. Finally, the jobs only open to those who needed to earn their livings, teaching and dressmaking, were badly paid (Helsinger xi-xv). In addition, the model of the Virgin Mary[2] was "symbolically charged in Victorian England", because she reflected social and cultural as well as religious concerns. (Hogan and Bradstock 159). Victorians' questions referring the role, nature and characteristics of women---what was broadly regarded to as The Woman Question---were, most often, expressed in their representations of the Virgin Mary. Many kinds of these concerns also found illustrated in Victorian representations of the ideal woman, popularly known as "the Angel in the House" which is proposed by

[2] Eve was out and the Virgin was in. If Eve represents the seductive woman to be shunned, the ideal Christian woman to be adored and worshipped is the Virgin Mary.

Coventry Patmore (Moi 63). The ideal woman is seen as a passive, docile and above all selfless creature. Like “the angelic woman”, the Virgin Mary was defined by her role as mother; she was perceived by most Anglicans as sinless (Hogan and Bradstock 156). When Mary did serve as a figure for Victorian Anglicans, on one hand, it was as an example of faith; on the other hand, Mary was important to Christians precisely because “she was a virgin and a mother” (Hogan and Bradstock 166).

“The Virgin Mary” and “the Angel in the House” were important characteristic figures in the Victorian ages, but the topic of female virginity was a disturbed issue in Victorian England. Female virginity was highly valued, until marriage; but most Anglicans rejected it as passivity. “Virginity” in “the angelic woman” means “innocence, naive, passivity” (Hogan and Bradstock 167). Therefore, as a virgin, Mary was “an imperfect model for Victorian women” (Hogan and Bradstock 167). As a virgin, Mary was outside of male control. While the reality in the nineteenth century was that the single life was, most often, a problem for women. The discussions of whether or not Mary was eternally a virgin revealed that virginity was seen as dangerous because it authorized “female independence from male control” (Hogan and Bradstock 167).

Furthermore, the Angel in the House myth surely benefited women in some ways. More importantly, however, the Virgin Mary posed essential challenges to the ideal of the Angel in the House. The Virgin Mary was understood by “Catholics and Protestants alike as a powerful figure” (Hogan and Bradstock 160). The connection between the Virgin Mary and the Angel in the House in those two crucial parts---virginity and motherhood---shows that it was because she challenged “the paradigm of the Angel in the late Victorian society (Hogan and Bradstock 160). The Virgin Mary, however, had historically been seen as a strong woman, by virtue of her

motherhood. Her virginity and her motherhood gave her independent power; it was dangerous for joining the Angel in the House as the ideal Victorian woman. Hence, for a man's point of view, a modest woman, or a proper lady, should repress her sexual desire so that she would seem to have no desire for men at all. The basic reason for women to repress their desire was because the Victorians regarded human desire as entirely masculine; in other words, they saw women as the objects of desire. Women's secondary position minimized their individualism. In this way, women became selfless and functional.

II. Societal Approaches

Women's social identity has long been conditioned by their culture's perception, because they were described as "imperfect males" or "walking wombs" (Davis and Farge 99). Their lives are dominated by society's attitudes toward them in general. Society was still deeply controlled and dominated by men. It is certain, however, that many women came to feel oppressed by the drudgery of the domestic routine and the social isolation. Hence, for centuries, women have long got scant attention unless they talk about men or think about men. Toril Moi, as a critic, says that "women are defined as marginal by the patriarchy, their struggle can be theorized in the same way as any other struggle against the centralized power structure" (Eagleton 201). Compared to men, women did not have equal opportunities for education and work. Obviously, the vast majority of women in Britain belonged to the working class (Beddoe 28). In Medieval Ages, the society in Europe was "primarily masculine in character, with a culture reflecting the dominance, power struggles, and prejudices of men" (Davis and Farge 267). As younger girls grew older, they would go outside to work, such as tending geese or pigs or sheep at about 7 years old, and fetching food to farmer workers (Jewell 56). When older and more responsible they

were, endowed with more work with their parents, trusted with feeding animals, picking vegetables, helping with harvest and so on. As a child, Saint Joan, was a good, simple, pious girl, who was “generous with alms, working round the house, spinning, watching over animals” (Jewell 144). Girls and boys can not work together, and they work at different parts. It is obvious to see that the pattern of the work because of the sex.

As De Beauvoir says, “women have never constituted a closed and independent society; they form an integral part of the group, which is governed by males and in which they have a subordinate place” and “they belong at one and the same time to the male world and to a sphere in which that world is challenged; shut up in their world, surrounded by the other, they can settle down nowhere in peace” (De Beauvoir 597). Most women outside of the society, when compared with men, lacked the experienced at work; therefore, most often, they were seen as the subordinate one inside or outside at home. Women always wanted to struggle for equality with men, but they are trapped by certain factors. The women’s work in the labor market in the Middle Ages was confined to “assisting their husbands while they were alive or carrying on their husbands’ business after their death” (Postan 49). Many unmarried women supported themselves as “shopkeepers and wage earners and many married women carried on occupations of their own perfectly distinct from those of their husbands” (Postan 49).

De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* chiefly discusses the situation and history of woman, and this work also change the viewpoint of the condition of woman. In addition, it has been seen as the important book about women in the twentieth century and has the massive influence. In the eighteenth century, a woman could get more freedom, and “the intelligent and ambitious created opportunities” (106). After the

French Revolution, women got vote. As a whole, the entire history of woman is ruled by man who governs her fate. In *The Second Sex*, she says: “Woman herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today are men” (598). For a woman, she does not think she has the responsibility for it.

The transformation of social condition is away from the interdependence of status and traditional hierarchy towards the same connections of an urbanized, commercial society. As is the same situation with the middle age, among the Victorian ages, the majority of single girls still could find the circumstances of earning their own living. Hence, during the Victorian times, the middle-class women needed to make a living (Carol 176).

Shaw used 20th century, England as the background for the story in the Greek mythology. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza, for example, wants to find a better job to get more money. From the lower class to the high society, Eliza must learn a better language which can upgrade her position in the society. In Shaw’s opinion, gender equality is the method to forge a better society. Under the influence of the male-dominated society, Higgins expresses his lack of feeling about women. He is a man in a patriarchal society:

> HIGGINS…. I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exciting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and youre driving at another.
>
> PICKERING. At what, for example?

HIGGINS.〔coming off the piano restlessly〕Oh, Lord knows! I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other on to the wrong track. One wants to go north and the other south; and the result is that both have to go east, though they both hate the east wind.〔He sits down on the bench at the keyboard〕. So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so. (40)

Higgins does not treat Eliza as a lady at the beginning of the play. There, the fact that large numbers of women in nineteenth-century England and at the start of the 20th century had no choice other than to seek work outside the home, in order to support themselves or their families (Carol 176).

III. Literary point of view

Women appear in literature and documents almost exclusively as reflections of male ideas about them, as "the idols or demons of men's fantasies" (Davis and Farge 267). But we should not be misled into neglecting women by "the many loud male voices alone proclaimed their deeds and dreams" (Davis and Farge 267). In life and art, Bernard Shaw declines to be restricted by traditional approaches to the role of women in literature. Women, without exception, in Shaw's depiction, are arresting and powerful. Shaw's women are different from the nineteenth-century stereotype, feeble, "womanly" woman. He did intend to "create women characters who belong to the types familiar in Western literature" (Adams 158). He often depicts a woman who has broken out of "a traditional female role", or as an 'emancipated' woman" (Adams 158). His women desire freedom and frequently reject the traditional domestic role. They want to master a trade or profession which can maintain their own individuality through their own strength (Adams 159).

In Shaw's plays the women he creates are more attractive than his male characters. The gender equality between men and women is important. Shaw's New Women are not "the ideal and docile womanly woman", as he labeled them "The Unwomanly Woman" (Weintraub 8). Shaw is extremely sensitive to the middle-class status of women in the Victoria age. Since the Fabian movement attracts bright, middle-class young women "who were teachers, librarians, and social workers" (Weintraub 10).

Shaw, as a crusader for woman's rights, insists that women should be equal to men, Saint Joan possesses many qualities, and she shares a common point coming from Shaw's high estimation. Shaw's description of Joan of Arc reflects his inner mind, and Joan becomes one of Shaw's "unwomanly woman," which is introduced in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* written by G.B. Shaw. Watson says "woman is a good starting-point in two ways: first, as the woman's disadvantages give her reason to rebel; second, as her position is a *reductio ad absurdum*(reduction to absurdity) of the more general social ideals which Shaw was prepared to work" (Watson 48). The statement coincides exactly with the idea in Shaw's work. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw, in defence of the "Unwomanly Woman," points out woman, like Ibsen's Nora, a woman should sacrifice herself, in order to complete the duty for her husband and child. These stereotypes of "The New Woman," to some extent, show about the psychological anxieties against the society.

The three female characters in Shaw's plays are rebellious young women. In *Major Barbara* (1905), a young woman, Barbara Undershaft has enough courage and confidence to break away from the conventional life. Being a daughter of an upper-class family, Barbara rejects the conventional life and works in the slum as a Salvationist. She pays scant attention to propriety and decorum, and in the

meanwhile, she concerns about the religious spirit of the Salvation Army.

In *Pygmalion*, Shaw creates a heroine entirely different from the middle-class young women rebelling against their conventional environment: Eliza, the flower girl from the slum. She is transformed from a common ignorant girl into an upper-class lady by learning to speak the King's English as a new language and at the same time acquiring good manners and a superficial education---all in six months. Depicted as emerging from poor people in the slums, she is a model of the New woman in Shaw's depiction.

Among the Unwomanly Women, Joan in *Saint Joan* (1923) occupies a prominent place. Joan has at least partly fulfilled the transcendence. In her time, Joan needed to transcend gender, so that her male fellows could ignore her physical body. Furthermore, Joan's charisma depends on her denial of the Victorian womanly ideal and the identity of fashionable, elegant female type in the world. She is largely ignorant of the corrupt society which resists her and is beaten by her ignorance as well as by her spirituality. Joan is not only an individualist: she is totally loyal to the religious doctrine. Rather, in Shaw's time religious conviction was declining because of new discoveries in science:

> Many of these are terrible to think of--- such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving god; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, &c---yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they shew us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and to our accumulated knowledge…. These miserable and indirect consequences of our highest faculties may be compared with the incidental and occasional mistakes of the instincts of the lower animals. (Darwin 68-69)

Furthermore, Joan, with her need for individual integrity, is a relatively dangerous threat to the established temporal and ecclesiastical authorities of the Middle Ages. Joan is, beyond comparison, the most Unwomanly Woman in the Shavian canon.