

Roundabout Theatre Company

*Student Guide to*

# CANDIDA



Illustrations by Moss Freedman

# George Bernard Shaw (1856-1949)

**G**eorge Bernard Shaw was born an Irish Protestant, in Dublin, in 1856. At the age of 20 he uprooted and went to London where he educated himself at the British Museum. During this period he became an active socialist and an accomplished public speaker. George also developed a strong interest in cultural subjects which eventually led him to the theatre.

Shaw became known as a critic of music, art and theatre.

*Music in London 1890-1894* (1931), *Pen Portraits and Reviews* (1931), and *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (1931) are among the published volumes of Shaw's criticism. He also wrote five novels including *The Black Girl in Search of God* and *Some Lesser Tales* and *Cashel Byron's Profession*.

George Bernard Shaw was not a thespian by vocation. Shaw himself admitted that he had no interest in theatre, and but for his post as critic would never have even visited a playhouse. He did not even become involved in theatre criticism until the late 1890's. As a critic he conducted a strong attack on British theatre and was closely associated with the intellectual revival in British drama.

Though he wrote primarily in comic form, the plays of George Bernard Shaw fall into several categories: "Plays Unpleasant", "Plays Pleasant" comedies, chronicle-plays, "metabiological Pentateuch" (Back to Methuselah, a series of plays) and "political extravaganzas". Shaw based his plays on styles that preceeded him: old characters, old settings, old plots, etc. His works, however,

were shocking and subversive. Perhaps most distinctive were his unique female characters who served as heroines rather than as lovers. In this way he was ahead of his time, which accounts for the lengthy period he struggled to achieve success. Initially, His unconventional ideas and paradoxical situations only puzzled and irritated audiences. But organizations such as the Incorporated Stage Society, which was founded in 1899 to present modern plays, helped to slowly build his reputation.

Shaw also popularized the reading of plays, encouraging the publishing of theatrical texts as art independent of production and performance.

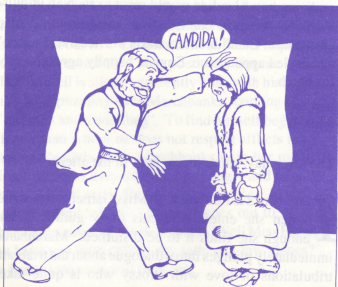
*Candida* is George Bernard Shaw's most frequently produced play. The play was first performed in 1895 and was first brought to New York on December 8, 1903. *Candida* was a revolutionary character for her time. In 1915 the New York Dramatic Mirror said "So voluminous moral is *Candida* in her immorality and so captivatingly immoral in her morality that she is one of the most fascinating exhibits in the Shaw museum . . ." The play is one of Shaw's greatest insights into womankind. Her complex, brutally honest, and

comandearing nature make *Candida* one of the most provocative characters in literary history.

His last play, *Buoyant's Billions*, written at age 93, one year before he passed away, made George Bernard Shaw the oldest practicing playwright in world history.



# CANDIDA



"Candida! Why—My darling!"

## ACT I

A fine morning in October 1894. London. The sitting room of St. Dominic's Parsonage.

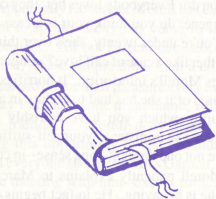
As the play opens, Reverend James Morell is going over his schedule of lectures and appearances with his typist, Miss Prosperine Garnett (Prossy). Morell's curate, Reverend Alexander Mill (known as Lexy), drops by. Morell is in great spirits awaiting his wife Candida's imminent return from the country where she has been staying with their children. Morell sings Candida's praises to Lexy and Prossy. "We have no more right to consume wealth without producing it. Get a wife like my Candida; and you'll always be in arrear with your repayment." Lexy mentions to James that his father-in-law, Mr. Burgess, is coming round to see him. Morell is incredulous, "But he hasn't called here for three years. Are you sure Lexy? You're not joking are you?". Morell, still startled by the news, exits.

Prossy expresses her resentment of all the raving about Candida: "...a man ought to be able to be fond of his wife without making a fool of himself about her... Candida

here, and Candida there, and Candida everywhere. It's enough to drive anyone out of their senses to hear a woman rave about in that absurd manner merely because she's got good hair and a tolerable figure." Lexy, ever-faithful, defends Reverend Morell and Candida to the end.

Mr. Burgess, Candida's father, enters unannounced. He is completely rude to Lexy who decides to make his exit. As Lexy is making for the door, Morell returns. Apparently, Burgess has come to end a long-standing disagreement he has had with James. He claims to have changed his ways and, though not for the best reasons, wishes to reclaim his daughter and son-in-law. Candida enters during the discussion between Morell and Burgess. James swoons at her presence. After sending him out to help Eugene with the bags, Candida greets her father and explains, "Eugene is one of James' discoveries. He found him sleeping on the embankment last June...His uncle's a peer...A real live earl." Burgess is intrigued by Eugene's significant social status.

Morell returns with Eugene Marchbanks. Mr. Burgess greets him heartily and insists that they dine together some time. Marchbanks is quite nervous. Burgess exits. Candida and James tease Marchbanks about his utter politeness. Candida exits.





*"Doesn't it look rather too like a case of calf love . . . Eugene my boy you are making a fool of yourself!"*

Morell insists that Marchbanks stay for lunch making him still more uneasy. He tries to back out of it but James insists he stay so that he can see what a happy marriage is really like. Marchbanks is forced to the boiling point. He bursts out at Morell: "Happy! Your marriage! You think that! You believe that! ...I must speak to you. There is something to be settled between us." Morell, with patience and kindness, encourages the boy to speak. Marchbanks boldly confronts him, "I love your wife!". Morell rolls with laughter. "Why my dear child, of course you do. Everybody loves her; they can't help it... I say, Eugene: do you think your is a case to be talked about? You're under twenty, she's over thirty. Doesn't it look rather like a case of calf love?" Eugene is furious. He argues Morell's inferiority, "It horrifies me to think of the doses of it she has had to endure in all the weary years during which you have selfishly and blindly sacrificed her to minister to your self-sufficiency: you! who have not one thought--one sense--in common with her." Morell patiently explains to Marchbanks how foolish he is behaving. He in fact begins preaching to Marchbanks. Eugene is ruthless, "I imagine King David, in his fits of enthusiasm, was very like you. But

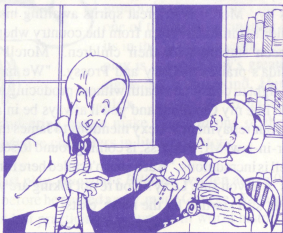
his wife despised him in her heart!". This is the final blow. Morell, physically threatening him, orders Eugene to leave his house. Physicality is yet another source of Eugene's disgust with Morell. Morell backs off realizing how Candida would react to such an impulse. Marchbanks warns that Candida must be told what has taken place. Candida enters and is worried over Eugene's disheveled appearance. Eugene happily agrees to stay for lunch.

## ACT II

The same day, same room, later in the afternoon.

Marchbanks is fiddling with Miss Garnett's typewriter When she enters he steals away guiltily. Sure enough she finds it to be disturbed. Marchbanks immediately plunges into a dialogue about the trials and tribulations of love with Prossy who is quite taken aback. But though she tries to ignore him and threatens to leave the room, Miss Garnett reveals enough for Marchbanks to surmise that she is in love with Rev. Morell. (A fact which he finds horrifying, "is it really and truly possible for a woman to love him?") Burgess enters saving Prossy from this conversation. Between her flustered state and his rude demeanor an argument inevitably ensues and Burgess threatens to have her fired. Prossy exits.

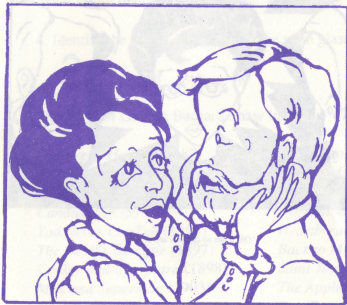
Burgess explains to Eugene that James Morell is completely crazy. (Fine criticism coming from scheming



*"Tell me: is it really and truly possible for a woman to love him?"*  
*"Yes!"*

Burgess!) James enters. Burgess "tattles" on Prossy but Morell completely dismisses these complaints. Morell explains that Candida is going through the house filling the lamps. Eugene is tormented to learn that she is soiling her hand, "your wife's beautiful fingers are dabbling in paraffin oil while you sit here comfortably preaching about it!". Candida enters. She is impressed (and James resentful) at how poetically Eugene speaks to her. Morell is silent, apparently busy with his letters: really he is puzzling over Marchbanks scorning him as a "moralist and a windbag". To find himself beginning to fear a man whom he does not respect afflicts him bitterly. Candida takes Marchbanks with her to chop onions. Burgess eyes this disapprovingly and remarks as such. Morell exits. Prossy warns that Rev. Morell is "mad as a March-hare". Burgess goes out to smoke. When James returns and asks Prossy, "Well Miss Prossy, why have you been calling my father-in-law names?", she bursts into tears and runs out.

Candida enters and sits at Morell's knee. She fawns over him and even tells him that Prossy, as well as many other women, are madly in love with him. "She's in love with you James...they're all in love with you. And you're in love with preaching because you do it so beautifully. And you think its all enthusiasm for the kingdom of



*"They're all in love with you. And you are in love with preaching because you do it so beautifully."*



Heaven on earth; and so do they. You dear silly!" But Candida is not jealous of these women that love him--she feels jealous for Eugene, "It seems unfair that all love should go to you, and none to him; although he needs it so much more than you do." Despite Morell's obvious discomfort she goes on. "He's a wonderful boy: I have grown fonder and fonder of him all the time I was away. Do you know, James, that though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love with me?" Morell, feeling threatened becomes increasingly distressed. Marchbanks and Burgess enter. Marchbanks inquires as to whether anything is wrong to which Morell replies, "Nothing but this: that either you were right this morning, or Candida is mad." But Candida is thoroughly enjoying Morell's torment and goes on teasing him by sitting on the sofa with Eugene. Eugene can not help but react to this game, "I hate cruelty. . . You have made him suffer frightfully. I feel his pain in my own heart. . . I shudder when you torture him and laugh."

Lexy enters. Apparently Reverend Morell has canceled an engagement to speak. Lexy has come to implore Morell to reconsider. All but Eugene are shocked by Morell's outburst, "these people think I am a talking machine to be turned on for their pleasure every evening of my life. May I not have one night home, with my wife, and my friends?". Morell does decide to go however, using this opportunity to test Candida. He announces that everyone (Burgess, Miss Garnett, Lexy) shall attend the meeting with him--except for Candida and Eugene. Morell and Marchbanks both realize the implications of leaving the two of them alone in the house together. Candida is anxious and troubled.



*"Now I can't say anything; all the words I know belong to some attitude or other—all except one—Candida, Candida, Candida."*

### ACT III

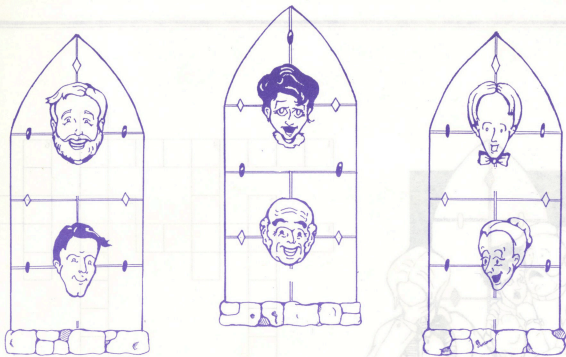
Late in the day. Candida and Eugene are sitting by the fire.

Eugene is reading poetry to Candida but she is disinterested. She asks him to talk with her. He is about to reveal his love for her when Morell walks in. He has returned alone, the others having all gone off to supper. Candida leaves to discharge the maids. Morell and Marchbanks confront one another. But the now cocky Marchbanks is wise to Morell's test, "... don't be afraid. Heroics are infectious: I caught the disease from you. I swore I would not say a word in your absence that I would not have said months ago in your presence." He belittles the reverend's sermons, repeating over and over how little Morell deserves Candida; implying all sorts of secret desires on Candida's part. Finally, Morell seizes him. "Out with the truth, man: my wife is my wife: I want no more of your fripperies. I know well that if I have lost her love and you have gained it, no law will bind her.". Marchbanks is fearless, "Catch me by my shirt Morell: she will arrange it for me afterwards as she did this morning. I shall feel her hands touch me." An out and out war is thus begun.

Candida is furious to find James distressed. She thoroughly chastises Eugene who is taken aback by Candida's vigor. Morell is uncomfortable being defended by his wife against another man. Meanwhile, Eugene is quickly losing confidence. Lexy, Prossy, and Burgess enter. They are giddy from champagne. After recounting their evening, Lexy is sent to escort Prossy home. Burgess bustles out as well. Morell and Marchbanks are left to confront Candida; Morell informs her that she is free to choose between them; he offers his strength; Marchbanks offers her his weakness. Morell tells Candida he trusts her goodness and purity; she tells him it would be wiser to trust in her love. Candida knows which of the two is weaker. Morell has no ability to conceal his anxiety despite what he says. Eugene, however, remains calm and reserved. It is based upon these reactions that Candida makes her choice. She chooses the needier of the two. She stays with James, her husband, knowing that the poet's misery will enrich him and help him to mature. Before leaving Eugene imparts to Candida, "In a hundred years we shall be the same age. But I have a better secret than that in my heart. Let me go now. The night outside grows impatient." Candida says goodbye. She and James embrace.



*"Oh! I am to choose am I?"*

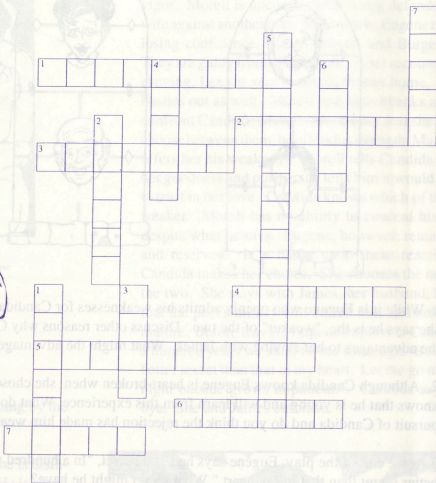
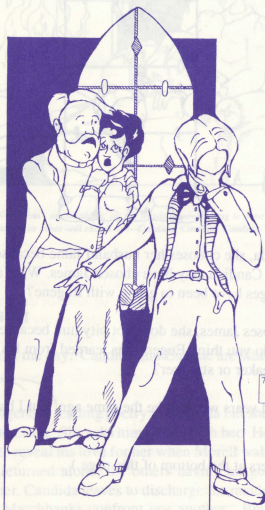


1. While it is Eugene who openly admits his weaknesses for Candida, she chooses her husband James because she says he is the "weaker" of the two. Discuss other reasons why Candida may have chosen James. What are the advantages to her staying with James. What might the advantages have been to going with Eugene?
2. Although Candida knows Eugene is heart-broken when she chooses James, she does not pity him because she knows that he is young and will learn from this experience. What do you think Eugene has learned from his pursuit of Candida and do you think the rejection has made him weaker or stronger?
3. At the end of the play, Eugene says he has a secret, "In a hundred years we shall be the same age. But I have a better secret than that in my heart." What secret might he have?
4. Identify the above characters in the stain glass windows. (Answers at the bottom of this page.)

The plays of George Bernard Shaw include:

<i>Widower's Houses</i> (1887)	<i>The Doctor's Dilemma</i> (1906)
<i>Arms and the Man</i> (1894)	<i>Getting Married</i> (1908)
<i>Mrs. Warren's Profession</i> (1893)	<i>Misalliance</i> (1910)
<i>Candida</i> (1895)	<i>Pygmalion</i> (1912)
<i>You Never Can Tell</i> (1898)	<i>Heartbreak House</i> (1920)
<i>The Devil's Disciple</i> (1897)	<i>Back to Methuselah</i> (1922)
<i>Caesar and Cleopatra</i> (1898)	<i>Saint Joan</i> (1923)
<i>Man and Superman</i> (1903)	<i>The Apple Cart</i> (1929)
<i>John Bull's Other Island</i> (1904)	<i>Too Good To Be True</i> (1932)
<i>Major Barbara</i> (1905)	<i>Buoyant Billions</i> (1949)

Characters: Top, left to right, Rev. James Morell, Candida, Eugene Marchbanks  
Bottom, left to right, Rev. Alexander Milllicent, Mr. Burgess, Prosperine Gremont



### Across

1. Prossy gets giddy on \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Morell is known for his \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Candida's father.
4. Shaw was an Irishman who lived in and satirized life in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Miss Garnett gets irate when Eugene uses this machine.
6. Candida fixes Eugene's \_\_\_\_\_ for him.
7. Burgess calls Candida this sweet nickname.

### Down

1. Prossy calls Burgess an old \_\_\_\_\_.
2. George Bernard Shaw's primary occupation.
3. Eugene's profession of choice.
4. It is not a sword, but a \_\_\_\_\_ that comes between Candida and Marchbanks.
5. Miss Prosperine Garnett has a crush on \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Eugene can't bare that Candida must fill the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Candida's choice.

Answers: Across 1 champagne 2 sermons 3 Burgess 4 London 5 typewriter 6 collar 7 Candy  
Down 1 fathead 2 critic 3 poet 4 poker 5 Reverend Morell 6 Jamps 7 James