Men in Petticoats: Women Characters in Bernard Shaw’s Late Victorian and Edwardian Plays (1893-1910)

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This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. (Man and Superman, xxxi)
Atalay Gündüz

Atalay Gündüz is an assistant professor at the department of English Language and Literature at Celal Bayar University. He is the vice chair of the same department and the director of Centre for the Reasearch and Application of Foreign Languages (YADAM). He worked as an instructor of English as a foreign language for thirteen years at Ege University where he received his BA, MA and PhD degrees in English Language and Literature. He also taught at the department of American Culture and Literature at Izmir University (2010-2011). In 2005 he received a Fulbright scholarship to do research on his PhD dissertation entitled “Turkey and Turks in British and American Travel Writing from 1850 to the Present” at The University of Pennsylvania (2005-2006). He received another grant from Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) for the summer of 2012 and completed his research for the current book at The University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Gündüz is interested in comparative literature, travel writing, modern drama and Irish literature.

The central concern of Bernard Shaw’s approach to the Woman Question in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is the assumption that any human being needs to fulfill itself in order to lead a self-satisfied and happy life. Shaw was acutely aware of the fact that women were denied that very basic right upon the presumptions that women had a totally different “nature” than men and that they were created to stay at home and mind domestic affairs. Shaw creates a counter-hegemonic discourse against the patriarchal and misogynist discourse of the late Victorian and Edwardian England. At the heart of Shaw’s objection to the dominant discourse of his era is the generally held belief that women and men are in their “nature” totally different creatures. Shaw defies this artificial and most arbitrary distinction and declares that he sees women as “men in petticoats” and men as “women without petticoats.” He does not assume that there is any “mystery about woman” instead, he just “observes the world around him.” Yet, as a dramatist, Shaw gives voice to various discourses in his plays. Hence, he has been quoted against himself on many different and opposing points.