

Noor Afzal

ENGL 3540

4/1/2023

Implications of Prostitution in an 18th century text and Contemporary as Proven by *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Gilmore Girls*

Many of us have seen *Gilmore Girls*, (if you haven't you should!), and love it for many reasons.

From the not-so-typical mother-daughter relationship to growing up without a father, to the implications of being a single mother, *Gilmore Girls*, albeit a fun show to watch, tackles serious contemporary issues. In an 18th century novel, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the story of Mrs. Warren whose profession is running brothel houses, in which the author, Bernard Shaw aims to tackle the issue of prostitution.

It may not be a surprise that the notion of prostitution has been used as an insult towards women, however, what are the real implications of that? Shaw in his novel, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, criticizes not the women who decide to become prostitutes but rather the society or the economy that leaves them no other option for survival. Due to this necessity, women in the 18th century were faced with



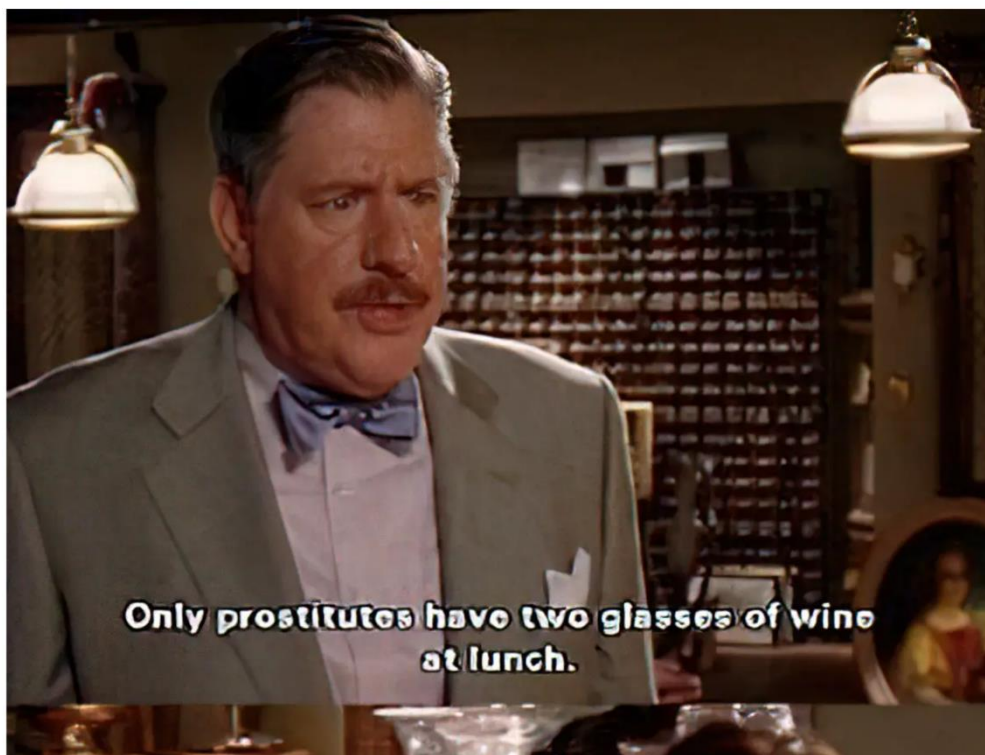
this defacing struggle to maintain their dignity in society, when they had no other means of a stable, and decent income. This issue is quite contemporary in nature as well; in *Gilmore Girls*, there is a scene in which Lorelai is holding two bags and asks her daughter Rory, “Hey, which one says, ‘Hi, I’m not a whore, enjoy your day’?”. This came about during the time, Rory’s best friend, Lane is getting married; and Lorelai being a single mother faces the challenge of not looking like a “whore” or even a prostitute in society. To be successful in this enterprise, Lorelai invokes the use of a man, Christopher, Rory’s father, so that she can maintain her dignity in front of others.

In *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, maintaining one’s dignity comes as no surprise to Vivie, Mrs. Warren’s daughter, as she grew up with plenty of money and education – so for her to maintain her dignity was a higher priority than to survive or earn a living. So, the very idea that her mother owned brothel houses and propagated the prostitution business was like a slap in the face. Vivie in conversation with her mother states, “Wait a moment. I’ve not done. Tell me why you continue your business now that you are independent of it. Your sister, you told me, has left all that behind her. Why don’t you do the same?” (Shaw, 158). Vivie uses the word, “independent” for good reason, as that implies that the prostitution business is no longer a necessity for Mrs. Warren’s living. Furthermore, asking her mother to do the “same” as her sister is implying that Vivie wants her mother to live a more dignified life according to her moral compass. Vivie, at this point in the novel understands the reasons why her mother had to go into the prostitution business, what she doesn’t understand – is why she continues to stay in it, which seems like a valid point. There is no reason to go on with something that doesn’t appeal to one’s conscience if it is not necessary for one’s survival, is Vivie’s thinking and understandably so. However, Mrs. Warren is unable to let go of her business, because that is all she has ever known.

This is because the correlation between this 18th century text and the contemporary issue in *Gilmore Girls* is no different – being labeled as a “whore” or “prostitute” is an insult at any time and place. Moreover, there are similarities between Lorelai in *Gilmore Girls* to Mrs. Warren in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, both are self-made women. Lorelai leaves her rich family, and supports her daughter by first being a maid, then running her own inn. While Mrs. Warren starts off as a waitress, but then manages to own a brothel house in order to support her daughter, Vivie.

Furthermore, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* also explores how Vivie grew up without a father, rather she never knew who her father was. The repercussion of prostitution leads one with plenty of ambiguity on the subject of knowing one’s father. Earlier on in this text, the readers see Croft, and Praed (friends of Mrs. Warren) discussing the matter of who is Vivie’s father. Croft even states to Praed, “I have asked her, often enough. But she’s so determined to keep the child all to herself that she would deny that it ever had a father if she could. [Rising.] I’m thoroughly uncomfortable about it, Praed” (Shaw, 99). It is interesting to see how Croft says he is “uncomfortable”, even though readers see him being very comfortable in expressing his romantic interest in Vivie. The very fact that Mrs. Warren, as Craft states is, “determined to keep the child all to herself that she would deny that it ever had a father if she could” is a direct result of prostitution. So, prostitution is more than an insult, it has serious drawbacks in knowing your nearest relation, such as a father. Moreover, Croft is the sort of character that proposes marriage to Vivie, all the while knowing that there could be a possibility that he is actually her father! In other words, prostitution has the possibility of leading to even potential incestuous actions.

Now, imagine if Rory from Gilmore Girls did not know that her father was Christopher, neither did her mother, and she falls in love with him – how incestuous would that be? It is like a calling to a horrible mythological story. Nonetheless, these are the very real repercussions of prostitution. So, the question begets, is it okay to continue with a proposition (prostitution business) when it is no longer necessary for survival, but has simply become a means of capitalizing on a resource? Individuals like Vivie would say absolutely not – as that is something



that is shunned by society for moral reasons. Shunning the concept of prostitution is a contemporary concept as well, we see this in Gilmore Girls –

when Richard in a spat with Emily tells her that “only prostitutes have two glasses of wine in the afternoon”.

We have long established now that being a prostitute or seeming-like one has been shunned in society, but the real argument is how one’s economic status plays a big role in that part. It’s possible that if Lorelai’s job as a maid did not pay enough for her to survive on, would she have turned to other means? That is exactly how Vivie’s mother, Mrs. Warren describes her situation – that she used to work as a waitress but hardly met ends meet, so she went into prostitution to

put food on her table. Shaw makes the most excellent point in his novel by not critiquing the women who had no other option, but rather the society or economy that compelled them into this position. However, one may question – how much of a role does society or economy play in an individual's life? How right is it of Shaw to blame the existence of prostitution on the economy? And how right are individuals like Vivie to shun the existence of this sort of career? These are the questions to ponder upon as one explores the complexity of such a controversial career or rather enterprise.

Works Cited:

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