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# Shavian Ethic As Evidenced In Four Major Plays

Carol E. Auterson

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**SHAVIAN ETHIC AS EVIDENCED IN FOUR MAJOR PLAYS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Theatre

By

Carol E. Auterson

December 2016

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# SHAVIAN ETHIC AS EVIDENCED IN FOUR MAJOR PLAYS

Theatre and Dance

Missouri State University, December 2016

Master of Arts

Carol E. Auterson

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not George Bernard Shaw reflects in his work any sort of moral ethic—a clearly delineated sense of right and wrong—and, if so, what it is and is not. His method, which is classically known as Shavian Method, is the vehicle employed in his stagecraft to achieve the objective of removing obstacles that prevent him from influencing the ethical opinions of others. In his plays, Shaw creates situations that highlight and over-exaggerate particular issues in the Victorian era such as poverty, prostitution, and religious piety. Shaw's plays tend to be overly argumentative and easily dismissed; it is easy to assume he merely created conflict for the sake of being destructive. However, when closely studied, a pattern emerges in his plays which requires a more thoughtful approach to societal issues. The four major plays covered here are some of the most controversial for their content and for the social problems they highlight. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* touches on prostitution and lack of opportunities for women in the workforce. *Candida* looks at the issues related to pious clerics. *Major Barbara* condemns religious and social organizations for their support of social poverty. Finally, *Pygmalion* is concerned with genuine transformation and its implications. By creating plays involving over-exaggerated scenarios and characters that center on current day issues, Shaw uses a method designed to provoke thought and action for a better society, commonly known as Shavian Method.

**KEYWORDS:** Shaw, George Bernard, shavian method, life force, ethic, creative evolution, censorship

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Dr. Christopher Herr  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
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A Masters Thesis  
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December 2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Herr – why did you have to mention *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in Modern Theatre History class? It has been an education.

Thank You!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1-SHAVIAN ETHIC .....	3
CHAPTER 2-MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION.....	20
CHAPTER 3-CANDIDA.....	32
CHAPTER 4-MAJOR BARBARA .....	43
CHAPTER 5-PYGMALION.....	53
CONCLUSION.....	63
LITERATURE CITED .....	66

## INTRODUCTION

George Bernard Shaw is one of the most well-known playwrights of the modern period. His penchant for word-play is undeniable, but his purpose is easily lost within his wordy debates between scandalous characters. It is easy to assume that he merely argues purely for the sake of being argumentative. However, by reviewing his dramatic and non-dramatic work it is possible to find clues as to what he would have wanted to see happen in his society during his day and age and how he implemented a method in his plays which draw sharp attention to the problems he sees in his society.

His upbringing was out of the ordinary in that he was not raised in the traditions typical to someone of his class; Shaw says of his father, “he had been brought up to believe that there was an inborn virtue of gentility in all Shaws, since they revolved impecuniously in a sort of vague second cousinship round a baronetcy” (Laurence, *Selected*, 434). The Shaw’s were descendents of the gentry. This lack of training is what makes him able to critically evaluate the inconsistencies he sees both in society as a whole and within religious constructs. He did not approve of the double standards he saw within the Victorian era and he called attention to the glaring inconsistencies protected within his society’s framework.

In order to address these inconsistencies, Shaw develops a method of attack in his dramatic works which is designed to show off the faults of society. Eric Bentley comments in his book, *Bernard Shaw*:

Shaw has a secret, though an open one. It is that his famous method, his pose of arrogance, was a deliberate strategy in an utterly altruistic struggle...He wanted his pen to be his sword in a struggle that was more ethical than aesthetic. Wishing to change the world, he wished to speak to the public at large, not merely to his



literary confreres. So he tried to put his genius at the service of his moral passion.  
(193-194)

Rather than traffic in happy endings and well-made plays, Shaw uses his plays to provoke thought and possibly to elicit action to resolve problems. Shaw's intention was to make his world a better place by pulling down all of the constructs that did not work.

## CHAPTER 1-SHAVIAN ETHIC

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on July 26, 1856, to George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw. His father insisted that the family had claim to a baronetcy and was able to obtain a government post, but the post was dissolved and his father had to turn to a merchant trade for employment: the corn trade. Even though his father had turned to this merchant trade, he insisted that Shaw not associate with boys whose parents earned a living in the working class (Laurence, *Selected*, 434-435). It would be easy to assume Shaw's sympathy for the proletariat and his unusually keen sense of questioning stemmed from this double standard his father set up in his formative years. Hypocrisy is something Shaw did not pick up on until he realized that his father-who resolutely degraded pubs (public houses)-was an alcoholic. Later in life, he commented about this point in his childhood: "it is a rhetorical exaggeration to say that I have never since believed in anything or anybody; but the wrench from my childhood faith in my father as perfect and omniscient to the discovery that he was a hypocrite and a dipsomaniac was so sudden and violent that it must have left its mark on me" (Henderson, 12).

Shaw's family was musical: his mother not only could read music, she was gifted at arranging orchestral parts. His father could play any type of musical instrument but was unable to read music (Henderson, 34). Between both of his parents, especially his mother, Shaw was exposed to music daily which helped him develop an ear for it ultimately leading to success as a music critic. Henderson notes that Shaw commented later in life: "he had learned to understand and appreciate great literature through the medium of great music" (39). George John Vandaleur Lee was a music teacher who

moved in with the Shaws after Lee's brother died (Henderson, 35). Lee contributed financially to their household expenses but ended up moving to London in 1872, which left the family in financial straits. In order to find work, Shaw's mother decided to pack up and move to London that year while Shaw stayed behind with his father and worked as a clerk. Shaw's mother needed to move in order to find pupils and to further her talent and to keep things together for the family (Laurence, *Selected*, 452).

In 1876 Shaw moved from Dublin to London to live with his mother. According to Henderson, when Shaw moved he had already developed two extraordinary ideas: 1) he decided he was a great man and wanted to master the English language to become a great writer and 2) he decided never to do another honest day's work in his life. He relied on his mother's income and the one pound per week his father was sending her to make his start (Henderson, 62).

When Shaw joined his mother, he found work writing musical and theatrical reviews. In fact, he credits his mother with contributing to the greatest part of his education: "her musical activity was of the greatest importance in my education...I took refuge in total idleness at school, and picked up at home...a knowledge of that extraordinary literature of modern music, from Bach to Wagner" (Laurence, *Selected*, 446). From 1876 to 1882, he wrote novels and worked intermittently as a music critic and from 1885-1888 he worked as a book reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and gave music and art critiques.

According to Gordon N. Ray in the "Introductory Note" to D.H. Laurence's *Selected Non-Dramatic Writings of George Bernard Shaw*, Shaw's parents treated him as a small adult rather than a child. This gave him a freedom few others in his society had:

the ability to question everything, even socially accepted norms. He had no preconceived notions about what society should be like and was able to look at all points of view (Laurence, *Selected*, vii). He was literal—he questioned the literality of everything. G.K. Chesterton was an ardent critic of Shaw’s principles, but in his book *Heretics*, Chesterton praises Shaw for his consistency and agreed that Shaw was a different breed socially. Rather than accept the norms society had to offer, he questioned all sides of an issue:

The thing which weak-minded revolutionists and weak-minded Conservatives really hate (and fear) in him, is exactly this, that his scales, such as they are, are held even, and that his law, such as it is, is justly enforced. You may attack his principles, as I do; but I do not know of any instance in which you can attack their application...He is almost mechanically just; he has something of the terrible quality of a machine. (19)

Shaw would curiously ask why greenish grapes were considered white grapes and why yellowish wine was considered white—and refuse to, “accept the general belief that white is yellow” (20).

Shaw’s unnerving habit is reminiscent of the Hans Christian Anderson’s story, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, in which a materialistic emperor hires two con men to create new clothes for him. Because no one in the kingdom wanted to be thought stupid or unfit by the emperor, they enable the emperor’s delusion that the clothes are real. The only thing that unravels this tale is a small child in the audience who points at the emperor and exclaims: “He hasn’t got anything on” (Anderson). Shaw stands in the crowd of society and points out the obvious, even when others are afraid of the consequences of what such declarations may mean for their current or future realities.

It is widely acknowledged that Bernard Shaw was rarely ever at a loss for words. In his 94 years he critiqued art and music, he wrote, he lectured and, most notably, he used theatre as a propaganda tool. The subject of each play that he wrote varies, from

prostitution and marriage to war and charity and class struggles, and any written introductions he gives for them usually have very little to do with the stories. However, there is one unifying core ethic which lies beneath some of his most notable narratives: the idea that a “Life Force” is behind the evolution of existence, and that humanity is the most recent product of that evolution. Shaw’s contemporary biographer, Archibald Henderson, comments that Shaw’s philosophy remained consistent: “During his last forty years, Shaw’s philosophy broadened and deepened, but did not essentially change” (761-762).

Henderson goes on to quote Shaw’s comments regarding what he believed to be his purpose in writing:

I am a sort of intellectual dustman. The difficulty is not to induce people to accept new ideas: on the contrary they are so eager and uncritical in their love of them that they are always running after novelties that are neither new nor true. But they never dream of scrapping the old ideas that the new ones supersede: they just plant them in the old garden and never do any weeding. I am a first rate weed killer: I not only appropriate all the new ideas as other people do, but see what their acceptance involves. (762)

As Chesterton acknowledged, Shaw questions all sides of an issue without discrimination or holding to pre-conceived notions of how society should be constructed.

Shaw’s lecture, *Modern Religion*, given at Hampstead Conservatoire in 1919 in London provides a succinct look into his personal thoughts on national religion and the origin of ethics, not to mention his own core beliefs surrounding them. He spends the better part of this lecture arguing what a modern, national religion would have to be in order to unite everyone regardless of whether or not they were a religious person. Even though England has a national religion—the Church of England—Shaw argues that it cannot unify every citizen to the point that they could set aside their differences and work toward

building a better community and improving the standards of living for everyone. Chiefly, he believes the issue of income would be the primary item addressed. “The first thing you have got to do if people are to have any religious, intellectual, or artistic life, is to feed them” (Laurence, *Platform*, 118). Marxism is mentioned in this regard as he believes it could handle the economic side of a stronger community. Shaw debates whether or not such a religion exists or could exist since “It must have room for mystics, prophets, and for priests” and be able to “prevent the priests from stoning the prophets as they always do” (Laurence, *Platform*, 113).

Shaw debates the issue of religion from the side of the “pragmatic” approach which questions if any religion is necessary at all. He suggests that the educated argument for pragmatism is, basically, if it works it’s true, but then goes on to name examples of why pragmatism cannot work in practice. One example is Russia’s state of affairs under the Tsars. The Tsars were able to keep their people under control through the use of illiteracy, secret police, armies, and religious organizations who sanctioned the Tsars’ authority. These methods worked to keep the citizens under control, but ultimately is not an ideal way of how to govern a society (BBC, 1-3). Pragmatism cannot work to develop a unified people. Instead, Shaw says, “You will have to come back to your old Platonic ideals. You will have to use your reason as best you can, to make up your mind there are certain things that are right and certain things that are true” (Laurence, *Platform*, 115).

Using Platonic reasoning as the method for reaching an ethic-or a sense of right and wrong and rules of personal conduct-Shaw discusses Darwin’s argument for evolution by natural selection in which life evolves purely out of need. Written in 1859,

Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was the popular, secular view of his day. It explained the biological workings of plants and animals-in mechanical and systematical terms-and removed the need for a creator; in short, it removed the need for a religious overseer, or god. Some at the time saw Darwin's approach as too mechanistic, however, leaving no place for human activity or free will. In contrast to Darwin, the French philosopher Henri Bergson argued for an *élan vital*, or vital impulse, which opened up the idea of a driving force behind evolutionary movement (Laurence, *Platform*, 127). Rather than a completely mechanistic view of evolving life, this idea suggests that human intelligence can act independently of biological imperatives.

Not satisfied with the entire argument for natural selection, Shaw sides with Samuel Butler's comment that if one removes intellect from the process of an evolving world, everything becomes nothing more than a series of accidents. No ethic or sense of right or wrong can be agreed upon since no basic anchor of belief could exist. Neither could there be meaning to any one person's life (Laurence, *Platform*, 124-126). Shaw purports that there is a Life Force at work which evolves itself through humanity-from the amoeba to the modern human being-and he explains it as a sort-of God in the making, something that will be omnipotent and omniscient in the end:

You really do see that somehow or other...we cannot be satisfied that we are the last word. It really would be too awful to think there is nothing more to come but us. Nevertheless, we may hope if only we give everybody the best possible chance in life, this evolution of life may go on, and after some time, if we begin to worship life...if we begin to try to get a community in which life is given every possible chance, and in which the development of life is the one thing that is everybody's religion...you begin to feel your hands are hands of God...[that] your mind is the mind of God; that he made your mind in order to work with. Then you not only get an enormous addition in courage, self-respect, dignity, and purpose; get turned aside from all sorts of vile and base things, but you get a

religion which may be accepted practically by almost all the Churches, as they purge themselves more or less of their superstition. (Laurence, *Platform*, 128)

Briefly stated, the Shavian Ethic preserves the ideal of creative evolution and allows the “Life Force” to continue moving humanity on to the next higher state of being. Along the path of evolution are road blocks which inhibit life from having the opportunity to progress. Shaw addressed the areas that he believed stunted the growth of this Life Force and used theatre to draw attention to them. Purdom quotes Shaw’s comments made at the 1909 Parliamentary Committee on the Censorship in which Shaw explains his purpose in writing plays:

I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England today with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters. (98)

Shaw has no interest in keeping alive societal or religious ideals or doctrines; he wants us to question everything and accept only those things that hold true.

Plato creates an image of humanity’s imprisonment away from true enlightenment in Book VII of *The Republic*. The allegory describes a cave, or den, in which humans face away from the opening, chained by the neck and legs so that they cannot leave and cannot turn their heads. There is a fire burning behind them and between it and the humans is an obstruction like a screen so that they can only see shadows from the fire reflected on the back of the cave wall which stands in front of them. The sounds they hear are only echoes of passers-by so nothing that they experience is real. It is one or two or more steps removed from the things that are creating the noise or the images that they hear and see. Theatre or drama, from Plato’s perspective, is one of those experiences



which further remove humanity from finding their way out of the cave into the light of knowledge (177).

Unlike Plato, however, Shaw saw theatre as a useful tool to open the eyes and minds of the public to the double standards and antiquated ideals of a decadent empire, in an effort to give them the ability to logically consider their culture's dictums rather than accepting what was placed in front of them. In his preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* he goes so far as to say that art is the best form of propaganda: "So effective do I find the dramatic method that I have no doubt that I shall at last persuade even London to take its conscience and its brains with it when it goes to the theatre" (Shaw, *Complete*, 7).

Censorship was both a road block and an open gate for Shaw: it restricted his work from performance but it simultaneously built his reputation as a force to be reckoned with in the literary world. The Licensing Act of 1737 enacted by Sir Robert Walpole opened a path for the scrutiny of any play that was to be performed in Britain, along with the theater houses that required licensing (Richards, 524). P.J. Crean argues that the Licensing Act came as a direct result of Henry Fielding's series of allegorical satires about the Prime Minister, the most successful of which was *Pasquin, a dramatic satire of the times* (249). In his review of *Censorship of the Arts and the Press*, Joel H. Wiener further explains that censorship extended to Biblical and royal characters in addition to politically charged ones (499). Shaw does not name specific individuals but uses their occupations as background for his characters to scandalize the individuals.

This form of formal oversight was not new to Shaw: censorship had been in place long before he was born. However, he deliberately chooses to treat topics and develop scenarios that elicit negative responses from the Lord Chamberlain's Office. By doing

this early in his career, he all but ensures that his ideas for reform and artistic propaganda, at a minimum, creates enough of a stir that society at large would have to take notice and address the issues and situations about which he writes. Brad Kent sums up Shaw's use of censorship this way:

Shaw targeted the Lord Chamberlain's Office as representing the ideas he challenged, the moralities he sought to shift, and the society he wished to reform. His public battles added to his credibility and celebrity, which in turn had the positive effect of helping him to avoid future censorship because the authorities feared him. (249)

Kent makes another interesting observation regarding *Mrs. Warren's Profession*: he argues that her profession – she is the madam of a brothel – is not the actual issue with which the Lord Chamberlain's office was concerned, since women of ill-repute were strewn throughout British literature. The offensive issue is that Shaw, through this play, points his finger at society as the party responsible for this form of employment since better-paying jobs for working women are not available (236). Opportunities are not enough since there was no guarantee that any of them would provide all that the worker needed.

Britain's Industrial Revolution lasted from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and brought with it plenty of opportunity for growth in various areas from science and agriculture to shipbuilding and industry (Manolopoulou, 1-3). There were ever-increasing demands for labor, including women and children, to the point that the government had to intervene with labor laws to protect employees from the long hours and harsh conditions of their employers.

In her article, "Women's Work," Pat Hudson states that two thirds of females in the lower classes worked for wages in Victorian Britain. Higher birth rates and longer life

expectancies meant larger families and increasing needs for income (1). The employment opportunities appear to be substantial and with so many women in the work force it would seem as if the accusation Shaw makes in his play regarding Mrs. Warren is far too harsh. However, looking at the actual trades available and the wages in comparison to skilled laborers, the playwright may only have used moderate exaggeration. Hudson suggests that 30 to 40 percent of women in the working classes contributed significantly to their households and of that percentage, the largest area of employment centered on domestic services. Next was textiles and clothing, with a large number of women working in metal, pottery, and other miscellaneous trades. Although there appears to be a wide variety of employment opportunities for women, they were generally earned low wages (2-3).

An exception to this trend of lower wages was the white lead trade. Carolyn Malone discusses the political aspects of this type of employment and how government intervened in a trade that gave women higher wages than men but came with a cost of more health hazards than their usual trades. The most dangerous aspect of the job was removing the dry lead after it had been processed and this was the area in which some of the women worked. What made it dangerous was the lead dust that would go airborne and be inhaled by the workers. Many cases of illness by the women in this specific part of the trade along with sensational news articles which played up horrific scenarios in the early 1890's were cited as the reasoning behind the government's intervention. The 1891 Factory and Workshop Act required employers to provide specialty equipment and by 1898 women were completely restricted from that part of the industry, replaced by men

who were thought to have-at the time-a stronger “constitution” and able to perform more work (15-18, 23-24).

In *Mrs. Warran’s Profession*, Shaw creates a specific offstage character for Mrs. Warren-her half sister-who worked in the white lead trade and died from it. This play was written between 1893 and 1894 but not allowed production by the Lord Chamberlain until 1905. The writing of this play appears to be a well-timed hit to that industry given the concurrent debate surrounding women’s health issues in white lead factories. Having a sister who died from lead poisoning helps to support Mrs. Warren’s (and Shaw’s) argument that there are few safe, well-paying jobs available to women in Victorian society. The best paying jobs available to women appeared to be the most dangerous to their health and, in typical Shavian fashion, this type of work is one of two examples he uses in his censored play to drive home his point that society is liable for other lucrative and socially unacceptable trades for women, such as prostitution.

Because he placed such an emphasis on providing decent work opportunities for women, this naturally raises the question about why he insists that women be given the opportunity to earn a livable wage during a time when the “male-breadwinner” ideal was espoused by society (Hudson, 2). As Shaw explains it, the Victorian era erected the notion of women having angelic status. Being a “romantic people,” society used this notion of an angel in the house to give men something to adore or worship outside of their difficult and mundane lives. As he explained in a speech on behalf of the Cecil Houses Funds in 1927, treating women as something other than human-such as an angel-is all well and good until they require accommodations that bring them down out of the

clouds. There are very specific needs women have, particularly during pregnancy, that were not being addressed (Laurence, *Platform*, 172-173).

Work was essential not only for the obvious reasons, such as keeping food on the table, but also for remaining useful. Shaw expressed it this way in a 1927 speaking engagement, "...you have to remember that the leisured woman is not only a menace to herself and to everybody else, but that the leisured human being who has got nothing to do at all...whether male or female, is a predestined miserable person and an injurious person to everybody around" (Laurence, *Platform*, 171).

He underscores this idea using a horse as an example: if you keep a horse as a showpiece- just for aesthetic purposes-it will end up a lethargic and potentially disabled animal. However, if the horse is required to work for even a few hours a day it will seldom be ill (Laurence, *Platform*, 171). Women, as well as men, should work and they should be given better options of employment because poverty was, to Shaw's way of thinking, a disease to be cured.

Poverty is another major social issue that Shaw attacks in his lectures and his plays. During a speech he gave at a demonstration against poverty in 1912, Shaw differentiated the poverty problem from other societal ills: murderers cannot be rehabilitated and thieves cannot be reformed. Poverty is the only curable social grievance that the government could eradicate and this is what he sought to convey to his audience. In his speech, "The Crime of Poverty," he gives details about his life as a small child and being walked around outside by his nurse, coming across the poor. He detested them from a small age and sought to remove poverty from his country, "You can take a poor man and you can give him money. Then he wont [sic] be a poor man any longer"

(Laurence, *Selected*, 94). He suggests that everyone who works, with a few exceptions, produces a surplus and this is what should be used to give to the poor to cure them and help them leave their poverty. To Shaw's way of thinking, employees produce roughly double of what they need. "What are we actually doing with this enormous surplus of wealth?" (95). This appears to be an oversimplified cure for what Shaw claims to be a "disease" in society. Victorian England had a population explosion that has been attributed to improved longevity, more births, and migrations from rural to urban areas as rural opportunities for income diminished (Hudson, 1).

Eric Bentley's review of Shaw's politics indicates that although Shaw was a Socialist who called himself an "old Marxist," it appears that the most Shaw read of Marxist literature was the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital I* and *II*, and that he only understood Marxism on the basis of the economic positions that it promoted. Just as he disagreed with Darwin's evolutionary mechanics because of the determinism-life would evolve mechanically, without human will, on its own-Shaw disagreed with the Marxist position that capitalism would naturally give way to socialism. Again, this left no room for human will or effort. As Bentley states, "Shaw fought the Marxists whenever, like the Darwinists, they seemed to be determinists" (5-7).

In order to move society forward to produce a stronger, more evolved humanity, Shaw saw a need to fight these social threats through speeches, activism, and plays. He also voiced his opinions on the religious mores which inhibited the evolution of mankind but resolutely asserted that humanity had the tools to better itself.

No discussion on Shaw can begin without at least a brief synopsis of his method. One of the hallmarks of Shavian Method is actually something that is not present in his

plays; it is the marked absence of a component at all – spectacle. Shaw had little need for weddings, ghosts, and the like to fill time and stage-space in his stories. He had too many pressing social issues to assail rather than be bothered with creating fictitious happy endings in the manner of the well-made plays of Scribe and Sardou. In *Candida*, for example, nothing appears to happen at all. Most plays of the period revolve around some inciting incident or event to move the action but here the disruption to Reverend Morell's day is an unexpected visit. Morell is anxiously awaiting the arrival of his beloved wife but is instead greeted by his father-in-law.

Morell is an accomplished orator whose passionate speeches are so well known that he is kept busy with speaking engagements in addition to his usual church duties. He is confident in his religious beliefs and appears to have every question about the world answered and every riddle surrounding life resolved. Then, an eighteen-year-old aristocrat comes into the story.

Morell has seemingly never had his faith in his religious beliefs shaken nor his beliefs in his wife's love for him tested until Marchbanks comes back from vacation with *Candida*. This story does peak when both Morell and Marchbanks believe that *Candida* should choose between them—seemingly between faith and reason (Morell) and soul and spirit (Marchbanks)—which is when Morell sets up an opportunity for the poet to spend time alone with her as a test. After a long evening out at a speaking engagement, Morell and Marchbanks confront *Candida* and compel her to make a final choice between them. She becomes indignant at the absurdity of such a notion and decides to accept the weaker of the two, which from all outward appearances would be Marchbanks. Morell, however, is the weaker person she chooses.

In the hands of another playwright or novelist, this would be the point at which Marchbanks passionately flings himself into the night air and commits suicide. Or, Morell's discovery that his wife doesn't love him on his terms (only on her terms) might catapult him into a mid-life crisis and cause him to leave to find Prossy (his secretary) or another mistress. But, this is a Shavian play which has no need for suicides or blatant reversals of character. What happens instead is that Morell is left alone with his beloved Candida and an entirely new set of questions to be answered about the core of who he is outside of his religion and the meaning of his relationship to his wife. When Morell explains to his wife she must choose between him and their young friend he still does not realize that Candida cannot belong to either of them; she is her own person with her own ideas (Shaw, *Complete*, 264).

Another component of Shavian Method includes exaggeration in excess. Theatre, by nature, already has heightened and overplayed themes, plots, characters and everything else in order to convey a story, a moral, and so on. Down to the music and sound effects, any story, however realistic it is said to be, will exaggerate one or more pieces of the storyline. Shaw forces each component to its would-be extreme: by overstatement and implication, Shaw pushes the envelope (and the pen and the paper) to create a willingness by the audience to reevaluate the status quo.

Creating a character such as Mrs. Warren, a brothel keeper in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, was scandalous because she profits well from her business of running brothels rather from another, morally legitimate profession. To add insult to injury, Mrs. Warren does not seem to suffer any consequences-physically or financially-by participating in an unapproved career choice by her society at that time. In fact, she



greatly profits from her business even in a depressed economy. Shaw also goes so far as to give her two half-sisters who did abide by society's unwritten rules of behavior for women and who subsequently suffered dearly for it. One half-sister married a decent man until he developed a drinking problem. The other half-sister worked in a white-lead factory twelve hours a day and died of lead poisoning. By using these two culturally-approved professions, Shaw demonstrates that neither option is desirable for any woman who does not want to live in an abusive relationship or die young.

Mrs. Warren had an older sister who showed her an alternative to waitressing at the local bar. Lizzie's character is written as a suave, sophisticated lady of society who shows her that, even though she may not have talent for music, stage, or writing, she could still earn a living by cashing in on her appearance. Again, Shaw uses exaggeration in his use of a successful sister to Mrs. Warren who shows her the only apparent way to provide for herself in such a society as one that reduces women to chamber maids or abused spouses.

As a final component, the most obvious and well-remembered piece of Shavian Method is another missing item: the dramatic climax of the storyline, or-at least-a climactic point not present on stage. Western theatre in particular uses the climax of any story as the point at which lessons are learned, love is requited, or families are reunited. The climax of a play traditionally signals the end of the story and the subsequent tying up of loose ends (or *dénouement*). By removing the pinnacle of the storyline, Shaw forces the audience to consider the deeper truths and meanings to the story that has just unfolded rather than the literal situations that are played out by his characters.

As an example, the storyline of *Pygmalion* leads up to the presentation of Eliza Doolittle to society as a lady rather than as a low-class flower vendor. The general expectation is that her convincing performance in a public venue would be essential to the storyline Shaw creates particularly when the entire play is centered on this success. Since Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering made a wager on whether or not Higgins could mold Eliza into a proper lady and successfully present her in public, a grand social event would be essential as a climactic point in the story. Did she convince the aristocracy, the queen? However, by moving this would-be climactic point offstage and between Acts III and IV, Shaw removes any of the frills that could trap his viewer into a visually stunning moment. Aside from the stage notes depicting Eliza's wardrobe for the evening-with her gown, diamonds, and accessories-the audience does not witness this first-hand encounter with high society. The information is gained through the banter between Higgins and Pickering. Shaw removes the expected event and focuses on how the lives of these main characters are forever changed by their accidental meeting.

A careful examination of four major plays reveals Shaw's ethic and subsequent method to expose issues with which he concerned himself and that he wanted his audience to consider in order to challenge the status quo. Beginning with an earlier, censored play, each work will be evaluated to peel away the verbiage and expose Shaw's message. One of Shaw's unique writing styles is his refusal to use apostrophe's as he considered them unnecessary in most contractions which is why his plays can be difficult to read (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, footnote 2, 408).

## CHAPTER 2-MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

Mrs. *Warren's Profession* was written during 1893 and 1894 but was censored by the Lord Chamberlain. The first performance in 1902 only came about because the Stage Society-a private club exempt from the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction-decided to run two performances. It was subsequently performed in New Haven in 1905 (Shaw, *Complete*, 1, 4). In his *Preface* to the play Shaw's intention is clear: he wants to challenge the status quo and use his dramatic writing as a tool to that end:

All censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions, and executed by supplanting existing institutions. Consequently the first condition of progress is the removal of censorships. There is the whole case against censorships in a nutshell. (16)

This censored play was an insult to society at large because it spoke aloud an unmentionable topic and a double standard that remained unchallenged in Victorian society. Shaw admits in his preface that this play is specifically written to highlight the fact that, "prostitution is caused... simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together" (3). These are the same words he puts in the mouth of a character from a later play-the Reverend James Morrell in *Candida*-when discussing the shameful practices of Burgess's underpaid employees in his factories: "If on the large social scale we get what we call vice instead of what we call virtue it is simply because we are paying more for it. No normal woman would be a professional prostitute if she could better herself by being respectable, nor marry for money if she could afford to marry for love" (3).

Shaw's method is successfully structured in this dramatic piece which carries out his contention that society does not provide enough options for women to support themselves. Obviously, there are no spectacles made of romance or marriage, and Shaw resolutely creates Vivie, the protagonist, with no sentimental attachments to any ideas of love. She is described as having more classically masculine attributes opposed to the feminine. For example, the mere mention of art makes her ill at ease, and she explains to Praed in Act I that she can't stand holidays and this one will be her last. The entire party of adults discusses ideas of marriage throughout the play, but Vivie-whose marriage they are discussing-refuses to entertain the idea as a possibility for her future.

The exaggerated lengths to which Shaw goes in giving Mrs. Warren a successful brothel business are a hallmark in his dramatic works. Rather than using any of the other more humbling career choices for women (for example, chambermaids, factory workers, etc.) prostitution serves his purpose. It deliberately shocks the audience of that day but it also drives home the point that this is the best that they-their society-can offer to a struggling woman. As Brad Kent mentions, prostitution occurs throughout British literature; the offensiveness comes, though, in how Shaw blames his audience for the scandalous trade. The other obvious exaggeration is how Shaw sets Mrs. Warren up with two sisters who tried honest work and how it leads them to premature deaths.

The anti-climatic scene of Mrs. Warren and Vivie parting ways for life is more thought-provoking than visually sensational. Rather than some sort of angry brawl and subsequent tearful scene between the mother and daughter reconciling their differences, we see a cold, indifferent Vivie more intent to carry out her career plans and a near hysterical Mrs. Warren who vows to build her career up even more and not look back.

Vivie Warren has spent her entire life ignorant of how her mother earned a living. She was raised by paid caretakers and attended schools and college but knew very little about her mother. She knew Mrs. Warren spent time working abroad but outside of the few short visits over the years Vivie did not know her mom:

Since I was a child I have lived in England, at school or college, or with people paid to take charge of me. I have been boarded out all my life. My mother has lived in Brussels or Vienna and never let me go to her. I only see her when she visits England for a few days. I don't complain: it's been very pleasant; for people have been very good to me; and there has always been plenty of money to make things smooth. But don't imagine I know anything about my mother. I know far less than you do. (Shaw, *Complete*, 39)

Essentially, Vivie and her mother were friendly acquaintances who only meet every so often. The title "mother" is probably even foreign to Vivie since it is a title reserved for a distant relative.

Though the play is called *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Vivie is arguably the protagonist of this play. It is she who undergoes the most radical change in her perception of who she is and her heritage. More importantly, what she does at the end of Act IV puts action to her transformation in that she refuses to continue to live in what appears to be a dishonest way of life: she decides to cut herself off from the monthly allowance she receives from her mother. Vivie begins her change in total ignorance; she has no idea what her mother's career is and apparently has never asked. The first conversation we hear is between her and her mother's friend, Praed, who assumes that Vivie knows about the business but quickly realizes the truth and decides to withhold that information believing Mrs. Warren should be the one to fill her in on the details.

When the play opens, Vivie appears to be a very matter-of-fact, no-nonsense, logical woman who tells Praed she intends to start earning her own living after she meets

with her mother. She is already expecting a fight over this but after Praed hints at the potential scandal of her mother's life she decides to use that to her advantage later during their visit. Her intention is to work for Honoria Fraser in the city as a conveyancer and an actuary. She knows her mother would not approve and with this hint of scandal from Praed she decides to use that to win her upcoming argument with Mrs. Warren: "Only mind this, Mr. Praed. I expect there to be a battle royal when my mother hears of my Chancery Lane project...I shall win, because I want nothing but my fare to London to start there to-morrow earning my own living...Besides, I have no mysteries to keep up; and it seems she has. I shall use that advantage over her if necessary" (Shaw, *Complete*, 40).

Her mother eventually does tell her the truth but in the past tense as if that part of Mrs. Warren's life is over, so that by the end of Act II we see a more sympathetic Vivie believing that the harsh reality of Mrs. Warren's youth drove her mother into a career path that was later abandoned. When Vivie attempts to question her mother's choices, Mrs. Warren argues back with her own logic, echoing Shaw's comments from his preface:

The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she cant expect it: why should she? it wouldnt be for her own happiness. Ask any lady in London society that has daughters; and she'll tell you the same, except that I tell you straight and she'll tell you crooked. Thats all the difference. (Shaw, *Complete*, 60)

Vivie is awed by her mother's response and replies, "You have got completely the better of me tonight, though I intended it to be the other way. Let us be good friends now" (Shaw, *Complete*, 70). They embrace as the best of friends and the issue of Mrs.

Warren's scandalous past appears to be accepted even by Vivie; but she does not yet know that her mother continues to work in the brothel.

Act III occurs the next morning while the group is touring part of the countryside where Vivie's friend, Frank, lives with his father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner at a small rectory. Frank is disturbed by the physical affection Vivie is showing to her mother and attempts to reason with her that Mrs. Warren is really a wretch. Since she is unaware that her mother still operates her business, Vivie is confused by Frank's remarks and warns him not to disrespect her parent just because she had no other alternatives in life. Mrs. Warren's older business partner, Sir George Crofts, comes back from the tour to speak with Vivie so Frank leaves. It is Crofts who explains to her that the business is not just profitable, but that it is thriving. Her mother is a managing director for several *hotels* in various locations which can still turn a good profit even in a down economy.

Crofts wants to offer Vivie a convenient way out of unwanted scrutiny of her mother's business by marrying him, since the most socially reasonable thing for her to do with her life is to marry. Given that her mother operates brothels, Vivie's prospects for marriage would be limited in polite society. Since he has a title, is twice her age (i.e. he would predecease her), and has plenty of money, he can offer her security and discretion. Disgusted with this new facet of the truth, Vivie leaves the rectory garden and travels back to Chancery Lane, her new place of employment. Having learned the whole truth about her mother's profession, she decides to discontinue accepting her mother's monthly allowance immediately and live independently on her own terms. Act IV begins with Vivie explaining to Frank she never wants to marry. Earlier in the play the insinuation is made that Frank is possibly Vivie's half-sister since Mrs. Warren refuses to reveal who is

Vivie's father. Out of spite Crofts tells Vivie that Frank is, in fact, her brother. When Vivie says her goodbyes to Frank in Act IV she explains to Frank that she would have preferred that they were related, "It's the only relation that I care for, even if we could afford any other. I mean that" (Shaw, *Complete*, 90). When Mrs. Warren arrives a few minutes later, Vivie says that she no longer wants to have a relationship with her, "If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another... That is why I am bidding you goodbye now" (Shaw, *Complete*, 104).

Vivie begins her journey as a well-educated young woman who is ignorant of the truth of her mother's life. After learning a small facet of the truth she is able to find sympathy for her mother and for others in similar situations that have few alternatives. She quickly becomes enraged after learning the whole truth and decides to not only follow through on her plan to support herself-something she discussed in Act I with Præd-but to cut off all ties to her mother and her mother's income.

Mrs. Warren may not necessarily appear to be an antagonist but she does impede Vivie's path to wisdom. She also transforms through the play but it is more of a devolving process juxtaposed to Vivie's evolving path. She has a well-established business and has all the things money can buy. She is expecting to have a pleasant visit with her daughter and her friends during their holiday. From all outward appearances she seems to have everything she wants except her daughter's attention and, later, her daughter's respect. Mrs. Warren's compelling argument regarding her past choices leave the impression that she is now a respectable person in society and Vivie ceases to question anything about her mother's life. Had Mrs. Warren given her daughter the



entire truth during their argument in Act II Vivie might have carried out her plan of independence earlier, but it would not have lead to the dramatic tension in Act IV.

In Act I Mrs. Warren arrives with Crofts and the entire party enjoys tea and a walk later in the day. She appears to be one of those petty frivolous women Shaw denounces in his non-dramatic writing. His description of her appearance in the stage notes indicates that she tries too hard to keep up the appearances of being respectable. She complains about trivial issues-walking too far, eating supper too late-but when left alone with her daughter at the end of Act II she attempts to take charge of Vivie as if she were still a child who needed a parent. Vivie expresses her independence and for the first time she realizes that her daughter has a mind of her own and will not tolerate being told how to live.

Their quarrel begins after their guests leave for the evening and they discuss the qualities of Frank and Crofts. Mrs. Warren cannot accept that Vivie knows anything about the subject, "What do you know of men, child, to talk that way about them?" (Shaw, *Complete*, 61). At this point she expresses her expectation that Vivie will live with her until she marries. Vivie calmly explains to her that she will not be living with her, or getting married, but will go to work earning her own living. When Mrs. Warren attempts to compel Vivie to respect her based on the fact that she has certain rights as Vivie's mother, Vivie comes back with a sound argument based on the fact that their entire family is a mystery:

Then where are our relatives? my father? our family friends? You claim the rights of a mother: the right to call me fool and child; to speak to me as no woman in authority over me at college dare speak to me; to dictate my way of life; and to force on me the acquaintance of a brute whom anyone can see to be the most vicious sort of London man about town. (Shaw, *Complete*, 63)

Not to be outdone, Mrs. Warren responds by explaining how Vivie has had the opportunity to have a stable, decent life with a good home and a good education. It was due to her sacrifices that Vivie has options in a better career than their family, and her sacrifices should be respected. In effect, it's as if Mrs. Warren is warning Vivie not to bite the hand that feeds her. Her comments through the entire conversation at the end of Act II echo Shaw's insistence that options for working women are either too limiting or too dangerous. The most any woman could hope for was to marry a good man who could provide for her. Bars, lead factories, and abusive men are the examples Mrs. Warren uses to argue her point that women have too few choices to provide for themselves.

Mrs. Warren then reveals a small part of her business to Vivie but suggests it is in the past. She only gives her clues and facts as to the very early years when she was young and trying to live on wages that never provided for all of her needs. The justification she uses for her choices are that of her older sister, Lizzie, and their two younger half-sisters. The two younger ones died early, one of lead poisoning working in a factory and the other from an abusive marriage. If dying young was the only way to be considered respectable, Mrs. Warren wanted no part of it. She and Lizzie attended a religious school and were warned against particular ways of living, but one night Lizzie left home and never came back. The priest thought she would soon follow her sister but when she didn't, he was able to set her up with employment as a scullery maid-hard work for very little money. Even after being promoted to working at the bar she still had a difficult time providing for herself. Thus, she learned that respectable work leads to an early grave, and she would not hear of it. Since she had no other talents aside from her good looks she

listened to Lizzie's advice one night and accepted a loan to begin her business. Lizzie had been saving up to purchase a house in Brussels, and she gave Mrs. Warren a chance to work with her: "Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shopgirls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely" (Shaw, *Complete*, 67). She pleads with Vivie, "I always thought that oughtn't to be. It can't be right, Vivie, that there shouldn't be better opportunities for women" (Shaw, *Complete*, 68).

By the end of this conversation, Mrs. Warren has finally gained Vivie's respect: she has been justified in her plight to her daughter. However, this is only part of the truth. It is evident that she leaves out the other part of her life because by this point in their holiday she knows that Vivie is intelligent and holds to her own principles gained from being raised by a society of double standards. She dares not let Vivie in on the fact that the business has continued to the present day. The next morning when they head out for the rectory garden she enjoys her daughter's physical affection and takes a tour of the grounds with the rest of her group. What she doesn't find out until later is that Crofts has told Vivie that they are in fact still in business, with no signs of giving any of it up for a 'respectable' career.

Mrs. Warren embarks on her own journey through this play but it is more of a path from acknowledging her duplicitous life to making the choice to be consistent in how she behaves as manager behind a thriving-albeit scandalous-business. Before her trip begins she is content to put on airs and superficially behave as a respectable lady of society while profiting from an unrespectable career below the surface. It's possible that

up until she and Vivie had their quarrel that she would have continued down her path of ‘fashionable morality,’ continuing to say one thing while meaning something else. Once she is exposed, she offers her daughter some of the same excuses we see today; she attempts to further justify herself and asks Vivie to look the other way.

Mrs. Warren offers Vivie a life of leisure; money is no object, and if Vivie does take her up on the offer to live like her, she says, “trust me, nobody will blame you: you may take my word for that” (Shaw, *Complete*, 100). She then explains that if she left the business someone else would replace her—regardless of what Vivie believes about it, someone will always keep this kind of business alive: “If I don’t do it somebody else would; so I don’t do any real harm by it” (Shaw, *Complete*, 102). If leaving the business has no impact on whether or not that particular field goes away completely, why not stay and reap the benefits? Her more emphatic excuse is that Vivie owes her loyalty as a mother: “We’re mother and daughter...I’ve a right to you...You’ve no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter” (Shaw, *Complete*, 103). As Vivie’s resolve holds, Mrs. Warren completes her journey.

I always wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work; and I was slave-driven until I cursed the day I ever heard of honest work. I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I was a leper...From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I’ll do wrong and nothing but wrong. And I’ll prosper on it. (Shaw, *Complete*, 104)

Edmund Fuller sums up Mrs. Warren’s life in two parts, “What her mother had done in the first instance was from a sort of necessity. What she continues to do now is from greed and corruption with no mitigating circumstances” (Shaw, *Complete*, 23). Mrs. Warren has no reason now—later in life—to continue on with such a business. In the

beginning it appeared to be her only way out of a poverty-stricken life; however, now, it is out of greed that she continues to keep her brothels running.

Both Vivie and her mother change throughout the course of the play and they make monumental decisions at the end. Vivie appears to be the quintessential Shavian ideal in that she sees the double standards of life, realizes that she benefits from something with which she disagrees, and alters her course in order to live consistent with her conscience. She knows the consequences and is content to work around them in order to avoid supporting or condoning her mother's career.

Eric Bentley explains Shaw's use of Mrs. Warren's career as a symbol for capitalism: "In a society of buying and selling the vast mass of the population has nothing to sell but itself. Capitalism ought thus...to be called proletarianism, which again is but a polite word for prostitution. Mrs. Warren's profession is only the most dramatic example of proletarianism" (Shaw, *Complete*, 6). Mrs. Warren is, no doubt, an extreme example for Shaw's refusal to accept a capitalist point of view; she is not someone we should look up to for inspiration. Greed is not a trait anyone in society should aspire to cultivate and Mrs. Warren is the epitome of greed. Mrs. Warren does change; however, it is in the opposite direction of her daughter. Rather than take Vivie's advice to quit the business, she digs her heels in even deeper and declares that were she able to do anything over again in her life she would raise Vivie herself while running her brothels.

Michael Holroyd originally wrote a biography of Shaw in four volumes beginning in 1988 and it was later published as one volume in 1997. He comments that the problem of prostitution at that time began to exceed slum-landlordism as a Victorian 'social evil.' "In representing prostitution as an economic phenomenon...Shaw was writing from the

point of view of women; but he also wrote as a socialist...who prescribed as his remedy a living wage for women” (Shaw, *Complete*, 164-165). By using prostitution as a vehicle, Shaw made his point that everyone, including women, should be given opportunities to work and earn a livable wage or accept the fact that unacceptable careers will continue to thrive.

### **CHAPTER 3-CANDIDA**

*Candida* is one of Shaw's better known plays and it is more palatable than *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in that he doesn't attack something so controversial to Victorian etiquette. In this play Shaw creates a protagonist, Morell, who is self-righteous but kind and lovable and who asserts some of the concepts Shaw espoused, such as honest work and wages. The counterpoint to this character is arguably Marchbanks, the antagonist, who is in tune with *Candida's* soul but he is unable to understand why she is content to live with such a conceited individual as Morell.

In his book, *A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw*, C.B. Purdom begins his instruction of how to stage *Candida* with an introduction to its theme. The play, written in 1894, is "Shaw's best constructed play, classic in its economy and observance of time and place, and in some ways probably his most important play, highly interesting from a technical point of view as a play of anti-climax. In it, too, he disclosed himself as he seldom did before or after, displaying the naked conflict between the poet and commonsense" (164). Though the play is titled for his wife, *Candida*, Morell is the focus of the dramatic action. It is he who faces the reality not only of his hollow façade but also the unexpected perspectives of his wife and others around him. He is the typical voice of reason-or commonsense-while an eighteen-year-old poet is the voice of love-or sentiment.

Purdom goes on to quote Frank Harris's biography of Shaw when he says that Morell has no idea that his wife has a soul which relates to Henrick Ibsen's *A Doll's House*: Torvald Helmar (the husband) does not acknowledge that Nora (his wife) has a

soul (165). However, rather than leaving her husband and children as Nora does, Candida exposes Morell to his duplicitous ideals which, by the end of Act III, Morell acknowledges as correct.

William Irvine calls *Candida* Ibsen's *A Doll's House* upside down: "Ibsen had shown that unhappiness results when a husband treats his wife as a doll. Shaw points out that happiness may result when a wife treats her husband as a doll" (497). In fact, Candida has successfully supported Morell's talent for so long that his perception of his success is overly inflated. Shaw describes him being a blunt person but able to get away with it because he is such a good-hearted speaker and reverend: "Withal, a great baby, pardonably vain of his powers and unconsciously pleased with himself" (Shaw, *Complete*, 201). Shaw is also sure to point out that Morell is not aware of his own self pride. Once his daily routine is disrupted by family and friends, he becomes conscious of his short-comings and starts a complete reversal of attitude from where he is at the beginning of Act I when Marchbanks arrives. Shaw leaves the impression that matters in the Morell house are forever changed, and probably for the better.

The Reverend James Mavor Morell is a forty-year-old cleric whose speaking abilities are in high demand. He is surrounded by supporters either who are in love with him or who want to be him due to his ability to turn a phrase and rouse an audience. Those who do not fall into either category find ways to support his view of his own self-image or they say nothing. Either way, Morell is stuck in a delusion of self-importance which is shaken to the core when his wife returns home from a trip with an eighteen-year-old family friend.



Morell is a boisterous person and we find him in Act I overly praising his wife, anticipating her return home from a vacation. To his young curate, Alexander Mill, he says of his wife, “An honest man feels that he must pay Heaven for every hour of happiness with a good spell of hard unselfish work to make others happy. We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it. Get a wife like my Candida; and youll always be in arrear with your repayment” (Shaw, *Complete*, 204). Still unaware of Candida’s basis for her love of him, Morell expresses a piece of Shavian ethic: we’ve no right to happiness or wealth without working to produce either.

Two characters who work with Morell daily prevent him from understanding his own delusions of self-importance and, more importantly, understanding his wife’s love for him. Morell’s protégé is a young Oxford-trained reverend named Alexander Mill (Lexy) who worships the ground he walks on. His secretary is Miss Prosperpine Garnett (Prossy) who keeps his appointments, speaking engagements, and handles all his correspondence; she is also in love with him. Morell is someone to emulate, according to Lexy, but Prossy is impatient with how Morell praises his wife: after he leaves the drawing room in Act I she expresses her sentiment to Lexy, “Candida here, and Candida there, and Candida everywhere! It’s enough to drive anyone out of their senses to hear a woman raved about in that absurd manner merely because she’s got good hair and a tolerable figure” (Shaw, *Complete*, 205).

Prossy’s annoyance is understandable considering she is in love with Morell, but Lexy expresses shock at her comments. Lexy admires his mentor and attempts to “follow his example, not to imitate him” as Prossy insists (Shaw, *Complete*, 206). Lexy views

Morell as a genuinely sincere pastor who cares for all of his church members and for the causes he supports (socialism). Lexy is offended when Prossy has the final word during their exchange, which ends with her citing several tangible examples where Lexy behaves one way in front of an audience and another when he thinks no one is watching; “Why do you walk with your chin stuck out before you...Why do you say ‘knoledge’ in church, though you always say ‘knolledge’ in private conversation!” (Shaw, *Complete*, 207). Surrounded by these two employees who only support his perspectives of religion and socialism, Morell continues to remain stuck in his self-righteous ideals without a contradicting viewpoint. But this changes when Marchbanks is introduced into the plot.

Morell’s father-in-law, Burgess, is another character who remains a distraction for Morell. What is interesting about the relationship between Morell and Burgess is that Morell can correctly perceive the truth about his father-in-law but not about himself. Burgess is a businessman who is notorious for not paying his employees fair wages. Burgess hasn’t come around in several years due to a disagreement over a lost contract: Morell was upfront about the business practices of Burgess and as a result the contract went to someone else. Burgess arrives at the end of Act I to ‘forgive him.’ Morell knows that Burgess is a bad employer and that the wages he pays are “starvation wages” that would “have driven them [female employees] to the streets to keep body and soul together” (Shaw, *Complete*, 209). He insists that Burgess should be honest about how the business is run rather than posturing as if Burgess, himself, has truly changed. Again, the delusions Burgess expresses are more obvious to Morell than his own.

Marchbanks is the one who is able to come in and chisel away at the cracks in Morell’s confidence and who is finally able to break through to expose deep insecurities

upon arriving home after a three-week vacation. Eugene Marchbanks is an eighteen-year-old aristocrat who has no tact or sense of propriety when around other people. He is a poet and is passionate about pursuing honest and real emotion, particularly love, but the simple pleasantries of society are a mystery to him. The day-to-day menial tasks of life are lost on him; he doesn't even know how much he should pay the cab driver when he and Candida arrive. He is delayed from joining the others in the drawing room because he is worried about what to give the cabbie as a tip. His parents have not nurtured him as they did his older siblings, and he has been left mostly alone to learn about the world on his own.

Even though he is the character Shaw uses to unhinge Morell's self-inflated ideas and confidence, Eugene does evolve down his own path starting in Act I as a mere youth and ending up as an understanding adult by the end of Act III. The beginning of the play shows him as a timid young aristocrat with a keen insight into the human soul. Marchbanks declares his love for Candida to Morell at the end of Act I but Morell laughs it off as "calf love" and insists that no one can help but love his wife. Marchbanks interprets this reluctance to accept his declaration of love as an indication that Morell does believe him. By the end of their conversation, Morell's confidence in his love (and Candida's love for him) has been shaken to the core. Marchbanks cannot understand what Candida sees in her husband and wants to free her from the "metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric" which she has had to live with all these years (Shaw, *Complete*, 223). By announcing his love for Candida so quickly after they arrive, it is clear Marchbanks is still a child. If he had feelings of this sort and he truly loved her he could have found a less direct approach to express, them or at least have found a way to

respect Morell and not mention them at all since it is clear Candida chose Morell as her husband. It is possible, too, that Marchbanks saw no need to corral love under restrictive, socially constructed institutions such as marriage but this is perfectly in keeping with Shaw, too—marriages only work if they are marriages of people who know what they are getting into. He has all the intuition of an older adult but none of the wisdom in how to treat the people around him.

Marchbanks treats Prossy in the same manner later that afternoon in Act II when they are alone because he can clearly see what the others cannot about her love for Morell. He does not understand how anyone can love “words” and asks her, “I want to know: I must know. I cant understand it. I can see nothing in him but words, pious resolutions, what people call goodness. You cant love that.” He ends with the question, “Is it possible for a woman to love him?” to which she finally admits, “Yes” and they are interrupted by Burgess (Shaw, *Complete*, 231).

As household tasks are mentioned throughout Act II—and he sees Candida managing them—he flies into a fit of utter disgust at the thought of her having to handle paraffin oil and onions and the dirty boots of her husband. Instead of attempting to understand how these tasks are normal for everyday working people, he insists on handling all of the undesirable tasks while he is in their home. To save her delicate hands, his answer to performing the mundane tasks of life is a poetic one, to live in nature “where the lamps are stars, and dont need to be filled with paraffin oil everyday” (Shaw, *Complete*, 236). Morell retorts, in typical Shavian fashion, that the trouble is Marchbanks wants to be idle, selfish, and useless.

By Act III, Marchbanks has witnessed how Candida is able to torment Morell by making light of her husband's ideals and followers. He realizes that Candida does see through the pomp and grandiosity of Morell's preaching and he finds a new respect for the reverend. By the end of Act III Marchbanks is in awe of Morell when Morell chases everyone out into the evening to watch his next speaking engagement, leaving him alone with Candida for several hours. Even when tempted to speak frankly with Candida about his love for her while the others are out, he resists his urge and contents himself to read poetry for fear that if he stopped his recitation, he would have to converse with her and he would not be able to hide his true feelings. In the end, when Candida explains to them both how she arrives at her decision he knows immediately whom she has chosen; he understands her sentiments toward Morell and why she chose him long ago. He gets up and leaves into the night alone.

Marchbanks is an intuitive young adult; however, he does not have the emotional maturity to wield his gift like an expert for the benefit of others. His clumsy confession to Morell of his love for Candida is the biggest indicator of how unprepared he is to consider the feelings of anyone else. He is more interested in forcing the truth out of the Morell household and anyone in it, rather than in the consequences of what his confessions (or anyone else's) could mean for their lives long term. In this way, Marchbanks is reminiscent of the child who points to the naked Emperor; he is Shaw who cannot accept that white wine is yellow.

Both Morell and Marchbanks evolve throughout the play but each stumble along the way. Morell's popularity keeps him blind to his own shallowness. His love of religion and his speaking abilities prevent him from finding the truth of who he is and why his

wife loves him. His biggest fans are the two people around him every day, keeping him blind to his own hollowness. He is also distracted by Burgess, whose dubious intentions in business are obvious; it is easier to see the faults in his father-in-law's life than in his own.

Marchbanks speaks more to Candida's soul than Morell can understand and he is able to observe and interpret the actions of the people around him. However, Marchbanks' love for Candida gets in the way of his own progress. He cannot understand the object of her affection because he is too affected by his own love for her. His keen focus on the truth and his desire to dispense with pleasantries inhibit his ability to read how people respond to his curt behavior.

By the end of the play, Morell's confidence in everything is undone. He knows now that his wife doesn't view him as the strong bulwark that he believes he is and that she does not love him for the reasons he thought she did (or should). In Act III, when he and Marchbanks insists on Candida choosing one of them for her affections, she decides on the 'weaker' of the two, which he immediately interprets as Marchbanks. However, she means him; Candida sees her husband as weaker than the eighteen-year-old poet because he has always had his mother and sisters tending to the everyday tasks of living while he developed his speaking abilities and education. He always had the love and support of his family to carry him through his formative years. Marchbanks, however, was not so fortunate.

In the end, Morell acknowledges that the work Candida does on a daily basis is the only reason why he is successful as a husband, a father, and a public figure. Candida tells Marchbanks, "I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand

sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so” (Shaw, *Complete*, 267). Marchbanks has had to find his own path without the help of his parents or siblings. He has had to find his own life without anyone holding him up; therefore, he is the ‘stronger’ of the two men.

Morell’s challenge is not his appearance or any of the obvious improprieties (like Mrs. Warren). His issues are completely internal; he believes he is building the “Kingdom of Heaven” starting with his own little piece of it at home. When his wife arrives, this notion is challenged because Marchbanks saw through the pious talk and called him on it. Marchbanks believes he knows better than Morell what Candida needs as a woman—a person who can speak to her soul—but he does not understand that she is aware of the choices she has made and is content to live with the pros and cons of that decision.

In both characters we can see a bit of Shaw. Morell’s insistence of being useful and not idle is something Shaw required of everyone regardless of gender. The speaking abilities and word-play Morell is gifted with is also typical of Shaw. Morell’s refusal to accept Burgess’ statement that he is a model employer speaks to Shaw’s ability to see past extraneous excuses to the intent of others. Marchbanks’ also has the ability to see past the social façade of others and he points his finger at it asking why the pretense? Marchbanks is overly honest which comes across as being spiteful when he is actually seeking truth.

Shavian method is present in this play as in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, although it is not as obvious. There are some definite opportunities for Shaw to use ‘spectacle’ in

several places but rather than focus the attention on suicides or weddings he keeps the spotlight on Morell's path of self-discovery. Act I could have seen more violence when Marchbanks expresses his undying love to Candida; rather than just ruffling his clothes Shaw could have added a fist fight just for sheer visual effect. If one of Morell's speaking engagements had been added to any of the scenes-maybe the evening when they leave Marchbanks alone with Candida-it would have made a good break from the drama of Marchbanks' fits of horror at the thought of paraffin oil. Prossy was slightly, if not completely, intoxicated when they arrive at the Morell home in Act III – this could have been made into so much more of a comedic scene with her inhibitions gone. Finally, Marchbanks, being the poet he is, could have gone out into the night to commit suicide or Morell could have decided to take advantage of Prossy's uninhibited state. However, Shaw avoids all of these possibilities in order to focus on the task at hand: Morell has his act together on the outside but not on the inside.

Overexaggeration is also muted but present. Marchbanks' "pain" seems a little over-the-top even for an aristocrat. In Act II, he is so horrified that the lady he loves has to soil her hands every day to trim the lamps and thinks it laughable: "your wife's beautiful fingers are dabbling in paraffin oil while you sit here comfortably preaching about it: everlasting preaching! preaching! words! words! words!" (Shaw, *Complete*, 235). Burgess' character as an employer is also over-played: everything he says and does is obviously for his own personal benefit from his delight at meeting Marchbanks (an aristocrat who could connect him with the right people) to the 'champagne dinner' after Morell's speaking engagement to impress a member of the County Council (who could float work contracts his way). Morell leaving Candida home alone with the eighteen-



year-old is also a little extreme. Having been married for so long to be threatened enough to 'test' his spouse is over playing the situation.

There appears to be no climactic point in this storyline, or at a minimum, there is a muted one. It seems a little far-fetched for someone of Morell's character to be genuinely insecure about an eighteen year old friend having the ability to sweep his wife off her feet. Morell and Marchbanks are in agony by the end of Act III; they really have no idea whom Candida will choose. They believe that there is a choice to be made; however, what they fail to realize is that Candida made that choice years prior to this day when she married Morell. We see no more of this evening or the next day or how any of the characters continue on in their own respective lives; however, it is clear that not only has Marchbanks grown up a little, Morell has come down from his alter to a level path of reality which is where his wife waits for him.

Purdom sums up Candida's character as:

An ordinary woman, however, not intellectually remarkable, nor with artistic tastes; with nothing remarkable about her, indeed, for her good looks she shares with other women, except that she possesses largeness of mind and dignity of character. Also the insight of love, which enables her to know her husband and still to love him, and to know the poet and not to allow his love to unbalance her. (166)

Despite the insecurity of her husband and the love expressed to her by a poet, Candida has more wisdom than either of them. She gives Morell credit for teaching her to think for herself but it only, "works beautifully as long as I think the same things as he [Morell] does" (Shaw, *Complete*, 243).

## **CHAPTER 4-MAJOR BARBARA**

Written in 1905, the focus of *Major Barbara* is poverty and the illusions manifested by religion and society that keep it around. Shaw is adamant that poverty is a disease and that “The greatest curse of poverty is that it destroys the will power of the poor until they become the most ardent supporters of their own poverty” (Laurence, *Platform*, 96). The characters he creates, particularly in Act II with the Salvation Army’s poor, are a clear example of this sentiment. He creates the protagonist, Barbara Undershaft, as representative of the typical religious idealist and Adolphus Cusins as representative of a classically educated professor who traffics in intellectual arguments.

Barbara Undershaft is a strong-willed woman who works daily to save the souls of poverty stricken people using the Salvation Army as a vehicle. We see her in Act I as a devoted employee of the Army in full dress and, after news of her father’s visit later that evening, eager to meet another soul in need of salvation. Most of the people that surround her support her work in the Army with mild interest, including her fiancé, Adolphus Cusins, who follows her around simply out of a desire to be near her.

Adolphus Cusins is a student of Greek and a collector of religions. He is intent on marrying Barbara and works with her at the Salvation Army even though he does not necessarily accept all of their religious tenets. He does have a genuine interest in their views but, as Lady Britomart correctly judges, the only reason he helps at the shelter at all is out of a desire to be around Barbara (Shaw, *Major*, 18). At the end of Act III he reveals that he is a ‘foundling’ and is therefore a candidate for inheriting Barbara’s father’s armament factory. The surprise to the whole family is when Cusins reveals that,

although his parents are married under Australian law, he is considered a 'foundling' in Britain because his father married his sister-in-law after his first wife dies..

Barbara is the protagonist of this play because she is the one who has the most radical shift in her perception of life. She is the religious idealist who believes that by feeding the body she can save the soul. She evolves through several stages during the three acts and her journey begins when her father, Andrew Undershaft, stops in at the family home to pay a visit in Act I. She views him as another possible convert and is hopeful to show him her work at the shelter. She is not intimidated by her father's business but is instead confident that she can convert him to her cause, despite his warnings: "Take care. It may end in your giving up the cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army" to which Undershaft responds, "Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of cannons?" (Shaw, *Major*, 17). Instead of impressing her father, her father demonstrates to her how everyone-even her shelter-can be purchased if they are hungry enough. Holroyd says of Barbara that "hers is not really a conversion: it is a growing-up" (Shaw, *Major*, 312). Ultimately, she is her father's daughter and she finally acknowledges that turning her back on 'tainted money' means turning her back on life: "Undershaft and Bodger: their hands stretch everywhere: when we feed a starving fellow creature, it is with their bread...Turning our backs on Bodger and Undershaft is turning our backs on life" (Shaw, *Major*, 80).

Cusins is representative of an educated class of society that does not fix the problem of poverty anymore than the Salvation Army. However, he is "the real convert" to Undershaft's 'religion,' as Holroyd puts it (Shaw, *Major*, 312). Cusins begins his journey interested in learning Barbara's religious views and her work with the Salvation

Army but stumbles over Undershaft's questions that challenge his own commitment to his beliefs. He does eventually come around to Undershaft's point of view but works his passion for the common people into it by insisting that he is giving power to them by arming them against the people he formerly armed intellectually.

Shaw begins Act II with conversations between several of the Army's indigent 'patients' and it is soon revealed that they are not true converts, as Barbara and her co-workers believe. Snobby Price is an example of an anti-Shavian work ethic: Price has a trade but he refuses to work at it and he gives several reasons why he begs rather than works. The Army's poor are merely pretending to have had a true conversion in order to help raise money for their shelter to keep it open and continue receiving free meals. Again, as Shaw mentions it, they are perpetuating their own poverty. The better the story of their depraved life before salvation, the more money they can help raise. As Rummy says, "And where would they get the money to rescue us if we was to let on we're no worse than other people?" (Shaw, *Major*, 22). Those helped by the shelter know that it is a game of conscience-pragmatically saying what they have to in order to play on the sympathy of society to get what they need to survive; basically, it is self-preservation for the 'converted.' Unfortunately for Barbara she believes she is the one who is wielding the power of God in order to save their souls.

Undershaft keeps his word and visits his daughter at her shelter to observe what she does with her time. Barbara sets him out in the yard where he watches as she tries to convert Bill Walker, an abusive man who hit one of the shelter workers earlier in the day; Bill doesn't believe in the existence of the soul. Cusins comes in as Bill leaves and he and Undershaft become more acquainted with each other's religious views. They decide that

they must win Barbara away from the Army to preach Undershaft's religion of "money and gunpowder; freedom and power; command of life and command of death" (Shaw, *Major*, 37). Cusins reminds him that Barbara is in love with the common people just as he is, but Undershaft insists that unless they rise up out of society through the vehicle of money and power they cannot help the common people, or their children, to rise up beside them.

Undershaft knows that in order to win Barbara over he needs to show her how her Army really survives. Mrs. Baines, the Salvation Army commissioner, arrives with exciting news that Lord Saxmundham pledged to give their shelters five-thousand pounds if five other gentlemen donate one-thousand pounds each. Undershaft takes the opportunity and pulls out his checkbook and begins to write out a check for the entire five-thousand pounds to match Saxmundham's donation. Barbara protests, especially when they bring up the fact that Saxmundham is really Sir Horace Bodger, a famous distiller. Through several generous donations he was able to secure a title and a place in society by selling his liquor. Mrs. Baines fails Barbara's idealistic notions about the Army; it is Barbara's belief that there is such a thing as 'tainted' money and accepting it from those who are morally corrupt will contaminate the Army. She is quickly disillusioned when she witnesses her father's donation to the shelter, knowing that his money is 'tainted' owing to his business of armaments. Mrs. Baines gives her an excuse of, "will there be less drinking or more if all those poor souls we are saving come tomorrow and find the doors of our shelters shut in their faces? Lord Saxmundham gives us the money to stop drinking-to take his own business from him." (Shaw, *Major*, 46).

At this point Barbara realizes that regardless of how the money was obtained, anyone and anything-such as her shelter-can be purchased. She decides that she is unable to continue working with her beloved Salvation Army and takes her silver “S” pin from her lapel and pins it to her father’s collar. Undershaft has succeeded in his demonstration. What underscores his point about salvation for sale is Bill Walker coming back into the yard looking for the sovereign he left for the collection; he finds out that Snobby Price stole it while everyone else was distracted over the excitement of Saxmundham’s donation. Walker throws it in Barbara’s face that Price stole the money after giving his testimony of salvation and drives his point home, “Wot prawce selvytion nah [what price salvation now]?” (Shaw, *Major*, 49). Everything can be purchased.

True to her word, Barbara visits her father’s factory the next day along with her family. It is a charming, clean town and not at all like what she is expecting, “a sort of pit where lost creatures with blackened faces stirred up smoky fires and were driven and tormented by my father” (Shaw, *Major*, 61). She does acknowledge that Undershaft has proven his point that she was not using the power of God to save anyone; she was really under the power of her father and Bodger. It is easy to bribe a starving person to believe any religion with bread in one hand a Bible in the other. Undershaft’s point is that through money he saves his employees-and saved her-from his definition of the seven deadly sins which boils down to the ultimate crime of poverty.

Her father gives her hope that she can be more effective now that she does not have to bribe her converts with food. She talks to her fiancé alone after the others leave to tour the gun cotton shed and verbalizes her new perspective having seen how her father’s business is operated. In the end she is convinced that only when people are healthy and

well-cared for can their hungry souls be attended to; she no longer has to use bread as a bribe to salvation. She can more effectively touch the souls of her father's town now that they are:

not weak souls in starved bodies, sobbing with gratitude for a scrap of bread and treacle, but fullfed, quarrelsome, snobbish, uppish creatures, all standing on their little rights and dignities, and thinking that my father ought to be greatly obliged to them for making so much money for him-and so he ought. That is where salvation is really wanted...I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women.  
(Shaw, *Major*, 81)

Barbara begins her path at a desperately poor shelter that depends on the charity of others to keep the doors open. She doesn't realize that the only reason they have anything to give is due to disreputable businesses that stand against her own religious values. Thanks to her father's intervention, she is able to see past the façade of the values she adopted and learns a more effective way to minister to the souls of others.

Cusins' worldview begins to shift when he and Undershaft have a chance to visit alone in the yard of the Army in Act II. Cusins is intrigued by Undershaft's willingness to admit that money and gunpowder are the only things necessary for salvation when no one else in polite society can admit to it aloud. He does profess his sincerity to the Army's religion owing to how its positions on various religious topics differ from other established religions and their focus is on joy, love and courage. The Army transforms a waster into a man and a worm into a woman. Undershaft insists that the only way to live a happy life is not by adopting rules of other religious organizations but by acquiring "money enough for a decent life, and power enough to be your own master" (Shaw, *Major*, 35). Money and gunpowder are the tenets of Undershaft's religion.

When Cusins informs Undershaft that his marriage to Barbara is inevitable, Undershaft points out that he will have to reconcile his devotion to her with her devotion to her religion. He exposes more of his hidden beliefs to Undershaft when he explains that the Salvation Army exists to save souls, not necessarily to argue about the path they walk to save souls (Shaw, *Major*, 36). After this Undershaft accepts Cusins as an equal and together they work through how they can 'win' Barbara away from the Army. This is easily accomplished by a large donation: Undershaft knows that the only way shelters can stay open is by selling themselves. Cusins brings up some objections to the idea that anything and anyone is for sale but Undershaft meets him point for point and overcomes all of his arguments (Shaw, *Major*, 38).

By the end of Act III, Cusins has come around to Undershaft's view that only through money and power can people be free. He studied Greek because a Greek scholar's position could trump any challenges (Shaw, *Major*, 14). After visiting Undershaft's factory and town, and after being given an offer to take over the business for his future father-in-law, Cusins discusses his conclusions about what he has learned in regards to using his academics versus Undershaft's cannons to help society:

As a teacher of Greek I gave the intellectual man weapons against the common man. I now want to give the common man weapons against the intellectual man. I love the common people. I want to arm them against the lawyers, the doctors, politicians, who, once in authority, are more disastrous and tyrannical than all the fools, rascals, and impostors. I want a power simple enough for common men to use, yet strong enough to force the intellectual oligarchy to use its genius for the general good. (Shaw, *Major*, 79)

Both Barbara and Cusins are trapped in their own personal views of religion and academia until Undershaft disrupts their lives. Undershaft is aware that only an internal transformation leads to an external change and he demonstrates this to Barbara by his



donation and to Cusins by pushing him closer to his own end conclusions. So, for both of them, Undershaft is an impediment to their evolution but in the end the disruption gives them the impetus to step away from their arbitrary ideals and view a new perspective. Barbara represents religion and Cusins represents society and both of these ideals have failed the common people they claim to love. Undershaft offers them both the power to help their society in a real way through his own professed religion of money and gunpowder.

Barbara and Cusins impede each other on their respective paths to enlightenment because Cusins enables Barbara's religious views and doesn't challenge them. His love for Barbara prevents him from owning up to the fact that none of his schooling has helped the common people he loves. Barbara has the added illusion of actually having the power to 'save' anyone's soul. Even though Undershaft and Lady Britomart hint to Cusins that his only interest in the Army is Barbara, he still does not acknowledge it until he and Undershaft discuss their own views of religion. What we see in Act III is that his 'religion' was Barbara as the others pointed out earlier, "You accused me yourself, Lady Brit, of joining the Army to worship Barbara; and so I did. She bought my soul like a flower at a street corner; but she bought it for herself" (Shaw, *Major*, 67).

Shaw challenges the notion that society can continue to throw money at poverty and that the issues will work themselves out in time. By maintaining shelters and charity work, society prolongs the inevitable emergencies that will arise as more people lose their employment or face other challenges rather than giving them substantial opportunities to better their position and contribute something back to their country.

The business of Undershaft is obviously an affront to any religious views of that time. But, by using an arms manufacturer and a whiskey distiller as benefactors to the Salvation Army, Shaw again takes this issue of poverty and taunts his audience by intimating the hypocrisy of religious taboos through this situation and demonstrating how the ‘crime of poverty’ will never resolve itself by begging. He mocks the religious ideal of ‘turning the other cheek.’ Scoundrel that he is, Undershaft provides the solution to both Barbara’s and Cusins’ dilemma; Cusins asks Barbara in Act III “Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?” and she replies, “Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of men to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of The Shadow” (Shaw, *Major*, 81).

Shavian method is again expressed here with a lack of spectacle; although, several instances in the yard of the Salvation Army come close, such as when Bill Walker hits a worker in the face. There could have been a wedding at the close of Act III after Cusins accepts Undershaft’s offer and Barbara accepts Cusins as her future husband. An explosion at the ‘death factory’ was a missed opportunity in stage theatrics but it would not have served Shaw’s purpose.

There are examples of definite overexaggeration though, not necessarily to the level of Mrs. Warren’s prostitution ring. Undershaft’s profession is almost as scandalous especially when he makes glib comments like, “Here I am, a profiteer of mutilation and murder” (Shaw, *Major*, 16). The shock of his work is expressed through Undershaft’s other future son-in-law, Charles Lomax, who insists that a cannon business just can’t be right. Lomax is also a bit exaggerated as well; his opinion on Undershaft’s business changes like the wind. In Act I he feels it is morally repugnant but necessary and by the

end of Act III-after touring the nice town in which the armory is located-he has decided that it's not so bad, especially if Undershaft is willing to give his daughter an allowance after they are married.

True to form, there is no defined climax, other than witnessing Barbara and Cusins remove their ideals and pick up Undershaft's theories on life, society, and religion. Barbara doesn't attempt suicide or murder upon realizing that her shelter is paid for by 'bad' donors and 'tainted' money. She doesn't break up with Cusins either. Instead, as a retort to her mother's insistence that they all leave their 'wicked' father and his town, she states that it's no use running away from the wicked because turning away to run doesn't save anyone.

## **CHAPTER 5-PYGMALION**

Written in 1912, *Pygmalion* is, arguably, Shaw's best known play. Michael Holroyd comments that "This is Shaw's gesture towards removing the power for change from fighting men who were threatening to alter the world by warfare, and handing it to men of words..." (435). By altering speech, people can alter their future and so we see what happens when Professor Higgins does exactly that for his pupil, Eliza Doolittle. Themes of social responsibility are threaded through the play in the guise of Higgins who mocks Eliza's desire for independence and through Eliza's budding awareness of genuine transformation from the inside out.

Eliza Doolittle is a hard-working lower-class flower vendor who attempts to sell her goods to passers-by. She is intent on maintaining the appearance of being respectable: *i.e.*, she does not swindle or cheat her customers. When Professor Higgins appears and she suspects he is a detective or a plain-clothes officer she is desperate to ensure that he knows she is not a thief-appearances are everything to her since it could mean her job and independence. She begins her evolution in ignorance and she behaves as expected-boldly pushing her wares on others to earn her living until the chance encounter with Higgins. Through his training and, more importantly, through Colonel Pickering's treatment of her, she comes to discover her value as a human being. What she learns is not only how to speak and behave properly but how to treat others in the same manner regardless of who they are or how they speak.

Eliza is described as a young eighteen or twenty-year-old person, dirty, but as clean as she can make herself and selling flowers to earn a living. When she hears Higgins' boast to Pickering that he could teach her to speak well enough to improve her

employment situation, she formulates a plan to buy lessons from him, which is played out in Act II. Another indication of her obsession with appearances is her inquiry to Mrs. Pearce, the housekeeper, if Higgins knew that she arrived at his door by taxi. Her proactive choice to seek out Higgins is a demonstration on her part that she is willing to pay her own way. Higgins suggests a wager to Pickering who agrees to pay for expenses of the experiment while Eliza is subjected to learning phonetics and how to behave like a lady.

Professor Higgins is on his own path of discovery but his changes are not as obvious as Eliza's transformation. He is an obnoxious character who is able to determine the near exact location of where a person was raised based on listening to how they speak. He is so good in his profession that he seems to be overly arrogant and boastful which is what brings an enticing offer of glory into his life through the means of a lowly flower girl. Higgins certainly has the intelligence to pull off such a wager but this information of how a true lady behaves is merely appearance, a game of external images to be manipulated. His approach involves plenty of clever schemes, but none of it adds up to the wisdom Eliza learns from watching Colonel Pickering. In the end Higgins does find pride not only in his own work on her, but in Eliza's spirit, which she deftly expresses at the end of Act V after he is put into a rage at her suggestions of taking his methods to a competitor in his field.

Higgins is seen taking notes during Eliza's sales pitch to Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her children during a summer rainstorm as people are crowding under the portico of St. Paul's Church for shelter. He is intently involved with his notebook and the others notice that he is writing down Eliza's speech patterns. As each bystander speaks Higgins tells

them the approximate location of where they were raised. Colonel Pickering is impressed by his display and they both realize that they know each other by reputation. Higgins makes the boast that he could take this flower girl and pass her off as a duchess in as little as three months.

Higgins tests his results by having her over to his mother's at-home day (a set time each week for receiving visitors). Eliza passes extraordinarily well until she follows a rabbit trail from topics of the weather, to the flu, and to how her aunt had passed away from it but she believed instead that someone else had killed her: "What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in." Higgins is able to interrupt her before she rattles on and exposes herself as a fraud, pretending to be a lady with class. Once she leaves the room her speech is passed off as the "new ways" of talking (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 438-439).

Although Higgins appears to be a well-spoken adult and dedicated teacher, it's not until he arrives at his mother's house that we see his childish behaviors. Shaw describes him as having babyish qualities. He is impatient, unsociable with her guests waiting on Eliza to arrive, and short-tempered. When she does arrive he resumes his professorial pose and is able to stop her when she begins to expose herself as a commoner. Once everyone leaves, Mrs. Higgins picks up her questioning about their arrangement for this experiment and what's to be done with her once the wager is over. Mrs. Higgins is able to see something about this arrangement that they cannot, "You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll" (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 441). Being a lady brought up in society, she understands Eliza's dilemma in regards to her

future. Higgins' excitement at the success he is having in his experiment clouds his perspective; his overall arrogance prevents him from acknowledging that his mother is correct about the fact that Eliza is a person who will continue to have needs beyond their six-month schooling.

Eliza becomes aware of the issue of her future in Act IV, which Mrs. Higgins mentions to the professor and the Colonel at the end of Act III: now that Eliza can pass as a lady, what can she do since it's obvious that Higgins has only succeeded in changing her external mannerisms and not the things that give her away if she begins to veer off the course of what she has been taught: "What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?...I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me" (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 446-447). She's overqualified to sell flowers as she did previously but she is unfit to assimilate and 'sell' herself into the class level she has been taught by the professor. Act IV opens after Eliza has successfully presented herself as a duchess at a garden party, a dinner party, and an opera, with Higgins and Pickering hardly giving her credit for the work she has done. The two men continue to talk around her as if she were merely a statue, an inanimate object or doll that they created and for which they had won a prize. Higgins drones on about how tired he is of the whole experiment and that he is glad it is over. Eliza boldly proclaims that she has won the bet for him, which infuriates Higgins. But, she holds to her claim and goes on to ask what she may keep as her own property; realizing the wager is complete, it appears she knows she will be leaving soon and everything provided for her was intended for use

in the bet: now that it's over, who owns the personal property? She leaves in the night and ends up at the home of Mrs. Higgins.

Act V begins with Higgins and Pickering arriving at Mrs. Higgins' home desperate to find Eliza and take her back. They even go to the extent of phoning the police as if Eliza were a runaway. It becomes apparent that she did more in their household than learn proper speech; she kept Higgins' appointments, ordered clothing, and took care of other miscellaneous things. The professor attributes her mood the previous evening to exhaustion and expects that she would be fine after a good night's rest. Here again, at his mother's house, Higgins appears to be a child whose favorite toy has just been taken away from him. As his mother calmly explains that Eliza has needs beyond material possessions and speech lessons he throws himself down on an ottoman, a chair, hollers, and forgets the manners he does possess.

After a brief interruption from Alfred Doolittle, Mrs. Higgins rings for Eliza who comes in and calmly begins her learned small talk with Higgins and Pickering, behaving as she has been taught. When Eliza does come in Higgins is incensed that she uses her small talk on him and impatiently listens while she addresses Pickering. Higgins takes credit for her appearance and even for what she thinks, "Let her speak for herself. You will jolly soon see whether she has an idea that I havnt put into her heard or a word that I havnt put into her mouth" (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 454). Higgins insists that he created this magnificently sculpted statue out of a crushed cabbage leaf. He wants nothing to do this 'game' of small talk since he is the one who taught her.



Eliza gives them a sincere explanation of what she learned from both of them and how it has permanently changed her life. She learned from Higgins how to speak, behave, and appear like a lady but it was from Pickering she learned how to actually be a lady:

But do you know what began my real education?...Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me... You see, really and truly, apart from the thing anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how shes treated. (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 454-455)

After the others leave Higgins explains to Eliza that he has the same manners as Pickering who treats a flower girl like a duchess only he treats a duchess like a flower girl, the same treatment for everyone regardless of who they are or what rung of the social ladder they occupy: “The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another” (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 458).

In the end Eliza earns her humanity in the eyes of Higgins by standing up to his brash treatment. In her last private conversation with Higgins she bounces back and forth emotionally between calm and utter despondency not knowing what she is fit to do and reacting to Higgins’ seemingly cold heart. She finally has a breakthrough when she suggests that she might teach phonetics or assist a rival in Higgins’ profession. When this evokes a vehement response from him she finally realizes she has more options than just marriage or floral arrangements:

Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You cant take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can...I’ll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you

taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 461)

It is apparent that she has more self-respect and wisdom than she did before a chance encounter on a rainy evening.

Higgins has no respect for her when she expresses her contempt for his manners. But, when she threatens to take her knowledge of phonetics to a rival professor or teach lessons, he becomes incensed and rushes at her before he remembers his manners. She has found his weakness and uses it against him, which is when he stands back and applauds her for having a backbone: "Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now you're a tower of strength" (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 461).

For Higgins' part, he does treat Eliza as a science project to be coerced and manipulated until she is completely made over. However, he also realizes that she is able to find a way to become a true human being with a soul that cannot be crushed. From the beginning he acknowledged that every soul is valuable; he just does not show patience with the ones who refuse to behave-in his opinion-like human beings:

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere-no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespear and Milton and The Bible; and dont sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon. (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 415)

Both Eliza and Professor Higgins have their own impediments around which they have to navigate as they work through their respective paths to maturity in this play and, in general, they create their own obstacles. Eliza is overly concerned with appearances that are necessary in her situation since her entire livelihood depends on being an aboveboard vendor. Her desperation in Act I that she not be taken as a common thief is evidence of her attitude toward those who would misuse and abuse the generosity of their

patrons. She has to push her floral business in order to subsist but she is determined to ensure that she does not fall to the level of thievery. There are no other obvious people in her life who impede her progress, but there are those who do not encourage her growth. She gives Colonel Pickering credit for beginning her true education due his treatment of her. However, Pickering encouraged the wager to begin with and apparently gave no thought to any of the other needs that Eliza has since he banters on with Higgins at Mrs. Higgins' home. After the success of the opera night, he actually appears to enable Higgins' behavior. The Professor's attitude toward her also keeps Eliza focused on appearances, something she was already struggling with, by insisting on proper speech, clothes, and behavior. By Act V, however, his bad manners actually help her find a way to fight back against his demeaning attitude toward her.

Although Higgins appears to be an uncaring, arrogant brute, he does have his own little evolution of sorts. He is purely scientific and makes a good living from it, and this experiment with Eliza was more for the challenge than of giving someone an opportunity to better their life. He does tell Eliza in Act I that she should give more care to her speech since it is the language in which so many great artists spoke and wrote but his obvious lack of sympathy to the kind of change she undergoes indicates his callousness for his fellow man/woman. His arrogance prevents him from acknowledging she is anything more than a science experiment. Colonel Pickering is again a roadblock in that he encourages Higgins' behavior and doesn't attempt to advocate for Eliza's well-being other than the clothes and other items he agreed to furnish.

Higgins' comment to Eliza in Act V is reminiscent of Shaw's insistence that everyone is responsible to work and contribute to their society. She is caught in a

dilemma between going back to Wimpole Street and finding a career to regain her independence which is when he replies, “Independence? That’s middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth” (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 461). Social responsibility is what Higgins preaches and by giving her an opportunity to better herself in society she is now able to contribute her labor and money rather than depending on the kindness of others (again, an anti-poverty message). Alfred Doolittle expresses his honest intentions of using up the five pounds he is given for Eliza so that he will have to go back to work after a spending spree; he will even give employment to others by drinking the money away at a local establishment.

Shaw employs his method in this play as with the others on all three points. Again, there are no spectacles except for that of Eliza’s hideous speech patterns and Higgins’ temper tantrums. There were no marriages or courtships, only Freddy’s infatuation with Eliza after their meeting at Mrs. Higgins’ home. Probably the largest lack of spectacle is what occurs between Acts III and IV-the evening Eliza successfully performs in public at several venues, convincing everyone she is who she appears to be-a duchess.

Overexaggeration is apparent in both main characters and the others: Higgins is overly mechanical in his dealings with Eliza. Her speech patterns before she is taught and later her ecstatic moods in Act V seem to go over the top-after all, she is street savvy and she now knows how to traverse through the upper classes of society and has valuable knowledge she can put to good use. Alfred seems to be a bit of a caricature in that he is intent on not saving money and is very upset when he is given a bequest which sets him up for the rest of his life; he no longer has the freedom to do as he likes. The anti-climax

arrives (or doesn't) when we see the three returning from a successful evening: this would have been a visually stunning event and would seem to be the point at which we know that Eliza is set up for a positive future, the wager is won, and they can continue on down their own respective paths. Instead, Act IV only describes the success and we are treated to another Act in which we see Eliza truly come into her own having conquered her fear of how she will support herself.

## CONCLUSION

“We must reform society before we can reform ourselves...personal righteousness is impossible in an unrighteous environment” Shaw wrote to H. G. Wells in 1917 (Holroyd, 15). Shaw was unflinching in his goal of questioning everything, even to the extent of publically deriding socially and religiously accepted norms of his day. He did not reserve judgment for only certain sects or religious organizations; he was critical of every aspect of each dogma or law regardless of who his criticisms offended. His contemporary critic, G. K. Chesterton, further says of Shaw’s consistency:

If he dislikes lawlessness, he dislikes the lawlessness of Socialists as much as that of Individualists. If he dislikes the fever of patriotism, he dislikes it in Boers and Irishmen as well as in Englishmen. If he dislikes the vows and bonds of marriage, he dislikes still more the fiercer bonds and wilder vows that are made by lawless love. If he laughs at the irresponsibility of faith, he condemns with a sane consistency the equal irresponsibility of art. (19)

Shaw is consistent, almost mechanically so, in his disregard and subsequent criticisms of social and religious mores. His insistence that a Life Force is present and driving humanity to reach new, higher levels of achievement is present in both his non-dramatic and dramatic works. He ardently strives to convince his audience of the uselessness of holding to old social and religious norms which are outdated and ineffective in order to elicit a genuine re-thinking of how change can and needs to be achieved. The most obvious issues he attacks relate to the responsibility of each individual to earn their living and the responsibility of government and society to provide opportunities for earning a

living. The method he employs in his dramatic works is used to provoke thought in his audience and bring a new understanding to the issues he exposes.

Censorship was an obvious adversary that Shaw faced early on in his career. Due to his controversial topics, some of his most notable plays required rewrites or the removal of offensive parts, or were banned from performance altogether, as in the case of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Through censorship, the governing body of society was able to continue to protect outdated social and religious ideals with which Shaw disagreed. By protecting these ideals rather than fostering new insights into how social issues could be resolved, censoring helps to close off the public from imagining new solutions and cut off any potential for true reform.

One of those social reforms Shaw argues for is the work that women have access to in order to provide for themselves and their families. Seemingly, the opportunities that could provide a better subsistence were either trades which were dangerous to one's health or an seeking out an advantageous marriage. Rather than relying on a smart match in matrimony or working 18-hour days in dangerous conditions, Shaw creates situations in his dramatic pieces so extreme as to provoke thought and even outrage in order to elicit better options.

Poverty, above all else, is distasteful to Shaw. He goes so far as to call it a disease that can and must be cured. Being exposed to poverty at an early age is what his biographer, Michael Holroyd, says began Shaw's lifelong hatred of poverty (15). He could not reconcile the facts he knew of over production of goods with the poor slums he saw. Everyone, regardless of gender, must work and must be provided with opportunities for work.

Whether intentional or not, Shaw developed a method in his dramatic work that opens up the opportunity for genuine thought over a range of topics. By removing spectacles from his work he removed any possibility for a neat, clean-cut happy ending. His intention is to provoke thought, not warm feelings of happiness, through his writing. His audience will see no marriages or frilly opera balls or suicides. By over-exaggerating his characters' traits and dramatic situations, he creates extreme circumstances, which out of necessity force questions about the conditions he sets up. Why is it that a young woman believes that her best career option is prostitution? What does a formerly poor flower girl do to provide for herself now that she can speak and act on the level of a lady in society? By removing or diminishing the traditional climactic point of his plays, Shaw facilitates thought in his audience. Rather than being dazzled by a heightened point in the storyline, the viewer is kept along a level path to consider his characters and what their lives mean and the larger, overall picture he has painted about their society.

Shavian method facilitates the work of Shaw's ethic in that social and religious ideals must be removed or at a minimum reconsidered in order to bring about a true change in society. Whether or not Shaw was successful in his quest to make room for the Life Force is a matter of opinion, but his rhetoric and wit remain as the best example that one person's perspective can have a large impact as a polarizing force that demands consideration.



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