

# The Shawian Representations of Poverty: Pygmalion and Major Barbara

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**The Shawian Representations of  
Poverty: Pygmalion and Major Barbara**

(Smjer: književno-kulturološki)

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## INTRODUCTION

Shaw's plays *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* both deal with the complex issue of poverty in early twentieth-century England. In tackling this issue, Shaw creates a series of characters who come from varied backgrounds and thus offer unique social perspectives. On the one hand, *Pygmalion* focuses on the differences between the expectations and realities of climbing the social ladder in twentieth-century England. On the other hand, *Major Barbara* deals with themes of ideological conversion and morality far more prominently. Despite this fundamental difference, both plays feature transformations, which are both mental and physical in nature. This thesis will provide a comparative analysis of the two works to show the complex ways in which Shaw deals with poverty in his literary works. It will employ Shaw's essay *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), his sermon *The New Theology* (1907), and his non-fiction book *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928) for the purpose of exploring how the author's personal beliefs influence his representations of poverty. Furthermore, these and other texts will be utilized to analyze the juxtapositions between the spiritualistic idealism and the materialistic realism of Shaw's characters. In doing so, the thesis will provide an examination of the mercurial nature of belief and reality in Shaw's works. The moral component of poverty in Shaw's plays will be dealt with through an examination of the relations between creator and creation – Pygmalion and Galatea. The theme of the soul in *Major Barbara*, particularly as it relates to the concept of selling one's soul, will also be given special attention, accompanied by an analysis of the roles of Mephistopheles and Faust, and an exploration of the ways in which attempted remedies facilitate the perpetuation of poverty. Finally, the many attempts Shaw's characters make to resolve the problem of poverty will be used to provide insight into the inner workings of social structures as seen by Shaw, as well as the barriers that stand in the way of the eradication of poverty in early twentieth-century England.

## OF PYGMALIONS AND THEIR GALATEAS

*Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* are multifaceted works that can be read in several different ways. On its surface level, *Pygmalion* deals with the visual and auditive transformation of Eliza Doolittle, as assisted by the phonetician Henry Higgins: “the Cinderella-like transformation of Eliza Doolittle does, of course, provide the chief dramatic impact of *Pygmalion*; but it is by no means a transformation empty of social significance” (O’Donnell 7). *Major Barbara* also shows the complex social structures of early twentieth-century England, but it does so by focusing on the differences between middle- and upper-class members that are imperceptible to the poor. And, most importantly for the topic of this thesis, both works deal with representations of poverty and the class system, following the tendency that “Shaw’s prose often explores political, social, economic, and religious ideas overlooked by other writers of his day” (Reynolds 48). Eliza’s role, in part, is to bridge the gap between the poor and the wealthy, which is a recurring aspect of Shaw’s plays. Through her interactions with the gentlemen Higgins and Pickering, and her acclimatization to high society, Shaw illustrates the artificiality of the English class system. As an Irishman living in London, “Shaw used his outsider status to advantage,” creating characters who provide fresh perspectives for long-standing issues present in English society (Reynolds 48).

Class is a difficult term to define as class divisions have existed long before the word itself adopted its currently applicable meanings, as it was only “in the seventeenth century that the word ‘class’ entered the English language for the first time (...) it is defined as ‘a ship, or Navy, an order or distribution of people according to their several Degrees’” (Day 5-6). Before its advent there existed many different social hierarchies all over the world, and all of them find certain overlap with class as “In very broad terms, the word 'class' refers to divisions in society” (Day 2). The concrete definition of class that Shaw deals with, be it in his fiction or non-fiction works, is a division of twentieth-century English society into three broad sections. At the base of society are “The Lower Classes, the Hungry Ones, the Working Classes, the Masses, the Mob, or whatever else you call them. Classical culture has invented a general name for all people (...) who, having no land nor capital (no property), have to hire themselves out for a living” (*The Intelligent Woman’s Guide* 183). They hold no power and possess no capital other than their wage, which is often spent before the next arrives. On the other side of the spectrum are the

upper classes, who are both propertied and the arbiters of culture in society, which gives them ample power to be exerted as they see fit upon the other classes. Between the two groups stand the middle classes, who possess capital, and who command more societal respect than the lower classes, but who largely lack – and desire – the trend-setting power that is so readily available among the upper classes. Although culture is efficiently wielded as a self-serving tool by the upper classes, every section of society has their own culture, and to “live in the working-classes is even now to belong to an all-pervading culture, one in some ways as formal and stylized as any that is attributed to, say, the upper-classes” (Hoggart 17).

The differences in culture between the classes make class identity easily recognizable. They range from such obvious things as the size of one’s home and the style in which their furniture is arranged, one’s clothes and occupation, to such subtleties as when and what one eats and, what is most crucial in the context of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the language and the pronunciation one uses. Shaw frequently writes down the speech of the lower classes as it is heard, making it clear for the reader just how apparent one’s belonging to a certain class is depending on “which type of letter you favour in your pronunciation – or rather, which type you fail to pronounce. Those at the top of the social scale like to think that their way of speaking is ‘correct’, as it is clear and intelligible and accurate, while lower-class speech is ‘incorrect’” (Fox 29-30). The importance of speech is so great for Shaw that he wrote in his preface to *Pygmalion*: “It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him” (*Pygmalion* 2). Finally, the reason why the classes are often referred to in the plural form – the upper classes instead of the upper class – is because there exist more subtle differentiations between members of the same general class, and the lines between the classes often become blurred where edge cases are concerned. As Hoggart posits, “To the inhabitants there is a fine range of distinctions in prestige from street to street. Inside the single streets there are elaborate difference of status, of ‘standing’, between the houses themselves” (Hoggart 10). There is no consensus in the literature on this subject as to the particularities about how to enumerate and properly analyze the class structure in twentieth-century England, but all of them differentiate three large groups. For this reason, this thesis will concern itself with the more general stratification into upper, middle, and lower classes.

The social criticism aspect of Shaw's work is apparent in the first lines of *Pygmalion*, as the flower girl Eliza crosses paths with members of the middle and upper classes. Two things immediately spring up as a barrier between the differing social classes, the first being "money, which is mentioned no less than seventeen times, and physically produced three times, the last when Higgins dramatically throws a handful of money into Eliza's basket" (Hornby 123). Money is important as a barrier between the lower and middle classes, but it is not necessarily an indicator of upper-class belonging, insofar as a member of the middle classes may obtain and possess greater wealth than their more esteemed counterparts. The second is the intense prejudice and sense of superiority exhibited by members of the middle and especially the upper classes, as "the poor are stereotyped as morally weak. Moments after *Pygmalion* begins, Mrs. Eynsford-Hill suspects that Eliza is a prostitute and buys a bunch of flowers in hopes of confirming her suspicions" (Reynolds 50). Even Higgins, who gives Eliza money, not as a transaction in exchange for flowers but as charity, remarks most uncharitably about her: "A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live." (*Pygmalion* 12). Such a remark not only negates Higgins's philanthropy, but also gives further insight into class relations: "The insults that Higgins directs at Eliza are linguistic evidence of the 'naturalization' process that British class structure has undergone: He can throw epithets at her with no fear of reprisal or contradiction" (Reynolds 51). He, and others like him, feel both justified and secure in their visceral condemnation of Eliza and others like her because "The attempt to categorise the poor yielded to the dominance of the idea of the individual, which made poverty seem a consequence of personality rather than a result of capitalism" (Day 145). The conversation on poverty as presented by magazines and oral tradition of the time ignore the processes that create it – because acknowledging them would be inconvenient for the middle and upper classes, who greatly benefit from the current social order – and it is consequently implied that the plight of the impoverished is nobody's fault but their own. The idea that because they dress a certain way, work jobs that are considered dirty, and sometimes engage in immoral acts to win their bread are the reasons as to why they are poor, and not the other way around, is so pervasive that it is no longer questioned by Eliza's middle- and upper-class peers. The culture of the lower classes is never considered, acknowledged as worthwhile, and is readily deleted as "an unwritten rule requires the partner who is 'marrying up' to adopt the tastes and manners of the class he or she is marrying into, or at least to make rather more compromises and adjustments

than the higher-class partner” (Fox 128). The paradox of the expectation that those living in poverty should lift themselves out of it while also treating them like the plague was lost on Shaw’s contemporaries, not because they lacked the capacity to understand it but rather because, as Fox puts it, “those who are most ‘fluent’ in the rituals, customs and traditions of a particular culture generally lack the detachment necessary to explain the ‘grammar’ of these practices in an intelligible manner” (Fox 3). Eliza is Shaw’s way of bringing the detachment necessary to observe middle- and upper-class culture to his readers.

Another significance of Higgins’s introduction is in that he is a famous phonetician, drawing attention to the fact that language is a vital factor in determining a person’s worth in twentieth-century English society. As far as the English social structure is concerned, the pronunciation of words is more important than what a person thinks, even than the words that they say, as evidenced by the dichotomy of Higgins’s brash nature and the position of respect he holds. A society preoccupied with such externalities is quite easy to mislead, and Eliza does just that. Language is so integral to Eliza’s entrapment in poverty that, once she changes the way she speaks, she is immediately accepted by members of the upper class as one of their own. The difference between how she is treated depending on the accent and pronunciation she uses is so dramatic that it pulverizes the division into lower, middle, and upper classes into indiscernible pulp, calling the entire class structure of English society into question. For if one’s social standing is so easily remedied by the knowledge of how to pronounce the right words properly, any condemnations made against one’s character on account of language become utterly meaningless. The accuracy of Eliza’s example is reinforced by Fox’s assertion that “Speech is all-important. A person with an upper-class accent, using upper-class terminology, will be recognized as upper class even if he or she is earning poverty-line wages” (Fox 33). Higgins, representative of the upper class, does not realize that Eliza, before she even becomes his Galatea, is indispensable to society. Aside from doing the work which is seen as dirty and undesirable by the upper classes, Eliza, and others like her “perform another vital function that goes beyond their menial services to the rich: They help classify British social structure” (Reynolds 50).

This introductory scene reaches its symbolic culmination as the “flowers, sold by Eliza, which, as result of her collision with Freddy, are trampled in the mud – like Eliza herself, a



cockney flower trampled by society” (Hornby 123). The way that she is treated, not least because of her cockney speech, is a stark reminder that twentieth-century English culture “is not a meritocracy. Your accent and terminology reveal the class you were born into and raised in, not anything you have achieved through your own talents or efforts” (Fox 33). Trampled as she may be by them, Eliza believes that her only way out of poverty is to embrace the very systems that have kept her down for all her life. Despite all the scathing, undeserved comments she has endured, Eliza cannot help but want to be more like the people who despise her. She elects to become Higgins’s Galatea, lest she stay “in the gutter to the end of her days” as her future Pygmalion’s initial comments suggest (*Pygmalion* 13).

Eliza’s father Alfred Doolittle at first appears to fit all the stereotypes perpetuated by Higgins and his ilk, offering to sell his daughter to Higgins in his introductory scene. He appears to give excuse to those who treat the poor as lesser, but he serves another purpose entirely – showing the incompatibility of thought and morality across social classes. Higgins takes it for granted that there is an impassable gap which separates him from men like Doolittle, not realizing that Alfred’s “straightforward selfishness and his refusal to bother with rules or niceties give him much in common with Higgins” (McInerney 197). Higgins, who has been unkind to Eliza at nearly every step so far, is suddenly indignant, asking him “Have you no morals, man?” (*Pygmalion* 32). Doolittle does not go on the defensive, instead offering an unexpectedly honest answer, “Can’t afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me” (*Pygmalion* 32). The idea that parental responsibilities fall secondary to the matters of the empty coffer and the hungry stomach is further elaborated on by Shaw in his book *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928) where he states that “The common saying that the parents are the best people to take care of the interests of the children depends not only on the sort of people the parents are, but on whether they are well enough off to be able to afford to indulge their natural parental instinct” (*The Intelligent Woman’s Guide* 193). Shaw’s implied assertion is that parents can never be blamed for immorality if they are poor. His attempt at excusing such immoral acts is guided by the need to reveal the real culprit; the underlying issues of Doolittle’s apparent misuse of her daughter, having offered to sell her as a piece of property. In fact, Shaw harshly judges the sort of degradation that Doolittle has gone through: “But let not anyone imagine that men escape prostitution under Capitalism. If they do not sell their bodies they sell their souls (...) the prostitution of the mind is more mischievous, and is a deeper betrayal of the

divine purpose of our powers, than the prostitution of the body,” (*The Intelligent Woman’s Guide* 202-203) but he makes certain to juxtapose Doolittle with Higgins during the play, lest the reader’s ire become directed exclusively to one side of the equation. Doolittle’s guilt is apparent, and his proposition so vividly appalling that it risks distracting any effort of finding a solution; of working to solve and ultimately prevent the processes that create fathers like him. Doolittle is unapologetic and exhibits what Shaw calls a “Nietzschean transcendence of good and evil” (*Pygmalion* 79), whereas Higgins is a gentleman who is equally as repulsive as Doolittle in his treatment of Eliza. This juxtaposition exists precisely because Shaw wants to send his reader’s minds on a search for answers; to make them ponder why these two men are so certain that their immoralities are justified, as opposed to serving his audience the simple dichotomy of a proper gentleman and an immoral pauper.

Doolittle is also guilty of the prejudice exhibited by Higgins because he looks at his wealthier counterpart and sees only a stereotypical gentleman without realizing that both “the upper and lower classes often felt free to ignore what Doolittle calls ‘middle class morality’” (McInerney 197). The proper morality held up by English society is characterized as middle class because neither the lower nor the upper classes follow it, but with one significant difference: the upper classes evade the judgment that is readily thrown upon the lower classes for committing the same sin of veering away from accepted behavior. Higgins’s ambitions prove so great that he cannot content himself with Eliza, deciding to take on Alfred as a side-project, making him inherit an immense amount of money. What follows is a complete subversion of expectations: “Transformed in manners and accent, Eliza, like her father after he becomes rich, is intimidated by life” (O’Donnell 7). The two Galateas, having been molded into better versions of themselves, at least insofar as their *Pygmalion* is concerned, find their new positions untenable. Alfred who, judging by his proposition to sell his daughter, would have done any number of immoral acts to gain a smidgeon of the wealth he has been gifted, protests the changes thrust upon him: “It’s making a gentleman of me that I object to. Who asked him to make a gentleman of me? I was happy. I was free” (*Pygmalion* 61). It is reasonable to assume, then, that Alfred is not motivated by greed, but by need. Having grown accustomed to a life free of responsibility; a life filled with a spiteful rejection of society’s espoused moral norms, his transformation into the very thing he once hated entraps him. Conversely, Eliza is a willing Galatea who desires to bring change to her life, but at one point, her transformation entraps her as well. Despite her success in

adopting upper society's standards of language and appearance, Eliza isn't accepted by Higgins. This is because he knows who she used to be; he shares the "popular belief that every human possesses a stable and unchanging essence, or Self. In *Pygmalion*, this ideology causes Higgins to reject Eliza, despite her accomplishments" (Reynolds 56). She finds herself in a void between social classes. Unable to return to her previous life because of her appearance of wealth and power, and unable to continue living among high society because of the absence of actual wealth and power, she "becomes a prisoner of middle-class morality" (O'Donnell 7). In similar fashion to her father, she protests, saying: "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" (*Pygmalion* 56). Shaw sets up a myriad of obstacles on Eliza's path to achieving the life she had dreamed for herself, leading audiences to believe that her only way out is to accept Higgins as a romantic partner, but Shaw goes on to critique such expectations in his appendix to *Pygmalion*. He explains that "Eliza, in telling Higgins she would not marry him if he asked her, was not coquetting: she was announcing a well-considered decision (...) Her decision will depend a good deal on whether she is really free to choose; and that, again, will depend on her age and income." (*Pygmalion* 76). In other words, Eliza would have indeed been forced into a marriage of convenience had she been without other options, but Eliza has the youth, the rebellious inclination, and the potential to manifest her desires for freedom. The appendix to *Pygmalion* also serves as a sequel, in which Shaw explains that Eliza was always intended to marry Freddy, who is also a member of the upper classes, a gentleman like Pickering and Higgins. She chooses him not because he is akin to Higgins, but quite on the contrary, because he "is not her master, nor ever likely to dominate her in spite of his advantage of social standing" (*Pygmalion* 78). Galatea was always destined to reject her Pygmalion, for that is the only way that for her to regain control of her life and shake off her creator's dominating gaze.

*Major Barbara* shifts the moral conflict from *Pygmalion*'s incompatibility between members of lower and upper social classes to "the early twentieth-century upper class British consciousness threatened by a growing awareness of the gap between its espoused ideals and morals and its actions" (Nutter 89). The core problem facing *Major Barbara*'s Undershaft family is money and the questionable morality of its attainment. Unlike *Pygmalion*'s Eliza who has everything to gain by giving in to the system, the Undershafts have everything to lose if they do not. Andrew Undershaft, an exceedingly wealthy arms manufacturer, holds the solution to

poverty, but it comes with the price of being associated with immorality. As a major of the Salvation Army, his daughter Barbara represents the core tenants of Christianity, specifically the virtues of poverty and passivity – turning the other cheek. Yet, ironically, she lives her life while passively enjoying the luxuries of upper-class wealth and respect, afforded to her family by her father’s immoral and violence-enabling weapon sales. At first Barbara and Undershaft appear to represent a battle between religion and atheism, but Andrew “calls his alternatives a religion (...) he speaks of money and gunpowder as his ‘gospel’” (Jordan 474). The two are, in fact, very similar to each other, the main difference being that Barbara’s “concern is with saving men’s souls, that is, with the spiritual dimension of their lives,” whereas Andrew’s ideology focuses on giving his disciples the material means of achieving freedom (Jordan 474). Lady Britomart says that Undershaft is a man who “didn’t exactly do wrong things: he said them and thought them (...) preaching immorality while he practised morality” (*Major Barbara* 8). The veracity of her claim is called into question as Undershaft chides Lady Britomart: “Not at all. I had the strongest scruples about poverty and starvation. Your moralists are quite unscrupulous about both: they make virtues of them” (*Major Barbara* 68). Undershaft’s retort makes it clear that he lives by a defined set of morals, but that they do not coincide with those held by his upper-class family members. It can be deduced, then, that the misunderstanding between Undershaft and the play’s other characters arises from their perceptions of reality becoming “distorted by the struggle to make them fit an idealist system” (Reynolds 59). Despite the moral qualms exhibited by Undershaft’s family, they nevertheless take his money. This is indicative of the fact that society keeps those who are useful, but who act immorally, in higher regard than those it deems the less useful, regardless of their morality. Thus, the social structure is designed to keep the poor in the lower classes. Life in poverty understandably shapes many souls into bitter and resentful ones, which in turn reinforces the idea that the middle and upper classes are the carriers of morality. The solution cannot be to blame the poor for not following rules they played no part in creating. It must be to blame the system which creates poverty. This is made clear in a conversation between Cusins and Undershaft, during which Andrew concludes that the poor cannot worry themselves with such things as “honor, justice, truth, love, mercy and so forth” because “they are the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life,” (*Major Barbara* 33) or in other words, that one cannot blame the poor for focusing on their primary needs; that only when they are helped out of poverty, and involved in the process of creating the artificial norms of society,

can they be held accountable for breaking them. The Undershafts, who can be held accountable by the same logic, for they have had every opportunity to train their consciousness to be aware of such transgressions, are not. Lady Britomart's response is to accept her husband's money while making it very public and very clear that she does not support the source of her wealth. Such an act is not only cowardly, but also incongruent with her espoused virtues and ideals.

Despite being fundamentally opposed in their views, Andrew and Barbara both take on the role of Pygmalion. This is emphasized when the pair make a bet to see "who can convert whom," with the more convincing Pygmalion given the opportunity to turn the other into another one of their Galateas (Noel 136). The main differences between father and daughter are in the methods they use and their conceptions of what a finished Galatea looks like. Barbara seeks to impart spirituality into her Galateas through acts of charity, yet her most tangible societal function, inadvertent as it may be, is to prevent the collapse of the current social order by placating the restless poor, embedding them with passivity and preventing them from improving their lives, as well as splitting the sentiment of the lower classes so that they may not become organized. The philanthropism Barbara partakes in is a mere façade, created so that "active altruists gain self-righteousness and moral authority; power to torture and manipulate people like Bill Walker" (Nutter 89). If she was truly interested in feeding the poor, she would ensure food comes to the poor regardless of whether they desire to join her religion or not. It would certainly not be the case that "To get bread, Snobby and Rummy have to do penance for uncommitted sins," and setting up such strict terms makes clear that "Penance, not bread, is the point" (Nutter 89). In another ironic inversion of her espoused ideals of the virtues of poverty, Barbara complains that she cannot "talk religion to a man with bodily hunger in his eyes" (*Major Barbara* 38). The Salvation Army needs money to function, but it does not produce money, much to Barbara's chagrin: "I want to convert people, not to be always begging for the Army in a way I'd die sooner than beg for myself" (*Major Barbara* 38). Without ever realizing the major flaw in her approach, she offers a temporary remedy for the soul, never coming close to solving the underpinning issues in her Galateas. She is incapable of understanding the issues responsible for her subjects' disadvantageous situations because she grows up in a well-off family, and "dedicates herself to Christian idealism based on faith which is blind to basic realities of the world it operates in" (Noel 140).

Barbara's attempt at providing a solution to poverty only forces the poor into acceptance of their position, and into an acceptance of the maladies of society. By ignoring the part that society plays in creating poverty and only concerning herself with the immediate solution of feeding the less fortunate, she creates an endless loop of the poor coming to claim their charity. As she engages in this act of kindness, the social structures that caused poverty in the first place grow increasingly more rigid. This is because her ideology bars entry to the higher classes for the poor. Even if Barbara intended to feed all the poor all the time, the Salvation Army is not self-sufficient enough to afford that. Consequently, the speeches she holds before Undershaft as he visits her at her place of work and worship, no matter how long and well-articulated, are never at risk of converting Andrew into her religion. He sees her philanthropy as a mere trade of bread for religion and calls her out on it: "It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other (...) Try your hand on my men: their souls are hungry because their bodies are full" (*Major Barbara* 67). He realizes the flaw in her approach: that she cannot hope to exert her influence over those who are not hungry, be it bodily hunger or the metaphorical hunger of the soul. Through the bet Barbara places with Andrew, "Shaw challenges religionists to test the 'opium of the people' on people not in need of an opiate," (Nutter 90) and Barbara's ideology is found wanting.

Undershaft takes the opposite approach. He specifically targets poverty because, unlike Barbara, he has experienced it first-hand: "I was an east ender. I moralized and starved until one day I swore that I would be a fullfed free man at all costs--that nothing should stop me except a bullet, neither reason nor morals nor the lives of other men" (*Major Barbara* 67). By providing his Galateas with work, he cleanses their minds of worry for their stomachs, ensuring that they can start growing their awareness of society's problems. Only after his subjects have their physical needs taken care of does he impart his religion in them. Yet, he is no philanthropist either, as he uses his subjects to make himself richer. Not only do his subjects increase his wealth, but they also take their place in an army of Undershaft's devotees for use in a hypothetical social revolution. At the heart of Undershaft's ideology, therefore, is money, but Shaw never paints Andrew as a caricature of a capital-obsessed businessman: "In Undershaft's case the nutritional urge is a self-conscious one, not a blindly instinctive one. Shaw himself speaks of Undershaft as 'intellectually and spiritually as well as practically conscious' of the truth of poverty" (Jordan 473). Undershaft uses his wealth intelligently, not hoarding it, but using

it as a lever with which he can exact his will upon society. By leveraging the fact that “Money has the power to influence by taking away as well as by giving,” (Noel 138) he can manipulate others regardless of their personal development, for capital is one of the pillars of society that nobody is untouched by. This is further evidenced as Undershaft proceeds to shatter Barbara’s convictions with the simple act of a charitable donation to her cause, as their “contest quickly proves lopsided to the point of ridiculousness. Undershaft toys with his daughter-opponent for a few rounds of repartee and then finishes her off with a flick of the pen in his checkbook” (Noel 136). Her defeat leaves Barbara reduced to a childlike state, and her desire for an outlet makes her malleable enough for her father to impart his teachings to her. Barbara consequently accepts her father’s religion, but Undershaft’s victory is not yet complete, as her new role “provides a focal point for illuminating the central issues of Undershaft's religion” (Berst 77).

While money is one of the components necessary for freedom in Undershaft’s ideology, the weapons he creates in his factories are just as important: “Poverty and slavery have stood up for centuries to your sermons and leading articles: they will not stand up to my machine guns. Don't preach at them: don't reason with them. Kill them” (*Major Barbara* 68). His goal is to start a revolution, since he believes that society is incapable of naturally ridding itself of its problems: “That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won’t scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions” (*Major Barbara* 66). According to the views he champions, the safety of wealth, when combined with violent revolution, leads to true freedom; however, he only follows through on one of these steps. He never attempts a revolution during the play. As evidenced by Lady Britomart’s characterization that Undershaft “didn’t exactly do wrong things,” (*Major Barbara* 8) it is safe to assume that the violent uprising he preaches for has never occurred in the past, either. Because of Undershaft’s reluctance to act on the revolutionary trajectory of his thought, even as Barbara accepts Undershaft’s ideas and is seemingly set on a path to freedom through wealth, Barbara is fated to become “just as dependent on Cusins for her and her children's well-being as her mother is on Undershaft” (Noel 139). An endless cycle of slavery to society and its structures is seen at play, but Undershaft’s revolution is nowhere to be seen. This is because Undershaft operates from within the system. He has chosen to embrace one of the pillars of society, and he cannot willingly do away with his wealth for as long as he sees value in the immediate products of his philanthropy. In other words, “he has accepted the status

quo as justifying its own existence and requiring no thought or action from him except exploitation” (Nutter 91).

It can therefore be surmised that none of Shaw’s Pygmaliions have successfully created a Galatea who is fully independent. As a result of their attempts to produce quick solutions, each achieves incomplete results. Their respective approaches consider only one of the core powers present in society as presented by Shaw. Each of these powers is responsible for holding up the social structure, which in turn holds down the poor. Wealth, culture, and spirituality lead to quick, momentary happiness, but they are not proper tools for the job of creating a more just society. To ensure that all of society’s members can benefit from these boons, their current forms must be torn down. Spirituality alone is not the answer, for Barbara admits that she “escaped from the world into a paradise of enthusiasm and prayer and soul saving,” (*Major Barbara* 73) meaning that religion was never truly the answer to society’s problems, but a way for her to feel virtuous. Eliza has the idea of using culture to move up the social ladder. Her outset from the beginning is that, to build something for herself, she must play into society’s conceptions of proper speech and dress. Higgins’s cultural changes make Eliza respectable, but he offers her no safety; he makes no plan for her to keep her respectability after the process is completed: “when I’ve done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again” (*Pygmalion* 23). This miscalculation sees her become enslaved by her newly attained culture, forcing her to act in ways she did not intend to. Her final rejection of Higgins sets her free: “In a reversal of the original Pygmalion story, Higgins takes a live girl and turns her into a statue - i.e., a duchess in externals only; Eliza then comes back to life, fully transformed into an independent woman, reaffirming the Pygmalion/Galatea story after all,” (Hornby 122) but her desire for personal emancipation also blinds her to the plight of those who are kept in poverty and regarded with contempt because of their dialect and their clothes, just as Eliza once was. Shaw removes much of the ambiguity from Eliza’s rebellion in his appendix to *Pygmalion*, as Eliza has the means to sustain her new way of life, as well as the funds necessary to open a flower shop because of Pickering’s charitable donations, but money alone is not the answer. Eliza marries into gentility, but she is still not accepted, as her “mother-in-law had her feelings when he married a flower girl who had become declassee under extraordinary circumstances which were now notorious” (*Pygmalion* 79). As Undershaft asserts, “money and gunpowder; freedom and power” as a pair are necessary to enact change (*Major Barbara* 35). Without the



means to demand respect, she cannot attain complete freedom, for her lifestyle depends entirely on the success of her begging from Pickering, and she is consequently “humbled to the dust by having to beg from him so often” (*Pygmalion* 83). She is also unable to help others like her, even if that were a concern of Eliza’s, for she can barely sustain herself and her genteel, respectable, but penniless and unambitious husband. Freddy is essentially the opposite of Eliza – commanding certain power, but without the finances required to exert it in a meaningful way, even if he had the aspirations to do so. Eliza’s final emancipation in Shaw’s sequel happens spontaneously, as the success of her flower-shop business is largely accredited to luck and continuous begging, and not any discernible action taken by Eliza. By ending Eliza’s journey in such an anticlimactic manner, Shaw ensures that her story is not taken as a model for success, for there is no guarantee that one aspiring to achieve the same outcome will likewise find a wealthy and exceptionally charitable friend such as Pickering, or that one’s business competitors would wilt away as happily as they do for Eliza’s happily-wedded-after convenience. The way to achieve lasting and widespread change requires changing society, not playing into it.

Undershaft, like Eliza, grows up in poverty. Like Eliza, for Undershaft, money is “the source of freedom, a virtual giver of life because it overcomes the soul-shrinking effects of poverty” (Berst 71). Unlike Eliza, he uses it as his primary means of social mobility, focusing all of his efforts into its amassment. Undershaft’s position in society stands as evidence of him having chosen the more appropriate path forward. Money has a greater capacity when directly applied for upward movement in the social structure than culture does; however, Doolittle’s fate calls the usefulness of money into question. Despite having attained a great amount of wealth, he is neither happy nor free, and thus it can be concluded that capital alone is not the solution to poverty. The reason why it works for Undershaft and not for Doolittle is in the fact that Undershaft accepts life within the society that once held him down as an escape from poverty, whereas Doolittle would happily reject society in favor of life in poverty. In that sense, Doolittle is more alike to the unconverted Barbara than he is to Undershaft. Despite their striking similarities, such as both men having experienced poverty and having suddenly inherited great wealth, their expectations from life are different, and so their experiences of wealth are also different. Taking away his excuse of poverty forces Doolittle into unease: “I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Henry Higgins. Now I am worried; tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money” (*Pygmalion* 61). Higgins is

unsuccessful in his attempt to make a gentleman out of Doolittle because he hasn't had the opportunity to develop an appreciation for the benefits of responsibility, or the sense of self-importance that continued adherence to conventional morality fosters. As Undershaft asserts, "they are the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life," (*Major Barbara* 33) which is something that Doolittle was never afforded before.

Barbara's religion only dulls the senses of those her Pygmalion-hand touches, perpetuating the existing social order by disincentivizing movement up the social ladder. Her subjects are convinced that they are better off living a meagre existence with the promise of a great reward at the end of their journey. The only tangible change she has enacted is a few full bellies and the privilege of being able to answer affirmatively to all the questions that matter in Christianity: "Have you kept the commandments? Have you obeyed the law? Have you attended church regularly (...) And even a scoundrel can do them all and yet live a worse life than the smuggler or prostitute who must answer No all through the catechism" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 131). Undershaft's path to wealth leaves his pupils well-fed and safe, but their association with him leaves them without social respect. Not only that, but his religion is also one of violence; a violence that never comes to fruition, leaving his disciples craving for a resolution that never comes. He even admits that "their souls are hungry," (*Major Barbara* 67) and while he imparts his ideology into them, he leaves the work of bearing it to completion for someone else to carry out. His work is the most productive of all of Shaw's Pygmalions in that he pushes his Galateas onto a path of potentially becoming Pygmalion, as evidenced by Cusins's confession that he wants to "make power for the world," and his excuses for the use of force to achieve his vision, insisting that the power of violence "has never been so horribly abused as the intellectual power, the imaginative power, the poetic, religious power that can enslave men's souls" (*Major Barbara* 72). Shaw's interest in the imagery of slavery and its connections to capitalism are further elaborated upon in his non-fiction work: "Horses and slaves are worth something: if you kill them you have to pay for new ones. But if instead of employing horses and slaves you employ "free" children and women and men, you may work them to death as hard and as soon as you" (*The Intelligent Woman's Guide* 188). Because the working classes are placated by such gifted religious orators as Barbara, but also the cunning capitalists who promise them security but give them only what they must and may just as well discard them at the first moment of inconvenience, the workers are hardly treated better than a slave. They are allowed to leave

their homes whenever they desire, but without the means to afford even a single taxi trip as in Eliza's case before Higgins's donation, the tangible freedom of the lower classes is called into question.

The only solution to society's inequalities that springs up in every Pygmalion's mind, be it Undershaft, Barbara, or Higgins, is philanthropy. Each Pygmalion's example further illustrates the fact that charity offers only temporary solutions to an ongoing problem. As the first Undershaft wrote in his shop, "IF GOD GAVE THE HAND, LET NOT MAN WITHHOLD THE SWORD" (*Major Barbara* 65). In other words, if society is to be changed, charity must not be accepted, for it is merely a moral outlet for an immoral system. This charity is not to be confused with Doolittle's attempts to quickly make money. Such attempts are a consequence of his underprivileged existence, and they never take what little power he has in society away from him. Philanthropy, on the other hand, diminishes his power: "Middle-class charity, he feels, is a device for instilling in the 'undeserving poor' the fear of the godly" (O'Donnell 8). In trying to create a long-term solution to poverty and morality, all the Pygmalions have failed. Neither Higgins's cultural transformations in *Pygmalion*, nor the religious and materialistic movements in *Major Barbara*, can do anything but offer temporary and incomplete solutions. In Eliza's and Undershaft's case, because of the business-investment and the business-transfer charities of Pickering and the previous Undershaft respectively, they attain self-sufficiency, but even in the most extreme and unlikely cases such as these – in which poverty is cured, and not temporarily alleviated – its roots remain, and it continues to thrive. Charity, in all its different forms depicted by Shaw, perpetuates the reign of the systems of oppression on which society is built because it is always handed out by those who were rewarded by society. It facilitates the continuation of the very systems that made one in need of charity in the first place.

Therefore, in both *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara*, society is the original Pygmalion and the final Galatea. It begins shaping its subjects from birth, leaving no one free from its snare. Eliza claims her freedom by rejecting her final transformation by Higgins, rejecting the security that she once desired in favor of being able to choose her further life path. Yet, after freeing herself from Higgins, she is not free from the consequences of society's influence, thus exposing "the deadness of social manners, the paralysis of gentility and its empty forms," (Goldberg 121) and the ultimate meaninglessness of her transformation. Her ongoing escape from poverty

requires her to make endless sacrifices lest she be thrust into it once more. The only way to achieve lasting freedom is to understand that the “real Galatea is Respectable Society,” (Goldberg 121) and that she must be reshaped before a solution to poverty can be reached.

### THE ROLES OF FAUSTUS AND MEPHISTOPHELES

In parallel to the reading of *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* as being driven by the enactment of the wills of their respective Pygmalions, there is another which reverses the roles of Pygmalion and Galatea as creator and creation by focusing on the transactions of souls. *Major Barbara* makes no attempt to hide its deep connections with the Faust myth. Faust even in his “earliest manifestation can be seen to stand for the aggressive, analytic side of man’s nature, the eternal thirst for knowledge which will not stop at hubris, and which is perhaps for that reason essentially and inevitably antireligious,” (Thorslev 84) a description that forms an immediate and direct parallel to Shaw’s Undershaft. Solidifying their connection, Undershaft’s attempt of creating a fairer society is the “most obvious connection that Shaw’s play has with Goethe’s Faust,” more specifically “the similarity in the major themes involved: money, war, and the attempt to create a kind of paradise on earth” (Jewkes 81). While *Pygmalion* deals primarily with the social significance of the transformation and eventual emancipation of Eliza, in *Major Barbara*, “So constantly are the image of the buying and selling of souls, the motive of power, and references to salvation and damnation employed in the play that they in effect overwhelm the other archetypal plot of the foundling coming into his inheritance” (Jewkes 80). Shaw further reinforces this connection by directly calling Undershaft “Mephistopheles,” alternating between such synonymic names as “Prince of Darkness,” “devil,” and others (*Major Barbara* 38; 49; 57). To understand Undershaft’s role as the Devil, it is important to first understand what Shaw thinks of God:

The God who would send bears to eat up little children would be a wicked God—what Shelley called an Almighty Fiend. Why did not Shelley’s protest produce very much impression on the people of this country? Because, believing he was an Almighty Fiend, they feared and obeyed him very largely as such and supposed that if they told him the truth to his face he would probably strike them dead for blasphemy. (*The New Theology* 6)

Much like Shaw's conception of the fiendish god, Undershaft does indeed threaten to strike his opponents dead for the petty crime of not accepting his will. His comparison to God continues as Cusins calls Undershaft's factory town "a 'heavenly city' (if it only had a cathedral) as well as 'perfect' and 'wonderful'. Such definitive affirmation is not given for any of the other characters in the play" (Noel 136). The difference is in that Undershaft never commits acts of violence. He is more akin to the Devil because his power comes from manipulation. Like the biblical tempter, he offers a bite from the forbidden fruit, and reveals a world of knowledge that was previously hidden from humanity. As made visible by Barbara's reaction to this process, where "By the end of Act II she completely dominates the play in the agony of her disillusionment," (Jordan 474) the attainment of Undershaft's knowledge is just as disastrous for his Galateas as it is for Adam and Eve. What follows for the Galateas is exile, for they cannot return to their unknowing existence anymore; they can no longer sit by in tranquility when they feel the urge to rebel against the system, even if it comes at the price of having to sell their soul.

Undershaft's deep connections with Faust are on display once more as he is misunderstood by the conservative forces present in English society, just as "the authors of the early Faust books and the audience for whom they were written were quite pious, Faust is therefore depicted as a fearful villain at 'best,' and at his lowest, as something of a criminal buffoon" (Thorslev 84). Shaw comes to the defense of Undershaft's position, excusing the destructive nature of his preaching: "To the pious man the newly made freethinker, suddenly renouncing supernatural revelation, and denying all obligation to believe the Bible and obey the commandments as such, appears to be claiming the right to rob and murder at large" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 8). A similar defense is afforded to Faust in his later literary incarnations, and his transformation from a villain into an antihero "is seen most clearly in the Helen episode, which in its new form is Marlowe's most important addition to the story (...) Faust in Marlowe's drama is a Renaissance hero struggling out from under the repression of medieval orthodoxy" (Thorslev 84). Shaw's description of the manner in which a freethinker is treated by the pious and Faust's initial presentation also line up with Lady Britomart's condemnation of Undershaft's influence as a corrupting force: "You would all have grown up without principles, without any knowledge of right and wrong, if he had been in the house" (*Major Barbara* 8). Because Undershaft's religion allows morality to develop naturally and spontaneously, it is seen as dangerous. Such an interpretation does not consider that Undershaft

nurtures man's consciousness to rise "above the danger and the fear that his acquisitiveness will lead him to theft, his temper to murder, and his affections to debauchery," (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 28) because man, not God nor the fate thrust upon him by society, is in control. To those who are accustomed to their enslavement by society, his teachings seem monstrous and overly ambitious, but Shaw's intent was not to use imagery of the Devil to discredit Undershaft. If God is wicked, then his opposite must be in some way virtuous. Using Undershaft, Shaw "builds the esthetics of his argument by successfully playing the devil's advocate" (Berst 74).

Lady Britomart assumes that if a list of commandments is not presented, people will simply not know how to behave, and chaos will ensue. Just as she complains that children "did not dislike him; and he took advantage of it to put the wickedest ideas into their heads, and make them quite unmanageable," (*Major Barbara* 8) so does society at large also reject and condemn his teachings because they may inspire the lower classes to misbehave. An orderly society is, by definition, conservative. It cannot allow for the subversion of its rules if it is to remain orderly; however, Undershaft is not above the danger of "falling into the same conservatism when the time comes for his own belief to be questioned" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 9). Shaw makes a point of emphasizing that free thinkers risk becoming the very thing they rebel against: "No sooner has he triumphed over the theologian than he forthwith sets up as binding on all men the duty of acting logically with the object of securing the greatest good of the greatest number" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 9). That is precisely what happens with Undershaft, for he has not destroyed religion, but deposed one religion in favor of another. Undershaft's name hides Shaw's allusion to the nature of his religion as following in the footsteps of ancient pagans, taking its name from a church that was "in the shadow of a tall maypole which rose higher than the steeple-hence the designation 'Undershaft.' (...) The religion of Undershaft, dominated as it is by the profanity of a pagan mysticism, renders his name symbolically apropos" (Berst 74). As is to be expected from a true pagan religion, Undershaft's "devotees exult in having freed themselves from the old slavery to a collection of books written by Jewish men of letters," (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 9) not realizing that at some point they may be asked to sacrifice themselves in the name of the greater good; to appease their pagan god's appetite for change. Shaw intentionally separates Undershaft from the rest of society because only an exile can hope to shed some light on what genuinely concerns Shaw: "He is dramatically and allegorically powerful in his devil role because he is representative of social and political truth stripped of

pretense and hypocrisy. He is a statement regarding the actual location of power in society, and of society's moral enslavement to that power" (Berst 76).

Through the concept of soul-selling, Shaw presents the idea that it is not Pygmalion who is in control of all the processes that perpetuate poverty; that Galatea bears equal responsibility. It is Galatea who is given agency with the opportunity to sell herself for a desired outcome. Indeed, even though she is recreated in Higgins's vision, Eliza's transformation is initiated at her behest as she comes to Higgins's home, proclaiming: "I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road" (*Pygmalion* 17). The Pygmalions of both plays have attained their roles because, at some point in the past, as a Galatea, they made the decision to sell a part of themselves to do so. It is a cyclical process rather than a unilateral exertion of power, and Andrew Undershaft is a perfect example of this process: "as society has battered his personality, so in turn does his personality boomerang upon society" (Berst 74). Rather than a source of an original evil, Undershaft is a product of the immorality embedded in the foundations of the system that created him. A similar idea is presented in Shaw's *The New Theology* (1907), where he suggests that the conceptualization of God as the perfect creator who creates imperfect beings is incorrect, suggesting instead to "turn that process the other way and to conceive of the force behind the universe as working up through imperfection and mistake to a perfect, organized being, having the power of fulfilling its highest purposes" (*The New Theology* 15). This concept brings a new framework for the understanding of the roles of Pygmalion and Galatea. The Pygmalions in Shaw's plays can therefore be interpreted as one part of the process of creation; as the tools with which Galatea can shape herself, rather than as almighty visionaries who enact their wills without restriction. By selling her right to individuality, Galatea enacts her own will, reshaping reality.

Barbara does not willingly renounce Christianity, but once she is forced into seeing things from Undershaft's perspective, this renunciation is motivated by her internal processes: "Undershaft's victory over her in Act II is a demonstration that the basis on which she worked, the gospel of poverty, was wrong, and that in her work she has been a dupe of the forces of evil, an instrument in the hands of the capitalist exploiters of society" (Jordan 474). By making the underclasses embrace passivity, Barbara was inadvertently acting as a gatekeeper for social movement, thus prolonging the agony of the poor. Her gradual conversion facilitates the bridging

of incompatible moral frameworks and serves as a gateway for the reader into Undershaftian religion. The trade of Barbara's metaphorical soul "helps set in context the last act of Major Barbara. Here, as in Faust, the emphasis is thrown mainly on the value of what the soul is sold for" (Jewkes 86). She does not suffer degradation on account of having sold herself to the Devil as Faust, but flourishes, as "Once she is educated, Barbara's spiritual potential is, ironically, greater than her father's. Although Undershaft has attained the freedom of wealth, his mysticism is ensnared in his past and his position" (Berst 78). Undershaft has acquired freedom for himself and many others, but in doing so, he has played into the very pillar of society that had once facilitated his misery and near-starvation: "his psychology has been molded by the ruthless economics of his rise through society, his vital coherence is linked to his vested commercial interests. In comparison, Barbara has genuine freedom" (Berst 78). His compromise with society is another Faustian agreement. As a result of this bargain, Andrew "retains a bleak, intellectual quasi-integrity at the price of his soul" (Nutter 90-91). The duality of Undershaft as both the original Faust of *Major Barbara* who sells his soul for wealth and power before the play's first act begins, and as the primary Mephistopheles presented in the first act, hints at the existence of another, more ancient devil than Andrew. Both Barbara and her father trade their souls in exchange for freedom, but Andrew sells his to a far unkind Mephistopheles, society. Barbara enjoys more freedom because Undershaft took steps to give her a better starting ground. His religion is imperfect, but it ensures greater clarity of thought: "Materialism, in short, only isolated the great mystery of consciousness by clearing away several petty mysteries with which we had confused it" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 14).

The nature of the Faustian deal that Undershaft and all his predecessors make with society gives them an immense amount of wealth and an unyielding capacity to rationalize every immoral thought, even as Andrew is "asserting the very need for and right of men to kill in the name of causes in which they believe" (Jordan 473). In return for this power, society neuters their ability to act. The Undershafts desire revolution, preaching it wholeheartedly, but can never fulfil their ambitions, as evidenced by the quotes the previous Undershafts have written in their shops: "ALL HAVE THE RIGHT TO FIGHT: NONE HAVE THE RIGHT TO JUDGE (...) NOTHING IS EVER DONE IN THIS WORLD UNTIL MEN ARE PREPARED TO KILL ONE ANOTHER IF IT IS NOT DONE" (*Major Barbara* 65). They have all had a similar idea of what is wrong in society, and a desire of changing it for the better. Since society has stood the



test of time and survived until Andrew's generation, and the Undershaft business yet stands as well, it is safe to assume that none of them were willing to risk starting a revolution. We see a similar Faustian deal in-the-making as "Cusins attempts a compromise: he will use the Prince of Darkness' means to accomplish sacred goals; he will 'make war on war'" (Nutter 91). The paradox of waging war on war is much like the paradox of exchanging one religion for another. Neither can accomplish the reformation of society because the changes they bring are illusory; a magic trick whereby one container is exchanged for another one. Even if they have different contents, they stand on the same troubled foundations as what came before. If the free thinker keeps rationalizing the use of these systems for immediate profit, then "to both theologian and rationalist progress at last appears alarming, threatening, hideous, because it seems to tend towards chaos" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 15). To continue Shaw's religious metaphor, Undershaft knows the direction in which true freedom lies, but like the biblical Moses, cannot enter the promised land – Andrew leads the revolutionary charge, but he only "takes men up to a certain point. It is up to others to raise them further" (Jordan 473). Undershaft's partial success can be credited to his exile status; to fight the injustices inherent to society and bring long-term change, one must erase its foundations. To move forward, Undershaft, too, must be forsaken: "God was once the most sacred of our conceptions; and he had to be denied. Then Reason became the Infallible Pope, only to be deposed in turn" (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 18). His rejection is necessary, but it is not the solution. Once he is removed, he must also be replaced. As the world orchestrates the replacement, it can "feel nothing but relief at having got rid of such a God altogether," (*The New Theology* 11) but this relief takes attention away from the important work of creating a more just system.

The soul-bargains that riddle *Major Barbara* are also present in *Pygmalion*, although they are never directly associated with a metaphysical or metaphorical soul. It is nevertheless clear that these bargains serve the same purpose of prolonging a corrupt system: "The artificial system of middle-class morality is artificial because, as in *Pygmalion*, it enforces in all the relations of social life a network of 'bargains' born of intimidation by the insecurities of life in modern business society" (O'Donnell 9). Eliza's decision to give up her personality and, unwittingly, her freedom, is by nature the same kind of bargain as occurs in *Major Barbara*. Her attempt to "win the love of Pygmalion-Higgins is the evidence of her fear of the role of the woman who has genteel manners without the money to maintain herself in a genteel setting" (O'Donnell 8).

Eliza's need to resort to marriage-bargains with the sole purpose of securing her position is comparable both to Lady Britomart at the start of *Major Barbara*, and to Barbara by the end of it. Furthermore, Undershaft is very similar to Eliza, the difference being that he is more successful than her.

They both start out poor and try to escape it at any cost, but Eliza decides to stop her transformation before she turns into Higgins. Like Eliza and Undershaft, the poor must relinquish a part of themselves if they are to succeed within the system. Like the Undershaft family, the upper classes must embrace immorality to continue their privileged existence in troubled times. Doolittle, with all his disregard for social conventions, also plays into the system by engaging in a reluctant marriage, which "is a bargain which enables husbands and wives to exact reluctant favors from one another" (O'Donnell 8). It all ties together as "this structure of individual bargains supports the power of such men as Undershaft, the Mephistophelian capitalist of Major Barbara" (O'Donnell 9). Finally, men like Undershaft feed power back into the system by exploiting it rather than taking it down, and Undershaft's "diabolism fully reveals itself as the evil of a good businessman" (Berst 75). Cusins's confession about his previous Faustian trades illustrates just how many such soul-trades occur on a regular basis, and for what trivial reasons: "I have sold it too often to care about that. I have sold it for a professorship (...) an income (...) to escape being imprisoned for refusing to pay taxes for hangmen's ropes and unjust wars and things that I abhor" (*Major Barbara* 72).

Finally, the significance of Undershaft's role as a devil is also in that it helps turn attention to the metatheatrical elements present throughout Shaw's plays; it helps "establish for the audience from the outset that they are seeing a play about theater, (...) not some particular theater, but a whole world that is theatricalized, in which people play roles that have often been artificially, and cruelly, forced upon them" (Hornby 126). As society keeps handing out the roles of Faustus and Mephistopheles in its metatheatre of life, and these roles are graciously accepted or taken for granted by a generation who has "not yet learned that the degradation by poverty of four out of every five of its number is artificial and remediable," poverty cannot hope to be solved (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 13). Undershaft is given the role of a pauper, but forces society to recast him, insisting: "I had rather be a thief than a pauper. I had rather be a murderer than a slave" (*Major Barbara* 174). Satisfied with his new role as Mephistopheles, Undershaft

admits that he is no longer as threatening to society as he was before: “I was a dangerous man until I had my will: now I am a useful, beneficent, kindly person” (*Major Barbara* 67). With the supporting cast too busy playing their roles to see the bigger picture, Shaw intentionally exiles his main actors, making them look at the play’s goings-on as outsiders. Eliza’s imprisonment between the classes, Barbara’s crushing ideological defeat, Undershaft’s rise to wealth from poverty, all provide these characters with important insight. They all make the mistake of contenting themselves with obtaining a better role in the ongoing play, when they should be changing the way that it is directed. Society’s problems endure because society’s immediate benefits seem too important to set aside even for a necessary moment of chaos. Instead of starting the expected revolution, Shaw’s characters, “like the Eynsford Hills, will rush out into the street after the final curtain in their elegant evening clothes, indifferent to the fate of the thousands of Elizas who are struggling there” (Hornby 126). Like Eliza and Doolittle, they are too intimidated to strip society of all its veneer as Higgins does to Eliza: “Take all her clothes off and burn them (...) Wrap her up in brown paper,” (*Pygmalion* 20) followed by the destruction of all its presuppositions just as Undershaft does to Barbara. In essence, Undershaft did have the right idea in that violent uprising is the only way out, “the final test of conviction, the only lever strong enough to overturn a social system, the only way of saying Must,” (*Major Barbara* 68) as it is the only way to make society malleable enough to be reshaped as Galatea. The reason why he is unsuccessful is because he is rendered impotent by his reliance on wealth as his means of exerting power, realizing that the destructive processes of revolution would take his power from him, and that is something he cannot allow.

## CONCLUSION

Shaw uses his plays *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* to deal with the issue of poverty in twentieth-century England. Having emigrated to England from Ireland, he uses his outsider perspective to observe the inequalities that are imperceptible to those who live in English society. In dealing with social, economic, and religious issues, Shaw always places particular emphasis on demonstrating the role of poverty in society. Poverty is always a topic of conversation, no matter the ideology espoused by his characters, and no matter their social position. The issue of poverty is central to both plays; it is what motivates their plots to begin, it is what characters to meet and juxtapose their positions to each other. It is what their finales hope to resolve. Shaw shows that poverty is a necessary side effect of social structure, but never excuses its existence. On the contrary, it is because society relies on poverty to define itself that it needs change, and Shaw infuses his characters with the energy and motivation to attempt this change. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza's personal need for a better life sets her on a path of transformation, but things do not turn out as she expects them to. Even when she achieves her goal of becoming well-mannered, cultured in appearance and in speech, she obtains neither happiness nor peace of mind. Instead, she becomes a social outcast, and this result once again places emphasis on the problems of the class system in English society. Eliza cannot be accepted into the upper classes because she has inherited no wealth or power. The only social mobility she is permitted to achieve, a marriage of convenience, comes with the price of selling her freedom. Although Higgins is the one who reshapes Eliza in his vision of the perfect Galatea, he does not bear the responsibility for these negative consequences alone. In accepting and playing into social conventions, Eliza legitimizes the very structures that are responsible for her life in poverty. Through her example, Shaw critiques not only the societal structures that enforce poverty, but also the individual who plays into their hand. In other words, Eliza's experience is a cautionary tale. The desire to find a quick and easy solution for poverty is only natural but, even if it were to work, it necessarily leads to more suffering. A society composed of thousands of people like Eliza is doomed to perpetuate its mistakes indefinitely, with each person reinforcing the foundations of the problems they are attempting to escape from. Higgins's decision to change Alfred Doolittle's life illustrates another problem, which is that members of the upper class hold an immense amount of power, and the poor are powerless to resist the exertion of said power. With nearly all the power in society concentrated in the upper class, the fate of the less fortunate

depends on the whim of men like Higgins, who may one day decide to turn their lives upside down. Yet, despite his power, the problem of poverty cannot be resolved by Higgins. By leveraging his wealth and influence, he only feeds the system further, and brings more misery than he offers solutions for. Unlike Higgins, *Major Barbara's* Andrew Undershaft has lived through poverty, and so his motivation is not born from a callous desire to experiment. He is the only character in the two plays who has both the necessary understanding of the world and the power to enact social change and potentially solve the problem of poverty. Through him, Shaw criticizes the self-made man who has succeeded in society. Undershaft is, essentially, a more driven and successful Eliza; an Eliza who is desperate enough to succeed that she does not stop her transformation before she turns into Higgins. With this analogy in mind, it becomes clear that Shaw intended Undershaft to exhibit both Higgins's unapologetic use of power and Eliza's energy for change. As another one of Shaw's outsider characters, Undershaft's gaze pierces the veneer of society, allowing him to pinpoint the most pressing issues of society with surgical precision. Yet, he is rendered incapable of starting his desired revolution on account of his reliance on the structures of power in society to enact his will. If he started tearing these systems down from the inside, they would collapse on his empire, and he would no longer be in control. Since none of the Undershafts before Andrew were able to dispense with their need for control in favor of lasting change, it can be concluded that the self-made man cannot lead the charge against society, precisely because he is successful. The most that he can do is offer a temporary solution to poverty by hiring workers for his factories. With every vacant position filled corresponding to one person saved from the evils of poverty, Undershaft already does more to solve poverty than any of Shaw's other characters throughout *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara*. The titular character of the latter play, Barbara, ironically carries the biggest potential for change, even though this potential never manifests itself on the written page. The eventual scale of her potential is ironic because, when she is first introduced, she is naively working against societal change. Having grown up in a well-off family, she does not understand poverty, and so she looks for solutions to it in religion, specifically Christianity. Her attempted kindness achieves nothing but the pacification of the underclasses, thus creating an endless cycle of plight and temporary charity. The problem is that the Salvation Army does not have the means to feed all the poor, and its preoccupation with religious conversion distracts people like Barbara who want to make positive change. As its charity component falls short, the cycle the Army creates is set off

balance, benefiting existing class structure more than it benefits the people it tries to help. In the end, nobody presents and fulfils a plan that can change the lives of the poor for the better. The more effort that is put into changing society, the more its systems reinforce themselves. It is precisely these failures of Shaw's characters, whose stories form a collection of cautionary tales, that point the reader to a working solution to poverty. Revolution is the final answer of the underprivileged, the only way of ensuring that their will is done. The reason why Barbara can carry out such a movement is because she has experienced destruction. After her reduction to a childlike state, she is ready to be reared once more. She is rebuilt better than she was before, as Undershaft's Galatea. She is a living testament to the fact that the creation of something better necessitates a period of chaos and ambiguity. Therefore, following from the examples set by Shaw's characters, the only course of action when trying to change a system built to resist change, and consequently provide a solution for poverty, is to start from its foundations. That necessarily means the destruction of everything built so far, which is a frightening prospect even for the most feared devils of society.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of two plays written by the famous Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw. *Pygmalion* and *Major Barbara* are both set against the backdrop of early twentieth-century England. Having emigrated from Ireland to England, Shaw is uniquely predisposed to noticing the social issues plaguing British society; issues that are imperceptible to those who do not have the benefit of Shaw's outsider gaze. This thesis analyzes the state of society presented in the two plays by exploring the differing perspectives of Shaw's characters, with the goal of providing insight into Shaw's understanding of poverty and its potential solutions. Shaw's essays *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, his sermon *The New Theology*, and his non-fiction book *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* are used to explore the author's personal beliefs, insofar as they are relevant for a more complete understanding of the ideologies espoused by his characters. Furthermore, the relationships between creator and creation present throughout the two plays are explored with the goal of understanding the significance of the Pygmalion myth in Shaw's work. Special focus is also directed to the theme of the soul, specifically the concept of selling one's soul, as the role of Faust is shown to perpetuate the problem of poverty. This thesis concludes that the experiences of Shaw's cast of characters form a collection of cautionary tales about how not to enact societal change, specifically regarding solving poverty. Charity, religion, capitalism, and the attainment of culture all ultimately fail to cause lasting change because they only deal with the surface problems of poverty. The only workable method left, one that is heavily alluded to by Shaw but never brought to fruition on the pages of his plays, is a revolution focused at changing the structural problems of society, because the foundations of the class system facilitate poverty.

## KEY WORDS

Poverty, Pygmalion, Major Barbara, Faust, George Bernard Shaw