Major Barbara Study Guide

Major Barbara by George Bernard Shaw

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Introduction

George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* has been called the most controversial of Shaw's works. The play was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre m London m 1905, and early reviews were decidedly mixed. Shaw's seeming criticism of Christianity caused some to accuse him of blasphemy, while others defended what they saw as Shaw's realistic presentation of religion. Critics complained about the violence of the play, particularly in the second act, saying it was so excessive as to be beyond realism. Others disagreed, saying that the depiction of that violence, if unrealistic, was so only because the violence was subdued. Whatever the opinion of the critics, however, the play was a success with the public. It remains popular and has enjoyed numerous revivals, including an adaptation to film in 1941. Today it is considered a very important work, not only among Shaw's plays but also in the history of modern drama.

Many of Shaw's plays are known for their involved arguments and *Major Barbara* is no exception Shaw himself called the play "a discussion in three long acts," and much of the play's "action" consists, in fact, of words. When the play was published in 1907, Shaw added, as with many of his works, a lengthy preface, contributing further discussion about the play itself. In addition, the play is noted for its unconventional attitudes toward morality as well as Its irony and humor. Given the serious nature of the issues examined in the play wealth and poverty, business and religion, cynicism and idealism-it is sometimes easy to overlook the fact that *Major Barbara* is, in fact, a comedy. Shaw uses the play to entertain his audience, to make people laugh, while examining issues that are as important today as they were when the play was first written.

Author Biography

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 26, 1856. His father was an alcoholic and unsuccessful businessman, and his mother a genteel woman interested in music and art. The family was poor and, when Shaw was six, moved in WIth another family to save expenses; his early experience of poverty is speculated to have affected the decidedly unromantic View of the poor shown in many of his plays, including *Major Barbara.* Shaw's formal education was brief, and he began work in a land agent's office before he was sixteen.

In 1876 Shaw moved to London, Joining his mother and sisters, who had arrived from Dublin the previous year. Working as a writer focusing on music criticism, short fiction, and drama, Shaw initially was unable to earn his own living and relied on his mother's earnings as well as an inheritance in order to make ends meet. His attempts at writing fiction were unsuccessful. It was not until the 1880s that Shaw achieved some success and was able to support himself. By this time he had made some significant changes in his life, including becoming a vegetarian and devoting his political energies to the cause of socialism. Shaw joined the Fabian Society, a group of socialists whose credo held that changes in government could not be successfully accomplished quickly by revolutionary means. Rather, the Fabians held that lasting change could only be wrought by sensible, gradual change.

As a member of the new Fabian Society (which was formed in England in 1884), Shaw was often called upon to speak, and he became a skilled orator as well as a noteworthy essayist. He also wrote book reviews and art criticism and became a well-regarded music and theater critic. During this period, Shaw became an admirer of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen *(A Doll's House),* whose dramas, known for their realism and focus on important social issues, were to become a major influence on Shaw's own writing. In 1895, Shaw became a theater critic for the *Saturday Review* and used his column to criticize the artificiality and hypocrisy of the English stage.

Shaw had been writing drama Since the 1880s when his first play, *Widowers' Houses* was produced in 1892, followed by the writing of *The Philanderer* (1893) and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), neither of which was produced for over a decade. Shaw's literary output was enormous, and he gradually gained fame as a dramatist. In the next few decades he completed numerous works, including *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1894), *Major Barbara* (1905), and *Pygmalion* (1914), his best-known work which became the inspiration for the 1956 musical *My Fair Lady.* When World War I broke out in 1914, Shaw temporarily ceased writing drama and turned instead to expounding on his pacifist views, which were extremely unpopular until public opinion shifted later in the war. After the war ended, he continued to write; his post-war plays include *Heartbreak House* (1916-1917) and *St. Joan* (1923).

In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne Townshend, an heiress, also interested m socialism, who had admired Shaw's writing The marriage ended with Charlotte's death in 1943. Shaw won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925, and he continued to write plays until his death at ninety-four on November 2, 1950. Known for his wit, social commentary, and brilliant dialogue, Shaw has often been called the greatest English dramatist Since William Shakespeare.

Plot Summary

Act I

Major Barbara opens with Lady Britomart In the library of her house in London, England, as her son Stephen, whom she has summoned, enters. She has asked to see him, she reveals, because of her concern about his future financial well-being, as well as that of his sisters, Sarah and Barbara. The audience learns that her daughter Sarah is engaged to Charles Lomax, who will not be able to support her until he receives his inheritance. It is also revealed that her other daughter, Barbara, who has joined the Salvation Army, is engaged to Adolphus Cusins, a Greek scholar who also has an insufficient income and who, Lady Britomart believes, only pretends to be a Salvationist because he is In love with Barbara. Stephen as well should soon seek a wife and will need to provide for his own family.

For this additional monetary support, Lady Britomart tells Stephen that she must turn to the children's father, Andrew Undershaft, a wealthy munitions manufacturer from whom she has been separated for many years.

Lady Britomart also reveals that Stephen will not inherit his father's business because each heir to the Undershaft enterprise must be a foundling and must, when he dies, leave the business to another foundling. Stephen, horrified by his father's profession, does not wish to take his father's money and is upset when he discovers that Undershaft is expected at Lady Britomart's house almost immediately.

Barbara, Sarah, Cusins, and Lomax, who have also been summoned, enter the library. Barbara is enthusiastic about seeing her father because he has a soul to be saved. Undershaft is shown into the room and introduced to his children. He expresses an interest in the Salvation Army, saying that their motto, "Blood and Fire," could be his as well. While the others are clearly uncomfortable with Undershaft's profiting from war, he reveals that he is not at all ashamed.

When Barbara invites him to her Salvation Army shelter, he agrees to come the next day provided she will come the day after to his munitions factories. Barbara, hoping to convert her father, agrees to this arrangement, while he says that he may in fact convert her. When Lady Britomart decides to ring for prayers. Undershaft says that he will only stay for a service conducted by Barbara, and Barbara agrees to conduct one. All leave for the service in the drawing room, except for Stephen who still disgusted by his father, remains in the library.

Act II

This act opens the following day at Barbara's Salvation Army shelter where Snobby Price, an unemployed workman, and Rummy Mitchens, a poverty-stricken woman, are seated at a table, eating the Army's standard meal of bread and milk. Both admit to confessing sins they never committed in order to please the Salvationists, on whom they depend for assistance. Jenny Hill, a young Salvationist, enters with Peter Shirley, also unemployed. Bill Walker, a rough young man, enters and accuses Hill of taking his girlfriend, whom Barbara later reveals has been "saved," into the Army. In his anger, Walker pushes Hill, strikes Mitchens, then strikes Hill as well. Barbara enters and, by her frank manner, lack of anger, and persistent talk of God's love, arouses feelings of shame, compounded also by Hill's forgiveness, in Walker.

Undershaft enters and observes as Barbara continues to work on Walker, who becomes more and more uncomfortable, finally leaving to seek his girlfriend at another shelter. Barbara exits, leaving Cusins to converse with Undershaft, who reveals that he considers money and gunpowder necessary to salvation, for without them, one cannot afford such niceties as honor, truth, and love. Cusins reveals that he has indeed become a Salvationist for love of Barbara, and the two men discover that their love for Barbara is what they have in common

Undershaft says he will convert Barbara to preaching his gospel and, to reach that end, will buy the Army, an organization that he finds useful because it causes workers to be honest and happy, and thus less likely to form unions or become socialists

When Barbara returns, Undershaft offers her money, but she refuses, believing his money to be tainted because of his profession. At this point, Walker returns and offers Hill a pound because of his ill treatment of her. She refuses, suggesting the money be given to Mitchens, whom he also hurt, but he will only give It to Hill, as Mitchens met his violence with threats of her own. Hill suggests some of the money be given to the Army, but Barbara refuses, what she wants is Walker's soul, which she hopes to save.

Mrs. Baines, the Army Commissioner, enters, saying she has wonderful news. A Lord Saxmundham will give the Army five thousand pounds If five other men will each meet his donation. Undershaft reveals that this benefactor owns Bodger's Whiskey, a fact that does not dissuade Mrs. Baines, who asks Undershaft for five thousand as well. When Undershaft agrees, Barbara is incredulous that the Army will take his money or the money from Bodger's Whiskey; she believes that businesses such as her father's and the whiskey company are harmful to a humane, Christian society. Cusins suggests that Mrs. Baines, Undershaft, and himself march immediately to the coming meeting, but Barbara refuses to attend. After the others leave, Walker, who has returned, taunts the defeated Barbara for saying the Army will not be bought. When Walker leaves, Barbara states that she will no longer work for the army and offers to take Shirley to tea. The act ends with the two of them leaving together.

Act III

This act opens in Lady Britomart's library, where Lady Britomart and Sarah are seated along with Barbara, who is now out of uniform. Lomax enters, followed by Cusins, who has spent the night drinking With Undershaft. Undershaft arrives to take the family to see his factories and Perivale St. Andrews, the model town he has built in which his workers live. Lady Britomart sends the children out of the room. Alone with her husband, she immediately tells Undershaft what income Barbara and Sarah will need, and he agrees to provide it. She once again appeals to Undershaft to leave his business to Stephen, but he refuses and, when Stephen enters, Stephen says he does not want his father's business. Barbara, Sarah, Cusins, and Lomax then enter the room and leave for their tour of Under shaft' s empire.

The scene shifts to Undershaft's factories and town, where Barbara stands as Cusins, Stephen, Sarah, and Lomax enter, each in turn exclaiming over the beauty of Perivale St. Andrews. Undershaft then enters, followed by Lady Britomart who, also praising the town, suggests the business be left, not to Stephen, but to Cusins and thus Barbara. When Undershaft responds that he must leave his factories to a foundling, Cusins reveals that his parents are related and that their marriage, while accepted m Australia, is not legal in Britain. Undershaft replies that Cusins can indeed succeed him. Cusins proceeds to bargain for a high salary, while Barbara comments that he is selling his soul. When she speaks of how her own beliefs have been shattered, Undershaft tells her she must seek a new religion, that he saw only poverty and misery at her shelter, in contrast to the material comfort of his own workers, whom he has saved from the horror of poverty. Asking Cusins to decide about succeeding him, Undershaft leaves with the others to see the gun cotton shed, and Barbara and Cusins are left alone.

Cusins tells Barbara he will accept Undershaft's offer, to which she replies that, if he had not, she would marry the man who would choose to succeed her father. Barbara has decided that she must have the town, that she must save the souls of those who cannot be bribed WIth bread or Heaven, that now she has found her work When the others come out of the shed, Barbara asks her mother to help her choose one of her father's houses for herself and Cusins.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Act 1 begins in the library of a well-appointed house in London. Lady Britomart Undershaft, a well-dressed society woman in her fifties is awaiting the arrival of her son, Stephen. Lady Britomart awaits Stephen's arrival so she may discuss with him his future as the head of the Undershaft family. Stephen has recently turned 24, and Lady Britomart wishes him to undertake more responsibilities as the only man in a family of three women. We soon learn that there is a Mr. Undershaft, but that he does not live with the family, as the husband and wife are separated. Stephen's discomfort at the mention of Undershaft's name is evident, but Lady Britomart claims that she can no longer withstand the strain of managing the family alone, due to the added strain of the marriage of her two daughters.

Her younger daughter, Sarah, is engaged to a man who will become wealthy at age 35, when he comes into his inheritance. However, until he turns 35, he is dirt poor and will need his wife's family to contribute to their livelihood in order to continue to move within high society. Her older daughter, Barbara, is engaged to a professor of Greek, who is an educated and socially suitable man, but he is also quite poor. Barbara herself has sworn off all creature comforts and she is a major in the Salvation Army, existing on one pound (British monetary unit) per week.

Because the two daughters are marrying poor men, the Undershaft family will need to support three households, rather than just one. Lady Britomart asks Stephen's advice on whether or not to appeal to her ex-husband, the father of her three children, for the extra support. Mr. Undershaft is extremely wealthy through his cannon foundry. Lady Britomart tells Stephen that the business of weaponry has been in the Undershaft family for generations. In this family, though, it has the peculiar distinction of being handed down only to foundlings, or babies born out of wedlock, as Undershaft himself was, rather than sons born legitimately within the Undershaft family. Lady Britomart explains to her son that she and his father had separated in order to meet Mr. Undershaft's wish of disinheriting Stephen, so that he may someday carry on the tradition.

After burdening Stephen with this new and disturbing knowledge, she again asks him for advice on the problem of the family finances. Stephen is horrified by his mother's proposal to ask Undershaft for money. She tells Stephen that . Undershaft provides all of their present income, which shocks Stephen further. Finally, Lady Britomart tells Stephen that she has invited Undershaft to the house that very night to ask him for the money, so that he may see the daughters he will be supporting and meet the future son-in-laws who cannot provide for them.

Lady Britomart calls Sarah, Barbara and their two fiancées, Charles Lomax and Adolphus Cusins, into the room to break the news to them that their father is coming to visit. Everyone except Barbara is stunned; she sees it as an opportunity to save her father's wicked soul. As a major in the Salvation Army, it is her job to save souls, and she takes her job very seriously.

Lady Britomart tells the girls that because their father has not seen them in years, it is important that they are on their best behavior. She does not disclose to the girls that she will be asking for money on their behalf.

Undershaft arrives, ushered in by the family butler, and in his discomfort, he mistakenly identifies Charles Lomax as his son. He obviously does not even know how many children he has, and thinks that all three men are his sons. Lady Britomart corrects him, explaining that he has only one son, who he then thinks is Adolphus Cusins. Cusins explains to him that he is engaged to Barbara, and introduces Barbara, Sarah and Stephen.

Undershaft asks Barbara about her work at the Salvation Army. She requests that he comes to see her at the Salvation Army tomorrow. Mr. Undershaft agrees, on the condition that Barbara will come to see his foundry the following day. The conversation is taken over by Cholly (Charles), who wonders abstractly about the morality of Undershaft's work at the cannonry. Undershaft responds by saying that he has no qualms about his work, and does neither seeks to justify it, nor to declare his self as good or bad. He only wishes to produce weapons to the best of his ability. Stephen interjects, saying that there are good men in the world and scoundrels. Barbara responds, saying that there is neither good nor evil in the world, just "children of one Father," and that in the Salvation Army she has the opportunity to help all people equally. Her father is obviously intrigued by Barbara more so than by any of his other children, though his disdain for Stephen is evident.

The topic of religion is not fit for discussion, according to Lady Britomart. Therefore, she tries unsuccessfully to change the subject. She finally agrees that if they are going to talk about religion, then it must be in the form of a prayer. No one agrees to this request, and everyone adjourns to the drawing room. Lady Britomart and Stephen are once again left alone in the library. As she begins to cry, she tells Stephen that she feels his father is trying to steal her children's love away from her. Finally, she follows the others in to the drawing room, leaving Stephen alone to sulk.

Act 1 Analysis

The beginning of Act 1 immediately introduces the ironic tone of the entire play. It is ironic that Lady Undershaft asks Stephen to play more significant role in the family affairs, to become a man, so to speak. She insists on treating him like a child even as she is encouraging him to grow up. Lady Britomart's ironic relationship with Stephen is further illustrated by her charade of asking Stephen for advice, then making the decision herself to ask her ex husband for the money, even in the face of Stephen's advice to the contrary. Her bossy way of speaking to Stephen will continue throughout Acts 1 and 2. In Act 3, Stephen will finally break free from his overbearing mother.

The explanation of Stephen's disinheritance of the family business is what first draws attention to the themes of class and social standing. There is an ironic reversal of the typical ideas of class however, as in the Undershaft family heritage, all privilege is given to foundlings, who are typically the outcasts of society. However, because Undershaft himself was a foundling, and does not wish to break the long tradition, he is willing to accept divorce from his wife and separation from his children to uphold the tradition.

Lady Britomart's speech about morality brings to light a second major theme in the play, that of skewed or hypocritical morals. When Stephen apologizes to his mother for being the sole cause of their divorce, she tells him that there were moral differences that hurt the marriage as well. Lady Britomart tells him that his father "didn't exactly do wrong things: he said them and thought them: that was what was so dreadful. He really had a sort of religion of wrongness just as one doesn't mind men practising immorality so long as they own that they are in the wrong by preaching morality; so I couldn't forgive Andrew for preaching immorality while he practiced morality."

Charles Lomax and Adolphus Cusins, Sarah and Barbara's fiancées, are affectionately known as Cholly and Dolly. Cholly is portrayed as a silly young man, frivolous, ineffectual and not at all intelligent. Dolly is a professor of Greek, and although he is slightly more intelligent and sincere than Cholly, we learn later that his passion for religion and the Salvation Army is simply a ruse to make Barbara fall in love with him.

Major Barbara is what is known as a discussion play, meaning that the plot is propelled more by dialogue than by actual occurrences. This is true in Act 1 more so than in either of the two subsequent acts, as Act 1 consists entirely of conversations among the various characters.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

Act 2 takes place at the Salvation Army in West Ham, where a man and a woman sit at the table finishing a sparse meal of bread and milk. They both have heavy common accents and appear to be extremely down on their luck. The man is Snobby Price, a young painter who believes that he is extremely intelligent and far too good to work or eat at the Salvation Army. The woman, Rummy Mitchens, reveals to Snobby Price that she is married, although she pretends not to be so that the Salvation Army will want to convert her to piety, feeding her in the process. Snobby Price has a similar story, and tells the Salvation Army staff that he used to blaspheme, gamble and beat his mother senseless so that they will continue to try to convert him, whilst they provide him with food and shelter. He tells Rummy that the truth is that his mother used to beat him. However, he cannot tell them that, because the Salvation Army only takes people who are bad and need to be saved.

Jenny Hill, a Salvation Army worker, enters with Peter Shirley, an elderly, half-starved, exhausted man. Jenny goes to get him some food, and he tells Rummy and Snobby that he has just lost his job because his hair had started turning gray, despite the fact that he is only 46. Jenny brings him back some food, and although he is starving, he does not want to take it because he has never had to live on charity before. His hunger gets the better of him though, and he begins to eat ravenously.

A rough-looking man, Bill Walker, enters the courtyard. Bill approaches Jenny, telling her that she took his girlfriend away from him. She converted the girlfriend and helped her find an alternative living situation so she could escape the abusive home life she had to endure with Bill. Bill hits both Rummy and Jenny in the face out of anger. Ironically, it is the older man, Peter Shirley, who finally stands up to Bill. Peter tells him that his son-in-law's brother is a fighting champion, and bets him that his courage only holds up to women and old men, and that he would not dare hit Todger Fairmile, the fighting champion. Although Bill is intimidated by Shirley, he agrees to fight Todger Fairmile.

At this moment, Major Barbara enters the courtyard. She ignores Bill and begins to talk to Peter Shirley, who is a newcomer to the Salvation Army. She then turns to Bill, and proceeds to engage him in a verbal sparring match, from which she clearly emerges as the winner. She tells Bill that the girl he has come to find has a new boyfriend, and that he happens to be the very same Todger Fairmile that Peter Shirley had goaded him into agreeing to fight only moments before.

Mr. Undershaft arrives to visit his daughter, as promised the previous night. He meets Peter Shirley, who tells him that he is proud of being poor and secular. Undershaft responds that poverty is nothing to be proud of, and that his own religion is being a Millionaire. He then promises to leave Barbara alone and to watch her while she works. Barbara goes to work on Bill's soul.

Dolly enters with his drum, and Barbara introduces him to Bill. Bill expresses his sympathy for any man who is going to marry a woman who talks as much as Barbara does. Barbara goes back into the shelter, leaving her father and her fiancée alone in the courtyard. Just as Lady Britomart had done, Undershaft accuses Dolly of being insincere in his devotion to the Salvation Army, assuming that he is more devoted to Barbara than he is to God. Cusins denies this accusation, saying that he is a "collector of religions," and believes in all of them equally. Undershaft on the other hand, believes that there are only two things necessary for salvation: money and gunpowder. Cusins is impressed by his sincerity, but asks whether there is room for ideals such as honor, justice, truth, love and mercy in his religion. Undershaft replies that these values are luxuries of the wealthy class, a direct result of wealth. Cusins is somewhat repulsed by Undershaft's mercenary attitude, and tells him that he will have to choose between his so-called religion and Barbara if he wants to keep her in his life henceforth. Barbara, with her deep love and compassion for the poor, will never stand for her father's callous religion and aversion to poverty, Dolly explains.

The men then begin discussing business and Dolly's plans for providing for Barbara. Dolly claims that Barbara's financial security is still the responsibility of her father, not his own responsibility. Dolly then tries to turn the subject back to religion. Undershaft concedes this, but tells Cusins that they both must win Barbara's love equally, as they have established that neither of them is religious in the same way as she is.

Mr. Undershaft tells Dolly that as he seeks to find the successor to his empire, he would choose Barbara over Stephen. He concedes that while he does not share Barbara's religious views, he feels that money and power should be used control the masses, not God. Undershaft vows to get Barbara to see his point of view. He states, "I have been a common man and a poor man; and it has no romance for me. Leave it to the poor to pretend that poverty is a blessing: leave it to the coward to make a religion of his cowardice by preaching humility: we know better than that. We three must stand together above the common people: how else can we help their children to climb up beside us? Barbara must belong to us, not to the Salvation Army."

In response to Cusins' accusation that he is crazy, Undershaft tells him that no plan is crazy with enough money to fund it. Cusins realizes that he plans to attempt to purchase his daughter's favor when Barbara comes back to the courtyard from a fundraiser, and her father tries to donate money to the Salvation Army to help the unsuccessful fundraiser.

Soon after they return, Bill Walker returns to the courtyard. He went to confront Todger Fairmile in an attempt to cleanse his conscience for hitting Jenny and Rummy, only to find that Todger too was a recent convert, and would do nothing more harmful to him than kneel down and pray for him. Because Bill's plan of being redeemed for his sins that morning by being beaten by Todger had backfired, he brought some money to donate to the Salvation Army in order to ease his conscience. Barbara refuses the money however, saying that forgiveness cannot be bought, but must be earned by joining the Army.

Mrs. Baines, another Salvation Army worker, enters, and reveals the good news that Lord Saxmundham has agreed to donate $5000 to the Army, on the condition that they can find someone else to match the sum with another $5000. Mrs. Baines appeals to Undershaft for the remaining $5000, and seeing his chance to "buy" his way into the Salvation Army, he writes a check immediately. Barbara protests the donations on the grounds that Lord Saxmundham owns a whiskey distillery, and her father owns a weaponry factory.

Mrs. Baines puts Barbara's protests aside, and gratefully accepts the check from Undershaft. Immediately, Barbara takes her Salvation Army pin off, gives it to her father and resigns from her position as Major. The others leave on a Salvation Army march, and Barbara is left alone in the courtyard with her converts, Bill Walker, Peter Shirley and Rummy. Bill realizes that as Snobby Price left, he stole the money Bill Walker was offering for redemption. He laughs at Barbara in her misery, haughty in his triumph against her, for he has single-handedly proven that Snobby Price's "conversion" was a farce, and that Snobby is still a Godless thief.

Act 2 Analysis

The first irony about the characters at the Salvation Army is that many of them do not actually need or want salvation, but they come pretending in order to be provided with free food and shelter. Rummy tells Snobby that she pretends to be extra bad so that the women who work at the Salvation Army are rewarded for their hard work by feeling that they are doing good. This is another instance of the ironic morality that is at play in this work, and it is an attempt by Shaw to criticize the Salvation Army as an institution that exists more to pander to its salvation-hungry workers and ease the consciences of its philanthropic donors than to make a moral or spiritual impact on its converts.

Through the members of the Salvation Army, we are shown the face of poverty in Britain in the early 1900s as portrayed by Shaw. These are characters that are embittered by their treatment by the wealthy business owners whose pockets they line with their thankless work. This contrasts with Undershaft's view of poverty, though he is one of the very business owners to whom the Salvation Army converts refer in their embittered complaints. In his eyes, poverty is extremely shameful, and his religion of wealth is, more than anything, a shield against the indignity of poverty. He feels that the logical way to conquer the disgraces of poverty is with money, not spirituality, and it is this path that he will offer Barbara and Cusins in becoming partners in his business. The hundreds of employees he pays in return for services rendered are given salvation from poverty through an honest day's wage, not through God, and in his mind, Undershaft's own methods are many times more effective than Barbara's are.

When Barbara comes back from her fundraising meeting, she is awakened to certain hypocrisies that exist within the Salvation Army. She realizes that she has begun to "think more of the collection than of the people's souls." She says to Snobby Price, who has returned with her from the fundraiser, "if you had given your poor mother just one more kick, we should have got the whole five shillings!"

At this point, Shaw alludes to a line from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, when Undershaft cries, "My ducats and my daughter!" The reference to that particular line in *The Merchant of Venice* paints Undershaft as even more mercenary, as the line indicates that he is more concerned with his money as his daughter, and admits it laughingly. His cry is followed by the complete conversion of Cusins to Undershaft's way of thinking, who replies to him, "Money and Gunpowder!" Barbara follows up with her own cry of despair, "Drunkenness and Murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?"

Barbara realizes that her God truly has forsaken her when Bill Walker points out that Snobby Price was "saved" in the morning, and by the afternoon was back to his thieving ways, stealing money that was meant for the Salvation Army. This is yet another triumph against Barbara and her crusade for souls, and Bill does not hesitate to mock her for it.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

Act 3 starts in much the same way as Act 1, with Lady Britomart writing in the library. Sarah and Barbara are already there, and Charles arrives soon after, followed by a drunken Adolphus Cusins. Charles tries clumsily to express his sympathies to Barbara, and Barbara reprimands Cusins for not arriving sooner. He admits that he has just had breakfast, despite the late hour in the day, and confesses that he was out all night drinking with her father. Barbara questions him about the Salvation Army march and meeting that she did not attend, and Cusins tells her that there were 117 conversions, brought on by the generosity of the two donors. He added that Undershaft chose to remain an anonymous donor, because he thought that other charities would begin to harass him for money if his name was publicized in association with such a large amount.

At that moment, Undershaft arrives to take them all to his cannon works. Lady Britomart tells them to go get ready, so that she can have a moment alone with Undershaft. She wastes no time in asking him for the required money to support Sarah and Barbara when they are married. Undershaft readily agrees, and then he turns the conversation to the subject of Stephen and the inheritance of the foundry. Undershaft stands firm that he will not hand the business over to Stephen, as he is not a foundling. He confesses though, that he is having trouble finding a suitable foundling that would be any more competent than Stephen, who is in Undershaft's mind not competent at all. He suggests to Lady Britomart that if she wants to keep the foundry in the family, she should find a suitable foundling and marry him to Barbara.

Stephen enters suddenly, and explains that he has no interest in going into business, be it the cannon foundry or any other. He has decided that he will go into politics, and Undershaft is relieved. Lady Britomart, however, is crushed, and she tries to intervene. She is quickly cut off by Stephen, who firmly requests that she stops treating him like a child, and that any further negotiations about his future will only be discussed between himself and his father. Undershaft applauds Stephen's bravery towards his mother, and agrees that in exchange for disinheriting him, he will help Stephen enter the world of politics. After realizing that Stephen has no natural talents, other than his self-proclaimed knowledge of right and wrong, Undershaft decides that his rightful starting point will be in journalism.

Undershaft is critical of Stephen's self-proclaimed knowledge of right and wrong, and criticizes the entire country for feeling that they are justified in moralizing right versus wrong, while having no practical knowledge or use whatsoever. Stephen resents his father's criticism of the country and government, and Undershaft responds,

"The government of your country! I am the government of your country…Do you suppose that you and half a dozen amateurs like you, sitting in a row in that foolish gabble shop, can govern Undershaft and Lazarus? No, my friend: you will do what pays US. You will make war when it suits us, and keep peace when it doesn't. You will find out that trade requires certain measures when we have decided on those measures. When I want anything to keep my dividends up, you will discover that my want is a national need. When other people want something to keep my dividends down, you will call out the police and military. And in return you shall have the support and applause of my newspapers, and the delight of imagining that you are a great statesman. Government of your country! Be off with you, my boy, and play with your caucuses and leading articles and historic parties and great leaders and burning questions and the rest of your toys. I am going back to my counting house to pay the piper and call the tune."

Sarah, Barbara, Cholly and Dolly enter, ready for their excursion to the foundry. There is some discussion as to who will travel in the more fashionable carriage, and who will travel in the unpainted bulletproof car that Undershaft is test-driving. Sarah and Cholly prefer the carriage, and Barbara and Dolly go with Undershaft. During the ride, Undershaft explains to them about the idyllic community he has created at the foundry, and the social hierarchy he uses as a management system, with each person managing the person directly below, so that he has no contact with his workers at all apart from occasional pleasantries.

Barbara tells her father that she can never forgive him for "buying" the Salvation Army from her, and in doing so, compromising a soul that she was in the process of saving. He tells her that there are other ways to do good work, preparing her for the glimpse she is about to get into his religion of guns and money.

They arrive at the surprisingly clean and organized foundry, and they are impressed by the churches, schools, libraries, nursing home and ballroom, that all seem to make the town, according to Cusins, almost "a heavenly city instead of a hellish one." Lady Britomart, who is at the foundry for the first time, proclaims that now that she has seen it, she feels she cannot give it up, that it is hers by right, implying that it must stay in the family, rather than be passed down to a foundling.

Adolphus steps forward, confessing that he is legally a foundling. He was born to parents whose marriage is legitimate in Australia, but not here in England. He had lied about it because he loves Barbara and wishes to be seen as an appropriate match for her. Undershaft, after hearing the story, proclaims Dolly an eligible heir and foundling. He begins to negotiate the details before Cusins has even accepted the proposition. They bargain over a salary, and they agree that Dolly will need to change his name to Andrew Undershaft, as per the tradition, and then begin the weightier task of bargaining over the moral issue.

When asked for her opinion on the matter of the morality of the business, Barbara says that the previous day she had thought that power came from God. After witnessing how easily a soul could be bought with money however, she recognized that money was the true source of power, and that Undershaft was like a God within his foundry. She challenges her father to show her some goodness and justification that comes from the immense power he wields, and he responds by saying, "Cleanliness and respectability do not need justification, Barbara: they justify themselves. I see no darkness here, no dreadfulness. In your Salvation shelter I saw poverty, misery, cold and hunger. You gave them bread and treacle and dreams of heaven. I give from thirty shillings a week to twelve thousand a year. They find their own dreams; but I look after the drainage."

Lady Britomart tries to get everyone to leave the foundry at once, lest they begin to buy into Undershaft's "wickedness." She is, however, too late, as everyone is listening to him with rapt attention, and even Barbara stands comes to her father's defense. Cusins is still trying to come to terms with his moral dilemma. The rest of the group leaves Barbara and Cusins alone to discuss their future, and Cusins makes his final decision. He will accept the inheritance of the foundry, and Barbara applauds him for the decision, confessing that had he not accepted it, she would have left him and waited for the man that would accept it. They rejoice, and Barbara calls out to her mother, asking her to go into the town to help her choose the house where she and Dolly will live.

Act 3 Analysis

Cusins' appearance in the library following a night of drunken revelry with Undershaft foreshadows his final acceptance of his fate as Undershaft's successor. Although he will fight the moral issue of being the owner of a cannon foundry, in the end he grows to understand Undershaft's ideas about poverty as a crime. Barbara's appearance in plain clothes, without her Salvation Army uniform, can be seen as a symbolic change that will allow her to shed her previous values and ideals about poverty and power, allowing her to begin to understand and accept her father's views. Undershaft further calls on Barbara to abandon the ideology she adopted during her time at the Salvation Army, and he encourages her to find a new one that will be more fitting to her newly acquired knowledge about the power of money.

When Barbara asks her father why he feels that poverty is a crime, he tells her that it is "the worst of crimes. All the other crimes are virtues beside it: all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible

pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it…there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society: they force us to do away with our own liberties and to organize unnatural cruelties for fear they should rise against us and drag us down into their abyss."

Undershaft's basic premise is that poverty, which he calls the worst crime of all, is the cause of everything that the so-called moralists define as crime. He hypothesizes that a man with food on his table, a bed on which to sleep and a job that gives him a sense of purpose, will not commit violent crimes. Thus, in order to eliminate poverty they must work toward the creation of wealth and jobs, regardless of what the jobs entail, and the elimination of crime will follow.

In one of Undershaft's last, and perhaps most provocative speeches, he declares that it is not only the wealth and jobs that the cannon foundry generates that make him powerful, but also the weapons themselves. He says that it is only through violence that historical changes are affected, and that as a contributor to the means of violence, he feels himself to be a part of this change.

In the final scene, Barbara and Cusins reconcile their differences and come to the conclusion that Cusins will accept her father's offer. Cusins realizes that "all power is spiritual: these cannons will not go off by themselves," and Barbara accepts that "there is no wicked side: life is all one. And I never wanted to shirk my share in whatever evil must be endured, whether it be sin or suffering."

Characters

Mrs. Baines

Mrs. Baines, a Salvation Army Commissioner, accepts the Undershaft money that Barbara has turned down, then reveals that the Army has also accepted money from Lord Saxmundham of Bodger's whiskey. Her willingness to accept money from those who cause so much harm disillusions Barbara and results in Barbara's leaving the Army.

Major Barbara

See Barbara Undershaft

Cholly

See Charles Lomax

Adolphus Cusins

Cusins is engaged to Barbara. Shaw describes him as "capable possibly of murder, but not of cruelty or coarseness." A professor of Greek, he pretends to be a Salvationist because of his love for Barbara, though he tells Andrew Undershaft that he has a genuine interest in religion. He shares some of Barbara's idealism and is revolted by Undershaft's cynical religion of money and gunpowder; in fact, he frequently calls Undershaft the dew or Mephistopheles. Yet he is also persuaded to some extent by Undershaft's arguments and agrees to succeed Undershaft in his armaments business. Nonetheless, he brings some of his own Idealism to that business, initially telling Undershaft that he will sell arms only to whom he wishes, while Undershaft insists he sell to everyone. Finally, citing his own socially acceptable but morally questionable acts, he agrees to accept Undershaft's offer, but leaves the audience with the impression that he and Barbara will try to do good through a business based on evil.

Dolly

See Adolphus Cusins

Jenny Hill

Jenny is a sincere Salvationist who takes Mitchens and Price's insincere religious posturings at face value. When Walker strikes her, her unending forgiveness and compassion cause him to feel tremendous guilt.

Charles Lomax

Charles is engaged to Sarah. He is a flighty young man whose lack of intelligence and inappropriate comments make him a source of humor in the play.

Rummy Mitchens

Mitchens is seen at the Salvation Army shelter. Worn down by poverty, she appears to be elderly but is probably middle-aged. She appreciates the kindness of the Salvation Army workers but knows that to make them happy, she must confess a multitude of SinS. When Walker strikes her, she repays him with anger and threats, in contrast to Jenny Hill, who treats the brute with kindness and forgiveness.

Snobby Price

Price is an unemployed workman who admits to confessing sins he never committed in order to please the Salvationists. He shows two faces to the audience: the cynicism he displays with Mitchens and the exaggerated religious demeanor he puts on in front of Barbara and Jenny.

Peter Shirley

Shirley is a forty-six-year-old worker who is ashamed of accepting help from the Salvation Army. He has recently lost his job because his streak of gray half makes him look like an old man. He tells Undershaft that he and those like him are poor because they work to make Undershaft and his kind rich.

Andrew Undershaft

Undershaft, Barbara's father, has become a wealthy man through the manufacture of armaments. Money and gunpowder form the basis of his religion, and he says that the Salvation Army's slogan, "Blood and Fire," could be his own. Though others are horrified by his profession, he is unapologetic, and his motto is "unashamed." Life as an anus manufacturer has kept him from what is believes is the greatest sin-poverty. There are numerous references to him as the devil throughout the play, and Barbara's description of how she has imagined his workplace fits m with stereotypical images of hell. Yet his workplace is not a hell; his workers are well fed and live in clean, comfortable houses. There is, however, a certain cynicism ill all this; 1£ his workers are satisfied, they will be better employees, less likely to form unions, more likely to be reliable. Undershaft's love for Barbara is genuine, and he wishes to convert her to his point of view. The play's ending appears to leave him triumphant, but Barbara remains a reformer She has seen the reality of what her father says and does, but she has not adopted his cynicism.

Barbara Undershaft

Barbara is the title character of the play. Born into a well-to-do family, she becomes a major in the Salvation Army, dismissing her servant and sharply curtailing her spending. Her primary focus is on doing what she believes to be the work of God. Shaw describes her as jolly and energetic and these attributes show in her work at the Salvation Army shelter, where her religious devotion and quiet persistence gradually begin to break the defenses of even the rough Bill Walker. Barbara is engaged to Adolphus Cusins. The play is set in motion when Barbara, meeting her father for the first time, asks him to come to her shelter, and he agrees, providing she comes to see his foundry and model town. Barbara's Idealism is dashed when her father comes to the shelter and the Army eagerly accepts his money, which Barbara considers tainted. She abandons the Army, not knowing what she will now do with the rest of her life.

When she sees the beauty of Perivale St. Andrews, Barbara becomes convinced that it is better to save those souls which cannot be bribed with bread or heaven. As Cusins accepts the proposition that he succeed Undershaft, Barbara gains a new sense of purpose. She has grown wise, but retains a sense of idealism in her plan to transform her father's model town.

Lady Britomart Undershaft

Lady Britomart is Barbara's mother and Andrew Undershaft's estranged wife. At the beginning f the play she has summoned Undershaft to discuss with him how he will provide for his adult children. She is particularly concerned about their son Stephen. She Initially separated from Undershaft because of his intention of leaving his business to a foundling instead of to Stephen. By the end of the play, she is satisfied with Undershaft leaving the business to Barbara through Cusins.

Sarah Undershaft

Sarah is Barbara's sister. She is more superficial than Barbara. Shaw describes her as "slender, bored, and mundane." She is engaged to Charles Lomax.

Stephen Undershaft

Stephen is the twenty-five-year-old son of Andrew Undershaft and Lady Britomart. He is a serious young man, initially horrified by his father's line of work and, unlike his siblings, rejects Undershaft from the beginning. But seeing his father's foundry and the city Perivale St. Andrews, he comes to admire and respect his father's work.

Bill Walker

Walker is a rough young man who comes to the shelter looking for a fight and eventually strikes both Mitchens and Hill. Because Mitchens responds with anger, he is not ashamed of striking her, but Hill's forgiveness provokes strong feelings of guilt within him. When he tries to pay money for his misdeed, Barbara tells him that the Army cannot be bought. But when Mrs. Baines accepts Undershaft' s money, Walker taunts Barbara, saying his money was only turned down because it wasn't enough.

Themes

Parent and Child

In the opening act of *Major Barbara,* Barbara meets her father, whom she cannot remember ever knowing. Although she has been raised solely by her mother, the two do not seem close, and Lady Britomart is clearly unhappy with-even uncomprehending of-Barbara's interest ill the Salvation Army. Barbara is not close to either her mother or her father, but in the Army she has found a sort of surrogate parent, a fact that is emphasized when Barbara later says that there are no orphans in the Army.

When Undershaft enters, however, the Importance of the relationship between Barbara and her father becomes immediately apparent. Barbara sees him as a soul in need of salvation; he wishes to convert her to his view of life. While showing the importance of Barbara's relationship with her father, Shaw also establishes some tension between Lady Britomart and Undershaft as parents when, as Undershaft leaves the room with the children at the end of Act I, Lady Britomart expresses dismay over the possibility of the children changing their loyalty from the mother who raised them to the father who initially cannot remember their names or even exactly how many children he has.

As the play progresses, Barbara becomes disillusioned with her surrogate parent, the Salvation Army, because of Its acceptance of her father's tainted money. At first she believes she has lost everything important to her, but after touring the Undershaft factories and town, she begins to see her father's point of view and to become closer to him. Because Cusins has been chosen as Undershaft's successor, Barbara has, in essence, become her father's heir. Her drawing closer to her father is concurrent with a newfound dependence on her mother. As the play closes, Barbara is seen calling out for her mother and clinging to her skirts like a child. Asking her mother to help her choose a home in her father's city, Barbara has finally become closer to both of her parents, though she also retains her own sense of self.

God and Religion

Through Barbara's involvement with the Salvation Army, Shaw offers an examination of Christianity in general and the Salvation Army in particular. Barbara's initial focus is on doing the work of God. Act II gives the audience a chance to look at the practical implications of this work, as seen through the eyes of Its targeted beneficiaries. Through the conversation of Rummy Mitchens and Snobby Price, Shaw reveals that, while grateful for the material assistance the Army gives them, Mitchens and Price essentially earn this assistance by lying. Both talk about the Salvation Army meetings in which they are expected to "testify" about their conversions. Price prides himself on convincing the Army of his former evil. "I know wot they like," he Says, "I'll tell 'em how I blasphemed and gambled and wopped my old mother."_ Mitchens bemoans the unfairness to women; their confessions cannot be loudly proclaimed but "'az to be whispered to one lady at a time."

The audience discovers the Army's manipulation as well in Barbara's treatment of Bill Walker. In order to try to save his soul, Barbara works incessantly on Walker's feelings of guilt about striking Mitchens and Jenny Hill. In addition, Barbara believes the Army to be hypocritical when it takes money from Bodger Whiskey and her father's munitions business, both of whom seem to embody the very evil the Salvation Army wants to eliminate. In the end, it is Undershaft's religion that feeds, houses, and clothes people.

Yet Shaw is not simply maligning the Army or Christianity. There is sincerity in Jenny Hill "turning the other cheek." And Barbara's intentions, though possibly misguided, are pure. In the end, though Barbara has abandoned the Army, she still speaks of saving souls but now without the Army's bribes of bread and heaven. She sees her new mission as "the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of the Shadow," Though Shaw reveals problems in the Army's techniques, the play does not dismiss the search for God.

Good vs. Evil

Shaw throws the traditional concept of good and evil into question throughout *Major Barbara.* In the beginning of the play, it seems fairly obvious that Barbara, who lives on little money so she can work feeding and sheltering the poor as well as trying to save their souls, is doing good. At the same time, Undershaft, who has become a rich man selling armaments to combatants regardless of the morality of their causes, and who believes poverty to be the only sin, is evil. Barbara's Salvation Army seems to be doing only good while Undershaft's factories, which initially horrify most of the play's major characters, are inherently evil. Yet in the second act, good and evil become interconnected as it is revealed that the Salvation Army is glad to accept funding from Undershaft's armaments as well as Bodger's Whiskey. Barbara, who sees good and evil as entirely separate entities, is horrified to discover that the Army takes this tainted money, so horrified, in fact, that she abandons the Army altogether. The sense of interconnection between good and evil is continued in the third act, where the audience discovers the results of Undershaft's evil-clean, well-kept homes for Undershaft's employees. Through his armaments, Undershaft has saved his workers from the evil of poverty; he has succeeded where the Army has failed. Through the success of her father's morally questionable business, Barbara is finally able to see the moral complexity of the concepts of good and evil.

Growth and Development

Barbara begins the playas an innocent who believes she has discovered the one right path in the Salvation Army. Moral issues are simple for her. The Army's mission of materially assisting the poor as well as working to save their souls is the work of God. Undershaft's munitions and Bodger's whiskey are the work of the Devil. As the play progresses, however, Barbara discovers that the Salvation Army, dependent on the funding of Undershaft, Lord Saxmundham, and others like them, is not as morally pure as she believed. Unable to accept the fact that the work of God is being done with the Devil's money, she abandons her idealism as well as the Army itself. Barbara says, "I stood on the rock I thought eternal; and without a word of warning It reeled and crumbled under me." Undershaft identifies her confusion as growth, saying to her, "You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something."

Losing her faith in the Army, Barbara finally comes to see that eliminating poverty is in itself a good deed and that, because of the material success of Undershaft's workers, she can no longer bribe them with bread or heaven; she is free to work, unencumbered, on saving their souls Despite this sense of Barbara reaching a sort of maturity at the end of the play, Shaw presents Barbara's growth as a paradox. The audience's final view of Barbara is of her calling for her mother, seeking her guidance. Thus Shaw complicates the concept of growth and development, leaving the audience with the sense that Barbara has matured and yet is still, in some ways, a child.

Style

Plot and Subplot

Critics have noted at least four possible plots in *Major Barbara:* the conversion struggle between Barbara and her father, the question of how Lady Britomart will secure incomes for her children, the question of whether Barbara and Cusins will marry, and Barbara's battle for Bill Walker's soul. Although each are distinct plots, all are intertwined throughout the course of the play. The "good vs. evil" contest between Barbara and her father is most often seen as the main plot, as the action of the play revolves around its development The others can be considered subplots. Although they are important, their main function is to support the main plot thread and their resolution is subordinate to that of the primary storyline.

Setting

Since Shaw did not specify a time period for the action in *Major Barbara,* the action can be assumed to take place around 1905, the year of the first production. The action takes place in three locations: Lady Britomart's library, Barbara's Salvation Army shelter, and Undershaft's factory and model town of Perivale St Andrews. The depiction of these three locations highlights the conflict between Barbara and Undershaft. They meet first on neutral ground, then in her territory, then in his, which also becomes Barbara's by the end of the play. The stage is used to illustrate the opulence of Lady Britomart's way of life in Act I, the poverty and degradation of the shelter in Act II, and the clean, modest comfort of Undershaft' s place of business in Act III. Also in Act III, however, the mutilated dummy soldiers serve as mute testimony to the horrors of Undershaft's business, undermining some of Perivale St. Andrew's beauty.

Allusion

An allusion is an indirect reference, usually to another literary work. Being familiar with an author's allusions leads to a deeper understanding of his or her work. In *Major Barbara,* references to Undershaft as the Devil and Mephistopheles as well as the selling-and saving-of souls are allusions to the Faust legends, in which Faust sells his soul to the Devil. The best known English-language retelling of this tale is Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (1594). Another well-known version is Johann Wolfgang van Goethe's *Faust* (Part I, 1808, Part II, 1832). There are also numerous references in *Major Barbara* to Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, and to Euripides, whose play *The Bacchae* (406 B.C.) is about the worship of Dionysus.

Symbolism

A symbol is a person, object, or action that suggests something else. Barbara's Salvation Army uniform and brooch are symbols of her faith in the Salvation Army. When she loses her faith, she no longer wears either. The mutilated dummy soldiers that appear in Act ill are symbols of the violence of both war and capitalism.

Comedy

The word comedy can refer to a play that is light and entertaining and has a happy ending. It can also be used to mean a play that deals with serious topics in a light or satirical manner. *Major Barbara* is both. There are many humorous moments throughout the play: Undershaft's inability to remember the names of his children, Lomax's stupidity, illustrated by his numerous inane comments and by his smoking in the explosives shed, nearly blowing up the Undershaft business; Lady Britomart's control of her controlling husband Shaw satirizes the Salvation Army by showing the recipients of its largesse gain this Christian organization's assistance by deceit. He also satirizes the violence of capitalism by juxtaposing the beauty of Perivale St. Andrews with the horror of the work done there. The play also has a happy ending. The heroine Barbara has found her work and, as occurs in numerous comedies, the play ends with a decision to marry.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an important aspect of *Major Barbara,* which has been criticized for what is sometimes seen as an excessive emphasis on verbal argument. Much of the "action" of the play, in fact, is actually in the dialogue, as characters' discussions move the drama forward For instance, Cusins' decision to succeed Undershaft is preceded by lengthy arguments about moral issues. Shaw himself re ferred to the plays as "a discussion in three long acts."

Historical Context

The early 1900s saw an increasing interest in Socialism (which advocates government ownership and/or control of the production and distribution of goods and services) worldwide, with Russian workers revolting against the Czar in 1905 In the United States, Upton Sincla1f's novel *The Jungle* depicted the horrifying working conditions of immigrant laborers in the meat packing plants of Chicago and called for a socialist solution. Sinclair inadvertently attracted more attention to the impurity of the meat products Americans were consuming than the plight of the workers, but the resulting passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was nevertheless a victory of sorts over unbridled capitalism

Over the course of the nineteenth century, England had changed from a primarily agricultural society to an industrial nation, and many people had moved from the country to the towns. The rise in industry brought an increasing amount of worker unrest and unemployment, which rose between 1900 and 1904. At the time, the government began to take more responsibility for the unemployed With the passage of the Unemployed Working Act of 1905, committees to assist the unemployed were established by the government, yet unemployment remained a major problem, working conditions were far from ideal, and laborers remained dissatisfied. There were a large number of strikes, and membership in trade unions doubled between 1900 and 1914.

In this climate, the socialist Fabian Society, of which Shaw was a member, gamed influence. The Fabians believed in changing society through participation in government-as opposed to overthrowing governments through revolutions-and members were elected to a variety of positions. The Fabian Society was only one of many organizations aimed at bringing about social reform. A number of individuals became known for their own efforts as well. Late Victorian and Edwardian England had begun to see poverty as the result of unemployment rather than the immorality of the poor, and so people were open to efforts at reform. This new attitude toward the poor is reflected in *Major Barbara,* which depicts poverty as an unnatural (even immoral) state for humankind.

Religion was an important force in England at this time, and churches were a major influence on efforts at social reform. In 1890, Salvation Army founder William Booth published *In Darkest England and the Way Out,* in which he argued that England, with the horrors of its own poverty, could not consider itself superior to Africa. Booth called for major changes in society in order to eliminate poverty. Shaw was greatly impressed by Booth's work, and its influence, particularly Booth's perception of poverty, can be seen in *Major Barbara.*

Although the importance of churches at this time cannot be ignored, there was also a rise in agnosticism, the belief that it is impossible to know whether or not there is a God. The term "agnostic," in fact, was coined by British naturalist Thomas Huxley in 1869 In 1859, Charles Darwin had published *The Origin of Species,* in which he presented his theories of evolution and natural selection. Darwin's theories shocked Victorians, as it cast doubt on traditional religious beliefs (most notably the belief that man was divinely created rather than evolved from lower primates as Darwin's work suggested), and religious people still felt threatened by Darwin's theories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For many, this period was a time of doubt as scientific progress seemed to call the truth of religion into question. In general, the good of increasing developments in science and technology was itself doubted. Early in the nineteenth century, the Luddites, who considered advancing technology to be an evil, had literally smashed the machines of the industrial Revolution. This mistrust of scientific and technological progress, which continued into the next century, is reflected in *Major Barbara* when Undershaft delights m the development of more advanced weapons technology, which is "better" because it can kill people more efficiently.

Another area of much disagreement was the subject of women's rights. The struggle for women's suffrage (or the right to vote) in England began in the 1870s and continued, without success, until 1926, when women were finally allowed to vote. At the time *Major Barbara* was produced, it had only recently been decided that women had the legal right to own property. And *in Major Barbara,* when Lady Britomart wants the Undershaft business to go to Barbara, this is accomplished by naming Cusins, Barbara's future husband, as Undershaft's successor. The place of women in society, however, was changing The term "new woman," probably coined in 1894, came into prominence. The new woman was a member of anew, more liberated, generation. She believed in women's suffrage as well as education for women and the end of the sexual double standard. The character of Barbara, who gains the masculine title of Major and who looks for fulfillment and duty outside of the home but who by the end of the play clearly embraces domestic life and the world of her mother as well, reflects the changing roles of women in Shaw's time.

Critical Overview

In the second volume of his biography, *Bernard Shaw,* Michael Holroyd writes of early reactions to *Major Barbara's* first production, focusing on the fact that, as Holroyd puts it, "The critics were impressively divided." Holroyd quotes one reviewer who spoke of the play's "religious passion," as well as another who called Shaw "destitute of the religious emotion," and a third who suggested that *Major Barbara's* "offences against good taste and good feeling" should have resulted in the play's censorship. Shaw, Holroyd writes, was accused of "deliberate perversity" and praised for his "sense of spiritual beauty." He was called "a high genius" as well as "a writer whose absence of feeling makes him a very unsafe guide." While the play no longer faces charges of blasphemy or immorality, It continues to be controversial. Much of that controversy revolves around the seeming ambiguity of Shaw's purpose. As Harold Bloom writes in his introduction to *George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara,* "the drama moves finally in a direction equally available for interpretation by the extreme Left or the extreme Right."

Writing in 1905, reviewer William Archer, quoted in Margery Morgan's compilation *File on Shaw,* said that "The play is one long discussion between Barbara. . . and Undershaft; and to Undershaft Mr. Shaw resolutely gives the upper hand." Some critics have continued to follow Archer's lead, seeing Undershaft as the clear winner in the play's central conflict,- as he supports realism over Barbara's idealism. Pat M. Carr in *Bernard Shaw* refers to Undershaft as Barbara's "mentor," saying that he contributes to her growth with "his greater realistic knowledge of the ways of the world." Undershaft, says Carr, is "the devil's advocate who has all the sensible lines "

Other critics, however, have focused on the complexity of Shaw's ending. In *Bernard Shaw, Playwright: Aspects of Shavian Drama,* Bernard F. Dukore notes that Undershaft has a "more viable morality than [Cusins and Barbara], Since it fits the facts of life." But Dukore goes on to point out that Cusins and Barbara will ultimately change Perivale St. Andrews "from paternalistic capitalism to presumably Socialist democracy." Although Undershaft's model City can be seen as heaven, according to Dukore, "It is a potential heaven, or ... a hell that may be raised to heaven." Barbara Bellow Watson, in her essay "Sainthood for Millionaires," in *George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara* acknowledges that the apparent victory is Undershaft's. He achieves "the reversal of all the stubbornly held opinions of his opponents," but Watson adds that Undershaft's seeming victory is "paradoxical only if we expect a socialist author to render simplistic fantasies in which virtue (poverty) triumphs over vice (money and power), or suffers in the right way." In other words, Shaw does not abandon his own socialism in this play; Undershaft only seems to be victorious. Shaw's criticism of capitalism is subtle; Watson refers, for example to "the products of Capitalism being miserably on display in Act n," which takes place at the shelter. In the end, Watson says, "Christianity may be vanquished, but materialism has not triumphed." Alfred Turco, Jr., in his essay "Shaw's Moral Vision" (also in *George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara)* also writes that Undershaft is not the clear winner, but, in Turco's opinion, the important point is not that Undershaft bas failed to wholly convert Barbara, but, in fact, that each bas succeeded, in part, m converting the other. Turco writes, "Barbara and Cusins 'give up' the Salvation Army by accepting the cannon factory, and Undershaft gives up his cannons by placing the power they represent at the service of the religious impulse." Neither side bas lost and "The respective 'professions' of Barbara and Undershaft will now develop in meaningful relation to each other instead of in isolation."

The resolution of the play is in the syntheses of Barbara and Undershaft's convictions. Margery M. Morgan, in her essay "Skeptical Faith," argues, however, that no such synthesis exists, but the play must be seen in a larger context. Morgan says the ending "implies a recognition. . . that the true resolution of socialist drama belongs not in the work of art but outside it in society." She acknowledges that, within the play, there is a resolution of plot in Cusin's acceptance of Undershaft's offer, but "as a total structure of ideas the play remains a paradox in which antitheses retain their full value and cannot be resolved away." Within the play, for Morgan, there is no resolution. In his essay "Shaw's Own Problem Play," J. Percy Smith argues that at least part of the problem in *Major Barbara's* interpretation lies in "the ambivalence of Shaw's attitude to the central moral question that [the play] raises. In other words, the ending remains unclear because Shaw himself never decided who really triumphs.

In spite of continued argument over the play's ending, most critics writing today agree that *Major Barbara* is one of Shaw's greatest works, and the play's importance in modern drama is virtually unchallenged. For many, the complications and seeming paradox of the play's final act only add to *Major Barbara's* complexity and richness as well as Shaw's reputation as one of the twentieth century's greatest playwrights.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Cross is a Ph.D. candidate specializing in modern drama. In this essay she discusses the development of Barbara's identity as it relates to her involvement with family and work.

In his play *Major Barbara,* Shaw focuses on the development of identity in his lead character, Barbara Undershaft. Although Barbara has a strong sense of self at the beginning of the play, Shaw shows that her identity is not fixed and simple but fluid and complex Her identity is composed of many factors that, initially, seem at odds. She is the daughter of wealthy parents whose lifestyles she rejects. Instead she chooses to work for the Salvation Army, accepting the tiny sum of a pound a week as salary. While her allegiance at the play's outset lies almost wholly With the Army, Barbara will come to realize that her family may enable her to better perform the work of God. 'This realization will bring her closer to God, closer to her parents and family, and, ultimately, bring her to a true concept of her Identity within the world in which the play is set.

From the beginning of the play, Barbara has, in essence, three parents. Lady Britomart, Andrew Undershaft, and her heavenly Father, God, whom she serves through her work in the Salvation Army. Act One establishes the positions of these three parents in Barbara's life. As the play begins, the audience discovers that Barbara has been entirely brought up by her mother and does not even know her biological father. Although her mother has raised her, it soon becomes clear that Barbara has rejected Lady Britomart's way of life. Before Barbara even walks on stage, her mother expresses disappointment in the path Barbara has taken: "1 thought Barbara was going to make the most brilliant career of all. . . . And what does she do? Joins the Salvation Army; discharges her maid; lives on a pound a week; and walks in one evening with a professor of Greek whom she has picked up m the street."

Barbara has clearly forsaken the opulence of her mother's life as well as Britomart's idea of an appropriate career for a respectable society woman. Yet, there is another way to see Barbara's relationship with her mother. As feminist critic J. Ellen Gainor remarked in her book *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender,* "The first half of the play.. stresses Barbara's maternal resemblance, which Shaw notes in several stage directions as well as in a wonderfully comic speech by her mother." The speech Gainor referred to is that in which Lady Britomart complains about Barbara's "propensity to have her own way and order people about" and adds, "I'm sure 1 don't know where she picks it up," when it is, in fact, obvious that Barbara's behavior resembles that of no one so much as Lady Britomart herself. In addition, while Barbara has rejected the luxury of her mother's lifestyle, she continues to live in her mother's house; her autonomy and austere lifestyle are supported by a safety net in the form of her mother's wealth In spite of her verbal declarations of independence, Barbara is reliant on her mother's way of life and still very much Lady Britomart's daughter.

Undershaft's initial relationship with Barbara is also established in the first act. Barbara's name is Undershaft, and she has been raised on her father's fortune (though her determination to live on "a pound a week" symbolically rejects that wealth). But in his introduction to the critical collection *George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara,* Harold Bloom points out that in the course of their initial discussion, Barbara and Undershaft are "[bonded] against the mother, as each stands for religion as the life force." The two also agree on the motto "blood and fire"-although there is considerable difference in the meaning each takes from the phrase.

At the end of Act One, when Barbara and Undershaft each agree to visit the other's place of work, the bond between father and daughter is again emphasized. After years of absence from their lives, Undershaft arrives and, while not completely winning them over, immediately wins the attentions of his daughters. When Lady Britomart complains about a father who "steals [the children's] affection away from [the mother]," Shaw establishes a tension between the paternal and maternal, the masculine and feminine forces in Barbara's life Gainor saw Barbara as the product of both parents, embracing the masculine as well as the feminine in her work in the Salvation Army. As Gainor pointed out, "the Army's essential function is more 'feminine': nurturing and concerned with the personal, while its structure is 'masculine': an army with hierarchies of power and financial concerns."

In spite of the tension between masculine and feminine, the first act presents Barbara as primarily a child of God. It is for her "heavenly Father" that Barbara has abandoned her father's money and her mother's concept of a "brilliant career" and chosen to do the work of God. When Lady Britomart tells Undershaft that Barbara "has no father to advise her," Barbara replies, "Oh yes she has. There are no orphans in the Salvation Army." God the Father has become Barbara's parent as well as the center of her work. Even Barbara's name and clothes reflect her total absorption into the world of this father She is no longer Barbara Undershaft but Major Barbara. She wears the uniform of the Salvation Army. Despite the resemblance she bears to her father and mother. Barbara sees her identity as fixed. She is the child of God. God's work (as represented by the Army's mission) is her work. Barbara sees no compromise in this; her work with the Army is the ultimate expression of her devotion to God.

In the second act, Shaw shows Barbara Undershaft as Major Barbara, Salvationist, child of God. Although this scene at the shelter shows Barbara in her element, doing the work of her heavenly father. it is also at this point in the play that

Undershaft begins to stake his claim on her. In his discussion with Cusins, he reveals that he loves Barbara, revealing his paternal emotions for her. Undershaft identifies Barbara with himself. When Cusins says that "Barbara is quite original in her own religion," Undershaft answers. "Barbara Undershaft would be. . . it is the Undershaft inheritance." He then goes on to say "I shall hand on my torch to my daughter." As Gainor appraised, "The father sees in the daughter an image of himself and intends to develop her capacity to carry on his public functions, as well as convert her to a form of Undershaft philosopher." Undershaft sees himself as Barbara's true father. Bernard F. Dukore wrote in his book *Bernard Shaw: Playwright,* "symbolically as well as literally, Undershaft sires Barbara" As Barbara's father, Undershaft sees her identity in him and wants her to do his work Later Barbara will see that being the daughter of Undershaft is indeed a part of her identity. She will also realize that being his daughter enables her to better perform her religious work.

But in Act Two, Barbara still sees Undershaft as the man in opposition to her true father, a man whose business negatively affects her real work. In support of this, Shaw does suggest that Undershaft is the opposite of God. Throughout *Major Barbara,* Undershaft is referred to as the Devil, the Prince of Darkness, and Mephistopheles. And it is in the second act that Barbara's earthly father reveals the hypocrisy of the Salvation Army. In essence, Undershaft buys the Salvation Army, and Barbara sees her identity as a child of God destroyed. She expresses that loss of identity in the symbolic action of pinning her Salvation Army brooch on Undershaft's collar. In the third act, she will exchange her uniform for ordinary clothes.

Barbara later cries out, "My God: why hast thou forsaken me?" In addition to losing God and the Salvation Army, she has also lost her work. "I'm like you now," she says to Peter Shirley. "Cleaned out, and lost my job." She later expresses the importance of this loss: "I stood on the rock eternal; and without a word of warning it reeled and crumbled under me. I was safe with an infinite wisdom watching me . . . and in a moment, I stood alone." The identity she saw as permanent seems to be gone altogether.

It is in the third act that Barbara begins to synthesize a new identity out of the fractured parts of her character. At first, when Barbara prepares to leave for Undershaft's factories and model town, the gulf she sees between God and Undershaft is emphasized when she describes her sense of Undershaft's work: "I have always thought of it as a sort of pit where lost creatures WIth blackened faces stirred up smoky fires and were driven and tormented by my father" Clearly she is describing the traditional Christian imagery of hell with her father as the Devil. But Undershaft is not the devil, and it is in this act that she begins to accept him as a parent. When he tells her, "You have learnt something. That always feels at first as If you lost something" This statement shows Undershaft in an understanding, fatherly role. For her part, Barbara begins to see that her father's work may do some good and that she may be able to learn from him.

It is here that Undershaft tells her he saved her soul from the seven deadly sins: "Food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children." It is only because of Undershaft, who has provided for Barbara's physical needs her entire life, that Barbara had the means to be able to seek and serve God. Her acceptance of Undershaft as her father is emphasized when, after Cusins decides to succeed her father, Barbara reveals that, had he not, she would have named the man who did. As Dukore pointed out, "Barbara, marrying Cusins, becomes-since Adolphus takes his new father's name-Mrs. Andrew Undershaft." Since Undershaft's successor must take his name, Barbara would have become Mrs. Andrew Undershaft regardless of who became her father's heir. Bloom, taking a Freudian point of view, saw Barbara's acceptance of her father as symbolically incestuous and refers to the pm's "dance of repressed psychosexual courtship." It seems more accurate, however, to see her as becoming fully her father's daughter, retaining, even in marriage, her father's name. In addition, this name is also her mother's, which places her even more strongly with both of her earthly parents.

Despite her disillusionment with the Salvation Army (and her "deal With the devil" in becoming Undershaft's heir), Barbara remains her heavenly Father's daughter as well; she has merely exchanged her idealistic view of God's work for one more realistic. She recognizes that poverty is in itself an evil, but her concern is still for saving souls, though no longer "weak souls is starved bodies. . . . My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread." She will continue to do the work of God but on different terms' "Let God's work be done for its own sake".

In addition to accepting both Undershaft and God as fathers, in the final scene Barbara turns again to her mother. "After all," she says, "my dear old mother has more sense than any of you." Although Barbara contrasts her mother's desire for "the houses and the kitchen ranges and the linen and the china," of Perivale St Andrews with her own focus on "all the human souls to be saved," she still accepts her place as her mother' s daughter. At the end of the play, Shaw describes her cry, "Mamma! Mamma! I want Mamma," as childlike, and describes Barbara as "[clutching] like a baby at her mother's skirt." Gainor viewed the reversion of Barbara to a childlike state as her acceptance of her role as a woman in her society. According to Gainor, women at this time "must. . . be reinscribed within the feminine realm to rationalize or confirm their status." She went on to say, ""As Victorian culture associated the child with the feminine, a display of childish behavior affirms the gender of the daughter." So Gainor saw Barbara's identity reverting to an earlier association with her mother thus establishing her femininity and subservient place m society.

There is, however, another way to view Barbara's childlike behavior in the final scene. As John A. Bertolini wrote in his book *The Playwrighting Self of Bernard Shaw,* "Barbara herself is mad with delight for the idea of conversion, especially conversion as a cleansing away of the old self." What Barbara experiences in the last scene can also be seen as "self-renewal through childlike behavior." Although the final scene certainly does identify Barbara as her mother's daughter, it also can be seen as indicative of a rebirth. Barbara has become anew person with a new identity which is a combination of all facets of her character.

Barbara's new identity, however, is not solely with mother, father, or God. She has synthesized all three of these influences; she encompasses the masculine, the feminine, the spiritual. Similarly, her work is now also a synthesis, the domestic aspect of her marriage reflecting her mother's influence, her new understanding of the Undershaft business reflecting her father's, her desire to save souls reflecting God's. All are integrated to create a new sense of work, a new sense of family, and a new way of life. Barbara's character loses its fragmentary nature, and she becomes her true self.

Source: Clare Cross, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Calling Major Barbara *Shaw's "most successful" drama, Kennedy provides an overview and background of Shaw's play in this essay.*

Shaw wrote a number of plays concerned with wealth and its distribution, but *Major Barbara* may be the most complex in theme and the most successful as drama. Barbara Undershaft has defied upperclass conventions by becoming a major in the Salvation Army, dedicating herself to the poor of London, who, naturally enough, resist her ministrations whenever they go beyond food and shelter. Adolphus Cusins, a professor of Greek given to quoting Euripides, pretends an equal dedication in order to be near her. Her mother, Lady Britomart-the owner of one of Shaw's most resounding character names-now needs more money for her children's marriages and turns to her long -es tranged husband, Andrew Undershaft, a munitions maker of low birth but noble proportions. He is "fabulously wealthy, because there is always a war going on somewhere"; but the ""Undershaft inheritance," which insists that the business must be passed on to another foundling boy, has been the cause of the rupture in their marriage. Andrew Undershaft is at the opposite moral pole from Barbara, yet father and daughter are immediately fascinated with one another and strike a bargain: he will visit her shelter if she will visit his armament works. The shelter is also in financial need and is saved from ruin only by the generosity of Undershaft and a whisky distiller; Barbara, shocked that the Army will accept money from two such manufacturers of evil, loses her faith and resigns her position But Undershaft's creed, that the worst of all possible crimes is poverty, begins to convert Cusins and Barbara, especially when they see its effects in his utopian company town. When Cusins turns out to be a foundling he is installed as the heir to the Undershaft money, gunpowder, and destruction, with Barbara by his side.

If Shaw had wished to write a simple play he would have made Undershaft an industrialist like Andrew Carnegie, someone whose labor practices may have been questionable but who made contributions to social and economic advancement Instead Undershaft is made to be a sower of death, like Alfred Nobel, disdaining common morality and the common excuses for his trade, selling munitions to anyone who applies, revelling in the devastation his guns bring. Nobel wished to buy respectability by endowing a prize for peace; Undershaft demands that his contribution to the Salvation Army be treated anonymously. As Cusins notes continually, Undershaft is a Prince of Darkness, a Dionysus in touch With the underside of human existence. Thus the di1emma he presents to Barbara and to readers and audience is enormously complicated. If poverty is the worst of crimes, then anything that eradicates it is good, even if that thing is, itself, normally considered evil. In this extreme of cases, Shaw's play implies, the end not only Justifies Undershaft' s means, but his means are the only realistic ones that can achieve the end.

A powerful second act in Barbara' s West Ham shelter shows that the Salvation Army is an unwitting tool of the status quo: It relieves the effects of poverty just enough to blunt the edge of social revolution, without actually altering the conditions of the classes or attempting to redistribute wealth. The violence and desperation of a bully like Bill Walker cannot be corrected by hot soup and a prayer meeting because they are caused not by moral defects but by social inequities. When Barbara loses her faith in the Army she awakens to the sentimental nature of the Christian promise of salvation; she also slowly awakens to the fact that the Army, dependent upon the largess of capitalists, is therefore part of the capitalist establishment, as much as the Parliament that Undershaft brags is in his pocket As one of the spiritual and economic unfortunates, Walker knows this truth in his bones. After the Army has accepted Undershaft's money, Walker speaks the cruellest and most incisive line of the play, rubbing salt into Barbara's wounds: "Wot prawce selvytion nah?"

The cannon is the metaphoric heart of *Major Barbara* From its mock-military title to its numerous references to actual battles, the play offers glimpses of the destructive impulse; the final scene is literally dominated by a huge cannon center stage.

In shifting Its attention from Barbara's spiritual dilemma to Undershaft's vision of an orderly universe based on gunpowder, the play seems to promote the strongman as savior, and firepower as the ultimate arbiter. Shaw's Preface, a brilliant essay on the nature of wealth, provides a less disturbing philosophic context by suggesting that public choice need not lie between poverty on the one hand and bombs on the other, Since it is capitalism that sanctions both, in a more humane economy both would be eradicated. But the play itself is profoundly ambiguous in Its social morality; the diabolic Undershaft is its most gripping character, and even when he is taken ironically *Major Barbara* resists neat categorizing.

Despite Its disturbing theme, its theatrical vitality has been unquestioned since the first performance in 1905. Shaw wrote it for Granville Barker's Court Theatre seasons, his first play designed with a specific company of actors in mind (Barker played Cusins, a role modelled on their mutual friend Gilbert Murray, whose translations of Euripides, which Cusins quotes, were also being performed at the Court). Since Its twin subjects of war and money have been the central subjects of the 20th century, it has shown little sign of losing its hold on us

Source: Dennis Kennedy, *"Major Barbara"* in The *International Dictionary of Theater,* Volume 1: *Plays,* edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St James Press, 1992, p 462

Critical Essay #3

Reviewing a 1987 production of Major Barbara *at that year's Shaw Festival in Ontario, Canada, O'Neill affirms the theatrical power of Shaw's play, calling the production the highlight of the festival.*

Genuine theatrical salvation for *Major Barbara,* perhaps Bernard Shaw's most relentless discussion for the stage, is the chief pleasure of the 1987 Shaw Festival where huge and handsome, if unadventuresome, productions are often the rule. As conceived by Christopher Newton, who also serves as the festival's artistic director, *Major Barbara* finds in the spectacle of its staging a visual accompaniment for the dazzling brilliance of Shaw's ideas.

Major Barbara has been directed with the scope and vision of opera, thereby revealing yet another key to a play in which Shaw, the music critic and great arbiter of the western artistic heritage, provides a symphony of thought articulated and debated in the intellectual duets of Undershaft and Cusins and in the passionate verbal arias of Barbara and the poor she intends to save. The stylized tones and rhythmic variety of the play's language are enriched, as the Salvation Army's activities are, with music: Barbara sings, Lomax is ordered to accompany prayers on the organ, Undershaft plays the trombone, and Cusins beats a huge drum to be near the woman he worships With the fervor of felt religion. These apparent clues to the musical nature of *Major Barbara* march through the production like a Salvation Army hymn, and the motif is completed at the play's end, when, after Barbara and Cusins have agreed to make war on war, "We're In The Money" plays softly and cynically as the house lights come up.

Each scene seems to have been orchestrated with comparable insight and choreographed as well with precision of movement and gesture. The curious and outraged Wilton Crescent quartet of Lady Britomart and her children, unable to resist Undershaft's charm, gives way in the second act to a chorus of humiliation in the Salvation Army shelter that crescendos into a lament of hypocrisy and despair. For the grand finale at Perivale St. Andrews, the characters flow effortlessly about Undershaft's stark white utopia, anxious to grasp a new illusion in which the benefits of wealth are an endless song.

These operatic dimensions of the play are boldly stated in the designs of Cameron Porteous, who uses the full height of the Festival Theater stage to dwarf Shaw's principals in settings as elaborate and as meaningful as the ideas they discuss Lady Britomart's library is a huge, rich room of books, marble, pottery, and dark wood, a small comer of the British Empire exhibiting its wealth. The walls are covered with paper and stained glass depicting the wild growth of the jungle that lies just beneath the polished exterior of those who live there, for these are powerful and rich people who are summoned together to discuss self-preservation through a continuation of their position and wealth. They descend, in Act II, into the hell of the East Ham shelter, a dimly lit, towering grey brick affair with smoke rolling across the littered floor. The nightmarish quality of the setting reinforces the moral quandary of this inferno where an army of angels unwittingly perpetuates the suffering it seeks to assuage, and the devilish Undershaft offers the only hope of an earthly redemption from poverty.

The scenic tour de force, however, occurs in the third act as the library revolves in full view into the foundry of Undershaft and Lazarus, visually suggesting the creative evolution from the former world into the latter that will be effected through the inheritance of Barbara and Cusins. The works themselves are Wittily conveyed: a huge, phallic cannon dominates a setting of white marble steps, Greek columns, and dummy soldiers displayed like so many Attic statues. The classicism of Cusins, already incorporated into the enterprise he intends to transform, appears frozen in another time, and thus the setting metaphorically asserts that his real connection to ancient Greece lies in the spirit of Dionysus within himself. That Spirit draws him to Barbara and will propel them past her father into a future they envision but do not as yet understand.

Jim Mezon' s Cusins, full of a calculated subtlety that grows into confidence by the play's end, emerges as a formidable revival to the properly demonic Undershaft, played by Douglas Rain with great verbal dexterity and just a hint of relief that the life force is indeed doing its work through him as he passes on the foundry to his chosen heirs. Both men bring a sexual edge to their roles, giving further credence to Shaw's contention that the superman is compelling and irresistible. Martha Burns as Barbara is full of confused energy, waiting to be awakened by her father's challenge and Cusins's love. The three form a Shavian love triangle in which the object of their affection is the force they instinctively recognize in one another.

The entire cast seems to have discovered a rich sexual energy in the play that imbues its comic moments with human folly and heightens its philosophical intrigue with unstated tension. Frances Hyland avohis the temptation to play Lady Britomart as a cousin to Lady Bracknell, opting instead to create an aging ingénue who pinches her cheeks to look attractive for Undershaft and sees in Barbara and Cusins a reflection of the feelings for her husband that she still relishes. As performed by Jon Bryden, Bill Walker's attacks on Jenny Hill and Rummy Mitchens seethe with the potential for rape, whereas Steven Sutcliffe's Stephen seems to wander through the play trying to figure out why anyone would expect him to marry. Lomax and Sarah, played by Michael Howell and Barbara Worthy, serve as effective foils for Cusins and Barbara. In the utter banality of their relationship, they demonstrate Shaw's belief in the power of the intellect to transform and sustain. The most passionate moment of *Major Barbara* occurs, appropriately, when Cusins and Barbara agree to accept Undershaft' s challenge. As they embrace in a long, provocative kiss on the steps of the foundry, there is no mistaking that for Shaw the passion of the intellect and passion itself are inseparable

This is an inspired production, a Shavian masterpiece accorded as little reverence as Undershaft himself gives tradition, yet thoughtful enough to make Shaw's ideas live and breathe through his characters, who, WIth us Since 1903, are now beginning to touch the realm of myth. The result is fresh and very funny, tantalizing the audience with possibilities of the human spirit we already expect will never come to pass.

Source: Michael C O'Neill, review of *Major Barbara* in *Theatre Journal,* Volume40, no. 1, March, 1988, pp. 105-06

Adaptations

Major Barbara was adapted as a film ill 1941, with additional scenes and characters added by Shaw. The film was directed by Gabriel Pascal and starred Wendy Hiller, Robert Morley, Rex Harrison, and Robert Newton.

Topics for Further Study

Research the place of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How does Barbara rebel against traditional feminine roles?

In view of Shaw's socialism, what might have been his purpose in making Andrew Undershaft's armaments factory and the adjacent town a model of success? In what ways does Shaw manage to show the negative side of Undershaft's achievement?

Compare Barbara and Cusins to the character Dr. Faustus m Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus.* Given that Undershaft is frequently referred to as a Satanic character, does Cusins sell his soul to the Devil? Does Barbara sell hers?

Compare Andrew Undershaft to Mother Courage in Bertolt Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children,* which was first produced during World War II. How might the intervening years of war account for differences between the two characters and between the two plays?

Read Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience." Discuss whether or not the characters in *Major Barbara* live according to their consciences. What does Shaw say about the relationship between individual action and society?

Compare and Contrast

1905: Interest in socialism grows with the development of many socialist organizations and an attempt at revolution in Russia. Although this revolution initially fails, hopes among socialists for future revolutions are high.

Today: The collapse of the governments of the Soviet Union and East Germany serves to create strong doubts about the possible viability of any socialist regime (many argue that, like Russia's system, a socialist government cannot function Without becoming a communist dictatorship). Although there are still socialist organizations, their beliefs are now well outside the mainstream of society.

1905: Women struggle for basic rights, including the right to vote, which is not granted in England until 1926.

Today: In the United States and England, women have earned legal rights equal to those of men, but many believe that much progress remains to be made, particularly in non-Western countries.

1905: Christianity is a major force, affecting all aspects of society, but interest in agnosticism continues to grow. In Western nations, members of non-Christian religions are subject to discrimination.

Today: Christianity remains viable, though its influence on society as a whole is lessened. Interest in non-Christian religions increases, and adherents of those religions face less prejudice. Agnosticism and atheism are acceptable-and increasingly popular-options.

1905: The government becomes more involved m social programs. Individuals and organizations make major efforts at social reform.

Today: Many people believe that the government cannot effectively solve social problems, and the governments of England and the United States have cut spending on social programs, resulting in a greater emphasis on volunteerism and privately-funded organizations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International.

1905: Charles Darwin's theories continue to cause debate. Much scientific progress is made, including Einstein's publication of his paper on the theory of relativity, but many question the good of rapid scientific and technological advances.

Today: The theories of natural selection and evolution are accepted by most educated people, but there is an increase in the search for scientific evidence for creationism (the belief that man was created, fully-formed, by God). The cloning of sheep raises serious ethical questions. The astronomical increase in the use of computers causes some debate over advancing technology's effect on the quality of life.

What Do I Read Next?

Mrs. Warren's Profession, a play written by Shaw in 1898, is also concerned with the morality of avoiding poverty by doing what may be considered Immoral work. Shaw's original title for *Major Barbara* was *Andrew Undershaft's Profession.*

Mother Courage and Her Children, a play written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939, seems to have been influenced by *Major Barbara.* Mother Courage, like Undershaft, is dependent on war to make her living but at a severe cost to her children and herself.

The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe, probably first performed in 1594, is a retelling of the legend of Faust, who sells his soul to the Devil. In *Major Barbara,* Undershaft is sometimes called Mephistopheles, the name of the Devil in Marlowe's play.

"Civil Disobedience," published in 1849, is an essay by Henry David Thoreau, who spent time in prison for refusing to pay taxes to support what he believed to be an immoral war. In this essay, Thoreau argues for following one's conscience, even if it means disobeying the law.

A Doll's House, a play by Henrik Ibsen, published in 1879, is also about the question of whether a seemingly immoral act can, in fact be the right thing to do. The play's lead character, Nora, is an early example of the strong independent woman of the late Victorian stage. Shaw was greatly influenced by Ibsen's work.

The Jungle, socialist Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, reveals the horrors of workers' conditions in the Chicago meat-packing plants of that time. In his preface to *Major Barbara,* Shaw writes about Sinclair's novel showing the position in which a capitalist society places the poor.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, Editor *George Bernard Shaw's* Major Barbara, Chelsea House, 1988.

This is a collection of papers by numerous critics on different aspects of Shaw's play.

Briggs, Asa. *A Social History of England,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson (London), 1994.

A study of English society from antiquity to the present, tins books contains a lengthy chapter on the Victorian and early Edwardian eras.

Gainor, J. Ellen *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender,* University of Michigan Press, 1991 This is a study of women in Shaw's plays, focusing on the conception of womanhood in Victorian culture and the Image of the daughter in Shaw's plays.

Peters, Sally. *Bernard Shaw The Ascent of the Superman,* Yale University Press (New Haven), 1996

This is an extended literary biography of Shaw, discussing his life as well as his works.

Weintraub, Stanley *Shaw's People. Victoria to Churchill,* Pennsylvania State University Press (University Park), 1996

This book focuses on Shaw and his relationships WIth and attitudes toward various people of his time, including Salvation Army founder William Booth It places Shaw more completely m the context of his society.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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