TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF NEFARIOUS CHARACTERS IN G.B. SHAW’S SELECTED PLAYS

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ABSTRACT
To Shaw, poverty was the greatest evil faced by humankind and the main theme in the beginning of his life as a dramatist. This paper delineates the wickedness and evil elements in the selected plays by Bernard Shaw. Such elements are held accountable for the plight of the poor and the helpless individuals in the society. The hypocritical attitude of certain institutions and the rich who contribute in certain way or another to the deterioration of the poor is also considered in this paper. This paper handles the elements of evil in the three major plays as follows Major Barbara, Mrs. Warren Profession and The Doctor’s Dilemma.

Keywords: Hypocrisy, Prostitution, Nefariousness, Profession’s Evil

INTRODUCTION
Shaw lived in the Victorian period that started with the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), during which England witnessed many and various changes on all levels—social, political, scientific and even military. That age is also characterized by progress and prosperity due to the speedy industrial revolution which does not only brings progress to the country but it also brings a tremendous amount of problems which are mainly social and economic and which lead to grave social ills like the increasing number of prostitutes due to poverty, and the appearance of fraudulent individuals whose main concern is to obtain money by any means available—legal or illegal—in order to afford for their own living and respectability. Thus, unemployment, destitution, poverty, social ills and immoral behavior on the part of the individual are the main traits that characterize the social aspects of the Victorian period of which Shaw has been quite aware and which are tackled in his dramas, especially the ones related to the characters that are tackled in this dissertation and that act according to the Machiavellian and the naturalistic perspectives.

In Major Barbara, the main character Barbara is presented as a poor woman. Though she is in a decent establishment, she lacks sufficient money to live at a standard, comfortable, and normal life. Jenny shows her feelings of pity and sorrow for her misfortune. In the novel, she always makes passionate grief and regret. In the novel, it is made clear that the Salvation Army is blamed by Shaw. It has many faults and weaknesses. The person holding positions of authority in the Salvation Army have excessive and erotic interests in themselves and their physical appearances. Throughout the events of the play, the members of the establishment persistently preach people of virtue and morality. They warn people of the sins coming from different evil deeds. Ironically, Shaw implies that it is much more important to focus on issues like the poverty, disease, and corruption that prevailed in the English society during the Victorian period. The members of the establishment earnestly advocate their principles but they do not make any initiative to help the helpless and the destitute. Barbara works as a major in the Salvation Army. The people coming to this establishment are treated by her fairly and tenderly. Undershaft who has a great deal of money, resources, and assets decided to buy the Salvation Army. A part of his money comes from companies and people who manufacture spirits. He is aware of Barbara’s morality and sincerity. So, he decides to get rid of her by making an attempt to own the Salvation Army. Barbara understands that it is ironic that the Salvation Army is owned by somebody getting money from the money of spirits. Here, Shaw shows a part of the social and religious hypocrisy that was common in the Victorian society. Shaw boldly tries to disclose a type of people who pretend that they are virtuous but in fact they are worse than those who practice vice and prostitution. Shaw wants to say that this kind of people is the reason behind the adverse and difficult circumstances the poor people have. The wealthy people make money from the bodies of people. They do not care of the value of human beings. In their eyes, humans are commodities as if the name of God becomes a trade mark that adds more money to the pockets of the rich whereas the poor gets nothing except the bad reputation and
abject poverty. It is ironical to see how Undershaft tries to donate money to the Salvation Army while this money comes from the profits of the alcoholic beverages. The role of the writer, as Shaw tries to say, should be a reaction to the complaint and the indignation that people had. The writer should show answerability and response to the most sensitive issues that center on the value of humans. When there is no one defending the rights of the poor, the writer takes the lead to send their voice to the public. Unfortunately, the Salvation Army accepts the donation from Undershaft. Barbara considers this as a hypocritical act. It is clear to see that the Salvation Army is surrounded by a pretense of having virtues, moral principles, or religious beliefs that it does not really possess. “As one of its officers said, they would take money from the devil himself and be only too glad to get it out of his hands and into God’s” (Paller, 2002, p. xix ). This act serves as a turning point for Barbara and she has started to free herself of illusion, belief, and idealism of this establishment. Thus, the Salvation Army can be considered here a nefarious entity that accepts evil. In the conversation between Undershaft and Cusins, the latter asks Undershaft whether the religion he adopts include any aspects of honor and mercy. Undershaft answers that these aspects are given only to the powerful and the rich: “Cusins: Excuse me: is there any place in your religion for honor, justice, truth, love, mercy, and so forth? / Undershaft: Yes: they are the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life” (Shaw, 2004, p.66).

It can be deduced that the criterion of religion for Undershaft is that the power and wealth are bestowed to the rich and they are a part of his religious teachings. Undershaft’s wickedness and viciousness reflect the fertile and evil and morally depraved institution that needs an urgent reformation and Shaw sees the realistic writer as one who has “the courage to see things as they are, not as one might wish them to be” (Baker, 2002, p. xii). Shaw succeeded in destroying the false view of the idealism. The Salvation Army is seen as an idealistic organization whose members preach people and help them. Shaw was himself resentful of the social illnesses that he witnessed at the early time of his life. These illnesses “inculcate[ed] in him that disbelieve in popular education, that disrespect for popular religion, and that contempt for social pretensions which are so deeply ingrained in his work and character” (Henderson, 1911, p.8). Unlike other writers, Shaw does not idealize the ones who have superior ranks, religious people and influential, he outspokenly shows the defects that are caused by such kind of people. By giving bold and unconventional representation to the reality, there would be effective solutions to many social problems. For Shaw, poverty is a serious offense, especially one in violation of morality. Shaw said himself that “the crying need of the nation is not for better morals, cheaper bread, temperance, liberty, culture, redemption of fallen sisters and erring brothers, nor the grace, love and fellowship of the Trinity, but simply for enough money (Baker, 2002, p.22).

In addition, Shaw considers the society as responsible for a misdeed, failure, or undesirable outcome of the poor and helpless. It is not a matter of only nefarious people in the play but also the people have the feelings of contentment or self-satisfaction, especially when coupled with an unawareness of danger, trouble, and controversy pertaining to the suffering of the people lacking support and protection. According to Paller (2014):

If Undershaft’s methods and opinions outrage us, we should direct our outrage not at him but at ourselves for allowing society to develop along the lines wherein an Undershaft can wield such power. Shaw’s targets are not his characters, which he tends not to judge, but us, in our complacency. Although he might (and did) say it in a speech or pamphlet, in a play like Major Barbara he didn’t feel it necessary to point out that any society that, rather than tending to the education of its young and the welfare of its poor, ill, and elderly, chooses instead to rely on the generosity of its tycoons, is going to get what it deserves. To come to that conclusion is the job of the audience. (p. 14)

The play is based on morality and immorality. As Paul points out, “Peter Shirley is what we call the honest poor man. Undershaft is what we call the wicked rich one” (Paul, 2002, p. xiv). The greed and wickedness are represented in the character of Undershaft who considers that everything is allowed for humans in order to be seeking wealth and fame: “To be wealthy, says Undershaft, is with me a point of honor for which I am prepared to kill at the risk of my own life” (Paul, 2002, p. xiv).

In Mrs. Warren’s Profession, Shaw presents a nefarious character represented by Mrs. Warren whose profession is prostitution. She owns a house of prostitution. Her daughter Vivi has a high degree of intelligence and is concerned with practical considerations and consequences. In the play, she has recently graduated from the University of Cambridge. Her practical point of view is reflected in her thinking that her
mother is doing the right thing due to the hard situations of finding a source of living. The ability to think like that is a serious matter that is handled by Bernard Shaw. It is the economic life that helps eliminate or at least reduce the rate of evil— prostitution is a part of this evil. It is not the pretention of making preaching and false righteousness that prevent people from committing sins and wrongdoing. It is, however, the genuine intention that enables people to make those who have a higher rank as a model they can follow. If the superior people exploit others by the motto of false morality and ethics, this will make people stick to the wrong deeds as they are not guided and directed properly. It is not only preaching that make people do the right thing. It is also the real and practical application of the ethical principles. In *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, Mrs. Warren is only blamed for being prostitute. The community does not take the circumstances that obliged Mrs. Warren to resort prostitution into account. Shaw himself expressed his condemnation candidly towards the society: “Nothing would please our sanctimonious English public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs. Warren’s profession on Mrs. Warren herself. Now the whole aim of the play is to throw that guilt on the British public itself” (Shaw, 1979, p. 8). The helpless is only blamed whereas the officials who are the reason behind misery of those people were seen as being sanctimonious.

The theme of nefariousness in Mrs. Warren’s character is reflected in the way that she is a prostitute. Prostitution is an act where woman loses her honor and she takes this career to make money. Her chastity is tainted and this is a stigma given to Mrs. Warren. During the Victorian period, a woman losing her chastity is given the name as a fallen woman “who had given in to seduction, living a life in sin” (Lee, 2009, par. 1). Being marked by lack of taste, culture, delicacy, and manner, Mrs. Warren is described by Shaw as a woman with a flamboyant style: “Mrs. Warren is between 40 and 50, formerly pretty, showily dressed in a brilliant hat and a gay blouse fitting tightly over her bust and flanked by fashionable sleeves. Rather spoilt and domineering, and decidedly vulgar, but, on the whole, a genial and fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman” (Shaw, 2005, p. 95). Like the choice of poverty in *Major Barbara*, the choice of prostitution is made reluctantly: “Another explanation may be that Shaw in this way wanted to indicate that Mrs. Warren did not voluntarily become a prostitute, but that she actually had no other choice” (Ollevier, 2012, p. 21). Poverty is the main reason behind the nefariousness makes people seek sustenance to their lives and the lives of their children and this is a realistic point of view from Shaw.

Mrs. Warren’s nefariousness is also represented by the way that she behaves differently from other women. During the Victorian era, it is not familiar that a woman speaks loudly and boldly with other men. In the play, Shaw presents Mrs. Warren as a woman having new qualities that are bizarre to the society. Shaw presents this character to show a type of woman that wants to prove her independence and individuality though she is a prostitute. Though she is a prostitute, Mrs. Warren is at odds with the society and its norms. She does not consider her career as immoral one. She considers that as a source of living. So, she does not relate respectability with her profession. Despite the fact that she behaves vulgarly, she wants to be respectable. He remarks that “these facts suggest that she wants to appear as a respectable lady. Furthermore, she accepts capitalist morality, which means she chooses the way through which she can get more payment— which is prostitution. This choice actually conflicts with the ideal of social respectability that she cherishes, given that prostitution is not considered to be an honourable business” (Ollevier, 2012, p.24). Nefariousness is implied in the text of the play. By reading the name of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the one thinks that is a symbol of purity and righteousness and “the representative of God’s love for all, but actually, the Archbishop is involved in the dirty business of running brothels” (Zheng, 2016, p.42). Thus, the Archbishop of Canterbury can be represented as a nefarious entity. Shaw expresses the vice as a part of nefariousness in the play. He expresses that in sarcastic tone. Though the play deals with a serious issue in the society, it undertones sarcasm and frivolousness. This help to make the play “concerned with social corruption (in this case prostitution), and is determined to fasten the blame for such vice not on the individual (the brothel madam) but on a (male capitalistic) social system that fosters it” (p. 40).

*Mrs. Warren’s Profession* takes a political dimension. Shaw was himself a socialist. He condemns the capitalist system. For Shaw, the capitalist system is broken. It urgently needs to be fixed. As Shaw puts it, he attributes the causes of nefarious deeds caused by some characters to the capitalist system. Edge explains that “Shaw was often, through his plays and other works, an effective propagandist against the cruelties and absurdities of the capitalist system” (1990, Par.2).
Shaw makes the theme of prostitution as an effective aspect of the Victorian society. Vasiliki Kasi (2013) points out that “It is an insightful critique on the hypocrisy and corruption of Victorian society. The reception of the play at the end of 19th century was not favorable” (p.133). In most of his plays, Shaw concentrates on the most serious issues in the society— the issues that are related mainly to the people, poverty, prostitution, diseases, greed, and broken system of the state. Though Shaw communicates such themes in an effective and horrible way to the reader, he makes an emphasis to make the audience shed light on them. Prostitution was common at that time. Shaw does not only put the blame on the people who practice prostitution, but criticizes the officials who forced people to resort to such means:

Reviewers overwhelmingly condemned the play as immoral, citing its focus on prostitution and incest. Today, however, the play is applauded for its astute view of the corruption at the heart of Victorian society. The play centers on Mrs. Warren, who, forced by the economic realities of nineteenth century London, becomes a prostitute and later runs several successful brothels (Kasi, 2013,qtd., p.133).

Shaw criticizes the society as a whole. He abhors the view that the society had towards women. Women were regarded as inferior creatures. Men regarded them as less capable than they are. Consequently, this led to deprive woman to get her fair rights in the institutions: employment, fair payment, and fair treatment:

Shaw intended to suggest that the responsibility for the phenomenon of prostitution is not personal but social. It lies not with the people who work in brothels but with society itself which maltreats women by underestimating them, underpaying them and driving them to such professions (Kasi, 2013, p. 133).

As a result, prostitution was one of the possible means that they could compellingly choose.

The nefarious character in The Doctor’s Dilemma is the doctor Sir Colenso Ridgeon. Shaw puts this character in a test concerning the humanitarian issue. He tries to subject this character to a test by choosing one of the two patients. The sickness of the one who must get the treatment should be more serious than the other. For a doctor, this situation requires a choice between options that are or seem equally unfavorable and unsatisfactory. Shaw makes this situation intentionally in order to say that the morality is a dilemma. In the play, Ridgeon is seen as a doctor who was able to discover a type of a drug and course of medical treatment used to restore health from the disease of tuberculosis. This disease is an infectious disease of humans and animals caused by the tubercle bacillus and characterized by the formation of tubercles on the lungs and other tissues of the body, often developing long after the initial infection. It was common during the 1880s in England. The doctor decided to treat the patient Dubuchat for two reasons. First, his wife is attractive. Second, she inspired him with unreasoning love and attachment. Later on, he fabricated a plan to claim that he would not be able to cure her husband. This malicious act clearly indicates the awful corruption found in the healthcare system. This type of act is seen as a type of crime in the perspective of Shaw. In the preface of the play, Shaw writes, “a fellow creature in pain or peril, what you want is comfort, reassurance, something to clutch at, were it but a straw. This doctor brings you. You have a wildly urgent feeling that something must be done; and the doctor does something. Sometimes what he does kills the patient” (Madhok, 2013,qtd. 11).

The ugliness of the exploitation and greed of the doctor can be compared to the cruel exploitation and dehumanization because of its consequences and enormity.

From the pretention of the religious establishment and the vices of prostitution to the greed and demonic acts of the doctors, Shaw presents another act of nefariousness in The Widower’s Houses which is the greed of landlords.

The nefarious character in The Widowers’ Houses is the landlord Sartorius. The nefarious character in this play is clearly Mr. Sartorius. Harry Trench, who is a tourist, comes to the city with his friend. Both of them want to stay at the hotel belonging to Mr. Sartorius. Harry Trench falls in love with Sartorius’s daughter. After discovering that Sartorius rents places to the poor people, Trench filled with outrage and irritation. He told Blanche, Sartorius’s daughter not take money from her father for this money is taken from the helpless. Here, there is another dilemma of morality— the dilemma of the landlordism. It is clear to see that Sartorius treats the tenants badly. Lickcheese treats the tenants mercifully and generously. For this reason, he was removed from the office by Sartorius. He discharges Lickcheese for dealing too leniently with tenants. Because Blanche is willing to accept money from her father, Trench and her parted company and ended their
relationship. Sartorius is depicted as a vicious character. He is merciless and does not pay attention to the poor conditions of the tenants. He is only interested in collecting money from them. In conversing with Trench, Sartorius rebukes him because of Trench’s disgust of Sartorius’s way of treatment to the tenants and because of the excessive desire of Sartorius for wealth and power: “which of us is the worse, I should like to know? Me that wrings the money out to keep a home over my children, or you that spends it and try to shove the blame on to me?”(Shaw, 1914, p.35).

Within the text of the play, the reader can hear the scream in the face of the greed, exploitation, and despise towards the poor people cause by the landlords. They show an insensitive and cruel disregard for those wretched occupants of Sartorius’s places. Srinivas points out:

It is a scathing attack directed at the social evils of slum landlordism and capitalism. The play, in Shaw’s own words, is a “grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism.” (x-xii) Shaw shows how the despicable attitude and callous indifference to the sufferings of the poor on the part of the rich and their greed for more money resulted in the degradation of the poor. It is the double standards of the whole social system, which provokes Shaw to unveil it and show vice its own face. Shaw’s Widower’s Houses matches Ibsen’s Ghosts for the general condemnation of its ruthless exposure of false idealism and pretentions.(Srinivas, 2014, p. 159).

CONCLUSION
In sum, by presenting the main nefarious characters in these particular plays, Shaw realistically revealed his direct disapproval and contempt towards the falseness of preaching and religiousness, uncovering vividly the aspects of corruption, gluttony, inhumanity, and finally the tragedies of the helpless and destitute. With my exploration of the concepts naturalism and realism, the paper made it clear to the readers that the evils of human beings are rooted and some others are created by the effects of the environment.

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