WORDS on PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Major Barbara

by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Dennis Garnhum
A coproduction with Theatre Calgary

The Geary Theater
January 8–February 2, 2014

WORDS ON PLAYS  VOL. XX, NO. 3

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Made possible by
Bingham McCutchen, Deloitte, The Hearst Foundations,
JP Morgan Chase & Co., The Kimball Foundation,
The Michelson Family Foundation, The MoCA Foundation,
National Corporate Theatre Fund, and The Sato Foundation
“A MAN MAY BE DOWN BUT HE’S NEVER OUT!”

HOME SERVICE FUND CAMPAIGN

SALVATION ARMY

MAY 19-26 1919
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OPPOSITE “A Man May Be Down but He’s Never Out!” (1919), by Frederick Duncan for the Home Service Fund Campaign (Library of Congress)
Overview of *Major Barbara*

*Major Barbara* was first produced by London’s Royal Court Theatre in 1905. It played on Broadway at the Playhouse Theatre in 1915; the first production in Canada was at Toronto’s Comedy Theatre in 1925, a presentation by the Cameron Matthews English Players. In 1940 it was adapted into a film. Despite a long history producing Shaw, this is the first time A.C.T. has produced *Major Barbara*.

**Characters and Cast of *Major Barbara***

Barbara Undershaft ............................... Gretchen Hall  
Lady Britomart Undershaft (*her mother*) ...... Kandis Chappell  
Stephen Undershaft (*Barbara’s brother*) ....... Stafford Perry  
Morrison (*a servant*) ............................. Dan Hiatt  
Sarah Undershaft (*Barbara’s sister*) .......... Elyse Price  
Adolphus Cusins (*Barbara’s fiancé*) .......... Nicholas Pelczar  
Charles Lomax (*Sarah’s fiancé*) ............... Tyrell Crews  
Andrew Undershaft (*Barbara’s father*) ......... Dean Paul Gibson  
Romola “Rummy” Mitchens ........................ Valerie Planche  
Bronterre O’Brien “Snobby” Price ............... Dan Clegg  
Jenny Hill .......................................... Nemuna Ceesay  
Peter Shirley ....................................... Dan Hiatt  
Bill Walker .......................................... Brian Rivera  
Mrs. Baines ......................................... Jennifer Clement  
Bilton .................................................. Dan Clegg

**Setting of *Major Barbara***

**Time** Three successive days in January 1906. **Place** London.

- **Act I** The library in Lady Britomart Undershaft’s house in Wilton Crescent
- **Act II** The West Ham Shelter of The Salvation Army
- **Act III** The library and then among the high-explosive sheds at the Arsenal of Messrs. Undershaft and Lazarus, near the model town of Perivale St. Andrews

*OPPOSITE Interior of U.S. Gun Shop, Washington Navy Yard (1903), by Frances Benjamin Johnston (Library of Congress)*
Synopsis

Act I The library in Lady Britomart Undershaft’s house in Wilton Crescent

Following dinner on a January night in 1906, Lady Britomart Undershaft calls her son, Stephen, to join her in their library to ask his advice on a matter concerning “family affairs.” The topic is a painful one: Stephen’s estranged father, Andrew Undershaft, who has not seen his children since they were babies. Stephen’s sisters, Sarah and Barbara, are engaged—Sarah to the kind-hearted buffoon Charles Lomax (Cholly) and Barbara to Adolphus Cusins (Dolly), an Australian-born professor of Greek. Both suitors are far from financially secure. Moreover, Barbara, while brilliant, has chosen to devote herself to The Salvation Army, committing herself to a life of poverty, and Dolly has been volunteering with the Army to be near her. Lady Britomart fears it will be necessary to call on her wealthy husband to support both couples.

This is no easy matter: Undershaft and his partner, Lazarus, are—as childhood bullies once taunted young Stephen—“death and destruction dealers.” Not only are they England’s chief weapons manufacturers, they also promote conflict by granting war loans. This is not, however, why Lady Britomart and Undershaft separated: she could not stand by as Undershaft disinherited Stephen in order to carry on the generations-old Undershaft tradition of handing the munitions business down to an adopted foundling. Undershaft himself was a foundling, and he intends to pass the business on to another foundling. This is just one example of what Lady Britomart viewed as her husband’s warped sense of morality.

Now, however, the family needs money. Stephen would sooner die than take it from his father, but his mother scoffs at his naïveté; she has already invited Undershaft to visit that very evening. She calls for her daughters, who are currently entertaining their fiancés in the drawing room. The girls have little time to digest the news of their father’s impending visit before the man arrives. The greetings are cordial enough, and very soon Undershaft is questioning Barbara about The Salvation Army. Barbara invites him to visit her shelter in West Ham so she might save his soul. Cholly reminds Barbara about her father’s business, but Undershaft is not the least bit ashamed of or conflicted about his profession. He agrees to visit Barbara’s shelter the next day if she will in turn agree to come to his cannon works in Perivale St. Andrews the day after and give him a chance to convince her that his way of life is best. She agrees.

Act II The West Ham Shelter of The Salvation Army

The next day, Bronterre O’Brien “Snobby” Price and the elderly Romola “Rummy” Mitchens, both down on their luck, are finishing a meal of bread and treacle (molasses) in the yard outside the West Ham Salvation Army shelter. They don’t actually believe their souls need saving, but they play the sinner in order to get some food. Soon Jenny Hill, a young Salvation Army volunteer, half-carries in Peter Shirley, who is weak with
hunger. Peter was recently fired from his job, and he is too proud to take charity, but once Jenny suggests that he think of the food as a loan, he eats ravenously.

Jenny does not have the same sway over Bill Walker, who arrives moments later, violently angry that Jenny has turned his girlfriend, Mog Habbijam, against him. He throws Jenny to the ground, grabs her hair, and strikes her in the face, as Rummy and Snobby run to get Barbara. A disgusted Peter reprimands Bill for assaulting the young woman, quieting the rash man slightly, but Bill is defiant when Barbara questions him. Barbara informs him that Mog has gone to the Salvation Army’s barracks in Canning Town with another man—Todger Fairmile, a professional music-hall wrestler.

As Bill sulks, Undershaft arrives and watches as Barbara tries to save Bill’s soul. She is close to breaking him down when Dolly interrupts. Defiant once more, Bill sets off for Canning Town to spit in Todger’s eye: he doesn’t need religion to soothe his tormented conscience; he’ll go get his own face bashed in as punishment for hitting Jenny.

After Barbara leaves her fiancé alone with her father, Dolly admits to Undershaft that he does not believe in the views of The Salvation Army, but instead considers himself something of a collector of religions. Undershaft’s own religion intrigues Dolly: the millionaire believes that there are only two things necessary for salvation—money and gunpowder—and that all other virtues are merely the luxuries of the rich, strong, and safe. The two warm to each other quickly, bonding over their shared affection for Barbara, and Undershaft begins plotting to win his daughter over to his gospel of power—and he’ll start by buying The Salvation Army.

Costume rendering for Barbara Undershaft (all costume renderings by Alex Jaeger)
When Barbara returns, Undershaft offers to donate some of his riches to her cause, but she refuses him, saying that one cannot buy salvation, despite the fact that, without more money, the West Ham shelter will close. Just then, Bill returns. He did confront Mog and Todger, but rather than break his jaw, Todger prayed for Bill’s soul. The disappointed Bill has returned to give the shelter two pounds to make up for hitting Jenny, but echoing Barbara, Jenny refuses it.

When Salvation Army Commissioner Mrs. Baines arrives, however, she gleefully announces that a wealthy whiskey distiller is donating £5,000, enough to keep all the shelters open for the winter; she is all too happy to accept Undershaft’s generosity when he offers to match the gift. He writes her a check on the spot. Barbara tries to stop her superior from accepting the blood money, but to no avail. Heartbroken, her entire belief system in question, Barbara takes off her Salvation Army badge and pins it on her father. Led out by an ecstatic Dolly, with a victorious Undershaft playing the trombone, everyone but a shaken Barbara and a sullen Bill march to the assembly hall to celebrate.

**Act III, Scene i The library**

The next day after lunch, Lady Britomart and her daughters await Undershaft in the library before heading out to his cannon works. A brooding Barbara is no longer wearing her Salvation Army uniform. Dolly comes in looking the worse for wear: after the raucous Salvation Army meeting, Undershaft got him drunk (while abstaining himself). Dolly confesses that now that Barbara has left the Army, he too has quit.

Everyone goes to ready themselves for the trip except for Lady Britomart, who is alone when Undershaft arrives. She uses this opportunity to tell her husband that their daughters are going to need his financial support; he concedes quickly, but he isn’t interested in discussing Stephen. Even so, Lady Britomart tries to convince him not to disinherit his legitimate son to keep the Undershaft tradition of passing the business down to a foundling. He admits that he has not yet found a suitable successor to whom to leave his business, but Stephen is certainly not the one. Stephen arrives, and to his father’s relief and his mother’s dismay, he tells his father he has absolutely no interest in the cannon business whatsoever—his aim is politics. The wind is taken out of Stephen’s sails when his father explains that politicians are controlled by wealthy men like him.
When the rest of the brood returns, Undershaft undermines another assumption. Barbara has often envisioned her father’s factory town as a grimy pit of hell; on the contrary, Undershaft explains, it is a spotlessly clean and beautiful hillside village. He doesn’t issue commands like a dictator; his workers order themselves according to their own hierarchy. He stays out of the way and enjoys the profits.

**Act III, Scene ii The Arsenal near the model town of Perivale St. Andrews**

The family finds Undershaft’s description of Perivale St. Andrews to be true when they visit that afternoon. Not only is it physically perfect—a triumph of modern industry, with libraries, schools, a nursing home, etc.—the workers adore “Dandy Andy,” as they call Undershaft. Everyone is amazed, no one more so than Lady Britomart, who is overwhelmed by the accumulated wealth it represents. She renews her pursuit of keeping her husband’s holdings in the family, suggesting that Dolly should succeed Undershaft so that Barbara might benefit. Undershaft admits he would like nothing better, were Dolly a foundling. Dolly then confesses that he lied about his birth in order to win over Barbara. His parents’ marriage is not legal in England, which makes him a foundling there.

Undershaft is ecstatic to have found an eligible heir, but Barbara worries that Dolly is selling her father his soul, and Dolly worries that Barbara will not marry him if he agrees to take over the armory. Everyone leaves the couple alone to discuss their future, and Dolly tells her he intends to accept Undershaft’s offer. Barbara says she will marry him—so that she can save the souls of everyone in Perivale St. Andrews.
A Brief Biography of George Bernard Shaw

By Shannon Stockwell

Early Life

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin in 1856, the son of George Carr Shaw, a corn merchant, and Lucinda Elizabeth “Bessie” Gurly, a singer and voice teacher. George Carr was “unskilled, unsober, and unserious”—traits the man blamed on a cat he had killed when he was younger that was having its revenge by never allowing him to be rich or successful. Before their marriage in 1852, George Carr had assured Bessie that he did not drink; this lie caused their marriage to fall apart. George Bernard would later remember his childhood as troubled and unhappy: “William Morris used to say that it is very difficult to judge who are the best people to take charge of children, but it is certain that the parents are the very worst,” he wrote to a friend in 1943.

Despite the family’s dysfunction, Bessie managed to expose her children to music, art, theater, and literature, and Shaw’s teachers would remember him as a good student. He hated his formal education, however. He found it unbearably boring and would in later years referred to the four schools he attended as prisons. He entered the work force as a clerk in a land agent’s office when he was 16, a job he found even more boring than school. “Of all the damnable waste of human life that ever was invented, clerking is the very worst,” he wrote 35 years later through a character in his play Misalliance. In 1873, his parents divorced, and his mother and sister, Lucy, moved to London with Bessie’s mentor, the conductor Vandeleur Lee. After three years, the 20-year-old Shaw followed them.

In 1876, the same year Shaw moved to London, Lee was offered a job writing music criticism for the paper the Hornet, and he, being a bad writer, offered Shaw a job ghostwriting for him. The column ran until September 1877, when the editor discovered Lee’s scheme. Nevertheless, Shaw discovered his voice. While living mostly on the income his mother earned as a voice teacher, he wrote feverishly. Shaw completed five novels during the next seven years, but he could not find anyone to publish them; one publisher said they were “too clever for the ‘general.’”

George Bernard Shaw (1925), by Sir John Bernard Partridge (National Portrait Gallery, London)
Shaw the Fabian

In 1882, Shaw happened to hear Henry George, an American economist and socialist (although he would balk at being defined as such) philosopher, make a speech on land nationalization. Shaw often credited this moment as the turning point in his life in politics. After the speech, Shaw purchased George’s book *Progress and Poverty*, which was hugely influential on his blossoming political stance. He went on to read works by Karl Marx and independently studied economics. As his political stance solidified, he perfected his speechmaking and debating skills, focusing on socialism and the economy. He took to soapboxes and clubs to overcome his stage fright. He became briefly active with the Social Democratic Federation, but ultimately did not join because he felt they were not on his intellectual level; while they claimed to be Marxists, Shaw was astonished to find that most of them had not actually *read* any Marx. He longed to “work with men of my own mental training.”

In 1884, 28-year-old Shaw came across the tract *Why Are the Many Poor?*, published by the newly created Fabian Society. The society was named after the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus (also known as Fabius the Delayer), who was famous for his strategy of avoiding direct confrontation—a strategy that ultimately led to Rome’s victory against Hannibal. The society, founded earlier in 1884 by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, was created specifically for politically minded intellectuals who wanted to reconstruct society. Their core principle was articulated in the tract Shaw read:

> For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did, most patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be vain and fruitless.

Compared to other socialist groups of the day, the Fabian Society took a decidedly pragmatic approach to reforming English society. Instead of destroying existing societal structures—the goal of many other socialist groups—the Fabians wanted to work within the system to effect gradual change. (Gradualism was an important aspect of Fabianism: their symbol was a turtle.) The Fabian Society was instrumental in establishing Britain’s Labour Party in 1900. Shaw, who became a member in September 1884 and was elected to the executive committee in January 1885, was one of the society’s most famous spokespeople, as well as the author of a number of its pamphlets.

Shaw’s Entry into Theater

While he wrote, edited, and spoke for the Fabians, Shaw was still fascinated by the arts. From 1885 to 1888, he finally became financially independent from his mother by writing literary criticism for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but he was ambivalent about this achievement. He was appalled that the paper gave “a page and a half of vapid comment to a book destined to be forgotten without having influenced the conduct or opinions of a single human being; whilst pamphlets that circulate by the thousands, dealing with the vital questions of national economy and private morals, are tossed aside into the waste-paper
basket.” Nonetheless, he continued. From 1888 to 1889, Shaw was employed as a music critic for the Star.

In 1891, he published The Quintessence of Ibsenism, a book that focused on the political ramifications of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s style. Shaw enthusiastically supported Ibsen’s controversial plays. He campaigned for a New Drama, which would replace the formulaic, sentimental plays so often found on the British stage with works that, like Ibsen’s, explored serious problems faced by society. Of course, these sorts of plays weren’t always popular, since they made audiences think about unpleasant, offensive, and depressing topics. Government censors would pick apart or ban altogether plays that weren’t up to the standards of polite British theater.

In spite of harsh censorship, ardent believers in the New Drama still found ways to produce these groundbreaking plays. Critic J. T. Grein founded a progressive private theater called the Independent Theatre Society, which was committed to producing plays of high literary and artistic value that were rejected by commercial theaters or suppressed by censors. Its first production was Ibsen’s Ghosts in 1891. Grein once lamented to Shaw that there were no British playwrights whose work was progressive enough for his theater. Shaw was also inspired by Ibsen’s revolutionary style (though he grew weary of being compared to Ibsen; in his preface to Major Barbara he wrote, “I am not an Ibsenist even secondhand”) and had felt that the best way to express his criticism of the modern British theater was to write plays himself. He informed Grein that he might have a play that would fit the bill. Widowers’ Houses, a play about a slumlord, was produced by the Independent Theatre in 1892. It was not well received. Shaw believed this was because the world the audience saw onstage made them uncomfortable, but critics stated that the play was “not a play” and that Shaw was “no playwright.”

The following year, he finished Mrs. Warren’s Profession, which was banned by the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays from being performed in public due to sexual content. Shaw rather cheerfully anticipated this reception from the Lord Chamberlain. Indeed, he felt that catching the attention of the censors meant he was doing something right: “All censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions,” he wrote in the preface of Mrs. Warren’s Profession. But he did not expect his allies at the Independent Theatre to have reactions similar to the Lord Chamberlain’s; Grein felt that the play might drive strong men to “insanity and suicide.” Consequently, the play—now one of his better-known works—did not receive a public performance in Britain until 1925. His next play, Arms and the Man (1894), was, compared to Widowers’ Houses and Mrs. Warren’s Profession, a wild success and a major stepping-stone in Shaw’s career. By 1898, he had written seven plays—some more successful than others—that he published in two volumes called Plays Pleasant and Plays Unpleasant. He also wrote dramatic criticism for the Saturday Review from 1895 to 1898. Shaw was becoming a household name in the theater world.
Rise to Fame

In 1896, Shaw met Charlotte Payne-Townsend, an Irish heiress, through the Fabian Society. Though he loved her, he was hesitant to marry her because she was rich, and he did not want others to think he was marrying her for her money. After a successful American run of his play *The Devil’s Disciple* in 1897, however, Shaw felt secure enough in his financial independence, and the two were wed in June 1898. No longer reliant on his journalism career, Shaw could write plays full time, and soon he wrote three of his most famous works: *Man and Superman* (1903), *John Bull’s Other Island* (1904), and *Major Barbara* (1905). Beatrice Webb said of *Man and Superman*: “He has found his form: a play which is not a play; but only a combination of essay, treatise, interlude, lyric—all the different forms illustrating the same central idea.” *Major Barbara* was Shaw’s most controversial play to date—critics were viciously divided. Shaw’s success was aided by the help of actor Harley Granville-Barker, who appeared in a production of *Candida* in 1904. Barker went on to manage the Court Theatre and shifted its focus toward progressive plays, giving Shaw a major platform on which to solidify his reputation as a leading theater artist of his time.

Often viewed as the climax of Shaw’s career, *Pygmalion* was first performed in Germany in 1913 and in England in 1914. At the time, much of the criticism focused on the use of the word “bloody” by the character Eliza Doolittle—a curse word such as this was never heard on the public British stage—but the play remains to this day one of his most popular and most produced. The relative lack of controversy, aside from that one word at the end of the play, puzzled Shaw: “There must be something radically wrong with the play if it pleases everybody, but at the moment I cannot find what it is.”

But Shaw quickly lost favor after the publication of his essay “Common Sense about the War” in November 1914, which expressed his controversial opinions about Britain’s involvement in World War I. While the rest of the country was wrapped up in a nationalistic, anti-German fervor, Shaw felt that Britain’s involvement was capitalist posturing not worth the inevitable loss of life and resources. Eventually, as the war grew bloodier and the body count rose, others began to understand the truth behind what Shaw had written, but at the time of its publication, “Common Sense” was a source of strain on many of Shaw’s relationships. H. G. Wells, a fellow Fabian, described him as an “almost unendurable nuisance.” Shaw had heated arguments with the Webbs. Minutes of a meeting from the Dramatists’ Club, of which Shaw was a member, mention the “objection of some members to meet Mr. G. B. Shaw on account of his attitude regarding the War, and the Secretary was instructed to inform him of the fact, and to suggest that he should be absent himself for the present.” The next month, Shaw also withdrew from the Society of Authors and the Dramatic Sub-Committee. Shaw was ostracized, reviled, and alone. During this period, Shaw wrote *Heartbreak House*, a play into which he poured all of his depression and frustration. It was not well received.

It would be seven years before one of his plays—*Back to Methuselah* in 1921—saw even moderate success. He regained mainstream popularity with *Saint Joan*, performed in 1924.
The following year, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* finally received a public performance, and in 1926, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature “for his work, which is marked by both idealism and humanity; its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty.” Shaw’s reaction to the prize was not entirely positive: “The Nobel Prize has been a calamity for me. . . . It was really almost as bad as my 70th birthday,” he wrote to a friend. He did not believe that artists should or could be graded and awarded. Nonetheless, he accepted the prize and, reluctantly, the prize money, which he had unsuccessfully tried to persuade the committee to spend on Swedish translations of his work. He ended up donating the money to the creation of an English edition of Swedish playwright August Strindberg’s work.

**Later Years**

After *Saint Joan*, many of Shaw’s later plays met with only moderate success. He remained politically active through his nondramatic writing—*The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* was published in 1927. He traveled widely, viewing himself as a kind of socialist evangelist. He oversaw the making of the film adaptations of *Pygmalion* (1938), *Major Barbara* (1940), and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945). In late 1950, Shaw fell and fractured his thigh while trimming a shrub in his garden. He developed a kidney infection, but he hated the hospital and refused treatment. He died in his home on November 2, 1950, at 94 years of age, with reporters outside his door waiting to write his obituary. More than 500 people attended his funeral. In his will, Shaw specified that a certain amount of his money go to a creation of a phonetic English alphabet, which, at the time, caused a certain amount of outrage among Britons, whose economy was still recovering from World War II. Shaw’s contemporary legacy, however, has remained one of distinction and genius.

**Select Bibliography**

1892 *Widowers’ Houses*  
1893 *The Philanderer*  
1893 *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*  
1894 *Arms and the Man*  
1894 *Candida*  
1895 *The Man of Destiny*  
1896 *You Never Can Tell*  
1897 *The Devil’s Disciple*  
1898 *Caesar and Cleopatra*  
1899 *Capt. Brassbound’s Conversion*  
1901 *The Admirable Bashville*  
1903 *Man and Superman*  
1904 *John Bull’s Other Island*  
1905 *Major Barbara*  
1906 *The Doctor’s Dilemma*  
1908 *Getting Married*  
1909 *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*  
1909 *Misalliance*  
1911 *Fanny’s First Play*  
1912 *Androcles and the Lion*  
1914 *Pygmalion*  
1920 *Heartbreak House*  
1922 *Back to Methuselah*  
1923 *Saint Joan*  
1929 *The Apple Cart*  
1933 *On the Rocks*  
1936 *The Millionairess*  
1939 *In Good King Charles’s Golden Days*  

*Produced by A.C.T.*

To Audiences of *Major Barbara*

When *Major Barbara* first appeared in America in 1915, Shaw circulated a note, excerpted below, to the press. It was purportedly written by “a playwright whose work is well known in this country, in England, and in Germany. He prefers to keep his identity a secret, but it may be said without betrayal of confidence that he knows intimately and admires greatly Bernard Shaw.”

The possibility of using the wooing of a man’s soul for his salvation as a substitute for the hackneyed wooing of a handsome young gentleman for the sake of marrying him had occurred to Bernard Shaw many years before, when, in the course of his campaigns for socialism, he had often found himself on Sunday mornings addressing a Socialist meeting in the open air in London or in the provinces while The Salvation Army was at work on the same ground. He had frequently, at the conclusion of his own meeting, joined the crowd round the Salvation lasses and watched their work and studied their methods sympathetically. . . . Bernard Shaw was not at this time a playwright, but such scenes were not lost on him; the future dramatist was collecting material everywhere.

Many years afterward when he had acquired a considerable reputation as a critic of music, Bernard Shaw saw in a daily paper a silly remark describing some horrible noise as being almost as bad as a Salvation Army band. He immediately wrote to the paper pointing out that the Salvation Army bands were mostly good, and that some of them were of very conspicuous excellence. This compliment from an unexpected quarter made quite a commotion at the Army’s headquarters in London. The general quoted it again and again in public, and the author was invited to attend one of the musical festivals of the Army. He did so and wrote an elaborate critical report on the bands.

Shaw took advantage of the relations thus established to ask the Army staff why they did not develop the dramatic side of their ritual by performing plays. He even offered to write a short play as a model of what might be done. The leaders of the Army, though interested and not themselves hostile to the proposal, could not venture to offend the deep prejudices against the theater that still form part of the English evangelism. They could only say rather doubtfully that if the author of a play could guarantee that everything in it had actually happened, that “it was all true,” it might be possible to reconcile the stricter Salvationists to it. Shaw put forward that parables were allowable; but he was met with assurance that the Salvationists believed the parables to be records of facts as well as vehicles of instruction.
Major Barbara
The Wildly Impossible Play

By Michael Paller

George Bernard Shaw began writing *Major Barbara* on March 22, 1905. Five days earlier, the bulky King Edward VII had laughed so hard at a performance of Shaw’s previous play *John Bull’s Other Island* that he broke the chair he was sitting on and tumbled to the floor. Between that seismic event and the even greater pleasure taken in the play by the conservative Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, who saw it five times, Shaw found himself the darling of the British establishment. It wasn’t a comfortable feeling for this crusading socialist and self-proclaimed “moral revolutionist.” He considered himself “the complete Outsider,” and he was certain that the new play he was starting would return him to that position—the better to assault the political, economic, and moral complacency of the upper and middle classes. The play would be, he said, “all religion and morals and [socialist] debates.” To the actress Eleanor Robson, for whom he was creating the title role, he wrote, “The play is wildly impossible, of course. It would run for a week. But what a week that would be!”

As it turned out, the play was almost wildly impossible to write. From March to early June, Shaw found it difficult to concentrate, distracted by rehearsals and productions of five other plays in London and three in America. There were revivals of two others to plan. For the benefit of the Actors’ Orphanage, a home and school for the children of destitute or dead actors, he dashed off a satirical melodrama, *Passion, Poison and Petrification*. In June, he returned to *Major Barbara*. He struggled. He usually wrote easily and fluidly, but according to biographer Michael Holroyd the manuscript of *Barbara* has more deletions, false starts, and significant revisions than any play he’d written to date. By the end of June, he managed to complete just the first act and half of the second.

At this point, his wife, Charlotte, stepped in. On July 6 she whisked him off to her family home in County Cork, Ireland. It was the first time that Shaw had set foot on Irish soil since the Dublin native left that city 29 years earlier. There he could write in peace, away from the distractions of the city. He fared somewhat better in the wet Irish weather, but on August 21 he wrote Robson, who by now had turned down his offer to play Barbara, “I have not yet finished the play; and my inspiration, as far as the heroine is concerned, is gone. I shall finish it with my brains alone.” Something was giving him
trouble in Act III. Finish the draft he did, on September 11, but he felt dissatisfied and unsettled. Brain power alone hadn't done the job. He returned to London on September 30, worried about the reading of it he'd do the next day.

His fears were confirmed when he read the play aloud on October 1 to Harley Granville-Barker, who was to play Dolly Cusins, and the family of Gilbert Murray, the Oxford professor of Greek who was Cusins’s inspiration. (Shaw was liberally inspired by the Murrays: Murray’s wife was a model for Barbara, and her mother for Lady Britomart.) The group was thrilled with the first two acts, particularly Act II at the Salvation Army shelter. However, they were disappointed in the second scene of Act III, in which Barbara’s father, Andrew Undershaft, seems to win her and her fiancé over to his munitions-maker’s vision of a world ruled by money and armed to the teeth. The next day, a disappointed Shaw wrote J. E. Vedrenne, the business manager of the Royal Court Theatre, where *Barbara* was scheduled to premiere, “I doubt now whether *Major B.* will be ready. . . . The last act is a total failure: I must sit down and write it absolutely afresh.”

Again, Charlotte stepped into the breach, removing him the next day to Edstaston, her sister’s estate in the English county of Shropshire. And again Shaw set to work. Murray sent him a letter with some ideas for a revised third act, including suggested dialogue, some of which Shaw used; they consulted closely by mail. In two more weeks, Shaw finished his revisions, and it was with this draft that he started rehearsals at the beginning of November.

Shaw’s initial plan was to combine Barbara’s idealism and Dolly’s mastery of ancient Greek poetry with Undershaft’s realism, forging some sort of mystical union of the three. What emerged as he wrote, however, was something else. At the end of Act II, Undershaft demolished Barbara’s idealism with one stroke of his pen. Then in Act III, when he convinced Cusins to become his heir, he swept all of their beliefs before him. It was Undershaft *Über Alles*.

In his revisions, Shaw tried to make Cusins and Barbara’s ideals as strong and as active as Undershaft’s. He told Murray that he wanted Cusins and Barbara to move from the cocoon of idle words into the world of action. At the same time, however, he wanted them to accede to Undershaft’s vision of the world, because, ultimately, Undershaft was right, while Cusins and Barbara were “very young, very romantic, very academic, very ignorant of the world.” How could he make them Undershaft’s equals and yet have Dolly, with Barbara’s approval, assume the Undershaft mantle and commit to a life as a maker of deadly weapons?

Holroyd tells us that Shaw made several cuts of dialogue in Act III that he thought made Cusins and Barbara merely facetious rather than decisive. He had Dolly choose to join Undershaft on his own, rather than leave the decision to Barbara, as he had in the first version. But he felt that Barbara and Cusins still lacked conviction as they came around to Undershaft’s point of view. Over the years, he would make numerous small changes in the scene to strengthen them until he published the final version in 1930.
What caused Shaw to write himself into a corner? How did he come to flounder in unexpectedly deep waters in Act III? Shaw himself was never certain what happened. “I write plays as they come to me, by inspiration and not conscious logic,” he later wrote to Murray, and his inspiration—his unconscious—drove him in a direction he didn’t intend or quite know how to manage. Two powerful and contradictory unconscious impulses seemed to be at work, pulling Shaw in opposite directions: one toward Undershaft; the other, away from him.

Almost from the start Shaw found himself seduced by Undershaft. (The play’s original title was *Andrew Undershaft’s Profession.*) This wasn’t just another example of his habit of giving all the most persuasive speeches to the character who would normally be considered the antagonist. At the end of July 1905, he wrote to Louis Calvert, the actor who would play him, “Undershaft is diabolically subtle, gentle, self-possessed, powerful, stupendous, as well as amusing and interesting. There are the makings of ten Hamlets and six Othellos in his mere leavings.” When Cusins calls Undershaft both Mephistopheles and Machiavelli, one can sense Shaw’s own unconscious admiration showing.

What attracted Shaw to this larger-than-life character was their mutual desire for power. Holroyd points out that power held an abiding, often unconscious, fascination for Shaw, a fascination reflected in a range of characters who use or seek it, from Caesar in *Caesar and Cleopatra* to Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House* to King Magnus in
the late play *The Apple Cart*. The need to exist in the realm of doing, not just imagining and thinking, was reflected in his attitude toward theater: “*A Doll’s House* will be as flat as ditchwater when *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* will still be as fresh as paint,” he wrote, “but it will have done more work in the world; and that is enough for the highest genius.”

This preoccupation with power was strong enough to manifest itself far beyond the almost 60 plays that he wrote. Indeed, the desire for power and influence in order to change the world permeated everything he did, from his earliest art, music, and theater criticism to the 50 years he devoted to political work. He campaigned for Socialist candidates and causes, his primary vehicle being the Fabian Society, dedicated to the peaceful conversion of Great Britain to socialism. For six years he served on the Pancras Borough Council; his last act as a politician was to run for a seat on the London County Council a year before beginning *Major Barbara*. (He lost.) If Shaw hadn’t at bottom possessed the temperament of an artist, he likely would have become a full-time politician.

The power that Undershaft so forcefully represented wasn’t the only reason Shaw found reining him in, and empowering Barbara and Cusins, so difficult. There were roots in his early life, as well. His father had been an alcoholic; his mother was utterly indifferent to the welfare of her son. While George Carr Shaw looked after his drink, Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw fell under the spell of her music teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, who lived in the Shaw household. Neither parent had any time for George Bernard. Indeed, when Shaw was a teenager, Lucinda deserted son and husband to pursue a singing career in London and never returned. Growing up without parental love, Shaw learned to do without it—and without parents.

Not surprisingly, he wrote several plays that centered on relations between child and parent or parent-figure. The usual climax featured a young woman making a discovery that causes her to reject a parent in a scene of great emotional energy. At first it seems as if *Major Barbara* will follow this pattern. At the end of Act II, Barbara is desolated by discovering The Salvation Army’s dependence on her father—and his satisfaction at maintaining that dependency. So far, so good; this is true to the Shavian model: following the discovery, the young woman’s enchanted childhood is replaced with disenchantment. The normal next step, as it is in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* and *Pygmalion*, calls for her to awaken to reality, cast the parent aside, and become an independent adult, happy to face the world on her own. But Shaw’s subterranean entanglement with Undershaft didn’t allow him to jettison the father; it called for him to win the daughter over to his world of action and power. Such a demand offended what was deep in Shaw’s nature. No wonder the last scene gave him so much trouble, and that Barbara and Cusins’s capitulation in the first draft struck its hearers as half-hearted. Perhaps as a substitute, Shaw included a scene in which Stephen Undershaft rejects both his parents and in return is rejected by his father. However, this scene, while important to the plot, is essentially comic and bears less emotional weight than those between Undershaft and Barbara.

In the end, the revisions helped, even if Shaw still worried about the last scene’s effect. On Christmas Eve, almost a month after the play opened, he wrote Robson, “It was a
Brainwork comes natural to me; but this time I knew I was working—and now nobody understands.” He felt better enough about it on New Year’s Day, to be able to reframe the problem to his satisfaction, when he wrote his friend William Archer: “The third act is so novel and revolutionary that it will never get across the footlights . . . at one hearing.”

Audiences and critics didn’t spend much time debating what seemed believable or unbelievable in the relationship between Barbara and Undershaft. Some critics were too busy decrying what they considered breaches of bad taste, objecting to Barbara’s cry of despair at the end of Act II, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me,” being followed by Bill’s, “Wot prawce Selvytion nah?” They called it blasphemous. One of them wondered why the king’s censor hadn’t struck the passage out and called the play a work of “deliberate perversity.” Others, however, found the play a triumph, “one of the most remarkable plays put upon the English stage,” and a play of “the keenest insight and sense of spiritual beauty.” The Sunday Times predicted, “It will raise discussion and arguments galore.”

The discussions and arguments, the humor, perhaps even the spiritual beauty, brought audiences in droves. Old Tories who opposed Shaw to the young political and literary progressives all flocked to the Royal Court. Leonard Woolf, publisher and Bloomsbury doyen, proclaimed Shaw “one of our leaders in the revolutionary movement of our youth.”

In the face of such popular and commercial success, Shaw needed to remind the world of his “Outsider” status. The preface to the published edition of Major Barbara, which he wrote the following summer, made sure there’d be no misunderstanding his position:

I am, and always have been, and shall now always be, a revolutionary writer, because our laws make law impossible; our liberties destroy all freedom; our property is organized robbery; our morality is an impudent hypocrisy; our wisdom is administered by inexperienced or malexperienced dupes; our power wielded by cowards and weaklings, and our honor false in all its points.

His disclaimer did little good. Over the next decade, his popularity would hold steady through the premieres of The Doctor’s Dilemma, Misalliance, and Pygmalion—even as the public refused to be convinced by his politics. He had the power to lead them to the theater, but not to make them think, or think anew. Only his principled, very public opposition to World War I, which led friends to cut him off and the press and politicians to call him libelous names, would make him an Outsider again.

Passion and Truth
An Interview with Director Dennis Garnhum

By Dan Rubin

Last November, hours before I was to interview Major Barbara’s director, Canadian Dennis Garnhum, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford was adding to the political maelstrom in which he was already drowning. Having finally come clean about smoking crack cocaine while in office, the embattled official used graphic sexual language during an impromptu press conference that he called to address allegations that he made crude sexual remarks to a former employee. His downfall was happening on the opposite side of Canada from Alberta, where Dennis has served as the artistic director of Theatre Calgary since 2005, but I decided to ask the director (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) what, if any, influence this living caricature of authority gone awry would have on his interpretation of Major Barbara’s larger-than-life industrial titan, Andrew Undershaft. “Ford is not an Undershaft,” Dennis asserted matter-of-factly. “Undershaft is a brilliant man. Rob Ford is not.”

Theatre Calgary, southern Alberta’s foremost professional nonprofit theater, is in many ways similar to A.C.T. It was founded in 1968, just one year after A.C.T. arrived in San Francisco. It currently produces plays in a two-balcony theater, not dissimilar to The Geary, and like A.C.T. it is in the process of establishing a second stage. As San Francisco is enjoying a second tech boom, Alberta is reaping the benefits of being home to the third largest oil reserves in the world. Calgary is the richest and fastest growing city in Canada’s richest province. “Major Barbara is an extraordinary opportunity, not just for my company, but for my city,” Dennis said. “Calgary wants to become an international city, and it is my company’s responsibility to lead the charge. Coming to San Francisco is hugely important. It will change the ground on which I can move forward.”

Taking place a full month before rehearsals for our international coproduction of Major Barbara began, this was Dennis’s first interview about the play, and he warned me that some of his thinking about the production was still forming. In truth, Dennis has been thinking about Major Barbara for years. Theatre Calgary and A.C.T. partnered once before, in 2011, when Dennis took A.C.T.’s Tosca Café north. Conversations about Major Barbara began immediately following that production. By the time I called him, Dennis was more than ready to talk about Shaw’s intensely passionate family drama.
I wanted to start with a seemingly easy question dealt with in the play: is war profiteering and weapons manufacturing evil?

Is it evil? I think Undershaft makes a compelling argument for war profiteering, and I think one should be left rattled by his clarity. I’m a pacifist, as was Shaw, and I don’t believe Undershaft, but about six years ago I adapted a famous Canadian novel, Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*—this beautiful novel about a young Canadian boy going off to war and the utter hell that he was put through. I remember going into it thinking, “Oh, I’m a pacifist and this is going to prove that war is hell,” but once you get in it, you realize that that’s a simplistic viewpoint, because there *will* always be war and there *will* always be humans sacrificed for that action. So, it’s not enough to say, “I don’t believe in war . . . okay, but let *some* of the Canadians die, let *some* of the Americans die.” During the process of adapting that piece, I changed my stance on war and became pro-peace/pro-soldier.

What I love about Undershaft, what he stands for, is that he makes no bones about it. Someone’s going to do it: someone is going to be the inventor and the innovator, and someone is going to reap the profits, so why not him?

**You don’t feel that if no one manufactured weapons then there wouldn’t be war?**

I think that’s overly simplistic. If it starts with Undershaft, if he’d be the first to close his shop, there will always be somebody else standing right behind him to carry on. The problem is the world leaders who push the button. And look at what’s happening: Toronto can’t get its corrupt mayor out because he was voted in. He’s standing there offending the world, but they can’t get him out. It’s amazing.
In the play, Undershaft claims that he has power over politicians, that he is the authority. So, it would be interesting to know what would happen if he were swayed by Barbara and quit. We’re having a lot of conversations still, again, always, about gun control, and it’s hard to know where the solution lies. Is it in the law and punishment? Is it in regulation? If we just shut down the factories that build the guns, would that solve it?

I think that’s the simplistic answer to the question. Yes, absolutely, if all the people involved in the work just stopped, the world would be a peaceful place. And would I subscribe to that? Absolutely. I do subscribe to it. I live in a country where we have gun control. It’s a whole different mindset walking down the streets in Canada than in America. And we prefer it.

Sidebar: I love America. I lived in New York for four years, and I gained great strengths from Americans and I feel like I’m a better, stronger person because of my time there because I learned... how do I say this simply? There’s a tenacity and directness that Americans have that Canadians don’t, and I think it can be a great value. In my role as an artistic director, which I got while I was living in Manhattan, I do believe it was my time in New York that gave me a backbone that allows me to be more confident and direct.

But Canada’s a very peaceful country. We are peacekeepers. That’s what we do. I think that’s going to be the interesting conversation in a rehearsal room with artists from both countries. One of the things that I’m most excited about with this production is that idea of international collaboration. What does it mean when Canadians and Americans get in the room and work on a British play? There’s a subtlety here and complexity to it. If it were a Spanish play, we could say, “Oh, they’re different,

Rummy Mitchens
they're Spanish, it's a different language.” But with Canadians, Americans, and the British, the differences are not as apparent. The designers and I have already found some nuances in the differences between our countries. We do, in fact, have a different language. We have different words for things and different ways of doing things. In Canada, we never put on our costumes until the dress rehearsal. In America, you wear your costumes through the whole tech. That makes the artist think differently.

Did you know we faced a very interesting challenge? More of George Bernard Shaw’s work is in public domain in Canada than in the United States. Shaw published an updated version of this play in 1930. Theatre Calgary can do that version for free, but A.C.T. can’t. So we’re doing the version that was originally published in 1906 so that you don’t have to pay royalties.

Were there significant changes between versions?
The later version has a lot more description, and the last line is different. He originally wrote, “Six o’clock tomorrow morning, my young friend,” and then he changed it to, “Six o’clock tomorrow morning, Euripides.” I think that’s quite a big change. But we’re doing the original, which I actually like better: “See you tomorrow, my young friend.”

My point is, this international team is going to bounce into this collaboration, and already has bounced into it. We’ve already experienced some of the joy and the frustration of being from two different countries. But it’s exciting because it means we’re examining different cultures and different ways of being, and if we get at the root of why we think differently . . . if we ask ourselves, “Why is that difference happening?” It’s thrilling to me just to have that energy in the room, and I’m going to make a point of

Sarah Undershaft
capitalizing on that: “Okay, Canadians, what do you think the answer is right now? Okay, Americans . . .” I’ll be interested to see what kind of difference it makes to the production. I think it will make a significant difference.

I’m curious, do you have any predictions as to how Canadian audiences and American audiences will receive the play differently?

That’s a very good question. Canada is a British commonwealth, so we have a greater connection to Britain, I would say. We’re still a child of Britain, so I think there’s an affinity there. And we have the Shaw Festival here. We’ve all grown up with this connection. I can’t tell you about your side, but I assume it’s not quite the same in America. And in terms of the ideas in the play, again it’s an interesting question. Those ideas are stirring. We’re a peacekeeping country, so we’re ready to agree with Barbara’s arguments in the play.

I have little doubt that our San Francisco audiences fall on the side of peace, as well. I do wonder if, because of our national defensiveness about being thought of as “the invader,” we may feel that the play is pointing its finger at us. I’m curious if Canadian audiences will find more distance from Undershaft, and if American audiences will see more of ourselves in Undershaft than we wish were there.

I think any great production of this play is going to get any audience, anywhere in the world, excited, challenged, angry, thrilled, because what Shaw is saying, anywhere in the world, is provocative. His ideas are sound and his insights are matter-of-factly truthful. We laugh at something because it’s truthful. We’re shocked by him because he’s saying what many of us think or are afraid that other people think.

Peter Shirley
The core of the production for me is not the debating of ideas. It’s a play about two very passionate human beings. Barbara, to her core, is a religious being who believes in a higher God—that life is bigger than what is on this planet. That is what motivates everything she does. On the exact opposite end of the spectrum, we have her dad, Undershaft, who believes in making the most of the time he has on this planet, to the betterment of his existence. So, even though the play seems like it’s about The Salvation Army vs. a munitions builder and a war monger, to me it’s really about heated, passionate people. For this production to resonate the way Shaw intended it to, we have to care about these human beings with the strongest points of view. Everybody else on the stage is behind or confused or timid or in opposition to taking a great stand, right? Barbara and Undershaft take a great stand, and I think that’s what the experience should be about. It should be about being in the presence of God in one moment and being in the presence of the ultimate capitalist in the next.

As I understand it, that’s what Shaw intended, as well. He was a political creature, but not in his plays. He tried to keep his socialist views out of his plays and allow his characters to voice whatever opinions he found in them even (especially) if they opposed is own.

Exactly. One of the things that I think is tricky about Major Barbara is that Undershaft has the extraordinary last scene, where he gets to make these gorgeous, gorgeous arguments, but Barbara wins. At the end of the play, she agrees to join Undershaft and it seems that he’s won because he’s said all these great things, but as the curtain is coming down, we should feel this sense of “Watch out for Barbara: she just might do it.”

Charles Lomax
She just might do what, exactly?

Convert every last one of these bomb builders. We have to remember, the play is called *Major Barbara*. It’s not called *Undershaft*. That is something I really want to illuminate in this production, because that’s my understanding of the play. I don’t come in with any intention to “fix” a play or clarify its points. I’m trying to lay out what I see before me, and what I see before me is two gorgeous minds meeting at the end.

This play is also family drama—a comedy, really. An estranged father returns home because his family needs more money, and by the end of the play the family is reunited. We have to see that humanity, and that’s partially why I cast it as I did. I cast people who had the insights and the thoughts, but also who had the passion behind the thoughts. In rehearsal we’re going to have to be very clear with the arguments, crystal clear on who is saying what and why, and then I’m going to spend most of the time understanding the passion behind those arguments. Sometimes the passion is joy. In the first scene in the house, as I read it, Barbara really likes her dad! She thinks he’s kind of neat! She laughs at him and she makes jokes with him and she says, “You’re cool, man!” I’ve never seen the play done that way, though. When she says, “Why don’t you come to my Salvation Army base tomorrow,” she isn’t challenging him, she’s saying, “I like you: do you want to see where I work?” When you look at the play from that point of view, it’s all there. It’s a great play. You don’t have to bend anything. The more I work on it, the clearer it becomes what’s in there to be had. I’ve never seen the production that I’m seeing in my head. It’s that human aspect that is essential.

Bill Walker
I completely agree. What’s lovely to me about this play is that Barbara and her dad are very similar creatures, and she recognizes herself in him. She can say, “Oh. You’re where I get it from. Whatever fire is in me is the same fire in you. It makes sense to me now.” I think you are going to have a lot of fun playing with that approach.

Doesn’t that sound more enjoyable to watch?

Much more enjoyable.

Also playing into all this is that I have a four-year-old daughter. The relationship between a father and a daughter is very unique and very specific, but that relationship informs me when I think of Barbara. I can imagine Undershaft walking into a room and this quirky girl perks up, and he thinks, “Wow, I like you. You turned out right. You turned out like me.”

Are there specific ways in which being a father is influencing how you’re thinking about that relationship?

I just think it’s an awareness more than anything, one that I didn’t have before. I didn’t know what any of that meant before having a child; I’ve had almost no greater love than with Abby. I guess it’s partially my bent anyway, to look at the family.

There is something fascinating about the play at the core of it, and that’s something you should feel. You should go on a ride. It shouldn’t be so obvious that this is a family story or a debate play; like I said, it’s both of those things. The Brits have a way with words, and they have an acting style that is so honest and direct and daring, and they’re not afraid to be honest and ugly and loud and vulnerable, and I think I’m going to take inspiration from that, as well.

Adolphus Cusins
You’ll have lots of opportunities to get into ugliness in the second act. I’m interested in the dichotomy between Act II and Act III, going from the world of this philanthropic charity—where do-gooders are helping people, but it’s a somewhat miserable place, full of violence and despair—to the model town in the third act, this place where death is basically created, but it is pristine and beautiful.

[Scenic designer] Dan Ostling can talk to you about this, but I wanted to be very clear about this in the design: I told Dan I wanted to set the world in the ugliness of the poverty constantly, so that we are constantly fighting to get out of it. When the audience comes in, they’re going to see broken windows and doors, and then we’re going to track on the most elegant room [Lady Britomart’s library], but you’ll never lose sight of what’s just beneath the surface. Undershaft says, “The greatest fear is poverty.” As I’m getting older, I think it’s true, especially for those of us in the arts (which is a whole conversation unto itself). That poverty is essential to keep in mind to make the argument at the end of the play vibrant, and one of the things that is tricky about the play as it is written is that by the time it gets into those arguments, we haven’t seen the poverty of Act II for a long time. I want to make the world of Act II a little more present throughout the play with a combination of design and direction.

The world of 1906 and the world of 2013 are very different, if for no other reason than just the scope of industrialism in that earlier period. How do you make this 100-year-old play current?

It’s such a great question. Sometimes directors put a little tag on their productions to comment on what it all means. I don’t think the play needs that. I think it’s very clear. Poverty has not changed. Some plays and some stories do go out of fashion, and it’s kind of great when they do, right? But that’s what’s shocking: nothing about this, nothing about this, has gone out of fashion. And that’s why I brought this project to Carey.

I’m living in Calgary, in the wealthiest province in Canada. We’re in the middle of a gigantic boom because of oil and gas, and we probably have more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in Canada. Oil and gas pays for much of our beauty in this province. But we also have high poverty. I’ve spent many days walking home past the shelters, stepping over all kinds of unpleasant sights, and I wonder how these two realities can align. I’ll be curious to see how that resonates with people here in Calgary. We all get it, right? The bottom line is we should do more, we should do more, absolutely.

Just as the alcohol business and the weapons manufacturing business support The Salvation Army in the play, oil and gas and whatever other questionable industries you want to point to support the arts in our countries.

Shaw is trying to raise the questions and make you do something about it. So we present the plays as cleanly and strongly as possible. If you’re thrilled by his capitalism you’ll run out and start your own bomb factory. If you’re offended by it, go out and start donating. What are you going to do to help? What difference are you going to make?
You started to talk about why you brought this project to Carey.

The history of this project goes: I saw Carey’s *Tosca Café* in San Francisco, and we brought it up to Canada. We changed half the cast to have Canadians in it, and I introduced her to Dean Paul Gibson to play the Bartender. I watched the two of them rehearse in the most gorgeous way, because they were so electric with each other. Dean did an extraordinary job in the role, and that is where the idea for *Major Barbara* actually started. I’ve always wanted to do the play, and I thought of Dean as Undershaft. Dean is a great actor and he’s very intelligent and he has this gigantic heart. His ideas are going to come across crystal clear, but it’s going to be the humanity that he brings to the role that’s going to make this production electric. Then we did a national search in the U.S. for Barbara, we auditioned more than 50 people and we came up with Gretchen Hall. I literally fell off my chair when she auditioned for us, because she was extraordinary. And to bring this conversation full circle, I’m so excited about having this Canadian man standing nose to nose with this American woman. I hope we feel that there are two countries aligning, coming at each other, in rehearsal and onstage.

Some people would say that Undershaft is a villain, but I don’t think Shaw thought of him that way, and it’s clear from this conversation that you don’t feel that way either. Undershaft says a lot of things that are hard to accept. I suspect our audience will have a hard time swallowing the idea that there’s any valid reason to support the weapons trade, and yet you’re giving these arguments to a man that you clearly feel a lot for.

It makes it even more provocative, right?

Absolutely.

If we get it right, people will be in discussion. Our job is just to present that discussion as humanly and passionately as possible, and then you decide if Undershaft is a horrible man. I mean, he is horrible. What he says is horrible, but it makes sense. Don’t get me wrong, I would much rather go for dinner with Barbara than Undershaft, but I can’t deny—we’re not supposed to deny—that he speaks truth. He’s saying, “This is how the world works, folks. Take it or leave it. We can battle for the ideal world we want to live in, but I’m living in this world and this is how this world works. Smart people figure that out fast.” I think that is true.

Even just hearing you explain it, it’s hard to stomach. It’s so bleak: this is how the world is, and there’s nothing we can do about it, so let’s use it to our own advantage.

And Barbara says the opposite. He says, “This is the way the world is,” and she says, “This is the way the world should be.” That’s the core of it. She’s hoping for a better world; he’s not hoping for a better world. It’s very simple. One’s pragmatic and one’s idealistic.
A World of Lived-in Windows
An Interview with Scenic Designer Dan Ostling

By Dan Rubin

When Dan Ostling was asked to create the set for last season’s music/theater hybrid Stuck Elevator, he had to find a way to make an elevator—a claustrophobic five-foot by five-foot by seven-foot metal box—fill The Geary Theater’s majestic stage. Moreover, he had to make that most everyday and constraining of spaces both theatrically interesting and flexible enough to allow the main character to explore the recesses of his imagination while remaining trapped within the confines of his cage. It was no small challenge, one that forced Ostling to consider the psychological and metaphysical worlds of the play’s characters. Ultimately, he created an environment of concentric rectangles, with the elevator in the middle of the stage, surrounded by an apartment building, in turn surrounded by a grid of buildings in the Bronx. “It is a reflection of both the internal and external world,” he explained at the time. “It’s New York, but it’s also the character’s mind.”

In his plans for the set of Major Barbara, Ostling is again relying on rectangles, but this time rather than surrounding one another, they create a battalion of interconnected windows that serve as an ever-present backdrop to the action of the play. For those who know Shaw’s work, this abstract concept might come as a bit of a surprise. Shaw describes the three locations in Major Barbara—a private library, the yard outside a Salvation Army shelter, and a crest overlooking an arsenal—with a degree of specificity, and he clearly had realism in mind. (This is unsurprising given that he cut his teeth as a playwright during the late 1800s, the century that gave us the realistic box set.) In his stage directions, the playwright mentions only one window, found in the library in Lady Britomart Undershaft’s upper-class house in the ritzy Wilton Crescent area of London; the other two locations are written as being outside.

So where did Ostling—who recently also designed sets for the A.C.T. productions of Endgame and Play (2012), The Homecoming (2011), War Music (2009), and Brainpeople (2008)—come up with the idea of using a wall of windows? We asked him that question when we spoke to him in November, just days after he sent director Dennis Garnhum his final designs.
How did you come to the idea of making the core of your set design a series of frames that surround the action?

I'm not sure that I necessarily know. This was a tricky show to design, actually, partially because it calls for three completely different, disparate settings—a London interior, the Salvation Army shelter, and the armory with the pastoral hills—but also because it's written with the idea that it will have these realistic box sets because Shaw lived in a time when the theater used box sets. Between each act, the curtain would come down, and all the scenery would be moved on and off and it would take a lot of time. There'd be a pause. Shaw is very exact in what he wants, but for any number of reasons, we really can't do that now. Number one, styles have changed. Having three box sets would feel rather clunky; audiences want plays to move quickly. We don't have the same patience that audiences had at that time, and the idea of bringing the curtain down for three or four minutes is crazy. Dennis had a really clear idea that he wanted there to be a space in which all three settings existed, and he wanted the poverty that is written into Act II to be visible in all of them, living on top of everything.
How do you present that poverty in the first act, which takes place in the library of an upper-class home?

That is what those windows will create. They represent the whole city. Those windows, the frames you were talking about, are going to be really textured and lived in—salvaged, the remnants of lives. The city is made up of rich neighborhoods surrounded by slums. Lady Britomart and her children are living in the same city as “those other people,” but they’re separated, insulated. In the first act, the action will take place on a kind of island in the middle of this world.

Dennis did not want this to be a picturesque vision of Victorian poverty. He didn't want this to be “ye olde poor,” Dickensian and whatnot. The last thing he wanted to do was tasteful poverty. He actually wanted to create a harshness, a brutality in the world—something that felt real and authentic.

For the last act, I had this really clear vision of these bombs hanging overhead. Precariousness. The weight of reality. We wanted a real tension in the space. I'm always interested in trying to create a real event or a real experience for the audience, as opposed to creating a set where just the characters onstage are having the experience.

You want the audience to feel afraid that these bombs are going to fall?

Having a series of bombs hanging overhead feels dangerous for everyone. It pulls the audience in.

The stage directions for the second scene of Act III depict Undershaft’s arsenal on a beautiful crest overlooking a model town with white smoke and clean walls. I'm very interested by the bombs in your design for two reasons. One is that they make this seem more like an interior space than I imagined when I read the play, and two is that I'm curious how this plays into the idea that the physically cleanest location in this story might be morally the dirtiest.

I hadn’t read *Major Barbara* since I was in undergrad, and going back to it, I enjoyed it so much more than when I was a kid. It’s very challenging in terms of the morality and the ethics of it. It’s not black and white. It doesn’t let anybody off the hook. It pulls you in so that you accept the arguments of this person and then the arguments of that person—you end up in a really thorny, unanswerable moral dilemma.

Dennis wanted the arsenal to be strong and ordered. He felt strongly that he wanted to create action, because there’s a lot of talking in this play. He wanted to create a place where things were actually happening.

It became an interior, because that’s where the weapons are made?

We are thinking of it as more like an indoor/outdoor space, almost like an airport hangar. The backdrop will be a sky, not a wall. There will be a sense of openness, and that openness is not idyllic in the way that Shaw is talking about, but there’s definitely a lightness.
We’re trying to create a fresh way of looking at the play that helps us concentrate on the actors and the words. I rarely do this—as a matter of fact, I try to stay away from it—but because I was having such trouble trying to figure out what to do for this play, I looked at other productions to see how other designers had solved it. So many of their designs were a tasteful arrangement of platforms: the first act has panels of books and the second act has bricks and the third act has whatever, and as soon as you see it, you know what it is going to be. It doesn’t satisfy you or stick with you. At best, it’s appropriate. It doesn’t amplify the experience of being in the theater. To me that’s always a bit of a shame. That’s not to say the set should tell the story, but it’s a visual art form, and it should be visually compelling.

But it was hard to figure out how to do that with this play. We latched onto those windows as real things, as real windows that surround you as you walk through the city, that give a sense of the ever-present multitudes. They felt really immediate and beautiful and satisfying. It will create a visual experience that will ultimately help the audience focus on the actors and allow us to hear those words in a clear and fresh way. I want people to hear these arguments and hear these words and say, “I don’t remember this play being so interesting.” I want it to not have felt appropriate. To not have been what people expected. Any time I approach old plays, I want to make them as dangerous today as they were when they were written. I don’t want to simply do what Shaw did, because he wouldn’t do it the same way today.
Your bombs also remind me of the meat-packing plants Upton Sinclair describes in *The Jungle*, which Shaw said was one of his influences. Sinclair gives these gruesome descriptions of these lines of hanging carcasses . . .

Again, Dennis didn’t want the scene to be next to the factory, he wanted it to be the factory. He doesn’t want workers constantly coming in and out, referencing something that is not happening onstage; he wants the workers and the work they’re doing to be represented onstage.

How much of your design was influenced by the fact that this production is going to travel to Canada by semi?

The design: not much. The way it’s going to be constructed, on the other hand: a bunch. It takes a lot more resources and a lot more thinking to build something that has to move. The theaters are actually pretty similar, which is good. That made approaching the design a little easier. Certainly, Theatre Calgary’s stage is a little smaller, so I won’t use every inch of The Geary because we’re not going to have that space up north. But they’re pretty similar.
I admit, I assumed the window idea for the set came about because it was something you could break down into smaller pieces relatively easily.

Oh no, this is actually not an easy set to construct. This is pretty challenging. It’s pretty complicated. It’d be much easier to have flats.

So you actually made it more of a challenge than it had to be.

You know, theater is hard. When I think about designing, it’s never about what is going to be easiest. I think about what will be the most powerful experience for an audience. I like to think the shops generally like working on my sets because they’re challenging. The sets ask for their creativity and ingenuity, and the shops are proud of what they do—they feel like they’re real players in what ends up onstage. This is a really hard job, being in the theater. I think people do it because they love the work. The design we are going with is not the easiest approach we considered. It’s probably one of the hardest of the ideas we were floating. Hopefully we’ll pull it off.
George Bernard Shaw
Paradoxes of a Moral Revolutionary

By Michael Paller

Fantasy and Reality

George Bernard Shaw, born in 1856 in Dublin, first went to the theater in that city as a boy. The theater of that era—its actors and plays—was gigantic. The fare was melodrama, farce, and Shakespeare, who, along with Dickens with his own oversized emotional world, became the boy’s favorite writer. A product of a family where abuse and neglect took the place of love, Shaw found a substitute home in Dublin’s Theatre Royal. There, he later wrote, “Existence touches you delicately to the very heart, and where mysteriously thrilling people, secretly known to you in the dreams of your childhood, enact a life in which terrors are as fascinating as delights; so that ghosts and death, agony and sin, became, like love and victory, phases of an unaccountable ecstasy.”

When he came to write his own plays, he harkened back to this world of huge emotions, theatrical gestures, musical speech. “My procedure,” he wrote, suggesting the size and vitality with which he endowed his characters, “is to imagine characters and let them rip.” While Shaw’s predecessors and even contemporaries used these artificialities to cocoon audiences in a world of thrills, fascination, and escape, Shaw employed them to wake up his characters to reality. That is the pattern of many of Shaw’s plays: a character, usually a young woman, has been living her life according to a belief she’s been taught is true. Through the play’s action, she learns that truth to be false, and life isn’t what she thought it was. She awakes from an illusion. Now she must choose: will she remain a child, or will she grow up? Will she go back to sleep, or will she live in the world as it is?

Good and Evil

Employing what were even then becoming old-fashioned stage falsities of acting, action, and emotion in order to pull reality onto the stage is only one of many paradoxes that run through every aspect of Shaw’s career. Another concerned the confluence—or lack of—between his careers as playwright and crusader for socialism. In the latter endeavor, Shaw wrote scores of pamphlets, speeches, essays, and books urging Britain to adopt socialism as its form of economic organization. He also wrote reams of art, music, and theater criticism, and journalism on a wide range of topics, all aimed at converting
readers to his point of view. You might expect such a writer to carry his habitual didacticism into his main work, playwriting. But he doesn’t. Bertolt Brecht, a great admirer of Shaw, noticed that you might never discern Shaw’s personal point of view on an issue from reading his plays. Shaw allows every character her or his opinion, and it’s a matter of honor with him that the most compelling and convincing speeches go to the character that other playwrights would call the villain.

For Shaw, lover of old-fashioned melodrama where Good is Good and always triumphs over Evil, there are no heroes or villains. There are only people doing what they think is right, from the best of motives. In the preface to St. Joan, a play in which he gave the most memorable speeches to the men charged with trying and convicting Joan of Arc, he wrote that there were no villains in his version of her story: “It is what men and women do at their best, with good intentions . . . that really concern us. . . . If Joan had not been burnt by normally innocent people in the energy of their righteousness her death at their hands would have no more significance than the Tokyo earthquake, which burnt a great many more maidens.” For Shaw, people come with their virtues and vices mixed together. It’s a lesson that Barbara learns in the course of Major Barbara: “There is no wicked side [of life]; life is all one,” she says to her father: “You may be a devil, but God speaks through you sometimes.”

**Emotional and Intellectual**

Waking up to the world of reality, facing the fact that you’ve spent your life dreaming, comes with a cost. After Barbara undergoes such an awakening, Undershaft says to her, “You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something.” This feeling of loss leads us to another Shavian paradox. For a long time, Shaw’s plays (and Shaw) have been accused of being devoid of emotion, all brain and no heart. This is because when the critics of Shaw’s time (and ours) speak of emotion, what they usually refer to, in the context of drama, are the emotions expressed between grown men and women—that is, love. That Shaw almost always refuses to give us a love story doesn’t mean his plays aren’t emotional. It means, as the critic Eric Bentley has pointed out, that we’re looking for emotions where Shaw doesn’t put them.

Where does he put them? One place is in ideas. Shaw’s major characters are on fire with their ideas and hold them with a passion that can only be described as love. It’s as much as they can do to sit still and be quiet for two minutes while somebody else is talking. The stakes are desperately personal, because Shaw’s characters identify so personally with their ideas. To reject their ideas is to reject them. That’s the negative side. The positive side is that because they and their ideas are indivisible, it’s essential that they be heard and accepted in the world. For Shaw’s characters, everything is at stake when they tell you what they believe.

The other place where powerful emotions reside in Shaw’s plays is in the relation between child and parent or parent figure. A child rejects her mother or father and declares herself independent. Often this is the moment when she wakes up to the
reality from which she’d been shielded, as in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*. Sometimes, as in *Pygmalion*, the character realizes she needn’t be subservient anymore. Henry Higgins made Eliza Doolittle into a woman—a duchess—in Act IV; in Act V she makes herself into an independent woman. In *St. Joan*, Joan rejects those who would be her worldly father figures and gives herself to her true Father. *Major Barbara* is unusual in that, while Barbara awakes to the true relationship between her father and The Salvation Army, this marks the beginning of a new relationship, not just the end of an old one.

**Personal and Public**

In these moments, it becomes clear that Shaw’s plays are both determinably public and intensely personal—another paradox. They’re personal in the deep emotions they contain, if you know where to look for them. They’re public not in the sense of being position papers, which they never are, but because they make us confront significant public issues. Or, rather, Shaw wants us to confronted confronting them, because while he asks big questions, he refuses to provide the answers.

If, for example, a British audience member in 1905 was shocked by the fact that in an unregulated capitalist society the very poor had to rely for sustenance on the self-interest of the enormously wealthy, then what was he going to do about it? That we are confronting similar questions today only indicates how short a distance we’ve traveled in the century since Shaw asked them. If Undershft’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 Undershft 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.

If Shaw wasn’t a propagandist in the theater, if he gave every character his or her say, refused to point fingers at villains or celebrate heroes, and didn’t give us a lesson or an evening of intellectual gamesmanship, then what was he up to? The answer lies not just in the words of his plays but in the actions, what the characters do: a person awakens and chooses to grow up, by seeing the world as it is, not as she’s been told it is. She learns to think and feel for herself, to see that the conventional wisdom is always more conventional than it is wise. She becomes her own authentic person. He has the same hope for us.

All of his work, Shaw wrote, was about “the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality”—between the real value and the false. He was not an economic or political revolutionary, but a moral one. His plays are, at heart, serious, but they are also some of the funniest in the English language. “My way of joking,” he said, “is to tell the truth. It’s the funniest joke in the world.”
Shaw on *Major Barbara*
Excerpts from Shaw’s 1906 “Preface to *Major Barbara*: First Aid to Critics”

**Shaw on the Crime of Poverty**

In the millionaire Undershaft I have represented a man who has become intellectually and spiritually as well as practically conscious of the irresistible natural truth which we all abhor and repudiate: to wit, that the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty, and that our first duty—a duty to which every other consideration should be sacrificed—is not to be poor. “Poor but honest,” “the respectable poor,” and such phrases are as intolerable and as immoral as “drunken but amiable,” “fraudulent but a good after-dinner speaker,” “splendidly criminal,” or the like. Security, the chief pretense of civilization, cannot exist where the worst of dangers, the danger of poverty, hangs over everyone’s head, and where the alleged protection of our persons from violence is only an accidental result of the existence of a police force whose real business is to force the poor man to see his children starve whilst idle people overfeed pet dogs with the money that might feed and clothe them. . . .

[With stupid levity] we tolerate poverty as if it were either a wholesome tonic for lazy people or else a virtue to be embraced as St. Francis embraced it. If a man is indolent, let him be poor. If he is drunken, let him be poor. If he is not a gentleman, let him be poor. If he is addicted to the fine arts or to pure science instead of to trade and finance, let him be poor. If he chooses to spend his urban 18 shillings a week or his agricultural 13 shillings a week on his beer and his family instead of saving it up for his old age, let him be poor. Let nothing be done for “the undeserving”: let him be poor. Serve him right! Also—somewhat inconsistently—blessed are the poor!

Now what does this *Let Him Be Poor* mean? It means let him be weak. Let him be ignorant. Let him become a nucleus of disease. Let him be a standing exhibition and example of ugliness and dirt. Let him have rickety children. Let him be cheap and let him drag his fellows down to his price by selling himself to do their work. Let his habitations turn our cities into poisonous congeries of slums. Let his daughters infect our young men with the diseases of the streets and his sons revenge him by turning the nation’s manhood into scrofula, cowardice, cruelty, hypocrisy, political imbecility, and all the other fruits of oppression and malnutrition. Let the undeserving become still less deserving; and let the deserving lay up for himself, not treasures in heaven, but horrors in hell upon earth. This being so, is it really wise to let him be poor? Would he not do ten
times less harm as a prosperous burglar, incendiary, ravisher, or murderer, to the utmost limits of humanity’s comparatively negligible impulses in these directions? Suppose we were to abolish all penalties for such activities, and decide that poverty is the one thing we will not tolerate—that every adult with less than, say, 365 pounds a year, shall be painlessly but inexorably killed, and every hungry half-naked child forcibly fattened and clothed, would not that be an enormous improvement on our existing system, which has already destroyed so many civilizations, and is visibly destroying ours in the same way? . . .

Undershaft, the hero of *Major Barbara*, is simply a man who, having grasped the fact that poverty is a crime, knows that when society offered him the alternative of poverty or a lucrative trade in death and destruction, it offered him, not a choice between opulent villainy and humble virtue, but between energetic enterprise and cowardly infamy. His conduct stands the Kantian test, which Peter Shirley’s does not. Peter Shirley is what we call the honest poor man. Undershaft is what we call the wicked rich one: Shirley is Lazarus, Undershaft Dives. Well, the misery of the world is due to the fact that the great mass of men act and believe as Peter Shirley acts and believes. If they acted and believed as Undershaft acts and believes, the immediate result would be a revolution of incalculable beneficence. 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. This preparedness is, as he says, the final test of sincerity. Like Froissart’s medieval hero, who saw that “to rob and pill was a good life,” he is not the dupe of that public sentiment against killing which is propagated and endowed by people who would otherwise be killed themselves, or of the mouth-honor paid to poverty and obedience by rich and insubordinate do-nothings who want to rob the poor without courage and command them without superiority. Froissart’s knight, in placing the achievement of a good life before all the other duties—which indeed are not duties at all when they conflict with it, but plain wickednesses—behaved bravely, admirably, and, in the final analysis, public-spiritedly. Medieval society, on the other hand, behaved very badly indeed in organizing itself so stupidly that a good life could be achieved by robbing and pillaging. If the knight’s contemporaries had been all as resolute as he, robbing and pillaging would have been the shortest way to the gallows, just as, if we were all as resolute and clear-sighted as Undershaft, an attempt to live by means of what is called “an independent income” would be the shortest way to the lethal chamber. But as, thanks to our political imbecility and personal cowardice (fruits of poverty both), the best imitation of a good life now procurable is life on an independent income, all sensible people aim at securing such an income, and are, of course, careful to legalize and moralize both it and all the actions and sentiments which lead to it and support it as an institution. What else can they do? They know, of course, that they are rich because others are poor. But they cannot help that: it is for the poor to repudiate poverty when they have had enough of it. . . .

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. And the evil to be attacked is
not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft, kingcraft, demagogy, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war, pestilence, nor any other of the scapegoats which reformers sacrifice, but simply poverty.

Shaw on The Salvation Army

When *Major Barbara* was produced in London, the second act was reported in an important northern newspaper as a withering attack on The Salvation Army, and the despairing ejaculation of Barbara deplored by a London daily as a tasteless blasphemy. And they were set right, not by the professed critics of the theater, but by religious and philosophical publicists like Sir Oliver Lodge and Dr. Stanton Coit, and strenuous Nonconformist journalists like Mr. William Stead, who not only understood the act as well as the Salvationists themselves, but also saw it in its relation to the religious life of the nation, a life which seems to lie not only outside the sympathy of many of our theater critics, but actually outside their knowledge of society. Indeed nothing could be more ironically curious than the confrontation *Major Barbara* effected of the theater enthusiasts with the religious enthusiasts. On the one hand was the playgoer, always seeking pleasure, paying exorbitantly for it, suffering unbearable discomforts for it, and hardly ever getting it. On the other hand was the Salvationist, repudiating gaiety and courting effort and sacrifice, yet always in the wildest spirits, laughing, joking, singing, rejoicing, drumming, and tambourining: his life flying by in a flash of excitement, and his death arriving as a climax of triumph. And, if you please, the playgoer despising the Salvationist as a joyless person, shut out from the heaven of the theater, self-condemned to a life of hideous gloom; and the

George Bernard Shaw (1911–12), by Sydney Haldane Olivier, First Baron Olivier (National Portrait Gallery, London)
Salvationist mourning over the playgoer as over a prodigal with vine leaves in his hair, careering outrageously to hell amid the popping of champagne corks and the ribald laughter of sirens! Could misunderstanding be more complete, or sympathy worse misplaced?

Fortunately, the Salvationists are more accessible to the religious character of the drama than the playgoers to the gay energy and artistic fertility of religion. They can see, when it is pointed out to them, that a theater, as a place where two or three are gathered together, takes from that divine presence an inalienable sanctity of which the grossest and profanest farce can no more deprive it than a hypocritical sermon by a snobbish bishop can desecrate Westminster Abbey. But in our professional playgoers this indispensable preliminary conception of sanctity seems wanting. They talk of actors as mimes and mummers, and, I fear, think of dramatic authors as liars and pandars, whose main business is the voluptuous soothing of the tired cityspeculator when what he calls the serious business of the day is over. Passion, the life of drama, means nothing to them but primitive sexual excitement: such phrases as “impassioned poetry” or “passionate love of truth” have fallen quite out of their vocabulary and been replaced by “passional crime” and the like. They assume, as far as I can gather, that people in whom passion has a larger scope are passionless and therefore uninteresting. Consequently they come to think of religious people as people who are not interesting and not amusing. And so, when Barbara cuts the regular Salvation Army jokes, and snatches a kiss from her lover across his drum, the devotees of the theater think they ought to appear shocked, and conclude that the whole play is an elaborate mockery of the Army. And then either hypocritically rebuke me for mocking, or foolishly take part in the supposed mockery! Even the handful of mentally competent critics got into difficulties over my demonstration of the economic deadlock in which The Salvation Army finds itself. Some of them thought that the Army would not have taken money from a distiller and a cannon founder: others thought it should not have taken it: all assumed more or less definitely that it reduced itself to absurdity or hypocrisy by taking it. On the first point the reply of the Army itself was prompt and conclusive. 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. They gratefully acknowledged that publicans not only give them money but allow them to collect it in the bar—sometimes even when there is a Salvation meeting outside preaching teetotalism. In fact, they questioned the verisimilitude of the play, not because Mrs. Baines took the money, but because Barbara refused it.

On the point that the Army ought not to take such money, its justification is obvious. It must take the money because it cannot exist without money, and there is no other money to be had. Practically all the spare money in the country consists of a mass of rent, interest, and profit, every penny of which is bound up with crime, drink, prostitution, disease, and all the evil fruits of poverty, as inextricably as with enterprise, wealth, commercial probity, and national prosperity. The notion that you can earmark certain coins as tainted is an unpractical individualist superstition. . . .
For the present, however, it is not my business to flatter The Salvation Army. Rather must I point out to it that it has almost as many weaknesses as the Church of England itself. . . . There is still too much other-worldliness about the Army. Like Frederick’s grenadier, the Salvationist wants to live forever (the most monstrous way of crying for the moon); and though it is evident to anyone who has ever heard General Booth and his best officers that they would work as hard for human salvation as they do at present if they believed that death would be the end of them individually, they and their followers have a bad habit of talking as if the Salvationists were heroically enduring a very bad time on earth as an investment which will bring them in dividends later on in the form, not of a better life to come for the whole world, but of an eternity spent by themselves personally in a sort of bliss which would bore any active person to a second death. Surely the truth is that the Salvationists are unusually happy people. And is it not the very diagnostic of true salvation that it shall overcome the fear of death? Now the man who has come to believe that there is no such thing as death, the change so called being merely the transition to an exquisitely happy and utterly careless life, has not overcome the fear of death at all: on the contrary, it has overcome him so completely that he refuses to die on any terms whatever. I do not call a Salvationist really saved until he is ready to lie down cheerfully on the scrap heap, having paid scot and lot and something over, and let his eternal life pass on to renew its youth in the battalions of the future.

The Flaw with Salvation

If there is to be no punishment there can be no forgiveness. We shall never have real moral responsibility until everyone knows that his deeds are irrevocable. . . . Great scoundrels have been beneficent rulers whilst amiable and privately harmless monarchs have ruined their countries by trusting to the hocus-pocus of innocence and guilt, reward and punishment, virtuous indignation and pardon, instead of standing up to the facts without either malice or mercy. Major Barbara stands up to Bill Walker in that way, with the result that the ruffian who cannot get hated, has to hate himself. To relieve this agony he tries to get punished; but the Salvationist whom he tries to provoke is as merciless as Barbara, and only prays for him. Then he tries to pay, but can get nobody to take his money. His doom is the doom of Cain, who, failing to find either a savior, a policeman, or an almoner to help him to pretend that his brother’s blood no longer cried from the ground, had to live and die a murderer. Cain took care not to commit another murder. . . . Had Cain been allowed to pay off his score, he might possibly have killed Adam and Eve for the mere sake of a second luxurious reconciliation with God afterwards. Bodger, you may depend on it, will go on to the end of his life poisoning people with bad whiskey, because he can always depend on The Salvation Army or the Church of England to negotiate a redemption for him in the consideration of a trifling percentage of his profits.
The Salvation Army: A History

By Shannon Stockwell

The London Poor

It was the common opinion of many well-to-do Victorians that there were two kinds of poor people. The “deserving poor” were those who, through no fault of their own, had fallen upon hard times, perhaps because of illness or a death in the family. These people were to be pitied and helped. The “undeserving poor” were the alcoholics, the criminals, and the lazy. Upper- and middle-class Victorians felt that these people had chosen to live their lives this way, and therefore the undeserving poor were inherently morally corrupt and shouldn’t be helped. The dichotomy between the deserving and undeserving poor was far from a new concept; the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 established similar distinctions and became a mandatory element of seeking government assistance. The Poor Law was revised and amended many times, always with a constant struggle between finding a way to help the deserving poor without enabling the undeserving.

The population of London increased drastically during the nineteenth century, rising from 1 million people to 6.5 million by the end. The poor were mostly confined to the East End, historically the poorest part of the city. Overpopulation caused homes to overflow with residents, and scarcity of housing led to a rise in rent. Because so many people had flocked to the city in search of jobs, many were unemployed or underemployed, making the high rent impossible to pay. Substandard sanitation and shoddily made sewage systems bred diseases like cholera and typhus; alcoholism, homelessness, and crime were rampant; parentless children often resorted to stealing and prostitution; and upper-class members of Victorian society soon realized that the poor, whether they were deserving of their poverty or not, had become a blight on the reputation of their great city.

The General’s Early Life

William Booth, the son of Mary Moss and Samuel Booth, was born in 1829 in Nottingham, which, despite its distance from London, also felt the strain of poverty, overpopulation, and unemployment. His family, once relatively well off, fell on hard times shortly after he turned 13. At his father’s request, Booth started working as apprentice to a pawnbroker in order to earn money for the family. Booth later claimed
that his years as a pawnbroker, while miserable, were his first introduction to the unhappy lives of the poor.

He also began attending services at the impressive Broad Street Chapel, a local Methodist church that attracted some of the best revivalist preachers of the time. Booth's first experience with preaching was with a group of young men from Broad Street who wanted to start a mission in the poorer parts of Nottingham. He never intended to run the group, but when their leader died of consumption in 1848, Booth found himself taking charge. Inspired by the revivalist preachers from Broad Street, he began practicing unusual methods of conversion, like accusing audience members of sinning, hoping to shame them into salvation. His rambunctious style, combined with the type of audience he sought, offended and confused the more uptight Methodists. In a famous incident, Booth brought a group of boys from the slums to take in a church service at Broad Street; church authorities told him that, in the future, he must make sure to bring this group in through the back door so that the rest of the congregation did not have to look at them.

Perhaps because of this outrageous incident, Booth was inspired to seek a life in the ministry. After he completed his pawnbroker's apprenticeship, however, he struggled to find work as a preacher in his hometown. He knew that he needed to find a job to continue supporting his family, so he moved to London in 1849, when he was 20 years old. Job opportunities in London were not as abundant as he had hoped. He reluctantly began work as a pawnbroker again. He planned to work six days a week and preach on Sundays, but soon he was preaching at night, as well. He was not sanctioned by any organization at first. Then, he hopped back and forth between different Methodist sects,
never making a long-term commitment to any particular one. He was finally ordained in 1858 by the Methodist New Connexion in Cornwall, at the southwesternmost tip of England.

The Christian Mission

Booth desperately wanted to be a traveling evangelist for the Methodist New Connexion. He liked arriving in a new town, converting lost souls, and then moving on to the next. He found it exciting. But the church's authorities, perhaps wary of the unusual methods he had developed on the street, consistently confined him to Cornwall. Booth was frustrated by the control the authorities had over him and left the sect in 1861. Uncertain where his unique brand of preaching would fit, he moved back to London to be with his wife, Catherine Booth, also—controversially, due to her gender—a Methodist preacher. She had recently been preaching in the city and found success, with several converts to her name. Intelligent and a calm but powerful orator, Catherine had strong opinions and the academic knowledge to back them up. Through letters, she and William debated on the subject of female ministry for some time before their marriage before he finally conceded that if a woman felt called by God to preach, she should do so. He claimed it was the only real disagreement they ever had. That was not entirely true; throughout their entire relationship, Catherine admonished William for not studying enough—a trait that would actually contribute to the success of The Salvation Army.

William continued preaching on the street in the years after he left the Methodist New Connexion, and he caught the attention of R. C. Morgan and Samuel Chase, the editors of the evangelical publication the Revival. They invited Booth to preach for six weeks in 1865 in Whitechapel, a neighborhood in the East End of London. He agreed, but he did not plan to stay after those six weeks were up. He remembered his days preaching in the slums of Nottingham and dealing with the poor as a pawnbroker. He knew firsthand that poverty was a complex problem, and he did not know if he had the skill to convert the poor and working classes, especially in neighborhoods as notorious as those found in the East End. At the same time, he found himself compelled: “I found my heart being strongly and strangely drawn out on behalf of a million people living within a mile of the tent—ninety out of a hundred whom, they told me, never heard the sound of a preacher’s voice. Why go further afield for audiences?”

Seeing that he was filling a need, Booth continued independently preaching in the East End—ironically choosing to stay put after he had left the New Connexion for making him do just that. He called the project the Christian Mission. His initial intention was not to start a new Methodist sect altogether; his only goal was to convert the outcasts the Methodist clergy had not been able to reach, and then, once they were saved, send them off to established churches. Converting the poor of East London was not easy, however. There were reasons other Methodist churches had failed to reach them: some were Roman Catholic, some were irreligious, and some simply did not have sufficient time or health to spend on churchgoing. But Booth soon discovered something
other preachers had not: inviting converts to tell their stories was an incredibly effective way to get the attention of an otherwise disinterested congregation. Since his converts were useful to him in this way, he did not send them to other established churches. Instead, he formed a congregation of his own. As the number of people he converted grew, he persuaded his sponsors to help him obtain more places to preach. Booth set up a headquarters in Whitechapel and continued preaching in any location he could get, holding open-air services and meetings in theaters, tents, dance halls, and other “unchurchly” locales. (Methodists had a strong aversion to theater and dancing.)

In 1871, Booth wrote and published *How to Win the Masses with the Gospel*, a book that elaborated on his newfound conversion method: encouraging the converted to tell their individual stories to convert others. Booth may not have consciously realized it, but the lives of a middle-class preacher and a poor homeless alcoholic were not at all the same, and being told to convert by such a preacher could be unhelpful, condescending, and even offensive. Under Booth’s new model, that same poor homeless alcoholic was preached to by someone who had been in a similar position and had been able to recover. The process established trust and hope, and suddenly Booth was able to reach the previously unreachable poor.
Becoming The Salvation Army

As the Christian Mission grew, it began to use military metaphors more and more in its advertisements and literature. By 1877, the militarist lingo was in full gear. Booth and his congregation now referred to themselves as a “Hallelujah Army.” A representative poster read, “WE ARE RUSHING INTO WAR. The battle has begun: thousands killed and wounded, a few have been saved from death. It is a field of blood already but what will it be?” The new style received mixed responses. Many non-religious people found it bizarre and ridiculous, and other Christians felt it took on a needlessly and offensively superior attitude. But the new style was undeniably popular. Queen Victoria’s imperial reach inspired many Britons, and Booth and other evangelicals were convinced that military-style discipline would be beneficial to an undisciplined group of people. Also, a holy “empire” and the idea of “invading” unsaved communities in other countries to fight a war against the devil were appealing to Booth.

They had already referred to themselves as an “army” in various literature, but the official name change from Christian Mission to The Salvation Army happened almost by accident. George Scott Railton, a fellow Salvationist and Booth’s right-hand man, had come up with the idea of comparing the Christian Mission with a volunteer army. When he mentioned the idea, however, Booth’s son Bramwell bristled. “Volunteer! I am not a volunteer. I’m a regular or nothing.” So Booth took Railton’s pen and crossed out “Volunteer.” In its place, he wrote “Salvation.” So the legend goes.

The new name solidified their brand, and changes to appearance and official language followed swiftly after. Churches became “corps.” Uniforms were designed. They coined the motto “Blood and Fire”—blood for Jesus Christ and fire for the fire of

A History of Equality

Catherine Booth was one of the few female preachers (outside of the Quaker faith) during the 1800s, but she believed it was only a matter of time before it would become commonplace to see women at the pulpit. Her husband agreed. In The Salvation Army’s earliest rules and regulations, women were put on equal footing with men:

- Women shall have the right to an equal share with men in the work of publishing salvation.
- A Woman may hold any position of power and authority within the Army.
- A Woman is not to be kept back from any position of power or influence on account of her sex.
- Women must be treated as equal with men in all intellectual and social relationships of life.

Unsurprisingly, young women comprised the backbone of the early Salvation Army movement.
the Holy Spirit. Military ranks were adopted; converts became soldiers, William Booth became the general, and in between were officers, commissioners, colonels, majors, captains, and lieutenants.

Music and bands soon became an integral part of The Salvation Army’s practice and aesthetic. The first Salvation Army band was not sanctioned by Booth. A family of musicians attended an open-air service and simply decided to accompany the hymns the Army sang. Methodists typically believed that artificial (i.e., instrumental) music was profane, but Booth recognized that bands attracted the group of people he hoped to convert. Salvationists began writing religious lyrics to popular secular tunes. According to Salvation Army legend, Booth claimed, “Why should the devil have all the best tunes?” Catchy music combined with an accessible form of preaching (a result of Booth’s distaste for formal education), and an attractive, organized, disciplined military style appealed to the poor, who were used to being overlooked, spoken down to, and disrespected.

From Salvation to Social Work

Many upper-class Victorian citizens believed that poverty stemmed from moral failure, and a high percentage of the poor were either irreligious or Roman Catholic. Protestant churches thought there was a causal correlation between this belief and this fact, and they deduced that bringing their form of the Gospel, and with it, Methodist rectitude, would uplift the poor spiritually—and, thus, economically. The Salvation Army had always subscribed to this basic concept, but how to turn the concept into action was not immediately clear. Some Salvationists, like George Scott Railton, believed that all they could do for the poor was save their souls. Others, like Catherine Booth, believed the poor needed material help before they could even begin to think about their souls. In its early days, the Christian Mission/Salvation Army tended to side with Railton. Even so, by the 1880s, they had made a few random attempts at philanthropy. In 1869, the Booths distributed 300 Christmas dinners to the poor. By 1872, they had a few soup kitchens where the poor could purchase soup and meals at a low price, but they had to be shut down due to “administrative headaches.” The Salvation Army opened its first rescue home for “fallen women” in 1883. The next year, the Army was a primary force in the fight against child prostitution, effectively raising the age of consent from 13 to 16. Mostly, however, they focused on conversion and spreading the Gospel.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a new approach to philanthropy, one summed up by famed socialist philosopher (and good friend of George Bernard Shaw) Beatrice Webb as “the union of faith in the scientific method with the transference of the emotion and self-sacrificing service from God to man.” She was referring to her cousin, Charles Booth (of no relation to William), who had written Life and Labour of the People in London (1889), a statistical analysis of the economic situation in London published in 17 volumes. The analysis served to move the conversation away from how the poor lived to how they came to live in that lifestyle. Instead of providing only examples of internal reasons for poverty (e.g., alcoholism, laziness, illness), it also
The Cab Horse Charter
Excerpted from In Darkest England and the Way Out

When in the streets of London a Cab Horse, weary or careless or stupid, trips and falls and lies stretched out in the midst of the traffic there is no question of debating how he came to stumble before we try to get him on his legs again. The Cab Horse is a very real illustration of poor broken-down humanity; he usually falls down because of overwork and underfeeding. If you put him on his feet without altering his conditions, it would only be to give him another dose of agony; but first of all you'll have to pick him up again. It may have been through overwork or underfeeding, or it may have been all his own fault that he has broken his knees and smashed the shafts, but that does not matter. If not for his own sake, then merely in order to prevent an obstruction of the traffic, all attention is concentrated upon the question of how we are to get him on his legs again. The load is taken off, the harness is unbuckled, or, if need be, cut, and everything is done to help him up. Then he is put in the shafts again and once more restored to his regular round of work. That is the first point. The second is that every Cab Horse in London has three things: a shelter for the night, food for its stomach, and work allotted to it by which it can earn its corn.

These are the two points of the Cab Horse’s Charter. When he is down he is helped up, and while he lives he has food, shelter, and work. That, although a humble standard, is at present absolutely unattainable by millions—literally by millions—of our fellow-men and women in this country.

included a discussion of external reasons, as well (e.g., the economy, societal structures, and government involvement, or lack thereof).

By 1889, it was impossible to deny the pull of philanthropy, which Webb called the “Time Spirit.” The Charity Organisation Society, which strove to oversee all of the charities in London (and was itself the epitome of the growing awareness of the problem of the poor), said in 1884, “Books on the poor, poverty, social questions, slums, and the like subjects, rush fast and furious from the press.” As books were feverishly published, so did philanthropic charities form: Dr. Barnardo’s Homes for Children, the Charity for the Houseless Poor, and Toynbee Hall, to name a few. Marxist and socialist groups dedicated to the reformation of the economy to better benefit the poor, such as the Socialist Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society, were abundant. The government passed various acts (like the Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act of 1882) and established royal commissions for the investigation of and improvement on a range of topics, like the “aged poor,” labor, housing, and the Poor Law. The Salvation Army was not immune to the philanthropic fervor of the “Time Spirit,” and it became fully devoted to meeting not just people’s spiritual needs, but their physical needs, as well.

William Booth, with the aid of journalist W. T. Stead and fellow Salvationist Frank Smith, began to write In Darkest England and the Way Out, which was published in
The book was a wild success; it sold 200,000 copies in the first year. It discussed the problems the poor faced, as many books had, but *In Darkest England* was popular because it also included the ever-important but often-ignored “way out.” The plan they proposed included the official establishment of services like homeless shelters, soup kitchens, rescue homes, sobriety retreats, and “Household Suffrage Brigades”—groups that would collect used clothes, furniture, toys, and other commodities and sell them for discounted prices, a practice that remains one of the most visible aspects of The Salvation Army today.

**A Different Approach**

In *Darkest England*, Booth argues that other charities at the time provided help to those who did not need it most: “the thrifty, the industrious, the sober, the thoughtful”; in other words, the deserving poor. He may have been criticizing the Charity Organisation Society, which systematically divided the poor into several different categories to determine what kind of help they could get; ironically, the “needy, but not desperate” often received the most help. The Salvation Army was the only organization providing assistance for, as Booth put it, “the improvident, the lazy, the vicious, and the criminal.” At last, someone was helping the “undeserving” poor.

The Salvation Army was among the most successful religious philanthropic organizations of the time. In 1878, when it first adopted its militaristic name, it had 5,000 members, 127 officers, and 81 corps. By 1906, when *Major Barbara* takes place, it had more than 100,000 members, 2,868 officers, and 1,431 corps in the United Kingdom alone, with about as many in other countries.

Despite these impressive statistics, the fact that the Army’s approach was different made it a target of backlash and criticism. In its early days, members were often harassed by mobs sometimes referred to as “Skeleton Armies.” Some of the riots, which vacillated between mocking the flamboyant nature of the Army’s ceremonies and outright violence, were initiated by brewers and publicans who feared that the message of temperance inherent in The Salvation Army’s mission would lead to a loss of business. To make matters worse, instead of arresting the instigators of the riots, the local authorities tended to blame The Salvation Army for the incidents; after all, the riots would not happen if the Army was not there in the first place, and therefore the Salvationists were not to be protected. In an effort to avoid conflict, the authorities would sometimes ban the Army from gathering altogether. These setbacks did not bring The Salvation Army’s spirit down, however. Being the enemy of sinners was exactly what they wanted to be. In the public’s eye, they were transformed from a rambunctious marching/singing army-church hybrid into heroic martyrs, bravely and peacefully enduring attacks from naysayers.

The Army was also the subject of less violent but more philosophical criticism, some of which was due to its Methodism. Impressed though Beatrice Webb was with the work the Army was doing, she could not help but feel strangely about, in the words of
Victorian scholar Gertrude Himmelfarb, “the religious pressure exerted upon men in a weakened condition by those in a position of authority.” More harshly, T. H. Huxley, a Darwinian biologist, agnostic, and one of the most vocal detractors of The Salvation Army, accused Booth of using social work as a guise under which he could proselytize and convert those who did not know any better: “Men are made sober and industrious, mainly, that, as washed, shorn, and docile sheep, they may be driven into the narrow theological fold which Mr. Booth patronises.”

The Charity Organisation Society agreed with Booth that the character and actions of the poor needed to be improved, but it felt that The Salvation Army encouraged the poor to rely on charity. Charles Booth concurred: “For the great bulk of the homeless poor who frequent the shelters, the cheap food and cheap lodgings are merely conveniences, which tend to confirm them in the manner of life to which they have fallen. Not only are their lives unaltered, they become more unalterable.” Another critic in a similar school of thought, Reverend J. Llewelyn Davies, added the question of self-respect to the argument: “To feed the poor like animals, with penny-a-liners standing by to report how hungrily they eat, is an insult to their self-respect and cannot but weaken what self-respect still remains in them.” But Booth took the criticism in stride, saying, “Fifty years hence it will matter very little indeed how these people treated us. It will matter a great deal how we dealt with the work of God.” Let the critics say what they would. Booth’s Army was feeding people who would otherwise starve, housing people who would otherwise freeze, helping people who would otherwise go overlooked—and hopefully giving them spiritual peace and a shot at heaven while doing so.

After the publication of *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, Booth and The Salvation Army committed to social work and philanthropy. In 1912, General William Booth developed complications due to eye surgery and died—or, in Salvation Army terms, was “promoted to Glory.” At the last minute, Queen Mary decided to attend the funeral along with 40,000 others; she was seated next to a former prostitute. After the death of its leader, The Salvation Army continued its work. By that point, it was well-established, well-known, and well-organized. Since then, The Salvation Army has continued to be one of the world’s best-recognized and ubiquitous charities/religious denominations.

San Francisco's Salvation Army Today

An Interview with San Francisco Salvation Army Major Robert H. Birks and Laine J. Hendricks, Public Relations Director for The Salvation Army’s Golden State Division

By Shannon Stockwell

The theater is actually an appropriate place for The Salvation Army. From our early days in the East End of London when we met in theaters and in music halls, to our meetings on street corners with our uniforms and our bands, we've always been very theatrical. That’s one of the reasons I’m glad that A.C.T. is doing Major Barbara. Theater and The Salvation Army are a good match. A good marriage, I think.

Salvation Army Major Robert H. Birks

The origin story of The Salvation Army, from General Booth’s birth in 1829 to the 1906 setting of Major Barbara, reveals that the organization went through numerous permutations—structurally, ideologically, and stylistically—before it became what we see in Shaw’s play. After discovering how much it changed in its early days, and comparing its history with The Salvation Army we recognize today, we were wondering what kind of changes the organization has been through over the past 100 years, and what it’s like today, in our own city of San Francisco.

The Salvation Army Golden State Division provides all types of help for San Franciscans in need. The Family Service Department provides assistance with paying PG&E bills, finding affordable housing, and purchasing groceries. They bring meals, social services, and case management to homebound individuals (who are unable, due to physical or mental disabilities, to leave their homes). Harbor Light Center is a detox and addiction treatment facility that can serve up to 90 men and women, who may come of their own volition or may be referred by the courts. Harbor House is a transitional housing program for single parents recovering from addiction. In any situation, case managers may learn more about those they are helping and refer them to other services from The Salvation Army and other nonprofits. These are just a few of the many services that The Salvation Army in San Francisco provides.
We sat down with Salvation Army Public Relations Director Laine J. Hendricks and Major Robert H. Birks (“Major Rob,” as he introduced himself and as Laine referred to him) to learn about their experiences with the Army. The two came to the Army from different places. Major Rob was born into it; his parents were officers for around 40 years. He met his wife through The Salvation Army, and they have been married for 24 years; he has been an officer for 22 years. As for Laine, a past coworker suggested she start volunteering for the Army, and after a year and a half of becoming more and more involved on a volunteer basis, she applied for a full-time position; she’s now in her fourth year. They both emphatically profess their love for the organization.

Laine emphasizes that The Salvation Army is not a “cookie-cutter” program. If you go to a Salvation Army facility in San Francisco, it’s not going to look like one in New York City, or even one in Oakland. This is because different communities have different needs. For example, because there are so many families in Oakland, The Salvation Army there has a shelter specifically for families that have suddenly lost their homes. The Salvation Army does not have a homeless shelter in San Francisco because there are other nonprofit groups in the city that already provide that service. “We try to come alongside and complement the other organizations, mending the safety net in the community and making sure no one falls through the cracks,” Laine says. “We are in a fractured system, unfortunately, and that’s where nonprofits, like The Salvation Army, can make sure that we’re taking care of everyone that needs help, regardless of their circumstances, where they come from, or how bad their past may be.”

In your own words, how would you describe the mission of The Salvation Army?

Major Rob I think that my definition is that we love people and meet their needs, regardless of whether we all agree on every single point. We believe that we were put on this earth to love people and meet their needs. We’re so fortunate that so many people help us to do that.

There’s a great story about William Booth wanting to send a telegram to all of his officers worldwide. There are different opinions on why he only sent one word, but he just sent the word “OTHERS.” That’s another way that I like to describe not only The Salvation Army, but how I want to live my life. I don’t want to live my life just for myself. I want to live it for others.

How has The Salvation Army changed since it was founded in 1865?

Major Rob We’ve gone through a lot of changes. In the United States, we’re mainly known as a social service organization, which is largely due to Evangeline Booth, William Booth’s daughter, who before she became the general was in charge of The Salvation Army just in the United States. When the big earthquake happened in San Francisco and when both the First and Second World Wars were on, we were on the front lines. Evangeline Booth was really instrumental in making sure that we were there, immediately, helping people. Because of that we’re mainly known as a social service
A History of The Salvation Army in San Francisco

The Salvation Army arrived in San Francisco early, having been encouraged by the Pacific Coast Holiness Association, which wrote to William Booth, “We'll turn over our troops to you.” Booth sent the young major Alfred Wells, a 24-year-old rising star in the organization. The West Coast’s first Salvation Army meeting met at 809 Montgomery Street on July 22, 1883. Almost immediately, it found its way to the notorious Barbary Coast to combat the drugs, gambling, crime, prostitution, and corruption that were rampant there. The San Francisco Chronicle sent a warning to the denizens of this district: “The Irish major will establish his headquarters [in this neighborhood] and sally forth daily and do battle with sin and the devil.” In 1885, Mary Stillwell opened a second Salvation Army corps; a third, the world’s first Chinese Salvation Army corps, opened in 1886. By 1893, there were ten corps in the city and others in Oakland, San Jose, Stockton, Sacramento, Napa, Santa Cruz, and Sausalito. One journalist wrote in an 1894 edition of the Wave:

Grotesque, but helpful; absurd, but a blessing to mankind; narrow in creed, but admirable in deed; an angel of good cheer in Harlequin's clothing; a message of peace. With a bass drum for an orchestra; uplifting fallen men, while the ghost of murdered music flees at its approach; ridiculously divine; preposterously glorious—This is The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army justifies its existence daily—red shirts, tin badges, bass drums, and all. If you don't believe it, ask San Francisco's poor.

The Salvation Army was instrumental in the initial response and long-term reconstruction following the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire, setting up a tent city in Oakland’s Beulah Park to house and feed those made homeless, who were crossing the Bay by the ferryload. They set up a department for reconnecting displaced families. U.S. National Commander Evangeline Booth, one of William Booth's daughters, held a fundraiser that raised more than $12,000 (equal to $300,000 dollars today) for the refugees—The Salvation Army’s first coordinated nationwide fundraiser. In 1989, when the Loma Prieta earthquake hit, The Salvation Army was again instrumental in helping rebuild the city; they served more than 227,000 people and distributed $3.6 million in goods and services. In addition to responding to these two catastrophic natural disasters, the Army has kept busy battling drug and alcohol addiction since 1885. In 1941, it opened Harbor Light, which remains open as a detox and treatment facility. In 1990, The Salvation Army became one of the first agencies in San Francisco to seek funding for AIDS treatment; starting in 1991, it received funding through the Federal Ryan White Care Act, but lost it in 1998 when it refused to offer employee benefits as prescribed by domestic partners legislation.

One of the most recognizable symbols of The Salvation Army, the red kettles that appear around Christmastime, originated in San Francisco. Captain Joseph McFee was trying to raise money to provide Christmas dinners to the poor in 1891. He remembered that back in Liverpool, where he used to be a sailor, there was a large iron kettle into which people would throw money for the poor. He set up a similar kettle at the Oakland Ferry Landing and raised enough money for 1,000 Christmas dinners. The tradition spread across the country, and in 1897 The Salvation Army was able to provide 150,000 Christmas dinners.
organization here, which I don't have a problem with, because it means that people know us for helping others. In other countries—in Australia, in Canada—The Salvation Army is actually known as one of the denominations of the Christian church. Here, not so much.

Our mission hasn't changed, our message hasn't really changed, but our methods certainly have changed—we hope! I want to say we're on the cutting edge, which is something that the Booths were. They saw changes that needed to take place, and they were active in making those changes. We try to stay up with the times.

Can you give an example of what that means, especially in San Francisco, which has been on the forefront of technological changes?

Major Rob We have definitely dived into social media. We're trying to make sure that we're using that to its fullest extent as far as getting our message out in the city and in the Bay Area, making sure people know what we're doing so they can come alongside and help us. We just did a huge home delivery of meals on Thanksgiving morning, where hundreds of volunteers signed up through a new database. So that's one way of using technology—we've updated our volunteer database to make it as state-of-the-art as we can to make sure that it's easy for people, and it worked.

Laine Hendricks We still have the red kettles out on the streets. Some people prefer to give cash, and they are a visible reminder that it's a time of year to give. But, of course, we have websites now where people can donate online, or even host their own virtual kettle online. We still live in a society that is very “across the board” in terms of technology. Our street outreach is very important. As technology evolves, it makes it that much more important for the Army to try to be in as many places as possible so we can always connect with the public. Even though our society is becoming more technological, there's still an audience that's not there yet. We see the need to be in both places at once.

Major Rob Our Harbor Light Center, for instance, down on 9th and Harrison, coordinates an outreach on Wednesday nights and Friday nights, where volunteers can pick up meals or toiletries or bottles of water and bring them to people who are living out under freeways and in bushes and by the off-ramps. They go from 8:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. to deliver food—and also to have a conversation. They know their names. To me, that's what's amazing. You can't email a bottle of water. You can't text a sandwich to somebody. No matter what changes happen with technology, there are still those needs to be met: their initial need and then their unspoken need to have a friend, a conversation, a laugh or a joke or a prayer. In the beginning, The Salvation Army found that meeting physical needs was important so that we could talk to people about other needs that they have. That hasn't changed.
What role does religion play in The Salvation Army today?

**Major Rob** We do what we do because of what we believe. We believe that we serve a loving God that loves everybody, and if we don’t love everybody, then we’re not serving Him well. The Bible says that if people say they love God but they hate their brother, then they’re a liar. We don’t want to be in that category.

I wouldn’t really use the term religion, because, to me, religion is about icons or rituals or how people go about their worship. To me, that has a negative connotation. I have a vertical relationship with God, and that has to play out in my horizontal relationships. One of our early phrases was, “Heart to God, hand to man.” (We would probably update that now to “Heart to God, hand to humanity,” because we want to be inclusive.) But that really says it for me. It’s that vertical relationship, but that is not a good relationship if I’m not treating Laine well—if I’m not treating you well. All of that informs what we do. Having said that, it doesn’t mean that everybody who helps us feels the same way we do or is informed by the same beliefs we have. We take all comers, because we help everybody.
Early on, the Booths adopted this military structure, so we have different names for things. We call our centers “Corps Community Centers.” That’s where some members meet on a Sunday, and if you stepped into any of them, it would feel like being in church. There are songs and there are prayers and there are sermons. There are six corps here in the city, and they vary. There’s one that’s all in Korean, and there’s one that’s in Chinese, and there’s one that’s in Spanish. The corps don’t look different in Australia or Canada, but there’s probably more people attending. I’ve been in Salvation Army corps in Canada where there’s been 200 people instead of the 50 that you might find in one of our places in San Francisco.

**In Major Barbara, the title character refuses to take a donation from an arms manufacturer, and then she loses faith in The Salvation Army when her superior accepts it. Does The Salvation Army have issues with accepting donations from people or organizations with differing political or moral beliefs? Does The Salvation Army have a political affiliation?**

**Major Rob** We don’t have a political affiliation. I would say we’re on the side of the poor, but I don’t see that as a political affiliation: I see that as being correct. The poor and the marginalized, we’re on their side. We don’t back political candidates. I think The Salvation Army has gone to great lengths to make sure that that’s not who we are.

On the other question about taking money, I don’t know that there has ever been some huge offer and we’ve refused it for some reason. I would hope that there would be discussions if something came up that just seemed so out there. I think part of the strength of Shaw’s take is that it really highlights critical thinking and conviction and acting on those convictions. I don’t see it as Major Barbara making the right decision and the other people making the wrong decision. I see it as people coming to different conclusions after critically thinking through their stance and acting on a conviction. I believe in a world where two opposing sides can have strong convictions and come to different conclusions and still be friends. Even Shaw didn’t take a stance and didn’t mean the play to be an indictment of The Salvation Army.

We wouldn’t pass judgment on somebody or how they made their money. We assume that if they donate to The Salvation Army, they want us to use it to help people. So that’s what we would do with it.

**Laine Hendricks** We partnered with a class from the University of San Francisco a few years ago to look at new strategies for promoting the red kettle campaign at Christmas. We had a number of students canvas neighborhoods of San Francisco and ask random people on the street their thoughts about the red kettle campaign. Not everyone understood where exactly the money went, but what they did have was an overwhelming sense that donating to that red kettle means good. We have people that will drop gold Krugerrands or a $5,000 check in the kettles. If it’s anonymous, we don’t know how they got it, how they earned it, but we believe that they’re giving it to us because they hope that we are going to turn around and do the most good that we can.
Due to comments made by some members, specifically in Australia, The Salvation Army is sometimes associated with homophobia. How do you respond to that?

**Major Rob** How we responded to it immediately was to reject those statements. That member misspoke, it was regrettable, and it was dealt with immediately. He didn’t convey how we feel about serving people. That happened, there’s no getting around that it happened. We’re a huge organization. We’re in 126 countries. Literally thousands of officers, employees, and volunteers help us fulfill our mission. Somebody, somewhere, at some point, is going to say something wrong. He did.

**Laine Hendricks** Everyone here was like, “No! No! That is not what we believe!”

**Major Rob** And it wasn’t just a PR response; it was fundamentally, “No, that’s just not who we are.” We talked about technology earlier and the advances of technology—one of the things that it does well is pass around statements without the whole story being told. So that one incident in Australia has been passed around a lot, to the point where, to some people, that is who we are. They haven’t taken the time to really investigate for themselves who we are, which is unfortunate. We can’t change that. All we can do, and all that we strive to do, is just be who we have been for 148 years, meeting people’s needs without discrimination. All kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds, beliefs, and behaviors, they all come to us to meet their needs. Another way we respond is by asking people to let us know if it happens again. It’s one thing to say, “Oh, that happened a few years ago in Australia.” But where does somebody get denied service in San Francisco because of perceived discrimination? We want to know! Where we get it wrong, we will self-correct, and if we don’t see it, we want somebody else to tell us because we will deal with it. We want to accurately reflect how we think we’re supposed to behave in this world, which is to love people.
Millionaires and Model Towns

By Zachary Moull

Though now overshadowed in our minds by the horrific warfare of the twentieth century, the decade that preceded George Bernard Shaw’s writing of *Major Barbara* saw wars across the globe. Japan fought successful wars against China (1894–95) and Russia (1904–05) and established itself as a world power. In 1897, Greece launched a failed attack on Ottoman Turkey over control of the island of Crete. The United States intervened in Cuba’s fight for independence in 1898, causing the United States and Spain to fight a ten-week war in the Caribbean and the Pacific that ended with Spain ceding most of its overseas colonies. For its part, the British Empire engaged in the Boer War (1899–1902) against Dutch settlers in South Africa, a costly and protracted struggle that Shaw and countless others opposed. All these conflicts—and many more—made the turn of the century a prosperous time for arms manufacturers, who were among the era’s most innovative and successful industrialists. As Lady Britomart Undershaft tells her son, Stephen, in *Major Barbara*, “Your father must be immensely wealthy, since there is always a war going on somewhere.”

Shaw had several examples available for the peculiar character of Andrew Undershaft, the arms maker who quotes Plato and gives his workers a comfortable lifestyle while profiting, as he himself admits, from “mutilation and murder.” One such example is Alfred Nobel, the Swedish industrialist who invented dynamite and, despite his own socialist convictions, made millions selling arms to factions of any ideology. Upon his death in 1896, he left a large part of his vast fortune to endow the Nobel Prize.

Another possible model is Basil Zaharoff, an arms dealer who was a true international man of mystery, with rumors of the day tracing his origins to anywhere from the brothel quarter of Constantinople to the slums of London’s East End. Rising from obscurity through a combination of luck and sheer force of will, Zaharoff eventually partnered with James Maxim (the inventor of the machine gun) and the Vickers manufacturing firm to create a powerful British weapons conglomerate. As Vickers’s principal dealer in the early 1900s, he sold weapons to both sides in several conflicts and arranged large lines of credit for warring nations. This led to accusations that he provoked wars for the profit of his firm. Zaharoff remained a shadowy figure his whole life, but he was widely believed to exert considerable control over politicians around the globe.

Foremost in the minds of *Major Barbara*'s first audiences may have been Fritz Krupp, the German weapons magnate and close associate of Emperor Wilhelm II. The Krupp industrial dynasty famously followed a strict tradition of primogeniture,
with the eldest son inheriting the full wealth and power of the family business. But when Fritz died without a male heir in 1902, the firm controversially passed to his unmarried daughter Bertha. (Bertha’s younger sister, Barbara, was disinherited.) Bertha’s eventual marriage became a matter of German national interest and the subject of intense speculation. Kaiser Wilhelm himself led the search for a suitable spouse. In 1906, shortly after the premiere of *Major Barbara*, Bertha married a scholarly diplomat named Gustav von Bohlen und Halbach. At the wedding, the kaiser granted Gustav the right to change his surname to Krupp.

Aside from his many contributions to weapons technology, Fritz Krupp was also a pioneer of the factory town. The Krupp ironworks was situated in the Rhine Valley town of Essen, and under Fritz’s direction the company built picturesque garden cottages for its workers and sponsored schools, churches, markets, and even beer halls in the town. Krupp offered a pension plan and fostered institutions such as a literary circle, an amateur orchestra, and a chess society. But while providing all these amenities, Krupp also took a paternalistic attitude towards his employees. Workers were subject to strict standards of behavior, with “supervision officers” scrutinizing everything from personal relationships to reading material. The stakes were very high, because when a Krupp employee lost his job, he lost everything—house, pension, and all.

Shaw could find comparable examples close to home. In 1851, wool tycoon Titus Salt founded Saltaire, a so-called “model town” built in the English countryside around a massive new mill, on a site that was chosen for its natural beauty. Salt provided sturdy houses and facilities such as schools, parks, and an infirmary, all arranged around the town’s central landmark—the 250-foot chimney of the factory. As a religious nonconformist and a teetotaller, he encouraged churches of all denominations, but forbade pubs. Members of the community were utterly dependent on Salt, but they reportedly held him in high esteem. Industrialist George Cadbury built a similar town around his chocolate factory in the countryside near Birmingham in 1879.

In 1887, William Lever built a soapworks and his own model town outside Liverpool. Named Port Sunlight after Lever’s Sunlight Soap brand, the community featured not only townhouses and schools but also restaurants, social clubs, and libraries, as well as a theater and a concert hall. Lever was known as an autocrat and apparently drew up the town’s plans himself. The soapworks was hidden away at one end of the townsite, but the smell of soap still permeated the whole community—a symbol both of the town’s pristine cleanliness and its complete reliance on Lever’s patronage.
The cleanliness of these model towns stood in stark contrast to conditions in the slums of Victorian England’s major cities. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, England’s population swelled from 10 million to 37 million during the nineteenth century. The new jobs available in urban factories triggered rapid unplanned city growth and caused congestion, squalor, and sprawl. In 1884, Shaw’s friend William Morris wrote of “the spreading sore of London, swallowing up, with its loathsomeness, field and wood and heath without hope, mocking our feeble efforts to deal even with its minor evils of smoke-laden sky and befouled river.”

The question of how best to organize a city dates back to Plato’s Republic, but the deplorable conditions of the era made the problem more urgent. Morris, a socialist, argued:

In a proper state of society every man willing to work should be ensured:

First—Honourable and fulfilling work
Second—A healthy and beautiful house
Third—Full leisure for rest of mind and body

Since the general standard of life in Britain fell far short of such goals, the late nineteenth century saw a flourishing of utopian literature and fanciful urban design theories. One prominent scheme was Ebenezer Howard’s garden city movement, which counted Shaw as a sometimes supporter. Howard’s 1898 manifesto, The Garden Cities of To-Morrow, argues for the construction of small satellite cities in the countryside around major urban centers. These new garden cities, separated by a greenbelt of undeveloped land, would be linked together by canals and an efficient rail network. Much like the model towns of the industrialists, the “slumless, smokeless” garden cities would combine the opportunities and social benefits of city living with the cleanliness, affordability, and ease of rural life. They would provide England’s working class with beautiful new communities in which to live, work, and play.

But Howard’s garden cities were to have a very different economic structure than company towns. Land would be owned by the town authorities, so that the whole community would collectively benefit from rent payments and increases in property value. In contrast, actual model towns ultimately benefited the industrialist patron. The social geographer David M. Smith suggests that the model town is simply a capitalist version of the former feudal relationship between the working class and its employers, serving to ensconce the industrialist as the beneficent head of the community and create a “stable, content, and therefore efficient labour force.” Or as Andrew Undershaft himself says of Perivale St. Andrews, “The result is a colossal profit, which comes to me.”

A Major Barbara Glossary
By Zachary Moull

Terms

Aerial Battlship Weaponized airships were a futuristic idea in 1906, when Major Barbara is set. The first real-world use of bomber planes was in 1911; they weren’t in heavy use until the latter half of World War I. Likewise, bullet-proof cars, like the one Undershaft drives, were not in widespread circulation until World War II.

Bursting Strain The outward force caused by the explosion that launches a projectile from heavy artillery.

Cantin’ Speaking sanctimoniously and hypocritically.

Commercial Travelers Traveling salesmen.

Corker Something shocking that leaves someone speechless, sealed up like a wine bottle with a cork in it.

Diapason A rich burst of sound.

Done in the Eye To have been taken advantage of.

Fitter A factory worker who puts metal parts together to make mechanical devices.

Gabble Speech that is incoherent or unintelligible.

Golden Syrup The West Ham Salvation Army shelter serves treacle, a sweet condiment similar to molasses that is a by-product of the process that refines sugar cane into sugar crystals.

Grand Duke Hand Grenade In 1905, Russian Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich was assassinated in Moscow by a member of a militant socialist faction, who threw a handheld nitroglycerin grenade into the duke’s carriage. Grenades were a favorite tool of revolutionaries and political assassins at the time of the play—and the years that followed.

Gun Cotton Highly flammable, gun cotton (nitrocellulose) is made by treating cotton wool with sulphuric acid and nitric acid and was used as an explosive in large cannons, such as those found on battleships.
Jawrin’ Slang for talking at length.


Kites Related to hawks and eagles, kites are scavengers that feed on carrion; a battlefield would be a feast for them.

“And sent to the knackers like an old horse.” A knacker is a type of butcher that specializes in animals not fit for human consumption.

List Slippers Footwear that is worn around loose gunpowder, because the hard strike of a normal shoe’s heel could ignite the powder.

Lyddite An explosive substance developed near the British town of Lydd in 1888 that was used in British armor-piercing artillery shells during the Boer War (1899–1902) and World War I.

Potwalloper A person who was entitled to vote because he had a fireplace large enough to boil a pot of water, as was the rule in certain British boroughs under archaic election laws. The laws were reformed in 1832, but the word stayed in use as an insult for a foolish or uncouth person.

Primrose League The Primrose League, founded in 1883, was an organization dedicated to spreading the Conservative Party’s principles throughout Britain by hosting dinners and other social gatherings.

“A sally from heaven” A sally was a sudden attack in which soldiers rush towards the enemy; also, The Salvation Army is sometimes referred to as Sally or Sally Ann.

“Scrape and catlap” Scrape refers to margarine spread on bread. Catlap is slang for watered-down milk.

“The money is settled.” A common practice among the wealthy at the time of the play, Undershaw would have settled or fixed a large sum of money on Lady Britomart when they married. Her household has since been supported by the interest that money earned.

Skyblue Watered-down milk, which has a bluish tinge.

“Thirteen four” The fighter Todger Fairmile weighs 13 stone and 4 pounds. As one stone unit is equal to 14 pounds, Fairmile weighs 186 pounds, making him a heavyweight by early-twentieth-century standards.

Tied House A bar that is owned by a brewer or distiller and only sells that manufacturer’s product.

Woolwich Infant A type of cannon built at London’s Woolwich Arsenal in the late 1800s, the ironically named Woolwich Infant weighed upwards of 35 tons and fired a 700-pound cannonball, making it one of the largest cannons of its time.
**Locations in Major Barbara**

**Assembly Hall at Mile End**
Mile End is one mile east of the City—the historic and financial core of London on the north bank of the River Thames—and the starting point of Mile End Road, which runs through the East End. The Great Assembly Hall on Mile End Road in the East End could seat 5,000 people and was designed for religious ceremonies and temperance meetings. It is about four miles from West Ham.

**The East End**
Barbara’s Salvation Army shelter is located in West Ham, a neighborhood in London’s working-class East End, which was chiefly comprised of slum housing and industrial sites. Just south of West Ham is Canning Town, an extremely poor area that is adjacent to London’s docklands.

The Parish of St. Andrew Undershaft
St. Andrew Undershaft is a real Anglican church built in 1532 in the City. St. Andrew was one of Jesus’s apostles; Undershaft refers to a large maypole that stood across the street from the church until 1547.

Perivale St. Andrews
Undershaft’s model town is situated in an idyllic valley somewhere in the countryside surrounding London. There is no actual place called Perivale St. Andrews, but there was a village called Perivale located about nine miles west of Wilton Crescent. The area is now part of suburban London. Perivale means “around the valley.”

**Wilton Crescent**
Lady Britomart lives with her grown children on Wilton Crescent, a street in the prestigious Belgravia neighborhood of London’s fashionable West End that consists mainly of grand five-story townhouses. Just east of Wilton Crescent is Buckingham Palace and then Pall Mall, the location of several elite gentlemen’s social clubs.
“Do you remember what Euripides says about your money and gunpowder?” . . . “One and another / In money and guns may outpass his brother . . . And shall not Barbara be loved forever.”

These two lengthy passages, only excerpted here, are taken from Murray’s 1904 translation of Euripides’ Bacchae. Cusins takes two liberties with the text, inserting “money and guns” in place of Murray’s “gold and power” and “Barbara” in place of “Loveliness.”

Mephistopheles! Machiavelli!

Mephistopheles is the demon who tempts Faust to sell his soul, as dramatized by Marlowe and Goethe. Niccolo Machiavelli is the Italian Renaissance political theorist whose name became synonymous with the unscrupulous pursuit of power.

Of course, Cusins is not the only educated man in Major Barbara. Stephen Undershift attended the elite boarding school Harrow and then King’s College at Cambridge University, so we should not be surprised that he quotes John Milton’s sonnet “To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652” when he is awestruck by his father’s munitions in Act III: “Peace hath her victories no less renowned than War.” Milton wrote the poem for Cromwell, who ruled England during its brief time as a commonwealth, as part of a campaign against the re-establishment of a state church. Milton worried that a state church would curtail the religious freedoms that had emerged during the English Civil War.

And, despite the fact that he has eschewed formal education, Undershift
paraphrases Plato to convince Cusins to take over the weapons business: “Society cannot be saved until either the professors of Greek take to making gunpowder, or else the makers of gunpowder become professors of Greek.” In his Republic, Plato suggests that a perfect society will not be achieved until philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers—“[until] political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils.”

This is not the first time that Undershaft shows that he is well read: when he leads the procession at the end of Act II, he cries, “My ducats and my daughter!” a reference to Shylock’s lament in The Merchant of Venice, when his daughter steals money from him and elopes with a Christian.

He also alludes to the 1882 Gilbert and Sullivan operetta Iolanthe, a satire on the British House of Lords, when he teases Stephen about being unfit for most professions: “Well, there is the army, the navy, the church, the bar. . . . Hardly anything left but the stage, is there?” In Iolanthe, the Lord Chancellor sings: “In other professions in which men engage / The Army, the Navy, the Church, and the Stage / Professional license, if carried too far, / Your chance of promotion will certainly mar; / And I fancy the rule might apply to the Bar.”

Religious References
Family Prayer Book
The Anglican Book of Common Prayer contains a section for family prayer within the home. Adolphus Cusins refers to the General Confession, which begins, “Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”

“If I could have the wings of a dove and fly away to heaven”
This line echoes Psalm 55: “And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! / for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”

“The millionaire’s mite”
Mite is the term used in the King James Bible for a small copper coin of minimal value. This line refers to a passage from the Book of Mark: “And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.’”
“The peace that passeth all understanding”
This is a reference to Philippians 4:7, in which Paul writes, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

“Bill offers twenty pieces of silver. All you need offer is the other ten.”
This is an allusion to the 30 pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed Jesus.

“There are two [Methodist chapels]: a Primitive and a sophisticated one.”
The Primitive Methodists, a more austere group than mainstream Methodists, broke away from the Methodist Church in the early 1800s. The name Primitive was meant to evoke a return to the first principles of Christianity (primus means first in Latin). The fact that Perivale St. Andrews has two Methodist chapels is ironic because The Salvation Army has its roots in Methodism. Methodist doctrine emphasizes salvation and the power of the Holy Spirit, and its adherents are known for their evangelical and missionary work.

“The trumpet in Zion!”
This is a biblical reference to the trumpet that will herald the Day of Judgment: “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.”

“Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered.”
This quotation comes from a passage in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus warns his disciples about the appearance of false Messiahs.

William Morris Labor Church
This church is named after William Morris (1834–96), a friend of Shaw who was an artist, poet, and prominent socialist. Morris founded the Socialist League in 1884 and published its official weekly newspaper. Although the church itself is fictional, the Labour Church movement was real. Founded in 1891, it supported trade unionism and socialism and was focused on ethics and social justice more than spiritualism.
Money Matters

Prior to the monetary reforms of 1971, the British currency system was as follows: 1 pound (£) equals 20 shillings; 1 shilling equals 12 pence. Common slang for these denominations include bob (shilling), quid (pound), and sovereign (a one-pound coin). Approximately £1 in 1906 is equivalent to £90 in 2013, which is worth about $140.

The money references made in *Major Barbara* illustrate the extreme disparity between the wealthy and poor characters. Charles Lomax receives £800 a year ($112,000 by today’s standards) from his trust fund; this is about eight times more than Snobby Price could earn with year-round employment at “38 bob a week” (about $14,000 a year today). Likewise, Bill Walker managed to save just £2 to see him through the cold winter ($280 today). The fighter Todger Fairmile is comparatively lucky in that he can sometimes win sizable purses wrestling in music hall variety shows; he recently won £20 ($2,800 today). By contrast, Undershaft writes The Salvation Army a check for £5,000 on a whim ($700,000 today). It would take Snobby Price 50 years of uninterrupted employment to earn this amount. When Cusins and Undershaft are negotiating Cusins’s starting salary as Undershaft’s apprentice, Undershaft proposes what today would amount to $140,000 a year. Cusins counters with $350,000, and they settle on $210,000. Undershaft will pay a professor of Greek, who has no skills that are transferable to the profession of running a munitions plant, 15 times the amount that Price can earn as a laborer.

What’s in a Name?

**Britomart**

Lady Britomart Undershaft’s first name comes from Thomas Spencer’s epic poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590), in which Britomart is a female knight who represents chastity and virtue. The name derives from the Ancient Greek name *Britomartis* (“sweet maiden”), but it also was associated with Britain’s martial power (“Brito-” and “mart”). In the century before *Major Barbara*, the British Navy gave the name *HMS Britomart* to six different battleships.

**Bronterre O’Brien “Snobby” Price**

Snobby is named after James Bronterre O’Brien, an Irish journalist who was a leader of the Chartists in the 1830s and ’40s. The Chartists were a working-class movement that sought to reform the British Parliament and make politics more accessible to the poor through measures such as universal suffrage, salaries for members of Parliament, and the abolition of the requirement for MPs to own property.

**Romola “Rummy” Mitchens**

Romola is the title character of an 1863 historical novel by George Eliot; the character is the virtuous and erudite daughter of a classical scholar.
Questions to Consider

1. What are the defining philosophies of Undershaft, Barbara, and Adolphus Cusins? How are they in conflict with one another and how do they ultimately overlap?

2. *Major Barbara* was written at a time when realistic box sets that wheeled on and off stage were the theatrical norm. How does this production’s more conceptual design influence your reception of the play?

3. George Bernard Shaw struggled to ensure that no one “wins” the arguments presented in the last act of *Major Barbara*. Do you think he was successful, or were you ultimately persuaded to side with Undershaft, Major Barbara, or Cusins?

4. Who are our modern-day Undershafts? In what ways do you interact with them and their business directly or indirectly? In what ways are you financially dependent on them?

5. Should charities refuse or accept donations based on how the money was earned?

For Further Information . . .


