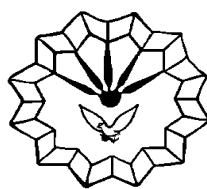


In the Name of God



Razi University

Faculty of Literature and Humanities
Department of English Language and Literature

M.A. Thesis

**George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* in the
Light of Michel Foucault's Theory of Power and Knowledge**

Supervisor:

Dr. Noorbakhsh Hooti

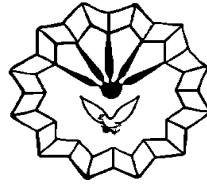
Advisor:

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*Dedicated to my parents and my
wife who offered me unconditional
love, support, encouragement, and
inspiration throughout all my life*

Abstract

The present thesis attempts to analyze George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* from the perspective of Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. Foucault thinks of power as a relation with multiple patterns and believes that it is one of the most influential elements in man's life. Power, in his vision, is a unique phenomenon which is inseparable from knowledge and not exclusive to governments and social institutions. Power is actively present everywhere and its survival depends largely on its close entanglement with resistance, freedom, and knowledge. The dynamic power relations within a society can help create individuals who are not subject to normalizing conventions but are free to engage themselves in power relations in order to shape their identity by actively exercising the process of 'the care of the self'. Following Foucault's ideas about power relations as the theoretical framework of the present study, the author of this research claims that the discourse of the two plays is the major battlefield in which Foucauldian power is demonstrated. It is also assessed how much the characters of the plays are able to stand against normalization and to what degree they are efficacious in attaining a new self. The findings of this research show that the major characters of the two plays are successful in resisting docility and, as a result, are not normalized by power relations. In addition, they achieve a new self through voicing their viewpoints with the aid of discourse to convince others that their beliefs are true. And finally, Andrew Undershaft in *Major Barbara* and Captain Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man* are the most powerful and knowledgeable characters from Foucauldian outlook who change and consequently direct the other characters' ideas toward their beliefs at the end of the plays.

Keywords: *Arms and the Man*, Disciplinary Power, Discourse, *Major Barbara*, Michel Foucault, Normalization, Theory of Power and Knowledge

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The first chapter of the present thesis displays an overall outline of the research so that its readers would know what the whole study is about. In the section 'Statement of the Problem', the readers are provided with a brief introduction to the subject of the study. And in the third section, 'Significance and Purpose of Study', the importance of the research and its targets are concisely clarified. The research questions are presented in the fourth section. The penultimate section is 'Definition of Important Terms' in which the key terms and concepts of the study are defined. The final section of this chapter is the 'Study Outline' which describes the five chapters of the thesis in brief.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This thesis aims to study Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, different kinds of power, and concepts such as normalization and revival of subjugated knowledges. The researcher attempts then to apply Foucault's theory of power and knowledge to George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man*. The characters' actions and the impacts of these actions on each of the characters of the two plays are analyzed. The purpose is to show that power is dispersed in all levels of the society and the relationships among the individuals in these plays. The ways the characters of the two plays respond to the power relations are also studied. Just as Foucault believes that individuals are free to participate in power relations, this research shows that in Shaw's

drama of ideas, especially in *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man*, the characters are liberally and actively voicing their ideologies in order to highlight and disseminate them.

Consequently, pursuing Foucault's viewpoints about power relations as the framework of the present thesis, it is attempted to focus mainly on the dynamic structure of power and the way it works in G. B. Shaw's two plays so as to achieve a better perception of the influences of power, knowledge, and discourse on individuals.

1.3. Significance and Purpose of Study

The present study endeavors to familiarize its readers with Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. It goes without saying that Foucault does not solely want to construct a theory based upon his viewpoints on power. He wants to look into and analyze the power relations among individuals in a society and the effects of these relations on the individuals. One of the most influential elements in man's life is power which Foucault thinks of as “a relation which is represented in multiple patterns” (Picard, 2010, p. 2). For Foucault, power is a unique phenomenon which is inseparable from knowledge and not exclusive to governments and social institutions while its survival depends primarily on its close entanglement with resistance and freedom. He holds that uncritical acceptance of any belief can affect power relations by censoring and obliterating individuals' thoughts and beliefs.

Hence, it deserves to investigate George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* in the light of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge because we can attain a clarified insight into Shaw's philosophy. Besides, Foucault's theory of power and knowledge can acquaint the readers of this thesis with new perspectives when dealing with society. Lots of studies have been carried out on Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* but none of them has investigated these two plays from a Foucauldian perspective.

This adds to the significance of the present research as an innovative exploration of Shaw's drama of ideas and an objective vivification of the contexts of the two plays at the time of their creation.

1.4. Research Questions

In order to investigate Shaw's two plays from the perspective of Foucauldian theory of power and knowledge, the following questions will be answered in this research:

1. How does Foucault's theory of power and knowledge help the readers of this thesis better understand Shaw's philosophy represented in *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man*?
2. How much are the characters of the plays powerful in 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'?
3. What is the role of Foucauldian discourse in depicting power relations in the plays?

1.5. Definition of Important Terms

1.5.1. Power

Foucault thinks of power as a relation with multiple patterns (Picard, 2010, p. 2) and a "dense web of apparatuses and institutions" (Foucault, 1990, p. 96) which can stem from different roots. He believes that power is omnipresent, dynamic, and relational. It is "productive in the sense that it brings about various ways of behavior and does not restrict the freedom of individuals" (Mills, 2003, p. 36). "...since power emerges in relationships and interactions, power is not possessed, but exercised" only on free subjects (Lynch, 2011, p. 22). Power is always accompanied with resistance. Without resistance, no power relation can appear or be altered. There are also intentions behind power relations.

1.5.2. Disciplinary Power

Foucauldian disciplinary power is mainly preoccupied with individuals. Hoffman (2011) holds that "...disciplinary power produces individuals as its objects, objectives, and instruments" (28). This is done by focusing on bodies so as to make them 'docile' and easily controlled. "Disciplinary power controls the body ... through the production not only of an individual but also an individuality..." (Arendt, 1985, p. 454). "This individuality consists of cellular, organic, genetic, and combinatory traits" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 29). Foucault believes that "the art of distributions" is an important factor in disciplinary power. "He attributes the success of this power to hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination" (pp. 30-31).

1.5.3. Power/Knowledge

Foucault uses this term which envelops the essence of his thoughts. "For Foucault, knowledge can only exist with the supports of the arrangements of power, arrangements that likewise have no clear origin, no person or body can be said to "have" it." (Feder, 2011, p. 56). Power/knowledge has a close connection with Bentham's *Panopticism*, both working to construct standards in which individuals are compared with each other by their similarities and differences.

1.5.4. Resistance

In *Power/Knowledge* (1980) Foucault avers that "there are no relations of power without resistance" (p. 142). For him resistance in itself is another representative of power which he calls a "reverse discourse" (p. 86). Whenever power is exercised on individuals, resistance is a fundamental counterpart of this process. "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of

exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). If there is no resistance between two parties pitting their viewpoints against each other, there will be no relations of power. In fact, power relations cannot be modified unless resistance takes place.

1.5.5. Discourse

Foucault thinks of discourse as the major field in which the impacts of power are visible. He believes that the relationship between power and discourse is much more complex than it seems to be:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it ... discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Foucault, 1978, pp. 100-101).

1.5.6. Normalization

In *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* (1976) Foucault states that in normalization, "continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms" are dealt with and power is intended to "qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor" (pp. 144-145). Foucault holds that normalization is the internalization of norms which are assigned according to standards of a society. It is the direct or indirect categorization of 'normal' behaviors as opposed to 'abnormal' behaviors for individuals. Through normalization, the power relations urge or force individuals indirectly through the Foucauldian 'gaze' to act in accordance with the established norms so that the power structure maintains and they can be controlled more easily. Norms are easily identified when individuals talk about the telltale standards against which they are valued. They can

be invisible when they are unspoken like when individuals modify themselves and want to look natural and ordinary, not odd, abnormal, or bizarre in different contexts.

1.5.7. Subject (Individual)

Foucault's dynamic vision of power relations provides us with the fact that a subject can also be dynamic and consequently emancipated. Power relations bring about subjects who are active and do not allow to be meekly acted upon. Foucault avers that "individuals and groups are neither preformed before they engage in power relations, nor unchanged by those relations" (Piomelli, 2004, p. 437). In other words, subjects can be passive preys who surrender to the burdens of power relations. In contrast, they can be agents who act and react in power relations and welcome the future opportunities in order to perform their ethics. This signifies the fact that our active involvement in power relations defines our identity.

1.5.8. Care of the Self

This concept indicates an ethical notion aimed at helping people cultivate and ameliorate themselves. The "cultivation of the self" is mainly achieved by the fact that one must "take care of self" (Martin, 1988, p. 45). It is this principle of "the care of the self" that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice. In ancient times its representation was generally assumed to involve a "cultivation of the soul" (*ibid.*). In earlier times this was a matter of self-mastery, but over the course of history it became more a matter of learning to shape one's own inner character.

1.6. Study Outline

This thesis is written in five chapters. Chapter one presents an overall outline of the study. Chapter two reviews related literature on George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man*, and focuses on Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge as the theoretical framework of this research. Chapter three and four aim at analyzing *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* from the Foucauldian perspective of power and knowledge. And finally, chapter five sums up the whole study by presenting the findings of the thesis and gives some suggestions for further studies on applying Michel Foucault's theories to George Bernard Shaw's selected plays.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter has two major sections which are dedicated to present the review of literature and the theoretical framework of this thesis. Part I of the chapter represents a review of the recent studies on Shaw's *Major Barbara* and *Arms and the Man* separately. Part II focuses mainly on Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge as the theoretical framework of the present research.

2.2. Part I: Review of Literature

2.2.1. *Major Barbara*

A review of literature pertinent to *Major Barbara* demonstrates that it has been studied from political, social, feministic, and other frameworks but not a single research has focused on it from Foucauldian outlook, which makes the present study novel. John Allett (1995) compares *Mrs. Warren's Profession* with *Major Barbara* based on the notion of "dirty hands politics" in order to portray Shaw as an active political figure whose plays have been "inspired by important political themes" (p. 32).

Amrollah Abjadian (2011) states that *Major Barbara* (1905) is a good example of Shaw's plays which "marks the beginning of modern English drama with its call for a revolution in the nature and function of drama." (p. 552). The play confronts the established norms by depicting vividly the "revival of serious drama, with a tendency away from the established traditions of poetic tragedy and comedy in favor of shorter plays stressing ideas or problems or situations, and depending much upon dialogue." (*ibid.*) He states that the play is mainly preoccupied with realism as an "objective reproduction of

contemporary life ... [which] calls for revolutionary change.” (*ibid.*) In most of Shaw’s plays, including *Major Barbara*, “Shaw mixes comedy and realism ... to deal with social, political, and ethical issues” so as to reform the society (*ibid.*).

Stuart E. Baker (2011) believes that *Major Barbara* is the best representative of Shaw’s philosophy and dramatic cannon. In his opinion, the play vivifies a realistic approach to the internal conflicts of the characters. Baker states that by using a real portrayal of “the clash between the free narrative of real people struggling with their circumstances”, Shaw tends to nourish a didactic dramatic approach for his readers to show them how the characters’ behavior changes their conditions (p. 87). In Baker’s opinion, *Major Barbara* is a “parable” which consists of “polar opposites that must be eternally at war: spirit against matter, religion against atheism, altruism versus egoism, heroic idealism opposed to cynical pragmatism.” (p. 91). The play is the battlefield in which idealism and realism stand against each other while idealism is defeated. Baker states that “In *Major Barbara*, as in Shaw’s other plays, the issues develop through the relationships of different sets of characters.” (p. 92). Shaw’s favorite technique is tripartite major characters who voice various viewpoints with regard to a specific social or ethical concern. Baker concludes that Barbara and her father are realists who “look at the world with open eyes and know the only way to combat the copious evil they see is to face and transform it.” (p. 105).

Stephanie Ollevier (2012) seeks to investigate Shaw’s viewpoints regarding the concept of ‘The New Woman’ in *Major Barbara* to show his uncertainty toward women who associate themselves with men’s positions in society. Ollevier claims that though Shaw approves of women’s rights and feminist institutions, he disapproves of these women’s efforts in breaking the glass ceiling by autonomously earning a living which was abnormal for the Victorian women. Shaw shows contempt for the masculinity and aspiration of these women who aim at deconstructing long-standing customs and norms of the Victorian