Ambivalence towards the New Woman in the plays of George Bernard Shaw

Supervisor: Dr. Kate Macdonald

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels – Duits” by Stefanie Ollevier

May 2012
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kate Macdonald, who advised and assisted me at all times. She has supported me throughout this academic year while I was engaged in writing my master dissertation on this topic. Whenever I needed counsel or was in doubt about something, I could count on her. Moreover, she was always willing to read the chapters I had finished. She also supervised me last year when I had to write my bachelor paper, for which I would like to thank her again. It has been a real pleasure to work with her these last two years.

I would also like to thank my parents for giving me the opportunity to go to university after I had finished secondary school to study what interested me most. Without their moral support, I would not have made it this far.
# Table of contents

1. Introduction 5

2. Background on Research 8

3. Literature Review 11
   3.1 Background reading on Shaw and on the New Woman 11
   3.2 Background reading on *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1893) 13
   3.3 Background reading on *Major Barbara* (1905) 14
   3.4 Background reading on *Getting Married* (1908) 15

4. Methodology 16

5. Investigation 17
   5.1 Short introduction on New Women and Shaw’s response to it 17
   5.2 *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) 20
      5.2.1 General introduction 20
      5.2.2 Mrs Warren 20
      5.2.3 Vivie Warren 27
   5.3 *Major Barbara* (1905) 36
      5.3.1 General introduction 36
      5.3.2 Lady Britomart 36
      5.3.3 Major Barbara 46
   5.4 *Getting Married* (1908) 56
      5.4.1 General introduction 56
      5.4.2 Lesbia Grantham 56
      5.4.3 Edith Bridgenorth 63
      5.4.4 Mrs George 68

6. Results 74
1. **Introduction**

George Bernard Shaw, an Irish author whose professional career as a playwright started at the end of the nineteenth century in London (Peters 1998: 5 – 6) and lasted until his death in 1950 (Peters 1998: 23), is well-known for his feminist sympathies. He was very much concerned with women’s rights, and campaigned to provide women with more independence in different areas, for example in politics, theatre, the household, and so forth (Holroyd 1979: 19 – 23): he wanted women to detach themselves from everything that hindered them to do as they please. Moreover, he supported the Suffragettes in their struggle to obtain the vote (Peters 1998: 18). Although he often refused to speak in public on events that they organized, he backed their political campaign, and contributed in other ways: he wrote numerous essays in which he for example attacked and criticised the custom of forcible feeding of imprisoned suffragettes, which the government practised when these women refused to eat (Peters 1998: 18 – 19).

Nevertheless, however much Shaw stood by the Suffragettes, and as hard as he advocated to generally grant women more independence, it appears that he quite ambiguously reacted to women who dared to push at social boundaries by using their brains to earn a living, and to live more independently than was normal for unmarried Victorian women (Powell 1998: 77). In the 1890s, these rebellious women, who were labelled New Women, mainly wanted to challenge the widely accepted norms and beliefs about gender, and about female beauty (Powell 1998: 76 – 77). Contrary to what one would expect, Shaw quite ambiguously reacted to these women: he criticised and ridiculed them for their masculine air and ambitions in some of his plays (Powell 1998: 77). Probably, he felt threatened by these strong-minded, independent women who wanted to subvert centuries-old traditions and conventions.

His mixed feelings towards the New Women can be traced in three of his earlier plays, *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Getting Married* (1908). These
three plays are spread over a certain period of time, which stretches itself over fifteen year. This enables one to investigate whether Shaw’s critical attitudes evolve throughout his early career as a playwright, or whether his initial views remain unaltered. This space of time, which I will research, commences in 1893 with Mrs Warren’s Profession when the phenomenon was still in its infancy, and terminates in 1908 with Getting Married when people were probably already more accustomed to these New Women. Firstly, however, before starting the actual analysis of the plays, these New Women and their goals, and Shaw’s reaction to them will be more thoroughly defined and explained. Subsequently, I will proceed to the actual analysis of the plays with regard to the research question, that is how does Shaw demonstrate his discomfort with and his critical attitude towards these New Women in his plays. The plays are dealt with in the order in which they have been written and published: the oldest one first, and the latest one last.

In Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893), I will focus upon Mrs Warren and her daughter, Vivie Warren. Lady Britomart and Major Barbara will form the core of the analysis in Major Barbara (1905). Lastly, Lesbia Grantham and Edith Bridgenorth will be exhaustively discussed for the analysis of Getting Married (1908). Mrs George will also be included, although not a New Woman: she is different kind of emphatic woman, whom Shaw ridicules. In all three plays, the female protagonists will be analyzed in a similar way. Firstly, what factors entail these female protagonists’ resemblance to the New Women, and how they emerge as independent, strong-minded women will be researched. For the analysis of Mrs George, what factors contribute to her assertive image will be focussed upon. Moreover, the relationship between the female and male protagonists will be brought forward with regard to the power roles, more in particular how they influence the women’s image: do these relations enforce or diminish the powerful status of the female protagonist? Obviously, what techniques Shaw employed to reveal his uneasiness with these New Women, or more
assertive women, will also be explained. He mainly applied caricature to the characters of these women, which elicits that they no longer appear as strong and independent as they did at the outset of the play. However, what is quite remarkable is that Shaw apparently used a different method in *Getting Married* (1908) to expose his disapproval of the New Women, while in *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) and in *Major Barbara* (1905) he proceeded in a more similar way. Nevertheless, Shaw still applied caricature in *Getting Married* (1908), although in a slightly different way.
2. Background to Research

George Bernard Shaw is a widely and thoroughly studied author. Most essays or biographies which consider Shaw’s life depict him as a male feminist. However, they do not discuss Shaw’s equivocal response to the New Woman (Powell 1998: 77). Most scholars and researchers, have not used Shaw’s female protagonists to examine how Shaw reveals his mixed feelings towards women conducting themselves in the way that men did, in professional and creative terms, or to career women who operated at the same level as men intellectually: how Shaw regarded such challenges to existing ideas about gender has mainly been neglected. I have opted to investigate how Shaw’s antipathies to the New Woman, or other kinds of emphatic women, appear in three of his plays.

In general, Shaw is portrayed as the great champion of equality between men and women. Critics conventionally discuss his ideas about how equality should be attained, and how this achievement would affect society as a whole. He for example introduced the principle of political equality between men and women in the Fabian Society by contributing “A Manifesto, Fabian Tract no. 2” (Peters 1998: 8), which asserted that men no longer needed to be protected against women by means of political privileges. Furthermore, his work The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891) was considered to be a feminist work that led to the breaking-up of many homes, and which converted the most conventional women to suffragism (Holroyd 1979: 21). My analysis will enable the readers of Shaw’s plays to see that Shaw had a complicated relationship with the existing, thoroughly defined gender-roles.

The heroines of Shaw’s plays have been discussed often as well, and are generally seen as independent, emancipated and rebellious women who do not attach great importance to custom or propriety (Peters 1998: 17). These women characters undergo a process of evolution throughout the plays, for better or worse. In Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893), for example, Vivie Warren is portrayed as a New Woman who does not take the slightest notion
of traditions. However, in the end, it appears she is actually quite conventional (Carpenter 1969: 58). This outcome can be interpreted as criticism on the New Woman, indicating that however independent women think they are, and however much they oppose certain beliefs about gender, they contribute to and depend upon a corrupt, capitalist society. What most scholars also seem to overlook is how Shaw sometimes subtly criticises the New Woman in the stage directions or in their behaviour, by asserting for example that women who smoke are vulgar. I want to reveal these kind of subtleties to show Shaw’s ambiguity towards women who conduct themselves in too male a fashion. Thus, in my opinion, however much Shaw supports the suffragettes and other feminist organisations, he criticises the New Woman through their behaviour, their appearance and their evolution in his plays, which has not yet been investigated sufficiently. I have only discovered two essays which address this aspect of Shaw. Firstly, the essay, “Ambiguous ‘New Women’ in Shaw’s Getting Married” (2006) by Oliver Kusovac, takes his criticism on the New Woman into consideration in Getting Married (1908). Secondly, Kerry Powell tackles Shaw’s ambiguity towards this new phenomenon in general, but also just touches upon how this emerges in Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893) in his essay “New Women, new plays, and Shaw in the 1890s” (1998).

Furthermore, many critics focus on Shaw’s socialist ideas, and research how these emerge in his plays: what institutions does he attack, what ideals does he try to destroy, his opinion on society in general and what he wants to alter. Charles Carpenter (1969) for example, focuses on what Shaw aimed for ethically, on his dramatic methods and how these strategies emerge in the plays. Furthermore, Carpenter also explains Shaw’s concepts in his Plays Unpleasant (1898) and Plays Pleasant (1898), and investigates how Shaw applied his ideas in the different plays. However, there is more to Shaw than his Socialism.

What I want to achieve with this analysis is to counter the image of Shaw as an out-and-out male feminist who defends women’s rights, and advocates their independence in
different spheres, and to show that he nevertheless was on the men’s side when it comes to redefining gender-roles in society, and more in particular also in theatre (Powell 1998: 85).

This is an aspect of Shaw which has not yet been studied so far, and which in my opinion is necessary to obtain a more nuanced view on the author.
3. **Literature Review**

Although Shaw is known as a progressive man who supported equality between men and women, he was equivocal towards women who actually struggled to become more independent, that is the New Women (Powell 1998: 77). Firstly, some secondary sources will be discussed which on the one hand establish Shaw’s feminist sympathies. On the other hand, another essay indicates that Shaw disliked the whole concept of the New Woman, especially when they started to intrude on his territory, that is theatre. Subsequently, the secondary sources dealing with the plays themselves will be focused upon according to the order in which Shaw has written them.

3.1 **Background reading on George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) and on the New Woman**

The first two essays which will be discussed, tackle Shaw’s life and include his participation in the struggle to obtain equality between the sexes. The first one is “Shaw’s life: a feminist in spite of himself” (1998) by Sally Peters. In addition to some major biographical facts, Sally Peters addresses Shaw’s feminist sympathies: he elaborates how Shaw advocated more independence for women, and how Shaw considered women capable to intellectually emancipate themselves (1998: 14). Shaw really aspired a world in which women had managed to acquire more independence, so that they did not have to be subject to men during their lives. This essay also deals with Shaw’s socialism. Obviously, an awareness of his politics is necessary to understand Shaw’s plays (Peters 1998: 8). He was a member of the Fabian Society, whose credo declared that a reform should pass gradually and peacefully rather than by immediate revolution (Peters 1998: 8). Again, his feminist spirit emerged here, in that he established political equality as a Fabian Society principle (Peters 1998: 8).

The second article which focuses on Shaw’s feminist sympathies is Michael Holroyd’s “George Bernard Shaw: Women and the Body Politic” (1979). Michael Holroyd mainly focuses on how Shaw tried to convince his audience that women should be granted more
independence: Shaw advocated the economic independence of women in the theatre (1979: 19), and supported the Fabian principles of political emancipation and economic independence for women (Shaw cited in Holroyd 1979: 23). He also championed equal citizenship “without distinction of sex, color, occupation, age, talent, character, heredity or what not” (Shaw cited in Holroyd 1979: 23). Furthermore, Michael Holroyd refers to one of Shaw’s most famous works, that is *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), in which Shaw asserts that a domestic career is not as natural to women as people think (1979: 22). At that time, this was a quite progressive and revolutionary idea. However, it is questionable how much Shaw meant what he said, given that he opposed to the New Women, who actually aspired to and exerted themselves to make a career for themselves outside of the household (Powell 1998: 77). Nevertheless, Michael Holroyd portrays Shaw as a feminist in heart and soul: he made a stand for equality between men and women, and championed more independence for women.

However, Kerry Powell seems to refute the assertion of Shaw being an out-and-out male feminist. He discusses Shaw’s ambiguous attitude towards the New Woman in the 1890s in his essay “New Women, new plays, and Shaw in the 1890s” (1998). The New Woman, a constructed category which “expressed metonymically” (Powell 1998: 76) how the traditional ideas on woman and gender were being challenged in the 1890s, was associated with rebellion and disorder. Even though Shaw advocated gender-equality, he behaved ambiguously and critically towards these women who wanted to redefine the traditional beliefs about gender, which can be traced in his drama (Powell 1998: 77). This ambiguity is actually the object of my research. Furthermore, Kerry Powell explains how male playwrights in general responded to this phenomenon, and how Shaw participated in this tradition of ridiculing the New Women (1998: 77). Hence, Shaw was on the men’s side in this discussion, and resisted women as playwrights (Powell 1998: 85), whose plays he immediately slated (Powell 1998: 85).
82). This essay thus contradicts the other two discussed earlier, showing that he is quite ambiguous in his approach towards the New Woman, which makes him to a lesser degree a woman’s advocate (Powell 1998: 94). Kerry Powell also often refers to some of Shaw’s plays, for example Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893), to demonstrate how Shaw’s mixed feelings crop up in his drama (1998: 78).

3.2 Background reading on Mrs. Warren’s Profession (1893)

Frederick J. Marker investigates Shaw’s Plays Unpleasant (1898) in his essay “Shaw’s early plays” (1998), and thoroughly analyzes the three different plays, which this volume of plays contains. What is relevant for this paper is his analysis of Mrs. Warren’s Profession (1893). According to Marker, it deals with social corruption, more specifically prostitution, for which Shaw blames the social system stimulating these kind of practices rather than the individual involving it (1998: 115). However, the actual dramatic tension is triggered by the “ambiguous and inconclusive spiritual education of Vivie Warren” (Marker 1998: 118). This female protagonist can be perceived as a comic version of the New Woman rather than a dyed-in-the-wool one (Marker 1998: 118). Furthermore, Frederick Marker examines and explains the major differences and similarities between Mrs Warren, Vivie’s mother, and Vivie, and how their relationship evolves throughout the play (1998: 118 – 121). Lastly, he explains the process of disillusionment Vivie undergoes. She always thought that she was very different from her mother, but in Act IV, she “recognizes herself and her own fiercely independent spirit in her mother” (Marker 1998: 120). This realization elicits that Vivie will take her life as it is without any frivolities.

In his book Bernard Shaw & the Art of Destroying Ideals (1969), Charles Carpenter firstly discusses Shaw’s methods and ideas in general. Subsequently, he looks into the plays of Plays Unpleasant (1898) and Plays Pleasant (1898) more closely. What is of interest for this study is Carpenter’s analysis of Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893), and how he describes
Vivie and Mrs Warren. He ascribes four fundamental characteristics to Mrs Warren, which perfectly grasp her personality (Carpenter 1969: 55 – 56). Furthermore, Charles Carpenter examines Vivie’s character, and her relationship with the other figures in the play. Hence, he scrutinizes the understanding between mother and daughter as well: he describes Vivie’s resemblance to her mother, but he also takes into account the differences between them (Carpenter 1969: 56 – 58). Moreover, Charles Carpenter not only focuses on the different characters: he also discusses how Shaw traps the audience into judging a situation falsely, and how he then convicts these same spectators for it (1969: 58). This actually represents Shaw’s main strategy in his *Plays Unpleasant* (1998).

3.3 Background reading on *Major Barbara* (1905)

Louis Crompton, another scholar who has applied himself on studying Shaw’s plays, discusses *Major Barbara* (1905) in the book he published on Shaw, *Shaw the Dramatist* (1971). Obviously, he looks into the different figures and their mutual relationships. What concerns me most is how he develops his analysis of both female protagonists in this play. Louis Crompton perceives Lady Britomart as a strong, emancipated woman, who simultaneously appears to be a conventional lady as well, which he works out in detail (1971: 107). He also thoroughly scrutinizes Barbara’s character, one of Lady Britomart’s children. Although Barbara seems to be the only child who resembles her mother to some extent, Louis Crompton demonstrates in what way Barbara is distinct from her mother (1971: 108). Furthermore, he investigates how Barbara loses her faith, which elicits that she bursts into tears (Crompton 1971: 113). Apparently, Undershaft and Cusins, given that he supports Undershaft, have caused this breakdown (Crompton 1971: 112 – 113).

Another author who focuses on *Major Barbara* is John A. Bertolini in his book *The Playwrighting Self of Bernard Shaw* (1991). The chapter on this play reveals that Barbara has to redefine herself in the course of the play. This need for redefinition is also reflected through
the different ways the other protagonists address Major Barbara (Bertolini 1991: 60). John A. Bertolini researches this process of Barbara’s self-definition, concluding that Barbara first has to resign from the Salvation Army, so that she “regresses to childlike behavior” before she could experience a rebirth, and become her “mother’s daughter” (1991: 63). What is also crucial and very remarkable in his analysis is that he argues that Undershaft controls the women at the end of the play: whenever Undershaft enters a domain ruled by either Lady Britomart in Act I or Major Barbara in Act II, he takes over the lead (Bertolini 1991: 71). John A. Bertolini thus discusses the reversal of the power roles in the play: Undershaft deprives both women from their powerful status, which causes that at the end of the play they no longer can be regarded in the same way as at the outset of the play.

3.4 Background reading on Getting Married (1908)

Olivera Kusovac has written a very interesting essay on this play, that is “Ambiguous ‘New Women’ in Shaw’s Getting Married” (2006). Olivera Kusovac first briefly explains the term New Woman, and describes how people reacted to this new phenomenon: men and women who wanted to maintain time-honoured beliefs about gender mocked these kind of progressive women through caricature (2006: 172). Then he researches how Shaw criticises and mocks the New Women in this play, represented by Lesbia Grantham and Edith Bridgenorth. He portrays Lesbia as a sophisticated, emancipated and liberated woman, but indicates all the same that her liberation is questionable (Kusovac 2006: 174). Shaw has tried to create his own ideal New Woman (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 172), and reveals in this way what he dislikes about the dyed-in-the-wool New Woman. Just like Lesbia, Edith is a self-assured, freed woman who says whatever she feels like. Nevertheless, however emancipated and feminist, Edith appears to be a “spoilt brat” (Kusovac 2006: 177), whose stances and social work are nothing more than mere pretence. These portrayals of Lesbia and Edith entail an “anti-feminist representation of the ‘new woman’” (Kusovac 2006: 178).
4. **Methodology**

In this paper, three of Shaw’s plays will be approached from a feminist perspective. In *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Getting Married* (1908), the women’s roles will be researched, more specifically, the female protagonists’ development in the course of the plays. Therefore, I will apply the methods of textual analysis and close reading. How Shaw describes his female protagonists will be interpreted, and what these depictions may imply about their personality: I will deal with their outward appearance, their behaviour, their mindset, and to what extent they feel the urge to alter some general societal institutions or traditions in regard to gender. Furthermore, I will investigate whether they retain their powerful status or if they are deprived from it in one or another way, and how some of the other, possibly male, figures may influence these changes. Eventually, these results will be linked to Shaw’s ambiguity towards the New Women, or other domineering women, and how he reveals his uneasiness with their ideas.
5. **Investigation**

5.1 Short introduction on New Women and Shaw’s response to it

The New Woman, who has been defined in various ways, is a phenomenon which occurred in the 1890s in Great Britain (Powell 1998: 76). One definition asserts that these women wanted to challenge the existing beliefs about female beauty by smoking cigarettes, and dressing in a simple and manlike fashion (Powell 1998: 77). They also often had a “severe coiffure”, and “affected emancipated habits, like […] riding a bicycle, using bold language and taking the omnibus or train unescorted” (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). These women behaved in this way to find equality with and freedom from men. To obtain this, “she [the New Woman] was prepared to overturn all convention and all accepted notions of femininity” (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). In a more wide perspective, it is possible to assert that they generally wanted to defy some prevalent societal traditions relating for example to class or marriage, as they were often described as women who were restless and discontent “with the existing order of things” (Powell 1998: 77). Dowling affirms this perception, as she argues that the New Women were believed to threaten the established culture, an argument which was repeatedly used to criticise New Woman fiction in the Victorian period (1979: 435).

Furthermore, these New Women probably had been educated “to a standard unknown to previous generations” (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). They also often devoted themselves to a certain profession or business. This would enable them to be “financially independent of father or husband” (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). They thus preferred to make a career for themselves rather than to bear and to raise the children. This is why Victorian people criticised these women, as the New Woman in this way would render herself unfit for her “role as wife and mother” (Dowling 1979: 446), an activity which was believed to have been “ordained for women” (Powell 1998: 77) by nature. Also their attitude towards men is used as a means to define the New Woman. The one time these women were perceived
as sexless creatures who refused “all relations with men” (Powell 1998: 77). The other time, they seemed to be freer in their dealings with men than tradition allowed, implying that they had some random relationships with men (Powell 1998: 77). What both approaches have in common is that marriage is probably out of the question. In sum, what all these definitions and characteristics of the New Woman have in common is that she symbolizes upheaval: the boundaries of gender were about to dissolve, since these women wanted to reopen the discussion “about what it meant to be a man or a woman” (Powell 1998: 77).

How Shaw responded to this new social phenomenon indicates that even a progressive man regards the New Woman with mixed feelings, which can also be traced in his early drama (Powell 1998: 77). Shaw was only willing to accept the New Woman if her disturbing was restricted to the field of the domestic and the sexual: her power and intelligence should have no impact outside of the household (Powell 1998: 78). Furthermore, Shaw involved himself in the general trend amongst men to caricature these women on stage. These New Women were not only criticised in drama, but also in cartoons published in magazines as for example Punch (Kusovac 2006: 172). In this debate, Shaw obviously was on the men’s side (Powell 1998: 85). When women, for example Elizabeth Robins, became playwrights, after being incited by the theatrical newspaper Era to start writing plays themselves as a response to the male ridicule in plays in order to reverse this current tendency and to defend their own cause (Powell 1998: 78), men like Shaw immediately criticised these plays. Shaw argued that writing plays required a masculine mind (Powell 1998: 82). To emphasize his disapproval of female playwrights, he even went as far as rewriting certain plays to his own taste, for example Elizabeth Robins’ Alan’s Wife (1893). In his opinion, women got it all wrong when it came to writing plays: first he claimed there is an excessive amount of emotions in their scripts, then he asserted that the plays needed more feeling to be considered real and true drama (Powell 1998: 86).
What stroke Shaw most was the New Women’s demand for male purity, an idea which had been uttered by a female figure in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) (Powell 1998: 87). Like other playwrights, Shaw found it hard to sympathize with this concept, and was part of the nervous male reaction to this crazy idea that a man’s life should be immaculate (Powell 1998: 88). This claim was regarded as controversial, and provoked a response of the male playwrights. Once again, they reacted by means of humour, ridiculing the female demand of liberties that traditionally only men could enjoy, and the desire to raise the men “to the standard of purity usually reserved for women” (Powell 1998: 88), for example in Grundy’s *The New Woman* (1894).

By researching Shaw’s ambiguity “on issues of gender” (Powell 1998: 94), he no longer appears as an out-and-out male feminist. As Kusovac so beautifully puts it, “Shaw appears to have been continuously torn between his conscious commitment to feminism as an advanced ideology of the time, […], and his subconscious urge to maintain the centuries-old gender imbalance and separateness of male and female spheres” (2006: 178). This equivocation is also reflected in his attitude towards female playwrights: although he wanted women to gain more independence in theatre, he “contributed to the subjection of women in theatre” (Powell 1998: 87) by denying their ability to write real plays.
5.2 Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893)

5.2.1 General introduction

*Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) centres on Mrs Warren, a brothel owner, and her relationship with her daughter Vivie Warren, who has received a good education at Cambridge, and aspires to become an accountant. Mrs Warren was induced into prostitution by circumstances originating from poverty (Carpenter 1969: 55), and eventually had earned enough money to become a manager in some high-quality brothels. When Vivie learns how her mother has obtained her wealth, with which she has paid for Vivie’s education, she is horrified, but she becomes reconciled with her mother after that she explained the grinding poverty that drove her into prostitution (Marker 1998: 119) at the end of Act II. However, this appeasement ends when it is revealed that this lucrative business is still running (Marker 1998: 119). Eventually, Vivie severs the ties with her mother and bids her farewell, obviously for good, relieved that she can return “the monthly check from her [Mrs Warren’s] brothel profit” (Crompton 1971: 10) she collects now that she works as an accountant. How Shaw uses Mrs Warren and Vivie to caricature the New Women will be focused upon.

5.2.2 Mrs Warren

The first impression the reader receives about Mrs Warren is that of a typical mother who wants her child to behave well in her absence, and who attempts to arrange her daughter’s life without consulting her. We learn this when Praed, a friend of Mrs Warren, arrives at Vivie’s cottage in Surrey and announces that her mother is about to arrive, which does not seem to please Vivie at all. When Mrs Warren eventually arrives at Vivie’s home and emerges for the first time on stage, Shaw seizes the opportunity to describe her in detail:

Mrs Warren is between 40 and 50, formerly pretty, showily dressed in a brilliant hat and a gay blouse fitting tightly over her bust and flanked by
fashionable sleeves. Rather spoilt and domineering, and decidedly vulgar, but, on the whole, a genial and fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman.

(Shaw 2000: 220)

This description shows that Shaw wanted the actress performing Mrs Warren to use her looks to suggest aspirations to being a lady, while showing that she is too vulgar ever to be respectable. This vulgarity refers to her low birth. Mrs Warren’s appearance falls between both stereotypes of being a respectable lady and of the “fallen woman” (Marker 1998: 117). The character Paula Ray in Arthur Wing Pinero’s *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1894) is a prostitute and a woman with a past just like Mrs Warren, but is portrayed as a youthful and sexually attractive woman of twenty-seven in an exquisite evening gown (Marker 1998: 117). Mrs Warren here emerges as a middle-aged woman who has nothing of “the tempting sexuality of the traditional stage courtesan” (Marker 1998: 117). Presumably, she had once been pretty, but her beauty has vanished as she aged. Shaw clearly wanted to avoid depicting Mrs Warren as a stereotype. He opposed the prevalent tradition of idealizing women, and portraying them as beautiful, virtuous creatures, which he here demonstrates via Mrs Warren (Holroyd 1979: 20). One may interpret Mrs Warren not being as seductive as the stereotypical stage courtesan as a characteristic that Shaw has ascribed to her to link her with the New Woman. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, these women want to challenge the prevalent beliefs about femininity by dressing in more masculine and simple way (Powell 1998: 77): they thus do not resemble the stereotypical ideal of female beauty and virtue either. Another explanation may be that Shaw in this way wanted to indicate that Mrs Warren did not voluntarily become a prostitute, but that she actually had no other choice. She did not intend to profit from her beauty, but rather turned to the alternative of prostitution to maintain her self-respect (Crompton 1971: 8). Moreover, as Mrs Warren’s appearance is maternal rather than alluring, this is an indication that Mrs Warren no longer works as a
prostitute, even though she is still part of the prostitution industry as owner of several brothels “stretching from Brussels to Budapest” (Marker 1998: 119).

Furthermore, Mrs Warren has made a career for herself throughout her life, even though one may consider it to be a quite ambiguous business she had herself involved in. During her childhood and her youth, Mrs Warren lived in poverty and had no other prospects than to go working for a pittance in the “whitelead factory” (Shaw 2000: 247). She first worked as a “scullery maid in a temperance restaurant” and subsequently, she became a waitress and “went to the bar at Waterloo station” (Shaw 2000: 248). One night, her sister Lizzie, entered this bar, dressed “in a long fur cloak, elegant and comfortable” and “with a lot of sovereigns in her purse” (Shaw 2000: 248). Actually, this unexpected encounter was the first time they saw each other again after Lizzie’s vanishing from the church school, which both Mrs Warren and Lizzie attended. Lizzie urged Mrs Warren to give up her job as waitress, as she was only wearing out her health and appearance by serving other people, without being able to enjoy the rewards from her labour. Lizzie herself worked as a prostitute, and was saving to buy a house in Brussels: she aspired to manage her own brothel. Because the money would be collected more rapidly if they collaborated, Lizzie persuaded Mrs Warren to cooperate. This is how Mrs Warren got herself involved in the prostitution industry. Her sister lent her some money to give her a start. Subsequently, Mrs Warren worked hard and paid her sister back, and “went into business with her [Lizzie] as a partner” (Shaw 2000: 248). The fact that she made a career for herself, just like her sister, can actually link her up with the New Woman who aspires after a professional career (Powell 1998: 77), so that she is financially independent of any man (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172).

What also adds to the perception of Mrs Warren being a New Woman is that she dares to oppose men: she says what she thinks, however vulgar it may be. This characteristic has been ascribed to the New Woman by Gardner (cited in Kusovac 2006: 172) Therefore, Shaw
describes her as being a “blackguard” (Shaw 2000: 220), a word which has a negative connotation: one of the word’s meanings is a person who uses filthy, inappropriate language. When Crofts in Act I for example insinuates that she is afraid of Praed, because he pointed out to her that it would be better to treat Vivie as an adult woman rather than as a child, an idea which Mrs Warren immediately repudiates and ridicules, she responds: “I’ll trouble you to mind your own business, and not try any of your sulks on me. I’m not afraid of you, anyhow. If you cant [sic] make yourself agreeable, youd [sic] better go home” (Shaw 2000: 222). She offends Crofts in the presence of other men in Vivie’s garden. Normally, a woman does not take such a high tone with a man. Her outspokenness also emerges when she resolutely rejects Frank and Crofts as possible marriage candidates for Vivie. When she refuses Frank’s marriage proposal, she affronts him by calling him a “young scamp” (Shaw 2000: 232). She also insults Crofts by saying that the only reason he is wealthy is “because youre [sic] as stingy as youre [sic] vicious” (Shaw 2000: 240), when he tries to convince her through this argument. Thus, generally, Mrs Warren has quite an offensive way of talking and does not mince her words, not even when she addresses a man.

Furthermore, Mrs Warren is able to exercise authority over men. At the end of Act I, it appears she has had Reverend Samuel Gardner in her power once, and apparently still has. The vicar tells his son, Frank, about some letters he had written to a woman and how he had offered money to get them back, probably because the content might be damaging for his reputation. However, she responded that “[k]nowledge is power” (Shaw 2000: 229), and that she would never sell power. Eventually, it is revealed that “that woman” (Shaw 2000: 229) was Mrs Warren: she says that she has kept his letters in the presence of Vivie and his son, Frank. The reverend immediately gets his wires crossed, and is “miserably confused” (Shaw 2000: 230), since she has revealed his secret, which can cause him a lot of trouble.
However, there are a lot of factors who contradict the perception of Mrs Warren being a New Woman. Firstly, she attaches great importance to respectability, and to fulfilling this societal ideal (Carpenter 1969: 55). Consequently, she behaves according to English standards, and demonstrates them as well: the girls working in her establishment are apparently well-treated, she manages her business efficiently, and tries to raise her daughter “with care and passable wisdom” (Carpenter 1969: 55). These facts suggest that she wants to appear as a respectable lady. Furthermore, she accepts capitalist morality, which means “she does what pays her best” (Carpenter 1969: 55), that is prostitution. This choice actually conflicts with the ideal of social respectability that she cherishes, given that prostitution is not considered to be an honourable business. Her admiration for her sister Lizzie as well establishes that she sets great store by respectability. Her sister now lives close to the cathedral in Winchester, where she is “one of the most respectable ladies”, chaperoning “girls at the county ball” (Shaw 2000: 248), even though she earned her living in the same way that Mrs Warren did. Mrs Warren wants her own daughter, Vivie, to be like her aunt: Vivie should fulfil “the ideal of the capitalistic ethic” (Carpenter 1969: 55), meaning propriety and churchgoing respectability (Carpenter 1969: 55). Actually, Mrs Warren imagines this kind of life for Vivie, because Mrs Warren herself was and will not be able to achieve this. Thus, she is too conventional a woman to be considered a New Woman, as she does not try to defy any societal tradition at all. On the contrary, she is fully entangled into them. This image of Mrs Warren is reinforced and confirmed in the last act as well, as Mrs Warren tries to persuade Vivie to accept her money by listing what advantages being rich and respectable has: 

It means a new dress every day; it means theatres and balls every night; it means having the pick of all gentleman in Europe at your feet; it means a lovely house and plenty of servants; it means the choicest of eating and
drinking; it means everything you like, everything you want, everything you can think of. (Shaw 2000: 281)

The things she lists here have always been attractive to her, especially when she was a girl, because she could not have any of these things herself when she had Vivie’s age. Thus, Mrs Warren accepts the standards and traditions of conventional English society, but she wants her daughter to demonstrate them. Hence, Mrs Warren is “a conventional woman at heart” (Shaw 2000: 286), as Vivie assert at the end of the play. Moreover, Mrs Warren is blind to her daughter’s desires: Vivie has a totally different moral sense, and consequently does not desire these particular things. In this respect, Mrs Warren may fall into the category of being inexperienced.

Secondly, the fact that Mrs Warren suddenly wants to be a good mother to her daughter makes it impossible to link her with the New Woman, as some repudiate motherhood to avoid having to occupy themselves with the bearing and raising of children (Powell 1998: 77). This sudden maternal behaviour is quite remarkable, because Mrs Warren has been absent from Vivie’s life most of the time:

I hardly know my mother. Since I was a child I have lived in England, at school or college, or with people paid to take charge of me. I have been boarded out all my life. My mother has lived in Brussels or Vienna and never let me go to her. I only see her when she visits England for a few days. (Shaw 2000: 219)

This sudden change in Mrs Warren is quite conspicuous: apparently, she was more of a New Woman in the past than she is now, as she now wants to fulfil the role of a caring mother. In Act II for example, when Mrs Warren is back at the cottage after her walk with Frank, and cannot find Vivie, she asserts that “she [Vivie] oughtnt [sic] go off like that without telling me” (Shaw 2000: 233). This statement implies that Vivie should ask her permission first
before she goes outdoors, which was actually conceived as normal at that time, as women did not have a life of their own when Shaw wrote this play. Furthermore, when it concerns Vivie’s romantic relationship with Frank Gardner, who wants to marry Vivie for her intelligence and particularly for her money, Mrs Warren interferes, and rejects Frank’s proposal mainly because “he has no money and no prospect of earning it” (Carpenter 1969: 62). Moreover, Mrs Warren claims that she will decide who her daughter will marry when Crofts admits that he is interested in marrying her as well, of which she obviously disapproves. At this point, Mrs Warren comes across as a “theatrically devoted mother” (Shaw 2000: 239). The good advice she gives Vivie, and her concern for Vivie’s well-being and future are actually nothing more than mere affectation. Presumably, she wants to make up for the years she has missed from Vivie’s life. Furthermore, Mrs Warren wants to assure that Vivie will lead the life that she, as a mother, has imagined for her. However, this contrived maternal behaviour comes across as unnaturally to the audience. Consequently, she appears as a laughable figure.

Lastly, what adds to the impossibility of perceiving Mrs Warren as a New Woman is that she suddenly becomes sentimental. She bursts out into tears several times throughout the play. In Act II, a fierce battle between Mrs Warren and Vivie takes place, as Vivie had anticipated in Act I. Vivie wants to earn her own money “by devilling for Honoraria” (Shaw 2000: 220), whereas Mrs Warren wants Vivie to marry and adopt her way of life. Obviously, Vivie opposes this idea, and wants to convince her mother of her Chancery Lane project. Eventually, Vivie reduces her mother into tears during this argument by behaving very ruthlessly to achieve her goal. Mrs Warren “buries her face in her hands” (Shaw 2000: 245), which implicates she started crying. Subsequently, Mrs Warren “breaks out vehemently in her natural tongue [...] with all her affections of maternal authority and conventional manners gone” (Shaw 2000: 245 – 246), and begins to tell her life story to Vivie. Apparently, Mrs
Warren has lost her self-control. This establishes to what extent Vivie has upset Mrs Warren by her indifferent and relentless behaviour.

In Act IV as well, there are some indications therefore that Mrs Warren has been transformed into an emotional woman. At the end of Act III, Vivie had fled her cottage in Surrey. Crofts had revealed that she and Frank were half-brother and half-sister, after Vivie rejected his proposal to marry him. Subsequently, Mrs Warren visits Vivie at her office at Chancery Lane. When Mrs Warren does not immediately find Vivie when she enters, she almost starts crying. Furthermore, it appears Mrs Warren has visibly changed. The brilliant hat she wore has been “replaced by a sober bonnet”, and “the gay blouse” is now “covered by a costly black silk mantle” (Shaw 2000: 278). Moreover, “[s]he is pitiously anxious and ill at ease: evidently panic-stricken” (Shaw 2000: 278). Little remains from the initial impression one had of Mrs Warren, that is of her being a strong, independent, rebellious woman. This emotional outburst may confirm that she, in the end, is not that strong a woman. Given that crying is mainly considered to be something particularly feminine, Shaw probably wanted to procure that the audience does not conceive Mrs Warren as a New Woman any longer. Apparently, Shaw ridicules Mrs Warren for her masculine air by turning her into this sentimental woman who attaches great importance to respectability, and suddenly wants to be a good, loving mother after many years’ absence.

5.2.3 Vivie Warren

At the beginning of Act I, Vivie appears as an educated woman who does her best to have mastery of a certain subject matter. She is studying in the backyard of her cottage in Surrey:

A big canvas umbrella, […], keeps the sun of the hammock, in which a young lady lies reading and making notes, […]. In front of the hammock, and within reach of her hand, is a common kitchen chair, with a pile of serious-looking books and a supply of writing paper on it. (Shaw 2000: 213)
Her being educated already connects her to the New Women (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). What adds to this impression is that Vivie aspires to become a first-rate businesswoman: she wants to set up some “chambers in the City, and work at actuarial calculations and conveyancing” (Shaw 2000: 217). In addition to this, she wants to do some law “with one eye on the Stock Exchange” (Shaw 2000: 217), which she was studying before Praed arrived. However, Praed’s arrival disturbs the peace and quiet she so much appreciates, which seemingly annoys her, as she now has lost her concentration. Nevertheless, when he asks whether she is “Miss Vivie Warren” (Shaw 2000: 213), it seems that her curiosity has been aroused. She invites him to enter her garden, although initially she was uninterested in the object of his coming. At this point, Shaw has taken to opportunity to describe Vivie in great detail:

She is an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly-educated young middle-class Englishwoman. Age 22. Prompt, strong, confident, self-possessed. Plain business-like dress, but not dowdy. She wears a chatelaine at her belt, with a fountain pen and a paper knife among its pendants. (Shaw 2000: 214)

Apparently, not only her knowledge and her dedication to a profession associates her with the New Women, but also her appearance and behaviour. First of all, she dresses less conspicuously and less feminine than her mother. Her clothing style may be defined as sober and masculine, which was a means by which the New Woman wanted to challenge the stereotypes of femininity (Powell 1998: 77). Nevertheless, she is decently dressed, and “not dowdy” (Shaw 2000: 214). Hence, Vivie’s looks do not fit the image people had in their minds of women who challenged the existing gender-roles, and who wanted to achieve equality between men and women: these women were regarded as slovenly, unattractive, and indifferent to their appearance (Croft 2009: 22). Vivie thus is “not conventionally
unconventionally” (Shaw 2000: 215), as she does not correspond to the prevalent stereotypes about rebellious women. Apparently, Shaw tries to avoid depicting his female protagonists according to the prevalent stereotypes (Holroyd 1979: 20). After all, even though he seems to criticise the New Women in his plays, he still advocates more independence for women (Shaw cited in Holroyd 1979: 23). If he would use only stereotypes to portray his female figures, he would lose his credibility. Furthermore, it is also possible to assert that Shaw in this way already anticipates that the image the reader now has from Vivie, that is her being a New Woman, will alter in the course of the play. As she is not fully unconventional, Vivie must have characteristics which make her appear as more conventional, or diminish the perception one has of her being a New Woman. Yet another explanation, which is quite contrary to the previous one, may be that Shaw demonstrates his discomfort with the phenomenon of the New Woman, who repudiates the gender-bound clothing traditions, by refusing to portray Vivie as fulfilling the stereotype of the unattractive, slovenly woman.

Secondly, it appears that she has a very strong handshake. After that Praed and Vivie shook hands, he had to exercise “his fingers, which are slightly numbed by her greeting” (Shaw 2000: 214). This feature, normally associated with men, recurs when she becomes acquainted with Crofts, one of her mother’s oldest friends: “[s]he takes his tenderly proffered hand and gives it a squeeze that makes him open his eyes” (Shaw 2000: 221).

However, even though Shaw already seems to indicate Vivie will be transformed in the course of the play, there are a myriad of other indications which demonstrate Vivie’s resemblance to the New Woman. She regards “[m]aidenly reserve” and “gentlemanly chivalry”, as a waste of time, “[e]specially women’s time” (Shaw 2000: 216). She wants to do as she pleases in her life without being restricted by some societal conventions, which prescribe how a woman should behave in the private and the public sphere. Furthermore, she repudiated to get involved with men, but rather devoted herself to her study, that is
mathematics. In Act I, she reveals that she is not interested in men and in romance during her conversation with Praed. When he asks her “[a]re you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?”, she responds: “I dont [sic] care for either, I assure you” (Shaw 2000: 217). The only things she really cares about are the following:

I like working and getting paid for it. When I’m tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it. (Shaw 2000: 218)

That Vivie enjoys smoking reinforces the impression that she falls into the category of the New Woman: smoking is a feature that Powell ascribes to them as a way to defy the stereotypes concerning female beauty (Powell 1998: 77).

In Act IV, she repeats that she is not interested in men or in romance. Praed and Frank are at her office in Chancery Lane, when Praed once again raises the subject of “life’s frivolities” (Marker 1998: 118). He actually wants to convince her to accompany him to Italy, so that she would become saturated “with beauty and romance” (Shaw 2000: 272). However, she argues that “there is no beauty and no romance in life for me”, and that she will take life “as it is” (Shaw 2000: 273). At the end of their discussion on this issue, Vivie emphasizes that she “must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single [to Frank] and permanently unromantic [to Praed]” (Shaw 2000: 274). Thus, she seems to be quite determined about remaining single all her life. Apparently, marriage is something that Vivie does not desire. One may also deduce this from her refusal to marry Crofts in Act III. He quite openly admits he wants “to settle down with a Lady Crofts” (Shaw 2000: 261), with which he implies he wants her as his wife. However, she declines his proposal, and stands her ground, even when he offers her money: “My no is final” (Shaw 2000: 262).

Nevertheless, even though at the end of the play she renounces men, she engaged in a “holiday romance” (Marker 1998: 119) with Frank before the beginning of the play. However,
she never intended to marry him. Presumably, she only considered his company to be pleasant every once in a while, but certainly not always. In Act II for example, when everyone has gathered in Vivie’s kitchen to have supper, Frank and Vivie wait, as there is not enough room for everybody. However, it seems that Frank annoys her. When “[h]e attempts to take her face caressingly in his hands”, she says: “Off with you: Vivvums is not in a humor for petting her little boy this evening” (Shaw 2000: 238). Hence, he can only approach her romantically when it suits her. Nevertheless, the fact that she involves herself with Frank elicits that she appears as a woman who cannot make up her mind. Although she claims not to need romance, she entered into a relationship with Frank in the past. Hence, Shaw’s critical attitude towards these women emerges: he primarily caricatures Vivie by means of her ambiguous position towards men.

However, the result of Vivie mainly focussing on mathematics, so that she could excel in exams, is that she has become "a more ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who hadn’t [sic] gone in for the tripos” (Shaw 2000: 217). According to Shaw, who conveys his opinion via Praed, she falls into the category of the inexperienced girls (Powell 1998: 81). Praed enunciates he had sensed that achieving such magnificent things at Cambridge, that is reading the mathematical tripos, “meant destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful” (Shaw 2000: 217). Since she always had her nose in a book, she did not experience romance and beauty in life, which entails her being ignorant about the things other people tend to set great store by. Although Vivie seems to have a quite pronounced opinion on everything, for example the need of love, she actually does not know anything about the joys and sorrows of life. Thus, Vivie is a caricature of the New Woman “with her manly dress, bone-crushing handshake and predilection for cigars and whisky” (Powell 1998: 78). Furthermore, Shaw very clearly utters his objections to smoking women via Frank. When Vivie in Act IV asks Frank to “[p]ass that cigarette box” (Shaw 2000: 269) when he is at her
office in Chancery Lane, he responds that smoking is a “[n]asty womanly habit” (Shaw 2000: 269).

Furthermore, Vivie is inexperienced because she does not know where the money, with which her mother has paid for her education, comes from. She does not know anything about her mother, as Mrs Warren was absent during most of Vivie’s life. However, Vivie does not complain, since “there has always been plenty of money to make things smooth” (Shaw 2000: 219). It is only when Vivie and Mrs Warren have a quarrel about Vivie’s future in Act II that Vivie learns what her mother had to endure to achieve a decent, comfortable life. Vivie manipulates her mother to tell about her past by arrogantly asking “[w]hat is that way of life you invite me to share with you and Sir George Crofts, pray?” (Shaw 2000: 243), assuming that her mother’s idea of life is inferior to hers. Vivie considers her mother to be “a woman of no purpose” (Carpenter 1969: 66):

> If I thought that I was like that – that I was going to be a waster, shifting along from one meal to another with no purpose, and no character, and no grit in me, I’d open an artery and bleed to death without one moment’s hesitation. (Shaw 2000: 238)

At this point, one may be inclined to think that Vivie will be the winner of her “battle royal” with her mother about her “Chancery Lane project” (Shaw 2000: 220). Mrs Warren bursts into tears and breaks out in her natural tongue because of Vivie’s arrogant, self-possessed tone, and reveals that she has obtained her wealth by prostituting herself and later managing some brothels herself. Even though Vivie raises objections to her mother’s choice by asserting that “[s]aving money and good management will succeed in any business” (Shaw 2000: 249), her mother manages to persuade Vivie that she had no other choice if she wanted to maintain her self-respect (Carpenter 1969: 55). It seems that they have reconciled (Marker 1998: 119), and that Vivie now respects her mother: she says that Mrs. Warren is “stronger than all
England” (Shaw 2000: 251). Vivie judged her mother falsely, which demonstrates that Vivie was very biased about her mother, just because she knew so little about her (Carpenter 1969: 67 – 68). She never took the trouble to ask “where the money I [Vivie] spent came from” (Shaw 2000: 265), which results in Vivie feeling “among the damned” (Shaw 2000: 266).

What is quite remarkable at this point in the play is that Vivie, just like her mother, seems to have been transformed into a sentimental woman. Vivie “takes her mother in her arms” (Shaw 2000: 252) after their reconciliation, which is the first time Vivie is “filled with affectionate regard for” (Crompton 1971: 8) her mother. This was quite unimaginable at the beginning of the play, as Vivie did not think much of her mother. She primarily ignored her mother and certainly did not take her mother’s wishes into account. In Act II for example when her mother points out to Vivie that she has to inform her when she goes somewhere, Vivie does not react. When Mrs Warren asks if Vivie has heard what she has said, Vivie quietly says “Yes, mother” (Shaw 2000: 236), and immediately brings up supper. However, now it seems that Vivie has found a way to respect her mother, which she now quite explicitly shows. In Act III as well, which takes place the day after their appeasement, Mrs Warren and Vivie walk “affectionately together” (Shaw 2000: 257) when they are on their way to the vicar’s house. This sight, of mother and daughter wandering around arm in arm, seems to astonish Frank, just because of its strangeness: “Look: she actually has her arm around the old woman’s waist. It’s her right arm: she began it. She’s gone sentimental, by God!” (Shaw 2000: 257). Anyhow, this reconciliation between mother and daughter will not last long. Once Vivie has been informed by Crofts in Act III that her mother’s business is still going on, she immediately decides to sever the ties with her mother for good.

At this point exactly, when Vivie is at her weakest, Frank manages to make her fall under his spell for a little moment. He wants to convince her not to go live with her mother. In a babyish way, he says she “[m]usnt [sic] go live with her” (Shaw 2000: 259), to which she
reacts by rocking him rhythmically “like a nurse” (Shaw 2000: 259). One does not expect this response: normally, Vivie would immediately have ordered him to stop behaving in this childish way. Hence, it seems Vivie’s sentimentality has come to a head. Even though this moment of weakness only lasts a couple of minutes, Frank has her in his power, which was quite inconceivable at the beginning of the play, as she appeared to be an independent woman who did not accept being empowered by anyone. This sentimentality emerges in the last act as well, when she wants to reveal her mother’s past to Praed and Frank when they are in her office at Chancery Lane. She cannot utter it since the shame is too horrible for her. Then “[s]he buries her face in her hands” (Shaw 2000: 276), which implies she is crying, just like her mother did during their battle. This outburst of emotion may surprise the audience, in that she told her mother to stop whimpering during their quarrel in Act II, since she could not stand it. Hence, she is more like her mother than she assumed. However, she herself thinks it dreadful that she has turned sentimental in Act IV. When Praed points out to Frank that he behaves quite unsympathetically towards Vivie during their visit, because he claims that Vivie lacks poetry, Vivie responds: “No: it’s good for me. It keeps me from being sentimental” (Shaw 2000: 274).

However, Vivie can not only be perceived as her “mother’s daughter” (Shaw 2000: 284) because she gets sentimental, but also because she seems to accept capitalist morality. Nevertheless, she repudiates the idea of social respectability, to which her mother attaches great importance (Carpenter 1969: 56). Just like her mother, Vivie feels the urge to work hard, even though this means making more money than she actually needs: “I [Vivie] am like you [Mrs Warren]: I must have work, and must make more money than I spend” (Shaw 2000: 284). She is determined to dedicate her life to actuarial calculations. This decision actually leaves the audience frustrated, since her profession has been inflicted upon her by “circumstances based on capitalist morality” (Carpenter 1969: 58). Moreover, she only sought
the distinction at Cambridge University because her mother had promised her fifty pound to win “honors in mathematics” (Carpenter 1969: 58). In this respect, she has prostituted herself to “nothing but mathematics” (Shaw 2000: 217), just like her mother chose vice over virtue to escape poverty. Thus, the fact that she uncritically focuses on “working and making money in a capitalist and sexist economy” (Powell 1998: 78) entails her resemblance to her mother. Hence, Vivie seems to be conventional to a certain extent as well.
5.3 Major Barbara (1905)

5.3.1 General introduction

This play tells the story of Lady Britomart, an aristocratic lady, who has raised her three children, Stephen, Sarah and Barbara, a Salvation Army Major who really dedicates herself to her vocation, alone. These children do not know who their father is: Lady Britomart has abandoned her husband Andrew Undershaft, a successful, wealthy businessman who manages a munitions factory, when they were still very little. However, given that Sarah’s and Barbara’s fiancés, Lomax and Cusins, a professor of Greek, will not be able to earn enough money to support them, Lady Britomart is determined to ask her estranged husband for financial help (Crompton 1971: 110). She invites him over to their house in Wilton Crescent, a decision which will radically change her and Barbara’s life. In this chapter, however, how Barbara and Lady Britomart appear as New Women will be investigated, and how Shaw procures that this impression alters towards the end of the play. This transformation is also closely connected to the relation between Undershaft and both female protagonists, which will be scrutinized as well.

5.3.2 Lady Britomart

The readers’ initial encounter with Lady Britomart occurs when she is working at her writing table in the library of her house in Wilton Crescent. She belongs to the aristocracy, as her father is “the Earl of Stevenage” (Shaw 2000: 55). Lady Britomart appears as a “well dressed” (Shaw 2000: 51) woman, because people expect a woman with upper-class origins to dress decently and fashionably. Simultaneously, Shaw asserts that she is “careless for her dress” (Shaw 2000: 51). This indifference may indicate that she would like to change the concept that upper-class women should dress stylishly and according to the latest fashion. This is a part of her personality that she has in common with the New Women. They are concerned
with challenging some societal conventions and beliefs as well, besides those about gender and femininity.

Furthermore, Lady Britomart can be considered a New Woman, since she abandoned her husband because of his immorality and his principles with regard to the succession of the munitions business. She thus distanced herself from her husband, and raised her children by herself. Nevertheless, she and her family have always depended upon him financially. She reveals this to Stephen when he objects to asking Undershaft for money: “But after all, Stephen, our present income comes from Andrew [Undershaft]” (Shaw 2000: 59). Thus, Lady Britomart is not as independent and rebellious as one may think, which elicits that she is not an out-and-out New Woman. These women prefer to be independent from both father and husband (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). Furthermore, Shaw portrays her as a woman who is full of contradictions:

Lady Britomart is a woman of fifty or thereabouts, […], well bred and quite reckless of her breeding, well mannered and yet appallingly outspoken and indifferent to the opinion of her interlocutors, amiable and yet peremptory, arbitrary, and high-tempered to the last bearable degree, and withal a very typical managing matron of the upper class, treated as a naughty child until she grew into a scolding mother, and finally settling down with plenty of practical ability and worldly experience, limited in the oddest way with domestic and class limitations, […], and being quite enlightened and liberal as to the books in the library, the pictures on the wall, the music in the portfolios, and the articles in the paper. (Shaw 2000: 51).

Shaw depicted Lady Britomart as a woman who on the one hand wants to reform some traditions which her class elicits. She wants to react against her traditional upbringing, which results in her being a well-bred and well-mannered woman, by professing to be a liberal
human being. However, she is confined by the rules and traditions that the class to which she belongs imposes upon her, which her clothing may already demonstrate. The scholar Louis Crompton perceives Lady Britomart along the same lines. According to him, she “represents the hereditary British governing class in its most enlightened and liberal aspect, but also under its limitations” (Crompton 1971: 107).

On the one hand, Lady Britomart thus appears as a woman who struggles to alter the prevalent beliefs about gender. She appears to be an avowed advocate of free speech (Crompton 1971: 106): she speaks very plainly, regardless of the opinions and feelings of her interlocutors. Furthermore, she is quite dominant and peremptory, not only towards her children but also to her daughters’ fiancés and her alienated husband, Andrew Undershaft. She mainly treats her children as toddlers, telling them what to do in a very commanding tone (Crompton 1971: 106). In Act I, she asks Stephen for advice and needs his help to “deal with him [Undershaft] about the girls [Sarah and Barbara]” (Shaw 2000: 53), since their husbands will not make enough money to support them properly. She now considers Stephen to be old enough to take his responsibility where family matters like this are concerned. Furthermore, given that he has been “at Harrow and Cambridge” and he has been “in India and Japan”, he “must know a lot of things” (Shaw 2000: 53). Nevertheless, she continuously treats him as a child, telling him to “be a good boy” (Shaw 2000: 57), and regarding him as too immature and inexperienced “to begin matchmaking” (Shaw 2000: 54).

However, she only wants to make Stephen believe she is consulting him to find a solution for this problem. During their conversation, she reveals “her own convictions” (Crompton 1971: 106), that is that she should try to extract dowries from Undershaft (Crompton 1971: 110), her children’s father, to compensate for the financial deficit that Sarah and Barbara will experience once they are married. She only wants Stephen to confirm her in her opinion:
Lady Britomart. But Sarah does [need money]; and Barbara does. That is Charles Lomax and Adolphus Cusins will cost them more. So I must put my pride in my pocket and ask for it, I suppose. That is your advice Stephen, is it not?

Stephen. No.

Lady Britomart [sharply] Stephen!

Stephen. Of course if you are determined –

Lady Britomart. I am not determined: I ask your advice; and I am waiting for it. I will not have all the responsibility thrown on my shoulders.

Stephen [obstinately] I would die sooner than ask him for another penny.

Lady Britomart [resignedly] You mean that I must ask him. Very well, Stephen: it shall be as you wish. You will be glad to know that your grandfather concurs. But he thinks I ought to ask Andrew to come here and see the girls. After all, he must have some natural affection for them.

[...]

Lady Britomart. New dont [sic] tease, Stephen. Come! You see that it is necessary that he should pay us a visit, dont [sic] you?

Stephen [reluctantly] I suppose so, if the girls cannot do without his money.

Lady Britomart. Thank you, Stephen. I knew you would give me the right advice when it was properly explained to you. I have asked your father to come this evening. [...](Shaw 2000: 60 – 61)

Firstly, Lady Britomart plucks at Stephen’s heart strings: she uses an emotional argument to persuade him that she is right. She let it be understood that approaching Undershaft to ask for help is quite a sacrifice: she will have to set her pride aside, which, as Stephen knows, is not that evident for Lady Britomart, given that she has a very strong personality. Secondly, when
Stephen enunciates he would not ask his father for help, implying she should not ask for it either, she consciously misinterprets his words: she pretends that Stephen suggests she should address Undershaft, and not him. Lastly, she quite indirectly admits that she has imposed her will upon him. It is possible to interpret the word “explained” (Shaw 2000: 60) as ‘enforced’. She thus twists his words, and subtly manipulates him. Eventually, he indulges: asking Undershaft for financial help is the best way to provide his sisters with enough money to make ends meet. After his surrender, she reveals that she has already arranged Undershaft’s visit before asking Stephen for advice, which indicates she was sure she would persuade him. Thus, already at the outset of Act I, Lady Britomart appears as a very peremptory, manipulative woman who is determined to get her way.

However, Stephen is not the only one who has to endure Lady Britomart’s instructive nature: every single figure in the play is confronted with this feature of Lady Britomart’s personality. When Sarah and Barbara enter the room with their fiancés, she “peremptorily” orders them to “[s]it down, all of you” (Shaw 2000: 63). Lady Britomart does not even spare the fiancés of her daughters, on whom they will later depend. Especially Charles Lomax, Sarah’s fiancé, has to swallow a lot of insults. She does not think highly of him, which is already demonstrated during their first encounter. After that Lomax has uttered his first word during the conversation, she already orders him to “[b]e quiet” (Shaw 2000: 63). A few moments later, when Lomax reveals he wonders how “the old man [Undershaft] will take” (Shaw 2000: 64) meeting his children, Lady Britomart immediately interprets this as an insult addressed to her, since she is about the same age as Undershaft, even though Lomax did not mean it this way. When he tries to apologize, she interrupts him, and takes him down a peg or two: “You didn’t [sic] think, Charles. You never do; and the result is, you never mean anything” (Shaw 2000: 64). She affronts him in the presence of his fiancée and her family, which can be considered as humiliating, especially for a man. However, Lady Britomart does
not take the slightest notice of this, and keeps offending Lomax similarly throughout the whole play.

The only person, however, who does not seem to be affected by Lady Britomart’s commanding nature is her estranged husband, Andrew Undershaft. The way in which Shaw describes him when he enters Lady Britomart’s library already indicate he is a very powerful, cunning and patient man who is able to entice someone very subtly into doing something to which they formerly opposed:

Andrew is, on the surface, a stoutish, easygoing elderly man, with kindly patient manners, and an engaging simplicity of character. But he has a watchful, deliberate, waiting, listening face, and formidable reserves of power, both bodily and mental, in his capacious chest and long head. His gentleness is partly that of a strong man who has learnt by experience that his natural grip hurts ordinary people unless he handles them very carefully, and partly the mellowness of age and success. (Shaw 2000: 65 – 66)

Initially, Undershaft feels ill at ease in his new surroundings, as he is confronted with his family from which one has been estranged for so many years. Presumably, Lady Britomart abandoned him when the children were very young, since he does not recognize who his children are: he considers Lomax to be his eldest son. Undershaft himself admits this when he says: “They have grown so much – er. Am I making any ridiculous mistake? I may as well confess: I recollect only one son. But so many things have happened since, of course – er -” (Shaw 2000: 66). Lady Britomart reacts by saying that he is “talking nonsense” (Shaw 2000: 66). In this way, she offends him very openly in the presence of his children and the girls’ fiancés. Nevertheless, Undershaft responds very calmly by asking her to introduce her to his children then. Apparently, Undershaft is not taken aback by Lady Britomart’s decisive tone.
He is able to deal with her in a calm manner, because as her husband, he ought to know her personality quite well.

However, the conversation progresses and Undershaft and his children discuss a myriad of subjects: the Salvation Army and its motto, religion in general and music. Clearly, Lady Britomart has been pushed into the background from the moment Undershaft entered her house: she barely takes part in the conversation. Ultimately, at the end of Act I, Undershaft seems to have seduced everyone away from Lady Britomart. Barbara “throws her arm round her father and sweeps him out” (Shaw 2000: 73), when he agreed to witness “a religious service conducted by Barbara with Lomax as organist” (Bertolini 1991: 71). Barbara is convinced that she will be able to save his soul and make him trade his “cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army” (Shaw 2000: 72). At this point, Lady Britomart cries out very desperately that she “will not be disobeyed by everybody” (Shaw 2000: 73), whereas everyone seems to ignore and abandon her. One by one, Lomax, Cusins and Sarah follow Barbara and Undershaft to the drawing room to attend the service, even though she tries to convince Cusins to pray with her by saying that she has him taped about his joining in the Salvation Army simply and solely to worship Major Barbara. Undershaft’s “undermining techniques” (Bertolini 1991: 71) have thus enticed everyone away from Lady Britomart at the end of Act I, which makes her appear as a powerless woman. She “gives way to a little gust of tears” (Shaw 2000: 74) when she is alone, but rapidly swishes “away her tears with her handkerchief” (Shaw 2000: 74) when Stephen, who refuses to join the others, asks if his mother is alright, because she cannot stand that one of her children sees her cry. Undershaft has broken her power down, and now she has no other option than follow his leads (Bertolini 1991: 71). Eventually, she joins her children and her husband in the drawing room, however much she has been hurt by them a couple of minutes before, as she does not want Undershaft to think that she acknowledges her defeat.
In Act III, when Lady Britomart rakes up the issue of the succession of Undershaft’s canon business for the first time, she insists on appointing Stephen as his successor instead of a complete stranger. Lady Britomart was offended in the past by Undershaft’s refusal to appoint Stephen as the next manager, as this condition was “at odds with aristocratic belief in birth and blood” (Crompton 1971: 108). However, Undershaft does not surrender, and stubbornly persists that Stephen is not capable of managing the foundry. Thus, Lady Britomart is unable to persuade him, which demonstrates how little influence she has on him. Even though she emerges as an independent, strong and confident woman at the beginning of the play, she is easily overridden by Undershaft, which changes the impression one had about her before. Like in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, one of the female protagonists breaks down in tears. That she has been financially dependent upon Undershaft also proves that she is not independent financially, and that money is very important for her. She thus is certainly not a New Woman, although one might have believed she was at the beginning of the play.

What may add to this impression is Lady Britomart’s morality is quite conventional (Crompton 1971: 107). According to Louis Crompton, “every speech that she utters shows her native aristocratic spirit” (1971: 106). First of all, she seems to attach great importance to money and to being able to live decently without having money problems. She herself does not run the risk to become poor, as she can support her children by means of the money Undershaft provides her with. However, she can only provide for her three children as long as they live in with her. Given that Sarah and Barbara are both engaged, they will probably soon marry, and leave their mother. Once her three children are married, they will have to provide for themselves, but this is exactly the problem: Lomax and Cusins will not be able to support Sarah and Barbara without outside help. Therefore, she decides to approach Undershaft in order to extract the money from him, as she “can’t [sic] keep four families in four separate houses” (Shaw 2000: 55). Asking her own father, the Earl of Stevenage, is not a option, since
“he has barely seven thousand a year now” (Shaw 2000: 55). He cannot do anything for them, and he presumably is not inclined to supply the extra money, since he considers it absurd “that he should be asked to provide for the children of a man who is rolling in money” (Shaw 2000: 55). Hence, the money deficit of Sarah and Major Barbara results in Lady Britomart losing the power over her children. However, she probably considers keeping her daughters away from poverty to be her task as a mother, since, given their class, this would be a flagrant scandal, one which she wants to spare her daughters.

Secondly, Lady Britomart’s sets great store by marriage, a feature which establishes her conventional nature as well. Even though she seems to be disgusted by her husband because of his immorality, she did not divorce him. Nevertheless, it is possible to assert that some laws would have impeded Lady Britomart. Women could only divorce their husband on the grounds of adultery in combination with “cruelty, bigamy, incest, or bestiality” (Norton Anthology 2006: 990). Given that Undershaft did not perpetrate any of these crimes, Lady Britomart could not use this argument to petition for a divorce. Yet another reason why Lady Britomart presumably did not divorce Undershaft is that he would no longer financially support her. Consequently, she would be unable to provide for her children, as she would no longer have an income. A woman did not have any property or money of her own: from the moment she was married, everything she owned belonged to her husband, as husband and wife “became ‘one person’” (Shanley 1986: 72) when they were married, and the woman’s legal independence was subsumed into her husband’s (Shanley 1986: 72). A woman thus fully depended upon her husband. However, this changed once the Married Women’s Property Acts (1870 - 1908) were passed (Norton Anthology 2006: 990). Nevertheless, even though some of these laws were already in force when Lady Britomart decided to abandon Undershaft, these laws were not valid for that long yet, and were not fully completed. This enables one to argue that Lady Britomart distrusted this law, and therefore decided not to
divorce Undershaft. Furthermore, Lady Britomart did not want to work to earn her living, given her upper-class origins, and the importance she attaches to aristocratic conventions.

What also adds to the impression that Lady Britomart considers marriage to be an important part of life is that she wants to find her children a desirable match, a plan she seems to bring to a favourable conclusion. She has made “a very good match for Sarah” (Shaw 2000: 53) by pairing her off to Charles Lomax who “will be a millionaire at 35” (Shaw 2000: 53). This again establishes how important money is to her. During their conversation in Act I, Lady Britomart mentions that Stephen as well “must marry soon” (Shaw 2000: 54). She is already “trying to arrange something for” (Shaw 2000: 54) him, as she disapproves “of the present fashion of philandering bachelors and late marriages” (Shaw 2000: 54). Only Barbara seems to have chosen her fiancé herself without her mother’s interference, that is Adolphus Cusins, whose income appears to be insufficient. Stephen is even surprised that his sister was engaged to Cusins considering “his income” (Shaw 2000: 54). Anyhow, Lady Britomart has approved of Barbara’s choice, although the “snobbish people” (Shaw 2000: 54) will probably condemn this marriage, which does not seem to bother Lady Britomart. She justifies her decision by arguing that having a thorough knowledge of Greek “stamps a man at once as an educated gentleman” (Shaw 2000: 54). How highly Lady Britomart assesses marriage, especially when children are involved, is also demonstrated when she tells Stephen about his father’s personality and past, his family history in particular. In her opinion, Undershaft broke the law from the moment he was born, as “his parents were not married” (Shaw 2000: 56).

Ultimately, what makes Lady Britomart conventional is that she expects and commands her children to behave according to the English upper-class conventions. This desire is revealed when she points out to Barbara that she is conducting improperly by telling Lomax he can laugh whenever he wants, even though Lady Britomart just requested him to leave the room if he cannot behave properly. Lady Britomart says: “Barbara: you have had the
education of a lady. Please let your father see that; and dont [sic] talk like a street girl” (Shaw 2000: 68). She had already hinted that she will not tolerate any kind of misbehaviour during the visit of their father:

Cusins [sweetly] You were saying that as Mr Undershaft has not seen his children since they were babies, he will form his opinion of the way you have brought them up from their behavior tonight, and that therefore you wish us all to be particularly careful to conduct ourselves well, especially Charles.

Lady Britomart [with emphatic approval] Precisely.

[...]

Lady Britomart [vehemently] [...]. It is most important that you should be good; and I do beg you for once not to pair off into opposite corners and giggle and whisper while I am speaking to your father. (Shaw 2000: 64 – 65)

She wants to prove to Undershaft that she has managed to raise their children decently without his aid, which is why she here emphasizes that everyone should behave according to the upper-class traditions. She is afraid that he will not supply the money if he sees that his children are not raised decently.

5.3.3 Major Barbara

Barbara, Lady Britomart’s daughter, is a young woman who “has developed a propensity to have her own way” (Shaw 2000: 61). Her mother always assumed that she would go far in the world, and would be the most successful of her children according to aristocratic conventions, but nothing is further from the truth. Barbara goes against her mother’s wishes, as she “[j]oins the Salvation army; discharges her maid; lives on a pound a week; and walks in one evening with a professor of Greek whom she has picked up in the street, [...]” (Shaw 2000: 54). Contrary to Lady Britomart, who is limited by her class, although she aspires to alter some upper-class traditions (Crompton 1971: 107), Barbara is so little “concerned with mere
propriety and good form” that “she has thrown aristocratic prejudice to the winds” (Crompton 1971: 108). Obviously, Lady Britomart had not imagined this kind of life for her daughter, during which she consorts mainly with people from the lower classes. This gap between the life Lady Britomart had in mind for Barbara and how Barbara actually lives her life may remind one of Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893), in which a similar situation arises: Mrs Warren wants Vivie to marry and be a respectable woman, whereas Vivie wants to remain single, and desires to work as an accountant at Chancery Lane.

Furthermore, Barbara, does not appear as feminine as her sister, Sarah. Barbara is “robust, jollier, much more energetic” than Sarah is, and her clothes are not as fashionable as her sister’s, as she is dressed “in Salvation Army uniform” (Shaw 2000: 61) Furthermore, Barbara appears to be a robust woman. This word may have two different connotations, which both can be applied to Barbara. On the one hand, it may mean she physically emerges as a powerful, sturdy woman who is not easily frightened. On the other hand, this may refer to the fact that Barbara does not mince her words. Furthermore, Barbara fully dedicates herself to the Salvation Army, which was not that self-evident at that time. As a result of her commitment, her talent, and her determination to convert people, she has been appointed Major. Hence, that she follows her vocation regardless of what other people think, and does not appear that fashionable at all, are two features which may link her up to the New Women.

Devoting oneself to make a career, and dressing in a more simple fashion are characteristics which Powell ascribes to these kind of women (1998: 77).

What adds to the image of Barbara as a powerful, strong and independent woman is that she is the only one of her siblings who has the courage to protest against Lady Britomart. Her mildly rebellious nature is revealed when she first enters the library in Wilton Crescent together with Sarah and their fiancés. When Lady Britomart expresses that she considers it inconvenient that Barbara addresses Charles as Cholly because of its vulgarity, Barbara
responds very shrewdly that Cholly is a term which in the meanwhile “is quite correct” (Shaw 2000: 62). In this way, she mocks Lady Britomart, because she is not yet acquainted with the new societal norms. She thus teases her mother in the presence of the others. Her recalcitrance may also be inferred from the fact that Lady Britomart is concerned about how Barbara will respond to the coming of Undershaft: she considers it possible that Barbara will “make a fuss” (Shaw 2000: 61) when she disapproves of his arrival, given her determinedness to get her own way. However, she does not make difficulties, and considers Undershaft as a person with “a soul to be saved like anybody else” (Shaw 2000: 63). She is convinced that she will be able to convert him, and therefore invites him to visit her shelter in West Ham. Eventually, he consents to go and see it for himself how they work there, but he stipulates that she has to pay his munitions business a visit as a condition, to which Barbara agrees. They thus challenge one another, both certain that they will manage to make the other give up his or her business. However, Barbara is yet ignorant of the fact that this will ruin her career in the Salvation Army, and will entail her losing all her ideals.

However, before Undershaft visits the West Ham shelter, her resolution to convert people, and her commitment to the Salvation Army is shown in every word she utters. She for example asserts that “[t]here are no orphans in the Salvation Army” (Shaw 2000: 69), and that “[t]here are neither good men nor scoundrels: there are just children of one Father” (Shaw 2000: 71). She thus already advocates her own cause passionately in Act I. Act II, then, is enacted in the West Ham shelter itself, where two converted people, Price and Rummy, a newcomer, Peter Shirley and Jenny Hill, a member of the Salvation Army, are gathered. Suddenly, Bill Walker, an aggressive young man looking for his girlfriend who has left him for another man, enters, and beats Jenny for no obvious reason. Nobody is able to calm him down, not even the attendant men who are not that easily shocked either. When Barbara enters, briskly and “businesslike” (Shaw 2000: 83), she seems to be the only one who can
soothe tempers. Although, initially, Bill thwarts, claiming he does not believe in God, and does not want to get involved in the Salvation Army, Barbara plays games with him, and manipulates him until he is “almost crying” (Shaw 2000: 90) and “is on the point of breaking down” (Shaw 2000: 91). Apparently, she is fearless and self-confident, yet very friendly. In her mind the case is already settled: Bill Walker will be a converted man when he walks out of the shelter. Being able to get her own way in a very cunning and sly manner is a characteristic which she seems to have inherited from both her parents. Eventually, her father arrives in the shelter, and requests that she continues working so he can observe her converting Bill. She would have succeeded in leading Bill to “brave manhood on earth and eternal glory in heaven”, if Cusins did not enable Bill to escape “from the spell [of Barbara]” (Shaw 2000: 91) by entering the shelter with a big drum. Thus, everything goes to show that Barbara very passionately tries to convert Bill, and employs every possible means to achieve her goal.

However, Shaw also mildly ridicules Barbara with regard to the Salvation army: she is unaware that some people’s willingness to be rescued is mere pretence. Barbara thinks that everyone who has been saved really believes in the Salvation Army’s cause, and wants to fully dedicate himself to it, whereas for example Rummy and Price only surrendered in order to obtain some food. Price even lies to be accepted into the Salvation Army: he asserts that he has been beaten by his mother, whereas actually he is the one who has been assaulted. During his conversion, he will “play the game as good as any of em”, behaving as if he hears a voice saying “’Snobby Price: where will you spend eternity?’” (Shaw 2000: 78). Thus, Barbara can be regarded as an inexperienced girl, because she believes in the innate goodness of human kind too much, and does not acknowledge some people only joined the Salvation Army to take advantage of it.
Another characteristic of Barbara’s is that she gives a lot of orders, and wants to be obeyed. Barbara thus “has Lady Britomart’s genius for leadership” (Crompton 1971: 108). Barbara’s peremptory nature is already revealed in Act I during Undershaft’s visit. After that Undershaft admitted that he is uneducated and is not in the least a gentleman, Cusins advises him to study Greek, because the position of Greek scholars is unchallengeable. Barbara then responds in the following way: “Dolly [Cusins]: dont be insincere. Cholly [Lomax]: fetch your concertina and play something for us” (Shaw 2000: 68). What is quite remarkable is that Lomax immediately obeys and “jumps up eagerly” (Shaw 2000: 68) without any muttering or without offering resistance. Apparently, she is able to exercise power over men. However, Barbara’s commanding nature not only emerges when she is with her family, but also when she is in the Salvation Army. When she first appears in the West Ham shelter in Act II, it is quite obvious that Barbara has considerably much power within the Salvation Army. She is carrying a note book in order to complete Peter Shirley’s forms, as he is a new-comer and they “want to know all about” him (Shaw 2000: 83). When he hesitates to sit down because he feels quite uncomfortable in his new environment, “she puts a friendly hand on his shoulder and makes him obey” (Shaw 2000: 83), making clear she tolerates no contradiction. The urge to have her own way, and Barbara’s commanding nature entail that Barbara resembles her mother, as much as Barbara differs from her mother in various ways. This strong likeness to her mother sometimes flashes out “for a moment” (Shaw 2000: 87): when Jenny says that Rummy, an old woman who was in the shelter, and whom Jenny should order “to clear away here”, is too afraid after the whole business with Bill, Barbara responds: “Nonsense! she must do as she’s told” (Shaw 2000: 87).

However, in Act II, in which Barbara initially is perceived as a peremptory and a powerful woman, the visit of her father to the West Ham shelter will change her life completely. The conversation between Undershaft and Cusins, which precedes Undershaft
offering money to the Salvation Army, discloses that Undershaft wants to “win Barbara” (Shaw 2000: 96), for the following reason: “She shall make my converts and preach my gospel – “, that is “[m]oney and gunpowder” (Shaw 2000: 96). To achieve this, he will buy the Salvation Army in order to make her convert, a plan which Cusins considers to be impossible. No sooner said than done, when Mrs Baines, a “Salvation Army Commissioner” (Shaw 2000: 104) reveals that Lord Saxmundham, a distiller, has promised the Salvation Army five thousand pounds, but that he has stipulated that “five other gentlemen” have to “give a thousand each to make it up to ten thousand” (Shaw 2000: 105) as a condition, Undershaft reassures that Mrs Baines will have her five thousand pounds, implying that he is willing to provide for the money. When Barbara realizes Mrs Baines is going to accept this money, as she asks Undershaft if he will let her “have the cheque to shew at the meeting” (Shaw 2000: 106), Barbara protests heavily, reminding Mrs Baines that Lord Saxmundham is “Bodger the whisky man” (Shaw 2000: 107), who Barbara had to fight the most to be able to rescue souls, since many poor souls who needed saving were addicted to his whisky. Quite evidently, Undershaft defends Bodger, asserting that alcohol is indispensible because it “heals the sick”, “makes life bearable” and “enables the Parliament to do things at eleven at night that no sane person would do at eleven in the morning” (Shaw 2000: 107 – 108). However, what hurts and disappoints Barbara the most is that Cusins fails her, as he sides with Mrs Baines and Undershaft, and even praises Bodger for his self-sacrifice. Due to this betrayal, she “almost breaks down” (Shaw 2000: 108). Eventually, regardless of Barbara’s many objections and her feelings, Undershaft signs the cheque, and hands it over to Mrs Baines.

Yet again, Undershaft has managed to seduce everyone away from one of the female protagonists, that is Barbara, by undermining her authority within the Salvation Army. He, thus, puts her in the position of her mother at the end of Act I (Bertolini 1991: 71). He first won Mrs Baines over, and subsequently, Cusins, who establishes his admiration for
Undershaft by enunciating that Undershaft “shall intone an Olympian diapason to the West Ham Salvation March” (Shaw 2000: 109) on the trombone on their way to the great meeting. However, everyone seems to forget about Barbara. They assume she will reconcile herself to the situation, and will accompany them to the meeting to announce that the Salvation Army has been saved by her father, and by “Bodger the whisky man” (Shaw 2000: 107). Nothing is further from the truth: she imparts that she “cant [sic] come” (Shaw 2000: 110). They only come to realize what is happening when Barbara “begins taking off the silver S brooch from her collar”, approximates to her father, and pins “the badge on his collar” (Shaw 2000: 110). She has lost her faith by the agency of Undershaft. When everyone has left for the meeting, “[s]he sinks on the form with her face buried in her hands” (Shaw 2000: 111), which implies she is crying. Like her mother in Act I had no other choice than follow everyone into the drawing room, Major Barbara is left with “little choice but to follow him [Undershaft] to the cannon works” (Bertolini 1991: 71) the next day.

This breakdown seems to initiate a change in Major Barbara’s behaviour, as the readers’ perception of Barbara as a kind of New Woman given her appearance, her outspokenness, her commanding nature, her career and her dedication to it, begins to alter. At the beginning of Act III, which takes place the next day, Shaw emphasizes this transformation by repeating twice that she is now “fashionably attired” (Shaw 2000: 114). Furthermore, she looks “pale and brooding” and is “in low spirits” (Shaw 2000: 114), caused by the loss of her faith. Hence, she appears as a more conventional, aristocratic, young woman who has lost all of her power and strength. However, she did not lose the knack of commanding. Sarah points out to Barbara that she wishes that she “wouldn’t [sic] tell Cholly to do things” because “[h]e always comes straight and does them” (Shaw 2000: 114). Then, Undershaft arrives at Wilton Crescent. The family discusses the succession of the canon business among other things, when Barbara suddenly reveals that she blames Undershaft for being unhappy: “Do you think
I can be happy in this vulgar silly dress? I! who have worn the uniform. Do you understand what you have done to me?” (Shaw 2000: 127). Nevertheless, a few seconds later, “[s]he takes her father’s hands and kisses them” (Shaw 2000: 128). After he asked whether his daughter despairs so easily, Barbara asserts that she feels he has given her back her happiness, even though her “spirit is troubled” (Shaw 2000: 128). Hence, she very unexpectedly forgives her father, and wants him to take her “to the factory of death” (Shaw 2000: 128), whereas a few minutes before, she despised it. This act of forgiveness and interestedness in her father’s affairs anticipates Barbara’s decision and behaviour at the end of play. It furthermore demonstrates that Undershaft pulls the strings, and that Barbara has been fully deprived from her powerful status.

The next scene is enacted in Perivale St Andrews, where Undershaft’s cannon business has its seat. All family members admire the well-equipped city which is provided with a library, a nursing home, and so forth. Suddenly, Lady Britomart brings up the issue of the succession again, and claims Barbara has as many rights to the inheritance as Stephen does. She thus proposes to appoint Cusins as successor which would entail that Barbara would benefit from Undershaft’s wealth as well. Eventually, Undershaft “offers him [Cusins] the management of the munitions work” (Crompton 1971: 121), after that Cusins seems to be an eligible candidate: his parents’ marriage is not legal in England, even though it is valid in Australia. Consequently, he is a foundling “in this island” (Shaw 2000: 135). Initially, Barbara, as his fiancée, disapproves of Cusins succeeding Undershaft, and asserts the following: “You are selling your own soul, Dolly” (Shaw 2000: 137). Nevertheless, Undershaft manages to persuade Cusins to accept the offer, even though Cusins seems to doubt: he risks losing Barbara if he agrees to Undershaft’s proposal. Anyhow, it appears that this fear of being abandoned is unjust, contrary to what one would expect. When Cusins and Barbara are alone after Cusins’ decision, Barbara admits that when she saw the place, she felt
that she must have it, and would consider marrying the man who accepted the offer if Cusins would have refused it. Moreover, that she is willing to marry Cusins is a characteristic of hers that she does not share with the New Women, as they mainly repudiate men and domestic life in general (Powell 1998: 77). However, she does not want to have Perivale St Andrews for its wealth but because of “all the human souls to be saved” (Shaw 2000: 152). She, thus, regains her faith at the end of Act III (Crompton 1971: 122), as she wants to change hell into heaven. She has found a new vocation, and prepares her for her new job in the munitions factory, which enables her to escape “the boredom and triviality of the genteel drawing room” (Crompton 1971: 122), which she dreads so much. Hence, she agrees to a partnership with Cusins, and consequently also with Undershaft (Bertolini 1991: 63). As much as she has tried “not to take money from Undershaft” (Bertolini 1991: 75), she now accepts it without any doubt. Hence, she becomes dependent upon him.

The very end of the play is even more remarkable than Barbara accepting Undershaft’s money. After that she assured Cusins that she will not abandon him, she runs out of the shed, and shouts “Mamma! Mamma! [...] I want Mamma!” (Shaw 2000: 153) in a childlike manner. Barbara thus regresses into childish behaviour, which may be derived from the scene which closes the play:

Lady Britomart [coming from the shed and stopping on the steps, obstructing Sarah, who follows with Lomax. Barbara clutches like a baby at her mother’s skirt] Barbara, when will you learn to be independent and to act and think for yourself? I know as well as possible that cry of ‘Mamma, Mamma’ means. Always running to me!

Sarah [touching Lady Britomart’s ribs with her finger tips and imitating a bicycle horn] Pip! Pip!
Lady Britomart [highly indignant] How dare you say Pip! pip! to me, Sarah? You are both very naughty children? What do you want, Barbara? Barbara. I want a house in the village to live in with Dolly. [Dragging at her skirt] Come and tell me which one to take.

Undershelf [to Cusins] Six o’clock tomorrow morning, Euripides. (Shaw 2000: 153)

That Barbara behaves “like a baby” (Shaw 2000: 153), and that she drags at her mother’s skirt demonstrates that Barbara has become dependent upon her mother as well. She needs her mother’s help to select a proper house for her and Cusins, whereas she did not need her mother’s opinion when she decided to join the Salvation Army. Hence, Barbara has transformed into a dependent, conventional, fashionably dressed woman who turns to her mother for advice and financially depends upon her father, whereas she previously was an independent, unconventional and strong-minded woman who opposed her mother and wore her Salvation Army uniform. According to John A. Bertolini, Barbara’s regression may also be interpreted “as an attempt to acknowledge herself as her mother’s daughter” (1991: 63). Whereas she formerly hardly ever exchanged a word with Lady Britomart, and rebelled against her mother, she now displays “filial affection and dependence” (Bertolini 1991: 63). Hence, Barbara’s childlike conduct may be perceived as deliberate (Bertolini 1991: 64).
5.4 Getting Married (1908)

5.4.1 General introduction

In *Getting Married* (1908), Shaw tackles the issue of marriage and caricatures its status. The play centres on Edith Brigdenorth’s marriage, for which the entire family gathered at the house of the Bishop, her father. However, the marriage is cancelled after both Edith and Cecil Sykes, her fiancé, have been informed about the consequences of marriage. Consequently, the entire family participates in designing a new system for marriage and divorce. However, they do not arrive at an agreement. Therefore, Collins, the Bridgenorth’s greengrocer, suggests to consult Mrs George, his sister in law, in the hope that she will be able to effect a compromise, since she is very experienced “in affairs of the heart” (Shaw 2008: 101). However, in this chapter, the main female protagonists will be analyzed in regard to their resemblance to the New Women. Lesbia and Edith are defined through their stance towards marriage, and through their analogies and differences with the image of the New Woman, an opinion which Olivera Kusovac shares (Kusovac 2006: 171). The third figure, which will be investigated, is Mrs George, who can be defined as another kind of assertive woman rather than as a New Woman.

5.4.2 Lesbia Grantham

At the outset of the play, Lesbia appears as a beautiful, sophisticated, well-mannered lady, who sets great store by her appearance and her clothing:

> She [Lesbia] is a tall, handsome, slender lady in her prime; that is, between 36 and 55. She has what is called a well-bred air, dressing very carefully to produce that effect without the least regard for the latest fashions, sure of herself, very terrifying to the young and shy, fastidious to the ends of her long finger-tips, and tolerant and amused rather than sympathetic. (Shaw 2008: 63).
She has nothing of Vivie’s or Barbara’s masculine air in *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) and *Major Barbara* (1905). By means of her clothing, she wants to confirm that she has been educated as an English lady, and quite explicitly asserts that she is “particularly proud of being one [an English lady]” (Shaw 2008: 66). Hence, she does not want to reform any of the prevalent traditions that being a lady entails. What also contributes to this image the audience has about her is that Shaw describes her as handsome. This may imply that she looks after herself, an activity which is considered to be more feminine in nature, since people assume that women are immaculately dressed and take care of themselves. Apparently, her looks really matter to her. Furthermore, she behaves gracefully when she first enters the kitchen of her sister’s house, Mrs Bridgenorth’s, as one expects from a lady, and she greets her sister and Collins very heartily:

**Lesbia.** Good morning, dear big sister.

**Mrs Bridgenorth.** Good morning, dear little sister. [They kiss].

**Lesbia.** Good morning, Collins. How well are you looking! And how young!

(Shaw 2008: 63)

This display of warmth and nice manners elicits that Lesbia is not very much like Barbara or Vivie: Lesbia does not initially appear as a rebellious woman who says whatever she likes without regarding the people in her entourage. She always thinks twice before she utters something, even when she is annoyed. Apparently, Lesbia fully embraces her femininity, and loves the idea of being a lady. Kusovac thinks along the same lines, as he claims that Lesbia does not reject “any symbols of femininity” (2006: 172). Consequently, she does not feel any urge to challenge the ideas on female beauty. This elicits that she as for appearance and behaviour does not fall into the category of the New Woman.

However, she can be considered a New Woman, as she generally seems to reject marriage. In this way, Shaw’s disgust of marriage is reflected: Shaw argued that there was
little difference between marriage and prostitution (Peters 1998: 15). Mrs Bridgenorth’s brother-in-law Boxer, alias the General, comes on stage shortly before Lesbia arrives. He has the air of being unhappy, because he has to “give away brides [his nieces]” (Shaw 2008: 60), but he remains unmarried himself, for which he blames Lesbia. He asked for Lesbia’s hand several times in the past, but she rejected his proposal time and again. When he bumps into Lesbia in Mrs Bridgenorth’s kitchen, he cannot refrain himself from returning to the subject of marriage. When he suddenly says “[f]or the tenth and last time –“ (Shaw 2008: 65), Lesbia can already anticipate what he is going to ask. His obtrusiveness obviously annoys her, as she abruptly interrupts him and says: “On Florence’s [one of Mrs Bridgenorth’s five daughters] wedding morning, two years ago, you said ‘For the ninth and last time’” (Shaw 2008: 65). Furthermore, she establishes that she is not interested in what he has to say. She for example sits “down with The Times in her hand” (Shaw 2008: 65), demonstrating she wants to be left alone. Lesbia also enunciates quite explicitly she is tired of repeating why she is “going to be an old maid” (Shaw 2008: 65), after he argues that remaining single is “not natural” (Shaw 2008: 65). Nevertheless, Boxer seems to be blind to these hints and continues bothering her, so that she would eventually surrender, and agree to marry him.

Eventually, she reiterates why she wants to remain a maid, hoping that Boxer will finally respect her choice. She says: “The one thing I never could stand is a great lout of a man smoking all over my house and going to sleep in his chair after dinner, and untidying everything” (Shaw 2008: 66). Thus, Lesbia dismisses the idea of having to live under the same roof with a man, because men tend to make a mess out of everything, reek of cigarettes, and assume that their wives will clean up the mess they have made. Furthermore, Lesbia would not think of giving up her independence, which she is so proud of. She does not need the company of men, as she is perfectly capable of entertaining herself: she has “plenty of books and music” (Shaw 2008: 66). How fond she is of her independence is also repeated at
the end of the play, after Edith’s and Cecil’s marriage. Lesbia heaves a sigh of relief when she realizes she has resisted the temptation to get married after the toing and froing about marriage and its provisions. She quite explicitly reveals this to Boxer: “To think that after all the dangers of the morning I am still unmarried! still independent! still my own mistress! still a glorious strong-minded old maid of old England!” (Shaw 2008: 138). Nevertheless, she reckons that she could be happier as Boxer’s wife “in a frowsy sort of way” when he again attempts to convince her to marry him, but Lesbia sticks to her guns and says: “I prefer my dignity and my independence” (Shaw 2008: 139). Hence, it appears that Lesbia rejects the role of the woman within the family: she does not want to become the slave of her husband. In this respect, she can be defined as a New Woman: she challenges the prevalent beliefs about marriage and about gender in a wider perspective. Olivera Kusovac thinks along the same lines: he claims that Shaw has portrayed Lesbia as an “emancipated, liberated woman”, who “succeeds in going beyond the socially imposed role of wife and mother, and in making her own choice” (Kusovac 2006: 174).

What Lesbia wants to alter about the prevalent marriage provisions precisely is manifested when all figures try to draw a new marital system after the cancellation of Edith’s and Cecil’s marriage. Everyone has very distinct ideas about how marriage should be arranged, and under which conditions divorce should be possible. However, Lesbia seems to have the most outspoken ideas. Firstly, she is the one who suggests that a marriage contract should be designed which establishes “honorable conditions” (Shaw 2008: 98) for women. She considers it to be her duty as an English lady to advocate these conditions. Moreover, she reveals that she is “willing to enter into an alliance with Boxer” (Shaw 2008: 98), if they succeed in effecting an agreement. Secondly, she claims that marriage should be dissolved when the man starts misbehaving, when Soames, the solicitor whom they have contacted to draw a marriage contract, asks for “[t]he term of years for which it [the contract] is to hold
good” (Shaw 2008: 105). Moreover, in Lesbia’s opinion, a woman should be able to leave her husband just “[b]ecause she wants to” (Shaw 2008: 106). This idea is progressive, and reflects Shaw’s own ideas on divorce: he argued that, in order to maintain marriage, a divorce should be possible for whatever reason “at the request of either party” (Holroyd 1979: 30). Thirdly, Lesbia asserts that “[i]f there are any children, the man must be cleared completely out of the house for two years on each occasion”, as he is then “superfluous, importunate, and ridiculous” (Shaw 2008: 107). The father can go wherever he wants to, but he should leave the mother in peace, so that she can fully focus upon raising the child without a man loafing around the house. She herself desires to become a mother and is willing to dedicate herself to her children, but “not to their father” (Shaw 2000: 67). Because currently, “[t]he law will not allow me [Lesbia] to do that” (Shaw 2008: 67), Lesbia has decided not to become a mother.

However, even though Lesbia can be classified as a New Woman because she wants to amend the prevalent marriage provisions, especially to the women’s advantage, Shaw actually represents his ideal of the New Woman through Lesbia: she is not a dyed-in-the-wool New Woman (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). Firstly, Shaw has portrayed her as a sophisticated, warm and feminine lady rather than a “mannish woman” (Kusovac 2006: 172). Probably, Shaw felt uncomfortable with women who dressed more manly and sober than people were accustomed to in order to challenge the existing beliefs on gender (Powell 1998: 77). Furthermore, it is remarkable that Lesbia, although she outrightly refuses a husband, and consequently does not want to marry, does not have any objections to male company (Kusovac 2006: 173). Her main ground to remain celibate is that she does not want to lose her independence: she does not want to be limited in her comings and goings, and does not want to be her husband’s slave. This actually reflects Shaw’s thoughts: he wanted women to become more independent and encouraged them to emancipate themselves (Shaw cited in Holroyd 1979: 23). This is possible when a woman is willing to repudiate “her womanliness,
her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself” (Shaw cited in Peters 1998: 14). What Shaw thus via Lesbia tries to demonstrate is that a woman is fully capable to support herself.

Nevertheless, she explains that one does not have to ban every man, even though one rejects having a husband. Apparently, she does not repudiate men but rather “the traditional female role of marriage and motherhood” (Kusovac 2006: 172). At the outset of the play, she reveals to Boxer that she has already been in love with men:

Oh, love! Have you no imagination? Do you think I have never been in love with wonderful men? heroes! archangels! princes! sages! even fascinating rascals! and had the strangest adventures with them? Do you know what it is to look at a mere real man after that? a man with his boots in every corner, and the smell of his tobacco in every curtain? (Shaw 2008: 66)

Clearly, she can feel attracted to men, and involved herself with them in the past. This idea is again repeated when all figures participate in designing the marriage contract. During the negotiations about the marriage contract, she argues that “[t]here is no reason why a mother should not have male society” (Shaw 2008: 108). However, on the one hand, because of her outright refusal of marriage, she falls into the category of the New Women, as some of them tend to keep away from men to maintain their independence, and to challenge the current gender-roles (Powell 1998: 77). On the other hand, she does not repudiate men entirely, and even seems to enjoy their company. Hence, she does not resemble the New Women fully. Nevertheless, some New Women involve themselves with men, and deal more freely, mainly sexually, with them than people were accustomed to (Powell 1998: 77). However, it is hard, or even impossible, to imagine that Lesbia’s strange adventures were sexual in nature. When Boxer mentions a human beings’ “natural appetites” (Shaw 2008: 67) during their initial conversation, thus referring to sexuality, Lesbia responds that “an English lady is not the slave
of her appetites” (Shaw 2008: 67). This implies that behaving licentiously, especially when it concerns sexuality, is completely out of the question. Hence, when it comes to Lesbia’s position towards men, she cannot be perceived as a New Woman.

Yet, there are two other reasons why Lesbia cannot be categorized as a New Woman. Firstly, she reveals her passionate desire to have children several times throughout the play, and explicitly expresses her willingness to “devote myself entirely to my children” (Shaw 2008: 67). This contrasts with what the New Women wish for in life: they prefer making a career for themselves rather than bearing and raising the children (Powell 1998: 77). Furthermore, the reason why she loathes the thought of being a married woman is quite trivial in comparison to her progressive opinions about marriage, the role of the woman and motherhood. Besides emphasizing her independence and her wealthy inner life (Kusovac 2006: 175), she argues that she does not want to live under the same roof as a man, because they leave everything untidy. When she explains to Boxer why she wants to be old maid, she also mentions this: “I’m very particular about my belongings, and to have it to myself. I have a very keen sense of beauty and fitness and cleanliness and order” (Shaw 2008: 66). Lesbia thus is almost pathologically obsessed with cleanliness and order (Kusovac 2006: 175). This characteristic is mostly ascribed to housewives who have little to do but running after her children and husband, and clear away their mess (Kusovac 2006: 175). This was actually one of the stereotypes the New Women wanted to defy, that is that a woman is predestined to do the household and look after the children (Powell 1998: 77). Moreover, she persistently repeats that cigarette smoke annoys her (Kusovac 2006: 175), which differentiates her from the New Women, as they try to challenge the prevalent beliefs about female beauty by smoking cigarettes (Powell 1998: 77). She reveals her disgust at smoking to Boxer both at the outset and the end of the play. When Boxer asks her if all the talk about marriage has not shown her the absurdity of not marrying during their last encounter, she says “[n]o: I cant say
it does. And [rising] you have been smoking again” (Shaw 2008: 139). Shaw himself disapproved of smoking women as well, which has already been discussed during the analysis of *Mrs Warren’s Profession*. Thus, the fact that Lesbia condemns smoking as well conveys Shaw’s opinion on smoking, and reinforces the impression that Shaw has depicted his ideal New Woman. Lastly, Lesbia feels the urge to reform solely the accepted norms about marriage, and not any other norms which concern gender and femininity. This restriction seems to reflect Shaw’s opinion about women who try to disrupt “the existing order of things” (Powell 1998: 77): disruption for women is allowed as long as it is confined to the domestic and the sexual (Powell 1998: 78). Thus, the idea that Shaw has created his very own ideal New Woman is confirmed. In this way, rather than by caricaturing the New Woman, Shaw reveals his discomfort with the out and out New Woman.

5.4.3 Edith Bridgenorth

Initially, one pictures Edith as a contented, young lady who is on the verge of marrying. There is no indication therefore that Edith disagrees with marrying Cecil. However, this conception of Edith being a lady who resigns herself to her fate, and will accept whatever marriage holds, alters shortly after Lesbia’s conversation with Boxer. Reginald, Leo’s husband, points out that it is “getting late” (Shaw 2008: 80): the wedding soon starts and Edith is nowhere to be found. The thought that Edith is not ready yet gives rise to alarm, which is why Mrs Bridgenorth asks Lesbia to go look if Edith “got into her veil and orange blossoms yet” (Shaw 2008: 80). When Lesbia returns, she imparts that “Edith is not dressed” (Shaw 2008: 81), and that she is not sure anymore “whether she’s going to be married” (Shaw 2008: 82). Edith has locked herself in her room, and is reading “[s]ome pamphlet that came by the eleven o’clock post” (Shaw 2008: 82). Things seem to get even more out of hand when Reginald and Hotchkiss, Leo’s lover whom she wants to divorce Reginald for, announce that Cecil has locked himself in his room as well while reading a book.
Shortly after these announcements, Cecil enters the tower, and quite desperately addresses the Bishop, Edith’s father. He breaks he protests to marrying Edith, now that he knows, after reading the book, that he is “legally responsible” (Shaw 2008: 88) when Edith libels someone once they are married. Nevertheless, he assures he will deliver on his promise anyhow. The fact that this notion seems to restrain Cecil from marrying Edith establishes that she does not mince her words, especially not when “her blood boils about” her social work: she organizes “shop assistants and sweated work girls” (Shaw 2008: 88). The perception of Edith which the audience now receives is that she advocates the lower-class girls’ cause, and that she says whatever she thinks regardless of her interlocutors when it involves these girls’ rights. However, Cecil had hardly revealed his doubts about marrying Edith, when she enters the room. She has overheard what Cecil said and wants to speak him privately, a plan which gets obstructed by the other members of her family. After Cecil spoke truly, and pointed out to her that “this outspokenness [of Edith] makes my position hard”, she asks Cecil whether he wants her “to flatter and be untruthful” (Shaw 2008: 89). This question actually implies that Edith does not intend to do either of the two. For this reason, Edith can already be perceived as a New Woman, as apparently she wants to alter the lower-class girls’ working conditions, and thus wants to change the way in which society now is organized.

However, Cecil is not the only one who has become more acquainted about the prevalent legal marital provisions, which caused him to doubt about marrying Edith. Edith seems to be affected even more by the pamphlet she read than Cecil by his book: she bases herself upon it to call off the wedding. After she questioned Cecil about his objections to marry her, even though she had already overheard them before she entered the room, she says to Cecil he does not need to worry about her pronouncedness, as she is “not going to be married” (Shaw 2008: 91). She breaks this to him in a dry, unemotional tone. Clearly, she has
control over Cecil, as she herself decides to cancel the wedding, whereas he is still willing to marry her: she only has “to be careful what you say about people” (Shaw 2008: 91).

Furthermore, the cancellation of the wedding seems to have a greater impact on Cecil than on Edith. She proposes to resume work now “there is to be no wedding” (Shaw 2008: 91), and does not display any sadness. She immediately orders her mother to tell Collins to slice the wedding cake into thirty-three pieces for the girls of the clubs of which she is a member. Apparently, Edith is quite peremptory, which has also been included in her description: “Imperious and dogmatic, she takes command of the party at once” (Shaw 2008: 88). This commanding and outspoken nature is also revealed when she addresses Cecil. When he tries to convince her not to abandon the wedding at the last minute, she says: “Sinjon [Cecil]: hold your tongue. You are a chatterbox and a fool” (Shaw 2008: 91). When he admits he still really wants to marry Edith, no matter what the book or pamphlet says, even though he risks losing his money and being incapable to support his mother, Edith offends him by saying that this willingness to marry shows “great weakness of character” (Shaw 2008: 93). This entails her resemblance to the New Woman, as she seems to be able to exercise power over men, uses “bold language” (Gardner cited in Kusovac 2006: 172), and does as she pleases. This can be interpreted as challenging the notions about gender, as normally, men are in control of women.

At this point, Edith expresses why she so suddenly calls off the wedding. She produces her pamphlet, and gives it to her father. This pamphlet centres on a woman who was unable to divorce her husband who “committed a murder, and then attempted to commit suicide” (Shaw 2008: 93). Her father eventually confirms that one cannot separate from her husband just because he did something terrible. Edith responds that she now most certainly refuses “to enter into any such wicked contract” (Shaw 2008: 94). Thus, she is very determined not to marry. Furthermore, one may also have the impression that she would like to alter this law,
which is another indication therefore that she may fall into the category of the New Woman: she wants to amend a societal institution, that is marriage, to the women’s advantage.

This urge to reform the prevalent marriage system is revealed during the discussion about the marriage contract: she expresses what amendments she precisely wants to include into the contract. Edith is the first one to broach the subject of money. She reveals that she wants to earn her own money: “When I’m married I shall have practically no money except what I shall earn” (Shaw 2008: 109). However, Cecil objects, and mentions he is able to support her. Her suggestions also concern him, since she had agreed to marry him on her own terms. She then responds: “[O]f course I shall work when I’m married. I shall keep your [Cecil’s] house” (Shaw 2008: 109). She thus expects Cecil to pay her for doing the household chores, and defends her cause by arguing that a hired housekeeper should be paid as well. In this way, she can save some money and create a fund “belonging solely to” her (Shaw 2008: 109), which was at that time not that self-evident. As husband and wife were considered to be “‘one person’ in the law” (Shanley 1986: 72), all her property, including her earnings, belonged to her husband. Because Edith apparently wants to change this law, she can be perceived as a New Woman. Also her will to work contributes to this impression, as these women also want to earn their own money, and aspire to make a career in one or another business or profession (Powell 1998: 77).

However, even though it is possible to categorize Edith as a New Woman, the reason why she wants to work is quite trivial. She wants to be paid for doing the household when she would marry to Cecil, which is actually part of her duty “as a wife” (Shaw 2008: 109). Hitherto, it would be possible to argue this adds to her image of being a New Woman, as she demonstrates that the work a housewife does should not be taken for granted. However, when one looks more closely into her motivation to work, it appears that she is primarily interested in money rather than in trying to alter the circumstances within marriage for women. She
wants to have her own money, because she does not want to beg to her husband every time she wants something new. Her second proposition to amend the marital system contributes to this perception as well. When Lesbia argues that the children should belong to the mother after the parents have divorced, Edith responds that

 [...] they should be divided between the parents. If Cecil wishes any of the children to be his exclusively, he should pay a certain sum for the risk and trouble of bringing them into the world: say a thousand pounds apiece. The interest on this could go towards the support of the child as long as we live together. But the principal would be my property. In that way, if Cecil took the child away from me, I should at least be paid for what it had cost me. (Shaw 2008: 111)

It seems as if she is talking about some random goods like furniture that need to be divided rather than about living creatures. Furthermore, she thinks that money can compensate for the loss of her children, and that it will enable her to process their loss more easily. Hence, it seems that Edith is more superficial than one previously would have considered. This emphasis on money demonstrates that Edith is accustomed to a high living standard. However, this may also be interpreted as social commentary against the current system. Edith is removing emotions from the arrangement, even though the audience knows emotions are inescapable. Moreover, discussing money in connection with marriage was not considered polite, and certainly not by women. Men took care of the financial arrangements of a marriage, and women were kept ignorant of them, and had no rights to their own income in any case “[u]ntil the passage of the Married Women’s Property Act (1870 – 1908)” (Norton Anthology 2006: 990).

Furthermore, the way in which Shaw describes her establishes that she actually resembles her mother, in that she behaves like a perfect gentlewoman, and attaches great
importance to the same things as her mother does, even though she seems to have pronounced opinions on marriage, which are repugnant to her mother:

    Edith, in dressing-jacket and petticoat, comes in through the tower, swiftly and determinedly, pamphlet in hand, principles up in arms, more of a bishop than her father, yet as much a gentlewoman as her mother. She is the typical spoilt child of a clerical household: [...] that is, all her childish affectations of conscientious scruple and religious impulse have been applauded and deferred to until she has become an ethical snob of the first water. Her father’s sense of humor and her mother’s placid balance have done something to save her humanity; but her impetuous temper and energetic will, unrestrained by any touch of humor or scepticism, carry everything before them. (Shaw 2008: 88)

Apparently, Edith is not driven by principles, but rather by mere affectation (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 178). Her social work and the stances that she took before are artificial rather than sincere. Shaw mocks her and criticises her “for her immaturity and frivolity” (Kusovac 2006: 178), even though initially he portrays her as an independent, strong-minded feminist. Hence, she appears to be an inexperienced, spoilt girl, who does not know anything about the world, except the things she learned from her parents. In sum, instead of creating his ideal New Woman, as Shaw did via Lesbia (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 172), he again applies humour to demonstrate his mixed feelings towards the New Woman. Nevertheless, he proceeds in a slightly different way than in *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) and *Major Barbara* (1905): Edith does not burst into tears, and is not deprived from her power in the end. She is just not that credible anymore with regard to the strong views she holds.

5.4.4 Mrs George

Mrs George is first introduced to the audience by Collins, her brother-in-law, during his initial talk with Mrs Bridgenorth. He describes Mrs George as “a very fine figure of a woman”, but
also as a “susceptible” and “changeable” one (Shaw 2008: 62), who has abandoned her husband repeatedly in the past. Every time that she fell in love with one or another man, she felt the urge to chase him, and did not hesitate to leave “her home and her husband without with-your-leave or by-your-leave” (Shaw 2008: 62). Nonetheless, even though she mostly acts on impulse, she always informed her husband about her departure, even when they have visitors:

She [Mrs George] didn’t [sic] seem to have any control over herself when she fell in love. She would mope for a couple of days, crying about nothing; and then she would up and say -- no matter who was there to hear her – ‘I must go to him, George’; [...]. (Shaw 2008: 62)

As it turns out, she says whatever she wants, without taking the people in her entourage into account. When Mrs Brigdenorth amazedly asks whether Mr George takes her back every time again, Collins responds:

Well, what could he do, maam [sic]? Three times out of four the men would bring her back the same evening and no harm done. Other times theyd [sic] run away from her. What could any man with a heart do but comfort her when she came back crying at the way they dodged her when she threw herself at their heads, pretending they was too noble to accept the sacrifice she was making. (Shaw 2008: 62)

It appears that Mrs George never voluntarily returned to her husband, which makes it even more shocking that Mr George did not threw her out. If she would return on her own initiative, then it would be possible to understand why Mr George tolerated that she repeatedly abandoned him: she then presumably regretted what she had done. At the same time, Mrs George’s unusual behaviour elicits that she can be regarded as a joke: she not only appears to be quite impetuous, she also gets rejected again and again. What also causes the
audience to raise a laugh is that Collins considers it to be evident that Mr George takes her back every time again. He “defends her unfaithfulness” (Sharp 1959: 108), and seems to admire her for her courage and her intrepidity: she does what she at that moment thinks will suit her best, regardless of other people’s feelings, and without considering the consequences. Presumably, the audience has to laugh at this point because of Shaw’s typical paradox: her “unconventional behavior is defended in such a way as to make it more acceptable than conventional behavior” (Sharp 1959: 108).

Anyhow, Mrs George has to act as a mediator during the negotiations about the marriage contract, since there are fewer women than men, which Collins considers to be unfair. He proposes to make an appeal to Mrs George, who he always consults “on delicate points like this [the drafting of the contract]” (Shaw 2008: 101). He believes that Mrs George can be useful, because “the variety of experience [with men] made her wonderful interesting”, and because coming to know “a lot about men of all sorts and ages [...] gave her a lot of sense” (Shaw 2008: 62 – 63). This argument actually belongs to Collins’ defense of Mrs George’s infidelity, and contributes to the paradox Shaw created. What is also remarkable is that Mrs Bridgenorth and the other family members always thought Collins invented Mrs George, or that he “stole her out of some book” (Shaw 2008: 64). They regarded her as some kind of mythical figure that Collins made up, because of her unconventional behaviour. When they find out that she “is a real person”, they are all “startled” (Shaw 2000: 101). However, they agree to consult Mrs George, and eventually Boxer will go and get her from the church.

While the rest of the company is already drafting the contract, or at least attempts to, Mrs George suddenly enters. Shaw has now taken the opportunity to describe her in detail, so that we now can fully visualize Mrs George, and no longer have to guess at her appearance. What is emphasized is that she is a very confident, pride, vital and indomitable woman between 40 and 50 who dares and knows how to wear colours. Furthermore, although she was
probably beautiful when she was young, this beauty has vanished. Nevertheless, when she speaks, “an alert sense of fun rejuvenates her in a moment”, which makes her company “irresistible” (Shaw 2008: 114). Hence, one may infer that Mrs George has matured over the years, and now stands firm and knows what she wants from life. What adds to the impression of her being a strong woman is that she is able to exercise power over men, especially over Hotchkiss. He encountered her in the past in London when he wanted to complain about the coals’ quality, which he had ordered from her husband. Apparently, she immediately evoked a “sensation of unrest, of emotion, of unsatisfied need” (Shaw 2008: 117) in him, followed by a period of pure madness. She appears to be a kind of femme fatale who has the capacity to drive him crazy. To prevent that she again casts a strange, unexplainable spell on him, he wants to flee.

Nevertheless, Hotchkiss’ plan to leave before she sees him falls through: Mrs George returns more rapidly than expected, after she talked to the women. They engage in conversation, and it turns out that he cannot resist her, and is willing to do whatever she asks. Hotchkiss immediately expresses his desire to meet her occasionally. However, before she allows him this, he will first have to manage to amuse her husband that same afternoon. Secondly, he will have to break off relations with Leo, of whom she does not think highly. Obviously, Mrs George disapproves of his plan to marry her, and wants to hinder it in this way. When he struggles and mentions that he cannot abandon Leo, because she took care of him when he was homeless, she mildly manipulates him by saying that they “shant [sic] meet again” (Shaw 2008: 121). Eventually, when she acknowledges he will not surrender that easily, she says: “Those are my orders, Sinjon. I cant [sic] have you marry another woman until George is tired of you” (Shaw 2008: 122). Evidently, she has him in her power.

However, Hotchkiss attempts to make her do what he wants once through physical power. When Mrs George denies him a kiss, after he saw Boxer kissing her hand, he catches
“her wrists dexterously”, after he already snatched her “into his arms” and kissed her (Shaw 2008: 125). However, she still has power over him mentally. After his physical assault, Mrs George forbids Hotchkiss to enter her house, and thus hinders that Hotchkiss can meet her husband. She thus indicates that she does not want to meet Hotchkiss anymore. Even when he threatens “to spoil your marriage” (Shaw 2008: 127), she does not surrender: she would sooner face unhappiness than be his slave. This answer elicits that he falls down on his knees and begs her to let him “make George’s acquaintance” (Shaw 2008: 128). Hence, he now appears as weak and desperate. Thus, she still pulls the strings. This is once more confirmed at the very end of the play. Collins asks Hotchkiss whether he stays to join breakfast after Edith and Cecil got married anyway, to which Hotchkiss responds that Collins should ask “SHE WHO MUST BE OBEYED” (Shaw 2008: 141).

However, one can argue that Shaw via Mrs George ridicules another kind of assertive woman. At the outset of the play, it emerges that Mrs George was quite impulsive when she was younger: she did not “seem to have any control over herself” (Shaw 2008: 62) when she was in love. She moped and cried for nothing until she eventually very impetuously decided to go after the man she fancied, which has already been explained. Eventually, she took her husband’s advice: “George [her husband] told her again and again that if she’d only stay at home and hold off a bit theyd [sic] be at her feet all day long” (Shaw 2008: 62). Consequently, she grew out of this habit, and became sensible. However, during her conversation with Hotchkiss, she almost loses her senses again, because he does not stop troubling her. She suddenly seizes the poker, and rushes up to Hotchkiss with the intention to hit him. Luckily, the Bishop enters just in time, so that nothing awful happens. Subsequently, she “throws down the poker; collapses into the nearest chair; and bursts into tears” (Shaw 2008: 128). This moment of weakness elicits that she resembles her younger, impulsive self
again. In this way, Shaw has weakened her powerful status. Nevertheless, even though she soon recovers herself, the damage is done.

Furthermore, it appears that Mrs George is the woman who anonymously writes letters to the Bishop. Before Mrs George has emerged on stage, the Bishop informs Mrs Bridgenorth that he yet again has received a letter “from the mysterious lady who cant [sic] spell” (Shaw 2008: 80). Apparently, she wrote them under a pseudonym, that is Incognita Appassionata. These letters, which seem to amuse and fascinate both the Bishop and his wife, say that she wants to meet the Bishop in heaven, but not on earth: she only wants to meet him “when she has risen above all her everyday vulgarities of earthly love” (Shaw 2008: 81). Although she does not literally run after the men she fell in love with anymore, it appears that she still cannot restrain herself from pursuing the one she fancies, in this case, by the means of letters. One may already have anticipated that Mrs George was Incognita. When Collins proposed to contact her to intervene in the negotiations about the marriage contract, he reveals that “she has forbidden me to talk about you [the Bishop], or to let her meet you” (Shaw 2008: 102). Eventually, after her breakdown she says to the Bishop that she sometimes felt the urge to kill him and to subsequently commit suicide “[s]o that we [Mrs George and the Bishop] might keep our assignation in Heaven” (Shaw 2008: 129). The Bishop immediately grasps that she is Incognita. That she has a crush on him may also be derived from the fact that she points out to him that he “should never have married” (Shaw 2008: 131). Hence, it appears that she is as impulsive and impressionable as she was in the past. Thus, the audience has to adjust their perception of Mrs George as a powerful, experienced woman. In the end, she rather appears as a laughable figure again, who has not changed a bit.
6. Results

Apparently, Shaw’s ambiguity towards the New Woman, or any other kind of assertive woman, can be perceived in the characterization of the female protagonists of all three plays. Nevertheless, all female figures, except Mrs George who can be defined as an emphatic woman, share some characteristics with these New Women, and are portrayed as independent, strong women who hold their ground and know what they want from life. In *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893), Mrs Warren is depicted as an unmarried, successful businesswoman, who has worked for her own wealth, and who has the ability to exercise power over men. She also does not correspond to the stereotypical sexual image the British had of a fallen woman (Marker 1998: 117), given that Shaw opposed to idealizing women (Holroyd 1979: 20). Her daughter, Vivie, however, seems to have even more in common with the New Woman than her mother. She dresses in a masculine way, has a strong handshake, loves to smoke and seems to be insensitive to romance and beauty. Moreover, she worked hard at university in order to become a first-rate businesswoman: she aspires to make a career, and earn her own money rather than being financially dependent upon a man.

Also in *Major Barbara* (1905), it is possible to initially perceive both Lady Britomart and Barbara as New Women. Lady Britomart is a dominant, commanding, rebellious, independent and aristocratic woman, who does not mince her words, and advocates free speech (Crompton 1971: 106). Furthermore, even though she is dressed according to the upper-class conventions, she is described as being “careless of her dress” (Shaw 2000: 51). Apparently, she is not that particular about the aristocratic customs, and even wants to reform some of these traditions, although she is limited by her class (Crompton 1971: 106). As far as Barbara is concerned, it seems she has inherited Lady Britomart’s peremptory nature: she has a way with ordering people herself (Crompton 1971: 108). Furthermore, Barbara is not that fashionably dressed initially, as she is wearing her Salvation Army uniform. Contrary to her
mother, Barbara does not take the slightest notion of upper-class conventions, and would not allow to be restrained by them (Crompton 1971: 108). As Barbara has been appointed as a Major, it appears she has managed to make a career in the Salvation Army, even though she merely followed her vocation. She is really committed to the Salvation Army, even going as far as subtly manipulating people, so that they would agree to be converted.

Lastly, in *Getting Married* (1908), it is possible to trace two New Women, and one other kind of domineering woman. Lesbia Grantham appears as a perfect English lady. Hence, as for appearance and behaviour, she cannot be considered as a New Woman. Nevertheless, she has very outspoken ideas about marriage and the raising of children, which she wants to include in the new marriage contract. She refuses marriage fully, which she justifies by asserting that she does not want to become a slave to her husband, and wants to maintain her independence. Edith Bridgenorth also wants to introduce improvements to the prevalent marriage provisions, which is why she participates in the negotiations about the new marriage contract. She was on the verge of marrying Cecil Sykes, but cancelled the wedding after reading a pamphlet saying that a woman cannot leave her husband when he does something terrible. Moreover, Edith is very profound, and seems to be willing to work for her own money. Mrs George, then, cannot be defined as a New Woman. Nevertheless, she can be perceived as an assertive, confident and outspoken woman, who is able to exercise power over men. Moreover, she does not take the slightest notion of tradition, and is rather free in her dealings with men, although she is married. She also comes across as an experienced woman who knows something of the world, although she was quite impulsive when she was younger.

However, even though all these female protagonists can be categorized as New Women at first, and Mrs George as an assertive women, the audience has to adjust their ideas about these women in the end. In *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) and in *Major Barbara*
(1905), Shaw ridicules his female figures in a similar way to establish his equivocation towards these women. In the first play, Mrs Warren suddenly aspires to be a good mother, although she neglected Vivie for the greater part of her life. This attempt to mother Vivie actually causes her to burst into tears. Furthermore, she is as conventional as can be: she accepts capitalist morality, and attaches great importance to social respectability (Carpenter 1969: 55). She wants Vivie to demonstrate the English standards, and seems to ignore what Vivie herself wants to achieve in life. Vivie then appears to be a very inexperienced girl (Powell 1998: 81), although she pretends to know a lot about life in general, and about her mother’s. Eventually, she also bursts out crying, and also seems to accept capitalist morality (Carpenter 1969: 58). In this respect, she resembles her mother, who she initially despised so much. Moreover, her attitude towards men seems to be ambiguous and undecided, for which Shaw ridicules her here: she initially seems to repudiate men and romance, but apparently, she is involved with Frank.

In *Major Barbara* (1905), Shaw proceeds in quite the same way. At the end of the play, both Lady Britomart and Barbara have been reduced to tears through Undershaft. Furthermore, Undershaft deprives them from their power on the domain they formerly ruled (Bertolini 1991: 71). Lady Britomart has no more control over her children in her own house in Act I. As far as Barbara is concerned, no one seems to care for her opinion anymore in the Salvation Army in Act II, which contrasts with her previous position. She even abandons her faith through this whole incident with Undershaft. Moreover, Lady Britomart is as conventional as can be (Crompton 1971: 106): she sets great store by money and marriage, and wants her children to behave according to the upper-class traditions. Also Barbara seems to be more conventional after she has lost her faith: she is dressed in an “ordinary fashionable dress” (Shaw 2000: 114). Furthermore, given that she is engaged to Cusins, she also seems to believe in marriage. As she does not break off the engagement after Cusins agreed to take
over the management of the munitions business, she now accepts Undershaft’s money, which she previously refused (Bertolini 1991: 75). Moreover, Shaw mocks Barbara for her being inexperienced about the Salvation Army, as she does not recognize that some people only want to take advantage of the organisation. Eventually, what also adds to the impression that Shaw ridicules her is that she “regresses to childlike behavior” (Bertolini 1991: 63), and needs her mother to make decisions, although formerly she decided everything on her own.

Apparently, Shaw reveals his mixed feelings towards the New Woman by means of humour in these plays. He ridicules the female protagonists because of their masculine air and their resemblance to these rebellious New Women, and transforms them into sentimental, powerless and conventional women towards the end of the play. By reducing them to tears every time again, Shaw ascribes a typically feminine characteristic to them, as sentimentality is generally considered to be something feminine. By doing so, he contrasts them with the New Women, as they tried to defy the common beliefs about femininity (Powell 1998: 77). All this mockery may reflect Shaw’s disapproval of these women’s urge to redefine the prevalent gender-roles. In this way, Shaw took part in the tendency amongst male playwrights to caricature progressive women on stage as a way to react to this phenomenon (Powell 1998: 77). Although he wanted women to be more independent in different areas (Shaw cited in Holroyd 1979: 23), he opposed the fact that they wanted to liberate themselves from the restrictions society imposed on them (Powell 1998: 77).

However, Shaw applies another method to reveal his ambiguous feelings towards the New Woman in Getting Married (1908). Firstly, via Lesbia, he establishes his ideal New Woman (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 172). With regard to her attitude towards men, her desire for children, and the importance she attaches to her femininity, it is hard to perceive her as a New Woman. In this way, he demonstrates which facets of the New Woman he disapproves of. Nevertheless, because Lesbia wants to amend the prevalent marriage
provisions, and refuses to marry herself, she can be categorized as one. Moreover, Shaw reflects his opinion on marriage through Lesbia. He himself was against marriage as well, and argued that there was little difference between marriage and prostitution (Peters 1998: 15). What also adds to the impression that Shaw has created his ideal New Woman is that Lesbia’s power and strength are confined to the domestic and the sexual: she only wants to change something about the marriage laws. This represents Shaw’s belief that a woman’s disturbing should have no impact outside of the household (Powell 1998: 78). Furthermore, her reason why she wants to remain an old maid is quite trivial, and entails her resemblance to a stereotypical housewife (Kusovac 2006: 175).

Nevertheless, although he does not ridicule Lesbia, he once again employs the method of caricature on Edith and Mrs George, although not in the exact same way as he did in Mrs Warren’s Profession (1893) and Major Barbara (1905). When one reconsiders the character of Edith, it is possible to argue that she is actually a spoilt young lady whose strong opinions on for example marriage, and whose efforts to ameliorate the working circumstances for the lower-class girls are mere pretence (Davis cited in Kusovac 2006: 177 – 178). The only things she is really interested in is money and a comfortable life. Shaw thus ridicules her because of her superficiality and her affectation. The character of Mrs George, although not a New Woman, is also subject to caricature. When she was young, she was a quite impulsive woman, who cried a lot, mostly about nothing. Furthermore, she quite impetuously chased every men who appealed to her, although she was married. This behaviour may be regarded as unconventional, which actually elicits that she appears as a joke, also because she is rejected every time again. Nevertheless, over the years, she became a sensible lady who gave up this habit on the advice of her husband. This is also the impression one has when she first appears on stage. However, at the end of the play, it emerges that, although the audience has the impression that she is now more mature, she still resembles her younger, impulsive self: she
goes out of her mind, and breaks down into tears at the end of her conversation with Hotchkiss. Furthermore, she still pursues the men that she fancies, even though she no longer literally runs after them. In this way, Shaw ridicules her, because she has not yet outgrown her former habits, although she pretends that she has. Hence, Shaw reveals his equivocation towards the New Women or a more assertive kind of woman in another way: he does not diminish the women’s power, and does not turn them into mere sentimental and conventional creatures, but establishes that Edith is only a spoilt girl, and that Mrs George is still her impetuous self.
7. **Implications**

During the analyses of the three plays, it has become clear that Shaw is quite ambiguous in his approach towards the New Woman, or even towards more emphatic women who cannot be defined as New Women, even though he has been considered and portrayed as an ardent champion for women’s rights and gender equality throughout the years. People regarded Shaw as the artist whose female protagonists are the most powerful and independent “on the English stage since Shakespeare” (Peters 1998: 17), which thus reflect Shaw’s strong feminism. Hence, his feminist sympathies may be traced in his drama (Peters 1998: 14). Even his novels, which were not that successful, and are not that widely known as his plays, document his early recognition of the women who support the women’s struggle for more say and power in society (Peters 1998: 9). However, it would be interesting to investigate whether he is as obscure as he was in his approach towards the rebellious New Women about other sections of society about which he had strong opinions, and which he would like to alter and modify according to his beliefs and opinions.

Shaw is not only known for advocating more rights for women, but he is also noted for his socialist ideas and his membership to the Fabian Society. He laboured for the socialist cause for almost sixty-five years. He initially buried himself in Karl Marx’ *Das Kapital*, and subsequently familiarized the common people with the ideas that this work contains by means of speeches he delivered in public places (Peters 1998: 8). However, shortly after he became obsessed with Marx, he turned to the Fabian Society in May, 1884 after reading the pamphlet *Why are the Many Poor*, by which he was intrigued (Peters 1998: 8). Hence, it appears that he swops theories on how to improve society quite easily. In 1888, he developed some new ideas about how society should evolve and develop, and explained his thoughts in two long speeches. The first one stresses the need to eliminate the illusory beliefs about capitalism in order to be able to free “the collective will of the exploited masses” (Carpenter 1969: 30), the
second makes predictions about “the kind of evolution that the unobstructed will should bring about” (Carpenter 1969: 30). Apparently, Shaw’s major concern was to destroy the “impeding economic and sociological ideals” (Carpenter 1969: 24) that nearly everyone in this capitalist society accepted, even the poorer lower classes who were harmed by them (Carpenter 1969: 33). Charles Carpenter elaborates on how Shaw proceeded in his volumes of plays *Plays Unpleasant* (1898) and *Plays Pleasant* (1898) to help people change their ideas about the current society and convince them of his concept of the perfect world. But was he actually an out-and-out socialist, or did he just advocate what he approved of, or what suited him best, just like with the issue of the New Women? Would it be possible that Shaw himself sometimes questioned and doubted the things he championed for? Furthermore, it is not unthinkable either that Shaw developed other ideas about society and capitalism in the course of his life, which may contradict his previous notions on these issues. It would be interesting to investigate how his socialist sympathies and his opinion on capitalism developed throughout his life, and how this is reflected in his plays and essays. Obviously, recording what historical events had an impact on these shift in thought would be useful. In this way, it would be possible to create a comparative study which includes the oeuvre from one and the same author, but which focuses on other eras in the twentieth century.

Secondly, his explicit ideas about the rottenness of the world entail the audience’s and critics’ uneasiness with the content of his plays. Carpenter argues that people were totally unprepared to respond to Shaw’s strong plays, which contain progressive stances and beliefs (Carpenter 1969: 74). *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1893) for example, which was considered to be immoral by its early critics, was only performed after Shaw made name in the theatre world with his *Plays Pleasant* (1898), which were more popular and accessible than his *Plays Unpleasant* (Marker 1998: 116). Moreover, the censor refused to supply the required license, which elicits that performing the play publicly was not allowed until 1925 (Marker 1998:
In response to this, Shaw wrote his *Author’s Apology* (1902) to explain what he wanted to achieve with the play and why, in his opinion, people regarded it this way: the characters do not behave conform the romantic stage logic, but rather conduct like real human beings (Marker 1998: 116). But how did this negative criticism and the fact that most of his plays were not that successful affect Shaw? Did it influence the way in which he operated in his later plays? His play *You Never Can Tell* (1897), for example, was written with the eye on people’s expectations from theatre at that time: he had “designed it as a fashionable West End comedy” (Carpenter 1969: 124). In what way then does it differ from the plays Shaw has written regardless of the laughs and popularities of the audience? Is it possible to argue that he has constructed other plays as well to find more recognition and to see his plays performed in more popular theatres?

Apparently, even though Shaw is an author who has been thoroughly and widely studied ever since his career was launched, there are still some voids in the research on his oeuvre. I have only listed and suggested a couple of subjects which are unexplored yet or are only briefly addressed, but obviously, there are a lot of other issues which could have been included in this chapter. Hence, being innovative and creative when it comes to studying Shaw is still possible.
8. Works cited


