



Pygmalion: Shaw's Psychic Flight from Rosmersholm

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Abstract:

This intertextual, psychoanalytic study shows that, on the basis of deep-structural similarities between Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and Shaw's *Pygmalion*, *Pygmalion* appears to be an unconscious rewriting of *Rosmersholm*, with Shaw turning Ibsen's tragedy of repression into his own comedy of repression. Ibsen's play, which shows the failure of repression/sublimation to contain erotic impulses and oedipal guilt, represented a psychic threat to Shaw, which Shaw countered by reversing the logic and outcome of *Rosmersholm*. In *Pygmalion*, Shaw follows Ibsen in showing two protagonists living together chastely and pursuing higher purposes despite strongly repressed erotic feelings. But he modifies the nature of the sublimations, repressions, and guilt feelings enough so that they can be maintained in a comic compromise, instead of leading to a tragic failure of repression as in *Rosmersholm*. Both plays thematize and re-enact the process of repression among the characters, and Shaw's play serves as an attempt to repress Ibsen's.

Keywords: Henrik Ibsen; psychoanalytic approach; repression in literature; sublimation in literature; guilt in literature; intertextual

To cite as:

Stringfellow, Frank, 2020, "*Pygmalion: Shaw's Psychic Flight from Rosmersholm*," *PsyArt*, pp. 1-50.

A young woman of low birth and straitened circumstances insinuates herself into the home of a sexually reticent man of the upper-class elite. Her presence excites in him strong erotic feelings of which he remains consciously unaware. The woman herself falls in love romantically and erotically with the man, but molds herself to fit the man's nonsexual view of their relationship and in effect becomes a kind of household companion. In exchange for conforming to this role, she also achieves an elevation beyond anything she could have imagined before. Naturally, this living arrangement raises suspicions in outsiders and even in the faithful housekeeper. But the man's buttoned-up repression, his loyalty to a woman from the past, the homoerotic attachment to his male friend, and his dedication to work—all of this, along with the woman's complicity, seems to preclude any sexual relationship. Nonetheless, the platonic stasis is eventually disturbed by an outburst of repressed passion, and at that point, the couple must either find their way to a new domestic equilibrium or return to the old one. The woman, believing that neither alternative is possible, decides to leave the house, taking with her only her meager possessions and ignoring the man's offer of continued support.

This bare-bones description summarizes much of the action of Bernard Shaw's comedy *Pygmalion* (1916). It also covers the back-story and the general plot development of Henrik Ibsen's 1876 drama *Rosmersholm*, stopping short of the tragic turn at the end, the double suicide of the lovers.

What are we to make of this overlap? We know that Ibsen would have been on Shaw's mind when he was writing *Pygmalion*—a draft of which was finished by June, 1912—for he had recently been working on revisions for the second edition of his 1891 volume *The Quintessence*

of *Ibsenism*.¹ We also know that, from the time of Shaw's first acquaintance with Ibsen's work, *Rosmersholm* was one of the plays that most imposed itself on him. It was Shaw who pushed for the first English production of the play, in 1891, and persuaded Florence Farr to take the role of Rebekka; Farr had approached him with plans to put on *The Lady from the Sea*, but he "delivered to her so powerful a discourse on *Rosmersholm* that she presently told me that she was resolved to create Rebecca or die" (Shaw's letter of 6 January 1891 to Janet Achurch; quoted. in Holroyd 1988-1992, 1:252). As Templeton notes, it was while working with the actors on this production that Shaw wrote his account of *Rosmersholm* for the *Quintessence*, an account Templeton calls "the first detailed psychological analysis of Ibsen's most psychologically complex play" (2018, 120, 118). Shaw's undiminished, perhaps even heightened, enthusiasm for the play appeared again when he reviewed the 1895 production brought to London by Aurélien Lugné-Poë's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre: "the first act of *Rosmersholm* had hardly begun on Monday night, when I recognized, with something like excitement, the true atmosphere of this most enthralling of all Ibsen's works rising like an enchanted mist for the first time on an English stage" (Shaw 1932, 1:72). On the other hand, ambivalent feelings that lay behind all of this fascination with *Rosmersholm* also come across, when Shaw, referring to post-rehearsal jitters about the 1891 production, acknowledges that "at the last moment I was terrified myself at having thrust Florence on such an enterprise" (Shaw 1965, 287; letter of 30 March 1891 to Charles

¹ A helpful chronology is given by Harold F. Brooks (1960). Brooks notes that Shaw read *Pygmalion* to Stella Campbell and others in June, 1912, and that on 31 January 1913, Shaw sent proofs of the new edition of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* to Campbell, although a year and a half earlier, in a letter of 6 July 1911, Shaw had already mentioned having written a new preface for the work. The preface for the published 1913 *Quintessence* bears the date 1912-13.

Charrington). From a psychoanalytic point of view, the unconscious implication is that Shaw is “terrified” at having thrust *himself* into the enterprise of *Rosmersholm*—the emphatic doubling of “I” and “myself” suggesting that Florence is his displaced, metonymic stand-in.

We have no statements from Shaw linking any play of Ibsen’s with *Pygmalion*. However, given the parallels noted above and the strong, probably reawakened, impact that *Rosmersholm* had on Shaw, it is not out of the question that he was purposefully taking up *Rosmersholm* yet again when he set to writing *Pygmalion*—that he was knowingly engaged in a rewriting, turning Ibsen’s tragedy of repression into his own comedy of repression. Certainly, he was not averse to taking the issues raised by an Ibsen play and giving them a comic spin, a change he had explicitly worked on *A Doll House* in his early play *The Philanderer*, written in 1893, almost twenty years before *Pygmalion*. And of course Shaw could be tempted to recast a tragic story by superimposing a new tone and even a new, comic ending, as we see in his great *Saint Joan*.

Still, the fact that the striking repetition between the two plays appears primarily at the level of deep structure and is well hidden by glaring “surface” differences in tone, style, plotment, and genre suggests that the rewriting was likely a disguised one—disguised, that is, to the author, just as Freud says the threatening, latent meaning of the dream is disguised to the dreamer. *Rosmersholm* would then represent, as it were, the unconscious knowledge, fear, or desire which *Pygmalion* attempts to repress even as, in the very act of rewriting, Shaw reawakens these powerfully attractive and fearful emotions. The English word “repress” implies a slightly different metaphor from Freud’s original “verdrängen.” In line with the meaning of the Latin prefix *re-*, the verb “repress” tends to suggest the act of holding something back or in check; in a psychological context, that would mean pushing it back into the unconscious or

keeping it there. “Verdrängen,” on the other hand, suggests driving something out or away, and can be used of one thing driving something else out, with the connotation of replacement (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*). In his key article on repression, Freud does not explicitly discuss the metaphor behind the word “verdrängen,” but he does actualize the metaphor when he says that the process of repression usually involves what he calls a “substitutive formation” (Ersatzbildung)—a new formation that replaces the thing being repressed, as a way of enabling and solidifying the repression (Freud 1915b, 154; 1946, 256). Especially if we bring in the connotations of the German “verdrängen” and Freud’s idea of the “substitutive formation,” we can then see the way in which *Pygmalion* functions as the repression of *Rosmersholm*. The *Rosmersholm-Pygmalion* connection shows us, in fact, a particular kind of intertextuality that psychoanalytic interpretation can bring out, one text representing, so to speak, the unconscious of a later text, and the later text trying to repress the earlier one by driving it out and replacing it. Indeed, a comparison of the two plays can also show us, if we look at what was replaced, where Shaw found the Ibsen play deeply troubling and what alternate fantasy—what substitutive formation—he needed to create in order to drive out the threatening fantasy embodied in *Rosmersholm*. Ibsen’s play must have represented a great psychological threat to Shaw, one that he ultimately countered, whether consciously or (more likely) unconsciously, when he was able to write *Pygmalion*.

It is worth emphasizing that this hypothesis does not originate in biography; it originates in the literary-critical finding that the two plays show deep, and apparently disguised, affinities. The task then becomes to construct a theory of Shaw’s motivations that could account for—and illuminate—these affinities, and that would be commensurate with the depth, pervasiveness, and unconsciousness that seem to characterize them. Psychoanalysis, as a theory of the unconscious,

is the indispensable tool. Granted, a psychic reconstruction like this can only be speculative. In this regard, its status remains in the same interrogative mode that Adam Phillips describes so pointedly, and so sympathetically, in his book on Freud. To Phillips, psychoanalysis cannot answer, but can only leave open, the question of how, in an apparent contradiction in terms, a psychoanalyst could *know* what's in the unconscious, or the question, implicit right from the beginning of psychoanalysis, of "how unconscious the unconscious would be allowed to be" (2014, 127). But the literary critic is perhaps in a less compromised, if more ambiguous, position than either the psychoanalyst with her patient or the (psycho)biographer with his subject. For, in the present case, in attempting to show the psychic connections between *Rosmersholm* and *Pygmalion*, the knowledge we are seeking concerns the two literary works in the first place, and only secondarily the psychic conditions in Shaw's unconscious that must be hypothesized to explain the connections. Shaw is the locus because he is both the reader and the rewriter of *Rosmersholm*, and the results of this investigation can give us a particular way of looking at *Pygmalion* as the product of this psychically charged rewriting, but Shaw's rewriting may also bring out particular psychic features of *Rosmersholm* itself, ones that Shaw was especially alert to and, falling under Ibsen's sway, needed to defend himself against.

The Ibsen-Shaw connection has, of course, been looked at fruitfully by many different critics, most recently including Joan Templeton (2018), who in a finding relevant to the present essay rehabilitates Shaw as a perceptive reader of Ibsen. Only two critics, however, have focused on major connections between *Pygmalion* and Ibsen's plays. The first treatment of *Pygmalion* to focus on this relation is Harold F. Brooks's "*Pygmalion* and *When We Dead Awaken*" (1960). Brooks sees the Ibsen play as a "source" for *Pygmalion*. In the latter, Higgins uses his art to

transfigure Eliza, but succeeds only because of her cooperation as “a living, independent woman” who feels that she is part of a “human relationship.” When, after the ball, Higgins denies the existence of this relationship, he also “denies her humanity.” In the story of Rubek and Irena in *When We Dead Awaken*, Brooks says, “the like denial of relationship, after a masterpiece of the hero’s art had depended on the woman bringing her whole personality into the co-operation (except that, like Higgins and Eliza, they are not to be lovers), is the root of the tragedy in Ibsen’s play” (469).

Errol Durbach (2002) also looks at the connection between *When We Dead Awaken* and *Pygmalion*, explicitly adding *Rosmersholm* (and *John Gabriel Borkman*) into the mix; however, he ends by turning Brooks’s argument on its head. Durbach does see, in Rubek, Rosmer, and Borkman, “the denial of Venus, the flight from sexuality, the sacrifice of human realities to ascetic ideals” (531)—all traits that one could easily argue characterize Henry Higgins as well. But Durbach does not emphasize this negative connection between Higgins and the Ibsen protagonists; instead, he sees Higgins as having much in common with “the spirit of positive Ibsenism” (532), a spirit that Durbach finds represented by Johannes Rosmer:

Higgins-as-Pygmalion is not only an artist and teacher but an idealist of the political life, a reformer of the moral life, and a socialist of the soul. His idealism, indeed, has much in common with those moral-political aspirations of Ibsen’s heroes—of Rosmer, for example, whose life’s quest it is to free society from its spiritual limitations (534)

Durbach acknowledges, of course, that Rosmer “can effect his revolution only by destroying all joy in Rebekka” and demanding her suicide (534). Durbach could hardly do otherwise, but by making a mere concession out of something that ought to be the main point, he calls into

question his view of *Rosmersholm* and his understanding of the connection between *Rosmersholm* and *Pygmalion*.

To complete his argument about positive Ibsenism in *Pygmalion*, Durbach turns from Higgins to Eliza. The prototype for Eliza, he argues, is Nora from *A Doll House*: “Eliza, like Nora, discovers ... a *divine fire* which turns dead form into living flesh by defining herself in the face of a stronger and potentially destructive personality” (537). Thus, *Pygmalion* is “a genuinely Ibsenist play in the very best sense of the word” (536)—because it goes back to the spirit of *A Doll House*.

In response to Durbach, I would argue that political, social, and even moral ideals are not the real issue in *Rosmersholm*. They are a cover. Though we don’t know where Rosmer’s idealistic goals came from, the chronology that emerges in the play suggests that Rebekka implanted them in Rosmer at the same time that she started him down the road to atheism. And even though Rebekka herself seems to take the ideals seriously and to assume that she will be a helpmate—and beneficiary—in Rosmer’s efforts to realize them, it is hard not to think of Dr. Relling from *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen’s immediately preceding play, who tries to help his patients by “fostering the life-illusion [livslögnen, literally ‘the life-lie’]” in them (Ibsen 1890, 361; act 5). In the *Quintessence*, Shaw himself opens his section on *Rosmersholm* by noting that “Ibsen did not in *The Wild Duck* exhaust the subject of the danger of forming ideals for other people, and interfering in their lives with a view to enabling them to realize those ideals” (1979, 162), though Shaw does think that Rosmer’s ideals predate, in some form, the arrival of Rebekka West. But if Rosmer did have his ideals from an earlier time in his life, they undoubtedly would have come from his tutor Ulrik Brendel, an even more suspect source than Rebekka. Indeed,

there is no clearer sign of how we are meant to judge Rosmer's idealistic purposes than their parodic doubling in the figure of Ulrik Brendel.

In *Pygmalion*, on the other hand, as Durbach suggests, the idealistic purposes espoused, sometimes eloquently and sometimes loutishly, by Henry Higgins do seem to have deep, genuine roots in the character himself and do appear to be endorsed, with reservations, by the playwright. In fact, I would argue that this is precisely one of the main ways in which Shaw is rewriting *Rosmersholm*, and it is worth trying to see what the import of this particular change is.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, idealistic purposes represent a sublimation. And if a repression is a kind of driving out, sublimation is always in the first place a repression, with the idealized purpose serving as the substitutive formation that drives out, or attempts to drive out, the forbidden impulse. In *Rosmersholm*, there are essentially two kinds of sublimation: the noble task that Rosmer sets for himself, and the idealized love that Rebekka and Rosmer seem to feel for each other. However, both forms of sublimation ultimately fail in the course of the play. If, as I wish to argue, Shaw was deeply disturbed by the failure of sublimation in *Rosmersholm*—disturbed enough to rewrite the play in a disguised, marvelously transformed fashion—then one of the changes he needed to make was to shore up both kinds of sublimation so that they could better withstand the onslaught of the dangerous erotic impulses. With regard to Rosmer's noble goals, this change was relatively easy: Shaw just needed to give Higgins a more deeply rooted and more convincing purpose.

In the published play (1916), Shaw starts in on this task right in the “Preface to *Pygmalion*,” when he claims, “The reformer England needs today is an energetic phonetic

enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play” (99).² What is interesting is the way Shaw, by comparison to *Rosmersholm*, has reduced the grandeur of the noble goal. Thus, Rosmer tells Kroll: “I will devote my life and all my energies to this one thing—the creation of a true democracy in this country.” When Kroll presses him, he further defines his goal: “That of making all the people of this country noble-men,” and when Kroll asks how he is going to do this, he specifies: “By freeing their minds and purifying their wills, of course” (Ibsen 1904, 30; act 1).³ Shaw, in the manner of the ironist, tries to have it both ways. On the one hand, he makes the goal more realistic by rooting it in the practice of a legitimate profession—phonetics—and by grounding it in Higgins’s enthusiastic practice of his profession. On the other hand, he then tries to re-inflate the goal almost to the status of Rosmer’s. That is why, in the preface, he claims—in an apparently ironic way that denies its own irony—that his play is meant to show that phoneticians “are among the most important people in England at present” (102). And that is why he gives Higgins a speech such as the following, which in

² Except as specifically noted, all references to *Pygmalion*, including the Preface and the Sequel, are to the first edition (Shaw 1916), and are given parenthetically in the text.

³ Shaw knew little Dano-Norwegian, so it is important, given the argument in this essay, to cite the English version of *Rosmersholm* that would have been known to him. Therefore, all references to *Rosmersholm*, which are given parenthetically in the text, are to the translation by Charles Archer (Ibsen 1904). Though two English translations of *Rosmersholm* were published earlier, we know that Shaw was familiar with Archer’s, since he quotes from it in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. It was originally published in 1891, in volume 5 of *Ibsen’s Prose Dramas* (1890-91), a series edited, and in part translated, by Shaw’s great friend William Archer, brother of Charles and the person largely responsible for introducing Shaw to Ibsen’s work. This publication history is given by James McFarlane (1960, 448). I cite the 1904 imprint of Charles Archer’s translation, available on-line. References to the original text of *Rosmersholm* are to the on-line *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* (Ibsen 2009).

Durbach's reading "expresses the idealism behind [Higgins's] own program of social transfiguration in very similar Ibsenist terms" (Durbach 2002, 534) compared to the ones used by Rosmer:

[...] you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul. (156-57; act 3)

As mentioned, Rosmer's ideals are ironized within *Rosmersholm*, especially by Ibsen's insertion of the otherwise almost gratuitous character of Ulrik Brendel. In act 1, shortly before we hear Rosmer articulate his purposes, the feckless, destitute Brendel appears, "dressed like a common tramp," and announces his own noble goal, which is an ironic debasement of Rosmer's: "Simple as I stand here before you, I am engaged in a comprehensive campaign—more comprehensive than all my previous excursions put together" (21, 22). And when Brendel reappears in the final act, he asks Rosmer for "a loan":

Can you spare an ideal or two? [...] One or two cast-off ideals. It would be doing a good deed. For I'm cleaned out, my boy. Ruined, beggared. (106; act 4)

This is a statement both about Brendel's ideals and about Rosmer's.

In *Pygmalion*, Higgins's goals are probably subject to more irony than Durbach's theory would allow for. For example, in Higgins's speech to his mother, just quoted, there is an ironic disjunction between changing someone into a "quite different human being" and calling the job "frightfully interesting"—maybe the job ought to be just plain frightening. And for Higgins to wax poetic in claiming that his work with Eliza is ending the gap between soul and soul is a little hard to swallow, since the audience is probably most struck precisely by the gap Higgins

maintains between the two of them. Still, Higgins's undoubted competence at his work and his ability to translate passion for his mission into actual results constitute a kind of bedrock that the play never questions, and that gives his purposes a certain reality and credibility

The situation is quite different with Rosmer, who must be guided and encouraged by Rebekka and others, and who is so ill-matched to his idealistic purposes that they cannot be taken very seriously as a sublimation in Ibsen's play. Nevertheless, Ibsen does seem to have some concept of sublimation, for he clearly suggests a connection between these two starkly defining characteristics of Rosmer, his sexual repression and his noble goals, as if what we are seeing is a failed effort at sublimation. Here, as often, Ibsen anticipated a Freudian theory; it is, indeed, hardly an accident that Freud's analysis of *Rosmersholm*, in his essay "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-analytic Work" (1916), is one of his most trenchant pieces of literary interpretation. Shaw, too, was quite aware of the concept of sublimation. To be sure, there is no evidence that Shaw was drawing on Freud here; in a thorough review of the connections between Shaw and psychoanalysis, Arthur H. Nethercot says that "the first direct evidence I have been able to find of Shaw's clear acquaintance with psychoanalysis appeared ... in a letter he wrote in 1921" (1968, 360), around nine years after Shaw completed *Pygmalion*. But however Shaw came to the concept, he provides a virtual definition of sublimation—omitting only the word itself—in the Sequel to *Pygmalion*, where he claims that Higgins's work ideals represent one half of a successful sublimation:

If an imaginative boy has a sufficiently rich mother who has intelligence, personal grace, dignity of character without harshness, and a cultivated sense of the best art of her time to enable her to make her house beautiful, she sets a standard for him against which very few women can struggle, besides effecting for him a

disengagement of his affections, his sense of beauty, and his idealism from his specifically sexual impulses. This makes him a standing puzzle to the huge number of uncultivated people who have been brought up in tasteless homes by commonplace or disagreeable parents, and to whom, consequently, literature, painting, sculpture, music, and affectionate personal relations come as modes of sex if they come at all. The word passion means nothing else to them; and that Higgins could have a passion for phonetics and idealize his mother instead of Eliza, would seem to them absurd and unnatural. (193)

For all of its insistence, this passage is, of course, also quite defensive. While it is typical of Shaw to argue for a contrarian point of view, Shaw's pose here is that there are large numbers of people who could never understand his claim that, in Higgins's case, the (presumably original) connection between sexual drives and more idealized aims has been completely severed. The defensiveness actually points to Shaw's own overinvestment in Higgins's successful sublimation of his sexual instincts. And Shaw's ventriloquizing of the skeptical counterargument—the implication of which is that Higgins's behavior is still connected to his sexuality—suggests that he may be projecting his own nervous doubts onto these “uncultivated people.”

Both *Rosmersholm* and *Pygmalion* enact a sublimation, one that we actually see or hear about as it comes into being. These sublimations are enacted in the women, Rebekka and Eliza, but the women are a vessel for a sublimation that originates with and is essentially controlled by the men—one that is, as it were, an emanation of the men's own sublimation. Sublimation in the Freudian sense would not come into being like this. It would either have arisen unconsciously during childhood—for example, in Freud's view, the very “instinct for knowledge” is a sublimation that develops between the ages of three and five (Freud 1905, 194)—or, in

adulthood, it might arise as the result of a process that “takes place of itself as soon as [a patient’s] inhibitions have been overcome by analysis” (Freud 1912b, 119). Thus, the sublimation in Rebekka and Eliza has a kind of contingent quality, and in the case of Eliza, essentially a symbolic aspect as well.

In act 4, Rebekka tells Rosmer about the “wild, uncontrollable desire” she began to feel for him: “It came upon me like a storm on the sea. It was like one of the storms we sometimes have in the North in the winter time” (99). Then the change:

But when I came to live alone with you here,—in quiet—in solitude,—when you showed me all your thoughts without reserve—every sweet and delicate mood—just as it came to you—then the great change came over me. Little by little, you understand. Almost imperceptibly—but at last with such overwhelming force [men så overvældende til slut] that it reached to the bottom of my soul. (Ibsen 1904, 101; 2009)

And she continues:

All the rest—the horrible sense-intoxicated desire—passed far, far away from me. All the whirling passions settled down into quiet and silence. Rest descended on my soul—a stillness as on one of our northern bird-cliffs under the midnight sun. (101)

Rebekka sees this repression as ending in a sublimation: “It was love that was born in me. The great self-denying love, that is content with life, as we two have lived in together” (101).

Rebekka’s sublimation derives from Rosmer’s, which it then reinforces. However, Rebekka’s understanding of her sublimation, as she expresses it here, is romanticized in two ways. In the first place, her view of Rosmer is mistaken, and she is creating a false self of her own that

harmonizes with the false self that Rosmer has presented to her. And second, here she views her idealized love for Rosmer as born of a gentle process of repression, whereas elsewhere in the same scene she clearly recognizes the violence of the repression, to which she alludes even in this account when she says that the change ultimately took place “with such overwhelming force.” Indeed, Rebekka herself must understand that her passion could only be subdued by an equally violent counter-force. Here, then, is the alternate view she gives of the birth of her repression, which she explains to Rosmer:

REBEKKA. It is the Rosmer view of life—or *your* view of life, at any rate—that has infected my will.

ROSMER. Infected?

REBEKKA. And made it sick. Enslaved it to laws that had no power over me before. You—life with you—has ennobled my mind— (102; act 4)

When these passages are taken together (and even within the individual passages), we see a kind of psychological splitting visible in Rebekka’s attitude. The repressing authority is both mild and tyrannical; it is Rosmer and it is something other than Rosmer; it is slavery and it is ennoblement. The one thing it is not—and here Rebekka is mistaken—is Rebekka herself.

In *Pygmalion*, Eliza enacts a symbolic sublimation as she takes the path from the dirt and mud of the gutter—symbolically the locale and form of raw sexuality—to the drawing rooms of the wealthy upper middle class, from which dirt and mud are banished by baths and other repressions. And when Eliza and her father bring mud that threatens to contaminate the drawing room, they must be sanitized, schooled, and transformed. But the symbolic sublimation is accompanied by Higgins’s effort to force Eliza into an actual sexual sublimation as well. In the last act, he tries to shame her into abandoning the gutter for good:

If you cant stand the coldness of my sort of life, and the strain of it, go back to the gutter. Work til you are more a brute than a human being; and then cuddle and squabble and drink til you fall asleep. Oh, it's a fine life, the life of the gutter. It's real: it's warm: it's violent: you can feel it through the thickest skin: you can taste it and smell it without any training or any work. Not like Science and Literature and Classical Music and Philosophy and Art. You find me cold, unfeeling, selfish, dont you? Very well: be off with you to the sort of people you like. Marry some sentimental hog or other with lots of money, and a thick pair of lips to kiss you with and a thick pair of boots to kick you with. (188-89; act 5)

Instead, he offers Eliza the same deal that Rebekka has with Rosmer: Live on with him (and Pickering) as a companion of indefinite status in a non-sexual relationship. Presumably with sexuality out of the way, she will be able to participate in Higgins's sublimations of Science, Literature, and so on. In his psychobiographical study of Shaw, Daniel Dervin suggests that Shaw, in his marriage, "did not seek an object for sex so much as an ally for repression" and that "he sought to align himself with the maternal woman in an alliance against the sexual male" (1975, 332). The relationship Higgins is imagining here between himself and Eliza would be analogous.

And yet Eliza is not completely on board. Though Shaw himself would demur, he left no doubt, in his original version of *Pygmalion*, that Eliza has romantic and sexual feelings for Higgins, and her efforts to repress and sublimate these feelings, while apparently successful, do not go nearly as deeply as do Rebekka's. As Freud suggests, some people simply have more of a capacity for sublimation than others do (Freud 1912b, 119). The most evident demonstration of Eliza's feelings comes at the end of act 4, the scene following her triumph. At this point, Eliza's

efforts at repression and sublimation fail, but she continues to follow Higgins's unspoken bidding in that she chooses to leave entirely rather than to openly confront Higgins with her real, unrepressed feelings. In this regard, she imitates Rebekka, who is trying to spare her counterpart the pain of bringing repressed feelings out into the open. Eliza's less high-minded compromise, however, is that she plays the scene as the charged break-up of a romantic relationship, even of an engagement or a marriage. Indeed, she takes on the role of a Griselda (though not a patient Griselda) being thrown back to the place where she was found, perhaps without a stitch of clothing—her own clothes, as she notes, were burned, and she doesn't know whether she is allowed to take any of the clothes she was given. The last thing she surrenders is the ring that Higgins bought her at Brighton. Here again she is both endorsing Higgins's repressed view of their relationship and at the same time acknowledging the real state of her feelings: she tells Higgins, "I don't want it [the ring] now," but after he leaves, she "*finally goes down on her knees on the hearthrug to look for the ring*" (167, 168; act 4). Shaw, who wished to keep things as repressed as Higgins does, not surprisingly tried to undo this stage direction in his final version of the play (completed in November 1939 and published in 1941) by adding: "*When she finds it she considers for a moment what to do with it. Finally she flings it down on the dessert stand and goes upstairs in a tearing rage*" (Shaw 1972, 753; act 4).⁴ In adding this language, Shaw is engaged in a barely disguised form of undoing, in the psychoanalytic sense. That is, he is threatened by the failure of sexual repression in Eliza, both because he identifies with Higgins (the object of this unwanted passion, like Rosmer with Beate) and because he identifies with Eliza herself. But he cannot simply discard the original stage direction and try something else.

⁴ The dates here are drawn from the useful account that Derek McGovern (2011) gives of this particular change (18-19), and indeed of the whole panoply of changes that Shaw made in the different versions of *Pygmalion*.

Rather, he both preserves the original impulse in Eliza (and himself), and then tries to undo it by showing Eliza as first indecisive and then as furious—fury, of course, being a somewhat questionable way of denying Eliza’s passion for Higgins. Thus, Shaw is in effect acknowledging both the ambivalence and the inefficacy of his own effort to undo, and the ambivalence that Eliza herself shows here presumably mirrors Shaw’s own.

As in *Rosmersholm*, the repression that Eliza engages in, presumably half-consciously, also results from a kind of splitting, though this splitting is psychologically simpler and more familiar. Like Rebekka, she must match herself to the repression of her male counterpart, but this male is easily assimilable to the feared and loved father. Higgins, as the angry father, punishes her for the forbidden feelings that he himself arouses—and denies arousing or having. As the loved father, he is the person whom Eliza must please by performing, perfectly, all the tricks that he is teaching her. Shaw has simplified and sharply localized the force of repression that, in *Rosmersholm*, was diffused among the dead ancestors, the generalized sense of place, and Rector Kroll, and in doing so, he has actually made it less threatening. For it seems that the repression can be identified and managed within the context of a two-person relationship.

It must be noted, however, that the conscious repression that Rebekka and Eliza attempt has deep sources, in both cases, in an unconscious repression that the two female protagonists have as a back-story. In the case of Rebekka, the sources and nature of this repression are explained by Freud himself in his remarkable analysis of *Rosmersholm*. What is more, the forcible lifting of the underlying repression, through Kroll’s intervention, makes the later, half-willed repression untenable. In Freud’s view, Rebekka’s original repression takes place around the oedipal feelings she has toward her mother, Mrs. Gamvik, and her foster-father, Dr. West. The intense guilt aroused by these feelings would only have been intensified by Rebekka’s

apparent oedipal victory when her mother dies and she goes off with Dr. West, with whom at some point she begins an affair. As Freud points out, Rebekka then recreates this oedipal constellation when she comes to Rosmersholm, falls passionately in love with Rosmer, and wins a second oedipal victory over the mother, Beate, by pushing the latter into suicide. In a psychic tour de force, Rebekka subsequently manages to extend the original unconscious repression of her oedipal passion and guilt so that it assists her in muting the feelings she has for Rosmer and the guilt that has come alive in her (again) because of her victory over Beate. This effort at willed suppression must, then, fail precisely when Kroll's attack causes the original repression to fail. For once Kroll leads Rebekka to the belief that Dr. West was her actual father, she is shocked into the recognition that in submitting to a secret affair with him, she was guilty of the crime of incest. The dike of repression cannot hold against the flood of guilt and knowledge that ensues. And it is precisely this serial failure of repression in *Rosmersholm*, beginning with its failure in Rebekka, that Shaw seems to have found so threatening and that he attempts to undo in *Pygmalion*. In speaking of the *failure* of repression, I am of course adopting what I take to be Shaw's (perhaps unconscious) point of view—and his fear. Other readers of *Rosmersholm*, to the extent they can bear the realized threat of the double suicide, could interpret the play as portraying not a failure of repression, but a *liberation* from repression. Thus, Carlsson writes: “Like Rosmer, Rebekka is led step by step to full self-knowledge. Freed from its repressions, the conservative conscience reaches a *new level*” (1979, 559; my translation, original italics). But the more idealist, liberationist elements of the play, which can lead and have led to

interpretations like Carlsson's,⁵ evidently did not make the play any less threatening for Shaw. Perhaps the opposite—for the liberationist-tragic dimension of *Rosmersholm* is precisely one that Shaw tries to flatten out when he comes to write *Pygmalion* as his undoing of Ibsen's play.

This flattening out is reflected, among other places, in Eliza's more garden (or garden-party) variety of Rebekka's underlying repression. Rebekka's problem is that she has had entirely too much of the father's love, from which she can protect herself only by moderating and suppressing her own love for him—though it's too late for that solution in the case of Dr. West. Eliza's problem is the more common oedipal one of needing to attract the father's love to begin with, and to do that she must first find a way to get the father to pay attention to her. Since she obviously succeeded in neither goal with her actual father, who paid her little heed from what we learn, Eliza's solution must have been the common one of renunciation and repression of her forbidden oedipal desires out of frustration and even despair that they would ever be fulfilled. Indeed, the conscious feelings of anger that she shows toward her father during the play suggest the remnants of this frustration. What Shaw is trying to leave out of the picture is oedipal guilt, which is Rebekka's downfall, as Freud clearly points out and as Shaw must have seen as well. And it's not as if there isn't a possible cause for oedipal guilt in Eliza: for Eliza's mother has been gotten rid of (like, *mutatis mutandis*, Rebecca's mother and Beate), and indeed, Eliza's father never wanted to marry her mother (just as Dr. West seems only to have been a visitor to Rebekka's mother). So the threat of oedipal guilt is raised—and Shaw manages to smooth it over deftly. If there was any oedipal triumph in Eliza's past, she undoes it in the present time of the

⁵ Despite attempts at definitive interpretations of the ending of *Rosmersholm*, Van Laan (2006) can still write that the double suicide “can be seen, and has been seen, in two sharply conflicting perspectives,” as “a positive accomplishment” or as “essentially an act of despair” (374-75).

play by retreating on two fronts from oedipal wishes for the father. In the first place, Alfred Doolittle now decides to marry Eliza's (substitute) mother, and Eliza will attend the wedding to show her acquiescence and her submission to the parents' relationship. Second, in the substitute oedipal triangle of Higgins-Mrs Higgins-Eliza, Eliza ends up allying herself with the mother (Mrs Higgins), who seems completely unthreatened by her; and she explicitly renounces any designs on Higgins toward the end of the play. So Eliza has given reparation for any guilt she might have incurred. She has, of course, transferred her original oedipal feelings for her father onto Higgins, who plays hard to get in a way that must make Higgins a comfortable facsimile of her father. However, the only way that Eliza—in her own mind—can win the attention, the approval, and the love of Higgins is through the effort of sublimation, that is, the sublimation of her passionate feelings into the flawless performance of the pupil. Thus, here as well, she is both expressing her love and undoing it at the same time, along with the attendant guilt. As in *Rosmersholm*, however, Eliza is wrong in this assessment of Higgins; like Rebekka, she takes her counterpart's repression too much at face value, even as she is responding to the erotic passion he feels. For Higgins is deeply attracted to the mud, to the elemental aspects of life and eros that Eliza represents to him, and has been so right from the first act of the play.

In both works, then, the female protagonists engage in a mixed kind of repression: an attempt at willed repression that is built on a genuine, unconscious one. Rosmer and Higgins, on the other hand, show a thorough-going, top-to-bottom psychic sublimation that puts them somewhere behind their female counterparts—to use Ibsen's implicit value judgment; Shaw, using *his* value scheme, would say that Higgins is ahead of Eliza. In Rosmer's case, the sublimation is double: it consists of his weak political ideals, and his idealized and desexualized relationship with Rebekka. In Higgins's case, the sublimation consists of his devotion to his

science and to culture, with a corresponding and conscious rejection of low sexuality. In both cases, the sublimation results from a deep-seated psychological fear of any sexual impulses whatsoever, and their consequent repression. But in reinventing Rosmer as Henry Higgins, Shaw removes the most threatening aspect of Rosmer's repression-sublimation—the guilt, ultimately an oedipal guilt, that gives it its power and horror. Instead, Shaw gives us, in Higgins, a repression-sublimation that is explicitly oedipal, but without any oedipal guilt—a remarkable half-repression, on Shaw's part, of the Oedipus complex. A similar dynamic is reflected in Shaw's Eliza as well and, in a more complex and precarious way, in Ibsen's Rebekka.

Rosmer's repression of sexuality is a key part of the back-story Ibsen gives him. As Madam Helseth tells Rebekka, the children at Rosmersholm never cry, and “When they grow up, they never laugh. Never, as long as they live” (71; act 3), the repression of laughter being an evident stand-in for the repression of sexuality. More specifically, Rosmer reveals his horror of sexuality when he defends, to Kroll, his certainty about Beate's mental illness: “I have told you of her wild frenzies of passion—which she expected me to return. Oh how they appalled me! And then her causeless, consuming self-reproaches during the last few years” (60; act 2). Presumably the wife was so frustrated by her husband's lack of sexual interest in her that she made sexual advances herself, in a way that repulsed Rosmer because of the threat represented by her sexuality and his, too. And the last sentence in the passage just quoted suggests that this state of affairs long predates Rebekka's arrival on the scene. On the other hand, when Kroll tells Rosmer that “You bury yourself alive here, with your historical collections” (20; act 1), it is easy to be reminded of Freud's view that “the instinct for knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them” (Freud 1905, 194). In other words, Rosmer's historical research—which he is undertaking,

not out in the world, but still within the home—represents the drive to learn the historical secrets of his parents' and his own sexuality and therefore also represents the countervailing force that seeks to lift the repression. This interpretation seems to be confirmed when Rosmer tells Kroll, “I wanted to read, to bury myself in all the studies that until then had been sealed books to me. I wanted to make myself thoroughly at home in the great world of truth and freedom that has been revealed to me” (43-44; act 1). We see here the sublimation of sexual knowledge into “the great world of truth and freedom,” and a certain prematurity as well—because the repression represented by the sublimation guarantees that truth and freedom have not in fact been revealed to Rosmer.

Of course, the most striking feature of Rosmer's repression is the guilt that it is linked to. The static situation at the beginning of the play suggests that Rosmer's old “solutions” to oedipal conflicts—primarily the sexual repression/sublimation just described—are locked into place in a settled compromise formation, one that keeps in check the ancient guilt and the ancient erotic strivings. But the play shows that, in trying to update whatever original compromise of repression/sublimation he achieved, Rosmer has incurred so much guilt that the guilt batters and then destroys the repression, at least in its contemporary form. That form involves the denial of his erotic feelings for Rebekka, the denial of his responsibility for Beate's suicide, and the denial of the consequences of his apostasy, as well as Rosmer's obsession with complete innocence, an obvious reaction formation to the guilt feelings he is desperately trying to keep in check. All of these repressions would, of course, repeat earlier ones associated with guilt, for example over erotic feelings for the mother or over the (contrary) wish to replace the mother with another woman. The play actually makes this link clearest in showing that Rosmer's religious apostasy, which Kroll connects with free love, is an oedipal rebellion against the forefathers whose

portraits hang on the walls. Rosmer denies the hostility behind his change of views, but when Kroll, who (among other things) represents the authoritarian and reactionary father in the play, confronts him, Rosmer ends up fleeing back to him, to the safe and guilt-free identification with authority.

In *Pygmalion*, we get the apparently guilt-free version of some of these dynamics. First of all, though Higgins walks on the wild, muddy side with Eliza, he denies that he is doing so, and Shaw tries his best to second Higgins's denial. Thus, Higgins does not throw over his mother for Eliza, and, unlike Beate, the mother is alive and well in the play. On the contrary, Higgins feels so guilt-free over his relations with Eliza that he can bring his mother's rival right into her drawing room with an easy conscience. And Mrs Higgins is so unthreatened by Eliza that she can take her side—though, of course, in taking her side she insures that Eliza and Henry do not get back together. But what about oedipal guilt toward the father, especially since Higgins cleaves so insistently to his mother? Here again Shaw stacks the deck in Higgins's favor. The two father-figures in the play—they are other things as well, certainly—are Alfred Doolittle and Colonel Pickering. Doolittle is the most accommodating of fathers. He is delighted to sell Eliza, the woman in his possession, to Higgins for a modest fee. Having paid up (and Higgins is very insistent that the sum be paid), Higgins has no debt, and no guilt, toward the father. And the father, far from being the castrating, forbidding, authoritarian father, is another “m[a]n of the world” who completely understands what he believes to be Higgins's sexual intentions (137; act 2). In fact, the father can see and approve of Higgins's sexual wishes even when Higgins cannot see them himself.⁶

⁶ In his psychobiographical article “George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*: A Creative Response to Loss after Early Childhood Trauma,” Joseph R. Silvio (1995) makes a similar point about the absence of oedipal guilt in the play, but

Colonel Pickering is another defanged father-figure, as if oedipal fathers have been transformed from Furies into Kindly Ones. Pickering establishes himself as the benefactor and the guardian of Eliza, and toward the end of the play, Higgins cheerily returns Eliza to her rightful possessor, Pickering, by offering her the chance to marry him. But before that, as Higgins has essentially had his way with Eliza, the three of them have lived together in harmony, not as two oedipal rivals fighting over the object of their sexual attentions. Indeed, there is a strong homosexual attachment between Higgins and Pickering, present right from the beginning as a kind of second romantic relationship in the play. “I came from India to meet you,” Pickering says. “I was going to India to meet you,” Higgins responds (115; act 1). This homosexual attachment should be seen as representing Higgins’s negative oedipal relationship to the father, i.e., the relationship in which the boy wants to possess the father and eliminate his rival the mother—a relationship that, in Freud’s view, coexists with the boy’s positive oedipal wishes to possess the mother and eliminate the father. In Higgins’s house on Walpole Street, the strong (and contradictory) erotic undercurrents that underlie this double oedipal triangle manage to stay mostly repressed in a status quo that is strongly reminiscent of the initial status quo in *Rosmersholm*, under which Rosmer and Rebekka live in sexless peace at Rosmersholm. The

in the context of a quite different argument from the present one. In the play, Silvio says, “Shaw magically transforms his painful childhood. ... And he creates for himself the best of all possible worlds—an oedipal victory without guilt and”—Silvio adds—“without the relinquishment of preoedipal dependence” (334). For Silvio, *Pygmalion* is essentially a fantasy in which all wishes are fulfilled, without guilt and without contradiction—and therefore, with no real repression of wishes and no dire consequences. According to the present argument, Shaw could never imagine, consciously or unconsciously, that such an outcome was possible. Lifting of repression leads to the tragedy of *Rosmersholm*; *Pygmalion*, in response, shows the complex and comic maintenance of repression—comic because of the low cost of the repression and the high reward of the resulting sublimation.

main difference is that the status quo in *Pygmalion* ought to be even more precarious in that it involves a triangle rather than a dyadic relationship. And indeed, this expectation is mostly borne out in the plays, as we will see.

In *Pygmalion*, Higgins's negative oedipal wishes ultimately win out over the positive ones when he drives the woman away and he is left alone with Pickering (Mrs Pearce, whom Doolittle refers to as Higgins's "missus," is the beard [137; act 2]). Thus, any oedipal guilt Higgins might feel either toward father or mother on account of his heterosexual wishes is banished. Any oedipal guilt he might feel on account of his homosexual wishes remains deeply repressed, in that, at the conscious level, Higgins sees himself as choosing the mother. So he gets things both ways—no guilt for choosing the father's actual wife (because he, symbolically, gives up the father's possession Eliza) and no guilt for choosing Pickering (because he chooses his mother over everyone).

In *Rosmersholm*, negative oedipal wishes also win out over positive ones, but only temporarily. Thus, in act 3, Rosmer chooses Kroll over Rebekka and, in effect, drives her away from Rosmersholm just as Higgins will drive Eliza from his home. Indeed, at the end of the act, Rosmer actually asks to leave with Kroll, just after Kroll raises the specter of Rosmer's male ancestors: "And this is the woman you are living under the same roof with—in the closest intimacy! [*Looks round at the pictures.*] Oh, if those that are gone could see us now!" (91). Rebekka becomes the morally and sexually debased female who can be linked with certain male oedipal fantasies described by Freud in his "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" (Freud 1910, 1912a). In this case, Rebekka is the sexually available mother who has been desired by both Kroll and Rosmer, but who must now be rejected and expelled in order to placate, in an almost Kafkaesque image, all of the fathers back through history who are now united against the

faithless woman—and in order to expunge the oedipal guilt resulting from Rosmer's sexual wishes for her. The negative choice of Kroll, then, becomes the way for Rosmer to attempt to repress the guilt of which he has become conscious during the play. Indeed, Rebekka has sacrificed herself to give Rosmer precisely this hope: As she begins the confession that leads to Rosmer's departure, she tells him, "I will restore to you what you require in order to live your life. Dear friend, you shall have your happy innocence back again!" (87; act 3). Of course, there is also every difference between Rosmer's effort to drive Rebekka away at the end of act 3 and Higgins's move to drive Eliza away and choose Pickering instead. In Ibsen's play, Rosmer acts because he has had to face his guilt over his feelings for Rebekka consciously, whereas in Shaw's reworking of this action, Higgins has not even become conscious of his feelings for Eliza, much less of any guilt that he needs to feel because of them. Indeed, Higgins can even deny that he is trying to drive Eliza away. Not only does he not understand why she would ever want to leave, but he also makes energetic attempts to bring her back, beginning with his calls to the police. Naturally, he would not call the police if any of this were a matter of guilt!

The victory of Rosmer's negative oedipal feelings is, of course, reversed when he returns to Rebekka in the last act of the play, and this reversal is made possible by the lifting of Rosmer's repressions. Both of these results would ordinarily be associated with heterosexual comedy. In *Rosmersholm*, they lead to tragedy. Rebekka must still be expelled, but now Rosmer must be as well, and the comic sexual consummation becomes a double suicide. Shaw wants none of these results. One of the main points of Ibsen's play is that the depth of the repression leads to the tragic outcome when the repression is removed. But the question the play implicitly raises is whether the repression has to be lifted at all. If Rebekka and Rosmer's repressions can continue indefinitely, then they can have an idyllic, if sexless, existence, and maybe that state of

innocent cohabitation is worth the repression. That, in effect, would be Shaw's desired outcome. The danger that *Rosmersholm* represents to Shaw is that it not only offers a case study in the tragedy that occurs when repression is lifted, but also suggests that this lifting is inevitable. In response, Shaw recreates the idyllic state of existence that is the opening status quo in *Rosmersholm*, but rewrites the tragic development that proceeds out of that state.

In the opening pages of *Rosmersholm*, when the visiting Kroll asks Rebekka how things are at Rosmersholm, Rebekka answers, "Oh, everything is going in its quiet, jog-trot way. One day is just like another" (6; act 1). Further in the conversation, Kroll asks her, "And do you think of remaining here?—permanently, I mean," and Rebekka responds, "My dear Rector, I haven't really thought about it, one way or the other. I've got so used to the place now, that I almost feel as if I belonged to it" (8). Rebekka and Rosmer, the two innocent children—Rosmer later speaks of their "sort of sweet secret child-love" (75-76; act 30)—are living in a suspended state under the benevolent and indulgent eyes of the "mother," Madam Helseth, and the calm flow of their existence does not need to be inspected self-consciously. It is only Kroll's return to the estate that disrupts this peaceful condition. The threatening oedipal forefathers have been there on the wall the whole time, but their influence so far had been limited to taming Rebekka in a way that underwrites the idyllic life she leads with Rosmer. Now Kroll reactivates, as it were, the lethal oedipal dynamics that they represent. But what does Kroll's irruption into the peaceful and stable life at Rosmersholm represent? In some ways his intrusion seems to be mere happenstance, like Kristine's fateful return to Nora's life in *A Doll House* because of the recent death of her husband. In other ways, Kroll seems like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, a malevolent presence that is, so to speak, metaphysically necessary. But it can also be argued that Kroll's appearance—actually a reappearance, if the prehistory of the drama is factored in—represents

the psychological pressure exerted by the repressed drives and repressed guilt, and therefore points to the instability of the idyllic state, however secure that state may seem. In fact, Kroll's intrusion into the Rosmersholm life has its own backstory. Kroll has lost control within his own house: his son and daughter are rebelling against his authority, and his wife is siding with the children against her husband. This loss of control is doubled at the societal level, where the forces of innovation seem to be gaining power, so much so that Kroll feels he must enlist Rosmer to his cause in this "civil war," as he says he is "almost" ready to call it (7; act 1). Thus, Kroll represents the threatened oedipal father—and the superego that is trying to reestablish control. This superego has apparently been dormant at Rosmersholm, but it cannot remain so.

With critical differences, Shaw re-creates this unstable triangle, watched over in both plays by the suspicious housekeeper. The primary difference is that Shaw, who understands the instability that Ibsen explicates, must guard against it by relocating its main source. In *Rosmersholm*, once the repressions are loosened, they follow their logic all the way to the end; they cannot be recorraled. The repressions are figured as secrets, and the revelation of one secret leads on to the exposure of the next, even more damaging one. Neither Rosmer nor Rebekka is immune; the process plays out in the context of their own relationship, and their relationships to Kroll. In *Pygmalion*, on the other hand, Henry Higgins shows a resistance—in the Freudian sense—to whatever drives and feelings are struggling for expression. This is the source of the comfort that Shaw can take in re-inventing the story: the triangle is unstable, but at the end the male protagonist remains unmoved and out of danger, as signified by his expulsion of Eliza and his choice of Pickering and Mrs Higgins. The instability comes from the woman, from Eliza. She, like Rebekka, has been engaging in a kind of voluntary repression of her sexuality and her erotic feelings, and as with Rebekka, this repression seems to become a kind of second nature to

her. However, in the case of Eliza, the second nature never quite becomes a first nature. Thus, when she goes out into the world—something that Rebekka and Rosmer do not do—by making her appearance at the garden party, she leaves her idyllic existence behind, and her feelings overcome her, as is clear in the scene following the party. It is true that Eliza’s feelings have developed in response to the feelings that Higgins has for her, but Higgins will never consciously acknowledge his part in this mutual process. Therefore, the expulsion of the woman solves the problem and leaves the male repressions disturbed but triumphant. Moreover, Higgins’s renunciation and sublimation of his sexual impulses definitively solves the problem of oedipal guilt, for the “parents”—Alfred Doolittle and his common-law wife—finally get married at the end of the play. Whereas, in standard comedy, the oedipal child achieves marriage or sexual union at the end of the play and thereby triumphs over the forbidding elders, in this play it is the elders who achieve this (first-time!) marriage, and the oedipal child who cedes the field to them.

Shaw, of course, would—and did—deny the account of Higgins’s and Eliza’s feelings for each other that is given here. However, anyone who is at all psychoanalytically minded will be immediately alert to the depth of the repression in Higgins’s language and behavior. First of all, like Rosmer, Higgins puts himself in a highly sexualized situation while denying that there is anything sexual about it—the kind of denial that would require a great deal of unconscious psychic energy to maintain. Widower Rosmer, having given up the church and its strictures, lives alone on his estate with an unmarried woman whose sexual past he certainly has some suspicions about, and with only a housekeeper as “chaperone.” Shaw outdoes Ibsen here when Higgins brings a young lower-class woman to live in a house with *two* men, after first having her stripped and her clothes burned. Again a housekeeper provides the only buffer, although Mrs Pearce’s participation in the stripping of Eliza makes her more of an accomplice than a neutral party.

Outsiders, as well as the two housekeepers, naturally recognize the sexual character of these arrangements. Kroll, now that he has learned that the situation at Rosmersholm involves “an unbelieving man [...] living with an—emancipated woman,” virtually accuses Rosmer and Rebekka of practicing “free love” (46, 47; act 2). And when Rebekka tells Madam Helseth that she is leaving, the housekeeper assumes that Rebekka must go because Rosmer has gotten her pregnant and is not stepping up. In *Pygmalion*, both Mrs Pearce and Mrs Higgins raise questions about Eliza’s position in Higgins’s household, but both also participate in Higgins’s denial. Mrs Pearce, as she is objecting to Eliza’s treatment, says, “Of course I know you dont mean her any harm” (129; act 2). And Mrs Higgins desexualizes her reproach when she tells Higgins, “You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll” (156; act 3). From a factual point of view, both Mrs Pearce and Mrs Higgins are correct not to think that Henry will take sexual advantage of Eliza. And from one psychological point of view they are also correct, in that, because of Higgins’s inhibitions and oedipal attachment to his mother, he will never replace either mother—either Mrs Higgins or Mrs Pearce—with Eliza. But from the psychological point of view of Higgins’s unconscious sexual strivings, they are wrong.

Thus, when Higgins plays the role of the seducer and abductor in act 2, offering Eliza chocolates to remain in the house, his exaggerated performance as the villain in a melodrama is comically matched by Eliza’s fearful response: “How do I know what might be in them? Ive heard of girls being drugged by the like of you” (127). But she is not wrong—Higgins is enacting this role because it corresponds in some way to his unconscious wishes. And Eliza is not wrong to protest, as Higgins offers gold, taxis, diamonds, and more chocolates: “I’m a good girl, I am” (128). Higgins’s response to this outburst is perhaps even more telling: “You shall remain so, Eliza, under the care of Mrs Pearce. And you shall marry an officer in the Guards, with a

beautiful moustache: the son of a marquis, who will disinherit him for marrying you, but will relent when he sees your beauty and goodness—” (128). This is the second melodrama that Higgins invokes in his seduction of Eliza, and it doubtless says more about the mind of the character who is proposing it than it does about the susceptibilities of its intended audience. Higgins’s original fascination with Eliza is owing to the fact that she represents the mud and dirt of the streets, of the lower classes—and of raw sexuality. Therefore she is supposed to be an easy mark for him as a sexual object, and in the first melodrama he performs he is the abductor of this Eliza. But in this second melodrama, Higgins is obsessed with Eliza as marriage material, a good girl who is worthy of the son of a marquis. And this obsession is nothing more than Higgins’s wish to marry her himself, to be the romantic hero of this melodrama—and to find a woman whom the oedipal father at first forbids him to have but then gives him willingly and without evoking guilt. So in this short section of act 2, we see that Higgins unconsciously combines in Eliza the purely sexual object (the object of the lowest sexual desires) and the sexualized romantic object, i.e., the partially sublimated sexual object. That Eliza meets these desires so fully is the reason Higgins’s wish for her is so powerful, and the repression of this wish so all-consuming. And of course, in the romantic scenario there is still a homosexual escape for Higgins: he can give Eliza to another man—the man with the “beautiful moustache” whom Higgins himself can envision as a romantic object, ostensibly for a woman.

Higgins’s unconscious wish to possess Eliza re-emerges at other important points in the play. It is seen very obviously in Higgins’s intense jealousy toward Freddy—which tellingly reawakens Higgins’s romantic fantasy of marrying Eliza off to someone of elevated status. Thus, when Eliza threatens to marry Freddy, Higgins responds: “(*sitting down beside her*) Rubbish! you shall marry an ambassador. You shall marry the Governor-General of India or the Lord-

Lieutenant of Ireland, or somebody who wants a deputy-queen” (189; act 5).⁷ Here again the fantasized husband represents both Higgins himself and also his successful, powerful oedipal rival, but with an added twist, in that the possibility that the inferior, sibling rival Freddy might triumph must be soundly negated as a more devastating defeat than losing to the powerful and deserving father (paradoxically, the fantasy also puts Higgins in the position of the loser Freddy). Another version of the same marriage fantasy, also in act 5, almost undoes the symbolic displacement because it is less romantically fanciful, and reveals Higgins’s wish for Eliza even more directly: When Eliza complains that “I’m a slave now, for all my fine clothes,” Higgins answers: “Not a bit. I’ll adopt you as my daughter and settle money on you if you like. Or would you rather marry Pickering?” (187). Attuned as we must be, by act 5, to Higgins’s sexual wishes for Eliza, his offer to make Eliza his daughter seems more incestuous than innocent, but the incestuous wishes are, of course, unconscious to Higgins. In addition, the alternative Higgins imagines to an incestuous relationship between Eliza and himself is a marriage between Eliza and Colonel Pickering—a second displacement of his own wish for Eliza, and also, as discussed above, a retreat before the more powerful oedipal father. Appropriately, Eliza responds to the subtext in the final sentence here, which logically and psychologically ought to read, “Or would you rather *marry* me [instead of being adopted by me]?” She says, “I wouldnt marry you if you

⁷ Shaw’s later revisions show him trying to renegotiate the psychological undercurrents of this passage. In the final, 1941 version, he has Higgins focus more on Freddy’s inadequacies, and he tones down the extravagant language of the marriage fantasy, while (in the opposite direction) simultaneously raising the status of Eliza’s imagined husband to king: “[*thunderstruck*] Freddy!!! that young fool! That poor devil who couldnt get a job as an errand boy even if he had the guts to try for it! Woman: do you not understand that I have made you a consort for a king” (Shaw 1972, 780).

asked me; and you're nearer my age than what he is" (187). Higgins then has to defend against this exposure of his real question by correcting Eliza's grammar ("Than he is: not 'than what he is'") and thus deflecting from the point at issue. In terms of Pickering, he has, in a homosexual direction, again imagined another man as a romantic object (for a woman), and then confirmed the homosexual bond between himself and Pickering: "I don't suppose Pickering would [marry you], though. He's as confirmed an old bachelor as I am" (187). Indeed, his homosexual attraction to Pickering is one of Higgins's main defenses against his attraction to Eliza, but following a pattern described by Freud,⁸ he ends up using the instrument of repression (the defense) as an outlet for the repressed: Higgins tries to deny Eliza's gender difference and extend his homosexual bond with Pickering to cover her too— "You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors together instead of only two men and a silly girl" (190; act 5).

As in *Rosmersholm*, *Pygmalion* also offers some outside observers who, viewing the situation in Higgins's household, remind us that, from a certain point of view, the thing speaks for itself. In both plays, in fact, there is a sense in which the benighted outsiders who are unable to understand the glorious sublimations of the protagonists, by that very blindness put their finger on the actual—but repressed—sexual relationships. In *Pygmalion*, the outsider who has this kind of no-nonsense vision is primarily Alfred Doolittle, of course. He knows exactly what the two gentlemen are up to, and what they want from Eliza. But there is also a funny moment at the beginning of act 5 when Higgins and Pickering are explaining to Mrs Higgins that they have contacted the police about Eliza, and Pickering notes, "The inspector made a lot of difficulties. I

⁸ Freud gives the example of an etching by Félicien Rops: "An ascetic monk has fled, no doubt from the temptations of the world, to the image of the crucified Saviour. And now the cross sinks down like a shadow, and in its place, radiant, there rises instead the image of a voluptuous, naked woman in the same crucified attitude" (Freud 1907, 35).

really think he suspected us of some improper purpose” (170). Doubtless this statement also indicates a certain amount of projection; even Pickering’s fatherly demeanor with Eliza may be less securely sublimated than he imagines, and in this respect Pickering doubles Higgins.

It is difficult not to feel some amusement at Shaw’s efforts to control the reception of *Pygmalion*, both through bluster and through his numerous revisions to the original play. Yet the vehemence of these efforts also provides a clue about the underlying psychic stakes for Shaw. The main issue for Shaw was his insistence that Eliza and Higgins do not have passionate feelings for one another and that they separate at the end of the play without prospect of future romantic involvement. Yet right from the beginning, actors, directors, and audiences rejected this unromantic account of the two protagonists. Indeed, Shaw gave them every reason to do so, beginning with the title’s suggestion that the play will repeat the Pygmalion and Galatea story. Shaw invokes other romances as well, especially the fairy tale of Cinderella and the recurrent fantasy of the low servant girl who comes up in the world by marrying the master (a fantasy that, as Freud insists, is psychologically active in *Rosmersholm* as well). In addition, from the beginning of the action (the subtitle “A Romance in Five Acts” did not appear in the first edition), Shaw strongly invokes the generic expectations of romantic comedy, and as has been suggested here, repeatedly shows the protagonists’ erotic feelings for each other fighting to escape repression. But when directors and actors pursued the erotic and generic logic of the play—and audiences happily followed them—Shaw felt the need to arrest this logic, claiming that his play had been misunderstood. Of course, it was Shaw himself who made these undercurrents in the play virtually irresistible; Shaw himself who would most have liked to follow them to their erotic conclusion.

Of the various efforts Shaw made to maintain control over the meaning and reception of his play, including the five different versions of the end of the play that he wrote over a quarter of a century (three for published editions of the play and two for screenplays), the most important is the Sequel that Shaw added to the first published edition of *Pygmalion* (1916). In the opening sentence of the Sequel, Shaw says: “The rest of the story need not be shewn in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of ‘happy endings’ to misfit all stories” (191). The “us” Shaw is complaining about are those who have deficient imaginations, with “imagination” suggesting the capacity to imagine or engage in sublimation, as becomes clear when Shaw goes on to speak of “an imaginative boy” who has the right kind of mother—a mother who “effect[s] for him a disengagement of his affections, his sense of beauty, and his idealism from his specifically sexual impulses” (193). The play cannot teach “us”—average sensual human beings—to engage in this kind of sublimation. However, it can show us that such sublimation exists, and it can show us the value of this sublimation, through the story of Henry Higgins. But just as Freud says that psychoanalytic treatment can only work under conditions of abstinence, with neither the patient nor the analyst acting on his/her feelings (Freud 1915a, 165) —so does the play require a kind of abstinence on the part of the audience if we are to understand the sublimation that the play depicts. And the purpose of the Sequel is to persuade us to accept that abstinence, if the play itself has not already done so. Shaw offers reasoned arguments, based on psychology and common sense, for why Eliza and Henry Higgins cannot and should not pair up sexually. However, the basic demand on us is articulated in the first sentence, quoted above. We must be able to tolerate a symbolic interruption of the sexual drive that leads to “happy endings.” And of

course, Shaw is identifying both with the “us” who have failed in our imaginative sublimation and with the “imaginative boy” who has succeeded.

Shaw’s insistence that both he and the audience must arrest the erotic and narrative drive of the play—“play” here taking on its broadest meaning—brings us precisely to the point where *Rosmersholm* and *Pygmalion* diverge. At the end of act 3 of *Rosmersholm*, Rebekka asks Madam Helseth to have her trunk brought down; she is going away and, as she says, “I shall never come back again” (93). “I’ve taken fright today,” she explains to Madam Helseth; “I think I saw something like a glimpse of white horses.” Most obviously, in the ghost story of the play the white horses stand for the coming of death. However, the symbol is a condensation, in Freud’s sense of the term, for the horses also represent eros—in *The Ego and the Id* Freud famously analogizes the id to a horse that the rider/ego is trying to control (Freud 1923, 25) —and the whiteness symbolizes innocence and purity. The white horses, in other words, represent precisely the outcome of the drama, where the double suicide of Rebekka and Rosmer in the millstream brings together a baptism into innocence, a marriage and sexual consummation, and the triumph of guilt, the superego, and the death instinct. Rebekka’s glimpse of the white horses means that she knows what will happen if she stays, and she maintains her resolve to get away from *Rosmersholm* and all its works almost until the end. Rosmer tells her that he has “made arrangements” and “Whatever may happen, you are provided for” (108; act 4). But, like Eliza, she doesn’t seem interested in anything that her one-time protector can offer her for the future. Indeed, Rebekka speaks of “my future” ironically, as if she doesn’t have one (108; act 4). By leaving she would be avoiding death, but this triumph of repression would also condemn her to a life that is not really lived. So this is the logic of repression that Ibsen portrays: The lifting of the repression, which is what Rebekka chooses when she finally decides not to leave, leads both

Rebekka and Rosmer to a tragic death—at best, to a *Liebestod*—while the continued repression would lead the two protagonists to a life-in-death. And even more disturbing to Shaw would have been Ibsen’s strong suggestion that continuing the repression is not a possible outcome in any event. This suggestion on Ibsen’s part is also precisely the place where he parts company with Freud, who is closer to Shaw here than to Ibsen. Unlike some of his successors, Freud did not imagine or wish for a repression-free psyche. Ibsen, however, is a playwright who, for all his realism, traffics in fantasy like other creative writers, and he imagines exactly this kind of totalizing escape from repression; the problem is that the escape is tragically inseparable from death—in this respect, Ibsen’s (psychoanalytic) realism reappears.

Ibsen’s play would have been less threatening to Shaw if Rebecca’s attempt to leave had some chance of success—if, in other words, the logic of the repression-sublimation that she and Rosmer have undergone could allow for a victory at least of the repression, even if the earlier sublimation has been lost irretrievably. With a tragic writer like Racine, the logic of the action and of the characters’ psychology seems determined right from the start. Ibsen, however, always *appears* to introduce a strong element of chance and therefore of possible variability. Thus, in *Rosmersholm* the intervention of chance seems to play a crucial role in overturning Rebekka’s decision to leave for the north. Ulrik Brendel, a character who represents all the randomness of comedy, unexpectedly interrupts the exit interview between Rosmer and Rebekka in act 4, and it is only following his intervention that Rosmer can finally explain the sacrifice he wants from Rebekka and that she gives up her plan to leave. But Brendel simply gives expression to psychic forces in Rebekka and Rosmer that are too powerful to remain repressed—their deeply sexualized sadomasochistic wishes. Thus, Brendel tells the pair that Rosmer’s “victory” in his “great cause” is assured only on one condition, which he explains as he takes hold of Rebekka’s

wrist: “That the woman who loves him shall gladly go out into the kitchen and hack off her tender, rosy-white little finger—*here*—just *here* at the middle joint. Item, that the aforesaid loving woman—again gladly—shall slice off her incomparably-moulded left ear” (108-109). The graphic, erotic nature of this double-castration fantasy, in which the woman loses both phallus and female genitalia, presumably strengthens the sexual impulses of both Rosmer and Rebekka so that these impulses overpower the repression. The fantasy looks as if it comes from outside, but it belongs to the play, and in that sense it is part of the psychological logic of *Rosmersholm* that all of the characters enact, especially the two protagonists of course. And according to that logic, repression and sublimation must ultimately fail, and the failure of repression is tragic. Indeed, the overwhelming force of the sadomasochistic wishes may be even more fatal to the repression if these wishes derive not only from eros but also from thanatos, a connection that Freud emphasized in his theorizing about the death drive. Shaw’s rewriting of *Rosmersholm* shows up primarily as a fearful denial of the power of eros to destroy repression and sublimation, but his deepest fear may have come from his recognition that, in Ibsen’s play, the death drive, especially in combination with eros, cannot be denied its victory over the repression. In that sense, when Shaw fights his battle with *Rosmersholm* he does not choose an unwinnable fight. He chooses one he thinks he can win, by rewriting the play so that repression and sublimation have a comic victory over erotic and erotically sadomasochistic wishes. That was the most he could hope for.

Given that the crux of the relevant psychological action in *Rosmersholm* is Rebekka’s decision first to leave, and then to stay with Rosmer, it becomes clearer why Shaw, in his rewriting of Ibsen, was so obsessed with Eliza’s decision to leave Higgins and so determined to close off the question of whether she sticks to this decision or not. The same basic forces are at

work in *Pygmalion* as in *Rosmersholm*, though Shaw needs to code them as comedy rather than tragedy. In particular, the sexual sadomasochism that forces the issue in *Rosmersholm* is very much present in the relationship between Higgins and Eliza, whether in Higgins's sadistic fantasies of abduction or in the sadomasochistic teacher-pupil dynamics, with gender coding, that characterize their relationship.⁹ Shaw, in effect, acknowledges that the sadomasochistic impulses must progress to their logical conclusion in his own play too, but he finds a compromise that Ibsen would not be satisfied with. He gives us the sexual fulfillment of these wishes in the final act when Eliza threatens to replace Higgins by "offer[ing]" herself to another man, Professor Nepean, as his assistant. Higgins, "*rising in a fury*," inveighs against his rival and threatens Eliza: "You take one step in his direction and I'll wring your neck. [*He lays hands on her*]." The exchange culminates:

LIZA. [*defiantly non-resistant*]: Wring away. What do I care? I knew you'd strike me some day. [*He lets her go, stamping with rage at having forgotten himself, and recoils so hastily that he stumbles back into his seat on the ottoman*]. (189-90)

⁹ In her analysis of the scene in which Mrs Pearce bathes Eliza, in the British film of *Pygmalion*, J. Ellen Gainor (1991) argues that "Shaw projects onto Mrs Pearce the physical, sexual violation of Eliza that Henry suppresses throughout, in a lesbian 'rape' scene added to the original script at the time it was filmed (1938)," with Mrs Pearce wielding "the phallic brush and cleansing ball" and serving as "a female surrogate for the male rapist" (235-236). This scene certainly makes explicit important unconscious trends in Higgins and in Eliza, and Shaw went on to incorporate it into his final, 1941, printed version of the play (Shaw 1972, 700-701; act 2), though, as Bernard F. Dukore explains, it was originally added not by Shaw, but by Albert Riéra in his screenplay for a proposed French version of *Pygmalion* (Dukore 1980, 41-43).

This is a barely disguised consummation, with Higgins forgetting himself in rage/lust and then recoiling hastily after the deed (the language and the action here strongly reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets about lust), but it is still disguised—and that is crucial for Shaw. However, the full import of this moment can only be appreciated when it is seen as Shaw's domesticated, compromise alternative to the ending of *Rosmersholm*, where the sadomasochistic double-suicide brings consummation to all of the wishes that have impelled the action in Ibsen's play. Indeed, there is another echo of *Rosmersholm* in this moment: Even though the sadistic wishes belong to Rosmer, and even though these wishes are supercharged by Brendel's erotic fantasy, it is Rebekka herself who keeps pushing Rosmer until he reveals his desire that she kill herself for him. Thus, in the stage direction when Rosmer first, almost sarcastically, tells Rebekka to prove her love for him, Ibsen notes that he is "*as if impelled against his will to speak*" (110; act 4). Eliza, too, pushes Higgins into forgetting himself—or, more accurately, into acting out repressed wishes, which allow her to act out her own.

Shaw, then, partly allows the logic of *Rosmersholm* to play itself out, as if acknowledging, in a disguised way, the fatal and unstoppable power of the drives to overcome repression. But at the same time Shaw must shut down the possibility of this kind of victory, and that seems to be his dominant purpose in rewriting Ibsen's play. Shaw has been playing a dangerous game throughout the play, allowing the drives—presumably his own wishes—to push relentlessly against the barriers of repression. However, he can do this only because he is confident that he can put the winds back in Aeolus' bag, both for himself and his audience. He could not succeed if he followed Ibsen's pattern in every respect. In particular, if, as stated above, Rebekka's choice is to stay and consummate her relationship in death, or to sail off to a life without a future, a death-in-life in the arctic north, then the victory of repression (the latter

choice) would scarcely be a victory at all. Thus, it is precisely a *future* that Shaw must give Eliza. He starts to do this in the play itself. Unlike Rebekka, who says that she gives no thought to her future, Eliza talks repeatedly, if sometimes despairingly, about her future, and so do those around her. Then, in the Sequel, Shaw attempts to give Eliza a full-blown future, complete with all the compromises that a continued repression would demand and allow: a ménage-à-quatre with Higgins, Eliza, Freddy, and Pickering; a sexual relationship between Eliza and Freddy as stand-in for Higgins; Eliza's desert-island fantasies of herself and Higgins; and Higgins's continued sublimations in science and in fatherly protection of Eliza. The Sequel is like an ideal Freudian outcome, in that all kinds of balanced, stable, and not overly damaging compromises are achieved between the drives and the forces of repression and sublimation. Contrary to this achievement, the failure of compromise, repression, and sublimation in *Rosmersholm* is a shattering alternative that has to be itself repressed in order to be warded off.

Of course, this same tension in Shaw between the wish to push against the repression and the overwhelming need to reaffirm its power is replayed in the very relation between play and sequel. In the text of the play as it was first published, Shaw does not foreclose the possibility that Eliza might follow the model of Rebekka and return to Higgins. In this original ending, after Higgins gives Liza a list of items to buy for him, Liza responds, "Buy them yourself," and "*sweeps out.*" Mrs Higgins offers to buy Henry the tie and gloves, and the play concludes:

HIGGINS [*sunnily*]. Oh, dont bother. She'll buy em all right enough. Good-bye.

They kiss. Mrs Higgins runs out. Higgins, left alone, rattles his cash in his pocket; chuckles; and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner.

(191)

One can make different arguments about exactly where this original ending leaves the play, but the main point is that the ending requires some interpretation. Nevertheless, in the Sequel (and in later pronouncements), Shaw denied that the ending he wrote is ambiguous. He believed that, when the actors in the first English production made it seem that Eliza and Higgins would get back together, his play was being misinterpreted. And of course, that is why he had to write the Sequel and, in later years, make further revisions to the play and particularly to the ending: he had to shut down these misinterpretations. However, from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is quite likely that Shaw's efforts to control the interpretation others put on his play—efforts that, in practical terms, largely failed—were first and foremost Shaw's insistent attempt to control *his own* interpretation of his own play. The original version of the play never quite renounces the Ibsenist fantasy of liberating oneself from the repression, however dangerous and distressing Shaw may have found that fantasy, however much he was trying to overturn it in this rewriting of *Rosmersholm*. To some extent, Shaw tries to cover over this counter-current by suggesting that even if Eliza returns to Higgins, she would not find the satisfaction of her sexual wishes, but would instead return to a state of repressed old-bachelorhood with Higgins and Pickering. But when audiences, actors, and directors refused to accept anything less than a love match, Shaw, at least at an unconscious level, was forced to confront the dangerous erotic fantasies in his play that worked so counter to his dominant purpose and that threatened to overwhelm the repression. To protect himself, he seems even to have evoked the most visceral feelings of repulsion; in a revealing comment, he wrote to Siegfried Trebitsch that “the notion of her [Eliza's] marrying Higgins is disgusting” (Shaw 1986, 342; letter of 15 June 1934). For the most part, however, his defense was to deny retroactively that these counter-currents were in the play at all—to rewrite the play both by adding and changing material and by insisting on his official interpretation, for

example by editorializing in the screenplay: “The producer should bear in mind from the beginning that ... all suggestion of a love interest between Eliza and Higgins should be most carefully avoided” (Shaw 1980, 226).

The argument being presented here is essentially an intertextual one, with the two actual texts being expanded a bit to include Shaw’s pronouncements about both of them. However, it would not be difficult to line up this analysis with the macro-psychological interpretations of Shaw presented by various psychobiographers and biographical critics writing since Shaw’s death. Weissman (1958), Holroyd (1988-1992), and O’Toole (2017) would perhaps be especially relevant because of the way they treat the strange triangle of adults in Shaw’s childhood home—his mother Bessie, his father George, and the mother’s singing teacher, George Vandeleur Lee—Bessie ultimately going off to England to be with Lee, leaving the father (and son) behind in Ireland. These critics are in considerable agreement about the powerful oedipal effects of this environment on Shaw, and particularly on his sexuality. Holroyd, for example, claims that Shaw needed to “disinfect the relationship [between Bessie Shaw and Lee] from all sexual implication” (probably the relationship between mother and father, too); and further, that Shaw “was to model himself on Lee because of the extraordinary effect Lee had produced on Bessie and, in a number of three-cornered relationships, he was to play out the presumed sexuality of their liaison by refusing to compromise his own chastity” (1988-1992, 1:26, 24).

For our purposes, what is important in Holroyd’s claim, and similar ones, is the idea that Shaw required repression and sublimation of sexual impulses both from the adults (the music being Bessie and Lee’s sublimation) and from himself, first as child and later as adult male. Thus, as reader of *Rosmersholm* and author of *Pygmalion*, Shaw would occupy multiple

positions: as the invisible oedipal child trying to enforce abstinence on the parents, and as all four of the parents (Rosmer, Rebekka, Eliza, and Higgins) enforcing abstinence and sublimation on themselves and each other. It is certainly easy to imagine the raw psychic impact Shaw must have felt when reading Rosmer's "We have nothing to reproach ourselves with" in act 1 (12), or his comment in act 2: "I knew well enough that sooner or later our beautiful, pure friendship might be misinterpreted and bespattered" (59).

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom (1973) expounds his well-known concept of poetic "misprision," the idea that great poets fundamentally misunderstand the predecessors whom they are trying to outdo. In some ways, this is a very psychoanalytic idea, and in the particular case of Shaw and Ibsen, it is echoed by a critic like Daniel Derwin, who writes of "Shaw's failure to penetrate to the heart of Ibsen's work" and calls this failure "another episode in the unwritten tragicomedy of the narcissist, who tends to level differences rather than emphasize them" (1975, 185). But there is another strand in psychoanalytic thought, one that emphasizes the ways in which, in our most intimate relationships, we understand the other all too well, though this understanding may belong only to our unconscious. Shaw did not misunderstand Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. Templeton (2018) argues this point in regard to Shaw's reasoned, conscious analysis of Ibsen's themes and purposes; I am arguing it in regard to Shaw's unconscious, reactive understanding of the play. Shaw was mesmerized by *Rosmersholm* precisely because, at some level, he perceived only too clearly the threat that its fantasies posed to the psychic fantasies and beliefs that he found indispensable. As a writer, however, he could turn the fatal trajectory of sublimation and repression in Ibsen's play into a Freudian comedy of mostly successful, mostly sustainable sublimation and repression, and that was his—probably

unconscious—aim in *Pygmalion*. In his 1891 *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw called *Rosmersholm* “incomparably the most difficult and dangerous, as it is also the greatest, of Ibsen’s later plays” (1979, 226). A danger of this magnitude—of this greatness—could not go unanswered, as the deep affinities between *Rosmersholm* and *Pygmalion* attest.

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