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## LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY "PYGMALION" BY G.B. SHAW

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**Abstract.** This article is devoted to English literature and literary analysis of the play Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw. In this article, the life and creative activity of George Bernard Shaw and especially his famous play Pygmalion: the characters of the play and their spiritual philosophy, conflict and social background of the play, writing style of Pygmalion and the origin of its title were investigated.

**Key words:** drama, playwright, society, class, artistic, pronunciation, changing, play

English literature has passed great and complicated way of development. It gave to the treasure of world literature such great names as Shakespeare, Chaucer, Byron, Shaw, Hemingway, Twain and so many others.

Bernard Shaw occupies a conspicuous place in the historical development of the English and the world literature. In his books Shaw could realistically describe the social life of people. He considered language a lot and tried to reform English and make it easier to read and to learn. This point of Shaw's creative activity determines the actuality of my course paper.

Shaw entered drama area as the original innovator. He established a new type of a drama at the English theatre - an intellectual drama in which the basic place belongs neither to an intrigue, nor to a fascinating plot but to those intense disputes, witty verbal duels which are conducted by its heroes. Shaw called his plays "plays-discussions". They grasped the depth of problems, the extraordinary form of their resolution; they excited consciousness of the spectator, forced him to reflect tensely over an event and to laugh together with the playwright at the absurd of existing laws, orders and customs. In this assignment I intend to analyze the play «Pygmalion» of Bernard Shaw and show its peculiarities to the reader.

Surveys showed that at the beginning of the 20th century 25% of the population were living in poverty. They found that at least 15% were living at subsistence level. They had just enough money for food, rent, fuel and clothes. They could not afford 'luxuries' such as newspapers or public transport. About 10% were living in below subsistence level and could not afford an adequate diet.

The main cause of poverty was low wages. The main cause of extreme poverty was the loss of the main breadwinner. If father was dead, ill or unemployed it was a disaster. Mother might get a job but women were paid much lower wages than men.

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The children of the poor were expected to help towards the family budget, often working long hours in dangerous jobs for low wages. Agile boys were employed by the chimney sweeps; small children were employed to scramble under machinery to retrieve cotton bobbins; and children were also employed to work in coal mines, crawling through tunnels too narrow and low for adults. Children also worked as errand boys, crossing sweepers, or shoe blacks, or selling matches, flowers, and other cheap goods. Some children undertook work as apprentices to respectable trades, such as building, or as domestic servants (there were over 120,000 domestic servants in London in the mid 18th century). Working hours were long: builders might work 64 hours a week in summer and 52 in winter, while domestic servants worked 80 hour weeks. Many young people worked as prostitutes.

George Bernard Shaw (26 July 1856 - 2 November 1950) was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. Although his first profitable writing was music and literary criticism, in which capacity he wrote many highly articulate pieces of journalism, his main talent was for drama, and he wrote more than 60 plays. Nearly all his writings deal sternly with prevailing social problems, but have a vein of comedy to make their stark themes more palatable. Shaw examined education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege.

He was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class, and most of his writings censure that abuse. An ardent socialist, Shaw wrote many brochures and speeches for the Fabian Society. He became an accomplished orator in the furtherance of its causes, which included gaining equal rights for men and women, alleviating abuses of the working class, rescinding private ownership of productive land, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

George Bernard Shaw ranks next to Shakespeare among English playwrights, and yet he did not begin to write drama until he was middle-aged. He made up for lost time with an amazing output of more than 60 plays during a creative life that spanned the Victorian and modern eras. A brilliant and opinionated man, Shaw was essentially self-educated, and he did a splendid job of teaching himself what he needed to know. Above all else, he was always vigorously engaged with the world around him; his long, productive life bristled with vitality, intelligence, and a consuming passion for ideas.

George Bernard Shaw was born in Synge Street, Dublin in 1856 to George Carr Shaw (1814-85), an unsuccessful grain merchant and sometime civil servant, and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, née Gurly (1830-1913), a professional singer. Shaw briefly attended the Wesleyan Connexional School, a grammar school operated by the Methodist New Connexion, before moving to a private school near Dalkey and then transferring to Dublin's Central Model School. He ended his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. He harboured a lifelong animosity toward schools and teachers, saying: "Schools and schoolmasters, as we have them today, are not popular as places of education and

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teachers, but rather prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents". In the astringent prologue to Cashel Byron's Profession young Byron's educational experience is a fictionalized description of Shaw's own schooldays. Later, he painstakingly detailed the reasons for his aversion to formal education in his Treatise on Parents and Children. In brief, he considered the standardized curricula useless, deadening to the spirit and stifling to the intellect. He particularly deplored the use of corporal punishment, which was prevalent in his time.

When his mother left home and followed her voice teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, to London, Shaw was almost sixteen years old. His sisters accompanied their mother but Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, first as a reluctant pupil, then as a clerk in an estate office. He worked efficiently, albeit discontentedly, for several years. In 1876, Shaw joined his mother's London household. She, Vandeleur Lee, and his sister Lucy, provided him with a pound a week while he frequented public libraries and the British Museum reading room where he studied earnestly and began writing novels. He earned his allowance by ghostwriting Vandeleur Lee's music column, which appeared in the London Hornet. His novels were rejected, however, so his literary earnings remained negligible until 1885, when he became self-supporting as a critic of the arts.

Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society, a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means. In the course of his political activities he met Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress and fellow Fabian; they married in 1898. In 1906 the Shaws moved into a house, now called Shaw's Corner, in Ayot St. Lawrence, a small village in Hertfordshire, England; it was to be their home for the remainder of their lives, although they also maintained a residence at 29 Fitzroy Square in London.

Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1890s. By the end of the decade he was an established playwright. He wrote sixty-three plays and his output as novelist, critic, pamphleteer, essayist and private correspondent was prodigious. He is known to have written more than 250,000 letters. Along with Fabian Society members Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Graham Wallas, Shaw founded the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895 with funding provided by private philanthropy, including a bequest of J20,000 from Henry Hunt Hutchinson to the Fabian Society. One of the libraries at the LSE is named in Shaw's honor; it contains collections of his papers and photographs.

During his later years, Shaw enjoyed attending to the grounds at Shaw's Corner. He died at the age of 94, of renal failure precipitated by injuries incurred by falling while pruning a tree. His ashes, mixed with those of his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, were scattered along footpaths and around the statue of Saint Joan in their garden.

Shaw became a critic of the arts when, sponsored by William Archer, he joined the reviewing staff of the Pall Mall Gazette in 1885. There he wrote under

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the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto" ("basset horn")--chosen because it sounded European and nobody knew what a corno di bassetto was. In a miscellany of other periodicals, including *Dramatic Review* (1885-86), *Our Corner* (1885-86), and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1885-88) his byline was "GBS". From 1895 to 1898, Shaw was the drama critic for Frank Harris' *Saturday Review*, in which position he campaigned brilliantly to displace the artificialities and hypocrisies of the Victorian stage with a theatre of actuality and thought. His earnings as a critic made him self-supporting as an author and his articles for the *Saturday Review* made his name well-known.

Much of Shaw's music criticism, ranging from short comments to the book-length essay *The Perfect Wagnerite*, extols the work of the German composer Richard Wagner. Wagner worked 25 years composing *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a massive four-part musical dramatization drawn from the Teutonic mythology of gods, giants, dwarves and Rhine maidens; Shaw considered it a work of genius and reviewed it in detail. Beyond the music, he saw it as an allegory of social evolution where workers, driven by "the invisible whip of hunger", seek freedom from their wealthy masters. Wagner did have socialistic sympathies, as Shaw carefully points out, but made no such claim about his opus. Conversely, Shaw disparaged Brahms, deriding *A German Requiem* by saying "it could only have come from the establishment of a first-class undertaker". Although he found Brahms lacking in intellect, he praised his musicality, saying "...nobody can listen to Brahms' natural utterance of the richest absolute music, especially in his chamber compositions, without rejoicing in his natural gift". In the 1920s, he recanted, calling his earlier animosity towards Brahms "my only mistake". Shaw's writings about music gained great popularity because they were understandable to the average well-read audience member of the day, thus contrasting starkly with the dourly pretentious pedantry of most critiques in that era. All of his music critiques have been collected in *Shaw's Music*. As a drama critic for the *Saturday Review*, a post he held from 1895 to 1898, Shaw championed Henrik Ibsen whose realistic plays scandalized the Victorian public. His influential *Quintessence of Ibsenism* was written in 1891.

Although it is often conflated in the popular imagination with the much-loved musical it inspired, George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Pygmalion* is somewhat different from the romantic comedy *My Fair Lady*. Let's take a closer look at Shaw's play and some of its prominent themes. Before we offer an analysis of *Pygmalion*, though, let's briefly recap the story of the play.

George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* is a retelling of Ovid's ancient story, with a modern perspective. Though the play shares the name of the myth, the references and similarities are vaguer and more suggested than they are direct and clear. His plot points reflect an anti-classism sentiment and his characters embody the feminist struggle for equality and fair treatment. Shaw's *Pygmalion* thoroughly deconstructs and recontextualizes the original Greek story of creating the perfect woman, placing it in the social and political world of early 20th century England.

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Shaw's version retains many features of the original story, though they are presented through cultural artifices of the time. In this story, the character Mr. Higgins takes the place of Pygmalion. Mr. Higgins takes it upon himself the project of transforming the flower girl Eliza from the low-class impoverished girl she is to someone who could be mistaken for a duchess. This plot is a clear indictment of the intense classism present in early 20th century England. The reality of Eliza's transformation is a change of clothes and a change of accent. With this Shaw suggests that the things that make a noble are truly superficial and Eliza's success is even more condemning. However, within this story of class struggle hide more complex themes of womanhood, belonging, and self-actualization, all of which are entirely absent from the source material.

The act of Pygmalion sculpting Galatea out of ivory is represented by Eliza's transformation; and Shaw's commentary is already present in this action. Mr. Higgins initially suggests this project as a crude wager, with no real intention of fulfilling it. When Eliza comes to his home the next day, he only takes on the work once payment is assured. Pygmalion's skill with sculpture is replaced by Mr. Higgins' knowledge with phonetics and Mr. Higgins ostensibly causes a change within Eliza with this knowledge. However, the reality of Eliza's change differs greatly from the sculpting of Galatea.

Galatea is created by the skill of Pygmalion alone. She emerges fully formed from the ivory block. This simple genesis is contrasted with the complex and multilayered transformation of Eliza. Not only must she change the way that she speaks, she must also change the way she looks and dresses. Of course, Mr. Higgins cannot be bothered enough to assist in the bathing and dressing and Eliza, but he does impart his knowledge of pronunciation to Eliza. A careful reading will show however that even Eliza's dramatic change in accent isn't entirely from the work of Mr. Higgins. Eliza's own practice and determination alongside Mr. Higgins' knowledge and coaching is what transforms her. Another difference in the creation aspect is that while Eliza looks and sounds like a noblewoman, she doesn't talk like one. Her language is still somewhat crude and her topics of discussion unsavory. Her transformation is imperfect, and she never truly realizes the perfection seen in Ovid's story.

Galatea is created from an inanimate object, and therefore is incapable of influencing her own creation. This framing reflects the social situation of the time as women were viewed as property of either their fathers or their husbands. Shaw's story is written during the mature first wave feminist movement and therefore reflects the changing ideas of a woman's influence on her own destiny. Hence Eliza must have been the main source for her own change. She acted on her own volition; her own desire become someone more important. Through this difference Shaw posits that though men may think they have great control over women, women are fully in charge of their destiny and are fully capable of changing their future. This theming is reinforced when Eliza rejects a life with Mr. Higgins at the end of the play.

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Eliza's rejection of Mr. Higgins contributes to the new feminist ideation of the woman in society. Of course, this plot point is strikingly different from what is seen in Ovid's story, where Pygmalion and Galatea fall in love and have a child together. Eliza's rejects Mr. Higgins because all the different ways he mistreated her throughout the play. One moment that is very impactful on Eliza's character is the scenes following the ball, where Eliza passes for a woman of the upper class. Eliza is supremely concerned with her future. Having remade herself, she no longer understands where she belongs and desires more, and is afraid of losing what she has gained. Mr. Higgins is dismissive toward her concern, suggesting that marriage will solve her problems. In the final scene of the play Eliza refuses a life with Mr. Higgins because his refusal to treat her with kindness or dignity. This is a clear feminist interpretation of the "happily ever after" plot point in Ovid's story.

Why should Galatea love Pygmalion, and why should she want to be with him? This question likely never crossed the minds of the ancient Greeks, because it wasn't the point of the story. The 20th century reader however may wonder who Galatea wants to be and if Pygmalion is a good match for her. Shaw tries to answer these questions in his story. He concludes the Pygmalion doesn't actually love Galatea, he loves himself, his work and skill, and he is therefore undeserving of Galatea's love. How could a man who so despised womankind that he made his own love even that woman? And a better question then arises, how could any woman be condemned to the fate of being with a man that despises women? He cannot love her, and no woman ought to be so condemned. Eliza's abandonment of Mr. Higgins completes the deconstruction, stating that the character of Galatea is an impossibility; because every woman has control over her destiny, she must leave the man that could only ruin her life.

George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion completely recontextualizes Ovid's story. He uses the new setting of 20th century England to criticize the idea of creating the perfect woman, placing under the lens of feminist critique. He deconstructs each plot point analyzing their multiple meanings and implications. Once he deconstructs the story, he then reassembles it through the eye of critical feminist theory. Pygmalion addresses questions of male female relationships and the female ability to choose by examining a text that only supports the patriarchal male perspective of those questions.

As Shaw's experience and popularity increased, his plays and prefaces became more voluble about reforms he advocated, without diminishing their success as entertainments. Such works, including Caesar and Cleopatra (1898), Man and Superman (1903), Major Barbara (1905) and The Doctor's Dilemma (1906), display Shaw's matured views, for he was approaching 50 when he wrote them. From 1904 to 1907, several of his plays had their London premieres in notable productions at the Court Theatre, managed by Harley Granville-Barker and J. E. Vedrenne. The first of his new plays to be performed at the Court Theatre, John Bull's Other Island (1904), while not especially popular today, made his

reputation in London when King Edward VII laughed so hard during a command performance that he broke his chair.

For the most part, Shaw's plays are comedies of ideas, works that present complex and often controversial themes within the framework of entertaining plots, appealing and unpredictable characters, and witty dialogue. Shaw's works are insistently rational, coolly ridiculing the conventions and prejudices of his time.

There are several examples of special words and phrases to compare:

Cab-short for taxi cab

St Paul's church- designed by Inigo Jones (1573-1651) in the centre of Covent Garden; known as The Actors' Church, it is still used for memorial services for people of the theater.

Covent Garden see 'London theater', He wont get no cab not until in Standard English this would be: He won't get a cab until...

Gumption-sense, courage

Southampton Street - in the Covent Garden area;

Evening dress- people would dress up to go the theater -it was a formal occasion for those sitting in the best seats. Men wore white tie and tails; women wore long dresses.

Charing Cross ,Ludgate Circus - Chering Cross Ladgeyt; famous landmarks at the west and east ends of The Strand ,which runs along the Covent Garden area to the south.

Hammersmith-in west London

Strandwards-Strand towards The Strand ;see note above .

Flower girl -girls like Eliza sold bunches of flowers to passers-by.

Nah then ,Freddy -E,Freddy; look wh'y' gowin ,deah now then Freddy ,look where you're going,dear?

Theres manners f'yer!Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad-there's manners for you!Two bunches of violets trodden into the mud.

Plinth-;square block at the base of a column used as a pedestal.

Ow, eez ye-ooa san,is e?Wal,fewd dan y'de-ooty bawmz a mather should ,eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn then ran awy athaht pyin.Will ye-oo py me f'them?-Oh,he's your son ,is he? Well,if you had done your duty by him as a mother should ,he would know better than to spoil a poor girl's flowers and then away without paying. Will you pay for them?

Sixpence- tanner -slang word for sixpence .See also 'A note on money '

Sovereign-half-a- crown-tuppence-:hapence see 'A note on money '

Hubbub-confusion ,noise

Deprecating-showing disapproval

Hollerin-shouting

Tec-detective (slang)

Aw rawt-all right

All these examples show the artistic ability of the writer how to describe the wrong pronunciation of flowergirl at the first play.

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