

**THE POLITICAL AGENDA OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S
PYGMALION: A ROMANCE IN FIVE ACTS**

Yıldız Tuncer-Kılıç*

The stage directions to each of the five acts of *Pygmalion* (1912) contain detail that is tantamount to a prose escort to the play. G.B. Shaw was always adamant as to the didactic nature of *Pygmalion*, exuberantly declaring in the 1912 preface:

It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacre who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that great art can never be anything else.¹

Indeed, ever the political activist, with or without his literary hat on, Shaw, often referred to as “a politically-conscious theorist”², utilised the play as a platform for his socialism and openly regaled a step by step process of exhorting female/lower-class autonomy. Suffice to say that *Pygmalion* is a candid political tract: by no means hiding anything under a bushel, least of all a spirited attack of middle-class pretensions. With surreptitious ingenuity it sugar coats its laboured attack for easier administration down the gullets of an unsuspecting upper-class theatre audience under the illusion that it has come to see a romance. Certainly the quest to promote the English language is an intrinsic part of Shaw’s battle cry, again vigorously voiced in the preface as the *raison d’être* to the play: “*The reformer we need most today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play.*”³ Language is a palpable means of depicting social mobility, ongoing class contentions and hypocrisy; while the popular appeal that is being fostered is the honey-trap to beckon the very same social climbers being criticised. Shaw has an agenda satirically affiliated to the comedy of manners, to manifestly deconstruct the arbitrary foundations of class definition and division; to ridicule supercilious middle-class condescension towards the working-classes; and to demonstrate that, in true J.S. Mill fashion,

* Yrd. Doç. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

¹ G.B. Shaw, *Prefaces by Bernard Shaw*, (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1938), p.809

² Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p.150

³ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts*, (London: Penguin Books, 1957), preface, p.5

women's independence must begin in women's minds through "...*self-will and government by self-control...*".⁴

Act one opens to a torrent of rain: London late at night is alive with all manner of people from all manner of backgrounds: "*Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the portico of St Paul's church (not Wren's cathedral but Inigo Jones's church in Covent Garden vegetable market), among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. All are peering out gloomily at the rain.*"⁵ The inclement weather generates a momentary chaotic mix of peoples and backgrounds; the universal wish not to get wet is a habitual endeavour and a beautifully artless social equaliser. Not dissimilar to the sentiments of *A Description of a City Shower* (1709) by Shaw's fellow compatriot, Jonathan Swift, when by the effect of a sudden deluge is united opportunist shopper with pious individual, seamstress with irreconcilable Tory and Whig, beneath the common protection of a shed roof, all forgetting "*their Fewds*"⁶ :

*Now in contiguous Drops the Flood comes down,
Threat'ning with Deluge this Devoted Town.
To Shops in Crouds the daged Females fly,
Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy.
The Templer spruce, while ev'ry Spout's a-broach,
Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a Coach.
The tuck'd-up Sempstress walks with hasty Strides,
While Streams run down her oil'd Umbrella's Sides.
Here various Kinds by various Fortunes led,
Commence Acquaintance underneath a Shed.
Triumphant Tories, and desponding Whigs,
Forget their Fewds, and join to save their Wigs.*⁷

"*All are peering gloomily at the rain*" but turbulent nature is not the only social equalizer: within the cosmopolitan domain of Covent Garden, the neutrality of St Paul's portico is the point of demarcation between the upper class confines of the Opera House and the declass  of the vegetable market. The air is electric with an incomprehensible tension,

⁴ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty, The Subjection of Women, etc.*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.433

⁵ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.13

⁶ Kermode, Frank & Hollander, John, ed. *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.1782 ("Their fueds")

⁷ *ibid.*

partly exasperated by the weather perhaps, but moreover a common irritant of perceived curtailment and the anxiety of disclosure.

Freddy, the fledgling middle-class patriarch ordered by his mother and sister to find a cab, collides with a flower girl selling her wares; in the ensuing fray her basket is knocked out of her hands and the flowers fall to the ground. Significantly the moment of impact is elaborated upon by the stage direction: “*A blinding flash of lightening, followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder, orchestrates the incident*”⁸. The moment is significant beyond the irony of their future relationship, but because the taboo of class divide has been challenged and these two representatives have been propelled, as the satirical invocation of Divine intervention, or possibly, outrage, demonstrates by a display of nature, into albeit momentary contact and convergence. While neither party seems particularly aware of the implications of this mishap, other than Liza’s lament at the loss of her flowers; it is the older matriarch, Mrs Eynsford-Hill who realises the magnitude of the encounter. When Liza with great annoyance at possible loss of livelihood shouts: “*Nah then, Freddy: look wh’y’ gowin, deah*”⁹ the lady prick up her ears and demands to know: “How do you know that my son’s name is Freddy, pray?” The question is by no mean an idle attempt at conversation: Liza’s sense of outrage means that she must first be plied by the offer of a few pennies to recompense her loss, by which time she recovers herself enough to become a little more lucid; meanwhile Miss Eynsford-Hill is outraged that her mother is talking to such an individual at all and does her best to curtail the exchange, yet the mother is adamant that she will get to the bottom of what is clearly a very disturbing dilemma:

THE MOTHER: Now tell me how do you know that young gentleman’s name?

THE FLOWER GIRL: I didn’t

THE MOTHER: I heard you call him by it. Don’t try to deceive me.

THE FLOWER GIRL: [protesting] Who’s trying to deceive you? I called him Freddy or Charlie same as you might yourself if you was talking to a stranger and wished to be pleasant.

⁸ G.B.Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.15

⁹ *ibid.*

So virulent is even the possibility of a class convergence that following Liza's explanation Clara cannot but censure her mother in the most severe way: "...*Really mother, you might have spared Freddy that. [She retreats in disgust behind the pillar].*"¹⁰

The Victorian middle-class disgust of class mobility, as Shaw was perfectly aware, was second only to their incredibly buoyant sense of hypocrisy. Maintaining a mistress, once a solely aristocratic pursuit, became common place to the extent that the affluent middle-class family was very often a *ménage à trios*. Prostitution itself was a virulent consequence of lower-class poverty: women would either work full-time or part-time to augment pitifully meagre wages attained working in factories or as seamstresses. Liza is all too aware of this reality, hence her defensive even "[*Hysterical*]" declaration "*I'm a respectable girl: so help me, I never spoke to him except to ask him to buy a flower off me.*"¹¹ just in case she is charged with soliciting, when they will she fears "...*take away my character and drive me on the streets...*"¹² The danger is a dramatically palpable threat and constant to the young girl, like a hound at her heels, all the while that she remains a demonstrably ignorant, ineffectual and working-class. When Higgins accepts the gauntlet thrown down by Pickering to demonstrate his powers as a phonetician and grammarian on the unworthy Liza, and asks Mrs Pearce to "*Take of all her clothes and burn them. Ring up Whitely or somebody for new ones...*"¹³ he demonstrates an authority to demoralize and dominate in terms that infers a 'natural' sexual ascendancy of upper-class male over lower-class female. Liza clearly recognises the covert sexual intimidation and confronted with such debauch-like rhetoric reacts again with "*You're no gentleman, you're not, to talk of such things. / I'm a good girl I am; and I know what the like of you are, I do.*"¹⁴ The confrontational intimation inherent to the moment is immediately and comically released with Higgins shifting from possible role as *seducer* to a *father* figure who demands respectful coercion:

*HIGGINS: We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You've got to learn to behave like a duchess. Take her away, Mrs Pearce, and if she gives you any trouble, wallop her.*¹⁵

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.17

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.19, 20

¹² *ibid.*, p.20

¹³ *ibid.*, p.41

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

As Christopher Gillie states, “*Shaw notoriously cultivated provocative statements: he sought to bring out that part of any truth which public opinion ignored and exaggerated it.*”¹⁶ Sexual innuendo, not always so intrusively contentious perhaps, is nevertheless a near constant source of duress for Liza, though it translates as a mutually shared joke between text and audience

THE FLOWER GIRL: [still nursing her sense of injury] Aint no call to meddle with me, he aint.

*THE BYSTANDERS: [to her] Of course he aint. Don't you stand it from him. [To the note taker] See here: what call have you to know about people what never offered to meddle with you.*¹⁷

At first the term *meddle* appears to be a reference to Higgins's officious interference in the lives of those over whom, by virtue of class, he appears to have the right to manipulate. Yet deeper ramifications exist: *meddle* is used from the mid 14th century to the 1700's as a euphemism for fornication; this is an archaic usage which would easily have fallen pray to forgetfulness and disuse were it not for Shakespeare's fondness for sexual puns.¹⁸ Shakespearean usage means that as a term it is sustained in literary memory therefore easily conjured and referenced for comic and political effect.¹⁹ Popular music hall gags were another readily available and easily referable source of sexual innuendo; Liza's complaint of Higgins, that “*He's no gentleman, he aint, to interfere with a poor girl*”²⁰, is meant to comically suggest sexual handling. What ever the source or nature of the intimation, the joke is invariably on Liza, for whom it means a taint on her reputation. Given that the greater majority of young women, even those in work, were forced into prostitution in order to survive, the danger of being defined in this way would have been a constant problem. Her rebuff is made more significant therefore since she chooses not to abandon herself to prostitution, which, given her poverty, would perhaps be the softer option. As if to prove that

¹⁶ Christopher Gillie, *Movements in English Literature 1900-1940*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.164

¹⁷ G.B.Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.24

¹⁸ Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and their Significance*, London: Palgrave Macmillian, 1984), p.170

¹⁹ *ibid.*,p.xi. “[Cobbler:] ‘Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the awl: I / meddle with no tradesman's matters, nor women's / matters, but with awl. I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon / to old shoes’. This cobbler disclaims meddling (sexual intimacy) with the matters of the tradesmen (brothel-keeper or bawd) or with women's matters (feminine pudenda: sexual intercourse).” The scene is taken by Rubinstein from *Julius Caesar* (Act. 1 Sc.1) and the lines end “when they are in great danger, I recover them”, whether Shaw was implying Higgins' pragmatic role as ‘maker’ ‘crafter’ of woman (like the mythical Pygmalion) or of society as a socialist intellectual, remains inconclusive.

²⁰ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.24

she is not a passive recipient of Higgins's manipulations, Liza at the earliest point in the play is demonstrably self-aware, proud and deeply conscientious as to who she is and how she is perceived by society: [*subsiding into a brooding melancholy over her basket, and talking very low-spiritedly to herself*] *I'm a good girl, I am.*²¹

Class is then, along side the contentious subject of female emancipation, a parallel political incentive in the play. When, for instance, Higgins is challenged by a particularly vocal bystander: "*You take us for dirt under your feet, don't you? Catch you taking liberties with a gentleman!*"²² a sense of age old hurt and humiliation belies the animosity of the first sentence, presented as a morally daunting question. In spite of the apparently egalitarian appearance of the sheltering portico, it seems that the bystander feels himself less than able to stand as an equal to Higgins. Ironically, in the second sentence, he re-validates the arbitrary assertion of class superiority by advocating, not himself as the formidable equal who will meet the challenge offered by 'the toff', but the person of another "*gentleman*" towards whom such scathing treatment would not be dared. Implied is the self-defeatism of an outspoken and potentially enlightened lower-class Englishman to the notion of class; pertaining issues have been internalised to the point that even in passionate revolt they are recalled unthinkingly and automatically reaffirmed. Throughout the play the hierarchal dynamics between the lower and upper orders are defined to the detriment of the former, the argument is not simply confined to polar positions (the humiliation of the lower through the crass assumptions of the upper) but elaborated upon far beyond the know niceties and injustices to the question whether class should exist at all.

The same 'natural' acceptance of arbitrary social dogma is seen in women's internalisation of patriarchal prejudice about themselves. "*The Mother*", or Mrs Eynsford-Hill as she is later named, is a matriarch of sufficient authority to send the young Freddy, her son, on a fool's errand, to accomplish that most impossible of all things, of finding a cab in the pouring rain. The said lady, alighting on the figure of Pickering as the most senior, upper-class and imposing patriarch there, asks in all earnestness: "*Oh Sir, is there any sign of it stopping.*"²³ Since a lady of her station would not initiate conversation with a perfect stranger, albeit a gentleman, were it not absolutely imperative, we know that this is not an idle remark. It is an enquiry which necessarily supposes not only that his judgement, as a man, is of greater consequence than her own (even though their experience of the rain is identical); but that by

²¹ *ibid.*, p.24

²² *ibid.*, p.24

²³ *ibid.*, p.17

nature of the phenomenon under enquiry, she assumes, presumably, that he can divine nature. Upon hearing that the rain has not lessened, that it has increased, she exclaims “*Oh dear*”, clearly moved by the surety of such divination. Conversely, Liza is not so reticent, as a female motivated by equal powers to the male, she immediately pipes up: “*If it’s worse, it’s a sign its nearly over. So cheer up, Captain*”²⁴, and provides a superseding empirical speculation.

Pickering short of small change offers three pence to Liza, the amount is insufficient to buy him a poesy, but enough, hopes the old gentleman, to keep Liza from brow-beating him into a purchase he does not have the small change to make. This handing of money unaccompanied by the exchange of goods carries the suggestion of prostitution. A bystander warns Liza by suggesting that she give a flower to legitimise the exchange. Liza is all too aware of what is being implied:

*THE FLOWER GIRL: (springing up terrified) I aint done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman, Ive a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. (Hysterically) I’m a respectable girl: so help me...*²⁵

The anxiety inherent to her defensive claim that she is not soliciting (keeping off the kerb) is exaggerated by the vociferous stage directions; and further exasperated still by the diverse and agitated reaction of the sheltering crowd around her, who with all the judicial self-importance of a tragedy chorus, turn the episode into a public debate:

*Whats the row? What-she-do? Where is he? A tec taking her down. What! Him? Yes: him over there: Took money off the gentleman etc.*²⁶

True to Shavian drama, *Pygmalion* resounds with political discussion on various levels: the public and private; idiosyncratic and representative; naïve and brutally radical. One senses that the entire play is a didactic onslaught; carefully sugared with romantic potential to make it palatable to the otherwise resistant middle-class palate, but a motivated, ‘no holds barred’ attack all the same. Shaw refers to the corporate identity, yet does not trust it. It has to be remembered that he was “*the dominating voice of the anti-Victorian reaction*” but “*he, [was] himself a Victorian...*”²⁷ Perhaps to the Victorian protectionist in Shaw, a large impersonal conglomerate of demanding voices, represents a mindless corporate identity lacking individuality, intellectual prowess, integrity and self-determinism is therefore a

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.18

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.19,20

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.20

²⁷ T.F. Evans, *George Bernard Shaw: The Critical Heritage*, (London & NewYork: Routledge, 1999), p.383 (129. Unsigned leading article, *The Times*, 3 Nov. 1950)

liability, rather than a productive means to social change. Hence, the public forum of lower-class individuals surrounding Liza is in danger of degenerating into a proletariat scrum as they jostle to see the contents of Higgins's notebook, ready to condemn him for being "a copper's nark"²⁸ or police informer, or indeed an undercover police officer.²⁹ His continued assurance in the face of "mob"³⁰ pressure, the accompanying stage directions affirm, "would upset a weaker man",³¹ while a more circumspect faction is stated to demonstratively take charge of Liza, who "is conducted by the more sympathetic demonstrators back to her plinth, where she resumes her seat ..."³² The representative 'chorus' of *Pygmalion* is largely, though not exclusively, of a working class identity, and due to his socialist preoccupations, one with which Shaw obviously has shared sympathies. One should not however make the mistake of thinking that he trusts the integrity of the crowd – he does not; and neither does he disassociate himself so completely with his own privileged status to assimilate entirely to the lower orders.

The play's representation of the masses epitomizes strained relations: while aware of, perhaps even sympathetic to, traditional middle-class antipathy and intolerance towards even the most innocent show of civil insurgence, the text dauntlessly depicts an untypically articulate and animated schism. Incivility takes the form of archetypal cockney³³ 'cheek': they are native people of urban London depicting a characteristically brazen temerity, of a comical sarcastic nature that is underlined by a crafty, street-wise facetiousness; the rhetoric of rebellion regionally hemmed; localized into the safer proportions of an 'epidemic', as opposed to the implication of immanent 'pandemic' sedition. The crowd that gathers beneath the church portico slowly emerges as a bold vocalisation of working-class opinion, yet it is also a political potential checked at every junction, not least of all by specifically being made into a vociferous anti-class revolt, rather than outright all inclusive anarchic remonstrance.

²⁸ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p. 21

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 22

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ The earliest recorded use of the term is 1362 in *The vision of William concerning Piers Plowman* by William Langland to literally mean 'a cock's egg'. In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale* (circa 1386) it appears as "cokenay", meaning a child tenderly brought up. By 1521 it was in use by country people as a derogatory reference for the effeminate town-dwellers. The term was used to describe those born within earshot of the Bow Bells in 1600, when Samuel Rowlands, in his satire *The Letting of Humours Blood in the Head-Vaine*, referred to 'a Bowe-bell Cockney'. John Minsheu (or Minshew) was the first lexicographer to define the word in this sense, in his *Ductor in Linguas* (1617), where he referred to 'A Cockney or Cockny, applied only to one born within the sound of Bow bell, that is in the City of London'.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockney>

Shaw seems not to believe in conglomerations whose inevitable lack of integrity and intellectual focus fall short of his own ideals. He is a man, as far as *Pygmalion* demonstrates him to be, who believes in the abilities and prowess of the individual. However, this should not be confused with the psychological, emotive or behavioural details of human nature: Shaw was not concerned with the human equation in the Shakespearean sense of the word and tended to disregard the instinctive side of human nature with a stoic unsentimental vision:

*The strongest impulse unable to explain itself in lucid terms, working without visible means of subsistence to heroic or evil ends, baffled his intellect. He could write it off only as a fresh manifestation of human stupidity and believe as long as possible that it was too unreasonable to be true... This defect of human understanding led him to suppose that the battle was never between virtue and vice or between duty and inclination but always between intelligence and stupidity.*³⁴

Shaw was concerned with social justice, as the didactic premise of *Pygmalion* and his embrace of the lower-classes cause vouches. He also insisted “*that every man is morally responsible for his own deeds, which are irrevocable, and that his life depends on his usefulness.*”³⁵ The pragmatic delineation of character clearly isolates Higgins as Shawian hero, in spite of his open chauvinism, disregard for human sensibility and wholly patriarchal Victorian trappings.

Higgins, defining the origins of those whom he phonetically transcribes, unsurprisingly ascribes Selsey, Listen Grove and Hoxton as the places of birth for the lower-class individuals around him. It is not until he subjects Pickering to the same onslaught, giving a superbly economic four point resume of the gentleman’s entire life and status, that the system of class definition is displayed before our eyes as a frighteningly dogmatic shorthand to social identity: “*Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge, and India*”; his place of birth; public school; university; and commission as an office, respectively.

As the “*Note Taker*”, Higgins is democratic in his interfering: equally irreverent in his definition and ridicule of the Eynsford-Hills as he is of the cockney contingent. Higgins is not a particularly endearing character: he is often belligerent and sways with schizophrenic duplicity between heated tyranny and cold indifference, he is certainly prejudicial and reactionary; a middle-aged, plutocratic Edwardian gentleman suckled on Victorian values.

³⁴ T.F. Evans, *George Bernard Shaw: The Critical Heritage*, p. 384-385

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.383

Yet the quality that Shaw wishes most to invest in Higgins is a sense of egalitarianism. Not a soppy liberalism which would sit oddly with his patriarchal credentials, but science orientated rationalist principle of ethics, ignited with good old fashion English eccentricity. The point made repeatedly by the text is that he maybe brusque, even down right rude yet he is a man whom, as in the words of Kipling, can “*Walk with kings nor loose the common touch*”.³⁶

Shaw’s decision to elaborate upon the premise of autonomous individuality via a young lower-class female lacking station and consequence suggests an agenda similar to Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740). Catering to the whims of a vacantly self-absorbed, middle-class, Richardson establishes a fine balance between consoling his readership and awakening them to concepts both radical and provocative. It is difficult to imagine who are the more daunted: the author, intent upon demonstrating social mobility; or his unsuspecting readership finding themselves amidst middle-class subterfuge and lower-class rebellion. Within such circumstances the presentation of a young, unprotected and socially insignificant girl, of whom all but the most petty and cowardly could possibly define as revolutionary, seems a sensible choice as representative of social mobility. Pamela may in the final analysis be a brazen gold-digger and a parody of ‘natural’ middle-class superiority, yet she is so very young and weak and female how on earth could she represent a threat to the status quo? Equally, just how insidious could the keeping of a diary be, or ability for rational and articulate speech, or indeed refinement and poise, and not least the natural propensity to faint (like a lady)? Surely it would be absurd to think that one so insignificant and superfluous could signify danger of the slightest degree to the great patriarchal machinations of English society. Yet long before she marries Mr B and realises not only the haloed echelons of a state of middle-class, but over-extending it by rising to the much sought-after and heady ranks of the aristocracy Pamela makes the claim: “*My soul is equal to the soul of a princess*”. Her claim is a demanding God ordained and therefore natural right to highest rank; after all does the Bible not state that all Christian souls are of equal worth within the sight of God. Christian verification drives home the assumption without fear of dissent, since to dispute it would mean a challenge to the word of God. This is a turning of the tables upon a middle-class rhetorical mainstay that leans heavily on Christian teachings.

Liza’s claim to ‘natural’ class superiority recalls Pamela’s plight, yet a major point of departure is the political objectives of each text. Richardson’s is an anthem to middle-class self-realisation, a further vindication to the cry of ‘ever onwards and upwards’, hence *Pamela*

³⁶Philip Larkin (ed.) *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Verse*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1984), p. 70

is the middle-class dream realised. Shaw, however, has an anarchic motive in respect to the issue of class: he does not wish to elevate Liza to the upper-orders, rather he wants to demonstrate the ease with which class divide can be overcome, to show how flimsy the arbitrary demarcation is between them so that class division can be revealed to be altogether arbitrary and non-essential to the worth of the individual and the function of society. Shaw does not want to generate class mobility, but to obliterate class altogether.

The age is one of social climbing: gone are the restraints of inflexible Victorian categorisation and calcified values. A more liberated exchange of dialogue between the classes is an exhilarating propensity in the play: once the rain has subsided the various classes represented take their leave of the church portico in a similarly un-class-conscious vein. The unnamed bystanders freely gibe at Higgins for “*losing our time listening to your silliness!*” Just so the “*Sarcastic Bystander*” who tells Higgins “*Go back there*” and is not shy in mocking him: “[*affecting great distinction of speech*] *Thank you, teacher. Haw haw! So long [he touches his hat with mock respect and strolls off]*.”³⁷ While the middle-class contingent in the shape of the Eynsford-Hills leave, planning to take public transport in the shape of a “*motor bus*”. The Edwardian period is characterised by a relatively fluid social definition – more openly denoted according to financial ability, decrees that the only way is upwardly mobile. Accent, amongst a myriad of superficial signs is a means of denoting class. Hence, changing accent means change in the way one is perceived by others and this in turn denotes status.

Shaw’s elaboration upon the science of phonetics arises from his evaluation of language as a definer of cultural identity. He elaborates on phonetics in his preface “*A Professor of Phonetics*”, isolating his main contention as the widespread disrespect of the English language, which is not systematically taught and therefore is not uniformly learnt or spoken. Variations in spoken English are then founded upon the nature of tutorage and educational opportunity; variables which accentuate still further the substantial rift between social groups. “[*I*] *it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him*”³⁸ he laments, implying that variety in spoken English leads to class distinction and therefore to irreconcilable fragmentation and ultimately to social disunity. As Higgins explains to Pickering:

³⁷G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.26.

³⁸ *ibid.*, preface, p.5

*This is an age of upstarts. Men begin in Kentish Town with £80 a year and end in Park Lane with a hundred thousand. They want to drop Kentish Town; but they give themselves away every time they open their mouths.*³⁹

While Higgins's condescension towards these 'upstarts' is perceptible, lower-class aspirations are not judged cruelly or condemned as improper.

The isolation of language as a particularly vehement means of class differentiation is explained in the preface. Ever the pragmatic, Shaw determines a specific niche: "...for the encouragement of people troubled with accents that cut them off from possibility of all high employment, I may add that the change wrought by Professor Higgins in the flower girl is neither impossible nor uncommon."⁴⁰ His aim is not the encouragement of those individuals intent upon "slough[ing] off their native dialects and acquir[ing] a new tongue" indeed he concludes, "An honest slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempts of phonetically untaught persons to imitate the plutocracy."⁴¹ He does not support imitation because he dismisses the institution of class per se. Intonation, as an arbitrary insinuation of class is a readily alterable barometer and as such declares the inanity of social designation based on the spoken word.

Shaw's admiration of phonetician Professor Henry Sweet, though he repudiates all likeness to Higgins, is nevertheless uncanny. Higgins is a mixture of properties gleaned from a similar gaggle of dialectologists, in whom Shaw invests heroism. Henry Sweet is anti-social and given to "savagely derisive attacks"⁴², his contribution to the scientific cannon negligible, yet because he is as inconsolable to "conventional morals as Ibsen and Samuel Butler"⁴³ and "would not suffer fools gladly"⁴⁴, Shaw grants him Shavian hero status: the quixotic idealist openly refusing to condescend to transient social niceties and belligerently defending his principles, all the while "crying in the wilderness."⁴⁵ Not unconnected is the additional spurring of charming English eccentricity which again extricates the individual from the homogenous pile: "Alexander J. Ellis was still a London patriarch, with an impressive head always covered by a velvet skull cap, for which he would apologise to public meetings in a

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, preface p.9

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*, preface, p.6

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.5

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

very curtly manner.”⁴⁶ A tender respect for romantic lost causes is the motivation behind a character like Henry Higgins, an oddly misanthropic champion of egalitarian individualism. Amidst tremendously invective outbursts like “[*explosively*] Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly... A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere – no right to live”⁴⁷, denying existence to those whom he considers dialectically sub-standards are juxtaposed lines of such frank beauty as: “*THE NOT TAKER: ... Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible;*”⁴⁸ With Pickering as appreciative sounding board Higgins is transformed into a Shavian mouthpiece. Ironically the statement to emerge from this tirade of abuse is the belief that the near bestial Liza (“*crooning like a bilious pigeon*”) is a worthy individual who appears otherwise due to dialect:

THE NOTE TAKER: You see this creature with the kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party. I could even get her a place as lady’s maid or shop assistant, which requires better English.

...

*Yes, you squashed cabbage leaf, you disgrace to the noble architecture of these columns, you incarnate insult to the English Language: I could pass you off as the Queen of Sheba.*⁴⁹

A seemingly insurmountable barrier given the importance surrounding spoken English, dialect is equally simple to overcome. Insinuating that those deemed the lower orders are not lacking in intellect but possess worthwhile opinion and ideas and only lack the proper means by which to express and showcase these qualities, and subsequently themselves.

The sub-text to Lisa’s comical exchange with the taxi driver reveals her dormant aspirations; interestingly it is not her choice to take a cab but her bourgeois embarrassment over her flower basket, emblematic of her working-class origin that fixes the moment as being significant. A handful of loose change seems sufficient aggrandizement to elevate the flower

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, preface p.6

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.27

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.27,28

girl to middle-class pretensions; equally the heady pinnacle of ‘the middle state’ is precipitated by nothing more sublime or intrinsic than money.⁵⁰ The flower basket, symbol of affiliation with trade, is intolerantly hidden within the cab: “*I dont want nobody to see it. [She crushes it into the cab and gets in...]*”⁵¹ The edge is taken off so calculated and typically middle-class a pretence by the naïve demand that she be taken to “*Bucknam Pellis*”;⁵² which rather than relieve the biting satirical implications being drawn regarding the insecurities of bourgeois sensibility, inflames it further still. Humour is central to the scene but cannot lessen the serious implication Shaw attaches to Liza’s aspirational mindset: as revealed by the formerly sad, snivelling creature entitled “*The Flower Girl*”, now being given identity as “*Liza*”, at the moment that she declares her intentions of advancement. She reverts back to being “*The Flower Girl*” in the second act, when she travels to Wimpole Street in search of Higgins and the prospect of becoming a shop girl; she remains nameless while arguing over money matters and driving him wild with outrage at her open impertinence. It is not until floundering at Higgins’s “[*thundering at her*]” demanding that she “*Sit down*”, she “*stands, half rebellious, half-bewildered*”,⁵³ that Pickering offers her a seat, “[*very courteous*] *Wont you sit down? [He places the stray chair near the hearthrug between himself and Higgins].*” As Liza is to recall with deliberate mindfulness in act five when she tells Pickering that it was his gallant treatment of her that “*began [her] real education*” elucidating that “*the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated...*”⁵⁴ Just so as Liza “[*cooly*]” says “*Don’t mind if I do*” and sits down, we note that her name has replaced the descriptive adage of flower girl. Hence, for a metaphorical liberalisation to occur and for the individual to escape the tiresome confines of class two things are necessary; firstly, self-defining drive, and secondly, equality.

It is a quality specific to *Pygmalion* that it is foremost a text, to be read and deciphered, and only secondarily a play, to be watched in performance. The elaborate nature of the stage directions and additional descriptive material, like the detailed information relating to the respective rooms occupied by Liza, Higgins and Mrs Higgins, all amount to a sub-text that inform upon the related dialogue, verifying, qualifying or questioning in turn. At face value this is a romance, as stated earlier, a means of pacifying resistance to ideas being

⁵⁰ The point is an antagonistic reproach to the nineteenth-century novel convention of pandering to bourgeois sensibility by reiterating the myth of the timeless and universal nature of the middle-classes; implying, rather like the ‘blue-blooded’ organic palpability of the aristocracy, that they are connaturally superior.

⁵¹ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 1, p.29

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 29 (Buckingham Palace)

⁵³ *ibid.*, Act 2, p.39

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Act 5, p.121-122

related in a play; ideas that are frankly objectionable and volatile to a middle-class audience whose very formative values are here under judgement and dismissal. Therefore, beneath a surface effect of romance and complimentary to the ongoing political argument of the play is a further, visual ‘semantic’ narrative of objects, costume, décor, architectural detail and dogmatic description. This visual narrative translated into set and décor are perhaps easily overlooked on the expanse of the stage or naturally back-grounded in performance by the physical action of performance and dialogue; it is only in a reading of the play as text do we see that the commanding visual details very often work to satirize or openly sabotage the overt romanticism, qualifying the hidden irony or negating that which is seemingly being stated or represented. It is probably for this reason that academic study of this play as a text easily reveals its political incentive, yet for those who have experienced it only as a stage performance the romantic story is an overpowering premise unpacifiable by Shaw’s directive panacea, especially when so often these productions choose to remove these directives altogether.

A very simple case in point is Higgins’s costume: the text dictates categorically that even in the early morning while residing in the comfort of his own home, Higgins is dressed in the sartorial best of the upper-class English gentleman, “*in a professional-looking black frock-coat with a white linen collar and black silk tie.*”⁵⁵ Yet in all film and stage adaptations from the 1930’s onward, whether they be play or musical, Higgins is dressed, at his most formal, in a tweed suit, suggesting a gentle ‘country-casual’ look inspiring a sense of comfort and ease and clearly investing an approachable informality and warmth into the character; while in the 1964 George Cukor musical *My Fair Lady*, he is a veritable pussy-cat lounging at home in a very tame cosy cardigan. It has to be understood that the latent political content of the play, apart from being implied through visual devices, is most clearly divulged by the dialogue of Higgins, whose outbursts tend to be magnificently oratorical (“*Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech...*”)⁵⁶. These statements are by design profoundly startling and singularly unexpected so that like a bolt out of the blue they resound with radical political intent. Since they are statements that rise above the cajoling romantic mist, they present an ambiguous statement to the audience: in order to lend authority to these subversive political comments and subdue the audience into accepting this authoritative voice, Higgins must be fixed in their minds as an unquestionable representative of their status quo, an icon of Victorian, patriarchal and scientific superiority –

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Act 2, p.34

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Act 1, p.27

hence the specific dynamics behind his costume. To soften the Professor's edges, as adaptations do in order to make plausible the romantic attachment with Liza, is to work against this assertion of absolute authority, hence its removal is to promote an imbalance from radical to romantic, an affect that is retrograde to Shaw's intentions.

The detailed reference to rooms as reverberations of their owners is a similar but more intense example. Liza's lodging is the first location to be described in great detail; as with this, just so the representative locations associated with Higgins and Mrs Higgins later on, elucidate upon each individual epitomizing that which they truly represent, as opposed to the socially appropriated representation.

Liza's irascibility towards even the driver's good humoured jibe is indicative of the importance she attaches to her self-worth, a quality which until now has appeared to us as nothing more than the naïve petulant surety of a child. She is not pretentious, her behaviour is not a deceptive 'putting-on' of ostentation; it is not a superfluous conceit that flags at the first put down or disappears altogether into cloud of self-doubt when in the private realm. Even though there is a salute of admiration in the drivers final "*Good Luck!*" as a statement it also harbours a disbelief in her actual pulling it off.

Apart from the ubiquitous and timeless teenage iconography, "*a portrait of a popular actor*" stuck to her wall, all else in the room reports of expectations far in excess of the possibilities in Liza's life: "*...fashion plates of ladies dresses... torn from newspapers...all wildly beyond Eliza's means.*"⁵⁷ The basic necessities, and they are duly so, "*...a wretched bed heaped with all sorts of coverings that have any warmth in them, a draped packing case with a basin and jug on it and a little looking glass over it*", are all so laudably minor that the few article of barely affordable "*luxury*" are made significantly prominent in relation to them. A birdcage "*its tenant died long ago: it remains as a memorial only*", symbolising perhaps Liza's own social incarceration: an energetic and driven individual held captive within the limited circumstances imposed by a vigorously applied class definition. Most incongruous of all is "*an American alarum clock*"⁵⁸: hardly prone to the time-keeping practices of a corporate life, Liza could have little need of such a timepiece; the anti-traditional liberalism innate to "*American*", plus the systematic purpose inherent to the "*alarum clock*" providing the proverbial 'wake-up call', indicates a young woman innately motivated towards achievement

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, Act 1, p.31

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.31

beyond her allocated lot – “*dreaming and planning*”⁵⁹. The constant mercantilist preoccupation with economy, utility and finance too is not lost on us:

*...counting her riches...until the gas goes out, when she enjoys for the first time the sensation of being able to put in another penny without grudging it. This prodigal mood does not extinguish her growing sense of the need for economy sufficiently to prevent her from calculating that she can dream and plan in bed more cheaply and warmly than sitting up without a tie.*⁶⁰

As Liza is slowly being manoeuvred from insignificant victim to surreptitious but formidable rebel, the middle-class audience are being lulled into accepting her and what better way to create familiarity than for her to appeal to basic middle-class principles as ‘petit bourgeois’ and foster an intimacy of shared values. The confident statement imparted to Mrs Pearce at the door of Wimpole Street that Higgins will “*be glad to see her when [he] knows what she’s come about*”⁶¹ is pure mercantilist bravado.

Higgins in his comparative abode represents a counterpart greater than that defined simply by class; the gender difference enlarges upon the class difference making it a social chasm disproportionately wide. This unsurpassable void between Liza and Higgins, of which there would have been no danger of contradiction from the audience, convergence on the idea ‘never the twain shall meet’; sentiments which would have reassured the audience with a sense of stability at the beginning of the play, but conversely would have further emphasised the extent of the tumultuous change at the end of the play given that Liza and Higgins become near equals.

Reference to Higgins’ laboratory accentuates the already hefty patriarchal identity avouched to ‘the man of science’. Situated in the study, where the head of the household would have withdrawn to the safety of his books, beverages and cigars the presence of a laboratory instead insinuates Higgins’s outward identity, his mindset in regard to the world at large: rational, clinical and pragmatic. The layout of the room is eclectic, however, and depicts a scientist, a pianist, a man dedicated to self-gratification (the single armchair by the fireside, the dish of bonbons and chocolates). His public persona maybe rigid and intimidating but not the sum-total of the man. The objects in the room and their particular lay out suggests the contradictory stance of an enthusiastic scientist with paraphernalia of “*phonograph,*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.31-32

⁶¹ *ibid.*, Act2, p.36

*laryngoscope...several tuning-forks of different sizes*⁶², yet in palpable opposition, literally demonstrated by its location in the direct opposite corner of the room, is a grand piano with bonbon dish perched on top. Given that the play is situated at the cusp of the Edwardian and Modern periods, it seems inevitable to expect a certain degree of counter-Victorian deconstruction of the patriarchal archetype: hence along side Shaw's demonstration of a formidable male icon in Higgins, the essence of a child-like petulance and open craving for creature-comforts works well with the changing gender values of the age. Needless to say, the Professor is by no means 'a New Man'; his pedantic nature may be seen to harbour certain weaknesses, associated in the previous age with the feminine (a delight for chocolate being one), but Shaw is quick to add that "*he is of the energetic scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people.*"⁶³ While his carelessness of others is often exemplified, Higgins's carelessness of himself seems largely invalidated, especially given that he is dressed in a "*black frock-coat with a white linen collar and black silk tie.*"⁶⁴ Higgins is unarguably manipulative, commanding and wholly arrogant, the quintessential ruling patriarch in thought, word and deed. Why else would his mother, the dowager with full right to the family home on Wimpole Street, abandon it following her husband's death to the 'son and heir' and prefer to occupy a bohemian apartment in Chelsea? Certainly, as will become apparent, it is proof of Mrs Higgins' own agenda of establishing autonomy, clearly only achievable by wilfully abandoning the patriarchal enclave once ruled by her husband and now superseded by her son.

Aside from the tentatively feminine association; the chocolate factor, the near tantrums, his refusal to adopt adult civility and his overt reliance chiefly on Mrs Pearce as surrogate-mother, are all indicative of childish immaturity:

*He is, in fact, but for his years and size, rather like a very impetuous baby 'taking notice' eagerly and loudly, and requiring almost as much watching to keep him out of unintended mischief. His manner varies from general bullying when he is in a good humour to stormy petulance when anything goes wrong; but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likable even in his least reasonable moments.*⁶⁵

⁶² *ibid.*, p.33, 34

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.34

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, Act 1, p.34

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Act 2, p.34

It is not incidental that apart from Pickering, the educated ‘natural gentleman’⁶⁶ counterpart to Higgins, his superiority is a quality reliant on being back grounded by social subordinates; women, lower-class individual, and those unversed in phonetics. The phallogocentric is maintained by virtue of his reliance on these subordinates. Hence, Higgins’s relationship with women though imparted as the exercise of paternal authority is underpinned by a perversely egoistic infantile depravity:

*But as to Higgins, the only distinction he makes between men and women is that when he is neither bullying nor exclaiming to the heavens against some featherweight cross, he coaxes women as a child coaxes its nurse when it wants to get anything out of her.*⁶⁷

The vacuum of male childishness, explainable perhaps as a momentary means of abdicating responsibility from the burdensome confines of patriarchal identity, is shown to be filled by a comparative seriousness of intent by the female contingent. In the midst of a heated exchange, when Liza having arrived at Wimpole Street insinuating power by virtue of the handful of coins in her pocket, so outrages the patriarchal sensibility of even the ‘egalitarian’ Higgins who at a loss as to how to handle the situation thunders commands at her:

THE FLOWER GIRL: Good enough for yə -oo. Now you know, don’t you? I’m coming to have lessons, I am. And to pay for em tə-oo: make no mistake.

HIGGINS: [stupent] Well!!! [Recovering his breath with a gasp] What do you expect me to say to you?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Well, if you was a gentleman, you might as me to sit down, I think...

*HIGGINS: Pickering: shall we ask this baggage to sit down, or shall we throw her out of the window?*⁶⁸

Then at the climax of his indignation having suffered the affront of having his authority and identity as ‘gentleman’ questioned by a “*half rebellious*” lower-class female:

HIGGINS: What’s your name?

⁶⁶ The term describes that type of man who displays qualities of charm, gentleness, fraternity and justice not as a learnt social skill, ie. ‘the English gentleman’, but as natural qualities innate to their very nature. A very lucid example would be the character of Joe Gargery in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. In Pickering, however, the adage of ‘educated’ denotes G.B.Shaw’s implied stipulation that improper education is destructive, while proper instruction is a viable means of generating worthy character.

⁶⁷ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 2, p.36

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.38

THE FLOWER GIRL: Liza Dolittle.

HIGGINS: [declaiming gravely]

Eliza, Elizabeth, Betsy and Bess,

They went to the woods to get a bird's nes':

PICKERING: They found a nest with four eggs in it:

HIGGINS: They took one apiece, and left three in it.

They laugh heartily at their own fun.

*LIZA: Oh, don't be silly.*⁶⁹

Liza's intervention re-establishes the order decimated by male vacancy and as 'heroine' that is in part her given objective, since "...when the patriarch no longer rules, and the "breadwinner" acknowledges his dependence, there is an end of the old order."⁷⁰

From this contradictory amalgamation of seemingly inconsolable characteristics emerges Shaw's exposition of the patriarch: a vigorous, intellectually viable but fixated, selfish child/man. The play's criticism of Higgins is nothing more damning than cantankerousness: likeness to infantile acrimony is not an exposé intended to condemn or even to ridicule, but rather to reduce the icon to human dimensions. The character of Higgins has been formulated to undermine the representative ideal not in anarchic terms, but to reveal the inner individual, as it were, 'warts' or 'weaknesses and all'. Just as he is aware of the ongoing debate into the 'woman question' and the resultant metamorphosis in the late-Victorian period of the 'New Woman', Shaw has not composed *Pygmalion* as a feminist tract. The sensitivity to female autonomy is a significant presence not only in regard to Liza, but also in the persons of Mrs Higgins and Clara Eynsford-Hill, as will be addressed in due course. A leit motif of misdemeanours relating to women meanders sporadically along the text: in regard to the burdensome life of the working-class woman Higgins remarks "*Don't you know that a woman of that class looks a worn out drudge of fifty a year after she's married*"⁷¹; voicing an opinion on female selflessness in the service of others Higgins gives Liza the example of Mrs Pearce, "*No, Eliza: do as his lady does: think of other people's futures; but never think of your own.*"⁷² But as the Pygmalion myth demonstrates, this is a

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.39

⁷⁰ Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p.196

⁷¹ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 2, p.42

⁷² *ibid.*, p.45

story of male creation of woman that is rewarded with a mutually rewarding relationship, hence it is about the social position of men, with women in the passive position. Hence, female autonomy is cogent, but the ongoing political contention exceeds gender to encapsulate a larger demand for class equality and the autonomy of the individual. The Professor is intellectually competent and socially prestigious, yet emotionally he is ineffectual, alienated and perverse. Like the formal black suit he wears, much of his power is not innate but superficial: patriarchal supremacy, like female subjection, lower-class vulgarity and the very concept of class are extrinsic; a socially orchestrated belief not unlike a psychogenic phenomenon. Alfred Doolittle, Liza's dustman father, is presumed to be dull and immoral by reason of his lower-class status, when the innate reality is of an intelligent and articulate man.

The patriarch's bastion of egocentric privilege is rudely shattered by the entrance of a determined Liza: her regal super-surety as she "*enters in state*"⁷³, as yet imparting only implicated parallel of self-worth. If Higgins has proposed making her into a duchess then his claim is surely extraneous and therefore insignificant to Liza's innate motivation; she clearly is, to all intents and purposes, already a 'duchess'. With full use of all available resources, Liza presents herself at her formidable best: "*She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky blue and red. She has a nearly clean apron and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little.*"⁷⁴ Her decrepitude emitting "*pathos*" and "*with it innocent vanity and [a] consequential air*" calms the bombast of her entrance and denounces to a degree the ramifications of a lower-class girl's surprising self-assurance. Liza's confidence stems from her financial ability to 'buy' the Professor's services: "*Dont I tell you I'm bringing you business?*"⁷⁵ and in doing so the tables are neatly turned around, so that it is not the sexually compromised figure of the lower-class female who is the commodity, but Higgins. To this class anomaly is added a parallel disunity between attributed class identity and the reality of Higgins's character:

*HIGGINS: [brusquely, recognising her with unconcealed disappointment, and at once, babylike, making an intolerable grievance of it] Why his is the girl I jotted down last night. She's no use...I'm not going to waste another cylinder on it. [To the girl] Be off with you: I don't want you.*⁷⁶

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.36

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.38

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.37

A description of “*babylike*” and reference to Liza as “*it*” directly contravenes the appearance of lofty authority; an intolerable attitude is made tolerable by social status.

The social balance is re-addressed following Higgins’s moment of self-indulgence—“*Eliza, Elizabeth, Betsy, Bess*”: perhaps it is a means of discrediting Liza’s display of proletarian disrespect by diminishing her individuality; through a grouping or pigeon holing that discredits the singularity of her offence. A confused Liza, her aggression and volatility subdued, reverts to type and beings to behave in accordance with conventional expectations. When she is made the butt of the joke, dismayed by the misinterpretation that she must pay £60 for lessons; again when she crumbles to fitful tears; and again when her poverty stricken drive diminishes to base covetousness (“*[snatching it] Here! You give me that handkerchief. He gev it to me, not to you.*”⁷⁷), all semblance of her former self is lost and Liza is again reduced to being at the mercy of middle-class moral pretensions. Higgins, having re-mastered the reigns, dictates, “*If I decide to teach you, I’ll be worse than two fathers to you*” and offers as payment the proverbial ‘beads to the natives’. Furthermore, brazen insults roll from the tongue of the offended patriarch as unguardedly and indiscriminately as the blows from a wounded animal: “*She’s so deliciously low- so horribly dirty ... this draggletailed guttersnipe...Put her in the dustbin.*”⁷⁸

Witness to the exchange between Higgins and Liza, sometimes as interloper, other times as referee are the polar figures of Mrs Pearce and Colonel Pickering. The lady a surrogate mother and the voice of common sense, but nevertheless working-class, female and a servant; the gentleman, an upper-class, educated, military man, but also instinctively compassionate, courteous and benign: each divided in regard to their innate characters and class identity; and then mutually divided in regard to gender, class and nature. In their separate ways they both exemplify integrity and sensibility in excess of those attributed to their respective class identities. Both are egalitarian in that each focuses primarily on individual characteristics, conversely Higgins asserts his egalitarianism, but by comparison his is largely misanthropically indifferent. In the final act when Liza questions Higgins’s manners and he feels compelled to defend himself by stating that his manners are exactly the same as Pickering’s:

LIZA: That’s not true. He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess.

HIGGINS: And I treat a duchess as if she is a flower girl.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.40

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 40-41

LIZA: I see...The same to everybody.

HIGGINS: Just so.

LIZA: Like father.

HIGGINS: [grinning, a little taken down] Without accepting the comparison at all points, Eliza, its quite true that your father is not a snob, and that he will be quite at home in any station of life to which his eccentric destiny may call him. [Seriously] The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.⁷⁹

The simplification of an issue that is so singularly central to the argument of the play to ‘treating everyone the same’, is presumably to accustomize the audience to its use through colloquiality. As an account of his egalitarianism, this dialogue raises certain questions. Higgins reiterates the point shortly afterwards stating, “*The question is not whether I treat you rudely but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better*”⁸⁰: curiously the answer to this rhetorical question is, yes, we have heard Higgins treat others better! Higgins’ notion of equality is not in dispute, simply because the play cannot function as a bid for the liberalisation of a staunchly class conscious society with an elitist hero, it would be a contradiction in terms. The point remains that Higgins is arrogant and insulting only towards Liza and Clara; towards Pickering he is jocular; towards his mother, Ms Pearce, Mrs Eynsford-Hill, and even Freddy he is consolatory, at worst, curt; even towards the antagonistic lower-class men in act one he is playful. When the issue in hand is so vital to the doctrine of the play, when the integrity of its most important proponent, namely Higgins, is clearly essential, then why the discrepancy, why pose a question whose answer is incongruous with professed principles?

If evidence is needed to the seriousness of Shaw’s intentions of asserting equality, then repeated reference to the human “soul” is an important point. Victorian social manipulation owed much to the use of Christian teachings and direct invocation of the Bible to verify otherwise arbitrary rules imposed on individuals, indeed the construction and continuation of the class system owes much to its flagrant application: in its simplest terms, verses like “*It is*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, Act 5, p.126

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.126

easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”⁸¹ and “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*”⁸² becomes a God ordained justification for the ‘unquestionable inevitability’ for the breach between rich and poor, insinuating that the rich may have a seemingly privileged life but they have no hope of heaven, while those suffering now (willing to suffer silently without recourse to rebellion) shall have the ultimate prize, an eternity of heaven, so God says! Shaw’s religious convictions are chiefly an unsubstantiated blur; he is thought to be an atheist but even in his will he ambiguously states that is “*religious convictions and scientific views cannot at present be more specifically defined than as those of a believer in creative revolution*”⁸³ and that he did not comply with any religious institution and that no memorial to him should “*take the form of a cross or any other instrument of torture or symbol of blood sacrifice.*”⁸⁴ So important was the assertion of his socialist beliefs in *Pygmalion*, especially those pertaining to the elevation of class, that he willingly utilised the irrefutable verification of the bible, even though he was not a believer.

The reason for his willingness to risk discrediting Higgins, the play’s most important mouthpiece, is then not a disregard for the political message, but a measure to safe guard it from potential romantic ties: by making Higgins singularly unattractive in conduct towards the only two women to whom he can possibly be romantically linked – Liza and Clara, the dread potential of the audience reaching any romantic conclusion is kept to a minimum. Just as the possibility of Higgins being perceived as an elitist is deadly to the logic of the play, equally, the possibility of a continued romantic expectation in the audience is detrimental to the essential didactic purpose: Liza obscured by the title of ‘Mrs Higgins’ is the possibility of “Galatea com[ing] to life”⁸⁵ forever lost, more gravely than before, to socially imposed limitation. As part of the need to sustain the fine balance between romantic viability and romantic unlikelihood, the discrepancy of Higgins as less than gallant husband material is counterbalanced by a background of unindulgent women in his life (his mother and Mrs

⁸¹ *King James Bible*, Mark 10:25, p.1024

⁸² *ibid.*, Matthew 5:5, p.974

⁸³ "Religion: Creative Revolutionary". *Time*. 4 December 1950.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,813999,00.html>. "a paragraph from his will made it clear where the author stood on the question of religion"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Shaw-Campbell Correspondence, p.160. Shaw's "FINAL ORDERS" letter to Mrs. Campbell on the first night.. *Collected Letters*, vol. III. This ending is not included in any print version of the play.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_\(play\)#cite_note-16](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_(play)#cite_note-16)

Pearce), suggesting the logic that he could not be interested in the spiritless Clara, but a feisty woman of Liza's calibre.

Though in the changed climate of the patriarchal abode Liza is a figment of her former fiery self: her helpless confusion at the hands of a manipulative Higgins, and especially the self-depreciatory resistance to her new bedroom: "*O-oh, I couldn't sleep here, missus. Its too good for the likes of me...*"⁸⁶ is an abject sight, singularly alien to our experience of Liza to date. The banality of the scene serves as an example of lower-class unworthiness, a trite but cajoling display for the benefit of the audience. Equally, the more degraded and pathetic Liza is presented; then the more stupendous her achievement when at the end of the play she challenges Higgins as an equal; if someone of such limited physical and social resources can achieve such a rise, then what cannot others, perhaps better equipped, do. The clichéd inanity of her reception of a bathroom she can barely negotiate her way around ("*Gawd! Whats this? Is this where you wash clothes?*"⁸⁷), and the very prospect of removing her clothes to take a bath ("*I couldn't . I dursnt. Its not natural: it would kill me...*"⁸⁸) is on one level a hackneyed expression of lower-class cliché, generating humour that is grossly misrepresentative, trite and pandering to middle-class prejudice. Resounding with condemnation of a society that hypocritically denies basic amenities to the poor then has the gall to condemn them for being dirty and unwholesome, a bathroom enlightened Liza is later to make the comment, as if in direct response to this social deficiency:

*LIZA: I tell you, its easy to clean up here. Hot and cold water on tap, just as much as you like, there is. Wooley towels, there is; and a towel horse so hot, it burns your fingers. Soft brushes to scrub yourself, and a wooden bowl of soap smelling like primroses. Now I know why ladies is so clean. Washing's a treat for them. Wish they could see what it is for the likes of me!*⁸⁹

In response to middle-class sanctimony there comes a point in the first bathing experience when Liza's remonstrations take on a hysterical intensity, the comedy diffuses and the mood shifts to one of pathos at her mortal fear of being cold. The simplicity of the assertion, not a complaint but a statement of inescapable fact, gives magnitude by its guileless candour, especially since it falls upon the deaf ears of a prickly Mrs Pearce, who impervious

⁸⁶ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 2, p.47

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.61

to so fleeting a moment of human tragedy twice calls Liza a “*dirty slut*”⁹⁰ and fails to react with any sort of compassion to “*Eliza’s screams [that are] heartrending.*”⁹¹

With the arrival of Alfred Doolittle, the near Swiftian excess of satirizing middle-class prejudices into an out and out comedy heightens. As exemplified by Pickering’s earlier query: “*Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feeling?*” to which Higgins answers in all seriousness “[*Looking critically at her*] *Oh no, I don’t think so. Not any feeling that we need bother about. [Cheerily] Have you Eliza?*”⁹² The joke inherent to this *comédie noire* is one laid squarely at the door of middle-class mentality: unpronounced it remains a dark prejudice colouring the judgement and silently and insidiously forms the basis of an entirely covert philosophy, but articulated with frankness it sounds perfectly lunatic and quite intolerable – similar to the shock tactics employed by Swift himself, who nonchalantly proposes we eat the poverty stricken Irish. The moment Mrs Pearce declares that the “*dustman*” has come seeking his daughter, Pickering, sensing the delicacy of the situation exclaims, “*Phew! I say!*”; Higgins’ reaction is immediately to form an unconfirmed opinion of the man as a “*blackguard*”:⁹³

PICKERING: He may not be a blackguard, Higgins.

HIGGINS: Nonsense. Of Course he is a blackguard.

The decidedness of his claim is based on nothing more substantial than class identity and tempered again by presumed expectations regarding how such an individual must behave given the situation of an implied hijacked daughter. The comedy is a farcical exposé of the absurdity of arbitrary definition. A definition that is immediately thrown into disrepute in two ways, firstly by playing on the expectations of the audience, but failing then to fulfil them: “*Shaw repeatedly takes stock sentimental and melodramatic situations and then deliberately travesties them, thus arousing the audience’s expectations then frustrating them.*”⁹⁴: Doolittle, contrary to the adage that translates as ‘lowly’, proves himself to a most clever, articulate and charismatic individual. The secondly, by the similarity between Alfred Doolittle and Professor Higgins:

Alfred Doolittle is an elderly but vigorous dustman, clad in the costume of his profession, including a hat with a back brim covering his neck and shoulders.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.47

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*, p.43

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.53

⁹⁴ Christopher Gillie, *Movements in English Literature 1900-1940*, p.168

*He has well marked and rather interesting features, and seems equally free from fear and conscience. He has a remarkably expressive voice, the result of a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve. His present pose is that of wounded honour and stern resolution.*⁹⁵

The “vigorous”ness of Doolittle matches the “robust, vital”ity of Higgins; while both men deliberately present themselves in their professional attire feeling perhaps that they represent a more formidable figure; Doolittle is “free from fear and conscience”, a description that reads like an elaboration of the phrase “very impetuous baby”⁹⁶ attributed to Higgins; Doolittle is blessed with “a remarkably expressive voice” rather akin to Higgins’ “[suddenly resorting]” when he wants to be most compelling “[to the most thrillingly beautiful low tones in his best elocutionary style]”⁹⁷; and when the text imparts that Doolittle’s eloquence is due to “a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve”, one need hardly trawl the text for evidence of a similarly opinionated expression for Higgins, since he seems not to possess any other sort. What better and convincing accolade for a lower-working-class man, a humble dustman, than to be so closely united in near blood fraternity with the patriarchal archetype and subsequently affiliated to that higher class. Though this proximity does not always insinuate positive association for either man: from the perspective of female emancipation the patriarchal figure represents repression, therefore repeated likening of Higgins to Doolittle, not least of all by Liza, is not a statement that is meant to flatter either of them. Liza’s complaint of Higgins’s surly manner in act one, “One would think you was my father” and his threatening reply, “...I’ll be worse than two fathers”⁹⁸, is clearly an implication of paternal limitation and antagonism, respectively. In the final act comes Liza’s definitive claim uniting patriarchal and paternal subjugation, “If only I could go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and all the world!”⁹⁹

While Alfred Doolittle ironically suffers through the comparative association with Higgins, he is allowed to reclaim some ground as a representative of his own class. Liza is undermined through cliché: her naivety becomes a viable arena for the histrionic display of stereotypic reactions attributed to the lower-class individual. Repeatedly she is the unsuspecting stooge to a trite comedy routine. Doolittle, however, whose very surname is a direct confrontation of automatic definition, aggressively utilises derogatory cliché, meant to

⁹⁵ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 2, p.53

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.34

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.42

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.40

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, Act 5, p.129

undermine the lower-classes for his own ends and in doing so, actively refutes their authority: while Liza is victimized and is subjected to misinterpretation and belittlement through them, Doolittle actively realising the cliché with brazen audacity, turns it into an antagonistic barefaced confrontation. Fatherly concern that Liza may have become little better than a prostitute at Wimpole Street is evaluated by him in expected ‘blackguard’ fashion: “*Heres a career opening for her as you might say.*”¹⁰⁰ Further elaborating upon the myth that the lower-class are ‘no better that they should be’, Liza is marketed as a commodity:

DOOLITTLE: ... All I ask is my right as a father; and youre the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see youre one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, whats a five-pound note to you? And whats Eliza to me?

PICKERING: I think you ought to know, Doolittle, that Mr Higgins’s intentions are entirely honourable.

DOOLITTLE: Course they are, Governor. If I thought they wasn’t, I’d ask fifty.

HIGGINS: [revolted] Do you mean to say that you would sell your daughter for £50?

*DOOLITTLE: Not in a general way I wouldn’t: but to oblige a gentleman like you I’d do a great deal, I assure you.*¹⁰¹

Distasteful, even to the hard bitten ‘devil-may-care’ sensibilities of Higgins, Doolittle’s faceoff with middle-class prejudice is notably blatant.

“*It is Mrs Higgins’s at-home day*”¹⁰² is a fittingly genteel introduction to the abode of an old lady; yet what follows on, namely that this is “*a flat on Chelsea Embankment*” and all consecutive details related to her private world seem directly to contravene this initial premise. As the mother of Professor Higgins, the lady in question is in essence dowager apparent to Wimpole Street, the family home. A mother of at least two sons,¹⁰³ whose husband has presumably died, her home should be the family abode, as tradition has it, yet everything about Mrs Higgins runs contrary to convention. She has chosen to live in a young and vibrant quarter of London, of a singularly bohemian demographic and a characteristic aura of creativity, innovation and liberality. In addition to this the choice of a flat, as opposed

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, Act 2, p.56

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.57-58

¹⁰² *ibid.*, Act 3, p.66. (The designated day on which the lady of the house makes it known that she will be “at-home” to receive guests).

¹⁰³ Higgins mentions to Alfred Doolittle that he has a “brother [who] is a clergyman. Act 2, p.62

to a house and the “*not so lofty*” ceiling suggests a modern outlook disinterested in excessive show of wealth. The specifically enumerated windows open and looking out onto the river with “*access on to a balcony with flower pots*” and inspire bohemian liberalism in palpable terms, the light and airy almost continental sensuality of the wind blowing freely from the Thames into the room suggesting refreshing flux in excess of the physical, pertaining equally perhaps to the intellectual or political. When we learn that “*Mrs Higgins was brought up on Morris and Burne Jones; and her room, which is very unlike her son’s room in Wimpole Street, is not crowded with furniture and little tables and nicknacks*”¹⁰⁴, it begins to clarify that even though the lady is Victorian born, she is not of Victorian mindset or education. The progressive political outlook characterised by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones is meant to signify that the young Miss Higgins had received a liberalist education: the two named artists, part of the Arts and Crafts movement and most immediate heirs to the radical avant-gardism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a reactionary English school of painting, denote socialist principles, political radicalism, a call for elegant simplicity over baroque over-indulgence and a belligerent rejection of decadent mass commercialism, for a return to individual-centred craftsmanship. Ironically, due to the right sort of education, much professed by Shaw, Mrs Higgins is of a more progressive and modern shift of mind than her son, whose room, amassed with furniture and objet d’art is guilty of Victorian excess. Morris designs fill Mrs Higgins’s room as wallpaper and textiles, and are the only ornamentation necessary: “*...Morris wallpaper, and the Morris chintz window curtains and brocade covers of the ottoman and its cushions, supply all the ornament, and are much too handsome to be hidden by odds and ends of useless things.*”¹⁰⁵ Of the few paintings occupying the room is a portrait of the lady “*as she was when she defied the fashion in her youth in one of the beautiful Rossettian costumes..*,” the same loose, bohemian look that was to partly stimulate and give direction to the developing concept of the ‘New Woman’, who questioned her given lot and in revolt sought autonomy. The absence of any such deviation from conventionality of this sort by the two young women, Clara and Liza, is made significant by its lack. Now an old lady in her sixties, Mrs Higgins has “*long past taking the trouble to dress out of fashion*”¹⁰⁶, however, what remains is an articulate and intellectual self-possession; presumably a sense of autonomy harboured within her over the long years of dutiful marriage and motherhood, concluded with the demise of her husband (the final controlling authority in the paternal – patriarchal chain

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, Act 3, p.66

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.67

removed), she moved out of her husband's house, as she had departed from her father's and finally achieved the long sought autonomy of her own abode, in which to demonstrate and display her own beliefs and ideals. Of all the supportive references to women in the play, one feels that it is with the character of Mrs Higgins to whom Shaw feels the greatest sympathy. In his epilogue to *Pygmalion*, written after the 1916 staging of the play, when to his abject horror audiences left with a greater conviction of romantic entanglement than political insight; his recourse was to "remarkable mothers" whom he considers rare but not impossible, and in describing such a remarkable individual he outlines all that we understand Mrs Higgins to be:

... [a] 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 impulse.

To Shaw's credit, the female ideal he defines, so often little more than a platitude in writings of the period, is an ideal applicable to either gender, the detail of a beautiful house aside, this could easily be a loose description of Pickering, for instance. Tellingly the same cannot be said of Higgins, who in the company of his comparatively serene and quietly assured mother is a troublesome, rude, hyper-active child.

Clara Eynsford-Hill, an unmarried, middle-class young girl, is a most disappointing counterpart to the progressive and single minded Mrs Higgins; Clara, who appears to hold in her grasp all the possibilities that status can yield and living in so much more enlightened times, one thinks, is intellectually and emotionally impoverished, largely living a social lie and imprisoned by unimpeachable limitation. For reasons not elaborated upon, the family Eynsford-Hill, consisting of mother, brother Freddy and Clara, are sufferers of "genteel poverty", when advantages present themselves at birth, but without the financial wherewithal to realise them. Indeed, compared to Liza's situation, it works out that Clara is not more, but a great deal less privileged. Liza maybe the lowest of the low, but given that she is bright and motivated, in possession of the dubious advantage of having nothing to lose but everything to gain, she has the powerful impetus of survival pushing her on. Clara, however, has no such 'do or die' motive to concentrate the mind; her first and foremost handicap, in Shaw's eyes is her reticence and lack of direction. Equally her being a member of the middle-classes offers no help and seems rather to be a disadvantage, since it means she cannot demean herself and

her entire family; ruin her chances of a decent marriage; risk ostracism and ridicule; subject herself to insult by compromising her class and going out to work! As Mrs Higgins explains it as a danger that Liza will also face following the completion of her education as a lady: “*The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now! The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady’s income!*”¹⁰⁷ The pettiness and absurdity of this claim is specifically elaborated in order to show, as Shaw clearly wishes to, the self-constrictive demands of middle-class pretensions about ‘middle-classdom’. Class is not only a problematic for the socially incarcerated lower-classes, but for all classes: the dilemma is not a marginal, left-wing issue, but a question of human rights.

As Higgins showcases Liza at his mother’s tea party, she is once again the stooge to the comedy of manners, in a scene of little delicacy the much shaken middle-class sensibility is cajoled by a working-class heroine who surely is no more than a joke, who could not possibly be anything other than the hapless fool they take her to be. Yet in the same scene Shaw has showcased other inadequate individuals, who, if judged by the same principles as Liza, will be found equally wanting. The problem with Liza at this developmental stage is that she sounds beautiful, but in contextual terms makes no sense; her speech lacks the content to match her articulation. But Liza has an excuse; it is not that she is empty headed, but that her education is incomplete. Clara, the unfortunate Miss Eynford-Hill, is a rather pathetic individual, a ‘rebel without a cause’ who does her best to fill in the gaps by pretence of social liberalism, or sulky bohemianism, or, convinced by Higgins that Liza’s misuse of words is the “*new small talk*”, feigning modernity:

CLARA: [throwing herself discontentedly into the Elizabethan chair] Oh, its all right, mamma, quite right., People will think we never go anywhere or see anybody if you are so old-fashioned.

...

CLARA: It’s all a matter of habit. Theres no right or wrong in it. Nobody means anything by it. And it’s so quaint, and gives such a smart emphasis to thangs that are not in themselves very witty. I find the new small talk delightful and quite innocent.

...

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.84

HIGGINS: ... Be sure to try on that small talk at the three at-homes. Don't be nervous about it. Pitch it in strong.

CLARA: [all smiles] I will. Goodbye. Such non-sense, all this early Victorian prudery!

HIGGINS: [tempting her] Such damn nonsense!

CLARA: Such bloody nonsense.

MRS EYNSFORD-HILL: [convulsively] Clara!

CLARA: Ha! Ha! [She goes out radiant, conscious of being thought thoroughly up to date, and is heard descending the stairs in a stream of silvery laughter].¹⁰⁸

Clara and Liza, representing contrary poles in the class system are shown to be subject to the same limitations. Clearly the weakest members of society bear the greater brunt, and how better to illustrate this but through the subjection of women: the misdemeanours of a hierarchal social order are freely and radically revealed through them without fear of culpability.

Following Liza's triumphant success at the embassy ball, when even a notorious former pupil of Higgins fails to spot that she is, as Shaw coins the phrase, a "disclassed" cockney, indeed the night ends with the ludicrous declaration that she is in fact a Hungarian princess. The prestigious evening bedazzles its audience with as much reference to characteristic backstabbing, falsehood and hypocrisy, as it does to diamonds and fancy costumes, and as we have come to expect as part of the overt didacticism of the play, quick to follow is the ubiquitous discrediting statement: when the hostess declares that Liza must be a "princess at least", the host conjectures, "Not necessarily legitimate, of course. Morganic perhaps. But that is undoubtedly her class."¹⁰⁹ In the case of the aristocracy (that glamorous magical pinnacle that decorate the dreams of the aspiring Victorian middle-classes), anything is possible; a social class that vehemently outlaws a middle-class woman from seeking gainful employment as 'improper', is happy to condone clandestine marriage and illegitimate birth in support of their open snobbery.

The "disclassed" Liza returning to Wimpole Street begins to question for the first time, "Whats to become of me?" The question is not metaphorical and Higgins is quick to realise,

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.79

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.95

when he gets his slippers thrown in his face that a problem needing answers is on the horizon. His immediate solution is that his mother should marry Liza off to “*some chap or other*”. This clearly is flippant even by his standards and receives a harsh answer from Liza who declares that she would not think of prostituting herself in a marriage of convenience: “*I sold flowers. I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else.*”¹¹⁰ Even though in an earlier act Higgins had explained the reason behind his own confirmed bachelorhood as the essentially inconsolable nature of the male female union:

*I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical... I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; ...One wants to go north and the other south.*¹¹¹

The subject of marriage was considered a taboo by Victorians and any sort of public debate upon its inevitable trials and tribulations was considered vulgar and singularly inappropriate. Starting from the mid-Victorian period onwards attitudes were being challenged by the likes of George Meredith in *Modern Love* (1862), where he bares naked the trauma of an unhappy marriage; and William Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), where the married woman’s silence is artfully broken. The invocation of marriage in this way is partly in response to the female subjugation in general and partly to erase audience expectations of a marriage between Higgins and Liza: the overtly romantic can perhaps convince themselves of a marriage occurring at the end of the play between Liza and Higgins or Freddy, but given that the text profoundly desists from allusions to love, then surely in the face of Liza’s acrid remarks on the subject of a loveless marriage, neither claim of romance nor marriage can viably be entertained.

A last room description appears near the end of act four, when Liza is dressing in preparation of leaving Wimpole Street for good. The room that she now occupies is a far cry from the poor garret from which she came: an electric lit room containing a large wardrobe, necessitated by her array of expensive dresses, and a “*sumptuous dressing-table*”¹¹² represents the very different world of which she is now a part, but which she abandons without a backward glance. However, as she gets ready we see that Liza is essentially unchanged: she

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, Act 4, p.103

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, Act 2, p.50

¹¹² *ibid.*, Act 4, p. 105

takes only a simple walking dress and shoes from the wardrobe, hanging up the rich attire of that evening and “*shuts [the wardrobe door] with a slam*”¹¹³; she slips onto her wrist a watch that represents the former “*American alarm clock*” signifying the same purposefulness; as always aware of financial necessity she checks to see that her purse is in her bag. With a sharpness of movement that “*expresses her furious resolution*”¹¹⁴ she makes to leave the room, stopping only to poke her tongue at her own reflection in the mirror, her integrity intact and her self-awareness sharply critical.

A “*self-possessed*”¹¹⁵ Liza greets Higgins at his mother’s flat where she has taken up residence. Her body language reveals, even before she speaks, that she has found her niche; her stance is characterised by a tangible lack of ease in Henry’s company, so that she gives only a “*staggeringly convincing exhibition of ease of manner*”¹¹⁶, nevertheless, the change that has occurred is not a superfluous one, but goes deep and taps into her existing powerhouse of self-reliance. Higgins is surprisingly edgy around a confident Liza, even though she offers him no challenge and does not try to provoke or reveal the extent of her anger towards him, he is antagonised by her aloof composure. It is as if he realises that his power over her has been nullified and he seeks to irritate her into confrontation: An emotionally emancipated, non-reliant Liza, secure and whole within herself is beyond Higgins’s manipulation:

LIZA: How do you do, Professor Higgins? Are you quite well?

HIGGINS: [choking] Am I - [he can say no more].

LIZA: But of course you are: you are never ill. So glad to see you again, Colonel Pickering. [He rises hastily; and they shake hands]. Quite chilly this morning, isn’t it? [She sits down on his left. He sits beside her].

HIGGINS: Don’t you dare try this game on me. I taught it to you; and it doesn’t take me in. Get up and come home; and don’t be a fool

*Eliza takes a piece of needlework from her basket, and begins to stitch at it, without taking the least notice of this outburst.*¹¹⁷

The matter-of-fact way in which Liza refuses to be drawn into Higgins’s heated debate drives him to admit that these are his tactics; the devil-may-care cold disengagement is

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, Act 5, p.120

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

Higgins's usual plan of defence against the world. Liza has been transformed almost overnight from a clingy, insecure girl, a burdensome child whining "What is to become of me?", to a serene self-possessed woman with drive and direction. True to the ideological format of the play, the triumph of her growth was not at the embassy ball, when she was believed to be something she is not, but at the climactic moment, when she prepared to depart from Wimpole Street and accepted the responsibility of being an autonomous individual. Clearly deeply antagonized by this turn of events Higgins is quick to launch a defensive attack where he presents himself as the sole reason for Liza's metamorphosis:

*HIGGINS: ... Let her speak for herself. You will jolly soon see whether she has an idea that O havnt put in her head or a word that I havnt put into her mouth. I tell you I have created this out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden: and not she pretends to play the fine lady with me.*¹¹⁸

Of course, as Higgins and the audience is all too aware, the inescapable reality of the situation is that this is no pretence: being a "fine lady" is a thing of superficiality; that which Liza has become and exactly what galls Higgins, is that she has become a strong individual who happens also to be female. This regard of women in the play is not as derogatory as it may first appear, since Shaw makes a point in regard to emancipation that is very similar to J.S. Mill, who demands that we first regard and define women as human beings and then according to the dimensions of their gender identity.¹¹⁹

It is Pickering that Liza singles out as the real formative influence in her emancipation: she explains how his example of gentlemanly behaviour was a catalyst in her education; but more significantly she allies her former self to Higgins and her present self to the Colonel:

*LIZA: But it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and that is what makes one a lady, isn't it? You see it was so very difficult for me with the example of Professor Higgins always before me. I was brought up to be just like him, unable to control myself, and using and language on the slightest provocation.*¹²⁰

This is the first invocation of equality between Higgins and Liza, it's a tentative 'toe in the water' sort of suggestion, but it is enough to send Higgins reeling, and presumably the audience too. Pickering's defence of Higgins is paltry compared to the unrelenting logic of

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.120,121

¹¹⁹ See footnote 4.

¹²⁰ G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Act 5, p.121

Liza's attack; he taught you to speak, insists Pickering, "*Of course: that is his profession*"¹²¹ she answers, and so it goes on. She then elucidates upon her changed manner, referring to it as "*the beginning of self-respect*". Finally, having named the source of her self-surety, she drives home her victory and further re-enforces her advantage of disengagement:

LIZA: I would like you to call me Eliza, now, if you would.

PICKERING: Thank you. Eliza, of course.

LIZA: And I should like Professor Higgins to call me Miss Doolittle.

*HIGGINS: I'll see you damned first.*¹²²

If Liza is resolute, then Higgins is unyielding: like two goats with horns locked in combat, both are determined to maintain their ground. But, of course in a play that preaches the unalienable right of the individual not to be coerced by arbitrary convention, each in resisting the precepts governing a relationship between a man and a woman is in effect demonstrating both individuality and equality. In this fierce contention where each state their autonomy is both the battle for equality and also metaphorical realisation:

LIZA: ... But I can do without you: don't think I cant.

...

LIZA: [earnestly] Don't you try to get round me. You'll have to do without me.

HIGGINS: [arrogant] I can do without anybody. I have my own soul: my own soul: my own spark of divine fire.

The dissension between Higgins and Liza becomes a converging of all the issues explored in the play to date: the ease with which class difference becomes obsolete when individuals meet as individuals; the only extrinsic obligation needed to be met by an individual being that of rectitude, incorporating self-knowledge, integrity and an equitable coherency of character; that spark of defiance in support of that which one believes to be right, as Higgins coins it, "*Making life means making trouble*"¹²³; female emancipation; and finally, the fortitude to practice that which one preaches with continuity in every sphere of life – egalitarianism not simply as chimerical social theory, but practised in the most basic, atomic level of community, that of the male/female union. True to Shavian principles

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*, p.122

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.128

“commercialism” is identified as the despoiling medium for all of these values: uniting beneath that heading injustice, inequality, female/working-class subjugation, arbitrary class/gender differentiation and the removal of the self-defining principle:

HIGGINS: ... I am expressing my righteous contempt for Commercialism. I don't and wont trade in affection. You call me a brute because you couldnt buy a claim on me by fetching my slippers and fetching my spectacles. You were a fool: I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I fetch your slippers? I think a good of you for throwing them in my face. No use slaving for me then saying you want to be cared for: who cares for a slave; for youll get nothing else. You've had a thousand times as much out of me as I have out of you; and if you dare to set up your little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers against my creation of a Duchess Eliza, I'll slam the door in your silly face.¹²⁴

If marriage is the metaphor for the sum-total of political misdemeanours the play hits on, then the only logical progression is Liza's extrication of herself from its potentially limiting hold. Perhaps it is because the sequential inevitability of this step is so singularly warranted that Shaw allows for the possibility of Freddy as husband to Liza. The claim is made by her under duress, as a retort to Higgins's continued verbal assault, possibly as a threat and of no greater significance than that. The play does not end on this note, but leads to a more significant junction when Liza confronts Higgins upon the very epicentre of his potency.

Higgins's identity as a man is very closely associated with professional abilities; from his dress, to the joy he derives from knowing that much more about people than they image he possibly could, to the obvious pride he derives from being the best at what he does. When ever he feels most threatened by Liza's show of independence we see that he resorts immediately to the Pygmalion myth, categorically declaring that he has fashioned Liza into what she has become. The Pygmalion story is one returned to again and again by successive generation, yet for the Victorians it has curiously plausible associations with the way in which they delineate the relationship between a man and a woman. For so deeply entrenched a patriarchal society, so hell-bent on the limitation of women in every sphere of their lives, the myth in question presents an ideal representation of man as a God-like figure, marked with the principle of creation and woman as wholly passive object of his manipulative powers and

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

incorporates it all within a gushingly sentimental guise of romance. Suggestive of the Coventry Patmore ‘Angel in the house’ archetype; or the ‘woman on a pedestal’ concept when women are actively objectivised and thereby subjugated and beneath a thin veneer of their supposed worship paradoxically imprisoned as queen of the house; deemed too precious, too fragile to exist in the outside world, therefore contained like a rare object: killed, in other words, with a rather claustrophobic sort of kindness. Higgins, as the play’s title demonstrates, is Pygmalion, a man divested with the propensity of creation, A God-like figure in other words. Hence, whenever he feels his patriarchal competence under check, his puissance disabled or questioned he lashes out with the apparent truth of his status- as creator and power absolute over woman. When Liza claims “*I’ll go and be a teacher... I’ll teach phonetics*”¹²⁵, a seemingly mild claim to equality, what she is actually laying claim to, given the mentality of the Pygmalion argument, is his very potency as a man; she is first castrating, then superseding the Creator. Higgins’s reception of such a claim is unsurprisingly blatant: “[*rising in a fury*] *What! ... I’ll wring your neck. [He lays hands on her] Do you hear?*”¹²⁶ And Liza’s triumphant claim, “*Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before... I’m not afraid of you, and can do without you,*” an unarguable climax. Even though the myth has been deciphered and its secret divulged and laid claim to by Liza, Higgins nevertheless can only retort to its claims once again, “[*wondering at her*] *You damned impudent slut, you! But it’s better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn’t it? [Rising] By George, Eliza, I said I’d make a woman of you; and I have.*”¹²⁷

In spite of so accusatory a message disclaiming the viability of romance, Shaw was mortified by the ‘Happy ever after’ conclusion arrived at by audiences and even some critics, which explained as intellectual laziness:

...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... This is unbearable, not only because [Liza’s] little drama, if acted on such a thoughtless assumption, must

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.131

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.131

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.132

*be spoiled, but because the true sequel is patent to anyone with a sense of human nature in general, and of feminine instinct in particular.*¹²⁸

What Shaw means by romance and what his audience understands by it are two completely different things and this is perhaps where the dilemma begins; the Shavian point of view is “*a romance because [of] the transfiguration it records*”¹²⁹, meaning that which is ‘romantic’ within the play is Liza’s transformation, and not the implication of possible romantic liaison. During the 1914 run of the play, to Shaw's exasperation the production sought to sweeten Shaw's ending, ironically in an anti-commercialist play in order to attain a more successful and profitable theatre run. “*Your ending is damnable; you ought to be shot*”¹³⁰ was Shaw’s reaction to the Tree production, which so infuriated him that he felt compelled to add an epilogue, “*What Happened Afterwards*” to the 1916 print edition for inclusion with subsequent editions, in which he explained why a marriage between Higgins and Liza would be detrimental to the coherency of the play. Corroborating the extent of his commitment to the political cause he felt compelled to protect the play's integrity. For at least some performances during the 1920 revival, Shaw re-emphasised the Shavian message. In an undated note to Mrs. Campbell he wrote:

*When Liza emancipates herself — when Galatea comes to life — she must not relapse. She must retain her pride and triumph to the end. When Higgins takes your arm on 'consort battleship' you must instantly throw him off with implacable pride; and this is the note until the final 'Buy them yourself.' He will go out on the balcony to watch your departure; come back triumphantly into the room; exclaim 'Galatea!' (meaning that the statue has come to life at last); and — curtain. Thus he gets the last word; and you get it too.*¹³¹

The issues which concern *Pygmalion* like class abolishment and egalitarianism are issues not directly enforced by legislation, but exist as a consequence of latent protectionist conservatism and capitalist principles. The battle that is being waged in this consciously didactic text is not towards material legislation (for example as Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838)

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, epilogue, p.134

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Shaw, Bernard, edited by Dan H. Laurence. *Collected Letters* vol. III: 1911-1925

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_\(play\)#cite_note-16](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_(play)#cite_note-16)

¹³¹ *ibid.*, Shaw-Campbell Correspondence, p.160. Shaw's "FINAL ORDERS" letter to Mrs. Campbell on the first night.. *Collected Letters*, vol. III. This ending is not included in any print version of the play.

was specifically about the consequential after-effects of the 1834 Poor Law Act), but internalised values pertaining to class, equality, the status of women, and so on; in other words a process of re-education and awakening of minds to the absurdity of compounded prejudices and ideas absorbed as custom and belief. For this reason the play has to appeal to its audience, intrigue and beguile them into sympathetic attachment; whereas political format relies on dispassionate and rational appraisal. Hence, *Pygmalion* is a fine balance of romantic potential and political demand that should tip towards the latter value, but, as Shaw found to his dismay, human understanding and art are not an exact science.

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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'UN PYGMALION: A ROMANCE IN FIVE ACTS' OYUNUNUN POLİTİK AJANDASI

Öz

George Bernard Shaw, Pygmalion (1912) oyununu modern dönemin başlarında yazmıştır. Tüm yazarlar, didaktik söylemin edebiyatta yeri olmadığına dair hemfikirdirler, bu toplumsal bazlı söylemin yerini, sübjektif bakış açısı almaktadır. Ancak, Shaw tiyatro/roman/şiir yazarlığı dışında sosyalisttir ve politik teori ve toplum yapısı hakkında yazmaktadır, bu nedenle oyunlarında ve özellikle de sınıf çatışmasının, kadının ve işçi sınıfının bağımsızlığının, bireyselliğin yorumlandığı Pygmalion'da, didaktik söylemi uygulamaktadır. Dönemine aykırı bir tutum sergilemekle bilinir. Onun için didaktik söylem demode veya yersiz bir teknik değildir. Tiyatroyu sadece sanat yapmak için değil, toplumu

değiştirebilecek tecrübelerin edinildiği bir yer olarak görür. Bu nedenle didaktik özelliği en yoğun olan bu oyununda Shaw orta-sınıf seyircisini eğlendirme vaadiyle tiyatro koltuğuna oturtur ama onları sosyalist tartışmanın ortasında tutsak eder. Oyun eski yunan mitinden esinlenerek yazılmıştır: Pygmalion bir heykeltıraştır, kadınlar konusunda uyumsuz ve zor beğenen biri olarak, bir türlü sevip evlenememiştir, günlerden bir gün bir kadın heykeli yapar, bu heykel öylesine güzeldir ki ona aşık olur. Pygmalion'u gören tanrıça haline acır ve heykeltıraşın Galatea adını verdiği yapıtını canlandırır. Pygmalion ve Galatea büyük bir aşkla evlenirler. Bu romantik öyküyü ele alan Shaw ataerkil /kapitalist bir toplumda kadın ve alt sınıfın nasıl köleleştirildiklerinin yanı sıra, sınıfsal ayrımın insanlar arasında ne denli uydurma ve gereksiz bir şey olduğunu gösterir. Tahmin edilebildiği gibi romantik öykü orta sınıfı temsil eden seyirciyi aldatarak tiyatroya çekmekte, onları, sınıf ideolojilerine ve anlayışlarına tamamen aykırı düşen fikir ve görüşlerle tanıştırmaktır. Ancak, insanların aşk konusundaki iyimserlikleri ve ciddi bir oyun karşısında düşünmektense kolayca kaçmayı tercih etmeleri, Shaw'ın bu planını, oyunun her sahnelenmesinde bozmaktadır, çünkü seyirci solcu siyaset yerine romantik olasılıklara önem vermiştir ve oyunda bağımsızlığını kanıtlayan kadın kahramanı ataerkil toplumu temsil eden kahramanla evlendirme çabasıdadır. Bu tutum Shaw'u çıldırtır çünkü bu evlilik düşüncesi, oyunda geliştirilen bağımsızlık, eşitlik ve bireysellik söylemini tümüyle yok etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *G.B. Shaw, İngiliz sosyalizm, 20.yy. İngiliz draması, didaktiksizim, Edward dönemi, toplumsal eleştiri, sınıf sistemi, kadın bağımsızlığı*

Abstract

George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion (1912) is a play written at the onset of modernism, when the majority consensus declared didacticism obsolete. Shaw, as well as being productive in a variety of literary genre, was also an active socialist, vocal in political theory who chose to focus on perennial issues of class, women's emancipation and working class autonomy; all of which, in Pygmalion, pivoted around the premise of individuality and a perverse didacticism. For Shaw didacticism was neither outdated nor inappropriate as a technique: the theater, he believed, need not be a place of mere entertainment, but could rise to the challenge of generating political awareness and altering even deeply entrenched dogmatism. Hence, in Pygmalion, one of his most intensely didactic plays, Shaw entices a middle-class audience with the promise of "Romance" but subsequently entraps them within a contentious socialist debate. The play is inspired by an ancient Greek myth: Pygmalion, is a

sculptor devoted to his art and the pursuit of perfection, to the extent of rendering him incompatible with women. One day he sculpts a female form so lovely that he falls hopelessly in love with it. The Goddess sees Pygmalion's devotion and taking pity on him breathes life into the creation he has named Galatea, so that eventually they are united in marriage. Shaw takes this romantic tale and uses it to depict female and lower class enslavement by a capitalist/patriarchal society, arriving at the blatant deduction that the the class system is both arbitrary and wholly redundant. In practice, however, the prospect of a 'love story', inspite of the seriously political content, proved to be a pull too great so that audiences, much to Shaw's dismay, were swept along by a clichéd anticipation of romantic attachment rather than intellectual speculation as to the nature of liberté and égalité. Hence inciting an imagined marriage between patriarch and underdog and thereby putting pay to any hope of burgeoning individuality and social autonomy.

Key Words: *G.B. Shaw, English socialism, 20th Century English drama, didacticism, Edwardian, social criticism, class system, women's emancipation*