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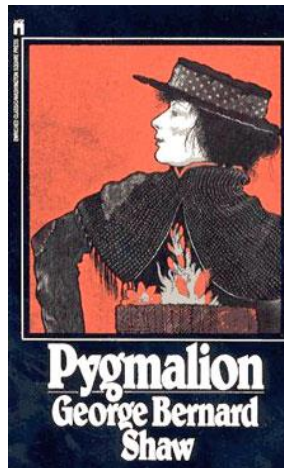
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Sexism or Gender Discrimination in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

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Abstract

This article introduces George Bernard Shaw as a critic, a novelist, and a socialist. He is known as an active person of Fabian society who follows the equality of man and woman in society. In his plays, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Arms and the Man* and *Pygmalion* social realism is presented in its different aspects. *Pygmalion* depicts many diverse aspects such as the hypocrisy of the upper class in Britain, class differentiation, and gender discrimination. Among all of these topics, Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion* expresses the way women are treated in society in terms of social realism. The aim of this paper is to study sexism or gender discrimination in Shaw's *Pygmalion* and to find out the results of it in women's lives.

Key terms: Social Realism, Gender Discrimination, Drama, George Bernard Shaw, Sexism

1. Introduction

In analyzing *Pygmalion*, one needs to know the play's background which is the Greek myth, the legend that shows men's attitudes towards women. Pygmalion, the mythical king of Cyprus had great problems with women. Pygmalion decided to remain single. So, he turned to art and made a sculpture from ivory. The sculpture was so beautiful in a way Pygmalion falls in love with her and names her Galatea. During the festival, he asks the goddess to grant his wish. Aphrodite grants his wish, Galatea comes alive and they get married. The same relationship is seen between Eliza and Higgins in this play.

Like Pygmalion, Higgins makes a beautiful creature out of a flower girl. But the difference between legend and reality is that in the legend, the creator admires his creation, while Higgins never seems to care for the feeling of his creation.

One of the reasons for surveying this subject is to make the readers aware of the conditions and the period in which the play was written. It takes us back to Victorian period, when people lived in a society which was greatly impacted by the industrial revolution. Working class people tried to improve their condition and rescue themselves from their harsh lives. Social realism had created an awareness of the ugly reality of Victorian society and many writers reflected these conditions in their works, such as Shaw's plays. Shaw was one of the active members of the Fabian society that emphasized the equality of income and of people's rights.

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Here the researcher shall try to clarify the factor of gender discrimination in the world of social realism, of which *Pygmalion* is a good sample.

2. *Pygmalion* and Gender Discrimination

One of the most important aspects of social realism is sexism or gender discrimination which is disused in *Pygmalion*. Shaw as a supporter of women's rights is against the idea that women are only objects for men, who help the men gain what they want. He believes on equality of men and women in society. But, unfortunately the role of the pawn in a game of chess is thrust upon women. Men hit others and fight to attract the opposite sex. If they attract the women's attention, they may receive the woman as a prize. Most of the time they use women as tools to achieve their ambitions and goals in life. Act II of the play exemplifies such an idea. For example, Higgins makes a bet with his friend Pickering challenging that he could turn a flower girl into a lady.

Pickering says to Higgins, "I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you are the greatest teacher alive if you make that good. I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can't do it. And I'll pay for the lessons." They make a bet as if she is an object, not a human being. They never care about the future of the girl after the completion of the experiment. They just pay attention to their goal. When Eliza is bartered by her father to Higgins for five pounds, in Act II, the readers could understand how women seem to be pawns in men's sport? And how they look at women? The play pokes fun at the idea that a father would sell his daughter, while Eliza's virtue is safe.

Doolittle [to Pickering]: I thank you, Governor. [To Higgins who takes refuge on the piano bench, a little overwhelmed by the proximity of his visitor; for Doolittle has a professional flavor of dust about him]: Well, the truth is, I've taken a sort of fancy to you, Governor; and if you want the girl, I'm not so set on having her back home again but what I might be open to an arrangement. Regarded in the light of a young woman, she's a fine handsome girl. As a daughter she's not worth her keep; and so I tell you straight. All I ask is my rights as a father; and you're the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight

sorts, Governor. Well, what's a five pound note to you? And what's Eliza to me? [He returns to his chair and sits down judicially].

Pickering: I think you ought to know, Doolittle, that Mr. Higgins's intentions are entirely honorable.

Doolittle: Course they are, Governor. If I thought they weren't, I'd ask fifty.

Higgins: [revolted] do you mean to say, you callous rascal that you would sell your daughter for 50 pounds?

Doolittle: Not in a general way, I wouldn't; but to oblige a gentleman like you I'd do a good deal, I do assure you. She was a flower girl that earns money by selling flowers, not herself." Now she is a lady that can't sell flowers, but could she sell herself? She doesn't know what would happen to her in the future?

3. Social Purity is Not Enough

Here Shaw shows the condition of women in the early 1900s. He believes that social purity is not enough response to the condition of society, if poor women cannot be rid of sexual license and step into society as wife, mother or friend. Shaw wants us to picture the conditions in which women are victims and decoration. But many women know they serve as chattels or possessions for men. Sometimes women dress up, in order to attract men's attention, since that would be the only way to attach oneself to a man is to be a chattel, and both of them are to blame somehow.

3. Conclusion

On the whole, Shaw's plays reveal class differentiation, gender discrimination, sexism, prostitution, and the ugly reality of society. The characters of *Pygmalion* show these differences between men and women as they are. Shaw was successful in showing the reality of society in his plays. He recognized drama as a means to show the ugly reality of society exposed.

The main point is that the objectification of women is done by both men and women; and women compete to receive men's attention and men in return treat them as a senseless objects.

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