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THE RECREATION OF ARCHETYPAL PYGMALION IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S  
"PYGMALION"

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ABSTRACT

This research paper looks at Shaw's Pygmalion as the recreation of the myth of Pygmalion-Galatea. The goal is to explore the problem of ambition that is not merely contemporary but one that has lasted through time. This has been done by examining events and characters of the Play with the archetypal characters and events of Pygmalion.

Elizabeth Doolittle, uneducated flower-selling girl of London street is Galatea. Shaw's Pygmalion revolves around the transformation of this girl who wants to talk more "Ganteel-Like".

The purpose of this paper is to identify the relationship between ambition and reality and so task which seems herculean was taken up by Higgins- a lover of adventures. The result is positive. Elizabeth's success at the Ambassador's Reception is overwhelming. But the experiment is followed by its aftermath. As euphoria of triumph is over, Eliza is faced with stark reality. She has become declassed, left unfit for her old life and unable to forgo a new one. She is tragic in her fear and despair. Unlike the fable tool Higgins is not in love with his creation.

This paper also aims to explore how Shaw is an advocate of the philosophy of "Life-Force" that prompts Eliza to marry Freddy.

To conclude; through showing the ambitions of Elizabeth and Higgins, this paper highlights the importance of struggle and self-renouncement in shaping one's personality and character according to one's wish.

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George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) the versatile dramatist used contemporary social, political and religious problems as subjects for his plays. Pygmalion, perhaps the only one of his many plays in which he points out to his audience and his readers that he has used an ancient classical myth to explore a problem that is not merely contemporary but one that has lasted through time. This myth is the story of Pygmalion – Galatea which has been told and retold by several later writers in differing forms.

In the most familiar version of this myth, Pygmalion was the king of Cyprus. He was also a great sculptor who used to make beautiful statues of bronze, marble and ivory. He was devoted to his art and always sought for perfection at any cost. His statues were always far more beautiful than the real human beings they depicted, and each statue was made more perfectly than the last. But Pygmalion had an insatiable lust for

perfection; due to this he always found something lacking in his statue under creation. He decided to make a statue through his art. He worked hard from morning to night to create an incomparable and loveliness in his statue. Finally he made an ivory statue of a girl which when completed satisfied his aesthetic sense in every way and filled him with exquisite pleasure. He named the statue Galatea and he fell in love with Galatea as if she was a human being.

Being a great devotee of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, Pygmalion prayed her to give life to the statue. She did so and turned the statue into a living woman. Pygmalion felt that hard ivory turned soft and warm like wax in his claps. He saw the lips grown red and the cheek blushed faintly pink. The Galatea opened her eyes and looked at Pygmalion. Pygmalion's dream became a reality when Galatea stepped down from her pedestal into his arms as a flesh- and- blood girl. In course of time the two were happily married and has a child who was named Paphus.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion* it is obvious that he did not follow the above Greek legend. In Shaw's play Henry Higgins, a professor of Phonetics, is the modern-day Pygmalion, and Eliza (Elizabeth) Doolittle, an uneducated girl who sells flowers in London Street is Galatea. Shaw's *Pygmalion* revolves around the transformation of this poor-ignorant flower girl into a cultured and aristocratic one. Professor Higgins, the Phonetician, had made phonetics as his profession and his hobby. His absorbing passion for the sounds of the language is revealed when he comes in contact with Eliza, who is an "incarnate insult to the English language". (14) The play begins in a dramatic circumstance. It is 11:15 P.M. in London. Torrents of heavy rain bring various classes of people together in the portico of St. Paul's Church. Among them is a young poor flower girl, a mother with her daughter and son, a note-taker and one colonel, picking by name. The bystanders present a cross section of London Life. As a flower girl Eliza, young but very dirty, bargains over prices, a bystander points out the presence of a note-taker among them – Professor Higgins. The bystanders are very suspicious and angry but Higgins calms them down by identifying the places to which each of them belongs through the way they speak. He declares that Eliza's "Kerb stone English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days" then he also says; "Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl of as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid as shop assistant which requires better English" (Pg. 16) Eliza, though poor but ambitious, happens to hear this and she decides to refine herself by modifying her speech. Thus, she comes to Wimpole Street in cheap dress. She wants to talk more "Genteel-like" (Pg.23) and become a lady in a flower shop. Over a bet with Colonel Pickering, Higgins accepts Eliza as his student.

The task seems herculean, but Higgins love of adventure and passion for the English Language helps him in his challenge. He takes academic interest in Eliza and makes experiments on her for about six months. He uses threats, persuasion, flattery and force to achieve his goal. Eliza resists all the way but Higgins' enthusiasm cannot be hindered. Even Mrs. Pearce's objections, who is the housekeeper of Higgins house, are brushed aside. Alfred Doolittle's paternal demands are settled with five-pound note. (Thus showing what the reality of her family is)

For months, poor Eliza had to pass through tough ordeal but her response to instruction is encouraging. She faces the initial test at Mrs. Higgins at home which is her first appearance in London Society of professional class. By this time, she has already made a dramatic change in her appearance, way of behavior and speech. She is exquisitely dressed and produces an impression of such a remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters, that everyone rises, quite fluttered. She starts off well but reverts to keep stone-conversation for Higgins has given her only a veneer of culture. But she leaves a profound impression on Clara and Freddy guests of Mrs. Higgins. Eliza's first venture into the polished society shows that she triumphs as far as her appearance and pronunciation are concerned.

The day has come for Eliza to face her final test at the Ambassador's Garden Party. Dressed in Opera Cloak with diamonds, fan, flowers and all other accessories she passes like a Duchess, creating sensation in the whole atmosphere. Nepummuck, the marvelous interpreter (and Higgins' previous student also to whom he taught phonetics) identifies her as a Hungarian princess. Thus her success at the ambassador's reception is overwhelming. But the experiment is followed by its aftermath. As euphoria of triumph is over, Eliza is faced with the stark reality. She has become disclassed, left unfit for her old life and unable for her old life and

unable to forge a new one Eliza is tragic in her fear and despair. Higgins is also quite unsentimental and unromantic in his approach to Eliza. Looking to this attitude of Professor Higgins Eliza shouted on him asking; "What am I fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What to become of me? Higgins' this attitude of indifference drives her to Freddy, who worships her. Eliza leaves Higgins house and so takes decisive step into the future.

Shaw explains the sexual attitude of Higgins towards Eliza in terms of the Oedipus Complex. In Appendix he says "If an imaginative boy has a suffering rich mother who has intelligence, personal grace, dignity of character without harshness and a cultivated sense of the best art of her time to enable her to make her house beautiful, she sets a standard for him a disengagement of his affections, his sense of beauty, and his idealism from his specifically and sexual impulses. The following conversation between Higgins and his mother Mrs. Higgins brings out the Oedipus Complex in Higgins:

Higgins – I've picked up a girl.

Mrs. Higgins – Does that not mean that some girls has picked  
you up?

Higgins – Not at all. I don't mean a Love-affair.

Mrs. Higgins – What a pity!

Higgins – Why?

Mrs. Higgins-Well, you never fall in love with anyone under  
forty-five. When will you discover that there are some rather  
nice-looking young women about?

Higgins-Oh, I can't be bothered with young women. My idea  
of a lovable women is somebody as like you as possible. I  
shall never get into the way of seriously liking young woman;  
some habits lie too deep to be changed. (ACT III)

He idealises his mother and cannot establish satisfactory relation with any other woman who does not come upto that standard if it is Eliza too.

Moreover, Shaw is an advocate of the philosophy of "Life-Force". He would not like an old man like Higgins to marry a young girl like Eliza. This "Life-Force" prompted Eliza to marry Fraddy who was much younger and was likely to prove himself a better father to her children.

To conclude, it can be said that Eliza was just like "clay" from which Pygmalion-Higgins had formed his Galatea. She was lovely but without any spirit and shrewd in the ways of the life of street. But she was ambitious to make herself better than what she was. When Galatea- Eliza is completely formed, Higgins saw that his creation had gone far beyond what he had done for her. His work was mechanically perfect. He created a soul and a mind, but like Pygmalion, Higgins did not beseech the God to give soul to the creation. As a matter of fact, he found it extremely embarrassing. Unlike the fable tool, Higgins was not in love with his creation.

Thus, this drama of Shaw may be based on Pygmalion's story, but he considerably deviated from it. He has modified it to suit his purpose. He has also mixed it up with the Cinderella fairy-tale. Like Cinderella, Eliza leads a wretched life for a long time, but suddenly a change comes in her life and she is created into a cultured lady who can easily pass off as a Duchess, and then loved Fraddy, a handsome young man, who marries her and with whom she leads a happy life. He is the prince of Cinderella's story who enters the life of Eliza, marries her and makes her happy and comfortable.

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