

Analyse george bernard shaw's presentation of transformation and how he explores ...

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Pygmalion is a play based on the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea incorporating many themes and ideas. The underlying themes are transformation and identity. George Bernard Shaw experiments with the feelings of the audience and challenges preconceived ideas. He also makes links between the real self and the ideal self and how authentic our transformations are. In the play Shaw highlights all aspects of transformation and the use of drama and visual impact is why it proves to be quite a powerful play.

The audience is taken through the journey of transformation of Eliza witnessing many other transformations whilst on this journey. Another theme included in Pygmalion is the distinction between social classes which was very clear at the time it was written. Shaw wished to highlight these issues and perhaps that is another reason why the play is so effective. Linked to the original myth it was based on, there are also many hints of the characters being "made" and Higgins completely dehumanizes Eliza. He views Eliza as his own creation and thinks he owns her, "I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden". Shaw also challenges whether change is entirely positive and how change can affect the society and people around you.

Shaw tests how much of our identity is affected by other things, and when a person undergoes a change, how that changes their identity. One of the main things Shaw attracts attention to is that transformation can happen at many different levels. A person can have changed on the outside, appearance wise, but not have changed at all on the inside. Our identity can remain the same even though we may look entirely different. George
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Bernard Shaw questions to what extent does our appearance affect and reflect our identity.

Things related to changing on the outside would be speech, clothes and posture. The way someone spoke was how members of society were marked at that time. Upper class people spoke better English than those lower down, "genteel English" as Eliza put it. But Shaw shows that although the way someone speaks can change them, the content of what is said is important too. An example of this is when Eliza is at Mrs Higgins' at home day and ends up saying the most inappropriate of things.

Higgins had begun to point this out before Eliza had entered that scene: "... you have to consider not only how a girl pronounces but what she pronounces..."

" However, although Eliza said inappropriate things, it was pardoned because she was thought of as middle class. So transformation can mean changing more than what we appear to be on the outside; it can be changing our identity which when done, is irrevocable. George Bernard Shaw shows that change is irreversible and that there is no going back after someone has undergone a change. The real problem that lay though the play was what was to become of Eliza after the bet had passed. Mrs Higgins, seen as quite a wise character, instantly picked up on this " the problem is what is to be done with her afterwards". Eliza cannot go back to what she was before because she would be a lady.

She says this at the end " Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else." The truth is that Eliza has undergone so much of a change that it is impossible to return to who she was. Shaw shows that transformation is irrevocable and presents that through Eliza. He also shows that many think they can manage the change but it ends up spiralling out of their control. Higgins thought he could get Eliza to be passed off as a duchess which she did but she ended up surprising him as she became an independent woman. George Bernard Shaw challenges our moral beliefs throughout the play and raises the point whether transforming someone is right.

Some people may think that changing someone from lower class into pretending that they are upper class is wrong and dishonest. Higgins looks down upon Eliza as a creature and completely dehumanizes her. This may be considered improper as it is a man controlling a woman. Different classes at the time also had their own beliefs on moral code. These are examined with middle class very closely looked at.

Men were expected to protect women. An example is when Freddy was expected to get a cab because he was a man and his mother and sister didn't want to get wet. Bystanders took to protecting the flower girl even though they didn't know her " Nice thing a girl can't shelter from the rain without being insulted." Shaw also put in Alfred Doolittle to demonstrate other points. Alfred was a dustman and from lower class. He was then offered a job as part of the moral reforms society due to Higgins.

Doolittle's speeches were rather effective. Higgins comments on this "... he could choose between a seat in the cabinet and a popular pulpit in Wales.

" Doolittle in his speech to gain £5 questions "...what is middle class morality?" which gives the audience something to reflect on. Doolittle also mentions that he cannot afford morals and how middle class people brand him as undeserving. When Doolittle is transformed into a gentleman he is rather upset by it.

This is because being a gentleman means having responsibilities that he would rather not have and following a different code than he was used to. " I have to live for others and not for myself: that's middle class morality." Shaw focuses on how society is changing and their reactions to the changes that take place. He explored this through two families: The Doolittle's and The Eynsford Hill's. The Eynsford Hill family is middle class but is very poor.

This is perhaps why Clara is so snobbish. The family is much poorer than some lower class families but retain status mainly because of their name. The Doolittle's were lower class people and as shown at the beginning of the play were looked down upon. The attitudes towards each class were very definite. The daughter and mother are very reproachful towards Eliza when she is a flower girl and Mrs Eynsford Hill paid her a sixpence because she was worried that her son had been mixing with someone from a lower class.

Clara comments " Honestly Mamma. You could have spared Freddy that" When, however, they meet Eliza who is presented as someone of middle class, they are openly friendly towards her and are very admiring, "

devouring her with her eyes". This shows that society reacts very differently towards people depending on who they are. However George Bernard Shaw also examines how the classes may be mixing and perhaps going backwards. Alfred Doolittle is made into a gentleman and Eliza is made into a lady however the Eynsford Hills seemed to be getting lower down the hierarchy.

Another thing that changed was people began to accept these changes, and that morals were changing. Near the end of the play, Eliza takes on an independent role and reverses the tradition of women being weak and needing men to defend them. When they needed a taxi, it was Eliza who produced the money " you should never go without ten pounds... Listen.

.." Shaw was showing that not only people were undergoing transformation but society itself was changing. George Bernard Shaw challenges whether transformation is entirely positive and whether it always brings happiness. Eliza wanted to become someone who owned a flower shop so she was eager about the opportunity to learn how to speak like a lady and be passed off as a duchess.

But it was after that event occurred that she realised the implications of this. Due to this she wouldn't be able to sell flowers as she had become a lady and had a different code to follow." You know I can't go back to the gutter" Shaw raises this point to the audience who begin to see that change brings other problems too. Alfred Doolittle was linked to two changes in Pygmalion, his own and Eliza's. Doolittle didn't care what changes Eliza would go through, in fact he " sold" her for money but when it came to his own transformation he was very negative towards it because he now didn't have

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the freedoms he had before and other things were expected of him. " I was happy.

I was free... Now I am worried." Through Doolittle, the audience see that transformation can be very negative. There are also many unchanging characters, one of which is Higgins although he is the agent of transformation.

This is quite ironic because he is the one who changes Eliza and changed many others before her such as Nepommuck but doesn't change himself. Although there are some hints to him changing a bit, especially at the end when he realizes that " Duchess Eliza" is more than just his creation and a person with their own feelings but overall Higgins remains unchanged. The last comment he makes to Eliza, we are shown by his " cheerful, careless, vigorous voice...that he is incorrigible" Colonel Pickering and Mrs Higgins also remain unchanged but as an audience we feel that they don't need to. Shaw has presented them as particularly amiable characters and their functions are to make sense of the play and to help the audience understand. Pickering is the example of the ideal gentleman, treating everyone the same.

When Eliza comments on this, Higgins is shocked and claims he is as discriminating as the Colonel, " and I treat duchesses as if they were flower girls". These two characters however are found reassuring by the audience. George Bernard Shaw shows many different sides of transformation and presents all aspects. The main thing he seems to be trying to get across is that transformation is permanent and irreversible. Shaw appears to raise the

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point of how much of someone's personality is affected when they undergo a change. At the end of *Pygmalion* Eliza finally reclaims her identity and her new character becomes authentic.

That is one of the key points of transformation; a change is not complete unless it becomes real and the person has taken control. George Bernard Shaw, however, leaves the play unresolved. This is his way of showing that the audience do not control the end of the play and so he leaves it open to interpretation. Bernard Shaw is saying that transformation happens all the time and that is why he chose not to draw the line at the end. He does however reveal in his writing afterwards on his thoughts what happened next explaining that he chose not to have it as a play "the rest of the story need not be shown in action".

Because these afterthoughts weren't part of the play, the audience may not be entirely satisfied with the ending but that was one of the techniques George Bernard Shaw used - he wanted to make the audience think. He managed to do that, especially near the end in the argument between Higgins and Eliza, the "creator" and the "creation". Both Higgins and Eliza had entirely reasonable claims and the audience were caught up in this tension trying to decide who was right. At various points in the play, the tension was so great that the characters seemed close to violence. At one major point in the play Eliza did actually do this, when she threw the slippers at Higgins.

This action had a major impact because it was all the tension and anger that had been building up in the play being released in one moment. Shaw leaves

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Eliza as an independent woman meaning that she is authentic and has gone through with her transformation. Shaw also decided to indicate that Eliza was going to marry Freddy instead of the fairy-tale expectation where she would fall in love with her creator, Higgins. George Bernard Shaw shows at the end that transformation never stops occurring and that tension is always being caused because of this " Making life means making trouble". He leaves us contemplating the many transformations in life at the end of a very thought-provoking play which may have influenced the thoughts of all the people watching the play at the time.