

بيجماليون لجورج برنارد شو: نقد نفسي اجتماعي

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مسرحية بيجماليون لجورج برنارد شو باعتبارها مسرحية تبحث في تأثير التسلسل الهرمي الاجتماعي واللغة وموضوع التحول على حياة الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين، البروفيسور هيغينز وليزا، وفقاً للتحليل النفسي الاجتماعي مثل التحليل النفسي لفرويد. توضح الدراسة الدور الذي تلعبه اللغة في تحويل ليزا إلى سيدة راقية من خلال عدسة اجتماعية نفسية، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار الدور الحاسم للغة كوسيلة للسلطة والتلاعب النفسي. وبالتالي، تحلل الدراسة كل من الآثار الاجتماعية والنفسية لتجربة هيغينز لتحويل ليزا إلى سيدة، وتأثيرها على هوية ليزا وشخصيتها في العصر الفيكتوري. تشرح تأثير التسلسل الهرمي الاجتماعي على الحالات النفسية للشخصيات والطريقة التي يسلط بها المؤلف الضوء على الدور الحاسم للسلطة والتحول والإدراك الذاتي في تشكيل أفكار الفرد وسلوكه. تسلط المناهج الاجتماعية النفسية المستخدمة الضوء على التناقضات بين الشخصيات. هيغينز، المعلم الشرير والمتلاعب، سيعيش بقية حياته شخصاً منعزلاً اجتماعياً ونفسياً، بينما تصبح ليزا امرأة حرة وقوية وتخطط للزواج من فريدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النفسي لفرويد، بيجماليون، السلطة، إدراك الذات، الهوية الاجتماعية، التحول.

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Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw: A Socio-Psychological Critique

Abstract

This study aims to analyze George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* as a play that explores the impact of social hierarchy, language, and the theme of transformation on the lives of the main characters, Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, through a socio-psychological lens based on theories such as Freudian psychoanalysis. It examines how language serves as a medium of power and psychological manipulation, driving Eliza's transformation into a refined lady. The study analyzes both the social and psychological consequences of Higgins's experiment to shape Eliza into a lady, its effects on her identity and personality in the Victorian era, and the influence of social hierarchy on the psychological state of the characters. It further investigates how the playwright emphasizes the critical roles of power, transformation, and self-perception in shaping an individual's thoughts and behavior. The socio-psychological approaches applied reveal stark contrasts between the characters: Higgins, as the manipulative mentor, is left socially and psychologically isolated, while Eliza emerges as an independent and empowered woman, eventually planning to marry Freddy.

Keywords: Freudian psychoanalysis, *Pygmalion*, power, self-perception, social identity, transformation.

1. Introduction:

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) explores crucial issues such as those of social class, transformation, social identity, and the relationship between language, power, and self-perception. Based on the Greek myth of Pygmalion, the author presents a modern text that explores the influence of language and accent upon the transformation of the female figure, Liza Doolittle. It begins with Eliza as a poor flower girl who runs among other pedestrians for "shelter into the portico of St Paul's church." (*Pygmalion*, 9), The Flower Girl, whose accent and language change throughout the play, undergoes a journey of transformation that turns her into a "lady" of refined speech and manners under the supervision of the professor of linguistics, Henry Higgins, who undertakes the task of transforming the Flower girl into a lady. This paper provides an analytical approach which focuses on the socio-psychological implications behind the Flower Girl's transformation through analyzing Higgins' inner psychological motives in taking on the experiment. Thus, it sheds light on themes such as power, class hierarchy and distinction, and self-perception in accordance with socio-psychological theories such as cognitive perception, social identity theory and Freud's psychoanalysis; it investigates the influence of language and social class on the characters' behavior and identity and the social and psychological impact of transformation on the play's central characters, Liza and Higgins, taking into consideration its historical and social context. Furthermore, the study analyzes the motivations of Henry Higgins to take on the experiment in accordance with Freud's psychological theory of the psyche and the unconscious mind as they appear in his book; it examines both the psychological and social motives that turn Higgins into a manipulative character, and psychologically and socially an isolated person.

1.2. Methodology:

Social psychology is the scientific approach that is concerned with examining the way the human behavior, thoughts and feelings are constructed within a particular social context. Thus, it looks at human thoughts and behavior as influenced by specific social conditions. Baron, Byrne, and Suls (1989) define social psychology as “the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior in social situations.” (86) Thus, social identity, attitudes and stereotypes are crucial themes in relation to social psychology, for they help in shaping a person’s thoughts and behavior.

Social psychologists emphasize the relationship between the human mind and the social context, and that a person’s thoughts and behavior are shaped by social interactions. Allport, G. W (1985) states that, “social psychology is the methodical study of how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.” (5) Thus, the human behavior is shaped as a result of the interaction between cognitive mind and social situation. Applying theories of social psychology such as social identity and self-concept theories, the study examines the social and psychological implications that let Higgins accept to take on in an attempt to turn Liza as a lady of refined manner and perfect language.

2. Discussion:

2.1. Social Identity:

The theme of identity is essential in relation to Shaw’s *Pygmalion* and the discussion of this study. At the start of the play, Higgins is given the role of the Note Taker who seems to guess where people are from through their accent and the language they speak. His awareness of his high social identity and his abilities as a professor is noticed the first time he introduces himself to Colonel Pickering or (The Gentleman) as shown in Act 1; he introduces himself as being the author of Higgins’

Universal Alphabet. Within the realm of social psychology, Higgins represents the theme of 'self-perception' as shown in his awareness of his abilities and behavior; he is capable of evaluating his opinions and abilities. Markus (1977) explains that "Self-concept is the whole sum of beliefs that people have about themselves. The self-concept is made up of cognitive aspects called self-schemas—beliefs that people have about themselves and that guide the processing of self-referential information." (65) Thus, self-concept plays a key role in shaping Higgins's behavior and interactions with other characters especially the flower girl; it is essentially an organized belief that shapes his personality and identity. His mental perception about himself as a professor of linguistics enables him to interpret the accents of middle or lower class people, to take advantage of them, and consequently, to look down at them.

Higgins shows his prejudice every moment he talks about himself and brags about the values and the language of the upper class which are contrasted with that of Liza or the Flower Girl. Tajfel (1971) maintains that "prejudice results simply from the awareness that there is an "out-group" (the other group)." (150) Tajfel's theory of social identity "states that individuals need to maintain a positive sense of personal and social identity: this is partly achieved by emphasizing the desirability of one's own group, focusing on distinctions between other "lesser" groups (152.) Higgins relationship with Eliza manifests that distinction between upper class identities and those of other lesser groups. When Eliza arrives at his house, in her dirty clothes and filthy appearance, Higgins shows his prejudice and frustration, especially the moment he recorded her accent, and asks her to leave. In his conversation with Pickering Colonel, Higgins says, "shall we ask this baggage to sit down, or shall we throw her out of the window?" (26) Liza, who is still identified as The Flower Girl, replies "I won't be called baggage when I've offered to pay like any lady" she

continues, "I want to be a lady in a flower shop instead of sellin at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I speak more genteel" (26).

Based on the previous dialogue, self-perception is reflected through the words of both Higgins and Liza (The Flower Girl); the former is aware of his superior abilities and thoughts, while the latter knows that her accent, clothing and behavior don't fit the upper class values, and in order for her to live up to its expectations of the Victorian society and its values, she has to learn how to speak proper English, otherwise, she will not be accepted by the people around her. Self-perception is resulted from the social hierarchy which seems to be at the core of the play. Being too prideful of his language and identity, Higgins criticizes Eliza's Cockney accent saying,

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. 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; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon." (18)

Higgins' awareness of his social status empowers his position in a society which celebrates social hierarchy. According to Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social power, "individuals from higher social classes wield symbolic power, a form of non-coercive control that is enacted through cultural practices such as language." (37) Higgins's social power enables him to control Eliza's transformation and to reshape her identity through imposing his own language on her.

In *Pygmalion*, the word 'transformation' is used to refer to Eliza's newly acquired identity, however, it has negative social connotations than it actually means; Shaw could have simply used alternative words such as 'improving' Eliza's accent or 'changing' it for the better so that she could easily communicate with the people of

the upper class, but he indirectly criticizes the illnesses of the Victorian society through depicting Higgins' experiment of Liza's transformation as a way of manipulating her and imposing his false values upon her personality.

Higgins' is not actually concerned about Liza's success and inner values; he uses the experiment of transformation for his own social and materialistic benefits; he exploits Liza's flaw in not speaking proper English and manipulates her, and Eliza, on her part, has to act according to his expectations and instructions. In other words, the experiment of transformation has no moral values; instead of treating Liza gently and showing considerations for her feelings as a lady, Higgins often mistreats her and makes her subordinate to him. Liza keeps repeating 'I always been a good girl.' (35) Even before the experiment finishes, Eliza insists that goodness comes from within and has nothing to do with one's accent, meaning that her true identity is at odd with the one Higgins expects her to represent. Within the context of social psychology, human beings can develop a sense of who they are through recognizing how others react to them and interpreting those reactions. This tension between self-perception and external expectations can be understood through Cooley's concept of the *looking-glass self*, which suggests that self-identity is constructed based on how others perceive us (165-166).

Liza does want to learn proper English, but she does not want to lose her self-esteem in the process of leaning it. She says, "I want to talk like a lady in a flower-shop." (32) When she is cursed and humiliated by Higgins, Liza replies saying, "you have no feeling heart in you: you don't care for nothing but yourself." (32)

2.2. Freud's Ideas Applied to Shaw's Play.

In addition to social cognitive theories, this study aims at analyzing the central characters in *Pygmalion* guided by Freud's psychoanalytical theory that focuses on the three components of the unconscious mind: the id, the unconscious part of the

human psyche which is driven by the pleasure principle and strives for satisfaction our wants, needs and urges. Freud (1949) explains that

The power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism's life. This consists in the satisfaction of its innate needs. No such purpose as that of keeping itself alive or of protecting itself from dangers by means of anxiety can be attributed to the id. That is the task of the ego, whose business it also is to discover the most favourable and least perilous method of obtaining satisfaction, taking the external world into account. The super-ego may bring fresh needs to the fore, but its main function remains the limitation of satisfactions. (Freud, 6-7)

The Ego, which is driven by reality principle, seeks balance between the Id and the ego, and the superego, which is driven by morality principle. Freud maintains that the superego is "a special psychical agency which performs the task of seeing that narcissistic satisfaction from the ego ideal is ensured...what we call our 'conscience'." Freud (1949) argues that "it is hard to say anything of the behaviour of the libido in the id and in the super-ego. All that we know about it relates to the ego, in which at first the whole available quota of libido is stored up. We call this state absolute, primary narcissism." (8)

As for the superego, it is described as "a successful instance of identification with the parental agency" (On Metapsychology, 89-90). It is the ideal and the ethical part of the human psyche that gives the moral standards. Freud (1923) explains that "the considerations that led us to assume the existence of a grade in the ego, a differentiation within the ego, which may be called the 'ego ideal' or 'superego', have been stated elsewhere. (65) According to Freud, these three components that comprise the human psyche are essential for understating and interpreting the human behavior. He believes that people are "simply actors in the drama of [their] own minds, pushed by desire, pulled by coincidence. Underneath the surface, our

personalities represent the power struggle going on deep within us.” (New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis) In Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, Fraud’s psychological approach helps readers and critics to interpret the motivations and the psychological implications of Higgins’ experiment of transformation for the Flower Girl or Liza. Based on the psychological theory of Freud, the conflict between the three central characters Henry Higgins, Eliza and Colonel Pickering parallels the struggle of the three components of the human psyche: the id, the ego and the superego.

To begin with, Higgins taking on the experiment for finding pleasure not for the sake of helping Liza to improve her accent shows his evil part and the influence of the Id upon his personality; his main concern is to enhance his reputation in the academic world, and to get paid and consequently, to become richer. He takes Liza as an object for his experiment just to prove that he is the best teacher alive. The experiment of Liza proves him to be a manipulative person because he mistreats Liza and humiliates her; it exposes the evil part of his personality that is associated with satisfying his inner urges in controlling Eliza and using her as an object of his experiment. When Higgins’s housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, asks her to leave and to go home to her parents, Liza says, “I aint got no parents. They told me I was big enough to earn my own living and turned me out.” (31) On his part, Higgins decides to take advantage of Liza’s weakness and the lack of any familial connections she has. He says, “Very well, then, what the earth is all this fuss about? The girl doesn’t belong to anyone- is no use to anybody but me.” (31)

In addition to manipulation, Higgins’ personality embodies self-centeredness, manipulation and materialism. Being mistreated and humiliated, Liza threatens to leave him, yet Higgins tempts her to stay. First he gives her a piece of chocolate, then, he says, “Think of chocolates, and taxis, and gold, and diamonds.” Liza says, “No: I don’t want no gold and no diamond. I’m a good girl.” (33)

As for Liza whom the play depicts at first as the Flower Girl, her personality represents the power of the ego in behaving in a realistic way. Freud describes that the Ego is "the sense of self, but later expanded it to include psychic functions such as judgment, tolerance, reality testing, control, planning, defense, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning, and memory. The ego is the organizing principle upon which thoughts and interpretations of the world are based" (Snowden, 106) According to Freud, "the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world." (Metapsychology 363)

Being a poor flower girl who lives in a Victorian society, Liza plans to come to terms with reality; she decides to undergo a journey of transformation that turns her into a Duchess. Thus, she is willing to pay for the language lessons in order to develop her accent and language, so that she can obtain a different job and a more acceptable position in her society; she is willing to adapt and to be included within that society.

The gentleman, Colonel Pickering represents the power of the superego which is the part of the human psyche that consists of the individuals' morals and ideals that a person acquire from his parents or society. In his "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," Freud (1933) states that

The super-ego applies the strictest moral standard to the helpless ego which is at its mercy; in general it represents the claims of morality, and we realize all at once that our moral sense of guilt is the expression of the tension between the ego and the super-ego. It is a most remarkable experience to see morality, which is supposed to have been given us by God and thus deeply implanted in us, functioning [in these patients] as a periodic phenomenon (60)

Based on Freudian definition of the superego, or what is called 'morality principle', one can think of Colonel Pickering's behavior and thoughts which represent the

moral implications of Liza's transformation into a lady. Pickering is interested in Higgins' experiment, yet he does not have any intentions of exploiting the girl or taking advantage of her flaws; on the contrary, he decides to help her and shows his willingness to pay for the language lessons that Liza will take. He says, "Higgins: Higgins: I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you're 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" (29).

Unlike Higgins, Pickering has no personal benefits out of the whole experiment; his generosity is contrasted with Higgins' greed and self-centeredness. Pickering appears to be responsible for the lady's real success, not Higgins. Addressing Higgins, he says, "You know what I mean. If I'm to be in this business I shall feel responsible for that girl. I hope it's understood that no advantage is to be taken of her position" (38).

On his part, Meyers (2007) states that "The superego aims for perfection," (7) This perfection is somehow reflected in Pickering's positive attitudes towards the lady. Pickering seems to be the real teacher and protector of Liza. He encourages her to speak proper language and is happy at her success; he leads her to a perfect position where she feels spiritually satisfied. Even towards the end of the play, Pickering apologizes for treating Liza as an object of the experiment, though he is not the one who humiliates her.

Having discussed the socio-psychological implications of Higgins' experiment of transforming Liza into a lady, one can realize that it is Higgins who is in real need of transformation, for his bad tempter and attitudes, especially towards those who are lower than his class; his superior attitude places him in a critical position where he seems to be socially isolated. Higgins doesn't seem to have any social integration with the middle class people; he does not show any social tolerance, while Pickering welcomes the middle class' performative aspects. Addressing Higgins, Pickering says,

You've never been broken in properly to the social routine. [Strolling over to the piano] I rather enjoy dipping into it occasionally myself: it makes me feel young again. Anyhow, it was a great success: an immense success. I was quite frightened once or twice because Eliza was doing it so well. You see, lots of the real people can't do it at all: they're such fools that they think style comes by nature to people in their position; and so they never learn. There's always something professional about doing a thing superlatively well. (75)

Higgins' mother also is annoyed with her son's attitudes towards people; she knows that he is too eccentric to be in front of the sort of respectable company that she is expecting. When Higgins shows up, she says, "What are you doing here today? It is my at-home day: you promised not to come." She continues, "You mustn't. I'm serious, Henry. You offend all my friends; they stop coming whenever they meet you." (54) Higgins' eccentric behavior and misogynistic attitudes turn him into a rejectionist and lead him to live the rest of his life in a state of social and psychological alienation.

3. Results and Conclusion:

In Shaw's play, Liza insists on emphasizing her goodness of as an actual trait of her personality, While Mr. Higgins often brags about his profession and experiences as a professor of linguistics; this focus on the intellectual pursuits leads Higgins to be an eccentric person who is socially and emotionally alienated. At the beginning of the play, Higgins, acts as the Note Taker, criticizes Liza's accent saying "a woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere – no right to live" (18) and he prides himself in being a phonetics expert who speaks "the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible." (18) Soon afterwards, Higgins gets confused when he realizes that Liza is no longer weak and dependent. The moment Liza decides to leave him, Mrs. Higgins says to Higgins, "you must have

frightened her," Got confused and cannot find what to do with without her, Higgins says, "Frightened her! a nonsense!What am I to do?" (86) Once Liza leaves, Higgins will not find satisfaction, because he finds pleasure in creating and "inventing new Elizas," (65) but as she leaves, he feels confused due to the fact that he is going to lose the object of his experiment, thus he will not be able to maintain a sense of self-esteem.

Moreover, at the beginning, he expresses his indifference to the opinions and thoughts of others; he sees himself above others and superior to them, thus, he is not concerned with social views, expectations and conventions, and that makes him a socially alienated who dismisses the possibility of relationships, love or marriage. As the play progresses, Higgins gets to be more isolated than before, both socially and emotionally, due to his obsession with phonetics experiments; he becomes intellectually arrogant and prioritizes phonetics over love and marriage, thus he becomes emotionally and socially disconnected. Unlike Liza, who succeeds to learn a proper language and gets married to Freddy, gets involved within the Victorian society.

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