
UNIT 1 BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH DRAMA FROM THE RESTORATION PERIOD TO BERNARD SHAW

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 English Drama from 1660 to Shaw and its European Background.
- 1.3 Shaw's Ideological Background
- 1.4 The life and plays of Shaw
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Questions
- 1.7 Suggested Reading, for the History of Drama

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to have an overview of the growth of English Drama from the Restoration till Shaw's time and also a broad acquaintance with Bernard Shaw's life and plays, his background, the important events in his life, the literary and intellectual influences on him and his own development as a playwright.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In England, the comedy of manners reached its zenith in the Restoration period but after the middle of the 18th century it entered a phase of decline. The lesser achievements of the heroic tragedy were also not sustained. After a comparatively barren period, drama in England was revived mainly under the influence of Ibsen. We shall first trace this process of the development of English drama and subsequently focus on Shaw's own career and the formative influences that shaped his philosophy and dramaturgy.

1.2 ENGLISH DRAMA FROM 1660 TO SHAW AND ITS EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

The closing of the English theatre in 1642 ended a glorious phase of English Drama, and its reopening in 1660 marked a decisive break with the past. However the Puritan repression of 1642-60 had not fully succeeded in snuffing out the spirit of the theatre and in some form or the other surreptitious performances and popular forms of entertainment continued during the interregnum. The dominant influence in the Restoration theatre came from France where Corneille had already created a grand tragedy and Moliere had achieved unrivalled success in comedy, but the pre-1642 tradition also had a revival, and some of the trends from the era continued to penetrate the spirit of Restoration drama.

The first twenty five years of the period i.e. the reign of Charles II (1660-85) were clearly marked by the spirit of Reason, Empiricism and license. **Influenced** by the

Inductive method of Bacon, the anti-idealistic political theory of Hobbes's **Leviathan** and the revolutionary astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo, the new age dispersed with faith, mystery and intellectual authority. It mistrusted the supernatural and denigrated Imagination. It discarded the old Ethic and called for a practical and pragmatic value system which ridiculed the notions of chastity and marital fidelity.

The theatre itself following the French model underwent a perceptible change. In the French theatre, the auditorium, an enclosed place, was long and narrow with the stage surrounded on three sides by the audience. **Artificial** lights, sets and **properties** were introduced, and women invaded the stage as actresses. Following the contemporary French theorists, the plays meticulously observed the unities of time, place and action. So in England also, in place of the open Elizabethan theatre bereft of light and sets, there was an enclosed theatre with artificial lights and some sets and rudiments of properties. Now the actresses played the female roles with no need for any one to "boy" **Cleopatra's** "greatness". Women did not have to be given male disguises as in **As You Like It** or **The Twelfth Night** and plays with dominant female roles could be written and performed.

The main Restoration tragedians were **Dryden**, Lee and Otway, all associated with the heroic tragedy. They were inspired by the French neo-classicists, Corneille and Racine, who in their contrasting manners dramatized the conflict between honour or reason and passion. Rhymed couplets furnished them with the appropriate format to adequately handle historical and mythical themes - in the grand manner in Corneille and with subtle psychological insight in Racine. **Dryden**, however, opted for blank verse in **All for Love** although he had employed rime in his other heroic plays like **The Conquest for Granada**, **All for Love**, his adaptation of Shakespeare's **Antony and Cleopatra**, which represents the Restoration tragedy at its best, had, like other plays of its kind, grand characters - Emperors, Kings, Generals - who were larger than life, exaggerated emotions and bombastic speeches. Its great theme was the clash of honour and passion-dramatized so effectively earlier in Corneille's **Le Cid**.

In contrast, Restoration comedy was a more popular and artistically superior genre. Here, the great French model was Moliere. Although he built his plays around central characters with marked eccentricities - a miser (**The Miser**), a misanthrope (**The Misanthrope**), a hypocrite (**Tartuffe**) or a hypochondriac (**The Imaginary Invalid**), he also combined the exposure of these characters with probing social criticism. The Restoration comedy of manners likewise provided a critique of the manners and morals of the contemporary society and used many comic devices employed by him such as disguises, intrigues, farcical action. Written primarily for the urban upper class, it reached its zenith in the plays of **Dryden** (**The Wild Gallant**, **Marriage a la Mode**), **Etherege** (**The Man of Mode**, **The Comical Revenge**), **Wycherley** (**The Country Wife**, **The Gentleman Dancing Master**, **The Plain Dealer**) and **Congreve** (**The Old Bachelor**, **Double Dealer**, **Love for Love**, **The Way of the World**). In the Orange period, **Farquhar** (**Recruiting officer**, **The Beaux Stratagem**) and **Vanbrugh** (**The Provoked Wife**, **Relapse**) carried on the tradition with some modifications. These plays had a contemporary setting with a number of gallants and belles from the London aristocracy, upper class witwounds, fops and country cousins, jealous and niggardly middle class traders and several servants including the clever valets. The plot was built around intrigues and seductions, often involving disguises and role playing. What made the plays really lively was the witty and polished dialogues and repartees. The successful lover was an urbane aristocrat with plenty of wit, grace, tact and shrewdness. The conventional morality was jettisoned as the ridiculed cuckold rather than the unscrupulous seducer became the target of satire.

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, leading to the successful culmination of the attack on King James and his Royalist supporters who believed in the Divine Rights of Kings, there emerged the new order under King William, theoretically based on the idea of governance as a kind of contract between the ruler and the ruled, Locke became the new political theorist of this order "women's Liberation Movement"

partly under the influence of the *precieux* movement in France and partly because of Queen Mary surfaced in a tangible manner. The voice of the "Feminists" against the casual promiscuity and the depiction of women as sexual objects in the plays was joined by a resurgent clergy protesting against the "immorality" and "indecenty" of English Drama. Bishop Jeremy Collier's tract entitled **Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage** virtually ended the career of Congreve and led to the demise of Restoration comedy after Vanbrugh and Farquhar.

Georgian England was Whig dominated with Walpole and his ilk rather than the monarchy as the real powers, and with their middle class orientation, the plays also underwent a transformation. The "immoral" comedies of intrigue had to give way to sentimental drama: Addison and Steele represented the new Age. Nevertheless, John Gay wrote **The Beggar's Opera**, an immensely popular musical about the underworld with all its corruption, crimes and license-adapted later by Brecht as **Three Penny Opera**. Henry Fielding would have been a worthy successor to Gay especially in the parodic mode of plays like **Tom Thumb**, **The Great**, but his ill advised and imprudent attacks on Walpole ushered in the Censorship Act and the end of a scintillating career in drama. Although Dr. Johnson thought of himself as a tragic poet, his *Irene* was anything but a stage success. After a lean phase of four decades which was quite a contrast to the rich French theatre of Voltaire and Beaumarchais, theatre in England flickered for a while in the plays of Goldsmith (**The Good Natured Man** and **She Stoops to Conquer**) and Sheridan (**The Rivals**, **The Critic** and **The School for Scandal**). The basic format of these plays was embedded in the Comedy of Manners but the license and the permissiveness of the Restoration era were missing. Romantic love, which had made a late appearance in Congreve in *Millamant's* attachment to *Mirabell* was extolled and glorified as the plays became morally simpler and narrower.

A century of Romantic and Victorian theatre (1790-1890) witnessed no resurgence of great drama in England. There were, as in the eighteenth century, numerous Shakespeare revivals and various forms of theatre, but no great dramatists. During the same period, Germany and surprisingly France gave birth to great Romantic plays. Although Goethe's magnum opus, *Faust* is not quite stageable, he did write stageworthy plays like **Emmott** and **Goetz von Berlichingen**. However, the great German Romantic playwright was Schiller whose masterpieces **William Tell**, **Mary Stuart**, **The Maid of Orleans** and **The Robbers** - presented larger than lifesize rebels, non-conformists and outcasts, struggling valiantly against authority. Hugo, the pivotal French Romantic playwright followed Schiller in depicting grand characters in exotic settings in works like **Cromwell** and **Hernani**. In contrast, all the English Romantic poets who tried writing plays - Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats failed as playwrights. Shelley's **The Cenci** was the best of these plays, closely followed by Byron's pieces like **Manfred** and **Cain**. The accent in them is on grand characters, rebels against authority, exotic and historical settings, lofty and poetic dialogues, a declamatory style of acting and a clear separation from the contemporary reality.

In the Victorian period, romantic drama degenerated into melodramas with black and white characters and sensational last minute rescues. In them, the divorce from contemporary life was complete and total. At the other end of the spectrum was the so-called "well-made play" popularised in France by Scribe, Sardou and Feydeau. Their intercepted messages, miscarried letters, central misunderstandings and twists in plot led to a highly contrived and artificial theatre.

However, the real break through came from Europe in the form of Realistic drama that Ibsen ushered in. Realism in a sense went back to the Wordsworthian Romantic concept of writing about low and humble characters in the language of common man. Its dominant concern was, of course the middle class, which it did so much to expose and satirise. This was partly because the period was clearly dominated by the middle class. In England, the First Reform Bill of 1832 had decisively shifted political

power to the whigs representing the shopkeepers, traders and industrialists. The repeal of the **Corn** laws in 1846 even more unmistakably undermined the economic base of the landed aristocracy and sealed the middle class control of the economic and political life of the nation. Across the channel, the uprising of 1830 in France was succeeded by the deposition of King Louis Philippe in 1848 and the revival of Bonapartism which was drenched in the middle class ethos. Central Europe had **gone** further in the overthrow of the old feudal class with violent revolutions in 1848.

To return to the plays, although Ibsen, continued the romantic predicament of the **artist** as alien and was often self-reflexive like them, his was primarily a revolt against romanticism. In his post 1876 plays **i.e.** in his realistic pieces, he aimed at verisimilitude, at the creation of the illusion of reality on the stage. Beginning with a **belief in objective** reality, he sought to embody its details in his choice of characters, events, plots, dialogues, imagery, music, lights, sets and the style of acting. Thus in plays like **A Doll's House**, **Ghosts**, **The Wild Duck**, **Rosmersholm** and **Hedda Gabler**, the characters resemble real people and nothing happens to them which cannot take place in real life. Following the Greek models of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Ibsen also aimed at the unities of time, place and action. As the unity of time required the action to begin at a late point of attack, it posed the problem of exposition which Ibsen usually solved by beginning the play with a visitor who came after a long time. In informing him, the residents acquaint the audience with the background of the past events. Otherwise, the play begins with servants who gossip about the secrets of the house. Ibsen's characters use prose and try to speak like real people. **The** realistic dialogues are matched by realistic imagery and symbolism as all the images and symbols have some meaning at both the literal and the metaphorical levels. **Similarly** sets, properties and lights are realistic. The plays have lamps on the stage to indicate the source of illumination, and consequently **Ibsen** builds a rich symbolic pattern of light and darkness in many of his works. Sets also are photographic and the play has all the properties that the "original" in "real life" is supposed to have. Likewise the source of music is known to the audience, and it is a part of the story. Finally, the acting style is natural and subdued. The stage and the auditorium are like watertight compartments and the actors are supposed to be completely oblivious of the presence of the audience. In fact, the **premise** is that the actor is not acting at all but just leading a real life.

Anton Chekhov in some ways went beyond Ibsen in modifying his realism. Thus he dispensed with some of the sensational actions in Ibsen - especially the suicides and violent deaths at the end of the plays - that are, to use Aristotle's words, "possible" but not "probable". In fact, Chekhov progressed through the **drama** of "indirect action" to the drama of "inaction". He also rejected the unity of time on the ground that too many events happening in a short span of time did **not convey** a sense of genuine reality. Chekhov also questioned Ibsen's idea of dialogue. As in real life, Chekhov's characters, unlike **Ibsen's**, do not listen to each other, and they change the topic of conversation frequently. Unlike Ibsen's drama of psychological intensity, Chekhov aims at the depiction of a social panorama.

In England (and Ireland), the resurgence of dramatic **literature** began in the late 19th Century with a few writers of well made plays and comedies including Oscar Wilde. Wilde's comedies of wit with sparkling dialogues and ingenious paradoxes, revealed at their best in *The Importance of Being Earnest* certainly prepared the way for the other great Anglo-Irish comic genius and master of paradox, George Bernard Shaw although Shaw's concept of **drama** for the sake of social-economic-political transformation of the world differed radically from **Wilde's dictum** of art for art's sake.

1.3 SHAW'S IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Shaw had absorbed a variety of philosophical and ideological influences in his early years. Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty* converted him to the

leftist cause with his lecture. Trade unions surfaced then on the scene in a notable way especially after the third reform bill of 1884. Around this time, the Fabian society with a social Democratic outlook emerged with thinkers and organisers like William Morris, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and H.M. Hyndman associated with it. Shaw discovered them by reading their tract, **Why are the many poor?** They advocated gradual social-economic reforms within the framework of democracy.

Shaw, however, soon realized that institutional changes alone could not bring fulfilment, justice and prosperity to mankind. What was needed was a change in the very nature of man. So he turned to Creative Evolution which could lead to the emergence of superior human beings or supermen. The idea of evolution was very much in the air in the 19th century and the intelligentsia was familiar with the theories of Darwin. Shaw, however, wanted to go beyond Darwin to those who felt that Evolution could be willed. **Lamarch** was an important forerunner in this respect. Another major influence was Samuel Butler who felt that Darwin had "banished mind from the universe". Butler "identified mind with design" with "intention". A contemporary of Shaw who developed the concept of Creative Evolution was **Henri Bergson** whose book **The Creative Evolution** appeared in 1907. On the other hand, the idea of a "will" which guides the growth of animals had been muted by Schopenhauer, the writer of **The World Considered as Will and Idea**. Schopenhauer thought of the Will as blind and the element of chance governing the movement of the universe. Nietzsche, the German Philosopher had conceived of the superman in an anti-Christian moral framework. By a rather interesting coincidence, Dostoevsky, the Russian novelist, had projected in Raskolnikov of **Crime and Punishment**, a young man, who following the exploits of Napoleon had decided to rise above ordinary humanity by killing a frail old woman. Whereas Dostoevsky resolved the moral conflict in Christian terms, Nietzsche condemned the teachings of Christ as a gospel of **weakness** and effeteness. When he envisaged a transcendence of Christianity he contemplated an ethic that would reject notions of good and evil, look down upon **charity** and compassion as indicators of effeminacy. Pronouncing the death of God, Nietzsche in books like **Thus Spake Znrathustra**, **Beyond Good and Evil** and **The Will to Power**, conceived of a **superman** who could be superior to normal humanity by virtue of his strength. Shaw, however, realized that not brute strength but intelligence is what the life force is driving at.

Nietzsche found a "consanguine" spirit in Wagner, the great musician, Wagner's operas similarly celebrated heroes of exceptional strength. Shaw as a great lover and connoisseur of music - in fact, he was a music critic for quite some time - thought of himself as a "Perfect **Wagnerite**" and that further linked him with Nietzsche,

However, Nietzsche's male chauvinism was something that Shaw could not stomach. Partly as a result of the influence of **Ibsen's** New Woman - as presented in **A Doll's House and Ghosts** - and partly out of his own convictions, Shaw saw a woman as active and dynamic, a fighter for her rights. Shaw, in fact, emerged as an early feminist of sorts. Also, in a remarkable study, **Whitman** points out that the **Shavian** ideology ultimately derived from **Hegel**.¹

For some of Shaw's ideological roots, we need to go back to his birth and upbringing.

1.4 THE LIFE AND PLAYS OF SHAW

George Bernard Shaw was **born** in a family of impoverished Irish Protestant gentry in Dublin on July 26, 1856 and he spent his first twenty years there. The monumental biography by Michael Holroyd suggests what earlier studies by Colin Wilson and others had not discounted that perhaps George Bernard Shaw was the son not of George **Carr** Shaw but of George John Vandeleur Lee, a music teacher and conductor, who stayed with the family and formed some kind of **menage a trois** with

George Carr and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw (nee Gurly). George Bernard acquired his love of music in early childhood - it was a part of the family life with both Lee and Mrs. Shaw earning their living from it. The drunkenness of Mr. Shaw, which had disastrous consequences for the family created in the boy a strong revulsion for alcohol and contributed subsequently to his "Puritanism".

George Bernard Shaw was miserable in Dublin before he moved to London to join his mother and sister Lucy - the other sister Agnes having died of tuberculosis - and Lee there. His early years in London were marked by struggle and failure. He wrote five novels which flopped miserably - *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist*. The first two of these written in 1878 and 1880 had autobiographical elements and along with *Sixteen Self Sketches*, written much later, provided insights into his early life. However, his work as a professional reviewer and critic of music and drama for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Dramatic Review*, *Magazine for Music* and *The Star* provided him with economic support, and more important than that, a platform for expressing his ideas.

Shaw's first exercises in dramatic writing resulted in three "unpleasant" plays - *The Widower's Houses*, *The Philanderer* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. In each one of these, he boldly engaged a contemporary issue in the manner of a discussion play - respectively the exploitation of poor tenants by landlords. Man-woman relationship in the context of the New Woman and organised prostitution. Even as he finally took one side, he also gave the "wrongside" its say. Thus Sartorius in *Widower's Houses* could justify himself, and Mrs. Warren could deeply move her daughter Vivie. *The Philanderer* had the added dimension of autobiography. Charteris was a self-portrait, Jullia Craven was Mrs. Jenny Patterson, the first woman to "seduce" Shaw and Grace Tranfield, the actress Florence Farr who was his mistress for several years in the 1890's. Although *Mrs. Warren's Profession* shows a deep grasp of the issues, these plays were too grim and bitter to appeal to the English audiences and they were not critical successes either.

However, the next four plays i.e. the "Plays Pleasant" - *You Never can Tell*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and above all, *Arms and the Man* - achieved great successes as in each of them, Shaw gave full vent to his comic genius along with his serious engagement with major social-ethical issues. *Candida*, as Christopher Innes points out in his book *Modern British Drama, 1890-1970*² takes off from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Here the woman, Candida instead of walking out of the house chooses to remain with her husband Morell in preference to the idealistic poet Eugene Marchbanks. Here, Shaw also introduced the triangle that often recurs in his plays - a woman who has to make a choice between the rational thinker and reformer and the sentimental poet, modelled here after Shelley or perhaps Yeats as Colin Wilson suggests in *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment*.³ *Arms and the Man*, the famous "anti-romantic" comedy has a similar triangle involving Raina, Sergius and Bluntschli. The play attacks both romantic warfare and romantic love. Another important theme is snobbery an awareness of class - distinction, which remained Shaw's perennial concern.

Before completing the "Three Plays for Puritans", Shaw got married in 1898 to Charlotte Payne-Townshend who in many ways resembled his own mother. Rich but sexually unattractive and puritanical, Charlotte, perhaps never consummated her marriage with Shaw. Except for his "diversion" with the great actress, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Shaw remained loyal to Charlotte in spite of the rather insipid marriage he had with her.

Among the "Three Plays for Puritans" *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* was a minor piece, and although *The Devil's Disciple* was a considerable commercial success in the U.S., it was *Caesar and Cleopatra* that was the great work of dramatic art, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shaw's first major "historical" venture, presents Cleopatra - vis-à-vis Caesar and not Antony as in Shakespeare and Dryden. He drew upon

Mommsen's History of Rome and Plutarch, but Caesar is also to some extent, a self-portrait. As distinguished from the romantic and superstitious Egyptians he is a hard-headed, down to earth, practical man who refuses to be swayed by romantic notions like love, revenge, heroic gestures etc. The play also has several anachronisms which give it a touch of contemporaneity.

Man and Superman, an ambitious and artistically consummate dramatisation of Shaw's concept of the Life Force recreates his favourite triangle - this time with Ann Whitefield, the "mother-woman", John Tanner, the "philosopher" - man and Octavius Robinson, the poet-lover. As is usual in Shaw, the mother-woman heads for the philosopher-man, Tanner - partly a self-portrait, who tries in vain to **escape** from her, in preference to the languishing and sighing lover-Octavius. Out of this union of Ann and Jack will emerge the Superman. This theme is supplemented by a medley of topics/motifs such as the datedness of the 19th century liberalism - embodied in the respectable Roebuck **Ramsden** - socialism and the new working class, represented differently by Mendoza, the President of the Brigands and Henry **Straker**, the smart chauffeur and also parent-child relationship depicted through Whitefields and Malones, the Irish-American tycoons. The play follows the conventions of comedy, with variations on stock devices such as the clever valet, verbal deflations and inversions, father-son conflict over the latter's choice of a bride.

However, this is punctuated by the dream sequence in Act **III** involving John Tanner (Don Juan), Mendoza (The Devil), **Ramsden** (The Statue - The Mayor) and Ann (Dona Ana) which marks a clear departure from conventions of realism. Shaw also makes extensive use of classical music in the play, especially that of Mozart.

John Bull's Other Island, which appeared in 1904, was a perceptive study of the English and the Irish characters through the contrasting portraits of the English Tom Broadbent and the Irish Larry Doyle - "partners in an engineering business" - and Peter Keegan the unfrocked priest. Nora Reilly, **Lerry's** early sweetheart completes the picture in an extremely humorous work which rejects Irish sentimental nationalism even as it denounces the business efficiency of the Englishman.

Major Barbara (1905), another "anti-romantic" play of Shaw dramatizes the conflict between the practical and ostensibly devillish Andrew Undershaft and his idealistic daughter Barbara (a major in the salvation **Army**) and her fiance, the Greek scholar and poet Adolphus Cusins, based to some extent on Gilbert Murray. Barbara's mother, Lady Britomart, her brother Stephen Undershaft, her sister Sarah and Sarah's fiance Charles Lomax all living away from Andrew are comparatively insignificant in the moral conflict. Instead of Barbara converting her father to the cause of the salvation **Army**, it is the latter who converts her and Cusins to his cause. Cusins will take over the Cannon factory from him. The solution to the world's problem is that the enlightened and sensitive **intellectual** must acquire power through practical means.

Besides the many minor plays, during the next ten years, he also wrote *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), *Androcles and the Lion: A Fable Play* (1912), and, of course, *Pygmalion* (1912). *The Doctor's Dilemma* encapsulated Shaw's almost obsessive attack on the medical profession in the form of the choice that Dr. Sir Colenso **Ridgeon** has to make - a choice between the painter - Louis Dubedat - a scoundrel, though a genius, based upon the unscrupulous socialist Edward Aveling - and Blenkinsop, a mediocre but honest general practitioner. The situation is further complicated by the fact that **Ridgeon** is in love with Mrs. Dubedat. **Ridgeon** with his limited resources can save only one patient and he opts for **Blenkinsop**, letting Dubedat die, but ironically Mrs. Dubedat, the widow refuses to marry **Ridgeon**. What gives life to the play is the liveliness of the dialogues and the sharp edge of the satire.

The Dark Lady of the Sonnets was Shaw's most sustained engagement with Shakespeare as a character. Although Shaw is full of allusions to Shakespeare in many of his plays, it is only in *The Dark Lady* that he has William Shakespeare and Mary Fitton as characters. The play in one act clearly deflates Shakespeare and his achievements.

Androcles and the Lion was a reexamination of Christianity in its early years through the story of Androcles, his wife Megæra, and a bunch of Christian prisoners and martyrs, victims of "the Roman persecution of the early Christians." However, as he said again in his postscript to the play, "my martyrs are martyrs of all time, and my persecutors the persecutors of all time."⁴

Heartbreak House, written over a period of six years (1913-19) dramatises the plight of the decadent aristocracy in England. The play subtitled a "fantasia in the Russian manner on English themes" shows Captain Shotover, his elder daughter Hesione and her husband Hector Hushabye as representing the Heartbreakers - the enlightened but effete aristocracy - in contrast to the younger daughter Ariadne, married to Sir Hastings Utterword, who embodies the Imperialist Class - the Horsebackers - and Boss Mangan, a Napoleon of Industry, a vulgar and crude business "magnate". The Heartbreakers are worth saving, but drifting and without will, they spend their time in dilettantism and flirtation, unconcerned with the business of money and management. Mazzini Dunn, a liberal, and his romantic daughter Ellie who is disillusioned when she discovers the unreality of Hector's tigers, Mangan's millions, Hesione's beautiful black hair and Shotover's "seventh degree of concentration" represent another social set along with the working class people - Nurse Guinness and her villainous "husband", Billy Dunn, a former boatsman of Shotover and now a "burglar". The bombers that destroy the rectory and the gravel pit complete Shaw's picture of mass-destruction, even Apocalypse if the enlightened upper class does not wake up to its responsibility of governing England. The house, built like Captain Shotover's ship effectively symbolizes England, and in a larger sense, "cultured, leisured Europe before the war". The disintegration of form in showing major variations on the comic structure and mode is punctuated by pointed references to *Othello*, *King Lear* and a scattering of quotations from other Shakespeare plays. Thus Ellie is the romantic Desdemona and Hector (Marcus Darnley) early Othello who captivates her. In contrast, Randall is the jealous Othello. On the other hand, Shotover is King Lear and Hesione and Ariadne, his two worldly daughters - Goneril and Regan. Hector is like Albany and Ellie, a parallel to Cordelia. The "drumming" in the sky at the end is like the storm in the heath and Mangan offering to take off all his clothes resembles Lear stripping himself. The Chekhovian manner is shown in the creation of an atmosphere through the country house setting with its weekend visitors, all the characters behaving strangely here like people going off to sleep, women "fascinating" men, the burglar getting deliberately caught etc. The season of autumn, the "scene" of the garden and the field beyond, the sound effects such as the drumming in the sky, Randy's flute and the visual effects of different shades of light all contribute to the creation of "mood".

Back to Methuselah, a "Metabiological Pentateuch" (1920) which Shaw regarded as his most ambitious work did not quite achieve the level of artistic success Shaw aimed at. The five parts are entitled, "In the Beginning", "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas", "The Thing Happens", "Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman" and "As Far as Thought can Reach," and there is also a "Post script after Twenty Five Years". They take us from the Garden of Eden to a point in time 30,000 years in the future, demonstrating and explaining Shaw's idea of Creative Evolution. Here Shaw reiterates that the Life Force in moving in the direction of superior brains and envisions a world in which people would live long only in order to transcend the physical body and lead a life of the mind. In the first part, Adam who finds life somewhat boring does not want to live very long, but in the second play, the brothers Barnabas expound their view that man should will to live for three hundred years. And in "The Thing Happens", Franklin Barnabas's housemaid and his son-in-law do

turn out to be long lived. In the next play, there are numerous long-liveds now inhabiting what was once Ireland. Finally in the last part we observe how intellectual pursuits have supplemented material comforts and physical enjoyment. A baby is delivered out of an egg and it is fully grown like a person of twenty and the phase of youthful pleasures lasts for barely five years before people turn to intellectual contemplation like thinking on the properties of numbers. Thus the Ancients are also disembodied minds spending all their time in pure thought. It is aimed at "complete mastery of matter" and it represents the highest stage of human evolution.

Saint Joan (1923), the most "moving" of Shaw's plays is a "Chronicle" that provides the typical modern treatment of historical material, highlighting the parallel between the past and the present, focusing issues of contemporary significance. Thus the conflict of Joan with the Church and the Feudal order becomes symbolic of the antagonism between individual genius and centralized authority. The rise of nationalism in the 15th century France parallels that in the 20th century Ireland; Joan who dresses up as a man and fights like a soldier represents the modern feminist - the New Woman. The issue of visions is carefully skirted by never showing Joan with her voices as she is always viewed in others' company. The play covers the entire military-political career of Joan and adds the epilogue to provide the typical Shavian touch. Although *Saint Joan* is a rare example of a Shavian play with an emotional appeal, Shaw repeatedly brings in comic elements to puncture the tragic and the emotional build up. The Epilogue makes sure that the play does not end on a crescendo of feelings, but it also provides a perspective and a corrective. The dream sequence in it pertinently universalizes the predicament of saints in the human world and it also enacts a confrontation of the past and the present. The "clerical looking gentleman in modern dress" enters the play to announce Joan's canonisation, and in the sharp dichotomy between his dress and that of the other characters, we observe the contrast of the 15th and the 20th centuries. At the same time, Shaw makes it clear that the world is not yet ready to receive its saints.

The last plays of Shaw, on the whole, show a clear decline in his powers and the only ones worth mentioning are *The Apple Cart* (1929), *Too True to be Good* (1932), *On the Rocks* (1933), *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (1934) *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939), *Buoyant Billions* (1947) and finally the "Playlet" (a debate in dialogue form) - *Shakespeare versus Shaw* (1949).. *The Apple Cart* was often seen as an attack on democracy and a defence of monarchy. However, it contains an objective scrutiny of the limitations of popular democracy showing how King Magnus, who is far more cultivated and intelligent than all his ministers including the Prime Minister, Proteus, can easily beat his opponents at their own game by offering to abdicate and contest the elections for the parliament. He clearly emerges as the political victor. The play also has a rather interesting interlude showing the King with his mistress which distinctly echoes Shaw's relationship with Mrs. Patrick Campbell but is not of much relevance to the political theme. *Too True to be Good* goes back to the Wasteland theme in its attempt to present boredom and despair, but the treatment is not unreal and the dreamlike atmosphere is far from convincing. *On the Rocks* returns to the metaphor of the ship of state to show how the cabinet government of the parliamentary system is unable to cope with the imminent crises facing the state. Shaw highlights the contradictions of the political parties and the system as the labour ministers reject the revolutionary plan of nationalization and the conservatives welcome it for their own reasons. At the end, however, nothing is resolved and there is no hope for the state. *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* has a lighthearted vision of the Final Judgement but the play is far from artistically consummate. *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* is set in the period of Charles II with Sir Isaac Newton, George Fox, Sir Godfrey Kneller and the King himself as characters. The play has no plot but the dialogues, which are powerful, carry it through. *Buoyant Billions*, although a rambling play, emphatically re-affirms the Shavian optimism and Idealism. Finally *Shakespeare versus Shaw* presents a rationale and a defence of Shaw's dramatic career as measured against the achievements of the

Bard of Avon. As expected Shaw glorifies his own works and intersperses curious judgements such as pointing out that **Heartbreak House** is superior to **King Lear**.

A lonely and bored man in his last years, Shaw had a fall on September 10, 1950 and soon after coming back home from the hospital, he died in his sleep on November 21, 1950. Thus ended a rather uneven career. A man of immense vitality, Shaw became a great public figure through sheer force of will and intellect. Although he wrote much that was pedestrian, he had a phase of great creativity starting from mid 1890's and subsequently there were many isolated perks of excellence such as **Heartbreak House** and **Saint Joan**. If we also recall his great achievements as a writer of non-fictional prose - which we have not rightly considered here - we have to admit that he deserved to be acknowledged as the Grand Old Man of English literature of the twentieth century.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have first surveyed the developments in and influences on English Drama from 1660 till Shaw's time. The Restoration Age was one of reason, **empiricism** and license, and the new theatre following the French model was less primitive than the earlier one. The heroic tragedy had grand characters, exaggerated emotions and bombastic speeches. In contrast, Restoration comedy was characterised by intrigues, disguises and role playing, witty and polished dialogues and stock characters such as wits and witwounds, cuckolds and gallants, belles and fops and the clever valets. Things began changing after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and Collier's tract attacking the profaneness of the English stage. The Eighteenth century was a barren phase in dramatic literature with the exception of Gay's, Goldsmith's and Sheridan's comedies. Similarly in the succeeding age, all the Romantic poets **failed** as playwrights. The revival of drama began with the influence of Ibsenite realism which aimed at verisimilitude or the illusion of reality. His drama represented the details of reality in his choice of events, characters, plot, dialogues, imagery, music, lights, sets and the style of action. Chekhov modified Ibsenite realism to make it less "dramatic" and sensational and dispensed with the unity of time and the neatly structured dialogues. In England the new drama was centred round writers of well made plays and witty comedies like Oscar Wilde.

Shaw's ideological antecedents initially came from Henry George and the Fabian society. On the other hand, his sustained interest in Life Force emanated from his encounter with the ideologies of Lamarck, Butler, Schopenhauer, **Hegel**, Nietzsche and Wagner.

We have also seen how Shaw's struggles in his early life led to his dramatic career, beginning with the "Unpleasant" plays, then the "Pleasant" Plays and "Three Plays for Puritans". **Man and Superman** with its devastating satire on the conventions, manners and beliefs of the age embodied Shaw's philosophy of the Life Force evolving in the direction of superior intelligence. **John Bull's Other Island** with its humorous exposition of the Irish character and **Major Barbara** which showed the triumph of the Armament manufacturer over his idealistic daughter in the salvation Army registered the zenith of Shaw's achievements in this phase. After **The Doctor's Dilemma**, Shaw struggled to regain the earlier artistic heights, but in the process, he wrote three of his greatest plays: **Heartbreak House**, **Back to Methuselah** and **Saint Joan**. **Back to Methuselah** is somewhat dragging even as it contains the quintessence of his philosophy of the Life Force, but both **Heartbreak House** and **Saint Joan** reveal impressive powers of technical innovation. The last twenty five years of his life finally indicated a sharp decline in his artistic talents although **The Applecart** has some claims to excellence.

1. Robert F. Whitman, *Shaw and the Play of Ideas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 107.
2. *Modern British Drama 1890-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
3. *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment* (1969: London: Macmillan, 1981).
4. George Bernard Shaw, *Complete Plays with Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, mead & Co, 1962), V.472.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. How did the Eighteenth Century Comedy differ from the Restoration Comedy?
2. What were the main features of the theatre of Realism?
3. How did Chekhov go beyond Ibsen's realism?
4. Trace the major influences on the Shawian philosophy of the Life Force and Creative Evolution.
5. Describe the development of Shaw as a dramatist from *Widower's Houses* to *Caesar and Cleopatra*.
6. Which institutions and beliefs did Shaw satirise in his plays of the middle phase?
7. What are the major technical innovations introduced by Shaw in *Heartbreak House* and *Saint Joan*?
8. How did Shaw's own background contribute to his view of man-woman relationship?
9. Why was Shaw called an iconoclast?
10. Mention some of the comic devices used by Shaw in his plays.
11. What were Shaw's political views as expressed in his plays?

1.7 SUGGESTED READING FOR THE HISTORY OF DRAMA

Brustein, Robert. *The Theatre of Revolt*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964.

Leech, C. and T.W. Craik, eds. *The Revels History of Drama in English* London: Methuen, 1975.

Pygmalion

Nicoll, Allardyce. *History of the English Drama 1660-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.

Williams, Raymond. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

(The list of books on Shaw will be given at the end of the units on *Pygmalion*)

Pygmalion

Nicoll, Allardyce. *History of the English Drama 1660-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1952.

Williams, Raymond. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

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UNIT 2 *PYGMALION* : THEMES AND ISSUES

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 *Pygmalion* as a play about phonetics
- 2.3 Class distinction, snobbery, kinds of manners, middle-class morality and the character of Doolittle
- 2.4 Man-woman relationships in the play: Higgins's mother-fixation and Oedipus complex; Higgins-Eliza equation; Eliza, the fighter and the Feminist
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will offer you perspectives on the themes in *Pygmalion* and the salient features of the major characters and their relationships.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Pygmalion is primarily a play about speech and phonetics, but related to it are Shaw's social concerns - class distinction, good manners and middle class morality. The "romance" of Higgins and Eliza does not culminate in matrimony but a complex network of mail-woman relationships with Eliza marrying Freddy, and Higgins unwilling to get out of chronic bachelorhood engendered by his mother-fixation. In this unit, we shall first explore the theme of English speech and the related cluster of subjects in the play. Subsequently we shall engage various facets of man-woman relationship with special reference to the characters of Eliza and Higgins.

2.2 *PYGMALION* AS A PLAY ABOUT PHONETICS

Pygmalion is overtly a play about phonetics or English speech. Shaw says in his preface to the play. "The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like. It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him". So in the play, he emphasizes the need to speak the language properly, and Higgins, the phonetician is the one who can teach people how to do so. Professor Higgins, as Shaw again points out in the Preface has "touches of Sweet" (p.193), a brilliant but unpleasant phonetician at Oxford. In Act I, Higgins is able to place all the bystanders simply on the basis of their accents. He tells Colonel Pickering "you can spot an Irish-man or a Yorkshire man by his brogue. I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets." (p.205). He denounces Eliza for her speech: "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." (P.206).

In fact the play is built around the professional life of Higgins as a phonetician, and its main action consists of the successful attempt of Higgins to convert Eliza, a flower girl into a duchess by giving her a new speech: "I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe."² (p.215). and Eliza with her impeccable accent-acquired in a few months of "learning how to speak beautifully" (p.220)- does pass off as a duchess, affirming Shaw's undeniable view that speech is one way of dividing class from class and emphasizing class distinction. Higgins can similarly bridge this gulf in Alfred Doolittle's case: "if we were to take this man in hand for three months, he could choose a seat in the Cabinet and a popular pulpit in Wales." (p.230). He tells his mother, "But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul." (P.248).

2.3 CLASS DISTINCTION, SNOBBERY, KINDS OF MANNERS, MIDDLE CLASS MORALITY, AND THE CHARACTER OF DOOLITTLE

Shaw also attacks snobbery in a more general way. In the opening scene itself, Eliza protest against social and economic snobbery by refusing to be cowed down by her social superiors. Her repeated protest "I'm a good girl, I am." Is to assert her dignity in the face of those, who, she (mistakenly) thinks, are trying to trample upon her. Nonetheless, she has her own brand of snobbery. When she rides in a taxi, she wants to show it to everyone. At Higgins's house she wants Mrs. Pearce to tell him that she came in a taxi. When the arrangements for Eliza's stay there are finalized and she is initiated in her new life, she says: "I should just like to take a taxi to the corner of Tottenham Court road and get out there and tell it to wait for me, just to put the girls in their place a bit. I wouldn't speak to them you know." Higgins rightly reprimands her: "you shouldn't cut your old friends now that you have risen in the world. That's what we call snobbery." (p.234).

Mrs. Pearce is so contemptuous of Eliza and her father because they belong to the working class. She tells Higgins about Eliza, "She's quite a common girl, Sir. Very Common indeed. I should have sent her away..." (p.210). When Eliza says to him, "don't be silly," Mrs. Pickering rebukes her "you mustn't speak to the gentleman like that." (p.213). Later, as Doolittle leaves, "He takes off his hat to Mrs. Pearce, who disdains the salutation and goes out..." (p.234). Even the polite man, Pickering asks him to sit on the floor: "the floor is yours, Mr. Doolittle," (P.228).

It is on account of the conventions of the class system that Eynsford Hills have to endure a shabby existence in genteel poverty. Mrs. Hill has "the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income" (p.250). Freddy and Clara cannot have suitable jobs. Clara's situation "had prevented her from getting educated, because the only education she could have afforded was education with the Earls court green grocer's daughter. It had led her to seek the society of her mother's class: and that class simply would not have her, because she was much poorer than the green grocer." (p.228). Certain professions and jobs are below their social class, and when Clara does take up a position, it is in defiance of the class system.

Similarly, Eliza also faces the larger problem of education-what to do after it-in a sense, the problem of the end result of liberal education. She, like them, has not been provided a vocational education, and once she moves up the social ladder by successfully winning the bet for Higgins, she cannot go back to her work of selling flowers on the pavement. What can she do? Mrs. Higgins reiterates the problem that Mrs. Pearce had noticed earlier: "the problem of what is to be done with her

afterwards" (p.250). Eliza herself asks Higgins after her success: "What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?" (p.256).

After Eliza and Freddy get married and set up a flower shop-after much prevarication, they are unfit to run it. "Freddy, like all youths educated at cheap, pretentious, and thoroughly inefficient schools, knew a little Latin"...unfortunately, he knew nothing else." (p 291-92). He did not have the slightest knowledge of accounts or business: "Colonel Pickering had to explain to him what a cheque book and a bank account meant" (p.292).

The play also highlights the fact that there are certain things that the working class people are deprived of, which affect the quality of their lives. Thus Higgins observes: "a woman of that class looks a worn out drudge of fifty a year after she's married." (p.216). As Eliza points out, working class women do not "clean" themselves because bathing is no joy for them: "Now I know why ladies is so clean. Washing's a treat for them. Wish they saw what it is for the like of me!" (p.232) When she first comes to his house, Higgins exclaims, "she's so deliciously low-so horribly dirty" (p.215). Her transformation is partly one from a dirty slovenly "baggage" to a clean, well-groomed woman.

Related to class distinction is the question of manners and discrimination in our behaviour towards people of different classes and stations. Higgins treats Eliza like dirt. She appropriately tells him: "Well, if you was a gentleman, you might ask me to sit down," and Higgins responds by asking Pickering: "shall we ask this baggage to sit down, or shall we throw her out of the window?" (p.212). In fact, he wants to put her in the dustbin. Even after her grand success at the party at which people mistake her for a "Duchess", when he rails at her, he calls her a "guttersnipe." Surprisingly, he tells Pickering: "Here I am, a shy, diffident sort of man. I've never been able to feel really grown up and tremendous like other chaps." (p.224).

Swearing is also a part of Higgins's bad manners. When he asks Mrs. Pearce "What the devil do you mean?" she responds: "[stolidly] That's what I mean, sir. You swear a great deal too much. I don't mind your damning and blasting, and what the devil and where the devil and who the devil." (p.223). His mother tells her that his language "would be quite proper - say on a canal barge" and Pickering supports her; "I haven't heard such language as yours since we used to review the volunteers in Hyde Park twenty years ago." (p.247).

In contrast the manners of colonel Pickering are uniformly pleasant. Eliza is deeply touched when he calls her "Miss Doolittle" and extends to her the courtesies normally reserved for ladies. She aptly remarks; "it was from you that I learnt really nice manners: and that is what makes me a lady, isn't it?" (p.269). She reiterates, "you thought and felt about me as if I were something better than a scullery - maid; though of course I know you would have been just the same to a scullery-maid if she had been let into the drawing room." (p.270).

The following discussion about manners not only sums up the contrast but also provides another important twist to it.

"HIGGINS...My manners are exactly the same as Colonel 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 was a flower girl."

He reiterates "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." (p.274).

So Shaw extends the discussion to the larger issue of equality and social differences. Implied in Eliza's transformation is the premise that given the opportunities, anyone can cross the class barriers.

There is also an assumption that this social climbing is not always desirable as the working class life style is not invariably inferior to that of the middle class and the upper class. In fact, Doolittle implies that the "middle class morality" is inappropriate for the lower class poor: "what is middle class morality? Just an excuse for never giving me anything." (p.230). When he comes back transformed as a "respectable" man, he blames Higgins for his miserable plight: "Ruined me. Destroyed my happiness. Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality." (p.263). He elaborates; "I was happy. I was free. I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Henry Higgins. Now I am worried: tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money." (p.264). Now he and Eliza's "step mother" are forced to marry each other. "Intimidated, Governor. Intimidated Middle class morality claims its victim." (p.272). He was never married to Eliza's mother because "that aint the natural way, colonel: it's only the middle class way." (p.272). He has lived with numerous women without getting married to any of them. None of Eliza's six "step-mothers" was married to him till he is forced by his new station to marry the last one,

He also attacks the so called morality of the affluent thriving on the family savings without doing any work: "Don't you be afraid that I'll save it and spare it and live idle on it. There won't be a penny of it left by Monday: I'll have to go to work same as if I'd never had it." (p.230-31).

Doolittle as a character is far from a stereotype and in many ways a very "Shavian" creation. He is the uniquely shavian character who has the capacity to subvert all our traditional ways of thinking and make all our conventional beliefs-especially our moral ideals-stand on their heads, giving us exactly the opposite of what we expect as he does with middle class morality. When he first enters the stage, he "seems equally free from fear and conscience." At the same time, he has a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve. His present pose is that of wounded honour and stern resolution." (p.225). When non-plussed by Higgins's response, he shows the full range of his "natural gift of rhetoric" as he says "I'm willing to tell you. I'm wanting to tell you. I'm waiting to tell you." (p.226). It is his eloquence that partly accounts for Higgins's approbation and his enduring popularity with the audience.

His family surname "Doolittle" provides a clue as much to his character as to his daughter Eliza's. If he does little by way of hard, constructive work, she can do little by way of earning her living after her transformation.

2.4 MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PLAY; HIGGINS'S MOTHER-FIXATION AND OEDIPUS COMPLEX: HIGGINS -ELIZA EQUATION; ELIZA, THE FIGHTER AND THE FEMINIST

The moral issues in the play include Shaw's views on man-woman relationship and the attitudes of several characters towards the opposite sex. As usual Shaw has his share of witticisms and paradoxical statements on the matter. When Pickering asks Higgins, "are you a man of good character where women are concerned?" he replies: "[moodily] Have you ever met a man of good character where women are concerned?" (p.221). Higgins is a confirmed bachelor who resists the erotic incursion of any woman in his life. He comments: "women upset everything. When you let

them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another.' (p.221). He elaborates, "I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other onto the wrong track." (p.221-22). In fact, he is totally indifferent to their sexual charm: "I'm seasoned. They might as well be blocks of wood. I might as well be a block of wood." (p.222). Shaw in his description states, "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 feather weight cross, he coaxes women as a child coaxes its nurse, when it wants to get anything out of her." (p.211).

The clue to Higgins's bachelorhood lies in his mother-fixation. When Mrs. Higgins says, "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?," her son replies, "Oh, I can't be bothered with young women. My idea of a lovable women is something as like you as possible." (p.237). It is this mother-fixation that prevents him from having a "normal" relationship with a woman. Shaw corroborates this: "when Higgins excused his indifference to young women on the ground that they had an irresistible rival in his mother, he gave the clue to his inveterate old-bachelordom," (p.282-83). He adds: "If an imaginative boy has a sufficiently 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 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 impulses." (p.283).

This aspect of Higgins which the Freudians would call his "oedipus complex" also has parallels in Shaw's own life—a fact which Colin Wilson in his book, *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment*, corroborates. It has been well known that George Carr Shaw, the father of Bernard Shaw, hardly mattered in the family and the children had centered their lives round their mother Mrs. Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw. Colin Wilson writes: "Percy Smith has argued convincingly that he not only idolised his mother, but that all the women in his play from *Candida* on are mother figures."³ His first mistress was Jenny Patterson, a widow fifteen years his senior and a friend of his mother. In his wife, to quote Wilson "What Shaw wanted was a mother figure." At the age of forty one, in July 1897 says in his letter to Ellen Terry that he wants to marry "a reasonably healthy woman of about sixty" who "must be plain featured."⁴ It is also widely believed that Shaw's own marriage to Charlotte Payne Townshend who very much resembled Lucinda Elizabeth Gurley was never consummated. Whereas Shaw as a bachelor found sexual release through at least two women, Jenny Patterson and the actress Florence Farr (who was the "right age"), Higgins remained a confirmed bachelor.

Higgins's relationship with Eliza has engendered a variety of responses from critics, directors, viewers and readers. Maurice Valency, says in *The Cart and the Trumpet* that *Pygmalion* like *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Man and Superman*—shows the tension between the man who is devoted to his work and the woman who is interested in emotional ties. Shaw adds a long afterword to the play to suggest that Eliza, instead of marrying Higgins, chooses Freddy and lives happily ever after with him. The film version, on the other hand, ends with Eliza's return to the Professor. Many readers also feel that Shaw is mistaken in separating her from Higgins. Is our playwright justified in his conclusion? Are Higgins and Eliza Compatible?

We observe that Higgins is "Careless about himself and other people, including their feelings." (p.210), and Eliza is too sensitive and self-respecting to tolerate this attitude. She insists on being treated with respect. When she encounters Higgins for the first time and observes him taking notes, she incessantly asserts that she is a good girl, repeatedly saying "I'm a good girl, I am." In Act II, when she goes to Higgins's place, she has her "innocent vanity and consequential air" (p.211). Naturally she resents the brutal treatment she receives from Higgins and she never allows him to

Pygmalion

walk over her. Her protest becomes quite pronounced after she wins his bet, and he responds to all **her** efforts by simply expressing his sense of relief that everything is over. She explodes by throwing her slippers at him and trying to scratch his face with her nails. She cannot accept the fact that she is merely a common ignorant girl to him and there **cannot** be any feeling between them.

Higgins cannot **understand** that she has violently retaliated because she is deeply hurt by his and Colonel Pickering's indifference to her. He tells her: "It is you who have hit me. You have wounded me to the heart" (p.259). Eliza has a sense of triumph and the power equation now changes with her acquiring a better status and never letting go her new position of strength. She is crystal clear: "I won't be passed **over**" (p.275). **Surprisingly** Higgins appeals to her emotions: "I shall miss you, Eliza" ... "I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance. I like **than**, rather." Eliza replies coolly: "Well, you have both of them on your gramophone and in your book of photographs. When you feel lonely without me, you can **turn** the machine on. It's got no feelings to hurt." (p.275).

At the same time, Higgins would not play the sentimental lover and Eliza does not want him to:-

"HIGGINS. In short, you want me to be as infatuated about you as Freddy? Is that it?

LIZA. No I don't. That's not the sort of feeling I want **from** you." (p.278).

She goes on to add: "I want a little kindness. I **know** I'm a **common** ignorant girl, and you a book-learned gentleman; but I'm not dirt under your feet." She reiterates: "I come-came - to care for you: not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us but more friendly like." (p.278). This, however, makes no impression on Higgins. He simply says "That's just how I feel. And how Pickering feels. Eliza: **you're** a fool." (p.278). They are not after all going to many each other.

At the same time, Higgins is quite jealous of Freddy. When he objects to Freddy writing love letter to Eliza three times a day, he is being quite possessive of the girl. Tracy C. Davis traces another parallel in Shaw's life-his relationship with Mrs. Patrick Campbell: "He functioned as Higgins, the self-styled **benefactor** of Campbell/Eliza, thwarted by her preference for a younger, less intellectual **man**, Cornwallis-West/Freddy."⁵

Shaw is not altogether wrong in his epilogue: "**Eliza's** instinct tells her not to marry Higgins. It does not tell her to give him up." (p.282). He goes on to refer to "her resentment of Higgins's domineering superiority, and her mistrust of his coaxing cleverness in getting round her and evading her wrath when he had gone too far with his **impetuous** bullying." (284).

Most readers with their conventional ideas of man-woman relationship say that Freddy is too weak to attract the strong-willed Eliza and she would much rather have Higgins. Shaw, however feels: "Eliza has no use for the foolish romantic tradition that all women love to be mastered, if not actually bullied and **beaten**." (p.284). He further says: "the man or woman who feels strong enough for two, seeks for every other quality in partner than strength." (p.285). So Eliza is not thrown overboard by the strength of Higgins, and yet, Shaw concedes that "she has even secret mischievous moments in which she wishes she could get him alone, on a desert island, away **from** all ties and with nobody else in the world to consider, and just drag him off his pedestal and see him making love like any common man. We all have private imaginations of that sort. But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished **from** the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel; and she does not like Higgins and Mr. **Doolittle**. **Galatea** never

does quite like *Pygmalion*: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable." (p.295).

Eliza-Higgins relationship also has **overtones** of an oedipal situation. When he tries to bully her on her first arrival at his place, she reacts by pointing out: "One would think you was my father." Higgins replies. "If I decide to teach you, I'll be worse than two fathers to you" (p.214). Much later, he tells her: "I'll adopt you as my daughter and settle money on you if you like. Or would you rather marry Pickering?" In response, Eliza explodes; "I wouldn't marry you if you asked me; and **you're** nearer my age than what he is." (p.277). There is a gap of **atleast** twenty years between them and those **readers/spectators** who want Eliza to **marry** Higgins are aware of the **possibility** of the young girl falling for a father figure.

To an extent, Eliza also represents the **Shavian** Life Force and moderate kind of Feminism. We have already seen how assertive she is and how she refuses to be treated as "dirt under anyone's feet." She asserts: "I won't be called a baggage when I've offered to pay like anybody." (p.212). She is also impelled by the driving energy that leads life upwards. She has the will and the ambition to go up in the world and she learns things with an astonishing rapidity.

Eliza, moreover is **not** willing to accept the humble subservient position that a woman is **normally** assigned in the human society. As we observed earlier, Shaw denies the view that women love to be mastered and bullied, even beaten. Eliza prefers the weaker Freddy, who adores her and whom she can dominate to the masterful Higgins when it comes to marriage. On that fateful night after the party, once she refuses to **carry** Higgins's slippers and act as his **personal** secretary, his own attitude towards her changes. Now he encourages her to play the assertive role. He may not sound very convincing when he says: "I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: ... I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face... who cares for a slave?" (p.276). Nevertheless everything changes that night, and Eliza seldom reverts to the earlier situation. Later "he storms and bullies and derides: but she stands up to him so ruthlessly..." (p.294). So in a way she represents a feminist who would not play the subservient role to any man, let alone accept the position of a doormat.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we initiated our analysis of the themes in *Pygmalion* with a glance at Shaw's concern with English speech and phonetics, observing Higgins's abilities in phonetics and his transformation of a flower girl into a Duchess by creating a new speech for her. As we noticed, one's speech **and** accent are indicators of one's class. Subsequently we engaged Shaw's critique of snobbery, and the snobbish variation in our manners for people of different classes. He also finds faults with other manifestations of class-consciousness such as non-vocational liberal education for the upper class and those upper class conventions that prevent one from earning one's living.

In our study of man-woman relationship, we observed how Higgins's mother fixation, which comes close to Oedipus complex, prevents him from getting erotically involved with any young woman and thus accounts for his lack of interest in Eliza. Moreover, Eliza cannot accept his rough treatment of her and marries **Freddie** who is much nicer. We also saw how **Eliza's** determination to fight for her rights against Higgins, the male bully can suggest the feminist angle in her make up.

References

1. George Bernard Shaw, *Complete Plays with Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962), I 191.

All the quotations from the play are from this edition (Volume I), and subsequently page numbers are given in parentheses.

2. Colin Wilson writes: "Lee caused something of a scandal among his upper class pupils in London when he tried to pass off his housemaid as one of them- an incident that sounds like the origin of *Pygmalion*."

See

Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment (1969; London: Macmillan, 1981) 09.

3. ***Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment*** 28.

4. As quoted in Colin Wilson, ***Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment*** 127. The quotation from Wilson himself is on the same page.

5. ***George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre*** (Westport, Conn: Preager, 1994) 93.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. What according to Shaw are the social implications of different accents and modes of English speech?
2. Can Higgins effect a transformation in Doolittle similar to the one he has brought about in Eliza?
3. How does Shaw denounce social snobbery and class distinctions?
4. What are the views of Shaw on the relevance of liberal education and its practical utility?
5. How do the **Eynsford** Hills suffer on account of their superior birth i.e. their upper class background?
6. Do you approve of the manners of Henry Higgins? Do you feel that because he is exceptionally talented, he has the right to ride roughshod over other people's feelings?
7. Is Doolittle an attractive character? Are you in substantial agreement with his critique of middle class morality?
8. Give arguments for and against the view that Higgins is a case of Oedipus - complex.
9. Who in your opinion should marry Eliza? Higgins or Freddy? Justify your answer.
10. In Eliza- Higgins conflicts, who has your sympathy and why?
11. Is Eliza's assertiveness ridiculous, or does it strike a chord in the reader?

UNIT 3 DRAMATIC STRUCTURE AND MINGLING OF GENRES

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Dramatic Structure of *Pygmalion*
- 3.3 The genre of the play; Elements of Romance, Comedy and Novel
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint you with two crucial aspects of the "forum" of the play: its dramatic structure and the mingling of the genres of comedy, romance and novel.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Pygmalion, which dramatises a Greek myth has an apparently unconventional form but certain structural principles can be perceived here such as a "thematic" division of the play into five acts and their neat sequencing, and comparison and contrast of parallel characters and events. The preface is more relevant to *Pygmalion* than the typical Shavian preface, but the epilogue is to a great extent an imposition on the play and contrary to the rules of dramatic composition. The play has the **framework** of a romance but it is interspersed with unromantic elements. At the same time, it uses several comic conventions and introduces novelistic element. In this unit, we shall initially examine the structure of the play and then explore how Shaw combines features of the conventional romance with certain comic conventions and a few typically fictional devices.

3.2 THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF *PYGMALION*

Pygmalion is a Shavian reworking of the myth of *Pygmalion* and *Galatea*. In the original myth, Pygmalion, the king of Cyprus, also a sculptor created the ivory statue of a lovely woman which was so beautiful that he fell in love with her. At his request, Aphrodite, the Goddess of love and beauty transformed the statue into an actual woman, *Galatea* by breathing life into her. The two got married and lived happily ever after. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Professor Higgins similarly "Creates" his own *Galatea* as he transforms Eliza, a common, ignorant, slovenly flower girl into a marvellous duchess by creating a new speech for her and with the help of Pickering and Mrs. Pearce giving her new manners and a new life style. So she is his creation - the new Eliza is the *Galatea* that Pygmalion has sculpted. However in Shaw's version, Pygmalion does not fall in love with her and she marries someone else - the typical Shavian twist. **Shaw**, as we shall see later, **has** the habit of giving us the reverse of what we expect. In unit II, we observed at length Shaw's reasons for Higgins not marrying *Eliza*. Nevertheless the parallel with the myth makes the play more resonant by introducing another frame of reference.

All the quotations from the play are from this edition (Volume I), and subsequently page numbers are given in parentheses.

2. Colin Wilson writes: "Lee caused something of a scandal among his upper class pupils in London ~~when~~ he tried to pass off his housemaid as one of them- an incident that sounds like the origin of *Pygmalion*."

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Shaw has used the five act structure common to English drama from the renaissance to the Romantic period to dramatize his version of the myth. There are no subdivisions of the Acts into scenes and each Act marks a stage in Eliza's **transformation**. In Act I, Higgins observes in Eliza's presence that by giving her a new speech he can convert her into a Duchess and this creates the desire in her to **transform** herself. So with Eliza approaching Higgins in Act II, the process is initiated. He takes Eliza to his mother, Mrs. Higgins in the third act to observe how she interacts with others in polite society - a test case. The fourth act is the culmination of the process and its **immediate** fall out: Eliza is seen with Higgins and Pickering after the **successful** party. Finally in the last act, Eliza, who had "bolted", is retraced at Mrs. Higgin's place where she works out new terms and conditions with Higgins and Pickering about her future.

The play has certain structural patterns. Thus the scenery alternates from a location outside Higgins' house to its interior. We move from Covent Garden to his laboratory in **Wimpole** Street to Mrs. Higgins's drawing room in Chelsea, back to the laboratory and finally again to Mrs. Higgins's room, thus constantly relating the work in phonetics to the larger world. Again within each Act, there is a pattern of arrivals and departures except for the fourth act which is set indoors late in the evening and naturally therefore cannot involve visitors. In each act, usually the characters at the beginning stay till the end, thus **imparting** unity and continuity to the scene even as the others come and go. Shaw also intermingles the two three characters' intense interactions of Acts **II and IV** set at Higgin's house with the more social group scenes of Acts I and III providing us with the larger picture of society. There is also a careful time **arrangement** with Acts I and **II** in **continuation**, showing the beginning of the process of transformation, Act III coming a little later to indicate its **middle** and Acts IV and V which **show** the end of the process again in continuation.

The characters are also neatly arranged in parallel to highlight their distinctive features. Thus Higgins and Pickering constitute the central pair of the plot. They are both phoneticians, both **confirmed** bachelors, both rich gentlemen interested in experimenting on Eliza - her possible transformation into a "duchess". However, as we have seen whereas Higgins is rude and unbearable, Pickering is polite and **gentlemanly**. Higgins is inconsiderate and rough, whereas Pickering is kind and generous. Higgins is also, as we have seen a parallel to and contrasted with Freddy. Between these two possible husbands for Eliza, Higgins, a bully and a tyrant is contrasted with Freddy, a "softy" and a weakling. Moreover, Higgins's indifference to her is opposed to Freddy's loving adoration for her. Furthermore, Higgins is at the pinnacle of his profession, whereas Freddy fails to even earn his living.

Their mothers also are studies in contrast. Mrs. Eynsford Hill is basically a "soft" person who tolerates her daughter Clara's rude and ungracious behaviour almost as a helpless onlooker. She appreciates her son Freddy but is unable to do anything for him. Essentially she is an ineffective mother who cannot give a sense of direction to her children's lives. Mrs. Higgins, who has an independent life of her own, lives away **from** her sons, partly because they are grown up and settled. It is interesting that although Henry **Higgins** mentions to Doolittle that he has a brother who is a clergy man, his name never crops up at his **mother's** nor is he ever seen there. Mrs. Higgins is unfailingly critical of her son Henry's ill manners but she has failed to impart to him proper manners and to make a real "gentleman" of him. Her dominating personality and her son's adoration of her has only resulted in his remaining a bachelor, as we have seen in an earlier unit. Both these mothers also serve as foils to the third parent in the play i.e. Alfred Doolittle. There is no love lost between the father and the daughter. To Doolittle, his daughter Eliza is immaterial: he is utterly indifferent to her, and he only uses his **relationship** to her to "touch" people for money.

The only siblings presented on the stage are also opposites of each other. Whereas Clara is rude, unbearable and ill-mannered, Freddy is **soft**, polite and pleasant. Clara

is looking for a matrimonial prospect, but Freddy falls in love with Eliza at first sight without weighing and considering the pros and cons of marrying her.

Both Higgins and Pickering are contrasted with Mrs. Pearce, the other inmate of the house. The housekeeper, who is prim, proper and snobbish, disapproves of Henry Higgins's unkempt behaviour and unconventional ways. She is opposed to social equality and has a "practical" way of looking at the whole experiment on Eliza, unlike the dreamers Higgins and Pickering.

Eliza herself is contrasted with her father. She has the ambition to rise socially and to improve her economic status unlike Doolittle who resents being catapulted into the class of a "gentleman" against his wishes. He enjoys his working class situation, habits and mores unlike Eliza who finds them degrading.

In fact, in the play, there is a structural parallel between the two transformations and also the reactions of the persons transformed in the process. In a larger sense, the implication is that social climbing is not exceptional as it occurs here in more than one case-one woman and one man-one young woman and one middle aged man. However, it may not be desirable in every case.

The play has a significant absentee character in the form of Eliza's "step-mother" - a lady who never appears on the stage but who is mentioned every time Doolittle comes or every time Eliza talks of her life with her "parents". Making her a character in the play, would have meant introducing a sub-plot and lengthening the already long five act play, making it more diffuse. Mrs. Doolittle could also have brought her own point of view to the play and either increased or reduced the sympathy for Eliza, depending, of course, on the way in which Shaw conceived her character. Her being an absentee character preserves her mystery and the audience's curiosity about it. At the same time, one cannot do without all the references to Mrs Doolittle, which do make us aware of the larger world and broaden the social references and range of the play.

Shaw has also deleted scenes from an earlier draft. In one of the editions, there is a garden party scene where we meet several interesting social lions, public figures and an expert in phonetics. Shaw has omitted this scene from the later edition of the plays. What has Shaw gained in the process, and what has he lost? Obviously the gain is, first of all, in economy. Secondly, he shows Eliza in "social" scene may be unnecessary. Moreover, Eliza's transformation may be difficult to show on the stage and is better reported. It is also interesting that Shaw does not dramatize the actual lessons. Perhaps that has been done to prevent tedious scenes which may get quite dull and technical for an audience of non-specialists.

Our play is incomplete without the preface and the epilogue. In general, a preface explains the meaning of a work of art, or points out the origin and the sources of the play. Often it comments on the reception of the play by the audience and the critics. It also provides the details needed to appreciate the play fully. However, a Shavian play frequently pursues a line of argument that is quite tangential to the play. Nevertheless, here Shaw is careful enough to take up in the Preface issues which are developed in the play. Thus he begins with comments on English speech, then he dilates on the career of Henry Sweet, who is partly a model of Higgins. Subsequently, he makes a statement about *Pygmalion* that leads to his philosophy of playwriting. "It is so intensely and deliberately didactic and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the head of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else". Finally he points out that transformations like Eliza's are not impossible in real life. So the preface, which performs the traditional roles expected of it and contains Shaw's credo, is carefully related to what happens in the play.

The epilogue obviously is aimed at convincing us that Eliza should not marry Higgins. In the process, it also narrates what happened subsequently to not only Eliza and Freddy but also Clara. In our discussion of man-woman relationship in the play in the earlier unit, we have already observed to what an extent, Shaw is justified in his view that Eliza should marry Freddy rather than Higgins. A point which should be made here is that a play usually does not have an epilogue of this kind. A dramatist must convey through the dialogues what he has to say. Obviously, Shaw feels that he has failed to do so through the five acts and consequently he has to write the epilogue to make his point. Moreover, the epilogue of an earlier, say an eighteenth century English play like *The School for Scandal* can be spoken to the audience by an actor or an actress which is impossible in *Pygmalion*. So clearly only the reader and not the audience can benefit from the epilogue. In this sense, it is a structural flaw in the play.

3.3 THE GENRE OF THE PLAY: ELEMENTS OF ROMANCE, COMEDY AND NOVEL

The form of the play is partly governed by Shaw calling it a "romance in five acts". Shaw begins his epilogue by saying "The rest of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by the ready-made and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories. Now, the history of Eliza Doolittle, though called a romance because the transfiguration it records seems exceedingly improbable is common enough." (p.281). The statement does not really negate what we concluded just now that the epilogue is a "structural flaw" in the play, but it does support the view that several other elements in the play can be better appreciated in the light of the conventions of Romance, although it does not have the traditional happy ending. As Colin Wilson wrote, *Pygmalion* is perhaps his frankest use of romanticism - disguised as anti-romanticism."² We naturally have at the heart of the story the transfiguration of Eliza and the parallel change in her father. Interestingly each of them reacts with great shock at observing the change in the appearance of the other. Doolittle mistakes his daughter for a "lady" to whom he shows deference, and Eliza is completely taken by surprise and utters those sounds which she thought she had left behind her after her education began. The element of romance and fairy tale - Eliza's transformation providing a somewhat mythical parallel to that of Cinderella imparts to the story elements of coincidence. Thus it is a coincidence that Eliza, Higgins, Pickering, Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her two children meet at the Covent Garden under the portico of St. Paul's Church on a summer evening on which it is raining heavily. It is also a coincidence that Eliza meets Mrs. Eynsford Hill, Clara and Freddy at Mrs. Higgins's at home. It is another coincidence that Doolittle visits Eliza and Higgins precisely on the days on which she starts her "education" and on which she "bolts" after winning the bet for Higgins but being ignored and neglected by him.

Lightning and thunder orchestrate Freddy's first meeting with Eliza, again in the manner of a romance. As he collides with her, "A blinding flash of lightning followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder, orchestrates the incident." (p.198).

There is a magical element also in Higgins placing everyone in his or her "locality" and accurately construing the person's background by listening to a few sentences spoken by him or her. He appears a wizard to these people. In fact, it further contributes to the very dramatic beginning of the play, created by "..." (p.197), thus torrents of heavy summer rain, cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter adding to the sensational element of romance, all reinforcing the view that we get here an ironic parallel to the story of Cinderella - the poor girl with a vicious "step-mother" and an indifferent father suddenly acquiring wealth and marrying a Prince.

The miraculous conversions in the play are also related to the use of comic conventions. As Northrop Frye mentions in his essay on comedy, "Mythos of Spring", unlikely conversions miraculous transformations and providential assistance are inseparable from comedy.³ so as to bring about the expected happy ending. However, there is a twist here as the sudden enrichment of Eliza or her father does not bring about the desired effect. As we have seen in unit 2, Doolittle is genuinely unhappy about his new social status and the responsibilities it entails. Similarly Eliza does not acquire the wealth or the social status of a duchess or even a rich commoner.

Shaw also makes use of the convention of comic reversal. Thus Doolittle is introduced as an eminent dustman. Totally amoral by conventional standards, he is declared by Higgins to a rich American to be "the most original moralist at present in England" (p.263). People believe that a mistress feels joyous when her lover marries her but Eliza's "Step-mother" i.e. Doolittle's "live-in mistress" is extremely miserable at the prospect of marrying him. Doolittle says of her: "she's been very low, thinking of the happy days that are no more" (p.273). Earlier, he had confirmed this unusual power equation by saying: "I'm a slave to that woman governor just because I'm not her lawful husband" (p.231). Similarly when Doolittle comes to Higgins to blackmail him about Eliza, it is Higgins who bullies him rather than Doolittle bullying Higgins. In fact Doolittle, much against the conventional expectations refuses to take Eliza back. So there is the typical Shavian comic inversion: we get the reverse of what we expect. Thus Doolittle, when talking to Higgins, says: "I'll have to learn to speak middle class language from you, instead of speaking proper English." (p.264). Similarly when Mrs. Pearce trying to prevent Higgins from doing anything unusual to Eliza, tells Pickering: "I do hope sir, you won't encourage him to do anything foolish," Higgins responds: "What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do. Never lose a chance: it doesn't come every day" (p.215). Similarly Eliza tells Higgins and Pickering "I don't want to talk grammar. I want to talk like a lady" (218). Soon Mrs. Pearce says "she should think of the future" and Higgins responds: "At her age! Nonsense! Time enough to think of the future when you haven't any future to think of ." (219) In the same scene, when Pickering tells Higgins: "she must understand thoroughly what she's doing," he disagrees and rhetorically asks: "do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?" (p.220) In a sense, each one of these statements contains a grain of truth, but essentially all of them fit into the larger pattern of comic reversals.⁴ Ironically, however, Shaw even reverses the typical comic ending- the hero does not marry the heroine. The Shavian twist to the ending, nevertheless, harks back to another comic convention that of the triumph of youth. Freddy the young man marries Eliza rather than Higgins or an olderman marrying her. In a loose sense, the play also provides a variation of the theme of the comic foreigner. In a conventional comedy the foreigner is comic partly because of his strange accent and grammar. Shaw by carefully recreating different accents and ungrammatical structures in Act I and showing them in a comic light invites laughter that arises from an insight into the nature of English speech and grammar.

The comic element in the play is mainly verbal but it also includes the comedy of situation. Thus in Act I, humour arises from Eliza's misunderstanding that Higgins is a policeman who is taking notes because he is out to arrest her on charges of making indecent advances to men to solicit them as customers or clients. Similarly in Act II, Eliza's washing rather badly: its mousy color can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to the waist. She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron. Her boots are much the worse for wear. She is no doubt as clacan as she can afford to be, but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than thiers, but their condition leaves something to be desired; and she needs the services of a dentist] (pp. 198-99). It is true that in the modern period, many dramatists describe the scene, the setting and the appearance of

characters at length, for example Ibsen in plays like *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler*. However, Shaw probes deeper in his own voice and analyses characters in the stage descriptions, something quite rare in drama. Thus the following description of Higgins is unusual for a play, especially an earlier play :

"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, including their feelings. 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 genial 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 likeable even in his least reasonable moments." (pp. 209-10)

Shaw even examines the thoughts of Higgins: "hearing in it the voice of God, rebuking him for his pharisaic want of charity to the poor girl" (p.207) Finally we observe the long epilogue which is not characteristic of a play but closer to a part of a novel.

Thus Shaw has combined in *Pygmalion* the elements of comedy, romance and novel and naturally created a work whose structure cannot follow the conventional symmetry and neatness of a "pure" genre.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we initially took cognisance of how Shaw's play has a parallel with the myth of Pygmalion: Higgins is Pygmalion and Eliza is his creation Galatea though with an altered ending. The myth is couched here in a five act structure with each act marking a stage in Eliza's "transformation". One organisational scheme is the alternation of scenery. We also observed how time is handled here according to a plan, and there are certain structural patterns in the play. Moreover, the plot is based on a contrast of parallel characters such as Higgins and Pickering, Higgins and Freddy, Mrs. Eynsford Hill and Mrs. Higgins and Mr. Doolittle, Clara and Freddy, Higgins and Pickering and Mrs. Pearce, Eliza and her father. The play also has a significant absentee character in Eliza's step-mother. Shaw wrote more than one draft of the play, and on the whole, the changes in the last draft were for the better. The preface to the play, unlike the typical Shavian preface is related to the play, but the epilogue seems to be imposed on it.

The genre of the play includes the element of romance in Eliza's "magical" transformation, the parallel to cinderella story, the presence of coincidences and a form of "pathetic fallacy" - nature orchestrating the human mood. On the other hand, the comic conventions of comic reversal and the comic foreigner are combined with the unconventional ending. The verbal comedy is interspersed with the comedy of situation. Finally the play also introduces novelistic techniques such as extended descriptions of characters, the absence of a list of *dramatis personae*, and detailed narration in the writer's own voice at the end that is in the epilogue.

References

- 1 George Bernard Shaw *Complete Plays with Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962) Vol I 194. All the other references to the text are from this edition and page numbers are indicated in parentheses.
- 2.. Colin Wilson, *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment* (1969; London: Macmillan, 1981).

3. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957).
4. Peter Kemp writes in his review of Michael Holroyd's biography Bernard Shaw Volume I: The Search *for* Love 1856-1898: "to cope with an upbringing in which everything seemed topsy-turvy, he adopted paradox as panacea." See The Listener, 15 September 1988, p.29.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Does Shaw's use of myth contribute to the enrichment of *Pygmalion*? Justify your answer.
2. How do the five acts of the play mark different stages of its plot?
3. What does Shaw achieve through his change of scenery in each act of *Pygmalion*?
4. Write an essay on the contrast of characters in the play?
5. Was Shaw justified in dropping scenes like the garden party one from *Pygmalion*? Would you have liked to see the party on the stage?
6. What impression have you formed of Eliza's "Step mother"? Answer in detail.
7. Are you in substantial agreement with what Shaw says in the Epilogue? Justify your answer.
8. Do the comic conventions in *Pygmalion* take away from the authenticity of the characters and the situations?
9. Was Shaw a romantic? Is the element of romance in the play in harmony with the "ideology" of Bernard Shaw?
10. Does Shaw's habit of describing and analysing characters and events in his own words go against the grain of the play by imposing something alien on the flow of events?

UNIT 4 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Shaw's Prose style and dialogues: 'effectiveness of assertion': recreation of actual speeches; speech rhythms of characters; literary and musical allusions; verbal humour
- 4.3 Critical approaches to Shaw and Screen Responses to *Pygmalion*
- 4.4 Passages from the play for Annotation
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will first analyse Shaw's prose style and dialogues in *Pygmalion* including individual speech rhythms when noticeable of major characters. Subsequently, we shall look at the reception of *Pygmalion* including film versions and significant criticism, observing in the process major critical approaches to the play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Shaw marshals the resources of his prose to aim at 'effectiveness of assertion.' He also recreates the actual speeches of his characters by reproducing their grammar and pronunciation. Within limits he gives distinct speech rhythms to many of his dramatist personae. Literary and musical allusions and verbal humour further contribute towards Shaw's goal.

Shavian criticism has been diverse but a pattern of approaches can be traced there. With the audience, *Pygmalion* itself was a modest success, but its "unauthorised" musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* was an astonishing box office hit. We would like you to keep these in mind as you look at Shaw's style and his reception.

4.2 SHAW'S PROSE STYLE AND DIALOGUES: EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSERTION: RECREATION OF ACTUAL SPEECHES; SPEECH RHYTHMS OF CHARACTERS: LITERARY AND MUSICAL ALLUSIONS; VERBAL HUMOUR

Bernard Shaw in his famous "Epistle Dedicatory to Arthur Bingham Walkley" which serves as his preface of *Man and Superman*, wrote, "Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style. He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none: he who has something to assert will go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him. Disprove his assertion after it is made, yet its style remains." Years later, Shaw commented, "I have never aimed at style in my life: style is a sort of melody that comes into my sentence by itself. If a writer says what he has to say as accurately and effectively as he can, his style will

take care of itself, if he has a style."² Nevertheless, Shaw strives for this "effectiveness of assertion" in a variety of ways. It is sometime through a sheer abundance of words. Thus he describes Clara in his "epilogue" ("sequel") as follows, "she was, in short, an utter failure, an ignorant, incompetent pretentious, unwelcome, penniless, useless little snob" (p.289)³ Sometimes, Shaw shows an abundance of words of negation. Thus if we look at the first page of the play, we observe negations in the second speech - the Mother says "Not so long" - , the third speech - a bystander speaks, "He won't get no cab not until half past eleven"- , , the fourth speech -the Mother says, "We can't stand here until half-past eleven. It's too bad"- , and the fifth speech -when the bystander retorts, "Well; it aint my fault, missus" (p.197).

Consider the beginning of Shaw's sequel to the play: "The rest of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs..."(p.281) Let us look at the beginning of Act IV:-

HIGGINS [calling down to Pickering] I say, Pick: lock up, will you? I shan't be going out again.

PICKERING. Right. Can Mrs. Pearce go to bed? We don't want anything more, do we?

HIGGINS. Lord, no! (p.252)

Both the passages are replete with negations.

Ohmann rightly refers to the "pattern of negation that gives structure to Shaw's arguments". They also contain what Ohmann calls "a number of other forms of denial and opposition."⁴ Expressions like "too bad" (p.197) and "so enfeebled" (281) cited above illustrate these forms of denial.

Sometimes, Shaw reveals a special fascination for certain sounds. An apt example comes from his description at the very beginning of the play:-

"Covent Garden at 11.15 p.m. Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico of St. Paul's Church." (p.197) one can notice here the preponderance of [t] and [d] sounds conveying the harshness of rain, the confusion engendered by it and the sad plight of those seeking shelter. Another telling illustration occurs at the beginning of Act III.

"It is Mrs. Higgins's at-home day. Nobody has yet arrived. Her drawing room, in a flat on Chelsea Embankment, has three windows looking on the river; and the ceiling is not so lofty as it would be in an older house of the same pretension." (p.236)

Here, too, the same sounds are repeated and the effect is one of a prosaic, dry manner. Perhaps it even goes with the personality of Mrs. Higgins, a formidable character.

Shaw paid special attention to the printing of his plays, often carefully using different kind of types and spaces between them for emphasis. Thus, when Higgins asks "The Gentleman" Do you know Colonel Pickering, the author of spoken Sanscrit?" He answers "I am Colonel Pickering" (p.206), emphasising his identity. The speech of Mrs. Pearce categorically telling Higgins not to swear before Eliza and citing instances of his swearing is printed as follows: "what the devil and where the devil and who the devil -" (p.223) Later as Higgins meets Freddy at his mother's (Mrs. Higgins's) at home, he tells him, "I've met you before somewhere", clearly stressing the word "you" (p.240) After Eliza leaves, Higgins asks his mother, "Do you mean

that my language is improper?" (p.247) He is evidently shocked at the possibility of anyone regarding **his** language, unlike more common people's as improper.

Shaw deviated from the standard spellings of several words, justifying his **departures** from the conventional "correct" spellings on the ground that he was trying out a **more** "logical" and "scientific" spelling of the word by approximating to its actual sound. Thus he spells "**Shakespeare**" as "Shakespeare", "Show" as "Shew", till as "**til**". Here one can see the point of "Shakespeare" but not of "Shew". He replaces "you are" with "**youre**". He also omits apostrophes from such expressions as "haven't" "can't, "wasn't and don't " respectively. Here perhaps **Shaw's** contentions that in real **speech** we are not conscious that we are dropping the letter "**o**" from "not".

Although Shaw acknowledged that his characters had the "power of expression"..." that differentiated me (or Shakespeare) from a gramophone and camera", he in his own way in *Pygmalion* tried in his dialogues to recreate the speeches of people in real life, thus ignoring the "correct" spellings and instead spelling the words as characters pronounce them. An example is the flower girl in Act I saying "Will ye-oo py me fthem?" (p.199) instead of "will you pay me for them?" Shaw goes on to explain. [Here with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London] (p.199) The dialogues also contain expressions such as "I knowed" (p.204), "A Copper's nark" (p.201), "a tec" (p.202), "toff" (203) etc., each one aiming at a recreation of exact speech.

In his attempt to faithfully reproduce the "actual" speeches of characters, Shaw also writes dialogues which are replete with the common grammatical mistakes of spoken English. Thus a bystander tells the Mother at the beginning of the play, "He won't get no cab not until half past eleven" (p.197). The above sentence contains not only double but triple negatives. Double negatives can also be found in Eliza's sentence, "I don't want to have no truck with **him**".(203) Later on a bystander tells Eliza "of course he aint" and asks Higgins: "what call have you to know about people what never offered to meddle with you?" (203) Eliza also uses the tenses wrongly e.g. "But I done without them" (p.217). She combines double negative with wrong use of pronouns when she talks of her father's drunkenness "It never did him no harm what I could see" (p.244) Her father Doolittle himself uses expressions like "You and me is men of the world aint we?" (p.228), misusing the numbers.

Although, it cannot be said of *Pygmalion* that every character has his own speech rhythm, one can **discern** certain distinguishing features in the speeches of some of the characters. Thus Higgins - as Mrs. Pearce and his mother corroborate -swears a lot and use expressions that show his peremptory, impatient manner. One of his **favourite** expressions is "By Georgy" which he utters frequently in his dialogues. To take up a few examples, when he tried to tempt Eliza to learn proper English speech from him in order to pass off as a Duchess, he tells her, "By George, Eliza, the streets will be strewn with the bodies of men shooting themselves for your sake before I've done with you". (p.217) Later when he runs into Eynsford Hills at his mother's place, he finds them useful for experimenting with Eliza's social skills and says, "Yes, by George" We want two or three people. You'll do as well as anybody else." (240) Soon after this, when he suddenly realizes where he had met Freddy, he says, "By George, yes: it all comes back to me! (They stare at **him**). Covent Garden! [**Lamentably**] what a damned thing! (p.242) In the very last Act, when his mother tells him, "**She** says she is quite willing to meet you on friendly terms and to let by gones be by **goners**," Higgins is indignant and says "Is she, by George? Ho! " (p.267) Just before the end, when he wonders at the transformation in Eliza's personality, he says, "By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you: and I have. I like you like this." (p.280) In all these five examples, culled out of many, "By George" is an exclamation indicating **Higgins's** surprise or excitement or sense of discovery or anger.

Higgins's expressions are strong, fitful and often exclamatory. Thus after Eliza utters, "**Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-ow-oo**", he responds with "Heavens! What a sound!" (p.206) Earlier, he tells Eliza, "Oh, shut up, shut up. Do I look like a policeman?" (p.201) He is generally quite direct. He tells Mrs. Hill, "Ha! ha! What a devil of a name! Excuse me. [To the **daughter**] you want a cab, do you?" (p.204) once in a while, this directness turns into picturesque, colourful expressions which describe people vividly e.g. "I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe" says he to Pickering and Mrs. Pearce (p.215).

Higgins generally prefers simple and compound sentences to complex ones. He tells **Pickering** 'simply phonetics. The science of speech. That's my profession: **also** my hobby' (p.205). When Eliza comes up to his **house**, he simply exclaims, "Be off with you: I don't want you." (p.211) He says to his **mother**, ~~when~~ his is looking for Eliza, "Of course. What are the police for? What else could we do?" (p.261) soon ~~after~~, as **Doolittle** surprises him with his accusation, he retorts, "**You're** raving. **You're** drunk. Your mad." (p.263). However, Higgins can be longwinded or complex, when he wants to be e.g. he tells Eliza, "**And** you shall marry an officer in the Guards, with a beautiful moustache: the son of a marquis, who will disinherit him for marrying you, but will relent • when he sees your beauty and goodness (p.219) His rhetorical manner can easily include a sentence like "I should imagine you won't have much difficulty in settling yourself some-where or other, though I hadn't quite realized that you were going away." (pp. 256-57)

In contrast, Pickering tends to have more indirect and convoluted expressions. e.g to the notetaker (HIGGINS), "Really, sir, if you are a detective, you need not begin protecting me against molestation by young women until I ask you" (p.202) The indirectness usually indicates his courtesy and politeness. Thus he asks Higgins, "May I ask, sir, do you do this for your living at a music hall?" (p.203) When Eliza uses the word "bloody", Pickering talks about "something to eliminate the sanguinary element from her conversation." (p. 247)

Eliza with a different background has another "mode of speech". Sometimes, her lingo is extremely colourful e.g. when talking about the death of her aunt at Mrs. Higgins's "at-home", she says, "my father he kept ladling gin down her throat till she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon." She continues, "What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What became of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in." Immediately Mrs. Eynsford Hill has to ask, "**What** does doing her in mean?" (p.243)

As an assertive person, Eliza invariably repeats certain words and phrases for emphasis e.g. she says to Higgins, "your a great bully, you are I never asked to go to **Buckham** Palace, I didn't. I was never in trouble with the police, not me." (p.221) she ends this speech with "I'm a good girl-" a statement that she must have repeated several times in the play. In fact in Act II, Higgins gets so exasperated with her that he has to say, "Eliza, if you say again that **you're** a good girl, your father shall take you home." (p.233).

Her father, Doolittle, on the other hand, can be quite rhetorical as Higgins points out by saying "this chap has a natural **gift** for rhetoric" (p.226) He tells Higgins and Pickering "What am I, Governors both? I ask you. What am I? I'm one of the undeserving poor: that's what I am. Think of what that means to a man. It means that he's up agen middle class morality all the time. ... I don't need less than a deserving **man**: I need more. I don't eat less hear hearty than him; and I **drink** a lot more. I want a bit of amusement, cause I'm a thinking **man**. I want **cheerfulness** and a song and a band when I feel low. ... Will you take advantage of a man's nature to do him out of the price of his own daughter what he's brought up and fed and clothed by the sweat of his brow until she's **grewed** big enough to be interesting to you two gentlemen? Is five pounds unreasonable? I put it to you; and I leave it to you: (pp.

229-30) Andrew **Kenney** refers to Shaw's "Comic-didactic bravura speech for a 'ventriloquist' like Doolittle..."⁶ Shaw himself compared Doolittle's oration on middle class morality to Falstaff's speech on honour.'

However, when Doolittle gets very excited, he uses like Higgins very short sentences e.g.

... see here! Do you see this? You done this.

HIGGINS. Done What, man?

DOOLITTLE. This, I tell you. Look at it. Look at this hat.

Look at this coat.

PICKERING. Has Eliza been buying you clothes?

DOOLITTLE. Eliza! Not she Not half! **Why** would shy buy me clothes?" (p.262)

Pygmalion, like many plays of Shaw, is replete with literary allusions, in fact references to not only literature but other arts as well. Thus Higgins, who admires Milton and writes "a little as a poet on **Mil-tonic** lines," quotes from Milton when he tells Pickering about Alfred Doolittle, "observe the rhythm of his native woodnotes wild" (p.226) In his "epilogue" or "afterward" to the play, Shaw, when referring to **H.G. Wells** writes, "Age had not withered him, nor could custom stale his infinite variety in half an hour" (p.291) The allusion here to Cleopatra of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* not only describes Wells but also parodies Shakespeare. A comparison with the captivating Cleopatra shows how Wells looks by contrast and it also deflates Cleopatra, the last phrase "in half an hour" clearly adding a touch of bathos to the entire description and undermining both. Pickering talking of Eliza's perfect musical ear, alludes to Beethoven and **Brahms** or Lehar and Lionel Monckton (p.249). Here he not only refers to Eliza's sensitivity but also enriches the texture by bringing in the context of musical history. A similar effect is produced when at the beginning of Act IV, after **returning** from the successful party, Higgins **"begins** half singing, half yawning an air from *Le Fanciulla del **Goden** West*" - (a piece by Puccini) (p.252). A little different is the description of the response of the Director of the London School of Economics to the appeal of Eliza and Freddy to "recommend a course bearing on the flower business." Shaw writes, "He, being a humorist, explained to them the method of celebrated Dickensian essay on Chinese Metaphysics by the gentleman who read an article on china and an article on Metaphysics and combined the information. He suggested that they should combine the London School with Kew Gardens" (292-93). Here the added dimension from Dickens, not only enriches the texture but also mildly deflates the Director. The fact that the original is comic certainly reduces the possibility of parody but it does not altogether abolish it.

As briefly mentioned in unit 3.3 a great deal of humour in our play is verbal and Shaw **exhibits** great ability to play with language to evoke laughter. To take up a few examples, when Mrs. Pearce tells Higgins not to "swear before the girl," the dialogue proceeds as follows:-

HIGGINS [**indignantly**] I swear! [most emphatically] I never swear. I detest the habit. What the devil do you mean? MRS. PEARCE [stolidly] That's what I **mean**, Sir. You swear a great deal too much. I don't mind your damning and blasting, and what the devil and where the devil and who the devil- **HIGGINS**. Mrs. Pearce: this language **from** your lips! Really!" (p.223).

Then she indirectly tells him not to continue using the word "**bloody**."

MRS. PEARCE. Only this morning, Sir, you applied it to your boots, to the butter and the brown bread.

HIGGINS. Oh, that! Mere alliteration, Mrs. Pearce, natural to a poet." (223).

In Act III, when Higgins opens the door violently and enters his mother's drawing room, Mrs. Higgins **scolds** him, "what are you doing here to-day: you promised not to **come**" (p. 237) The **humour** here arises **from** someone being told **that he is not welcome** on the at-home day. A little later, when Eliza begins talking of the weather, **she** says "The shallow depression in the West of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the **barometrical situation**."

Responds **FREDDY** "Ha! Ha! How awfully **funny**!" (p. 243) ⁸ In fact, Eliza's **reference** to her father pouring gin down her aunt's throat and then her drinking gin like "mother's a milk" makes the entire conversation extremely humorous. Freddy "is in convulsions of suppressed laughter" (p. 244) A little later, **after** Eliza leaves, Higgins and Pickering talk about her to **Mrs. Higgins:-**

"**PICKERING**. We're always talking Eliza.

HIGGINS. Teaching Eliza.

PICKERING. Dressing Eliza.

Mrs. **HIGGINS**. What!" (pp. 248-49)

In the last Act, as Doolittle condemns Higgins for writing to Ezra D Wannafeller about his (**Doolittle**) being "the most original moralist at present in England" and thus **making** a gentleman of him, **he** says: "And the next one to touch me will be you, **Henry Higgins**. I'll have to **learn** to speak middle class language from you, instead of speaking proper English." (261) Higgins, reacting to his mother's view that Doolittle can now look after Eliza, exclaims, "he can't provide for her. He shant provide for her. She doesn't belong to him. I paid him five pound for her". (p. 265) He implies that he could buy an adult female for five **pounds**! Soon, as Mrs. Higgins tells her son, "If you promise to behave yourself, Henry, I'll ask her to come down. If not, go home;" ... He replies, "Oh, all right. Very well. Pick: you behave yourself". (267) Obviously, Higgins cannot realize that he is the only person whose behaviour is improper. After Eliza comes down, he tells her "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." (p.268) His mother responds, "Very nicely put, indeed, Henry. No woman could resist such an invitation." (p.269) She of course uses irony. Interestingly the media personalities, the audiences, the critics have been unable to resist the invitation to respond to **Pygmalion**.

43 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO SHAW AND SCREEN RESPONSES TO PYGMALION

There have been phases in the reception of Bernard **Shaw's Pygmalion**: if we ignore many theatre reviewers and journalistic critics, much of whose criticism was ephemeral, rather than long lasting, we encounter first of all eminent contemporaries: men of letters, theatre personalities and social, political, ethical thinkers writing on his plays. They are followed by more "academic" critics. Later, there were two revivals of **Shaw**, one after his death and the other at the time of his centenary, The more recent criticism has been more ideological, embracing Feminist and Post-colonial approaches as well-much of it following the publication of **Holroyd's** monumental biography of Shaw.

The major contemporaries writing on Shaw included G.K. **Chesterton** (1909) and Frank Harris (1931). A detailed account of the early criticism can be found in T.F. Evans, ed. **Shaw: The Critical Heritage** (1976), which traces critical responses to Shaw over a period of time, In the 30s and 40s the notable studies were by H.C. Duffin, **The Quintessence of Bernard Shaw** (1920: rev.ed. 1939) Maurice Colbourne, **The real Bernard Shaw** (1930) which approaches him **from a performer's** angle,

S.C.Sen Gupta, *The Art of Bernard Shaw* (1936) and Edmund Wilson, "Bernard Shaw at Eighty," *Triple Thinkers* (1939). Slightly later appeared Eric Bentley, *Shaw: A Reconsideration* (1947), C.E.M.Joad, *Shaw* (1949), A.C.Ward, *Shaw* (1950). A.C.Ward also edited and wrote useful introductions to many Shaw plays.

The significant biographical studies written before Shaw's death were by Archibald Henderson *Shaw: His Life and Works* (1911) and Bernard *Shaw: Play boy and Prophet* (1932) and Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality* (1942). William Ervine's *The Universe of G.B.S.* (1949) is a worthwhile critical biography.

There was a spate of studies following his death and later his centenary. To begin with the relevant biographical studies, Archibald Henderson added to his earlier writings *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* (1956). Hesketh Pearson brought out the enlarged edition in 1961. St. John Ervine's *Bernard Shaw: His Life, work and Friends* (1956) was received as a standard life. These book admirably supplemented Shaw's autobiographical work *Sixteen Self-Sketches*-which appeared only a year before his death. Stanley Weintraub not only came out with *Private Shaw and Public Shaw: A Dual Portrait of Lawrence of Arabia and GBS* (1956) but also edited *Shaw: An Autobiography 1856-1898* (1969). A fine study of Shaw in his historical, social, political background was by Ivor Brown *Shaw in his own Time* (1965).

Major books on Modern Drama that contained chapter's -often perceptive chapters - on Shaw included Eric Bentley's *The Playwright as Thinker* (1946), Ronald Peacock, *Poet in the Theatre*-(1946) Francis Ferguson. *The idea of a Theater* (1949), Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952) revised as *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968) T.R.Tenn *The Harvest of Tragedy* (1956), J.L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy* (1962) and Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt* (1964). However, many of these have not even touched upon *Pygmalion*, let alone devoted a few pages to the analysis of our text.

The significant full length studies of Shaw's drama to appear during this period included L.Kronenberger *George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey* (1953), H. Nethercot, *Men and Supermen: The Shavian Portrait Gallery* (1954) - a discussion of Major Shavian characters, Richard Ohmann, *Shaw: The style and the Man*-(1962) - an analysis of his style as the vehicle of his attitudes and goals, Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre*-(1963) - a landmark study, Audrey Williamson, *Shaw: Man and Artist*-1963, R.M. Roy, *Shaw's Philosophy of life* (1964). Colin Wilson's *Bernard Shaw: A reassessment* (1968), a remarkable study of his life and works analysed him to an extent from an existential perspective.

The most important critical anthology of the 50s and 60s was R.J. Kaufmann's *G.B.Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1965) in the 20th Century view series. Among the contributors, it had the playwright Bertolt Brecht, the psychologist Erik H. Erickson and distinguished critics like Eric Bentley and G.Wilson Knight.

R. Mander and J.Mitchenson's (edited) *Theatrical Companions* to Shaw (1954) provides perspectives on Shaw on stage. C.B. Purdom's *A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw* (1963) performs a similar function, although it is written by only one author. In addition to describing the life and Time of Shaw, it also summarises and comments on individual plays.

This generation of Shaw criticism ended with Leon Hugo's *Bernard Shaw: Playwright and Preacher* (1971) and Maurice Valency's *The Cart and the Trumpet: The Plays of Bernard Shaw* (1973). The new studies that emerged with novel approaches comprised of Margery Morgan *The Shavian Playground: an Exploration of the Art of George Bernard Shaw* (1972). Alfred Turce, Jr; *Shaw's Moral Vision : The Self and Salvation* (1976), Robert F. Whitman, *Shaw and the Play of Ideas*

(1977), C.D. Sidhy, *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Bernard Shaw and J.L. Wisenthal, the Marriage of Contraries: Shaw's Middle Plays*-(1974). A separate mention must be made of **Rodelled Weitraub**, ed. *Fabian Feminist: Bernard Shaw and Women* (1977).

Later on, the Feminist Approach to Shaw was continued in **J. Ellen Gainer's** *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Construction of Gender* (1991) and Sally Peters, *Bernard Shaw: The Accent of the Superman* (1996) - a biographical study. However, the monumental **biography** of Shaw was Michael Holroyd's *Bernard Shaw* in four volumes, *Bernard Shaw 'The Search for Love' (I)*, *Bernard Shaw 'The Pursuit of Power' (II)*, *Bernard Shaw 'The Lure of Fantasy' (III)*, *The Last Laugh* which also forms part of Vols IV and V *The Shaw Companion*-(1988-92).

The other major books from new perspectives were **Arthur Ganz**, *George Bernard Shaw* (1983) and **David J. Gordon**, *Bernard Shaw and the Comic Sublime* (1990). Among the seminal critical anthologies were **Harold Bloom**, *George Bernard Shaw: Modern Critical Views* (1987), **Daniel Leary**, ed. *Shaw's Plays in Performance* (1983) and **Christopher Innes**, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (1998) - the last one including articles also from the perspectives of Feminism and Post-Colonial Theory. **Tracy C. Davis** *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (1994) locates the plays in the wider social, cultural, historical and ideological context. The critical response, to Shaw, as we have seen, has remained alive and vibrant and there may be a spurt as we approach the **Fiftieth** year of his death.

Written in 1912, *Pygmalion* was **first** staged (in German) on Oct 16, 1913 at the **Hofburg** Theatre, Vienna. It was **first** presented in England on April 11, 1914 by **Herbert Beerbohm Tree** at His Majesty's Theatre, London. The play had several revivals in both England and the U.S. The cast at one time included **Mr. Patrick Combell** (Stella) as Eliza. In later years, it was produced in 1974 at the Albert Theatre, directed by **John Dexter** with **Diana Rigg** and **Alec McCown** in the title roles. In the early 1980's **Peter O'Toole's** "theatre of comedy series included *Pygmalion*. It has also been produced at the Annual Shaw festival in **Niagara** on the Lake.

There have also been many film versions of *Pygmalion*. It was first screened in Germany on September 2, 1935 at Berlin with **Erich Angel** as the Director and **Heinrich Oberlander** and **Walter Wassermann** as the screenplay writers. The first dutch screening was at Amsterdam in March 1937. **Ludwig Berger** directed the play and also wrote the screenplay. Shaw was unhappy with both the versions as they hinted at **Higgins** and **Eliza** romantically coming together at the end. The first English screening was at London on October 6, 1938 followed by the New York screening of December 7, 1938. This **Gabriel Pascal** production was directed by **Anthony Asquith** and **Leslie Howard** and the screen play was by Shaw himself (with additional dialogues by **W.P. Liscomb** and **Cecil Lewis**). **Arthur Honegger** composed the music, **Wendy Hiller** played **Eliza** and **Leslie Howard** acted **Higgins**. The film was a great success and it bagged several Academy awards. Shaw was given the award for the best screenplay, the film was adjudged the best film of the year. Later **Alan Howard** and **Frances Barber** staged a "complete representation" of *Pygmalion* "conflating the theatre and film" at the **Oliver**.

When **Franz Lehar** proposed a musical version of *Pygmalion* to Shaw, he firmly **refused**. As **holroyd** points out, he rejected all appeals to 'downgrade' *Pygmalion* into a musical. In 1948, he wrote "I absolutely forbid any such **outrage**."⁹ However, *Pygmalion's* musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* (cockney slang for "**Mayfair** Lady") opened at the **Mark Hellinger** Theater on Broadway on **March** 15, 1956. It contained **fifteen** numbers composed by **Frederick Loewe** with lyrics by **Alan J. Learner**, and it was directed by **Moss Hart**. **Julie Andrews** played **Eliza**, **Rex Harison** was **Higgins** and **Stanley Holloway** acted as **Alfred Doolittle**. An astonishing hit with songs like "Wouldn't it be Lovely," "With a Little Bit of Luck" and "I Could Have Danced All Night," the musical had 2,717 performances on Broadway over six and a half years.

At the Drury Lane Theatre London where it opened in the spring of 1958, it had a run of six years encompassing 2,281 performances.

First screened in October 1964 at New York by **CBS/Warner**, the Film Version retained Rex Harrison as Higgins, but replaced Julie Andrews by Audrey **Hepburn** as Eliza. Alan J. Lerner wrote the screenplay. For the film, Oscars were presented to Andre Previn for his musical adaptation of the original score by **Frederich Lowewe**, to Rex Harrison for the hero's role, to George **Cukor** for direction and to Cecil **Beaton** for costumes. Thus ironically, Bernard Shaw acquired enormous **posthumous wealth** and popularity through a musical, he did not want to be produced.

4.4 PASSAGES FROM THE PLAY FOR ANNOTATION

ACT I

"THE NOTETAKER. Simply phonetics. The science of speech. That's my profession: also my hobby. Happy is the **eman** who can make a living by his bobby!" (p. 205).

"THE NOTETAKER. 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 should 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." (p.206)

ACT II

"Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another." (p.221)

"Here I am, a shy, diffident sort of man. I've never been able to feel really grown-up and tremendous like other chaps." (p.224)

"I'm willing to tell you. I'm wanting to tell you. I'm waiting to tell you." (p.226)

"What is middle class morality? Just an excuse for never giving me anything." (p.230)

ACT III

"A few good oil paintings from the exhibitions in the Grosvenor Gallery thirty years ago (the **Burne Jones**, not the Whistler side of them) are on its walls. The only landscape Cecil **Lawson** on the scale of a **Rubens**. There is a **portrait** of Mrs. Higgins as she was when she defied fashion in her youth in one of the beautiful **Rossettian Costumes**" (p.236)

"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?" (p.237)

"But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul." (p.248)

ACT IV

"What am I fit for? What have you **left** me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?" (p.256)

"I'm only a common ignorant girl: and in my station I have to be **careful**. There can't be **any** feelings between the like of you and the like of me." (p.258)

Language and s

ACT V

"**DDOLITTLE**. No: that aint the natural way, Colonel: It's only the middle class way. My way was always the undeserving way," (pp. 271-72)

"The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or nay other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls." (p.274)

THE EPILOGUE (THE SEQUEL)

"If an imaginative boy has a sufficiently 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** 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 impulses." (p.283) "Eliza has no use for the foolish romantic tradition that all women love to be mastered, if not actually bullied and beaten." (p.284).

"But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished from the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel: and she does not like Higgins and Mr. Doolittle. **Galatea** never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable." (p. 295)

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, as we analysed facets of **Shaw's** prose style and dialogues, we noticed his abundance of words, especially words of negation, use of harsh consonants, leaving space between letters for emphasising certain words, modifying spellings to make them more "phonetic" and reproducing faulty grammar and pronunciation of characters. Higgins, Eliza, her father and even Pickering are given within limits their **own** speech rhythms. Literary and musical allusions enrich the texture of the play by bringing in another context and sometimes, they serve a parodic purpose. The style is also embellished by abundant verbal humour.

Shavian criticism had different phases: There was a gradual development from the somewhat impressionistic reviews of the earlier period to the more theoretical and ideological approaches of the 1980's and 90's. On the stage, although **Pygmalion** was only a modest success, it was screened and **after Shaw's** death, the musical **My Fair Lady** proved to be an extraordinary commercial hit.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Give an example of Shaw's "**pattern** of negation" in any dialogue or stage description in **Pygmalion** (other than the ones cited here)
2. Do you find Shaw's "**spacing**" of letters in words an effective device for emphasis?

3. Is it justifiable on Shaw's part - to reproduce the wrong grammar and pronunciations of his characters or should he use only "correct" English? Is his habit especially relevant to a play about phonetics?
4. It has been said that Shaw's characters are mouthpieces, who sound alike. Can you distinguish Mrs. Higgins's speech rhythms from say Mrs. Pearce's?
5. Do you enjoy literary allusions in Shaw, or do you **find** them **irritating**? **Justify** your answer.
6. Is **Shaw's** verbal humour only funny, or is it also instructive? Give reasons for your answer and provide suitable illustrations **from** the play.
7. How did the critical response to Shaw change over the years (actually decades)?
8. Why do you think *My Fair Lady*-has been so popular with the audience when *Pygmalion* was never a great commercial success?
9. **How is *Pygmalion*** an early 20th century English play set in England meaningful to you in India at the end of the millenium?

4.7 SUGGESTED READING

Out of a few hundred books ^{written} on Shaw, it was difficult to separate the major ones from the less seminal ones. From our select list, I give below a smaller bibliography of books especially important for you and I add the names of few journals.

References

1. George Bernard Shaw, *Complete Plays with Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962) Vol. III 514. As mentioned in Unit 3, all the references to the text of Shaw is from this edition and page numbers are indicated in parentheses (*Pygmalion* is included in Volume I).
2. George Bernard Shaw's "Preface" to *Immaturity* (1921) *Prefaces* as quoted in Andrew K. Kennedy, *Six dramatists in search of a language: Studies in dramatic language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 47-48 note 15.
3. Richard M. Ohmann refers to "one of these Colossal series,.. The syntactical heaping up... such superabundance... the language of exaggeration...Hyperbole... the Shavian catalogue "Shaw's purpose is to "smother the audience and confront the opposition" **As** he **further** says "Shaw frequently compounds the **structure** of a whole piece **from** a set of negations" See "Born to set It Right: The Roots of Shaw's Style," from *Shaw: The Style and the Man* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1962) rapt, in R.J. Kaufmann, ed. (*G.B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice -Hall, 1965) 33.
4. Ibid - 34-35.
5. Shaw's letter to Alexander **Bashky** (1923) published in *The New York Times*, 12 June 1927 as quoted in Andrew K Kennedy, *Six dramatists in search of a language* 53.

6. *Six dramatists in search of a language*. 54.
7. *Shaw on Theatre*. ed. E.J. West (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1956) 132 as cited in Andrew Kennedy, *Six dramatists in search of a language* 54.
8. Andrew Kennedy says, "In Eliza's mechanical parroting of the clichés and noises of upper-class speech there was just a suggestion, within the comedy of manners, that social speech is synthetic, laboratory induced." See *Six dramatists in search of a language* 78.
9. Michael Holroyd, *The Shaw Companion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992) 56-57.

Books

- Entley, Eric. *Shaw: A Reconsideration* (1947)
 Bloom, Harold. *George Bernard Shaw: Modern Critical Views* (1987)
 Brown, Ivor *Shaw in his own Time* (1965)
 Davis, Tracy *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (1954)
 Evans, T.F. *Shaw: The Critical Heritage* (1976)
 Holroyd, Michael *Bernard Shaw*, Vols I and II (1988-92)
 Innes, Christopher *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (1998)
 Kaufmann, R.J. ed. *G.B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1965)
 Meisel, Martin, *Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre* (1963)
 Pundom, C.B. *A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw* (1963)
 Valency, Maurice *The Cart and the Trumpet: The Plays of Bernard Shaw* (1973)
 Weintraub, Rodelle ed. *Fabian Feminist: Bernard Shaw and Women* (1977)
 Wisenthal, J.L. *The Marriage of Contraries: Shaw's Middle Plays* (1974)
 Wilson, Colin *Bernard Shaw: A reassessment* (1968)

Journals

- The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, ed. Stanley Weintraub.
Modern Drama 2 (Sept 1959) - A Shaw number
The Shavian
The Shaw Review