

Social Strife and Class Conflict in George Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion'

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George Bernard Shaw, born on July 26, 1856, was an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist, and political activist. He recognized simply as Bernard Shaw. Shaw's influence on Western theater, culture, and politics spanned from the 1880s until his death and continues to be significant even today. He was a prolific writer, penning over sixty plays, including notable works such as *Man and Superman* (1902), *Pygmalion* (1913), and *Saint Joan* (1923).

Shaw's writing encompassed a wide range of styles, from modern satire to historical allegory. His plays often delved into social and political issues of the time, challenging conventional norms and questioning established beliefs. Shaw's wit and sharp social commentary made him a leading dramatist of his generation.

In recognition of his literary achievements, George Bernard Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. His plays continue to be performed and studied around the world, and his ideas on topics like social equality, feminism, and socialism remain influential. Shaw's legacy as a playwright, critic, and activist continues to shape and inspire the fields of theater, culture, and politics.

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* explores the themes of social strife and class conflict, which are central to the story. Set in early 20th century London, the play revolves around the transformation of a working-class flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a refined and eloquent lady under the tutelage of Professor Henry Higgins.

One of the main aspects of social strife in *Pygmalion* is the stark division between different social classes. Shaw highlights the stark contrast between the upper class, represented by characters like Higgins, and the lower class, represented by Eliza. The play showcases the prejudices and stereotypes that exist between these classes and the challenges faced by individuals attempting to transcend their social status.

The class conflict in *Pygmalion* is exemplified through the character of Eliza. As a working-class woman, she experiences marginalization, poverty, and limited opportunities. Through her transformation, Eliza becomes acutely aware of the disparity in treatment and the

power dynamics associated with social class. She challenges the conventions and expectations placed upon her and strive to assert her worth as a human being.

Shaw uses sharp dialogue and biting satire to expose the hypocrisy and absurdity of the class system. He critiques the rigid social hierarchy, showing how individuals are judged based on their birth and accent rather than their inherent qualities. The play raises questions about social mobility and the barriers that prevent individuals from breaking free from their predetermined societal roles.

Furthermore, "Pygmalion" examines the role of language and speech as markers of social class. Higgins, a phonetician, believes that one's accent and manner of speaking determine their social status. By transforming Eliza's speech patterns, he aims to change her social standing. This highlights the inherent biases and discrimination based on language and accent that exist within society.

Ultimately, Shaw's Pygmalion serves as a critique of the social stratification and inequality prevalent in Edwardian society. It challenges the notion that one's social class determines their worth and advocates for the recognition of individual potential and inherent dignity. Through the story of Eliza Doolittle, Shaw raises awareness about social strife and class conflict, emphasizing the need for greater equality and understanding among people from different backgrounds.

In "Pygmalion," George Bernard Shaw explores the theme of class conflict by depicting the stark divide between different social classes and examining the impact of social status on individuals' lives.

The play introduces two main characters that represent contrasting social classes. Eliza Doolittle, a working-class flower girl, is struggling to survive in poverty. On the other hand, Professor Henry Higgins, an upper-class phonetics expert, is part of the privileged elite. This stark contrast in their backgrounds sets the stage for the exploration of class conflict.

Shaw highlights the prejudices and stereotypes associated with social class. Eliza, as a lower-class individual, faces discrimination, marginalization, and limited opportunities due to her accent, manners, and lack of education. Her transformation under Higgins' guidance raises questions about the impact of appearance, speech, and social status on one's treatment and opportunities within society.

The play also challenges the notion of social mobility and the barriers individuals face in trying to transcend their predetermined social roles. Eliza's attempt to improve her social standing through learning proper speech and manners illustrates the difficulties faced by those trying to move between classes. Shaw criticizes the rigid class structure that denies equal opportunities based on birth and accent, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and fair society.

Furthermore, Shaw uses the interactions and conflicts between characters from different classes to highlight the hypocrisy and absurdity of the class system. The snobbery and condescension exhibited by some upper-class characters, such as Higgins and his mother, reveal the inherent biases and prejudices that exist within society.

Overall, Shaw's "Pygmalion" explores class conflict by exposing the disparities, prejudices, and challenges faced by individuals from different social classes. It raises questions about social inequality, mobility, and the importance of recognizing one's intrinsic worth beyond superficial markers of class. Through sharp wit and social commentary, Shaw prompts the audience to reflect on the impact of class divisions and advocate for a more equitable society.

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