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## THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S PLAY PYGMALION

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**Introduction.** George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* written in 1912 reflects quite acute social problems that made it popular in many countries around the world. The most important issue of this play is the problem of social inequality in English society. This play sharply raises the question of the social status of a woman of that time, which is viewed from a specific point. It considers the story of the flower girl's life path, coming from a poor part of London, who turns from a street child into a lady of high society. Also, an important aspect was devoted to the pronunciation matter. According to the author, this is the main thing that divides English society into social classes more strongly than any other factors.

**Task formulation.** Based on the above-mentioned problems, this play can be called relevant nowadays because Bernard Shaw sought to show that there is no unbridgeable gap between the "lower" and "higher" classes. The author struggles with old stereotypes of thinking that sometimes appear in people's heads and still do appear. The purpose of the research is to describe the changes taking place in English society at the turn of the XIXth – early XXth centuries and to analyze the features of understanding the problem of social inequality from the modern society prospective.

**Methods of research.** George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* was chosen for analysis, it was considered in the cultural and historical aspect with the involvement of contextual, comparative and descriptive methods.

**Results, their discussion and perspectives.** The plot of the play is set in London. It tells the story about a professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins, Colonel Pickering, a linguist of Indian dialects and the cockney speaking Covent Garden flower girl. Henry Higgins bets Pickering that he will be able to transform the flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a woman of high English society to present her as a Duchess in six months. According to the terms of the bet, Higgins must teach Eliza Doolittle the correct English pronunciation, which is accepted in high society. For Professor Higgins, it is just a challenge, and Eliza is like a lab rat. From Higgins's original point of view, only pronunciation can distinguish a street flower girl from a Duchess of high English society. But when he started his work, he realized that not only teaching pronunciation is required but also you need to teach the right manners and completely reshape a person's thinking.

Bernard Shaw didn't choose a simple example to show the drastic transformation of a person. By demonstrating to the reader such a radical change in a relatively short period of time, he showed that any other change in human nature is possible to implement in the same way.

Touching the aspect of correct pronunciation, we can put the question: "is it enough to teach a person to speak correctly in order to change their social status?". Let's go back to one of Professor Higgins remarks: "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 the soul» [4].

But it is not only the language that is considered an expression of human nature. It is worth noting without the aspect of human thinking. Returning to the work we recall the meeting of Mrs Higgins and Eliza. Everything seems to be going well but there is one contradiction - Eliza doesn't know what to talk about in high society.

"Pickering admitted that it is not enough for Eliza to have a lady's proper pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Also, she has to develop interests suitable for a lady. As long as her heart and mind are filled with the problems of her old world such as murders due to a straw hat and the beneficial effects of gin on her father's mood, she will not be able to become a lady, even if her language is indistinguishable from the lady's" [2].

Thus, we can say that the position of a person in society is directly related to the character of a person which depends not only on the environment but also on the interpersonal, emotional relationships and connections that he is surrounded with in his environment of communication. In this work the person who influenced Eliza is Colonel Pickering: «But do you know what began my real education?... Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me. And there were a hundred little things you never noticed, because they came naturally to you. Things about standing up and taking off your hat and opening doors... But it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and that is what makes one a lady, isn't it? You see it was so very difficult for me with the example of Professor Higgins always before me. I was brought up to be just like him, unable to control myself, and using bad language on the slightest provocation. And

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**Linguistics, Literature, Philology**

I should never have known that ladies and gentlemen didn't behave like that if you hadn't been there. The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will" [4].

Looking at the story of the main character, we cannot but notice a slight note of feminist idea. Perhaps a struggle for equality between the sexes had already begun. It was quite difficult for women to move from one class to another. They didn't have any rights. The only rescue was a successful marriage. Work as a governess, a seamstress, a flower girl was the destiny of the lower class women. Most of this work was temporary, such a work lasted until the girl got married. The play showed that Higgins had the same plan. He wanted to marry "his creation" to a wealthy suitor who could provide a comfortable existence. There was no word that Eliza was worth something and could earn for herself, nor was there any word of equal wages between men and women. And this problem stays relevant to this day. The debate about women's place in modern society is very common.

**Conclusion.** The main character, Eliza, can be compared to modern women; she wants to achieve everything herself, by her own work, to be independent. This girl has nothing in common with those ladies from high society. She didn't become a Duchess but she became a real woman who could only be admired.

According to Shaw, Eliza's "transformation" is intended to refute the established point of view that social barriers are insurmountable. They only prevent people from realizing their potential. Shaw has infinite faith in culture and the knowledge that according to Higgins "destroys the gap that separates class from class and soul from the soul" [3].

Thus, according to the author, money, pronunciation, manners, and education are the only differences between the upper class and the lower, but in modern society, these social problems can be solved.

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