



A Gradual Metamorphosis; Shakespeare's The Taming of Shrew and George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion Between Female Subservience and Marxist Revolution

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Abstract:

This article entitled A Gradual Metamorphosis; Shakespeare's The Taming of Shrew and George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion between Female Subservience and Marxist Revolution will view the women question from a Marxist feminist perspective correlating the issue of conflict between the classes with the conflict between the sexes. Just as the proletariat was oppressed by the bourgeoisie, women also were subjugated by men, and were treated inferiorly. The social unrest that ensues is examined by the two playwrights, each offering a different outcome to the one of full-blown revolution put forward by Marx. The seeds of discontent set by Shakespeare's heroines Bianca and the Widow Find fruit in Eliza with the production of George Bernard Shaw play Pygmalion, Like William Shakespeare, Shaw uses the gender question to illustrate the conflict in society and the ensuing social unrest. However, he upholds a very different solution to sedition than both Karl Marx and F. Bacon. As a member of the Fabien society, he advocated for social change through non-violent and gradualist intervention. Literature was one of the vehicles for this change.

Keywords: Marxist-feminism- Shakespeare-Shaw-metamorphosis.

Une métamorphose progressive : La Mégère apprivoisée de Shakespeare et Pygmalion de George Bernard Shaw : entre soumission féminine et révolution marxiste

Résumé :

Cet article, intitulé « Une métamorphose progressive : La Mégère apprivoisée de Shakespeare et Pygmalion de George Bernard Shaw entre soumission féminine et révolution marxiste », examine la question des femmes dans une perspective féministe marxiste, établissant un lien entre le conflit des classes et le conflit des sexes. De même que le prolétariat était opprimé par la bourgeoisie, les femmes étaient soumises aux hommes et traitées comme des êtres inférieurs. Les troubles sociaux qui en résultent sont analysés par les deux dramaturges, chacun proposant une issue différente de celle de la révolution totale défendue par Marx. Les germes du mécontentement semés par les héroïnes shakespeariennes Bianca et la Veuve trouvent leur origine dans Eliza, personnage central de la pièce Pygmalion de George Bernard Shaw. À l'instar de William Shakespeare, Shaw utilise la question du genre pour illustrer les conflits au sein de la société et les troubles sociaux qui en découlent. Cependant, il défend une solution à la sédition très différente de celles proposées par Karl Marx et F. Bacon. Membre de la Société fabienne, il prônait le changement social par une intervention non violente et progressive. La littérature était l'un des vecteurs de ce changement.

Mots-clés : *féminisme marxiste, Shakespeare, Shaw, métamorphose.*



Introduction:

This article intends to analyze the status of women as reflected in the two plays from two differing points in time: *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare and *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw.

These two plays have been extensively studied from a feminist point of view. For the purpose of this article, the ones most relevant to our article have been chosen. For instance, Penny Gay in her book *Avoiding the feminist challenge* argues that Katherine's cruel treatment "is for the victim's good, to enable her to become a compliant member of patriarchal society". This article will underline the inevitability of this outcome and argue women will never find a place until society is ready to change from patriarchal one to an egalitarian one. In contrast, and in keeping with this question, Marcie Ray in her article *My Fair Lady: A voice for change* shows that George Bernard Shaw through his play *Pygmalion*, reflects the changing values of British society. She argues that Eliza was able to undergo a dramatic metamorphosis simply because society was ready to accept it.

As for a Marxist interpretation, literature concerning *The Taming of the Shrew* is scarce. Allan Sillitoe in his book *Shakespeare and Marx* touches briefly on *The Taming of Shrew* and examines it according to class divisions and their related power struggle. Similarly, most of the critical analysis concerning Shaw's play *Pygmalion* ties the Marxist interpretation to class distinction. Abdulmadjid Alhanash in his article entitled *Quest of Socio-Cultural Change: Eliza's Metamorphosis in Shaw's Pygmalion* takes this analyses one

step further and brings education into the equation. He states that Eliza, with Higgin's, help is able to educate herself and transcend class boundaries. He concludes that the metamorphosis process is intended by Shaw to show that "*all social distinctions are mere ego and can be overcome by equality of humanitarian rights mainly education*". This article will refute these claims and try to show that neither class nor education impact the women question. We will show that feminist emancipation can only occur when the integral values of the society change from a patriarchal one to an egalitarian one.

This article will view the women question from a Marxist feminist perspective correlating the issue of conflict between the classes with the conflict between the sexes. Marx's economic and social ideology promulgated that whenever a powerful minority (the bourgeoisie) rule over a weak majority (the proletariat), social unrest is inevitable. Indeed, the ensuing conflict is a catalyst for change and the responsibility for this change lies in the hands of the oppressed masses. In "*Strategy and Tactics of the Class Struggle*", Marx, along with his collaborator, Engels, clearly emphasized this idea

"For nearly 40 years we have raised to prominence the idea of the class struggle as the immediate driving force of history, and particularly the class struggle between bourgeois and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; hence, we can hardly go along with people who want to strike this class struggle from the movement. At the founding of the international, we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself." (Marx and Engels, 6:1879).



In the above quotation, the word “*class*” can easily be replaced by the term “*gender*”, the terms bourgeoisie and proletariat by the words male and female, respectively, to highlight the blatant inequality between the sexes and to anticipate the social and political struggle of the suffragettes in the early twentieth century.

the two plays, “The Taming of the Shrew” and “Pygmalion”, our article not only traces the evolution of the feminist movement but also shows how the two playwrights, Shakespeare and Shaw, offer two dialectical solutions to the resounding “battle cry”. It is interesting that Marx uses the powerful terms of “battle” and “revolution”, with their connotations of violence and force to describe the inevitable outcome of social unrest. It is true to say that Marx does not preach violence per se but he thought it an inevitable outcome of any social discontent. In a newspaper article in 1848 he wrote:

“there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society and the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror” (Marx and Engels, pp:1848).

Our article will show that change can only occur when society is ready and willing to accept it; when the dictates of the both political and social mindset correspond to the demands of the majority. An analysis of the two different works of art The Taming of the Shrew and Pygmalion illustrates this point. William Shakespeare, reflecting the mindset of his time, upheld the views of Francis Bacon who advocated for the doctrine of Absolute Power to eradicate

social unrest and restore order to the kingdom. George Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, affirmed Marx's idea that the oppressed classes have to take responsibility for their own emancipation. Nevertheless, his play *Pygmalion* reflects the Fabian mindset of early twentieth century Britain which advocated for social change based on a two way approach in which the two conflicting forces learn to respect and appreciate each other.

1. Absolute Power in *The Taming of the Shrew*

In the Elizabethan era, society was geared towards upholding the status quo; perpetuating the false consciousness that women were biologically and intellectually inferior to men. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare through the example of Katherine, illustrates that any attempt at female independence would never bear fruit, the goal of society was to silence subversive elements and keep the female sex in ignorance.

Francis Bacon, a renaissance thinker, recognized that social unrest existed inevitably in any society. He upheld the stance of absolute power in order to eradicate completely any subversive elements. He believed that: "*the surest way to prevent seditions (If the times doe bear it), is to take away the Matter of them* (Bacon, 39: 1625) i.e. to take away the cause which he saw to be "*Much Poverty and Much Discontent*" (Ibid). The first sign of social unrest should be recognized and treated accordingly. It should not be left to spread revolution "*For if there be Fuel prepared, it is hard to tell whence the Spark shall come that shall set it on Fire*" (Ibid). He also declared that "*Remedies must answer to the particular Disease; And so be left to Counsel rather than to Rule*" (Ibid). In an ideal world, the ruling monarch would make it his or her aim to



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improve the social standing of all his or her citizens and ensure dissatisfaction didn't prevail.

Elizabethan England was far from an ideal world. The monarch was the voice of absolute power and any opposition to her word was tantamount to treason. Penalties were harsh as everything was done to uphold the status quo. The Elizabethans believed implicitly in social order. Chaos and anarchy had to be squashed at the outset. Drastic measures were needed to eradicate any form of social unrest; hierarchy had to be respected if a society was to flourish.

In *The Taming of the Shrew* the husband's position is parallel to the monarch and his wife to his subject. Shakespeare emphasises this connection in Katherine final speech. She declares to Bianca and the Widow: "*Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee*". (Shakespeare, act V scene ii line 146: 2006). In Shakespeare's time, a disobedient wife threatened order and harmony. The family was at the heart of society and a dutiful wife was a supporting pillar.

If disorder prevailed, it could threaten the very fabric on which society was built. Katherine in her speech equates a disobedient wife with destructive natural elements. She warns the two women that their scornful glances "*It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads, Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds*" (Ibid line 139-140). Just as the harshness of the elements can destroy the calm and beauty of nature, so a nagging wife can undermine the harmony of family life. Katherine has learnt from experience that a woman of shrewish character can be the sole cause of male rejection:

“A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty,
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.” (Ibid line 142-145).

By comparing a woman to a fountain, Katherine is underlining the importance of the female sex in society. Water is essential to life and a dutiful woman is like a beautiful fountain, offering nourishment and health. It is also there to be used by man for his advantage and sustenance. If the fountain is “*troubled*”, it can no longer replenish.

A “*troubled*” woman will not fulfil her potential as no man “*none so dry or thirsty*” (Ibid line 150) that is to say needy, will form a union with her. Furthermore, Elizabethans believed in cosmic order Thunder, snowstorms, frosts and whirlwinds were superstitiously thought to be wrath of God, visited as a punishment on sinning mortals: “*For I will board her, though she chides as loud. As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack*” (Ibid, act I scene 2 line 95-96).

It is highly symbolic when Petruchio compares Katherine to thunder, and his resolution to tame and silence her reflects, strengthens and fosters the Elizabethan belief that any seeds of rebellion should be squashed at the very beginning. Katherine in her final speech goes on to equate marital discord with anarchy and treason. She describes a disobedient wife as “*a foul contending rebel and graceless traitor to her loving lord*”. (Ibid, act V scene 2 line 160).

From a Marxist perspective, Elizabethan England was a quasi-dictatorship with the monarch holding tight to the reins of power and dominating her citizens with her regime. Treason or anarchy was treated harshly and brutal execution



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was commonplace. Following the dictates laid-down by Francis Bacon sedition had to be treated harshly if order was to remain in society, the "*remedy must answer to particular disease*". (Bacon, 39:1625)

The relationship between the male and female genders was a reflection of the relationship between monarch and subject. Like the monarch, the husband had the right to correct his wife both physically and mentally, it was in his power to chastise her and deprive her of essential human needs. Women were expected to be subservient and any attempts of rebellion were eradicated on the spot. It was the social duty of the Elizabethan husband to tame his wife when it proved necessary, the Scottish protestant leader John Knox in *The First Blast of the Trumpet* wrote: "*Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man.*" (Knox, 12:1995)

Disobedience was by no means acceptable and was considered to be a social sin, a crime and an omen for disaster that would make society ill with an infectious fever that would run like an epidemic through each corner of its realm and would leave in its wake devastating consequences. In *The Taming of The Shrew* Petruchio, who considers himself as the future husband of Katherine, asserts his mission to tame her: "*for I am he am born to tame Kate, And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate*" (Shakespeare, act II scene i line 276-277:2006).

The use of the adjective "*wild*" is poignant in its symbolism. A shrewish wife is considered to be no different from a wild animal and it is the mission of Petruchio the husband to domesticate her, control her misbehaviour and drag her into social order. To reach his aim all means were

acceptable. At the end of Act four, Petruchio outlines his methods to “*curb her mad and headstrong humour*” (Shakespeare, act IV scene i line 209:2006), it is interesting to note that he opens with the words “*Thus have I politically begun my reign*” (Ibid, line 188) reinforcing the idea that he is the dictator, the monarch in the relationship. Katherine is going to be forced to obey. Firstly, he uses the image of falconry to describe his methods for taming his wife. Like a hawk, she must be deprived of food if she is stoop and be obedient. Secondly, he is going to use the method of sleep deprivation to wear down her defences and weaken her resolve. These, to a modern sensibility, are harsh methods but Petruchio declares “*that all is done in reverend care of her*” (Ibid line 140).

According to the Oxford dictionary, the primary definition of the word “*domesticate*” is to naturalize. Katherine's shrewishness is unnatural. She must be brought back to normal to fulfil her potential as an Elizabethan wife.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare treats a conventional subject matter of an unruly wife and her harsh treatment by her legal husband. He takes as his precedent *A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife*. (Anon, p 34:2001).

In this ballad, the husband's treatment of his wife is clearly illustrated. He plots to break his wife by beating her and wrapping her in freshly salted horse-hide. Such brutality was the norm in Elizabethan society where punishment for any misdemeanour was severe. Judged in this light, Petruchio's treatment of Katherine is mild in comparison. He reflects a degree of compassion and understanding not commonly seen in other shrew-tamers of the period. He is clever, and this cleverness allows him to reform his wife without resorting to physical violence.



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Shakespeare in his portrayal of Petruchio is subtly advocating for social reform, he is making a concession to the conventions of the time that a husband has the right to punish his unruly wife, but he favours more humane treatment. Indeed this treatment has the desired effect. Katherine is sincerely reformed at the end of the play and the feeling between the couple is of mutual respect.

William Shakespeare, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, uses Katherine to illustrate that in the Elizabethan era, a small minority of women railed against their position. Katherine's railings were a sign of her frustration, but society, at that time was rigidly conventional, Class mobility was impossible and female independence was inconceivable. Women had no other choice but to follow the social code-blind obedience to their husbands, Order had to be restored at all cost. In her final speech, a fully redeemed Katherine, underlines the futility of the female struggle in a society rigid with conformity:

“Come, Come, you forward and unable women
My mind hath been as big as one of yours, My heart as great,
my reason haply more, To bandy word for word, and frown
for frown;
But now I see our lances are but straws” (Shakespeare, act V
scene ii line 169-173)

In the early sixteenth century, a feminine revolution could not bear fruit. Women had no other choice but to obey their male counter-parts. A revolution on the scale as later proposed by Marx had no chance in this male-dominated society. Katherine's remark "our lances are but straw" (Ibid)

attests that any struggle was futile. They could not even hope to dent the rigid conventions of the time.

At the end of the play, although Shakespeare has silenced Katherine's voice and order appears to have been restored there are still wayward elements in the plot. Both Bianca and the Widow refuse to obey the calls of their husbands.

Bianca gives a simple excuse but the Widow takes it one step further. She retorts "*she bids you come to her*" (Ibid line 92). Not only is she disrespectful to him but she asks for obedience from him. This is Shakespeare's humorous way of showing that the conflict between the genders is far from over. Nothing has yet been resolved and until it is, the call for female independence will still find a voice.

2. Doctrine of Non-Violent Intervention Shaw's Pygmalion

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century and the subsequent rise of capitalism brought about a binary division of society into two opposing classes, the so-called proletariat and bourgeoisie as named by Marx. This division anticipated a second sub-division between the sexes as women, relegated to the domestic scene, were totally subservient to men. In the Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw reiterates this idea:

"It is not surprising that our society being directly dominated by men, comes to regard women, not as an end in herself like Man, but solely as a means to ministering to his appetite. The ideal wife is the one who does everything that ideal husband likes and nothing else" (Shaw, 52: 1891).

As an advocate of female rights this treatment was, for a woman, tantamount to a living death. He goes on to say "*Now to treat a person as a mean instead of an end is to destroy that person's right to live*" (Ibid).



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According to Marx, the status quo is maintained only so long as the oppressed are kept in ignorance of their rights. An awakening of the social conscience means inevitable conflict within society. In his play, *Pygmalion* George Bernard Shaw examines the ensuing conflict between the sexes and subsequent social upheaval, reiterating the ideas of dialectic materialism through his character, the phonetician Higgins:

“Oh, lord knows I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other on the wrong track. One wants to go north and the other south; and the result is that both have to go east, though they both hate the east wind” (Sakespeare,act II line 150-151:YEAR).

In analysing Higgins speech, we can easily equate the capitalist regime with male chauvinistic society. Just as the bourgeois and the proletariat class, the thesis and anti-thesis of Marx's philosophy, are in perpetual conflicts so are the male and female sexes in twentieth century England. Their ideas are completely opposed as Higgins said “*the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his... [the result is social conflict]... each tries to drag the other on the wrong track... one wants to go north... [and the thesis]... and the other south⁵³ ...[the Antithesis]... and the result is that both have to go east*” (Ibid) the synthesis. The struggle between the sexes was in its infancy when Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* and the solution was a long way from being found “*though they both hate the east wind*” (Ibid)

According to Marx, this binary division of society and consequent alienation leads inevitably to social unrest. In *Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) Shaw explains how the awakening of the female conscience meant a repudiation of

duty to the patriarchal system. When a woman understands that she is just a means to an end; when she realizes that she is a tool used to further the reputation of men, then she must stand up for her rights if she is to live and not merely exist. To a newly-conscious woman, duty becomes the sterile acquiescence to the patriarchal system. With the awakening of consciousness comes the need to act "*Woman, if she dares face the fact that she is being so treated, must either loathe herself or else rebel*" (Shaw, 53:1891) Shaw's message is clear. The newly-awakened woman has two ways open to her, keep silent or voice her frustrations.

In keeping with Marx's theory, social conflict is the direct outcome of the awakening of social conscience. In *Pygmalion* Shaw depicts the awakening of Eliza in one of the most humorous scenes of the play, At the beginning of Act 4, on returning home from the Duchess's party, Higgins is in a self-congratulatory mood at the success of his experiment. When he calls for his slippers "*I wonder where the devil my slippers are!*" (Shakespeare, act IV line 8:2006). Eliza automatically goes to retrieve them for him "*She places them on the carpet before Higgins. And sits as before without a word*" (Ibid). This illustrates how dutiful and subservient she has learnt to be. It is as if the word "*slippers*" is a key-word for obedience.

The audience has already witnessed her instinctive obedience to Higgins' orders at the Duchess's party: "*walks like a somnambulist in a desert*" (Shakespeare, act III IV:2006) pays tribute to this idea. She is acting out the role expected of her and she has learnt her lessons well. Her awakening is a sudden jolt to her conscience. Higgins and Pickering, too full of their own success to heed Eliza's feelings, seem to dismiss her part in it as superfluous. She understands only



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too clearly that she has been deceived by platitudes so that Higgins could exploit her efforts to win his bet. She is frustrated by the paradox set down clearly by Marx: "*As soon as his labour actually begins, it has already ceased to belong to him; it can therefore no longer be sold by him*" (Marx, 8:1878). She realizes too late that she, as a person, is of no matter to Higgins. Her reaction is one of fury and violence. She snatches up the slippers and "*hurls them at him one after the other with all her force [then she] gives a suffocated scream of fury, and instinctively darts her nails at his face*" (Ibid line 29). To quote Shaw's words in the Quintessence of Ibsenism, she has "*torn off the mask of subservience to raise herself from mere consciousness to knowledge by daring more and more to face facts and tell herself the truth*" (Shaw, 23:1891)

The fourth act of Shaw's play Pygmalion emphasizes the theories set down by Marx; notably that a conflict of interest between two opposing classes inevitably leads to rebellion on the part of the subjugated class. Eliza is ferocious in her attack on Higgins. She is like a caged animal; however, her attack is no more effective than Katherine's railing many centuries before. Higgins, although surprized and shocked by her retaliation, treats her with a condescension born of conventional male chauvinistic authority. This is one of Shaw's strategies to show that, although women have progressed in their fight for emancipation, the early twentieth century society is not yet ready to embrace them.

As we have already discussed previously in this article, Marx believed the only way to political and social reform was through revolution. In his essay Class Struggle in France he stated: "*Revolutions are the locomotives of history*" (Marx, 62:1969). He believed that the powerful ruling

classes would not easily renounce their grip on the subjugated minority and he advocated for a violent revolution which could only have any sort of credence if both sides participated with equal fervour. Engels supported his idea and wrote passionately in his work *On Authority*: *"A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, authoritarian means, if such there be at all"* (Engels, 730: 1878)

Although George Bernard Shaw supported Marx need for social reform, he opposed violent revolution. He was a core member of the Fabian society which favoured social and political reform through non-violent means. It favoured gradual change rather than revolutionary change.

In Act 4 of *Pygmalion* Shaw succeeds in illustrating that violent retaliation could not effectively bear fruit in the struggle for female equality. Higgins's patronizing stance towards Eliza is fuelled by centuries of ingrained male complacency, which cannot be dented by such uncontrollable but minor outburst. Her non-violent protest, her flight to Mrs Higgins later in the act hits the mark. Through her absence she succeeds in getting the appreciation she craves. Higgins is forced to admit that he does in fact depend on her *"I have learnt something from your idiotic notions: I confess that humbly and gratefully. And I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance. I like them rather"*. (Shakespeare, act V line 198:2006). Shaw's message is clear. Women have to prove their worth: they have to show that they are an indispensable part of society; equal to any man. Marx, Respect both sides, has to be himself, also believed that one of the most important tasks of the female sex was to educate their male counterparts to see them in a



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new light. He wrote in a letter to his friend Kugelman: *“Is your wife also active in the German ladies’ great emancipation campaign? I think that German women should begin by driving their husbands to emancipation”*. (Marx, 173:1868).

Women must, first and foremost, find a voice that will give men a conscience to recognize not only the atrocities of their behaviour towards the female sex but the need for change.

Marx, unlike his predecessor Francis Bacon, ultimately believed that social change was the responsibility of the oppressed minority. Indeed, since the ruling classes' main objective in life was to maintain the status quo to preserve their interests, then only the oppressed minority could fight for change. George Bernard Shaw was a staunch believer in this Marxist theory. He advocates for social change but he understood that it had to be on a two way basis. Both men and women had to alter their attitudes towards each other if there was any hope for progress. From the very first scenes of the play *Pygmalion* it is apparent that the male domineering stance as adopted by Shakespeare's *Petruchio* will not succeed with the newly-conscious feminine class of the twentieth century.

Higgins tries to bully the terrified Eliza into sitting down but to no avail. Colonel Pickering. On the other hand requests her politely to take a seat and his words have the desired effect.

“HIGGINS: [peremptorily] Sit down.

THE FLOWER GIRL: Oh, if youre going to make a compliment of it HIGGINS [thundering at her] Sit down.

MRS. PEARCE: [severely] Sit down, girl. Do as youre told. [She places the stray chair near the hearthrug between Higgins and Pickering, and stands behind it waiting for the girl to sit down].

THE FLOWER GIRL: Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo! [She stands, half rebellious, half bewildered].

PICKERING: [very courteous] Wont you sit down?

LIZA: [coyly] Dont mind if I do. [She sits down. Pickering returns to the hearthrug]." (Shakespeare, act II line 34-40:2006).

His courteousness and respect influence Eliza's behaviour and she has no qualms in obeying Pickering. It is a request and not an order. It is interesting to note that Shaw names her for the first time after this exchange. Through Colonel Pickering's politeness to her, she has assumed an identity and has become a person in her own right. Shaw goes on to show that society can progress through the establishment of real human relations between men and women. In the prose section at the end of the play, he emphasises the relationship that has been built up between Eliza and Pickering. He illustrates just how much Eliza respects the colonel's opinion and listens to his point of view. In this passage when Eliza referred again to her project of teaching phonetics, Higgins abated not a jot of his violent opposition to it. He said she was not within ten years of being qualified to meddle with his pet subject; and as it was evident that the colonel agreed with him, she felt she could not go against them in this grave matter (Shaw, 112: 2003)

The influence is clear. She would have continued to rail against Higgins's violent opposition if Colonel Pickering had not shared the same views. It is out of her respect for him that she renounces the idea because the Colonel has said,



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that day at Mrs Higgins that "*it would never do*" (Ibid, p23). George Bernard Shaw saw the possibility of progress in society as based on mutual respect and appreciation. Mrs Higgins, in her sarcasm to her son, makes a similar implication:

"MRS HIGGINS She worked very hard for you, Henry. I don't think you quite realize what anything in the nature of brain work means to a girl of her class. Well, it seems that when the great day of trial came, and she did this wonderful thing for you without making a single mistake, you two sat there and never said a word to her, but talked you together of how glad you were that it was all over and how you had been bored with the whole thing. And then you were surprised because she threw your slippers at you! I should have thrown the fire-irons at you.

"HIGGINS: We said nothing except that we were tired and wanted to go to bed. Did we, Pick?

PICKERING: shrugging his shoulders That was all.

MRS HIGGINS: ironically Quite sure?

PICKERING: Absolutely. Really, that was all.

MRS HIGGINS: You didn't thank her, or pet her, or admire her, or tell her how splendid she'd been" (Shakespeare, act V line 84-88:2006).

Her message is clear. If only they had thanked Eliza for all her help, then this conflict could have been avoided.

In this article, we have tried to portray how the question of women's rights was an important issue in any society and instigated social conflict. We have chosen those two works of art, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Shaw's *Pygmalion*, to show how the English society over the period of three centuries progressed from a quasi-dictatorship to a budding democracy.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare succeeds in reflecting the values of a patriarchal society where women were forced into docile acceptance of a subservient role. Through the shrewish Katherine, he shows how easily the harmonious balance of society can easily break down. He uses the gender question to illustrate the absolute power of the monarch in Elizabethan society, Petruchio in many ways, symbolizes the dictator whose tyrannical rule forces his subjects to obey. However, the unconventional disobedience of Bianca and the Widow anticipate that the gender question is far from over and that absolute dictatorship is no guarantee to perfect harmony on all levels of society.

The seeds of discontent set by Shakespeare's heroines Bianca and the Widow find fruit in Eliza with the production of George Bernard Shaw play *Pygmalion*. Like William Shakespeare, Shaw uses the gender question to illustrate the conflict in society and the ensuing social unrest. However, he upholds a very different solution to sedition than both Karl Marx and F. Bacon. As a member of the Fabien society, he advocated for social change through non-violent and gradualist intervention. Literature was one of the vehicles for this change.



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Full author's name in capital letters comma then first name (reduced or not to the initial followed by a comma, year of publication in parentheses comma, title of the work in italics or "title of the article in quotes" in italic comma, place of edition comma, edition comma.

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