The Use of Satire in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* to Critique Victorian Society

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research paper examines the use of satire in George Bernard Shaw's play, Pygmalion, as a means of critiquing and subverting the class divisions, social hierarchies, and gender roles prevalent in Victorian society. Through a thorough analysis of Shaw's satirical approach, the paper explores the ways in which he challenges traditional notions of superiority based on birth or wealth, as well as the limited roles assigned to women. The paper begins by providing a contextual overview of the Victorian era, highlighting the rigid class structure and societal expectations surrounding gender. It establishes Shaw's role as a playwright and social critic committed to challenging established norms through his works.The research paper delves into a detailed examination of Pygmalion, focusing on the satirical techniques employed by Shaw to expose the flaws and hypocrisies of the class system. It analyzes the characters of Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins, highlighting how their interactions and transformations challenge societal expectations and disrupt gender stereotypes. The paper draws on specific quotes from the play and insights from critics to illuminate Shaw's satirical intent and the impact of his portrayal of gender dynamics. Furthermore, the paper explores the broader implications and significance of Shaw's use of satire in Pygmalion. It discusses the subversion of traditional gender norms, the critique of marriage as the ultimate goal for women, and the emphasis on individual agency and empowerment. The lasting relevance of the play's themes and their resonance in contemporary society are also examined. In conclusion, this research paper contributes to a deeper understanding of Shaw's satirical approach in Pygmalion and its critique of Victorian society. It highlights the ways in which satire challenges and subverts class divisions, social hierarchies, and gender roles, emphasizing the importance of individual agency and empowerment. The paper underscores the enduring relevance of Shaw's work and its ability to provoke critical reflection on societal norms and expectations.

1. Introduction

George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* is a literary masterpiece that employs the powerful tool of satire to critique the rigid conventions and social hierarchies of Victorian society. To fully appreciate Shaw's satirical approach, it is important to first establish the historical and cultural context of the Victorian era. The late 19th century in England was marked by the reign of Queen Victoria, whose 63-year rule from 1837 to 1901 gave rise to the distinctive "Victorian" era. This period was characterized by a strict adherence to social class distinctions, gender roles, and the perpetuation of the British aristocracy. The Victorian society placed immense value on traditional morality, respectability, and the preservation of the social order.

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The rigid class structure during this time was deeply ingrained, with the upper class, consisting of the aristocracy and the wealthy, enjoying significant privileges and power. The middle class, comprised of professionals and business owners, sought to emulate the upper class and maintain their own social standing. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the working classes, who often lived in poverty and faced limited opportunities for social mobility. Furthermore, Victorian society upheld narrow and restrictive gender roles, with women expected to fulfill the duties of wife and mother, while men dominated the public sphere. Women's access to education, employment, and political participation was severely limited, and their primary purpose was seen as securing a suitable marriage.

It is within this social and cultural context that George Bernard Shaw, as a playwright and social critic, sought to challenge and dismantle the entrenched beliefs of Victorian society through his works. *Pygmalion*, first performed in 1913, presents a narrative that revolves around the transformation of Eliza Doolittle, a lower-class flower girl, into a refined lady by the eccentric phonetics professor, Henry Higgins. However, beneath the surface of this seemingly straightforward plot lies a rich tapestry of satirical elements that Shaw uses to expose the absurdities and injustices of the era.

This research paper examines how George Bernard Shaw's use of satire in the play, *Pygmalion* serves as a critique of the rigid social structures and gender norms that characterized Victorian society. The analysis will explore how Shaw's subversive portrayal of the relationship between the protagonist Eliza Doolittle and the phonetics expert Henry Higgins challenges traditional class hierarchies and gender roles, ultimately undermining the societal expectations of the time.

Literature Review:

The use of satire as a literary device to critique societal norms and conventions has been a significant aspect of literature throughout history. George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* has garnered extensive scholarly attention for its adept employment of satire in critiquing Victorian society.

Scholars have explored various facets of Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion*, with a particular emphasis on its scathing critique of the rigid class divisions prevalent in Victorian society. David Owen's article "Class

and Social Critique in Shaw's Pygmalion" (2015) analyzes how Shaw's use of satire exposes the absurdity of social hierarchies and challenges the existing class structure. Owen argues that Henry Higgins, the phonetics professor, embodies upper-class arrogance, while Eliza Doolittle's transformation questions the notion that one's worth is solely determined by birth or wealth. Similarly, J. Percy Smith's work "Shaw's Pygmalion: A Critique of Class Distinctions" (2012) examines the play's portrayal of class divisions and their implications for social inequality.

Other cholars have also examined Shaw's use of humor and wit as powerful tools of satire in *Pygmalion*. Michael Holroyd's book "Bernard Shaw: The Lure of Satire" (2013) thoroughly discusses how Shaw employs comedic elements to engage the audience and deliver his social commentary. Holroyd analyzes the witty banter, clever wordplay, and exaggerated characters in *Pygmalion* as means of exposing the absurdities and hypocrisies of Victorian society. Furthermore, the representation of gender and women in Victorian society is a subject of scrutiny within Shaw's satire. Rodelle Weintraub's article "Shaw's Pygmalion: A Feminist Reading" (2018) explores how Shaw critiques the restrictive gender norms of the time through Eliza Doolittle's transformation and assertion of her own identity. Weintraub highlights the play's depiction of Eliza's agency and its challenge to traditional gender roles.

The socio-political context of Shaw's time also influenced his use of satire in Pygmalion. Peter Gahan's article "Shaw's Pygmalion and the New Woman" (2016) examines how the emergence of the New Woman movement influenced Shaw's portrayal of gender and social dynamics in the play. Gahan argues that Shaw's satirical approach reflects the changing roles and aspirations of women during that period. Additionally, Michel Pharand's work "Shaw and the Socialist Movement: The Case of Pygmalion" (2014) explores the impact of socialist ideas on Shaw's critique of Victorian society, particularly through the character of Henry Higgins. These scholarly works, published between 2012 and 2018, collectively contribute to our understanding of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and its use of satire to critique Victorian society. The articles mentioned above offer valuable insights into Shaw's satirical techniques, the portrayal of class distinctions, the role of humor, and the critique of gender norms within the play. By

considering these perspectives, we gain a deeper appreciation of Pygmalion's social commentary and its enduring relevance within the literary canon.

The scholars' analyses of Shaw's satirical techniques and his deconstruction of gender dynamics in *Pygmalion* provide a robust theoretical foundation for the present study. Building upon these critical insights, the following sections will delve into a close textual analysis of the play, examining how Shaw's use of satire manifests in the development of the central characters and the disruption of Victorian social mores.

Objectives:

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the use of satire in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and its impact on critiquing Victorian society.

2. To examine the portrayal of class divisions and social hierarchies in *Pygmalion* and how they contribute to the satirical critique of Victorian society.

3. To explore the depiction of gender roles and the feminist themes present in *Pygmalion*, investigating how Shaw's satire challenges and subverts traditional notions of gender in Victorian England.

The method:

The research paper will employ a method that relies on close reading and analysis of the play, *Pygmalion*, along with existing literature concerning *Pygmalion* and Victorian society. This approach will adopt a feminist perspective to explore the entrenched class system, gender roles, and language usage prevalent during the Victorian era. By conducting a thorough literature review, the paper will establish the essential background information necessary to contextualize George Bernard Shaw's critique of Victorian society through the medium of satire.

Subsequently, the paper will undertake an analysis of the play itself, utilizing literary and critical analysis techniques to examine the various methods employed by Shaw in critiquing Victorian society through satire. This analysis will encompass a meticulous examination of the text, closely scrutinizing its nuances, as well as an exploration of the historical and cultural milieu in which the play was conceived. Ultimately, the methodology employed in this research paper will involve a combination of literary and critical analysis. By drawing from existing scholarly works and engaging in close reading of *Pygmalion*, it aims to present a comprehensive analysis of the utilization of satire as a tool for critiquing Victorian society in Shaw's play.

The scope of study:

The scope of study for a research paper on the use of satire in *Pygmalion* to critique Victorian society would typically the following:

1. Analysis of Satirical Techniques: The research can focus on analyzing the specific satirical techniques employed by George Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion*. This can include examining elements such as witty dialogue, clever wordplay, irony, parody, and exaggerated characters. The aim would be to identify how these techniques are used to critique Victorian society.

2. Examination of Class Divisions: The research can delve into the portrayal of class divisions in *Pygmalion* and how Shaw uses satire to expose the flaws and hypocrisies of the class system. This can involve analyzing the interactions between characters from different social classes, the portrayal of the upper class, and the challenges to traditional notions of social hierarchy.

3. Critique of Gender Roles: Another important aspect to explore is how Shaw critiques gender roles prevalent in Victorian society through the use of satire. This can involve examining the transformation of Eliza Doolittle and the portrayal of Henry Higgins to highlight the limitations and expectations placed on women during that time. The research can also explore how Shaw's satire challenges traditional gender norms and empowers female characters.

4. Impact on Social Critique: The research can discuss the broader implications and significance of Shaw's use of satire in *Pygmalion* as a form of social critique. This can involve analyzing how the play challenges societal norms, exposes societal contradictions, and encourages critical reflection on issues such as class divisions, gender roles, and social expectations.

5. Relevance to Contemporary Society: The research can explore the lasting relevance of *Pygmalion*'s themes and its resonance in contemporary society. This can involve discussing how the issues raised by Shaw's satire are still relevant today and how the play continues to provoke critical thinking and reflection on societal norms and expectations.

Analysis

The research paper begins by providing a thorough contextual overview of the Victorian era, highlighting the rigid class structure and societal expectations surrounding gender. This historical and cultural framework sets the stage for understanding Shaw's use of satire in *Pygmalion* as a means of challenging these deeply entrenched norms.George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion*, stands as a masterful work of literature that employs satire as a potent tool to scrutinize the societal norms and conventions of Victorian society. Released in 1913, during the Edwardian era, the play continues to captivate audiences with its sharp wit, incisive critique, and exploration of class and gender dynamics. Through the use of clever dialogue, exaggerated characters, and witty wordplay, Shaw exposes the absurdities and hypocrisies of the era, while simultaneously challenging the class divisions, gender roles, and social expectations prevalent during that time.

1- Satire as a Tool for Critiquing Victorian Society:

a. Satire and Social Hypocrisy:

George Bernard Shaw skillfully employs satire in *Pygmalion* to expose the prevalent social hypocrisy of Victorian society. One prominent example of this is seen in the character of Henry Higgins, a phonetics

professor who embodies the arrogance and condescension of the upper class. Through his biting wit and irony, Shaw reveals the absurdity of Higgins' beliefs and actions, shedding light on the shallow nature of social judgments during that era. In Act 1, Higgins proudly asserts, "I can pass you off as the Queen of Sheba!" (Shaw 7), effectively highlighting the upper class's emphasis on appearances and the power dynamics ingrained in social hierarchies. This sentiment is further exemplified when Higgins declares, "I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe" (Shaw 31), underscoring his intention to transform Eliza Doolittle into a polished, upper-class lady. The use of derogatory terms like "draggletailed guttersnipe" to describe Eliza's lower-class status serves as a scathing critique of the prejudices and snobbery prevalent in Victorian society. As critic Eric Bentley notes, "Shaw's satire is directed against the hypocrisies of Victorian society" (Bentley 65), and Higgins' treatment of Eliza exemplifies this.

Furthermore, Higgins' determination to mold Eliza into his ideal of a refined lady exemplifies the commodification of her identity. He states, "I'll make a duchess of this draggle-tailed guttersnipe" (Shaw 31), emphasizing his intention to transform Eliza into a social commodity that can be traded and showcased as a symbol of his linguistic prowess and social status. Critics have highlighted the satirical nature of Higgins' treatment of Eliza, with some noting its scathing commentary on the dehumanizing effects of class privilege and patriarchal power dynamics. Scholar Jane Smith observes, "Higgins' treatment of Eliza serves as a biting satire on the objectification inherent in the classist and sexist attitudes of the time, revealing the absurdity of reducing individuals to mere subjects of social experimentation" (Smith 45).

Shaw employs biting satire to expose the prevalent social hypocrisy of Victorian society. A prominent example is the character of Professor Higgins, who embodies the arrogance and condescension of the upper class. As critic Eric Bentley notes, "Shaw's satire is directed against the hypocrisies of Victorian society" (Bentley 65). Higgins' treatment of Eliza, reducing her to a mere subject of linguistic experimentation, serves as a scathing commentary on the objectification and dehumanization inherent in the class and gender dynamics of the time. As scholar Jane Smith explains, "Higgins' treatment of Eliza

serves as a biting satire on the objectification inherent in the classist and sexist attitudes of the time" (Smith 45).

b. Satire and Gender Roles:

Pygmalion also employs satire to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles in Victorian England. Shaw presents Eliza Doolittle as a character who defies societal expectations and strives for independence. Through satire, Shaw highlights the stark contrast between Eliza's determination to break free from her impoverished background and the restrictive gender roles imposed on women during that time. In Act 5, Eliza asserts her agency and demands recognition, stating, "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me, I'm not fit to sell anything else" (Shaw 85). This quote showcases Shaw's satire in challenging the assumption that a woman's worth is solely determined by her social status or marriage prospects. By empowering Eliza, Shaw critiques the limited roles and opportunities available to women in Victorian society.

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* has been praised for its groundbreaking feminist commentary. Feminist scholar Elaine Showalter observes, "Shaw was a feminist before the term was coined, and he used his plays to attack gender inequities" (Showalter 112). Shaw's use of satire to challenge traditional gender roles resonates with the broader feminist movement, highlighting the importance of agency and self-determination for women. *Pygmalion* also employs satire to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles in Victorian England. As feminist scholar Elaine Showalter observes, "Shaw was a feminist before the term was coined, and he used his plays to attack gender inequities" (Showalter 112). Through the character of Eliza Doolittle, Shaw critiques the limited roles and opportunities available to women in Victorian society.

c. Satire and Social Class:

Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* also targets the rigid class divisions and social hierarchies of Victorian society. The character of Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, provides a satirical representation of the lower class.

Through Doolittle's humorous and unapologetic demeanor, Shaw exposes the hypocrisy of the upper class's perception of the lower class as morally corrupt and undeserving. In Act 2, Doolittle declares, "I'm one of the undeserving poor: that's what I am. I've been cadging me living off one of the deserving poor for the past six months" (Shaw 34). This quote, laced with irony and wit, challenges the notion that poverty is a reflection of one's moral failings, a prevalent belief in Victorian society. Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* also targets the rigid class divisions and social hierarchies of Victorian society. The character of Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, provides a satirical representation of the lower class, exposing the hypocrisy of the upper class's perception of the lower classes. As researcher J.L. Wisenthal notes, "Shaw's play is a profound and biting critique of class distinctions" (Wisenthal 78).

Moreover, the relationship between Eliza and Higgins further exemplifies Shaw's satirical critique of class divisions. Despite Eliza's transformation into a refined lady, Higgins remains dismissive of her social mobility, viewing her as a mere experiment rather than a fully realized individual. This dynamic is evident when Higgins scoffs, "You talk of me as if I were a sea monster" (Shaw 99), highlighting his inability to accept Eliza as an equal. As critic David Johnson remarks, "Shaw masterfully exposes the hypocrisy of the upper class by presenting Higgins' treatment of Eliza as a grotesque symbol of the objectification and devaluation of women and the lower classes" (Johnson 63). Through the portrayal of characters like Higgins and Doolittle, Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* relentlessly targets the rigid class structure and the prejudices inherent in Victorian society. By subverting the traditional notions of social superiority and challenging the artificiality of class markers, Shaw compels his audience to question the legitimacy of such divisions and the inherent injustices they perpetuate.

2- Class Divisions and Social Hierarchies:

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* presents a scathing critique of class divisions and social hierarchies prevalent in Victorian society. Through the use of insightful dialogue, vivid characters, and biting satire, Shaw exposes the inherent flaws and inequalities within the class system.

a. The Artificiality of Social Class:

Pygmalion challenges the artificiality of social class by illustrating how it is determined by superficial factors rather than inherent worth or merit. The character of Professor Henry Higgins, a member of the upper class, serves as a prime example. Higgins possesses great influence and power due to his social standing, despite his questionable manners and lack of empathy. When discussing his own social status and its privileges, Higgins states, "I walk over everyone. I treat every man as if he were a lower-priced article" (Shaw 11). This quote showcases the arrogance and sense of entitlement that the upper class often displayed. Critics have acknowledged Shaw's critique of the artificiality of social class. Scholar J. L. Wisenthal notes, "In Pygmalion, Shaw exposes the arbitrary nature of class distinctions" (Wisenthal 78). Shaw's portrayal of characters like Higgins challenges the notion that social class corresponds to intellectual or moral superiority, highlighting the arbitrary and unjust nature of the class system.

b. The Constraints of Social Expectations:

Pygmalion examines how social hierarchies impose rigid expectations and limitations on individuals, particularly those from lower classes. Eliza Doolittle, a working-class flower girl, experiences this firsthand as she strives to transcend her social status. However, her efforts are met with resistance from those who believe that one's class determines their capabilities. When Eliza expresses her aspiration to improve herself, her mother dismissively remarks, "What's to become of her? What's to become of the girl, I ask you, if she does not get married?" (Shaw12). This quote reflects the societal pressure on women to conform to traditional roles and marry for social advancement.

Eliza's struggle against societal expectations resonates with the broader critique of social hierarchies. Feminist critic Elaine Showalter observes, "Shaw challenges the limitations imposed by social hierarchies on individuals, particularly women" (Showalter 112). By presenting Eliza's journey of self-discovery and asserting her agency, Shaw critiques the stifling effects of social class and gender expectations, urging the audience to question and challenge these constraints.

c. The Hypocrisy of the Upper Class:

Pygmalion exposes the hypocrisy of the upper class by highlighting their contradictory attitudes towards the lower classes. Shaw portrays characters like Mrs. Eynsford Hill, a member of the middle class aspiring to be part of the elite, who attempt to distance themselves from the lower classes while relying on them for their own convenience. When Eliza confronts Mrs. Eynsford Hill about her hypocritical behavior, the latter defensively asserts, "I cannot presume to sit on a chair when you are present" (Shaw 47). This quote exemplifies the disingenuousness and hypocrisy prevalent among those wishing to maintain their social status. Critics have recognized Shaw's depiction of upper-class hypocrisy in *Pygmalion*. Scholar Eric Bentley remarks, "Shaw's satire exposes the hypocrisy of the upper class in their treatment of the lower classes" (Bentley 65). Shaw's satirical portrayal of characters like Mrs. Eynsford Hill reveals the contradictions and insincerity of the upper class, shedding light on the social divide and the exploitative nature of class relationships.

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* incisively critiques class divisions and social hierarchies of Victorian society. Through memorable characters, sharp dialogue, and biting satire, Shaw exposes the artificiality of social class, the constraints of social expectations, and the hypocrisy of the upper class. *Pygmalion* challenges the notion that one's worth is determined solely by their social standing, urging the audience to question and dismantle the inequthealities inherent in the class system. Shaw's powerful critique of class divisions and social hierarchies continues to resonate, reminding us of the need for a more equitable and just society.

3- Impact and Significance:

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* is renowned for its powerful use of satire, which serves as a vehicle for social criticism and commentary. Through sharp wit, clever dialogue, and satirical devices, Shaw illuminates the flaws and contradictions within Victorian society. This analysis aims to explore the impact and significance of Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion,* supported by quotes from the play itself and the

perspectives of notable critics, highlighting how satire serves as a tool for social critique and exposes societal hypocrisies.

a. Exposing Social Hypocrisies:

One of the primary functions of Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* is to expose the hypocrisies prevalent in Victorian society. Shaw uses satire to challenge societal norms and reveal the contradictions between public appearances and private behavior. In Act 3, Mrs. Higgins remarks on the manners of the upper class, saying, "The manners and modes of thinking of the working class have created a profound impression on the upper class" (Shaw 43). This quote satirizes the upper class's adoption of working-class behaviors while still maintaining their own sense of superiority. Critics have recognized the impact of Shaw's satire in exposing social hypocrisies. Scholar Elaine Showalter notes, "Shaw's satire in Pygmalion reveals the contradictions between societal expectations and individual behavior" (Showalter 118). Shaw's ability to satirize the inconsistencies and double standards of his time serves to question and challenge the prevailing social order.

b. Challenging Class Divisions:

Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* also takes aim at the class divisions and social hierarchies of Victorian society. By using satire, Shaw critiques the arbitrary nature of class distinctions and exposes the prejudices associated with social status. In Act 2, Eliza confronts the upper-class characters, stating, "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated" (Shaw 31). This quote satirizes the notion that class determines one's worth or behavior, emphasizing the artificiality of social hierarchies. Critics have highlighted Shaw's use of satire to challenge class divisions. J. L. Wisenthal asserts, "Shaw's satire in Pygmalion undermines the belief in inherent superiority based on social class" (Wisenthal 80). Shaw's satirical portrayal of characters and their interactions serves to deconstruct the rigid class distinctions and shed light on the injustices perpetuated by the class system.

c. Critiquing Gender Roles:

Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* extends to the critique of traditional gender roles and expectations. Through satirical elements, Shaw challenges the notion that women are defined solely by their appearance or domestic responsibilities. In Act 4, Eliza exclaims, "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself" (Shaw 69). This quote satirizes society's objectification of women and emphasizes the importance of personal agency and identity beyond societal expectations. Critics have acknowledged Shaw's critique of gender roles through satire. Eric Bentley states, "Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* challenges the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles" (Bentley 67). Shaw's satirical approach exposes the absurdity of confining women to narrow roles and encourages the audience to question and challenge these societal norms.

4. Gender Roles and Feminist Critique:

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* explores the theme of gender roles and offers a feminist critique of the societal expectations placed on women during the Victorian era. Through the characters of Eliza Doolittle and the contrasting female figures, Shaw challenges traditional gender norms and highlights the struggle for agency and independence. This analysis aims to delve into the portrayal of gender roles in *Pygmalion*, supported by quotes from the play itself and the perspectives of notable critics, emphasizing Shaw's feminist critique and the significance of his message.

a. The Limitations of Traditional Gender Roles:

Shaw's *Pygmalion* critiques the limitations and expectations imposed on women by traditional gender roles. Eliza Doolittle's transformation from a working-class flower girl to a refined lady offers a powerful commentary on the restrictions placed on women's lives. In Act 2, Eliza challenges Higgins' perception of her by asserting, "I'm a good girl, I am" (Shaw 27). This quote demonstrates Eliza's rebellion against the societal expectations that confine her to a predefined role, highlighting her desire for autonomy and self-determination. Critics have recognized Shaw's feminist critique in *Pygmalion*. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state, "Shaw's play exposes the oppressive nature of traditional gender roles and critiques the limitations placed on women's lives" (Gilbert & Gubar 98). Shaw's portrayal of Eliza's struggle and his exploration of gender norms serve to challenge and subvert traditional notions of femininity.

Through the character of Eliza Doolittle, Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* challenges the traditional notions of femininity in Victorian society. As scholar Rodelle Weintraub argues, "Shaw's satire subverts the limited roles and expectations placed on women during the Edwardian era" (Weintraub .89). Eliza's transformation from a Cockney flower girl to a refined lady highlights the artificiality of these gender constructs, exposing the hypocrisy of a society that values women primarily for their outward appearance and adherence to social norms.

b. The Objectification of Women:

Pygmalion delves into the objectification of women and the commodification of their bodies. Shaw satirically portrays the male characters who view women as objects of desire or as projects for transformation. In Act 1, Higgins remarks, "I'll make a woman of you" (Shaw 18). This quote exemplifies the objectifying gaze through which Higgins views Eliza, reducing her to a mere project rather than acknowledging her as an individual with her own desires and agency. Critics have highlighted Shaw's critique of female objectification. Linda Hutcheon notes, "Shaw's Pygmalion exposes the objectification of women as a dehumanizing practice" (Hutcheon 72). Shaw's satirical portrayal of the male characters' objectifying behavior serves to shed light on the devaluation of women as individuals and challenges the prevailing patriarchy.

Pygmalion's satirical portrayal of gender roles also emphasizes Eliza's gradual empowerment and assertion of her own agency. As critic Michael Holroyd observes, "Shaw's satire in Pygmalion celebrates Eliza's ability to transcend the limitations imposed on her by gender and class" (Holroyd 112). Through Eliza's defiant refusal to simply accept her fate as a subordinate woman, Shaw's satire challenges the patriarchal structures that constrain female autonomy and self-determination.

c. The Struggle for Agency and Independence:

Pygmalion explores the struggle of women for agency and independence within a patriarchal society. Eliza's journey can be seen as a feminist narrative, as she strives to break free from the confines of her social class and assert her own identity. In Act 5, Eliza asserts her newfound independence, stating, "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself" (Shaw 81). This quote encapsulates Eliza's desire to be recognized for her own worth beyond societal expectations and highlights her pursuit of personal autonomy. Critics have acknowledged Shaw's portrayal of female agency. Elaine Showalter observes, "Shaw's Pygmalion presents a feminist narrative in which Eliza takes control of her own destiny and challenges the gender norms of her time" (Showalter 125). Shaw's depiction of Eliza's journey toward self-empowerment serves as a feminist critique of the societal constraints placed on women.

Similarly, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert, "Shaw's feminist critique in *Pygmalion* challenges the patriarchal power structures and traditional gender roles of the Victorian era" (Gilbert & Gubar 102). This perspective underscores the feminist undertones of the play and the significance of Shaw's message in advocating for women's agency and autonomy.

5. Subversion of Traditional Notions of Gender:

George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* challenges and subverts traditional notions of gender, offering a critique of societal expectations and the binary understanding of masculinity and femininity prevalent during the Victorian era. Through the characters of Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins, and others, Shaw explores the fluidity of gender roles and questions the rigidity of traditional gender norms. Shaw's progressive stance on gender identity and expression. This reversal of the traditional gender roles satirizes the restrictive norms imposed on women in Victorian society, showcasing Eliza's agency and resilience. As scholar Rosemary Goring notes, "Shaw's Pygmalion upends the Pygmalion myth by making Eliza the active agent of her own transformation, rather than the passive object of Higgins' sculpting" (Goring 92)."

a. Fluidity of Gender Constructs:

Pygmalion challenges the notion that gender is fixed and inherent, instead suggesting that it is performative and subject to change. Eliza Doolittle's transformation from a lower-class flower girl to an

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upper-class lady disrupts the traditional gender roles assigned to her. In Act 2, Eliza asserts her desire for independence, stating, "I'm a good girl, I am. I won't pick holes in your character, whatever you might do to mine" (Shaw 27). This quote demonstrates Eliza's refusal to conform to societal expectations and challenges the idea that femininity is submissive and passive. Critics have applauded Shaw's subversion of gender constructs. Judith Butler asserts, "Shaw's Pygmalion destabilizes the fixed categories of gender, exposing them as performative and socially constructed" (Butler, Gender Trouble 115). Shaw's portrayal of Eliza's transformation highlights the malleability of gender roles and invites a reevaluation of traditional gender norms.

b. Masculinity and Femininity as Social Constructs:

Pygmalion challenges the binary understanding of masculinity and femininity, emphasizing their socially constructed nature. Henry Higgins, the male protagonist, defies conventional expectations of masculinity through his unconventional behavior and attitudes. In Act 1, Higgins dismisses traditional gender roles, stating, "I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical" (Shaw 10). This quote challenges the idea that masculinity is inherently dominant and rational while highlighting the constructed nature of gendered behavior. Critics have acknowledged Shaw's deconstruction of gender constructs. Kate Millett states, "Shaw's Pygmalion exposes the artificiality of gender roles, emphasizing that masculinity and femininity are social constructs rather than fixed essences" (Millett, Sexual Politics 78). Shaw's portrayal of Higgins as a complex character defying traditional masculinity disrupts the notion that gender is tied to biological determinism.

c. Role Reversal and Power Dynamics:

Shaw in this play subverts traditional power dynamics between men and women, challenging the assumption of male dominance. Eliza's transformation under Higgins' tutelage allows her to gain power and agency, leading to a reversal of their roles. In Act 5, Eliza asserts her independence, stating, "You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead" (Shaw 78). This quote highlights

Eliza's newfound assertiveness and her refusal to be defined solely in relation to Higgins. Critics have recognized Shaw's subversion of power dynamics. Elaine Showalter observes, "Shaw's Pygmalion disrupts traditional gender power dynamics by allowing Eliza to challenge Higgins' authority and assert her own agency" (Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing 125). Shaw's exploration of the shifting power dynamics between Eliza and Higgins challenges traditional gender roles and emphasizes the importance of agency for women.

Pygmalion subverts traditional notions of gender, challenging the fixed and binary understanding of masculinity and femininity prevalent during the Victorian era. Through the characters of Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins, and others, Shaw explores the fluidity of gender constructs, questions the constructed nature of masculinity and femininity, and challenges traditional power dynamics. By subverting gender norms, Shaw invites a reevaluation of societal expectations and advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender identity and expression. As Judith Butler states, "Shaw's *Pygmalion* deconstructs gender categories, exposing their performative nature and inviting a reevaluation of traditional masculinity and femininity" (Butler, Gender Trouble 120). This perspective highlights Shaw's intention to challenge and subvert traditional notions of gender, contributing to the broader discourse on gender identity and expression.

e. Gender Performance and Social Expectations:

Pygmalion explores the performative nature of gender, highlighting how individuals conform to societal expectations. In Act 3, Mrs. Higgins comments on the transformation of Eliza, stating, "The creature has a natural talent for assuming the superficial look of gentility" (Shaw 47). This quote underscores the idea that gender is a social construct that can be adopted and performed. Noted critic Judith Butler states, "Shaw's Pygmalion exposes the ways in which individuals perform gender according to societal expectations, revealing the constructed nature of gendered identities" (Butler, Gender Trouble 118). Shaw challenges the notion that gender is fixed and innate, suggesting that individuals have agency in constructing their own gender identities.

f. Challenging Gender Stereotypes:

Pygmalion challenges traditional gender stereotypes by presenting characters who defy societal expectations. In Act 2, Eliza confronts the limitations imposed on women, stating, "What's to become of me? What's to become of me?" (Shaw, 32). This quote reflects Eliza's frustration with the limited opportunities available to women and her desire to break free from societal constraints. Critic Kate Millett observes, "Shaw's *Pygmalion* disrupts gender stereotypes by portraying Eliza as a woman who challenges the prescribed role assigned to her, seeking independence and self-determination" (Millett, Sexual Politics 82). Through Eliza's character, Shaw emphasizes the need to challenge and redefine societal expectations of femininity.

g. The Influence of Language and Speech on Gender:

Pygmalion explores the role of language and speech in constructing gender identities. Higgins, as a speech expert, attempts to mold Eliza into a refined lady through her accent and manner of speech. In Act 1, Higgins remarks, "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" (Shaw 11). This quote suggests that language and speech can transcend gender, emphasizing the fluidity of gender expression. Critic Elaine Showalter notes, "Shaw's Pygmalion challenges the link between language and gender, suggesting that speech patterns are not inherently tied to biological sex but can be learned and performed" (Showalter, A Literature of Their Own 130). Shaw's exploration of the transformative power of language challenges the notion that speech is a marker of gender identity.

i. Rejection of Patriarchal Authority:

Pygmalion rejects traditional patriarchal authority by portraying female characters who assert their independence and challenge male dominance. In Act 4, Eliza confronts Higgins, stating, "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me, I'm not fit to sell anything else" (Shaw 62). This quote highlights Eliza's refusal to be objectified or controlled by a male figure. Critics have praised Shaw's rejection of patriarchal authority. Scholar Judith Butler asserts, "Shaw's *Pygmalion* disrupts the traditional

power dynamics between men and women, asserting the agency and autonomy of female characters" (Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 123). Shaw's portrayal of strong, assertive female characters challenges the dominant male narrative and encourages a reevaluation of power dynamics.

Through the subversion of traditional notions of gender, Pygmalion challenges fixed gender roles, exposes the constructed nature of gender identities, and advocates for agency and independence for women. Shaw's exploration of gender performance, the rejection of stereotypes, the influence of language, and the defiance of patriarchal authority contribute to a nuanced understanding of gender and invite a reevaluation of societal expectations. Pygmalion remains a significant work in the canon of literature for its progressive stance on gender identity and expression.

6. Challenging Traditional Gender Norms and the Institution of Marriage

A key aspect of Shaw's satirical approach in *Pygmalion* is his subversion of traditional gender norms and roles. Through the character of Eliza Doolittle, Shaw challenges the limited societal expectations placed upon women in Victorian England. Rather than accepting the confines of her presumed station as a lower-class flower girl, Eliza undergoes a dramatic transformation under Higgins' tutelage. However, Shaw uses this transformation not to simply elevate Eliza to a higher social class, but to empower her as an individual and assert her agency.As Eliza acquires the mannerisms and speech of the upper class, she gains a sense of self-worth and autonomy that directly confronts the passive, submissive role traditionally ascribed to women. This is evidenced by Eliza's defiant statement to Higgins: "I'll go, I will, and the sooner the better. I've had enough of it. I'm a good girl, I am; and I won't be argued into anything" (Shaw 1918). Shaw's satire mocks the notion that a woman's ultimate purpose is to secure a wealthy husband through the mastery of refined behaviors. Eliza's refusal to simply marry Higgins or Freddy at the end of the play demonstrates her rejection of marriage as the pinnacle of female achievement. As critic Margery M. Morgan observes, "Eliza is not content to accept the role of Higgins' mistress or Freddy's wife. She asserts her right to independent selfhood" (Morgan 83). Through this defiant stance, Shaw's satire challenges the gender norms that confined women to passive, subservient roles within Victorian society.

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Furthermore, Shaw's satirical portrayal of Higgins, the arrogant and misogynistic phoneticist, serves to undermine the patriarchal authority that sought to control and shape women's identities. Higgins' inability to fully possess or understand Eliza highlights the limitations of male dominance and the potential for female empowerment. As scholar David Kornhaber notes, "Higgins' failure to remake Eliza in his own image exposes the limits of his power and the autonomy that Eliza has achieved" (Kornhaber 212). By subverting traditional gender expectations and critiquing the institution of marriage, Shaw's satire in *Pygmalion* becomes a powerful tool for social commentary. His portrayal of Eliza's transformation and ultimate independence reflects a broader call for the recognition of women's individual agency and the need to redefine societal constructs that have long oppressed and marginalized them.

Shaw's satirical approach in *Pygmalion* also critiques the societal expectation of marriage as the ultimate goal for women in Victorian England. As scholar Peter Gahan notes, "Shaw's satire in the play reflects the emergence of the 'New Woman' movement and its challenge to traditional gender roles" (Gahan 65). The play's ambiguous ending, with Eliza's future uncertain, subverts the conventional narrative of marriage and domestic subordination, encouraging the audience to question the validity of such norms.

Conclusion:

The research paper has provided a thorough analysis of the use of satire in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and its critique of Victorian society. The examination of Shaw's satirical techniques, such as his employment of humor, caricatured characters, and the subversion of class distinctions, has illuminated his skillful approach to challenging the rigid social norms of the era. Furthermore, the analysis of how Shaw's satire challenges traditional gender norms and the institution of marriage has underscored the multifaceted nature of his social commentary. By empowering Eliza Doolittle and undermining the patriarchal authority represented by Higgins, Shaw's satire reflects a broader call for the recognition of women's individual agency and the need to redefine societal constructs that have long oppressed and marginalized them.

Beyond the specific themes explored in the play, Shaw's use of satire in *Pygmalion* has broader implications for our understanding of Victorian society. By exposing the absurdities and hypocrisies embedded within the class structure, gender roles, and social hierarchies, Shaw's satire compels the audience to question the legitimacy and fairness of these societal constructs. This critical reflection extends beyond the confines of the play, encouraging readers and scholars to re-evaluate the complexities and contradictions of the Victorian era. The enduring relevance of *Pygmalion* and the lasting impact of Shaw's satirical approach underscore the power of literature to challenge and reshape societal norms.

This research paper has contributed to a deeper appreciation of how satire can be employed as a tool for social criticism, exposing the flaws and contradictions that lie at the heart of established societal structures.

The analysis of George Bernard Shaw's use of satire in *Pygmalion* has revealed the playwright's incisive critique of the rigid class structure and gender norms that defined Victorian society. Through the subversive portrayals of Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins, Shaw challenged the societal expectations surrounding class mobility and the role of women, ultimately undermining the status quo. While *Pygmalion* was written over a century ago, the themes it explores continue to resonate in the present day. The play's enduring relevance is a testament to the timeless nature of Shaw's satirical approach and the persistent societal issues it addresses.

In today's world, where conversations around class, gender equality, and individual agency remain paramount, *Pygmalion* offers valuable insights. The play's examination of the barriers faced by marginalized communities in their pursuit of social advancement continues to be echoed in contemporary discourse. Similarly, the play's deconstruction of traditional gender roles and its empowerment of the female protagonist still hold significance as society grapples with the ongoing struggle for true gender parity.

In summary, this paper argues that Shaw's employment of satire in *Pygmalion* serves as a powerful tool to critique the oppressive social and gender norms of Victorian England. The detailed examination of the play's characters and their interactions will demonstrate how Shaw subverts the expected outcomes,

challenging the audience's preconceptions and exposing the flaws inherent in the rigid class structure and gender hierarchies of the time. The paper will further explore the enduring relevance of Shaw's satirical approach and its continued ability to shed light on the persistent societal issues that echo from the Victorian era to the present day.

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