Bernard Shaw – the outstanding English playwright, one of the founders of a realistic drama of XX century, the talented satirist, the humorist, the wittiest paradox composer. Shaw has entered drama area as the original innovator. He has confirmed at English theatre new type of a drama – an intellectual drama in which the basic place belongs not to an intrigue, nor to fascinating plot but to those intense disputes, witty verbal duels which are conducted by its heroes. Shaw named the plays "plays-discussions". They grasped depth of problems, the extraordinary form of their resolution; they excited consciousnesses of the spectator, forced it to reflect tensely over an event and cheerfully to laugh together with the playwright at absurd of existing laws, orders and customs. In this assignment I intend to analyze the play «Pygmalion» of Bernard Shaw and show his peculiarities in order to answer the question: Why Pygmalion is Shavian?

Every piece of literature needs an opening part and a good introduction. It should not only be an introduction to the place where it happens, but also an introduction to the different characters, the surroundings or the time. But in a play like Pygmalion, not only an introduction is needed, the reader or viewer of a play need additional information on the different characters. They need to know something about their background, what they are doing on or in a certain scene. The audience also needs this background information to understand actions in the course of the play. Even though this might sound easy, it is hard to include all these information in a play, since the author of a play does not have the same possibilities as an author of a novel has. A novelist can include these information into the text. A playwright on the other hand needs to consider how he can transmit background information especially to the viewer of the play without disturbing the actual plot of the play.

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw does not have anything similar. It has, in fact, a preface, but the preface does not reveal much about the actual background of one of the characters or gives a foreshadowing on the plot. Instead the preface of Pygmalion focuses more on one of the themes in the play, Phonetics. It gives the reader some scientific background into the field of Phonetics and the persons who, in a way, inspired Shaw to the characters. It also includes some personal opinions on the play.

In Pygmalion’s plot, Higgins, a phonetics expert, makes a friendly bet with his colleague Colonel Pickering that he can transform the speech and manners of Liza, a common flower girl, and present her as a lady to fashionable society. He succeeds, but Liza gains independence in the process, and leaves her former tutor because he is incapable of responding to her needs.

Pygmalion has a tightly-constructed plot, rising conflict, and other qualities of the “well-made play,” a popular form at the time. Shaw, however, revolutionized the English stage by disposing of other conventions of the well-made play; he discarded its theatrical dependence on prolonging and then resolving conflict in a sometimes contrived manner for a theater of ideas grounded in realism. Shaw was greatly influenced by Henrik Ibsen, who he claimed as a forerunner to his theatre of discussion or ideas. Ibsen’s A Doll House, Shaw felt, was an example of how to end a play indeterminately, leading the audience to reflect upon character and theme, rather than simply entertaining them with a neatly-resolved conclusion.

All plays of Shaw meet the major standards presented by Brecht to modern theatre, particularly: the theatre should aspire «to represent human nature as giving in to change and depending on a class association».

The high interest of Shaw with character and social standing relation especially proves the fact that Shaw has made radical character transformation the main theme of the play «Pygmalion». Entirely clear the intention pursued by Shaw, having named the play a name of the mythical king. Name ‘Pygmalion’ should remind that Eliza Doolittle has been created in the same way as Galatea by Pygmalion. The person can be formed by person that is a lesson of this, by own recognition of Shaw, «intensively and meaningly didactic» play. It is that lesson for which Brecht called, demanding that «construction of one figure was carried depending on a construction of other figure because in the life we mutually form each other».

Among literary critics there is an opinion, that Shaw’s plays more than plays of other playwrights propagandize certain political ideas. The doctrine about changeability of a human nature and its dependence on a class association is not that other, as the doctrine about social determinacy. The play «Pygmalion» is the good study-book in which the determinism issues are considered. Even the author considered it as "the outstanding didactic play».

In order to show how radically can be changed a person Shaw chose the method of transition from one extreme measure into another. If such radical change of the person probable in a considerably short time the spectator should tell to itself, that then is possible also any other changes of a human being.

Here is what Professor Higgins thinks:

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

Bernard Shaw gave a lot of attention to language problems. The play had a serious task: Shaw wished to attract the attention of the English public to phonetics. He stood up for creation of the new alphabet which to a greater extent correspond to the sounds of the English language than nowadays existing and which would facilitate a problem of studying of this language to children and foreigners.

To this problem Shaw repeatedly came back throughout his life and according to his will the big sum has been left for the creation of the new English alphabet.

Shaw, perhaps, the first has realized omnipotence of language in a society, its exclusive social role about which indirectly in the same years psychoanalysis has started talking. Shaw has told about it in placard-instructive but from that is not less ironic-fascinating “Pygmalion”. Professor Higgins, let and in the narrow special sphere, but nevertheless has outstripped structuralism and post structuralism which in the second half of the century will make the ideas of "discourse" and “totalitarian language practices” their central theme.

THE NOTE TAKER (Higgins). You see this creature with her curbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days.

Thus in «Pygmalion» Shaw masterfully has connected two themes equally exciting him: a problem of a social inequality and a problem of the classical English language. Act by act, word by word we understand that the set of behaviour, that is the form and the speech maintenance, a manner of judgment and the thoughts, habitual acts and typical reactions of people are adapted for the conditions of their environment. The subjective being and the objective world correspond each other and mutually penetrate each other.

From the author the big expense of drama means was required to convince of it each spectator. Shaw has found this means in systematical application of alienation effect forcing the characters from time to time to act in another environment that then step by step to return them into their own environment, skillfully creating at the beginning false representation concerning their present essence then this impression gradually and methodically alters.

Logic, the didactics and following to the concept of determinism so peculiar to Shaw force the reader to ponder upon each word to analyze each action of characters. The iceberg style is felt when deeply complicated social issues and philosophical views of the author are hidden under simple, apparently, displays of characters. Shaw prefers simple and compound sentences to complex ones. At the same time Shaw’s works are full of paradoxes, and “Pygmalion” is not exclusion.

"What is life but a series of inspired follies?"

"Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble."

"Happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby!"

The Shavian forethought is felt in the whole play. Even the interjections can not be changed by the actors. The interjections and grammatical mistakes is not used by Shaw simply as a comedian colouring but to expose the class distinction and to show how miserable is a person who can not explain his thoughts and resorts to different primitive sound combinations.

1. LIZA [protesting extremely] Ah--ah--ah--ah--ow--ow--oooo!!! I ain't dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did.
2. LIZA [overwhelmed] Ah--ah--ow--oo!

HIGGINS. There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah--ah--ow--oo! No use explaining.

Though on a genre «Pygmalion» can be considered as a comedy with the elements of narration like in a romance. In calling Pygmalion a romance (its subtitle is “A Romance in Five Acts”), Shaw was referencing a well-established literary form (not usually employed in theatre), to which Pygmalion does not fully conform. (Shaw was aiming to provoke thought by designating his play thusly.) The term romance does not imply, as it was misinterpreted to mean by many of Shaw’s contemporaries, a romantic element between Liza and Higgins. Since the middle ages, romances have been distinguished from more realistic forms by their exotic, exaggerated narratives, and their idealized characters and themes. Shaw playfully suggests Pygmalion is a romance because of the almost magical transformations which occur in the play and the idealized qualities to which the characters aspire.

Shaw broke both with the predominant intellectual principle of his day, that of “art for art’s sake,” as well as with the popular notion that the purpose of the theatre was strictly to entertain. Refusing to write a single sentence for the sake of either art or entertainment alone, Shaw openly declared that he was for a theater which preached to its audience on social issues. Edward Wagenknecht wrote in A Guide to Bernard Shaw that Shaw’s plays “are not plays: they are tracts in dramatic form.” He further reflected a popular perception of Shaw’s plays as intellectual exercises by stating that Shaw “has created one great character — G.B.S. [George Bernard Shaw] — and in play after play he performs infinite variations upon it.” Thus, in his day Shaw was viewed as succeeding despite his dramatic technique rather than because of it. Wagenknecht again: “it is amazing that a man whose theory of art is so patently wrong should have achieved such a place as Shaw has won.”

Though his plays do tend towards ideological discussion rather than dramatic tension, Shaw succeeded because he nevertheless understood what made a play theatrical, wrote scintillating dialogue, and always created rich, complex characters in the center of a philosophically complex drama. Among his character creations are some of the greatest in the modern theatre, especially the women: Major Barbara, Saint Joan, Liza Doolittle. Also, Shaw’s deep belief in the need for social improvement did not prevent him from having a wry sense of humor, an additional component of his dramatic technique which helped his plays, Pygmalion most predominantly, bridge a gap between popular and intellectual art.

In view of careful underlining of influence of environment the spectator easily could have a false representation as if characters in the world of heroes of Shaw entirely give in to restriction by influence of environment. For the prevention of this undesirable mislead Shaw with similar carefulness has brought in the play the thesis about existence of natural abilities and their value for this or that individual. This position is concretized at once in all four personages of the play: Liza, Higgins, Doolittle and Pickering.

In «Pygmalion» as well as in many products of B.Shaw the idea about boundless possibilities of the person lays. The spectator understands, that Eliza has become the lady not only due to the fact that she has been taught to dress and speak as the lady, but also due to her persistence and mental abilities. But “Pygmalion” would not be Shavian if there were no didactics, contrasts and many-sidedness. The instructiveness of the play consists in synthesis — determinative for a human being is its public relation to other people. But the public relation is something more, than unilateral behaviour of the person and the unilateral reference with it. The public relation includes two parties: behaviour and the reference. Eliza from the flower-girl becomes the lady due to that fact that simultaneously with her behaviour changed the treatment with her which she felt in her society.

Shaw masterful conducts creation and comparison of characters and on an example of his heroes brightly opens defects and advantages of various class groups. At the same time he allocates people of one class with habits peculiar to people of absolutely different class. Thus, characters of plays of Shaw become closer and more transparent to readers and spectators. In Shaw’s plays a person is a sensitive, impressionable not an amebic passive subject.

From the very beginning this dramatics is untypical. Introduction is devoted to phonetics, and at the end imposed the idea that Higgins and Liza should be together. «Pygmalion» is a work of Shaw and such an ending would have been misery for his characters.

*The Critical Heritage*, criticized many aspects of the production but had qualified praise for the play, “a puzzling work.” Aware that Shaw usually “does not use the drama merely as a vehicle for telling stories,” the critic expressed a curiosity about what “the foundation idea” of Pygmalion might be. “Curiosity, in the present instance,” however, “remains unsatisfied. There are plenty of ideas, but none is predominant.”