

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING PEACE AND JUSTICE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 'PYGMALION' AND 'MAJOR BARBARA'

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Abstract:

George Bernard Shaw, a renowned playwright and social critic, explores the transformative influence of education in challenging societal norms and advocates peace and justice in his works. This research paper critically examines "Pygmalion" and "Major Barbara." Shaw's literary portrayal of education as a catalyst for societal change, focusing on the characters' journeys and the thematic underpinnings of his plays:

The paper commences with an exploration of "Pygmalion," delving into the character of Eliza Doolittle and the profound impact of education on her social mobility. Shaw's narrative challenges rigid class structures and highlights the potential of education to disrupt societal hierarchies, presenting a nuanced perspective on the power dynamics inherent in education. In "Major Barbara," where Shaw probes the ethical complexities surrounding wealth, philanthropy, and societal obligations. The character of Barbara serves as a focal point for examining the clash between idealism and practicality, prompting discussions on moral implications of education and its role in shaping ethical perspectives.

Literary devices such as character development, and thematic explorations within these plays, this research paper investigates Shaw's advocacy for holistic approach to education, importance of critical thinking, empathy, and moral awareness as essential components of education system geared towards fostering a more just and harmonious society.

Key Words: Transformative, Societal Norms, Just, Harmonious Society, Hierarchy.

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Introduction:

George Bernard Shaw, through his seminal works "Pygmalion" and "Major Barbara," provides profound insights into the transformative potential of education in fostering societal change, particularly in the pursuit of peace and justice. This paper delves into Shaw's exploration of education's pivotal role in challenging societal norms, addressing class distinctions, and advocating for ethical responsibility.

Furthermore, the paper contextualizes Shaw's insights within the broader discourse on education's societal impact, linking his themes to contemporary discussions on social justice, equity, and the transformative potential of education in addressing systemic inequalities.

Through a comprehensive analysis of Shaw's literary works, this research paper aims to elucidate the multifaceted role of education in promoting peace, justice, and societal reform. It seeks to inspire further scholarly inquiry into the relevance of Shaw's perspectives in modern educational frameworks and their implications for creating a more equitable and compassionate world.



"Pygmalion": Disrupting Class Hierarchies through Education:

In "Pygmalion," Shaw unravels the story of Eliza Doolittle, showcasing the profound impact of education on individual transformation. Eliza's journey from a lower-class flower girl to a refined lady challenges traditional perceptions of class and identity, underscoring education's power to dismantle social hierarchies and advocate for equality.

a. Eliza Doolittle's Transformation and Assertiveness:

Eliza's journey from a Cockney flower girl to a refined lady is a central theme. Shaw explores the impact of Professor Henry Higgins' experiment, highlighting the transformative power of education and language. This transformation sparks debates on the ethics of Higgins' motives and Eliza's agency in her own transformation. Shaw's portrayal of Eliza's transformation from a lower-class flower girl to a refined lady underscores the transformative power of education. This transformation challenges the rigid class structure prevalent in society, highlighting the potential of education to break down social barriers. Eliza receives education in speech and manners from Professor Henry Higgins, her newfound linguistic proficiency and refined demeanor become symbols of her education. This education grants her access to social spaces previously restricted due to her class, highlighting the empowering aspect of learning.

b. Social Mobility, Class and Identity:

Through Eliza's journey, the play critiques the notion of fixed social class, emphasizing how education can serve as a vehicle for social mobility. It prompts discussions on the opportunities and limitations that education presents in the quest for societal equality. The play challenges societal norms surrounding class and identity. It questions whether education and speech refinement can alter one's social standing and identity fundamentally. This theme resonates with discussions about social mobility and the limitations faced by individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

c. Gender, Power Dynamics and Assertive Autonomy in Education:

Shaw's narrative also unveils the power dynamics inherent in education. It raises questions about the motivations behind education and whether it merely serves as a tool for assimilation or holds the promise of genuine empowerment. Shaw touches upon gender dynamics as Eliza gains education and independence. Her newfound assertiveness challenges traditional gender roles, raising questions about autonomy, self-determination, and the societal expectations placed on women. Her assertiveness emerges gradually as she gains confidence in her acquired skills. Her demands for respect, recognition of her worth, and refusal to be treated as a mere experiment by Higgins illustrate her growing sense of autonomy. For instance, her assertive response to Higgins's dismissive attitude after the embassy ball is a pivotal moment where she asserts her independence. Eliza asserts her dignity and independence, challenging Higgins's disregard for her feelings. Her confrontation highlights her refusal to be manipulated solely for his academic pursuits. Eliza's transformation challenges traditional gender roles. Her ambition to improve her circumstances and Higgins's acknowledgment of her as more than a "squashed cabbage leaf" challenges the notion of women confined to domestic roles. Shaw presents Eliza as a woman seeking self-improvement and agency beyond societal

expectations. Eliza's visit to Mrs Higgins: Her desire for acceptance in a different social setting portrays her aspiration for autonomy beyond her teacher-student relationship with Higgins, showcases her desire to fit into a different societal mould.

d. Questioning Patriarchal Norms:

The interactions between Eliza and the male characters, especially Higgins, Colonel Pickering, and her father, expose the underlying patriarchy. Eliza's pushback against being treated as an object for male experimentation or a decorative item demonstrates her resistance to conforming to gendered stereotypes.

e. Gender Dynamics in Speech and Conduct:

The scene at the races: Eliza's refined speech and conduct, juxtaposed with other women's behavior, challenge the societal expectations of femininity and reveal the transformative power of education in altering perceptions of class and gender.

These examples from key scenes in "Pygmalion" illustrate Eliza's journey towards autonomy, her challenges to societal norms, and Shaw's commentary on gender dynamics, emphasizing the transformative impact of education on women's agency and societal roles.

'Major Barbara': Ethical Complexities and Societal Obligations:

a. Barbara's Moral Conflict:

'Major Barbara' delves into the ethical dilemmas surrounding wealth, power, and social responsibility. Shaw's protagonist, Barbara, embodies the struggle between idealism and pragmatism. Her confrontation with the morality of using ill-gotten wealth for philanthropy prompts critical reflection on justice and the ethical implications of societal structures. Shaw presents Barbara as a character grappling with the ethical dilemma of using wealth acquired through questionable means for philanthropic purpose. Her struggle represents the clash between idealism and practicality, sparking debates on the moral implications of education.

b. Wealth, Ethics, and Salvation Army:

The play examines the morality of wealth acquired through the arms trade, with Andrew Undershaft, a munitions manufacturer, juxtaposed against Barbara, a Salvation Army officer. Barbara's upbringing in the Salvation Army underlines her strong ethical foundation. Her education within this context shapes her idealistic belief in helping the poor and her commitment to social service, illustrating the impact of educational upbringing on moral values. It delves into the conflicting notions of morality and philanthropy, prompting discussions on the responsibility of wealth and the complexities of ethical decision-making.

c. Conflict between Idealism and Pragmatism:

Shaw presents Barbara as torn between her idealistic beliefs and the pragmatic realities of the world. Her struggle to reconcile these conflicting ideals embodies the broader societal tension between ethical principles and practical necessities, shedding light on the challenges faced by individuals striving for societal change. Barbara's encounter with her father, Andrew Undershaft, challenges her ethical convictions. Undershaft's wealth derived from the arms trade conflicts with Barbara's idealism, forcing her to reevaluate her moral

stance. This clash of values underscores the complexity of ethical decision-making.

d. Critique of Institutional Structures:

Through Undershaft's character and his critique of societal institutions, Shaw challenges conventional notions of morality upheld by religious and social institutions. He raises thought-provoking questions about the influence of power, wealth, and individual agency in effecting change within these structures.

e. Education and Ethical Awareness:

The play prompts reflections on the ethical responsibilities instilled through education. It delves into the notion that education should not only impart knowledge but also cultivate ethical awareness, urging individuals to critically examine the societal structures they are a part of. Their discussions regarding the morality of wealth, power, and the responsibilities of the privileged shed light on Barbara's ethical dilemma. Her education within the Salvation Army frames her arguments, illustrating the influence of her upbringing on her ethical reasoning.

Barbara's interactions with the disadvantaged at the shelter reflect her educational approach to ethics. Her teachings and guidance to those in need exemplify her commitment to applying her ethical beliefs in practice, inspired by her education within the Salvation Army.

The influence of Undershaft's arguments on Barbara's ethical viewpoint exposes the complexities of ethical decision-making. Her education and subsequent exposure to conflicting viewpoints challenge her idealism, prompting a reevaluation of her beliefs.

Interconnected Themes:

Both plays interconnect through their exploration of societal structures, ethical dilemmas, and the transformative power of education. "Pygmalion" questions the impact of education on class and identity, while "Major Barbara" grapples with ethical conflicts amidst societal obligations. They collectively underscore Shaw's critiques of societal norms and institutions, advocating for introspection, critical thinking, and societal reform.

Holistic Education for Societal Change:

Shaw's works advocate for a holistic approach to education. They emphasize the importance of nurturing critical thinking, empathy, and moral awareness in educational curricula to cultivate individuals who actively challenge injustices and advocate for societal change.

Conclusion:

Through the analysis of Shaw's literary works, this paper seeks to elucidate the multifaceted role of education in promoting peace, justice, and societal reform. Shaw's literature advocates for a holistic education that extends beyond academic learning, emphasizing the cultivation of critical thinking, empathy, and self-awareness. His works prompt readers to question societal norms, challenge injustices, and advocate for a more equitable world. Through Shaw's characters and their journeys, educators gain valuable insights into education's potential to instill values that drive proactive contributions to peace and justice in society. The depth and complexity of these themes explore the nuances of Shaw's social commentary and his views on the intersections of education, ethics, and societal change. They serve as poignant reflections of the broader societal challenges and ethical quandaries

that persist in contemporary times, inviting continual analysis and interpretation.

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