

**Confessions of an Artist : Pygmalion**

" And the cow crunching with depress'd head  
Surpasses any statue."

Whitman, *Song of Myself*

The perennial popularity of *Pygmalion* is a revelation for it demonstrates yet again the success of the superficial elements of the play in disguising its disturbing — even tragic — heart. The subtitle of the play calls it "A Romance in Five Acts," and appropriately enough the plot is modelled on two extremely well-known romances, one a legend and the other a fairy-tale. In the Shavian reconstruction of the legend Higgins is Pygmalion and Eliza is Galatea : the flower-girl at Covent Gardens is a statue without a soul, the successful self-assured woman born at the ambassador's garden party is, or is supposed to be, Higgins's creation.

The similarity with the Cinderella story is equally obvious. A frowzy girl in rags, living in ignorance, poverty and filth is changed, as if by magic, into a duchess and entralls everybody at the party. If the play were to end in the third act, the fragment would be little more than the recasting of a fairy-tale in a modern garb.

The two stories have one thing in common — both gorge the common man's appetite for a perfect ending, since the

natural ending of a legend or a fairy-tale is, " And they lived happily ever after." It is not surprising, therefore, that the form should try to impose its natural conclusion on the play. The persistent attempts by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who threw a flower at Eliza before the fall of the curtain ; by Gabriel Pascal, whose film, made in Shaw's life-time, ended with hints of an imminent union between Higgins and Eliza ; and by Alan Jay Lerner, whose musical outdid every previous attempt by recapturing " one of the most beautiful love stories the world has ever taken to heart "<sup>1</sup> show how resistant the power of legend is to ironical tinkering. Thus Maurice Valency says :

It is indispensable that Cinderella have her prince at the end of the story and any other culmination is in the nature of a betrayal. Happily Shaw had the good sense to leave the way open in his play for an inference of fulfilment according to the rules of romance and *Pygmalion* has always been played in this manner...The epilogue may therefore be dismissed as an unfortunate irrelevancy....<sup>2</sup>

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Similarly Milton Crane believes that Higgins's marriage with Eliza should be the natural denouement of *Pygmalion* and that the epilogue is a piece of Shavian perversity, for the play is nothing else but a piece of orthodox comedy<sup>3</sup>.

Does the structure of the play permit such a happy

ending ? Parallels with the structure of myth or the fairy-tale are misleading. A careful reading will show that *Pygmalion* is a very different kind of play from what it has been assumed to be by Tree<sup>4</sup>, Pascal, Lerner, Crane and Valency. It is an intentional subversion of the 'original romantic models. As Bentley observes :

Actually *Pygmalion* : a *Romance* stands related to *Romance* precisely as *The Devil's Disciple* stands to *Melodrama* or *Candida* to *Domestic Drama*. It is a serious parody, a translation into the language of "natural history"<sup>5</sup>

The sense of magic and vital regeneration associated with myth and the fairy-tale is the cradle of comedy<sup>6</sup> and from its birth comedy has been nourished by such themes. The contrary process, the one unfolded by Shaw in his parody strikes at the root of comedy because it creates a new pattern according to which *Pygmalion* is not the life-giver but the life-taker. To quote Bentley again : "The Pygmalion of Romance turns a statue into a human being. The Pygmalion of 'natural history' tries to ... make of Eliza Doolittle a mechanical doll in the role of the duchess."<sup>7</sup>

When in his stage direction Shaw seeks to explain away Higgins's rudeness as mere eccentricity and his bullying of Eliza as the result of incomplete socialisation<sup>8</sup> he actually refuses to venture beyond the sunny facade of the play, for

under the skin Higgins is not Pygmalion but Frankenstein, and what is most remarkable in the play is Shaw's savage criticism — not necessarily conscious criticism — of the cult of the superman.<sup>9</sup>

This is indeed remarkable because many of Shaw's earlier heroes and heroines are mutations of the Pygmalion figure. Owen Jack and Julius Caesar are the most obvious examples, but among his heroines too, Candida and Lady Cicely, particularly the latter, are nothing if not teachers who mould their 'pupils' into completely different beings. Yet in the preface to *Misalliance* Shaw completely reverses his position when he argues:

A child is a fresh attempt to produce the just man made perfect : that is, to make humanity divine. And you will vitiate the experiment if you make the slightest attempt to abort it into some fancy figure of your own: for example, your notion of a good man or a womanly woman. If you ... begin with its own holiest aspirations, and suborn them for your own purposes, then there is hardly any limit to the mischief you may do.<sup>10</sup>

In *Pygmalion* we see Shaw's reaction against the superman, who, in seeking to make light of the holiest aspirations of a normal woman and in attempting to tamper with Nature's designs, is presented as an abortionist.

Higgins's assessment of Eliza at the portico of St. Paul's does not change substantially in the course of the play: to him she is a squashed cabbage leaf; and an "incarnate insult to the English language."<sup>11</sup> He boasts that in three months he "could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party."<sup>12</sup> Higgins speaks the language of the green-grocer and the cheap Jack, and the change that he hopes to bring about is neither real nor fundamental. He does not hope to change the cabbage into a duchess. The great difference between the fairy tale from which the play is derived and *Pygmalion* is that there is no element of magic in the latter, therefore no magical transformation.

How different Higgins is from the Pygmalion of the legend can be judged if we realize how inconsequential his boast is. He can only "pass her off" as a duchess. He can change a natural object—a vegetable—into an ersatz material—a simulated duchess. In his mind she is a thing, not a person; to create a duchess is beyond his power, so she remains fixed in his consciousness as a thing. Throughout the play his reactions show that Eliza has become for him an object, and her status is unchangeable. In the second act, when a helpless Eliza looks up to Pickering for help against a bullying Higgins, the following conversation takes place:

PICKERING [in good-humored remonstrance] Does it occur to you Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

HIGGINS [looking critically at her] Oh no, I don't think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about.<sup>13</sup>

Since in his eyes Eliza is' not a real person but a sham duchess, a cleverly designed puppet with which he has fooled the people assembling at the garden party, Higgins's interest flags the moment he is confident that Eliza will not be found out. He can think only of himself and his boredom: "I tell you, Pickering, never again for me. No more artificial duchesses."<sup>14</sup> He is very disagreeably surprised when Eliza insists that there is a second person in the story and another point of view as well, and is outraged when Eliza, a mere puppet in his eyes, claims to be a living person, the actual winner of the bet :"You won my bet ! You ! Presumptuous insect ! I won it. "<sup>15</sup>

The importance of this utterance, in which Higgins calls Eliza an insect, can be gauged if we make the proper distinction between such ejaculations and Higgins's normal habit of mixing highhandedness and cajolery. Among the Maxims for Revolutionists in *Man* and *Superman* is the cardinal maxim that "the unconscious self is the real genius."<sup>16</sup> How firmly Shaw himself subscribes to this view can be grasped if we realize that in play after play the climactic scene is also the moment of revelation in which the real but hidden nature of the characters flashes out. When Higgins calls Eliza an insect he reveals his essential nature hidden from his conscious self as surely as

Marchbanks , Morell, Dick Dudgeon and Anderson, Lady Cicely and Brassbound reveal their real and undiscovered selves in one sudden flash. We are made to realize that the image of Higgins as a great genial baby is a bogus image like the image of Marchbanks as a weakling or of Candida as the virgin Mother.

In *Pygmalion* the encounter between Higgins and Eliza in the fourth act is the moment of reckoning that the three preceding acts lead up to. It is the supreme dramatic moment of the play, the moment that decides the final configuration of relationships. True, Higgins regains self-control after a while and tells Eliza that he has made a woman of her, but by then Eliza is strong enough to despise his empty conciliatory signals, she knows that Higgins tries to metamorphose a human being into something less than human, that he thinks nothing of sacrificing a woman to his egotistic obsession.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth act shows the rebirth of Eliza through her cathartic experience. It also determines the ending of the play, putting a happy union between Higgins and Eliza beyond its pale.<sup>18</sup> Besides, it also shows the irrelevance of Shaw's remarks on the ending of the play. In the epilogue Shaw thinks, or pretends to think, that Eliza ruled out marriage with Higgins because that is what every young woman being free to choose would do.<sup>19</sup> He also speaks of "Higgins's formidable powers of resistance to the charm that prostrated

Freddy at the first glance...<sup>20</sup> Shaw argues that Eliza chose the way she did because "she was instinctively aware that she could never obtain a complete grip on him, or come between him and his mother (the first necessity of the married woman)."<sup>21</sup>

Shaw's explanation puts the reader on a false trail, because Eliza would never have thrown the slippers at Higgins's face had she not nurtured a secret love for him. That is the moment when she learns that what is wrong with Higgins is not merely his manners for she realises that in his eyes she will never be more than an attractive puppet. She realises, in other words, that there is something in Higgins that is dead and inhibits germination, and to be reborn as a living woman she must cut herself away from him. At this point we realize how little the story of Higgins and Eliza has in common with the story of Pygmalion and Galatea or with the story of Cinderella and her prince and how profoundly it resembles Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken*.

*Pygmalion* is the record of Shaw's revolt against himself, the revolt of the artist against the egotism of the artist just as *When We Dead Awaken* is Ibsen's most scathing self-criticism. Both plays reveal that the artist, when he is not also human, is not superhuman but subhuman, a sick monomaniac. Higgins is ostensibly very different from Rubek in the choice of his vocation ---- as a phonetician with

elaborate instruments in a well-fitted laboratory, he is an example of the scientist rather than the artist. Yet, though phonetics does play a part in the plot, the dramatic tension is created by the relationship between a man of genius — a creator — and the human being whom he uses as his medium. In this Higgins resembles Pygmalion, the mythical artist. Higgins himself speaks of his Miltonic mind<sup>22</sup>, he also compares himself with the maker of the world.<sup>23</sup> Shaw undoubtedly wanted to seize on that part of Higgins which resembled the Shavian artist.<sup>24</sup>

To Rubek and Higgins what counts is their work — the quality of the sculpture or the extent of change in Eliza's speech — and not the woman who serves as medium or model. In each case the human point of view is retained not by the artist but by the woman used by him.

The climactic fourth act brings out the vacuousness of Higgins's soul. Far from being able to understand Eliza's sudden burst of temper when she throws his slippers at him, he smugly attributes it to mere nervousness. Standing on the brink of a precipice and realising suddenly that she has wasted her affection on a soulless machine, she cries out in anguish : " Whats to become of me ? Whats to become of me ? " An unruffled Higgins shoots back: " How the devil do I know whats to become of you ? What does it matter what becomes of you ?"<sup>25</sup>

Ibsen treats the same relationship, makes the same

indictment of the artist's egotism in *When We Dead Awaken*. The fact that Ibsen's denunciation is more undisguised can be explained by the major difference between the two dramatists: the elder playwright was not pulled in opposite directions by the conflict between his philosophy and the truth felt in his bones. With the younger man, what he wanted to see often stood in the way of what he actually saw. What Irene says to Rubek may well be, with minor modifications, the substance of Eliza's unspoken words when she throws the slippers at Higgins :

IRENE (Coldly as before) I want to tell you something.

Arnold.

RUBEK Well ?

IRENE I never loved your art before I met you. Nor afterward, either.

RUBEK But the artist Irene ?

IRENE I detest the artist.

RUBGEK The artist in me, too ?

IRENE Most of all, in you. Whenever I <sup>undressed</sup>  
myself and stood there naked for you, I hated you,  
Arnold ——

RUBEK (INTENSELY) Irene, you didn't. That isn't true !

IRENE I hated you because you could stand  
there so unmoved ——

RUBEK (laughs) Unmoved ? You believe that ?

IRENE So infuriatingly self-controlled, then. And

because you were an artist. Not a man '<sup>26</sup>

Both Rubek and Higgins are essentially similar in their attitudes to the women who love them or once loved them, but Ibsen is more pitiless in grasping the similarity between the artist and the killer. Ulfheim, the bear-hunter in Ibsen's play, drives home a point which just as appropriately applies to Higgins. He says to Maja :

We both like working with hard material, ma'am— both I and your husband. He likes wrestling with blocks of marble, I imagine—— and I wrestle with the hard sinews of bears. And both of us force our material down under control at last. Become lord and master over it. We never give up till we've overcome it, no matter how much it fights back.<sup>27</sup>

In dominating and killing the artist is not very dissimilar from the bear-hunter. A number of times Irene reminds Rubek that he has killed her: "I gave you my young living soul. And that left me empty inside. Soulless. (Her eyes fixed on him) That's why I died, Arnold."<sup>28</sup>

Higgins conforms to Ulfheim's description even more perfectly than Rubek because he tries to force his "material down under control" much more savagely, he unsuccessfully tries to kill Eliza, so to say, but he tries so because he himself is spiritually a dead man and pretends to see in such death a higher principle than Eliza's life. He has

endless disdain for Eliza's life, for he feels that she wants to be governed by a thick pair of lips and a thick pair of boots. Throughout the play the physical aspect of Eliza's life elicits from Higgins both contempt and disgust for it is associated in his mind with the squashed cabbage leaf, with the gutter and with gross sensuality. His Miltonic mind has at least the Miltonic contempt for the earthiness of a woman's life. Rubek is more sensitive and he realises that it is he who had driven Irene on to the turntable where she exposed her naked body to hundreds of men. Irene ruefully remarks: "That love that belongs to the life on earth— this lovely, miraculously earthly life — this life full of mysteries — that love is dead in us both."<sup>29</sup>

It is curious that while Higgins, in line with other Shavian supermen, refuses to recognise any loveliness in the "love that belongs to life on earth," Shaw himself, in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, judges and condemns Rubek by Irene's values, the values which Shaw's heroes so conspicuously reject :

Take a man and a woman at the highest pitch of natural ability and charm yet attained, and enjoying all the culture that modern art and literature can offer them ; and what does it all come to ? Contrast them with an essentially uncivilized pair, with a man who lives for hunting and eating and ravishing and whose morals are those of the bully with the strong hand : in short a

man from the stone age as we conceive it... and couple him with a woman who has no interest or ambition in life except to be captured by such a man (and of these we have certainly no lack). Then face this question. What is there to choose between the two pairs ? Is the cultured gifted man less hardened, less selfish towards the woman, than the paleolithic man ? Is the woman less sacrificed, less enslaved, less dead spiritually in the one case than in the other ? Modern culture...shrieks at the question as an insult...Ibsen's reply is that the sacrifice of the woman of the stone age to fruitful passions which she herself shares is as nothing compared to the wresting of the modern woman's soul to gratify the imagination and stimulate the genius of the modern artist, poet, and philosopher. He shews us that no degradation ever devized or permitted is as disastrous as this degradation; and through it women die into luxuries for men, and yet can kill them... and... what remains to be seen as perhaps the most interesting of all imminent social developments is what will happen "when we dead awaken." <sup>30</sup>

The stark contrast between the implicit value system adopted in the essay and the one in *Pygmalion* is astonishing : in the play Higgins adopts the famous Shavian posture of the superman who transcends the all-too-human. In the epilogue

Shaw seems to justify the decision of both Higgins and Eliza in rejecting each other and seems to accept Higgins's behaviour as normal.

Yet when Higgins is presented with a different name in a play that has a different authorial signature, he immediately grasps the fact the Higgins is less than human, that he is dead and induces death. Underlying his criticism of *When We Dead Awaken* is the recognition "that love that belongs to life on earth "is miraculous and its absence makes the most accomplished artist a living corpse.

There can be no doubt about the intimate relationship between the two plays. Not only do the plays subject the artist to the demanding test of humanity and find him wanting, even single incidents---- incidents that are seminally important ---- found in Ibsen are echoed in Shaw. In *When We Dead Awaken* Irene can never forgive Rubek for regarding those beautiful days in which they came into close contact with each other as a mere episode; for those days alone gave a meaning to her life, made the flower of love—earthly love—— blossom and fill her with yearning. In the *Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw remarks :

And the reward [of Irene] is that when the work is finished and the statue achieved, he says "Thank you for a priceless EPISODE ", at which significant word, revealing as it does that she has, after all, been nothing to him but a means to an end, she leaves him

and drops out of his life.<sup>31</sup>

Yet that is exactly how Higgins sees Eliza. He sees the experiment as a tiring episode : " I tell you Pickering never again for 'me. No more artificial duchesses. The whole thing has been simple purgatory. "<sup>32</sup> Even Pickering shares his perspective when he congratulates Higgins saying that the success is " a triumph for you ".<sup>33</sup>

How does one account for the fact that Shaw seems so eager to endow Higgins with generosity and high-mindedness while he clearly sees the analogous figure in Ibsen's play for what he is — a consuming egotist ?

I have tried to show in my analysis of Shaw's novels and the plays preceding *Pygmalion* that through his work Shaw presents his own self-conflict. One of the most enduring Shavian masks is that of the superman. Shaw's drama is enriched by the conflict between his cultivated self-image and that which in the language of psychoanalysis is known as the id. The conflict between the urge to be a Nietzschean superman and the demands of the all-too-human is the wellspring of Shaw's plays. That the central conflict needed to be enacted almost endlessly in so many novels and plays bears testimony both to the personal origin of the conflict and to the brittleness of the victory of the persona. For such a man it would be only natural to read *When We Dead Awaken* as Ibsen's confession. Thus, though he himself stoutly resists any such interpretation in his plays —

tracing the key figures to De Quincey or Henry Sweet but never to himself — he unerringly sees Rubek as Ibsen's self-portrait. Ibsen "knew quite well that he was one of the greatest men living ; so he simply said " Suppose Me to be a sculptor instead of a playwright " and the thing was done.<sup>34</sup>

This unexpected observation holds the key to almost all of Shaw's plays but when he transposes Ibsen's play into the Shavian key, and in the epilogue plays Higgins's advocate, it is difficult not to suspect that the personal element in the play is responsible for the volte-face. Shaw can see like any normal man that Higgins, when he appears under the guise of Rubek, is inimical to the spontaneity of life, but if his critical apparatus deserts him when he studies his own play it is because all his life Shaw sought to escape the pain of being Eliza; the condition of Higgins presented him with a poise that he always consciously yearned for : it was the star to which he had hitched his philosophical wagon.

Ibsen does not allow his play to end in despair. Rubek and Irene have two choices left to them : either to accept their spiritual death and to return to their cold tombs or to raise themselves from the dead by a miraculous effort. They choose the way of the miracle. Rubek responds to Irene's call and the two go up the hazardous snow fields. Rubek once killed Irene's soul and died through her death, now the two walk out of their graves to climb the dangerous

play thus affirms a great paradox, perhaps the greatest paradox in life, that the final test of life is death, which thus becomes the most important fact of life.

Such an ending is beyond Shaw. He cannot allow himself to recognise any value in tragedy since that would militate against the utilitarian ethics on which his philosophy is founded.<sup>36</sup> Thus *Pygmalion* could have ended in only two ways : it could have ended where *When We Dead Awaken* would have ended if Rubek had not rallied to the call of Irene, which means that it could have ended in the awareness and acceptance of spiritual death, in bitter hopelessness; or it could have ended in a sudden artistic apostasy with the author superimposing a different play on the one already written. Shaw took the second course and through the epilogue he made a vain attempt to shift the dramatic focus from the study of dehumanization to the depiction of an unconvincing transformation. Higgins becomes the fairy who changes the girl in rags into a duchess. Shaw also takes care to show that the Cinderella of the play is merely a product of magic, she is the rabbit who can at any time be changed back into a handkerchief ; for Higgins's rabbit, like his handkerchief, is merely the product of his sleight of hand. The Eliza who pits herself against the might of Higgins and shows that it is Higgins who is the doll — it is he who cannot wake from the dead — suddenly relapses into her old self, marries the empty-headed Freddy, displays

no acumen for business or any constructive activity other than love-making, and constantly borrows from Higgins to let her husband live like a dandy.

Higgins actually becomes an indulgent god who chuckles at the reflexes of his duchess. The Eliza of the epilogue merely confirms Higgins's predictions about her. We remember that Higgins never claimed to be able to change her into a real duchess, he only said he would make her "pass off as a duchess." The Eliza of the epilogue is a triumph of Higgins, the triumph of fine speech, fine manners and fine gestures. The emptiness of her soul takes away from her the despair that Ibsen's Irene is capable of, it also excludes once for all a belated leap into humanity by Higgins --- the final version of Eliza is not only unsuited to the awakening of the dead, her inanity is enough to remove from Higgins's mind the uncomfortable suspicion that inspite of his thundering manners he may not be living after all.

It would be absurd even to entertain the idea that a superior person like Higgins can stoop to the level of marrying a dim-witted pretty woman like Eliza Doolittle, who dotes on Freddie and smothers him with kisses. In the play Higgins justifies to his mother his decision of not marrying Eliza, in the epilogue Shaw justifies the same decision. He seems to have succeeded in rewriting his play, making it a nice didactic comedy in which a girl thwarted by her socio-economic status cannot realize her ambition until

she meets a generous magician who feeds her and clothes her and makes her utter decent noises, takes her to the ambassador's garden party, makes her the cynosure of all eyes, and caps her success by removing the impediments to her union with her prince charming. All of a sudden Higgins's similarity with Rubek vanishes and he becomes a Prospero ; Freddy may be the only fly in the ointment but the reader soon learns to get over the initial uneasiness as he realises that *Pygmalion* is not Shakespeare's *Tempest* and that Freddy is the appropriate prince of a bourgeois romance.

I have tried to show in my study that such inversions are Shaw's *metier*, though perhaps nowhere is it so conspicuous as in *Pygmalion*. This is not the pattern of tragic-comedy, it is the pattern of pseudo-comedy grafted on an action that is not comic. It is the fruit of an ethical vision that time and again sacrifices the truth of art at the altar of the author's explicit moral concerns.

What is remarkable about *Pygmalion* is that the two facets of Shaw's personality — the world-betterer and the all-too-human do not fight it out on equal terms, the artistically false ending (much of which is carried beyond the play proper into the narrated epilogue) stands out like a sore thumb. *Pygmalion* stands out as a play that is denied its proper ending. Until Shaw rushes through with the inept tinkering, it gives the unmistakable impression that the

author's savage satire is directed against his own messianism. As Arnold Silver remarks:

[The] understanding [Shaw] now shows of a world-betterer , and his ridicule of him, contrast totally with the laudatory treatment of Don Juan and of Don Juan's desire to promote a better world . The later play [Pygmalion] thus rejects the "idealism" of *Man and Superman*...And when we also recall how in a late play like *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* Shaw ignores the moral turpitude of his supposedly idealistic protagonists then we are forced to conclude that he was unwilling to retain the disquieting knowledge of evil he had momentarily grasped in *Pygmalion*.<sup>37</sup>

How did the strange thing happen ? How did the demand of earthly love suddenly become so strong that it swept away like a whirlwind the philosophy of the higher self ? Borrowing from the language of *Too True to be Good* we may ask how did Shaw permit the lower centres to gain such ascendancy over the higher centres ? To find out how the play so movingly became Eliza's play rather than Higgins's, we must look briefly into the genesis of the play. Eliza was a part written for Patrick Campbell.Mrs Pat was also the original model of the character.<sup>38</sup> If the reality of Eliza's insulted womanhood is far more "moving than the airiness of Higgins's philosophical aspirations, it is

because Shaw's half-suppressed fantasies regarding Mrs Campbell got the better of the invulnerable persona that assumes in this play the character of Henry Higgins.

Shaw's judgment had always been paralysed by this extra-ordinary woman. He realised this as early as in the 1890s when he frankly admitted that the critic's judgement collapsed before this enthralling woman. Reviewing Sardou's *Fedora* Shaw remarked that if Sardou's play was not very tragic, the critic's condition was :

It is greatly to Mrs Patrick Campbell's credit that bad as the play was, her acting was worse. It was a masterpiece of failure. Not, pray observe, that Mrs Campbell herself did not succeed. The moment she was seen, our reason collapsed and our judgment failed. Every time the curtain fell there was a delirious roar. If the play was not tragic our infatuation was . I solemnly warn all and sundry that no common man's opinion of the artistic merits of that performance was worth a farthing, after the first flash of the heroine's eyes. It was not *Fedora*, but it was Circe; and I as sworn critic must make the best attempt to be Ulysses. 39

Shaw did not want to throw up the sponge without a fight with his infatuation. The struggle was not of much avail because Mrs Campbell "creates all sorts of illusions, and

gives one all sorts of searching sensations."<sup>40</sup>

It is conceivable that in *Pygmalion* Shaw wanted to give his intellect a better chance against the more elemental passion, for Henry Higgins's astringent personality has a built-in immunity against the *Odor di femina*. The excessive self control and the repression of the vital instincts produced results that were far from intended. The male figure in the play became a pitilessly satirised version of the *superman*, Shaw's own intellectual challenge to his passion crumbled. However, Shaw could not muster up enough courage to bring *Pygmalion* to its logical conclusion. In his review of *Fedora* he testified that the conflict between judgment and passion was tragic. It is a pity that the acute critic of the eighteen nineties kept the tragedy out of the play at the cost of its integrity, but it is interesting that what could have formed a legitimate part of the drama was enacted outside the play after it had been written.

During the rehearsals of *Pygmalion* the prolonged contact with Mrs Campbell turned Shaw's old infatuation into a violent passion. Not the one to submit easily to such impulses he projected himself as the amoral artist castigated in *When We Dead Awaken* and *Pygmalion*:

Shut your ears tight against this blarneying Irish liar and actor. Read no more of his letters. He will fill his fountain pen with your heart's blood, and sell your

most sacred emotions on the stage. He is a mass of imagination with no heart. He is a writing and talking machine that has worked for nearly forty years until its skill is devilish... He cares for nothing really but his mission, as he calls it, and his work.<sup>41</sup>

The similarity between his projected self and Higgins is too obvious to need further elaboration. But were he nothing more than Henry Higgins, Shaw would be safe for he could then rest in the certainty that cruel and heartless as he and his heroes might seem, as a select breed of supermen they were above the common clay of humanity. Had he been the writing machine and the relentless champion of his mission, he could have escaped such an agonising suspicion that Higgins and Rubek (before his redemption) are less than human and he, Bernard Shaw, had been deceiving himself in not recognising the fact.

In his novels and earlier plays the lover and the rhapsodist were the invariable targets of the author's ridicule. In *Man and Superman* "happiness" is the dirtiest word Tanner and Juan can bring themselves to utter. Yet Shaw was waking up to its value as he wrote to Mrs Campbell: "When I am dead let them put an inscription on 12 Hinde St. HERE A GREAT MAN FOUND HAPPINESS."<sup>42</sup>

A rhapsody that would, only a decade ago, have been used to underline the blooming folly of someone, like the sentimental poetaster Octavius sprang from his own pen:

I want my plaything that I am to throw away. I want my Virgin Mother enthroned in heaven. I want my Italian peasant woman. I want my rascallionly fellow vagabond. I want my dark lady. I want my angel-- I want my tempter. I want my inspiration, my folly, my happiness, my divinity, my madness...my day's wage, my night's dream, my darling and my star.<sup>43</sup>

Here were the unmistakable signs of a new consciousness. For once Shaw admitted implicitly that the artist's business is not to levitate above the world of a million human experiences, but to wade through them all : the richest life is the fullest life, and in that fullness the dark lady and the lighter of the seven lamps, divinity and madness, the angel and the tempter have equal roles.

This new awareness had no lasting effect on his art but at least once his blood and his bone marrow revealed to him the barrenness of his conscious artistic faith : "He is a writing and talking machine."<sup>44</sup>

He fetched his Eliza from the dream of his boyhood. In her was "an anticipation of the fulfilment of the destiny of the race",<sup>45</sup> but realising how disastrous the result would be for Shavianism he set up Higgins to wage his intellectual war for him. Shaw compensated for the forcible arrest of his vision by completing the play away from the text and away from the stage-wings. As a man he was learning things which

he previously understood only dimly and so he could now say, as he never did before : "I dare say it is good for us all to suffer."<sup>46</sup> When his dream ended and the affair with Mrs Campbell ended in a heartbreak, Shaw was definitely a changed man, impregnated with a knowledge of tragedy that is rarely evident in his works:

New years eve...Do you remember last years Eve? I am actually asking you do you remember it? Was it anything to you except that you were ill, and were determined to prevent me from seeing the new year in with Lillah and Barrie? I remember it: it tears me all to pieces... On that last New Years Eve... there was Eternity and Beauty; infinite boundless loveliness and content. I think of it with a frightful yearning, with a tragic despair; for you have wakened the latent tragedy in me, broken through my proud overbearing gaiety that carried all the tragedies of the world like feathers & stuck them in my cap and laughed.<sup>47</sup>

There was latent tragedy in *Pygmalion*, possibly there was latent despair. *Pygmalion* was the tragedy that was crying out to be written but was not written. Shaw's revolt against himself shook the foundation of his gaiety. Higgins did not carry his tragedy like a feather, nor did he laugh gaily. The curtain rang down on *Pygmalion* with Higgins's laughter, but it was mirthless raucous laughter. In his

letter to Patrick Campbell Shaw wrongly coupled despair with tragedy, but both ends were open in *Pygmalion*. With the epilogue Shaw avoided both and returned to his familiar posture of superiority. He probably hoped that a change in the ending would change the meaning of the entire play.

As if to atone for this violence on his art Shaw decided to act out in life the authentic scene that he had taken out of his play, for no criticism indictsthe ending of *Pygmalion* more strongly than the life of its author.

1. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p.141.
2. Maurice Valency. *The cart and the Trumpet*, pp.318-19.
3. Milton Crane, "Pygmalion : Bernard Shaw's Dramatic Theory and Practice," *PMLA* 66 (1951):879-885.
4. About Beerbohm Tree throwing bouquets at Eliza during the play's first production, and thus generating Shaw's disgust, see Myron Matlow, "Will Higgins Marry Eliza?", *Shavian* 12(1958):14-19.
5. Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p.143.
6. A theoretical discussion of the topic is taken up in the concluding chapter of the present study.
7. Eric Bentley, *op. cit.*, 143.
8. Shaw calls Higgins "a very impetuous baby who needs constant watching." CP IV, p.685. Higgins himself says like an inspired preacher : "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 : in short, behaving as if you are in Heaven, where there are no third class carriages and one soul is as good as another." CP IV, p.774.
9. A.M. Gibbs points out that in the last part of *Back to Methuselah* the Pygmalion image has completely dissolved into that of Frankenstein. See A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p.171. Burton also sees Higgins as a Frankenstein. Richard Burton, *Bernard Shaw : the Man and the Mask*, p.181.

10. CP IV p.20.
11. Ibid., p.680.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., pp.694-95.
14. Ibid., p. 746.
15. Ibid.,p. 747.
16. CP II, p. 791.
17. Desmond MacCarthy notes the similarity between Owen Jack and Higgins, but I think MacCarthy is seriously mistaken in viewing Higgins as a most humane person. Desmond MacCarthy, *Shaw*, p.111.
18. In his article, "On the Unpleasantness of Pygmalion", Norbert F. O' Donnell exposes the folly of sentimentalising *Pygmalion* into a romantic comedy. See *Shaw Bulletin* 2(1955):7-10.
19. CP IV, p.783.
20. Ibid., p. 784.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 776.
23. Ibid.
24. Desmond MacCarthy and Arnold Silver note the basic similarity between Higgins and Owen Jack of *Love Among the Artists*. MacCarthy, op.cit., p. 110., Arnold Silver, *Bernard Shaw : the Darker Side*, p.195.
25. CP IV, p. 748.
26. Henrik Ibsen, *The complete Major Prose Plays*, Tr. Rolf

- Fjelde, p.1070.
27. Ibid., p. 1044.
28. Ibid., p. 1055.
29. Ibid., p. 1090.
30. *Major Critical Essays*, pp. 110-11.
31. Ibid., p. 114.
32. CP IV, p. 746.
33. Ibid., p. 742.
34. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 111.
35. Ibid., p. 111.
36. The relationship between Shaw's ethics and tragedy is discussed in the last chapter.
37. Arnold Silver, op. cit., pp. 222-23.
38. Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry, "Well, I read it [Pygmalion] to a good friend of mine...and contrived that she [Mrs patrick Campbell] should be there. And she was there, reeking from Bella Donna. She saw through it like a shot. 'You beast, you wrote it for me, every line of it : I can hear you mimicking my voice in it etc etc.' And she rose to the occasion... And then-- and then - oh Ellen; and then? Why, then I went calmly to her house to discuss business with her, hard as nails, and as I am a living man, fell head over ears in love with her in thirty seconds." *The Terry Letters* , pp. 448-49.
39. *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol.I , pp. 134-35.
40. Ibid., p. 61.

41. *Collected Letters*, vol III, p. 126.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

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