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IN THE THINGS THEY CARRIED
(Yulianti)**

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THE PROTAGONIST'S STRUGGLE FOR EMANCIPATION IN G.B. SHAW'S PYGMALION: A CRITICAL THEORY APPROACH *

Yugianingrum

ABSTRACT

This article presents a discussion on the protagonist's struggle for emancipation in G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion. The discussion uses an approach based on Critical Theory, which aims at emancipation and enlightenment and is addressed to the members of disadvantaged and oppressed groups (Geuss, 1982: 55, 86). The protagonist is a flower girl who wants to be a flower shop lady but she thinks she is unable to realize her wish because of her bad language. Her struggle starts when she takes speech lessons from a professor of phonetics who boasts that he can transform her into a duchess by teaching her speech lessons. When she has finished the lessons and passed a test in an embassy party, she is disappointed to find that she has not really been transformed into a duchess. Not all people are willing to accept her as a duchess since her good achievements have been valued differently by different people. The discussion is to show how a philosophical theory can help readers understand a literary work better and how a literary work can help readers understand a philosophical theory better.

KEY WORDS

Critical Theory, enlightenment, emancipation, G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion

INTRODUCTION

A great deal has been said and written about the diversity of English, which has resulted in '... both a variety forms of English, but also a diversity of cultural contexts within which English is used in daily life...' (Graddol, 1997: 5), but it is still interesting to learn how standard English has been the subject of controversial arguments as seen in the following discussion. First, it is claimed that standard English has the potential to emancipate the disadvantaged people, specifically the underclass in the United States (Honey, 1997: 240, qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 48).

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This claim of Honey's is rejected by Wiley and Lukes (1996: 530, in Pennycook, 2001: 48), who point out that 'for all too many African Americans, the fact that mastery of the language does not ensure economic mobility or political access makes manifest the fallacy of standard English as the language of equal opportunity'. In responding to the two debatable arguments, Pennycook (2001: 48) writes that power lies in and outside language. This means that emancipation should be done not only through access to standard language forms but also through access to non-language matters.

Pennycook's interest in the relation between forms of language and forms of power seems to have the support from Giroux (1983, qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 49) through his statement that cultures are not equal as 'subordinate groups are often denied access to power, knowledge and resources that allow them to lead self-determined existences'.

Giroux's statement explains that the powerful class has made subordinate groups unable to obtain what they desire so that they will remain what they are. Consequently, the language they use is attributed to the subordinate culture and this leads to inequality of language forms. This is stressed by Pennycook (1994:13) when he says that English has become '... a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress'.

The arguments about language and power presented above are relevant to the protagonist's struggle for emancipation in Pygmalion, a famous play written by G.B. Shaw, a prominent English playwright who received a Noble Prize in 1925 for his works in literature. About Shaw's achievement, Salgado (1980: 183) points out that '... more of his plays seem likely to survive in the foreseeable future than any other twentieth century dramatists, not only on the stage but as reading texts ...'.

According to Fisher (1996: ix-x), much of Pygmalion tells about a divided class system because of Shaw's belief that people should not be limited to their birth or environment or even their speech. Furthermore, Fisher explains that Shaw was one of the first members of The Fabian Society, a socialist society founded in 1884, which was concerned with social justice, equality, and the need for the individual to strive for some kind of perfection. Moreover, in that period '...it was thought that 1 per cent of the

population owned nearly 70 per cent of the country's wealth—such was the division between what came to be called upper class and other classes' (Fisher, 1996: xvii).

Shaw took the title Pygmalion for his play from the name of Pygmalion, a sculptor in Greek mythology who falls so much in love with Galatea, the statue that has become a beautiful woman. The play was made into both a film and a stage musical in 1958 as My Fair Lady, written by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe. According to Purdom (1966: 247), in the film and musical versions Higgins ends up a happy man when finally Eliza decides to come back to him (Higgins), which indicates that 'Shaw to some degree compromised with his own sense of dramatic fitness'.

Shaw's Pygmalion is a story about Eliza Doolittle, a flower girl who suffers from her poor life, which she thinks is caused by her bad language. She then takes speech lessons from Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics who boasts that he can transform Eliza into a duchess through speech lessons. However, at the end of the story, Eliza—after her painful attempts-- realizes that her (good) achievement in learning how to speak 'good' English has not really transformed her into a duchess.

To show that the protagonist's struggle is relevant to all the arguments about language and power above, this article presents a discussion which is based on a Critical Theory approach. The discussion includes a description of the protagonist's suffering, right and wrong ideas about the suffering and things behind the wrong idea, the process of enlightenment and emancipation, and whether or not the protagonist is finally happy.

CRITICAL THEORY

Marc Poster suggests that 'Critical Theory springs from an assumption that we live amid world of pain, that much can be done to alleviate that pain, and that theory has a crucial role to play in that process'(qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 6). In real life as well as in fictional life, people suffer from their limitations and struggle for a better position, although not all of them can achieve what they want. According to Geuss (1986: 55), Critical Theory, which aims at emancipation and enlightenment, helps to make agents

aware of hidden coercion, to free them from that coercion and to put them in a position to determine where their true interests lie.

Geuss (1986: 58) explains that emancipation and enlightenment refer to a social transition from an initial state to a final state which has the following properties:

- (a) "The initial state is one of both false consciousness and error, and of 'unfree existence'.
- (b) "In the initial state false consciousness and 'unfree existence' are inherently connected so that agents can be liberated from the one only if they are also at the same time freed from the other.
- (c) "The 'unfree existence' from which the agents in the initial state suffer is a form of self-imposed coercion; their false consciousness is a kind of self-delusion.
- (d) "The coercion from which the agents suffer in the initial state is one whose 'power' or 'objectivity' derives only from the fact that the agents do not realize that it is self-imposed.
- (e) "The final state is one in which the agents are free of false consciousness they have been enlightened and free of self-imposed coercion they have been emancipated.

The explanation shows that it is the process of social change and not of language change that leads to emancipation. This is in line with Cameron's view of language and society that goes beyond a view that language reflects society: 'Critical Theory says that who you are (and are taken to be) depends on how you act' (qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 18).

If one accepts this notion of Cameron's, one will not agree with Bernstein in his saying that different social classes use different linguistic codes or, in other words, that 'who you are determines how you act' or 'how you act depends on who you are'. Bernstein's work which concerns the relation between social class, language, education, and the 'social distribution of knowledge' shows a version of cultural reproduction which is not very different from Pierre Bourdieu's (qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 122).

Bourdieu suggests that '...individuals occupy positions determined by the quantities of different types of capital they possess'; in other words, who you are (taken to be) depends on what you possess. The capital, according to him, has three forms, namely economic, social, and cultural. He then

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gives illustrations of the forms of capital in the field of Teaching forms English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): Economic form of capital is the money to pay for English classes; social form of capital refers to social connections within the field or access to certain people; cultural and linguistic forms of capital refer to ways of speaking, reading, behaving, etc. (qtd. in Pennycook, 2001: 124).

In practice, however, the possession of the three forms of capital does not guarantee that the possessors will automatically gain emancipation and enlightenment and occupy the position they desire. The reason is that none of these forms of capital matter unless what they represent is acknowledged as having legitimacy (Pennycook, 2001: 125). If the legitimacy is missing, the individual will not be able to gain emancipation. This idea is clearly seen in the discussion of the protagonist's struggle for emancipation when Higgins does not appreciate Eliza's successful appearance in an embassy party the way she expects.

However, if the theory stating that 'who you are depends on how you act' is used, the discussion will focus on the real achievements of the protagonist. She does not have to bother about other peoples attitude towards her and she does not have to depend on the way they value her achievement, either. Naturally, Eliza would be accepted as a duchess as long as she behaved as one. In other words, those who first reject to accept her as a duchess would eventually change their mind if she consistently showed them the quality of a duchess she has achieved. But in Pygmalion, after her successful appearance in an embassy party, Eliza is unable to keep showing the real quality of a duchess because she is in fact dependent on Higgins and Pickering's support.

All in all, the discussion on Critical Theory in this section has emphasized inequality, injustice, rights, wrongs, and compassion.

DISCUSSION ON THE PROTAGONIST'S STRUGGLE

This discussion is divided into parts: *Protagonist's Suffering, Right and Wrong Ideas about the Suffering and Things behind the Wrong Idea, Process of Enlightenment and Emancipation, and Is the Protagonist Finally Happy?*

The Protagonist's Suffering

Critical Theory springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle is depicted as a flower girl with very bad language, because of which, she thinks, she will not be able to become a flower shop lady. Her poor language is evident from what Higgins says to a gentleman, who actually is Colonel Pickering:

You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in a gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as Lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English.
 (Fisher, ed., 1996: 16)

Eliza knows that she is suffering from her poor life but she thinks that the source of it is only her poor language; that is why she goes to the professor to learn how to speak better English.

I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of sellin at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they wont take me unless I can talk more genteel. He said he could teach me. Well, here I am ready to pay him—not asking favor--and he treats me zif I was dirt.
 (Fisher, ed., 1996: 23)

During the learning process, Eliza still has to suffer from Higgins's way of teaching her.

[To Eliza] Now do you think you could possibly say tea? Not te-yee, mind:
 if you ever say be-yee ce-yee de-yee again you shall be dragged round the room three times by the hair of your head.
 (Fisher, ed., 1996: 50)

Eliza's suffering continues until the end of the story, which can be seen through Mrs Higgins's speech to his son when he comes to look for

Eliza: 'Eliza came this morning. She told me of the brutal way you two treated her' (Fisher, ed., 1996: 89). However, the peak of her suffering only occurs when Higgins says 'If you cant stand the coldness of my sort of life, and the strain of it, go back to the gutter. Work till youre more a brute than a human being; ...' (Fisher, ed., 1996: 102). All the things she has suffered from the beginning of the story till the end give the picture of what decision she is going to make.

Right and Wrong Ideas about the Suffering and Things behind the Wrong Idea

According to Geuss (1982: 83), agents know that they are suffering, but either do not know what the cause is or have a false theory about the cause. Eliza is right when she realizes that she is suffering from her poor life and thus she needs emancipation, but she is wrong when thinking that the source of the suffering is only her bad language. In fact, her suffering has various sources.

First, she suffers from her poor life because she has not been sufficiently educated. She does not have enough education because her parents are poor, and the government does not provide education needed by people like her. Her parents are poor because the country has a capitalistic economic system and a feudal social system, which deprive lower level people of the things they desire. Thus, the economic and social systems in Britain are two of the sources of her suffering.

Second, if Eliza's English were not poor, she would still suffer, because as to alleviate the whole pain she would also need other forms of capital, namely economic, social, and cultural (other than linguistic) forms. An example of a person with 'good' English but is unable to be emancipated is Mrs Pearce, Higgins's housekeeper. The following speech is uttered by her when she tells Higgins about Eliza's arrival:

Well, sir, she says youll be glad to see her when you know what she's come about. She's quite a common girl, sir. Very common indeed. I should have sent her away, only I thought perhaps you wanted her to talk into your machines. I hope

(Fisher, ed., 1996: 22)

Mrs Pearce's English and her behavior are good; she has acquired access to the higher society environment, but she does not possess enough money (economic form) and her role in the upper level class environment is merely as a housekeeper. Accordingly, she acts as a housekeeper and very possibly she would remain a housekeeper forever.

Third, when Eliza comes to Higgins to learn to speak better, she has no idea about how much she has to pay for the lessons. It is Pickering who offers to pay for all her expenses during the learning period. Thus, it is just lucky for her to be able to take speech lessons without having to pay for the tuition fee, the cost of living, and even for all the expensive clothes and accessories she wears; without Pickering's help she would be unable to take the speech lessons.

Fourth, Eliza has no imagination of other people's future attitude towards her attempts and achievements. Had she known that not everybody would appreciate them and thus some people would treat her as the same flower girl, she would not have accepted the professor's offer. This lack of knowledge is also one of the sources of her suffering.

Finally, Eliza never thinks about the consequences of her decision to accept Higgins's offer to learn how to speak better. When she has finished the lessons at Higgins's residence, will she automatically have a better life or will she have to go back to her old place? Her ignorance can be counted as a source of her suffering. She needs more serious thought in making a big decision like accepting the offer so that she will not have a big problem in the future. Fortunately, when the lessons and the tests are over, she finds herself more confident in making decisions.

Eliza's wrong ideas have been a result of her being uneducated. Even when she has learned to speak well, she still has shortcomings, as explained in the following quotation:

... and Eliza, though she could count money up to eighteen shillings or so, and had acquired a certain familiarity with the language of Milton from her struggles to qualify herself for winning Higgins's

bet, could not write out a bill without utterly disgracing the establishment.
(Fisher, ed., 1996: 115)

The description proves that language is not everything. Eliza has acquired some language but she has not learned many other things that are needed to pursue a better life. Those things can be acquired through education that emphasizes critical thinking, which aims at problem solving.

Process of Enlightenment and Emancipation

Eliza initially has a wrong idea about the sources of her suffering and as a flower girl she has no freedom to exist according to her desire. In Critical Theory, her wrong idea is interpreted as a form of self-imposed coercion and her inability to exist freely is a form of self-delusion. If she wants to be liberated from her 'unfree existence' or to be emancipated, she at the same time has to realize the sources of her suffering, or to be enlightened. In the story, some curious coincidences and non-coincidences help her to find ways for the realization and the liberation.

At the beginning of the story, she coincidentally overhears that a professor can transform her into a duchess by speech lessons and so she realizes that she can ask the professor to teach her. Then she goes to the professor, thinking that this is the very solution of her problem.

The next coincidence happens when she does not know how much the cost of the speech lessons is. Fortunately for her, Colonel Pickering offers to pay for all her expenses. Now she realizes the big cost she otherwise has to pay. Having been free from the financial obligation, she then is able to take the lessons.

Another coincidental happening takes place during the course. Eliza really never imagines the ordeal she has to go through. Higgins keeps intimidating her whenever she fails to perform well. Coincidentally, there is the Colonel, who always treats her politely, so that she can endure all the unpleasant things. Therefore, she is able to continue taking the lessons.

In the fourth act, after her successful appearance as a duchess at an embassy party, it is apparent that she does not expect to be treated in the

same old way by the professor. In fact, he does not treat her as a duchess, which is evident when he asks her to fetch his slippers:

I wonder where the devil my slippers are!
Eliza looks at him darkly; then rises suddenly and leaves the room.

.....
Eliza returns with a pair of large-at-heel slippers. She places them on the carpet before Higgins, and sits as before without a word.

(Fisher, 1996: 73)

A duchess surely does not fetch other people's slippers. So, after realizing that Higgins does not appreciate her achievements the way she expects, Eliza feels that she is now free to choose her future. She leaves the house and coincidentally she meets Freddy, the young man who loses his heart to her. Although she never thinks of marrying Freddy before, the meeting has made her decide to marry him because he appreciates her enough to make her happy. She tries to ignore her real feeling towards the professor.

Now, Eliza has come to realize a lot of things concerning her suffering. She has been enlightened. Consequently, she also becomes emancipated when she makes decisions for her future life. Although she has not really been transformed into a duchess, she can be 'a duchess' for some, especially for Freddy, the man she chooses to marry.

Is the Protagonist Finally Happy?

Happiness is not absolute. Being enlightened and emancipated can make Eliza happy, but her new existence can also make her unhappy. Eliza must feel happy when she realizes that she has become much better than her old existence as a flower girl. Now she can speak 'good' English; moreover, her appearance and behavior must have changed a lot.

However, when she has become like a lady, she has new suffering; that is, she needs to be treated accordingly, especially by Higgins. Inevitably, different people value her achievements differently. Higgins keeps treating her as the same Eliza. This leads to her new unhappiness and she has to

decide what to do to overcome the problem. To explain this, Shaw writes in the epilogue of the play:

Her decision will depend a good deal on whether she is really free to choose; She is therefore guided by her instinct in the matter.

Eliza's instinct tells her not to marry Higgins. ... Almost immediately after Eliza is stung into proclaiming her considered determination not to marry Higgins, she mentions that young Mr Frederick Eynsford Hill is pouring out his love to her

(Fisher, ed., 1996: 108-109)

At the end of the epilogue, Shaw decides that Eliza should marry Freddy although this young man has no money and no occupation: a decision that does not come up to the reader's expectation.

CONCLUSION

Having discussed the protagonist's struggle for emancipation in G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion, this article comes to the conclusion that Eliza Doolittle suffers from her poor life as a flower girl, therefore, she represents those who belong to the disadvantaged and oppressed group. Accordingly, she needs enlightenment and emancipation. These are the aim of Critical Theory, which emphasizes on social changes.

Initially, she has right and wrong ideas about her suffering. She knows that she suffers from her poor life, but she thinks that her poor life is caused only by her bad language. Her wrong idea has been a result of her lack of education. However, by some coincidences and non-coincidences, she comes to realize the sources of her suffering and is able to liberate herself from her 'unfree existence'. As a result, she becomes enlightened and emancipated, which is seen when she is able to make decisions for her future life: to leave Higgins and marry Freddy. The emancipation she has gained does not automatically provide her with whole happiness. This is only natural as after one problem has been overcome, there is always another to come, and that is life.

The discussion has shown the advantages of using Critical Theory in analysing a literary work. On the one hand, through a Critical Theory approach readers can understand the literary work better, and on the other hand they can also learn a lot about Critical Theory.

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