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Menis, Susanna Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and the myth of reformation: literature as discourse and an exercise in New Historicism. In: The Socio-Legal Studies Association Conference, 5-7 Apr 2017, Newcastle, UK. (Unpublished)

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Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion and the Myth of Reformation: literature as discourse and an exercise in new-historicism

To Deconstruct Pygmalion and use it to exemplify the 'reformation of the prisoner' paradigm.

To Use Pygmalion as a valid historical source suggestive of a social discourse.

To Demonstrate how the Myth of Reformation perspective is represented through Pygmalion and Bernard Shaw's own social views.

The Myth of Reformation

perspective argues that the concept of 'reforming' the prisoner has been shaped by socio-political discourses but its feasible application in practice has been insignificant; hence, it is a myth.

- Primary historical evidence.
- Prison upgrade: an experiment.
- Foundational drawback of the prison system.

The reform of the prisoner discourse has failed to recognise that prisoners indeed reform, but they reform to prison institutional life.

They looked on Elizabeth Fry as human creatures might be imagined to look upon being of a superior intelligence (p.99)



Pygmalion is the story of a flower girl transformed into a Lady by means of phonetics training.

Bernard Shaw explained that *ambitious flower-girls who read this play must not imagine that they can pass themselves off as fine ladies by untutored imitation* (preface).

New Historicism allows the use of a literary source as any other historical primary source. Advocates have drawn upon anthropology to emphasise the importance of anything produced by a culture as symbolising the culture itself.

Pygmalion and the Myth of Reformation:

- Pygmalion is inspired by the Greek mythological story of the sculptor who created a perfect ivory statue that transforms into a living woman.
- Shaw's sensitivity to class inequality: eliminate vulgarism to overcome class barriers.
- Fabian Society: *Educate, Agitate, Organise*.
- The transformation/reformation is imposed by an authority.
- In Shaw's the 'transformation' of Eliza, the flower girl, is merely temporal: superficiality of change.

What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?

(Eliza to Prof Higgins, p.102).

Gallagher C. and Greenblatt S., *Practicing New Historicism* (University of Chicago Press, 2000). Evans J., *The Politics and Plays of Bernard Shaw* (McFarland & Co, 2002). Menis S., *A Historiography of Women's Prisons: The Myth of Reformation* (PhD, 2016). Shaw B., *Pygmalion* (Penguin Classics, 1913, reprinted 2003).