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An Aesthetic Study of Transcendence and Decadence in Pygmalion of G. B. Shaw and Tawfiq AL-Hakim

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the transformative power of myth, particularly its ability to redefine and restudy narratives across different eras. Drawing on Roland Barthes' linguistic deconstruction of myth and its conceptual basis as a primitive human construction, the study aims to represent the mythological style of a consumer narrative, spanning from ancient times to modern interpretations. Utilising Kant's aesthetic analysis, the research emphasises the reconstruction of the myth of Pygmalion in the works of George Bernard Shaw (1912) and Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1942). The aesthetic analysis is approached from two aspects: the 'social' dimension, exploring decadence to transcendence in Shaw's Pygmalion, and the 'ideational' dimension, examining transcendence to decadence in Al-Hakim's Pygmalion. These aspects encapsulate the struggle between 'art' and 'life,' presenting a nuanced exploration of "free art" and Kant's analysis of 'the beautiful'. This study examines the themes of transcendence and decadence in Pygmalion, emphasising the structure of 'diversity within unity' in both plays.

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الحالات العصبية لتسيتسي دانغاريمبغا: دراسة نسوية ما بعد الاستعمار

الخلاصة:

يتعمق هذا البحث في القوة التحويلية للأسطورة، ولا سيما قدرتها على إعادة تعريف وإعادة دراسة السرديات عبر العصور المختلفة. بالاعتماد على التفكير اللغوي لرونال بارت للأسطورة وأساسها المفاهيمي كبناء إنساني بدائي، تهدف الدراسة إلى تمثيل النمط الأسطوري لسرد المستهلك، الممتد من العصور القديمة إلى التفسيرات الحديثة. ومن خلال استخدام التحليل الجمالي عند كانت. يؤكد البحث على إعادة بناء أسطورة بجماليون في أعمال جورج برنارد شو (1912) وتوفيق الحكيم (1942). يتم تناول التحليل الجمالي من جانبين: البعد الاجتماعي، وهو استكشاف الانحطاط إلى التعالي في بجماليون لجورج برنارد شو، والبعد الفكري، وهو دراسة الارتفاع إلى الانحطاط في بجماليون الحكيم. تلخص هذه الجوانب الصراع بين "الفن" و"الحياة"، وتقدم استكشافاً دقيقاً لمفهوم "الفن الحر" وتحليل "الجميل" من قبل كانت. تقدم هذه الدراسة فحصاً لموضوعات التعالي والانحطاط في الفن في بجماليون، وتؤكد على بنية فكرة "التنوع داخل الوحدة" في كلتا المسرحيتين.

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Introduction

Aesthetic, transcendence, and decadence are phrases that resound throughout art, philosophy, and culture, each with various meanings and consequences. These ideas guide people through the complex web of human existence, illuminating our quest for the sublime, the dangers of self-indulgence, and the essence of beauty. At the core of it, the word "aesthetic" alludes to the enjoyment of beauty and the sensory experiences that generate an incredible feeling of pleasure or contentment. Aesthetics are concerned with more than only the visual arts; they also include other forms of art and nature. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy concerned with investigating what constitutes beauty, how art should be evaluated, and its effect on the viewer (Dufrenne 76-101).

Because of the importance of personal taste and cultural background in determining what is aesthetically pleasing, aesthetics is inextricably bound up with subjectivity. Aesthetic experiences range from the orderly geometry of classical architecture to the bold experimentation of contemporary art, reflecting the fluidity of human perception .

Methodology

This paper follows the aesthetics theory as an approach. In contrast to the immanent and sensory emphasis of the aesthetic, transcendence aspires to connect with something beyond the self or the commonplace. Awe, astonishment, and the sensation of going beyond one's usual capabilities are common

responses to transcendent events. Spiritual, existential, or metaphysical transcendence in philosophy is a departure from the mundane into states of heightened awareness or the presence of the divine. Transcending one's material constraints and reaching a higher level of being is a common theme in many religious and philosophical traditions. Transcendent moments may be encountered in religious ceremonies, meditation, or the study of nature, allowing glimpses into the sublime and imparting a deep feeling of significance and connectivity (Taylor 65-98).

Decadence provides a complicated and frequently ambiguous dimension to examining human experience. Everyday use refers to a downward spiral toward self-indulgence, moral rot, or rejection of accepted values. In the context of the art, decadence may pursue beauty without more significant goals or moral concerns.

Cultural and literary trends, most notably the *fin de siècle* of the late 19th century, have often revisited the idea of decadence. Authors and painters of the time, such as G. B. Shaw and Tawfiq AL-Hakim, took on controversial topics such as 'art', 'life', 'social dimension' excess, sensuality, and transgression. The term "decadence" came to represent an examination of the shadowy, self-indulgent sides of human nature as a sort of protest against the strictures of Victorian culture (Nietzsche 117-123.)

This paper concerns to answer the following questions:

- How do the aesthetic elements, such as language, setting, and character portrayal, contribute to the representation of transcendence in George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" and Tawfiq al-Hakim's adaptation?
- In what ways do the aesthetic choices in the stage design, costumes, and visual elements enhance or detract from the depiction of decadence in both versions of "Pygmalion?"
- How do symbolism and metaphorical language contribute to the aesthetic portrayal of transcendence in the characters' journeys in Shaw's and Al-Hakim's adaptations?
- To what extent do cultural influences shape the aesthetic representation of transcendence and decadence in the two adaptations, considering the cultural context of Shaw's England and Al-Hakim's Egypt?
- How do variations in the aesthetic treatment of the characters' transformation contribute to the theme of transcendence in Shaw's and Al-Hakim's "Pygmalion?"
- What role do aesthetic elements play in conveying the societal critique of decadence in both works, considering the socio-cultural contexts in which they were written?

- How do audience perceptions and cultural backgrounds influence the interpretation of aesthetic choices related to transcendence and decadence in performances of Shaw's "Pygmalion" compared to Al-Hakim's adaptation?

Discussion

Both "Pygmalion" by G B Shaw and "Pygmalion Revisited" by Tawfiq Al-Hakim are considered critical works because they investigate the transformational potential of education as well as the expectations of society. These plays explore the regions of transcendence and decadence, providing a fertile field for studies in aesthetics (Fadda 85-101).

The play "Pygmalion" by G B Shaw is a time-honoured examination of the transformational power of education. Through the guidance of Professor Henry Higgins, Eliza Doolittle's character goes through a significant transformation, rising beyond her working-class background in the process. Shaw subverts the accepted standards of society by demonstrating how one's linguistic and social standing may be improved via the pursuit of an education (Shaw 20-51).

In contrast, "Pygmalion Revisited" by Al-Hakim takes an unconventional approach to transcendence. Not only does the play explore the topics of education, but it also provides a new dimension that transcends cultural boundaries. The cultural setting of post-colonial Egypt is woven into the story by Egyptian dramatist Al-Hakim, who also weaves this context into

the tale. It causes Eliza to change her language and manners. It forces her to traverse the intricate socio-cultural terrain of Egypt, which adds another layer of complexity to the investigation of transcendence (Al-Hakim 13-62).

A line from Shaw's Professor Higgins that might be paraphrased as follows :

The moment I let you sit down and talk to me as if we were equals, you presume to give yourself airs".

This remark calls into question the conventional power structures and draws attention to the resistance of society to transcendence. A further aesthetic element is added to the play's investigation of societal conventions by the character Higgins' refusal to accept Eliza as an equal on the same level as himself. This reflects the widespread sentiments about class disparities (Innes 153-156).

The tale of Pygmalion serves as inspiration for both of these plays; nevertheless, they approach the subject of decadence in quite different ways. Characters like Mrs. Higgins and Freddy Eynsford-Hill are shown to be shallow and morally bankrupt in Shaw's works, which are meant to be seen as a criticism of the decadence of the upper class. The decadence associated with the upper class serves as a counterpoint for Eliza's change, highlighting the moral bankruptcy associated with having social privilege(Shaffer 67-71).

"I ain't claiming to worthy no pity .

No, I do not deserve it and intend never to deserve it" (Shaw).

This phrase exemplifies the decadence that is discussed in "Pygmalion." The unashamed acknowledgement of Doolittle's moral failings serves as a sarcastic reflection on the hypocrisy of the upper class, and it is one of the factors contributing to the play's artistic richness. Al-Hakim adopts a nuanced approach to decadence in his work "Pygmalion Revisited" by interweaving it with the difficulties of modernity and post-colonial identity. Decadence is not limited to the upper class in Al-Hakim's art; instead, it extends beyond social norms and cultural identity, reflecting the complexity of Egypt's post-colonial age (Hoda 267-277).

The linguistic change of Eliza Doolittle in G B Shaw's "Pygmalion" plays a vital role in portraying the concept of transcendence. The language transformation experienced by Eliza, transitioning from a Cockney flower girl to a sophisticated woman, serves as a symbol of her personal growth and self-actualisation. Shaw employs language as a mechanism for societal critique, emphasising the profound influence of verbal communication. Eliza's statement, "I am a common ignorant girl, in my station of life, I have to be respectable," (Shaw 84), highlights her recognition of the significance of language in social advancement, thus illustrating the correlation between linguistic refinement and transcendence.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim's adaptation may give rise to a comparable language shift, which reflects the cultural

setting. The potential adaption might examine how language, when situated inside an alternative societal structure, continues to serve as a means for individuals and communities to surpass personal and social limitations (Rokison 47-50).

In Shaw's play "Pygmalion," the use of the Edwardian era as a backdrop accentuates the social limitations that the protagonists strive to surpass. The massive disparity between Eliza's modest origins in Covent Garden and her subsequent interactions among the upper echelons of society emphasises the profound influence that altering environments may have on an individual's development. The laboratory of Higgins and the upper-class environs serve as catalysts for Eliza's transformation. The location assumes a character-like role, influencing the story of transcendence (Ibid).

Tawfiq Al-Hakim's adaptation offers the possibility of modifying the location to accurately portray the cultural context of the Middle East, thus creating a distinct environment that enhances the characters' profound personal growth. Introducing the new environment can provide a variety of problems and possibilities that may significantly impact the characters' trajectories as they strive for transcendence (O'Toole 61-65).

The depiction of characters in G B Shaw's play "Pygmalion" plays a pivotal role in effectively expressing the overarching idea of transcendence. The character of Eliza transforms the narrative, progressing from a disadvantaged flower girl to a lady who

confidently asserts her identity. Professor Higgins, similarly, is subject to examination, which questions established notions. Shaw used the characters to challenge established societal conventions, as seen by Eliza's assertion ,

“I am an ordinary uneducated young woman, and given my social position, I am compelled to conform to societal expectations of propriety.”(Shaw 75).

This prompts the audience to reassess their preexisting notions of social class and gender critically. In Tawfiq Al-Hakim's play, the characters undergo reimagining to align with the cultural milieu while preserving the fundamental themes of individual development and societal analysis. The depiction of characters serves as a conduit for exploring overarching themes of personal growth and surpassing limitations.

The adaption by Al-Hakim includes a cultural element that enhances the examination of transcendence. The cultural environment assumes an inherent role in shaping language, establishing the scenario, and influencing the interactions between characters. The adaptation may emphasise cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions, offering a unique perspective through which characters travel their transformational journeys. Shaw's original work and Al-Hakim's adaption include artistic components that synergistically contribute to elucidating the profound concept of transcendence. It underscores the universal nature of human development and social criticism,

transcending cultural and language boundaries (Jardine and Smith 54-58).

Both literary works may use the metaphor of rebirth or transformation to symbolise the concept of transcendence. The metaphor of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon in Shaw's "Pygmalion" is entirely appropriate. Eliza's metamorphosis resembles the process of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, symbolising notions of aesthetic appeal and liberation. Al-Hakim's adaption employs analogies that draw from Middle Eastern symbolism, exemplified by the phoenix's emergence from the ashes, to communicate the themes of rejuvenation and regeneration experienced by the protagonists (Ibid).

"The moment I permit you to occupy that seat and engage in conversation with me on equal terms, you take undue advantage of it" (Shaw 61), articulated by Professor Higgins, effectively captures the hierarchical power dynamics and the inherent need for transcendence. The chair symbolises a seat of power, while the language mirrors the cultural obstacles the protagonists strive to overcome. The use of symbolism and metaphorical language in Shaw's "Pygmalion" and Tawfiq al-Hakim's play enhances the artistic representation of transcendence by offering intricate imagery and allegorical depths to the characters' quests. The use of many literary tropes enriches the plays' complexity, facilitating the audience's immersion in the characters' profound journeys on a symbolic plane beyond the storyline's literal boundaries (Scott 212-216).

Conclusion

The creative features of transcendence and decadence in Shaw's "Pygmalion" and Tawfiq al-Hakim's adaptation reveal human growth and society's progress. Both writers explore people undergoing significant changes, yet their approaches and cultures differ. Shaw's "Pygmalion" examines the power of education to transcend socioeconomic class. Eliza Doolittle transforms from a flower seller to an intelligent lady, challenging and questioning social norms. Shaw's intelligence and understanding of society expose how human growth and societal change are possible. By adding decadence, Al-Hakim's adaptation surprises. Al-Hakim exposes sadness and doubt regarding right and wrong, suggesting that social progress may have detrimental effects. The characters' transformations are complicated by transcendence and decadence, raising questions about metamorphosis and its effects on individuals and society.

The comparison of these two works shows the universality of the topics. Shaw's Edwardian England and Al-Hakim's Egyptian culture explore transcendence and the pitfalls of decadence, which are universal topics. Readers must consider the continuing impact of these issues on modern society in the aesthetic study. The analysis of transcendence and decadence in "Pygmalion" and its adaptation shows how literature may still probe human nature and societal processes. Both playwrights provide different perspectives on change, prompting the audience to consider the complex relationship between progress and ethical decline.

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