

Relationships are often central to literary works. How is this true of two works of literature you've studied.

In both *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw and *Kumukanda* by Kayo Chingonyi, it is true that relationships are central to the works. Both works reveal the importance of supportive relationships that allow the central characters to transform. Furthermore, both works reveal that even antagonistic relationships can spur transformation, as both works feature 'toxic' relationships that the central character must navigate. However, where the works differ is in the nature of the most important relationships. In *Pygmalion*, the central relationships are between Liza and other people: Higgins, Pickering, and Mrs Pearce. By contrast, in *Kumukanda*, Kayo's strongest relationships are with intangibles; his relationship with music and with a society that exhibits institutional racism are the central relationships in his poems.

Both *Kumukanda* and *Pygmalion* reveal the importance of relationships in personal transformation. On moving from London to a '*white flight satellite*' town called Harold Hill, Kayo Chingonyi finds himself isolated as the only black student in school. He's forced to endure racist insults and even the well-meaning but race-oriented advice from his teachers. His relationship with music provides him the security he needs to adapt to his environment. To represent this relationship, Chingonyi intertwines lines of his own poetry with 'samples' (lines from grime and garage music) by other artists. For example, in the poem *Self Portrait as a Garage Emcee*, Chingonyi embeds '*Boom like TNT/the explosive commentary*', a line by rapper TNT, and also alludes to the work of other artists (Napier Bones, Kenny Rogers) who were formative in his transformation. The importance of his relationship with music is evident when he writes how racist insults '*bounced off my back*' and fell at his feet with '*reverence*'. This metaphor suggests how he uses music to armour himself against bullies, and transform insults into requests to perform the lines he's memorized. Similarly, in *Pygmalion*, Shaw reveals the importance of relationships in Liza's transformation from poor flower seller who works on the streets to a graceful Duchess who can convince aristocrats that she is of royal birth. The central relationship in this work is with Higgins, a phoneticist who teaches her to speak English with a 'proper' accent. Just like Kayo memorizes rap music to project a new identity, so Liza memorizes the lessons that Higgins gives her (an early example from Act 1 is how to pronounce the word 'tea' in the phrase '*cup of tea*', a small but important lesson that will allow her to make a good impression at upper class social engagements). Therefore, both works place relationships with role models and guides, whether famous rap artists or renowned phoneticists, at the center of their stories.

Furthermore, both writers use the symbolism of clothing as a marker of transformation, conveying to the reader of Chingonyi's poems and the audience of Shaw's play the continued importance of positive, supportive relationships. A central relationship Liza forms is with Mrs Pearce, Higgins' housekeeper. Mrs Pearce plays an equally important role in building Liza's self-respect through her focus on Liza's appearance and presentation. An important moment in the play is when Mrs Pearce strips Liza of her clothes and forces her to bathe. In fact, she burns most of Liza's old clothes, a symbolic moment that conveys the beginning of her transformation. After her bath, she dresses Liza in a Japanese kimono. On returning to the stage, even Liza's own father doesn't recognize her, addressing her politely as '*miss*' which is certainly not how he usually treats her! Through the symbolism of clothing, Shaw reveals how Liza's relationship with Mrs Pearce is central to her transformation as with her help she elicits respect from other people. Similarly, Kayo Chingonyi uses clothing as a way of conveying the importance of his relationship with music. In *Self Portrait as A Garage Emcee*, Kayo transforms from being a victim of bullying to a popular figure in the playground through learning and performing rap lyrics. Just like Liza, this builds his self-esteem and gains him respect from his classmates; even girls two years older than him ask him to perform for them! At this moment, Chingonyi uses a metaphorical description of his clothing that transforms his school uniform ('*lanyard*', '*budget shoes*') into a rapper's '*gold chain*' and '*doeskin loafers*', both markers of his increased social status and self-confidence. Therefore, through the symbolism of clothing, both writers demonstrate the importance of relationships to personal transformation, helping reader and audience see how these relationships are central to the works.

While both *Kumukanda* and *Pygmalion* present positive supportive relationships as essential to personal growth, they also consider the impact of toxic relationships as a means of spurring characters to change, and this is where the works begin to differ more significantly. Shaw maintains his focus on interpersonal relationships, developing the relationship between Liza and Higgins to show how his demeaning treatment of her causes radical change. In Act One, Higgins encounters Liza on the streets of London during a survey he is conducting into local dialects. The language he uses to describe her is demeaning and even dehumanizing. He refers to her as '*garbage*', '*a bilious pigeon*' and a '*stain*' on the English language, all words and phrases that have connotations of pollution and uncleanness. At this point in her journey, Liza has no ability to stand up for herself, and is only able to reply in formless utterances, such as '*garn*' and '*ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo*'. However, later in the play Liza acknowledges her own transformation by saying: '*I have forgotten my own language and can speak nothing but yours.*' In this way, Shaw implies that even toxic and demeaning relationships can spur personal transformation through adversity.

On the other hand, Kayo Chingonyi continues to explore his relationship with society not through interpersonal relationships but through racist encounters and microaggressions. An important technique he uses is personification of 'the N-word' as a '*sly devil*' who '*lounges*' in the literary material he studies at university, and dresses itself up in '*binary new-age clothes*', a metaphor that suggests the word hides itself in the most unexpected places. Through this method, Chingonyi conveys the idea that racism and racist language stalks him throughout his life. Unlike Liza, Kayo doesn't have a toxic relationship with any one person; however, people frequently use this word in ways that shock and upset him. His girlfriend's best friend uses the word to describe him, and even his best friend at school uses the word, provoking Kayo to write about '*the urge to slap your negritude out of his mouth*'. In the poem Colloquy at Black Rock, a lecturer tries to dismiss his discomfort over the N word and fails to realize that, for Kayo, it's a sign that people see the world in terms of '*us and them*'. Like Liza, while the relationship is framed as toxic (he even uses violent language such as '*pitched*' to suggest the impact hearing the N word can make) it does spur Kayo to introspection. In the poem The Conservatoire System he explicitly questions whether he should let people see him '*as I am or as I've been taught*'. Therefore, while both works explore the idea that toxic relationships are a way of spurring personal growth, Shaw uses interpersonal relationships as his primary focus whilst Kayo Chingonyi explores his relationship with society itself.

Other major differences are a result of the different literary genres represented by each work. On one hand, as a collection of poems, Chingonyi uses poetic techniques to convey ideas about his relationship with society, and what that relationship is shaping him into. For example, throughout *calling a spade a spade* (a sequence of nine poems that recall his educational journey into acting) he wrestles with the question of why he is so determined to become a writer and actor, both traditional exclusive white spaces in British society. However, his determination to master poetic language is conveyed through the formalism of these poems: he writes each in eleven lines of eleven syllables, so that the poems both resemble small boxes that Kayo feels he is being pigeonholed into and, additionally, represent the difficulty black writers face in proving themselves in a white domain. On the other hand, Shaw uses the dramatic technique of proxemics to suggest ideas about the relationship between Liza and Higgins, in particular the way Higgins is, wittingly or unwittingly, shaping her into somebody who can think for and stand up for herself. For example, in Act Four Higgins continually tries to assert himself over Liza by advancing on her, using his masculine size and strength to dominate the scene. However, Liza moves to keep a stage prop (an *ottoman* sofa) between herself and Higgins. Dramatically, when seen from the audience point of view, her movements suggest she maintains control over her own self by blocking off an area of the stage from Higgins' advances. Therefore, while both

works depict characters struggling to find their own identity in the face of toxic relationships, the methodologies differ depending on whether the work is dramatic or poetic.

In conclusion, both Kayo Chingonyi and George Bernard Shaw place relationships at the center of their works, demonstrating the importance of relationships to the transformations that central characters undergo. For Liza, her interpersonal relationships with Henry Higgins and Mrs Pearce fundamentally change the course of her life, allowing her to climb the rigid social ladder of Victorian England and earn her a decent living owning a flower shop. For Kayo, his relationship with British society was also a fundamental influence, causing him to question the performance of his identity and ask whether, as a black man in a white world, he can ever be authentic to his true self.