"Pygmalion" vs "My Fair Lady": A comparison of the vision of two authors and what each play says to women

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PYGMALION vs. MY FAIR LADY: A COMPARISON OF THE VISION OF TWO AUTHORS AND WHAT EACH PLAY SAYS TO WOMEN

by

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Georgia College and State University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

*Pygmalion vs. My Fair Lady*: A Comparison of the Vision of Two Authors and What Each Play Says to Women

by

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This thesis examines the vision of George Bernard Shaw on his masterpiece *Pygmalion*, and compares it to that of Alan J. Lerner and composer Frederick Loewe on their adaptation of *Pygmalion* into a history making musical called *My Fair Lady*. Through this examination it is discovered what Shaw considered a romance and how his ideas could and couldn't be translated into the conventions of nineteen fifties musical theatre. This thesis follows each play from its inception through its arrival to legendary status. The last chapter is devoted to a discussion on which play, if any, makes a stronger statement in favor of women.
I think I was three when I first stepped foot on a stage, and I was hooked. I was twelve when I was in my first musical, and I was hooked. I was about the same age the first time I ever saw the film *My Fair Lady*. I remember, though, not wanting to watch it when it came on. My mother, however, insisted. It is ironic, in a sense, that twelve years later I would wind up writing my Masters thesis on a play I didn’t even want to see. But I did watch it, and of course, I was hooked.

I am not sure what it first was about the film that I fell in love with. I absolutely adored Audrey Hepburn, but that could be a book in itself. It was such a beautiful movie to me, even then. The costumes, the sets, the glorious characters, and obviously the music lifted me into another world. Henry Higgins was, to me, so divinely chauvinistic, that in present day is laughable. Most of all, I remember simply loving Eliza Doolittle. I loved her spark, her zest for life, but it wasn’t until much later that I realized why I was so drawn to her. To me, Eliza is a tenacious soul. She is a hard worker. Eliza does not want anything she does not work for. She longs to be respected and loved, but no matter how soft she appears on the outside, she is a survivor. I would like to think I am a little bit like her.

Sometimes, as actors often do, I question if theatre is what I really want to do. When this happens, all I have to do is hear the music to this show, and something in me becomes overwhelmed with enthusiasm. That enthusiasm assures me that I must
stay on this path. That is how special *My Fair Lady* is to me. And that is why I chose it as part of the subject of my thesis.

The time I have spent in graduate school here at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has been a long and trying journey. However, I believe that everything in this life happens for a reason. I have learned a lot about myself in this process; mostly in how I can endure. If it were not for a handful of people, I may not have made it to this point.

More than anyone, I would like to thank my parents for their undying love and support throughout my life. I would like to acknowledge Joe Aldridge for his support and encouragement, and for seeing me through this year. I would also like to acknowledge Paul Kreider for his time, effort, and sincere concern for my education over the last three years. In closing, I would like to say one last thing to every educator who cares to read this paper: sometimes all that students need to succeed is for someone to believe in them. Thank you to every teacher who has ever believed in me.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ORIGINS OF THE PLAY

The Story

The setting is Covent Garden, 1912, on the steps of St. Paul's church. A man is hiding behind a pillar jotting down a conversation between a cockney flower girl and a gentleman. Upon realizing that she is being watched, the flower girl becomes very upset. The gentleman comes to her defense. We then learn that the gentleman and the note taker are long time admirers of each other’s work. They introduce themselves as Colonel Pickering author of *Spoken Sanskrit* and Professor Henry Higgins, author of *Higgins’s Universal Alphabet*. Henry Higgins boasts that, through teaching phonetics, he could pass the flower girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party. Pickering and Higgins become so wrapped up in conversation that they dismiss the girl and go on their way.

The next day, Higgins gets a visit from the flower girl, whose name is Eliza Doolittle. She has come to inquire about taking English lessons. She desires to learn proper English so she can get a job selling flowers in a shop rather than on the street. At first Higgins hesitates, but after some consideration decides to take on the challenge and pursue his boast to try and pass Eliza off as a duchess. Little did Eliza know that what Henry Higgins would teach her would change her life forever. And so, Eliza went to live with Higgins at 27A Wimpole Street; they both would never be the same.
The Myth

In Greek Mythology, Pygmalion, a sculptor and King of Cyprus, detaches himself from women and vows to live in solitude. In his solitude he sculpts his version of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. He adorns her with jewels and other gifts and ultimately falls in love with his creation. He prays to Aphrodite that she bring his beautiful statue to life. Aphrodite in fact grants him his wish, and with a kiss from her creator, Galatea becomes flesh. Pygmalion and Galatea marry and they have a son named Paphos.

The story of Pygmalion and Galatea appears as the ninth story of the tenth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. In the introduction to his book, *Tales from Ovid*, Ted Hughes states:

Above all Ovid was interested in passion. Or rather, in what a passion feels like to the one possessed by it. Not just ordinary passion either, but human passion in extremis – passion where it combusts, or levitates, or mutates into an experience of the supernatural (ix).

Charles Berst closely connects Ovid’s *Pygmalion* to Shaw’s play:

Higgins clearly lacks the eroticism of Ovid’s Pygmalion, but his distaste for women in life’s gutters, his passion for creation, for an art that conceals its art in carving a thing of beauty from raw materials, his dressing Eliza in gowns and jewels, and his desire to articulate life and achieve an ideal, all echo Ovid’s hero (13).

Eliza is Galatea to Higgins’ Pygmalion. According to Keith Garebian, “Shaw very cleverly gives her subtle connections to the statuary Galatea – in the plinth on which she sits, sorting out her flowers, and in Higgins’ reference to women as ‘blocks of wood’”(13).

Richard Hornby suggests that the play is not a parallel to the myth but the opposite:

In a reversal of the original Pygmalion story, Higgins takes a live girl and turns her into a statue – i.e. a duchess in externals only; Eliza then comes back to life, fully transformed into an independent woman, reaffirming the Pygmalion/Galatea story after all (122).
Alan J. Lerner also felt that Shaw's play was in some way a reversal of the myth, "Unlike the original legend of Pygmalion and Galatea in which Pygmalion brought his statue to life because of his love for her, in Shaw's play Pygmalion brings Galatea to life by not loving her" (36).

Nigel Alexander suggests that Shaw used the classical title *Pygmalion*, "to remind his audience that he is himself a dramatist in the classical tradition and that this play too is a play of ideas" (19).

Other Sources

Although George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* is partly based on the myth, the play is also linked to W.S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* written in 1871 (Garebian 12). In Gilbert's story, Pygmalion is married to Cynisca. Cynisca's insane jealousy drives Galatea to realize that her life as a statue was somewhat happier; hence, she returns to her former state of stone.

In his book, *The Truth about Pygmalion*, Huggett notes that although sources of Shaw's *Pygmalion* include the Greek myth and W.S. Gilbert's story, Shaw's plot largely resembles Smollett's novel, *Peregrine Pickle*. In Chapter 87 of the book, Peregrine meets a young beggar-girl along a road who is dressed in rags and speaks poorly. He purchases her from her mother and takes her home. He then has his servant clean and dress her. He teaches her proper manners and after a few weeks of instruction he is able to present her to a country squire. Her behavior proves appropriate. She then is sent to London and lives with a female attendant. There she is taught French and is instructed in the arts. One night she is playing cards and spots a woman cheating. This provokes her
to exclaim vulgarities and leaves. Peregrine is embarrassed by her actions and is very relieved when he discovers that she has run off with his servant (21).

George Bernard Shaw's History

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1856. His family considered themselves middle to upper middle class, yet lived in 'genteel poverty', as Charles Berst states, like the Eynsford Hills (4). Shaw’s father was an alcoholic much like that of Alfred Doolittle, and, according to Berst, his mother failed to give her son much needed attention, which in turn allowed Shaw to become very independent, paralleling Eliza. He suggests that Shaw’s mother’s name, Bessie, is a derivative of Elizabeth or Eliza. Shaw’s mother had a voice teacher named George Vandeleur Lee, who came to their house regularly. It has been suggested that George Vandeleur Lee was Shaw’s father and that this might be a reason for a number of illegitimate children appearing in Shaw’s plays including Eliza (4).

Berst compares Shaw’s transformation to that of Eliza’s, as both were based much on their “education and increased self-confidence” (5).

Higgins-like aspects of Shaw appeared, appropriately enough, when he turned to socialism, assumed his diabolical likeness, and became first a critic of society, music, and theatre, and finally a playwright who combined all of these interests. Thus, the heroine and hero of Pygmalion not only embody two aspects of their author’s life but pit his youth against elements of his middle age. At the same time, the author’s experience and social views inform the play, and the play in turn transmutes these into something permanent and sublime (Berst 5).

Although he was married, it was no secret that Shaw had fallen for a leading actress of the day, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, known to Shaw as Stella. “The part of Eliza Doolittle was inspired by Mrs. Patrick Campbell and written especially for her…” (Huggett 9). In
The Truth about Pygmalion, Huggett cites a conversation between Mrs. Patrick Campbell and George Bernard Shaw that clearly initiated the creation of Shaw's masterpiece, Pygmalion:

'Will you write a play for me? Will you write your next play for me?' Shaw agreed. 'Then write me a cockney part' she said with a touch of defiance, 'and I'll show you what I can do. I'm much more versatile than people suspect. I'm so tired of playing ladies. Give me something nice and common, there's a dear.' Shaw nodded and went to see [George] Alexander who was evidently thinking along the same lines...It had been a fateful day, for out of those two short conversations, Pygmalion was born (20).
CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE AND CLASS DISTINCTIONS

Language

“The status and interaction of the plays characters make telling social points. If language and dress and manners can pass a flower girl off as a lady, what distinguishes a lady?” (Berst 12).

Throughout history, language has been used quite frequently to distinguish the classes. Even in America today, certain labels are given to people who misuse grammar. “Societies are always apt to construct class structures for themselves and other peoples’ accents are likely to remain as a source of amusement (Alexander 20). In Great Britain, the social divide is even greater. In ‘Talking Proper’ The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol, Lynda Mugglestone cites an anonymous book called Talking and Debate:

_Talking and Debate_ indicates, accent was itself to be regarded as a marker of social acceptability facilitating or impeding social advance; it alone could secure deference or disrespect, acting as an image of ‘worth’ in a culture increasingly attuned to the significance of phonetic propriety (qtd. in Mugglestone 1).

The addition or subtraction of certain letters in pronunciation can define a dialect or a class:

The use of [h] in modern English has become one of the principal signals of social identity, its presence in initial positions associated almost inevitably with the ‘educated’ and ‘polite’ while its loss commonly triggers popular connotations of the ‘vulgar’, the ‘ignorant’, and the ‘lower class’...Such patterns often figure significantly in modern literature, so that characters delineated in terms of their rustic location, rudimentary education, or membership of the lower classes all tend to have speech marked by the strategic omission of the [h] (Mugglestone 107).
During the turn of the century, the use of proper English not only distinguished the classes, but also defined ladies and gentleman:

The ‘lady’ and her masculine counterpart in social status, the ‘gentleman’ combines to exert a profound influence on notions of propriety, behaviour, and ‘correctness throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries...Language, perhaps predictably plays an integral role in the social and cultural definitions of the ‘lady’ which emerge over the course of the nineteenth century, as indeed it does in corresponding ones of the ‘gentleman’ (Mugglestone 160-163).

Shaw’s use of Language

Shaw was adamant about the development of a phonetic alphabet. He felt it was necessary to the education and development of the English people. He even went so far as to apologize for the way in which Eliza’s dialect is represented in Act I of Pygmalion. The stage directions read, “Here, with apologies this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London” (487). In the preface to the Pygmalion. Shaw minces no words on the subject matter:

The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like...German and Spanish are accessible to foreigners: English is not accessible even to Englishmen. The reformer England needs today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play...But if the play makes the public aware that there are such people as phoneticians, and that they are among the most important people in England at present, it will serve its turn (481-483).

Shaw was undoubtedly a master with language; his brilliant use of rhetoric and wit can account for much of his success as a playwright. Richard Hornby states, “It is ironic that Shaw, master of language, would write a play about language” (125). His use of language, however, should be seen as not just merely literal, but it represents something greater than “what is being said” (125). A good example of this is seen in Act III at Mrs.
Higgins’ at-home day, when Professor Higgins tests Eliza in the presence of the
Eynsford-Hills:

LIZA (darkly): My aunt died of influenza: so they said.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL (clicks her tongue sympathetically): !!!

LIZA (in the same tragic tone): But it’s my belief she done the old woman in.

MRS HIGGINS (puzzled): Done her in?

LIZA: Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before. I saw her with my own eyes. Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat till she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon. (Pygmalion 532)

Here Eliza pronounces everything properly and with an aristocratic air; but her thoughts and how she communicates them are quite Covent Garden-esque:

Like contemporary playwrights such as Ionesco or Pinter, who make human communication itself the subject as well as the vehicle for their plays, Shaw here employs language metalinguistically; the speeches in the play not only convey ideas to the audience, they also are about speech itself (Hornby 125).

Shaw on Class Distinctions

Shaw was fascinated with the idea of taking a commoner, educating him or her, and in that education elevating them to a different class. This idea is expressed quite clearly through Professor Higgins in his conversation with his mother in Act III:

MRS HIGGINS: You certainly are a pretty pair of babies playing with your live doll.

HIGGINS: Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It’s filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul (Pygmalion 537).
In *The Play of Ideas*, Nigel Alexander discusses Shaw's affinity to the issue of class distinctions and how he addresses the idea in *Pygmalion*:

It is clear that the play deals with an important social question and, as Shaw himself said: ‘Social questions are produced by the conflict of human institutions with human feeling’ ("The Problem Play"- a Symposium). In this case the human institution is the class structure of society, one of whose most visible and distinguishing marks in the England of the early nineteenth and early twentieth century was speech and accent...Shaw...was writing about a situation so extreme as to constitute an obvious social evil, one which, as he claimed, could be remedied by relatively simple means (20).

Nigel Alexander goes on to explain that in his play, Shaw wanted to convey the idea that the “difference between the flower girl and the duchess was a matter of education and accent, and not as the romantics held, one of birth and breeding” (20).

It is apparent in his writings that Shaw preferred the grace of one with good manners to the raw bawdiness of one with bad manners. In his play, he assigns Colonel Pickering and Mrs. Higgins perfect manners. They are clearly members of the upper eschilon of society, and how, Shaw believes, all members of society should behave. They are in complete contrast to Eliza and her father. It is ironic, however, that the man, who is teaching Eliza to become a productive member of the upper-middle class, severely lacks tact and politeness himself (Crompton 47). “Higgins, in treating people solely in terms of their speech, reduces them to machines, statues, ‘blocks of wood’” (Hornby 125). Higgins repeatedly refers to Eliza as “baggage”, as a “squashed cabbage leaf”, and other inanimate objects:

Clearly, the man who can vent such splendid wrath...is neither a snob nor a vulgarian but neither is he a gentleman, and he just as certainly has no more manners than the petulant daughter or the disgruntled flower girl...In creating Higgins, Shaw was assuredly driving at something more than a definition of true gentility (Crompton 48).
In creating Alfred Doolittle, however, Shaw takes the emphasis away from manners and addresses social morality:

...Doolittle's social and moral attitudes contrast strongly with Eliza's. Eliza yearns above all things to join the respectable lower middle class. Doolittle, finding his job as a garbage collector is too low on the social scale to have any morals attached to it, realizes that he already has, in a sense, the prerogatives of a duke, and is loath to rise. ...Shaw's aim as a socialist was to abolish the poor as a class on the grounds that such people were dangerous and contemptible. Shaw held it against poverty that it made Doolittle's kind of happiness all too easy (Crompton 49).

It is the irony of the character in his situation that makes Doolittle so appealing to audiences. He is a common dustman, turned moral preacher, and through that he became a millionaire. The irony is that he was happier as a common dustman. This unhappiness in his new-found riches is expressed in Act V:

DOOLITTLE: A year ago I hadn't a relative in the world except two or three that wouldn't speak to me. Now I've fifty, and not a decent week's wages among the lot of them. I have to live for others and not for myself: that's middle class morality (Pygmalion 553).

Eliza's father hasn't really been transformed into a gentleman. His mannerisms and dialect are just the same as they were before; however, everyone treats him as if he were a gentleman because of his money. In contrast, at the end of the play, it is clear that Higgins has in fact created a lady out of Eliza. She can now be a member of the middle class society as she had hoped. Higgins recognizes her transformation in the literal sense, but fails to treat her any differently. So in a sense Eliza is correct when in Act V she says to Pickering:

ELIZA: ...the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will (Pygmalion 559).
CHAPTER III

SHAW’S VISION

A Romance?

The title of the play is *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts*. From the very beginning there was controversy about the title of the play and how the play ends. If Shaw had just stopped the title at *Pygmalion*, one wonders if that would have been the end of the discussion; however, he did indeed include the word ‘romance’ in the title, and so the battle began.

In *Improving Pygmalion*, Louis Crompton writes, “It is worth noting that when Shaw subtitled his play ‘A Romance in Five Acts’, he was using the word to refer to the transformation of Eliza into a lady, not in the sentimental erotic sense” (50). Crompton was correct about Shaw’s use of the word ‘romance’ in the title, for in *The Truth about Pygmalion*, Huggett cites a detailed conversation between Shaw and a reporter from The Observer as to why he called the play a ‘romance’. It is interesting to note that Shaw very rarely allowed questions from the press, but this reporter happened to be a very attractive woman:

REPORTER: What would you say is the purpose of the play?

SHAW: Very simple: to boil the pot. I call it a romance because it is a story of a poor girl who meets a gentleman at a church door and is transformed by him into a beautiful lady. That is what I call a romance. It is also what everybody calls a romance, so for once we are agreed. She does not marry anybody. I draw the line at that. She can marry whom she pleases when the
curtain comes down, but I have something better for her to do when it is up (qtd. in Huggett 111).

This transformation is a romantic notion with a very Cinderella theme. Very few people would debate that the Cinderella story is a Romance. Cinderella is transformed into a beautiful lady much like Eliza. When she leaves the ball her prince comes after her much like Higgins comes after Eliza the day after the garden party; however, Cinderella’s prince is exactly that, a prince. He rescues her from her nasty stepmother’s house and whisks her away to live happily ever after in a castle. Higgins comes after Eliza, but he certainly doesn’t treat her as if she was a princess, and there is no castle. “The story of Cinderella is a splendid and romantic vision. Shaw suggests that it does not and cannot correspond to the truth” (Alexander 21). The reality is that Cinderella is a fairy-tale, and Eliza has to face real life when her fairy-tale experience of the garden party is over. In the sense of the transformation, both stories can be considered romantic in nature, but how they differ is easy. Cinderella’s is a love story; in Shaw’s Pygmalion, Eliza’s is not.

The following is Shaw’s original ending:

HIGGINS: Goodbye mother. (He is about to kiss her, when he recollects something). Oh, by the way, Eliza, order a ham and a Stilton cheese, will you? And buy me a pair of reindeer gloves, number eights, and a tie to match that new suit of mine, at Eale & Binman’s. You can choose the color. (His cheerful, careless, vigorous voice shows that he is incorrigible).

LIZA (disdainfully): Buy them yourself. (She sweeps out).

MRS HIGGINS: I’m afraid you’ve spoiled that girl, Henry. But never mind, dear: I’ll buy you the tie and gloves.

HIGGINS (sunnily): Oh don’t bother. She’ll buy’em all right enough. Goodbye (Pygmalion 570).

That’s how Shaw intended it. His actors apparently had their own idea about how the play should end.
The first production of *Pygmalion* took place on April 11, 1914, with Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Eliza and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Professor Higgins. Alan Jay Lerner recounts a story in which Mrs. Patrick Campbell chose to add her own ending to Shaw’s play:

...In the closing moments when Eliza is saying farewell, Higgins imperiously tells her to stop off and buy him some Stilton cheese and a pair of gloves. Ignoring his order she exits with finality. Higgins breaks into gales of enigmatic laughter and the play ends. On opening night, however, Mrs. Patrick Campbell returned to the stage and said: ‘What size?’ And the curtain fell, along with Shaw’s jaw (36-37).

It has also been said that at the end of the first performance Tree threw flowers at Eliza, “suggesting that a love affair was after all the natural end to the play” (Alexander 21).

Shaw was enraged by Tree’s action, and when he published the play in 1915 he added the sequel, the postscript, in which he explains that Eliza does in fact marry Freddy (21).

The Postscript

It is easy to see why Shaw wrote his sequel. He was astonished to see his actors and so many of his audience accept, as a satisfactory ending to the play, the image of Eliza marrying Higgins and settling down to fetch his slipper for him. This image is, of course, fiercely rejected in the play but, since the ending of the play is inconclusive it does remain as one possible interpretation of Eliza’s actions (Alexander 22).

Eric Bentley suggests that there should be no concern for what Eliza’s actions are after the climax of the play (15). He cites the following scene as the climax of *Pygmalion*:

LIZA: If I can’t have kindness, I’ll have independence.

HIGGINS: Independence? That’s middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on this earth.

LIZA (rising determinedly): I’ll let you see whether I’m dependent on you. If You can preach, I can teach. I’ll go and be a teacher.

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HIGGINS: What'll you teach in heaven's name?

LIZA: What you taught me. I'll teach phonetics.

HIGGINS: Ha! Ha! Ha!

LIZA: I'll offer myself as an assistant to professor Nepean.

HIGGINS (rising in a fury): What! That imposter! That humbug! That toadying ignoramous! Teach him my methods! My discoveries! You take one step in his direction and I'll wring your neck. (He lays hands on her). Do you hear?

LIZA (defiantly non-resistant): Wring away. What do I care? I knew you'd strike me some day. (He lets her go, stamping with rage) (569).

During this scene Eliza has become what Higgins has been preparing her for all along. Here she breaks free from him and from everything that she was dependent on. She has become a complete person:

After this it does not matter whether Eliza does the shopping or not. The situation is clear. Eliza's fate is settled as far as Higgins is concerned. The story of the experiment is over. Otherwise her fate is as unsettled as yours or mine (Bentley 16).

Many other critics disagreed with Shaw's addition of the postscript, and thought that it weakened the play. On his intention to rid audiences of further romantic notions between Higgins and Eliza, Nigel Alexander states, "This was a mistake, and it is a very clear demonstration of the dramatic principle that an audience need only to accept from an author what he has managed to dramatize and place on the stage in front of their eyes" (22). Charles Berst observes:

Shaw's afterward, in which Eliza marries Freddy, and aided by Pickering and Higgins, opens a flower and greengrocer shop, can hardly be considered part of Pygmalion. Written for the play's first edition in 1916, it was Shaw's first major volley at romantics who palpitated for a Cinderella ending. Most audiences will not know of it. The play must stand on its own with out it. (136).
It is important to note that the night *Pygmalion* opened marked the end of Shaw’s affair with Stella Campbell. Just prior to opening, she married George Cornwallis-West. Arnold Silver suggests that the postscript, along with several new scenes that were added over time, were all an attempt at revenge on Stella for getting married and ending their affair. “Here he invents an improbable sequel to the play’s story and adopts an entirely new attitude to both Eliza and Higgins” (108).

In the postscript Eliza gives up her desire to become a teacher and marries Freddy instead. After some time elapses, Colonel Pickering finances a flower shop for Eliza and Freddy. Because Freddy is bad with money, the flower shop fails. Eliza goes back to Colonel Pickering on numerous occasions to ask for money. In a humiliating sequence of events, she eventually asks Higgins to teach her to write correctly. Higgins and Pickering once again give her money and the flower shop takes off. At the end we are told that Higgins remains an important figure in Eliza’s life, and that she spends a lot of time with him because Freddy is so boring.

“In sum, the Eliza of the postscript is no longer the Eliza of the play, and Shaw has patched together a dummy figure into which he takes great pleasure in sticking pins” (Silver 109). Reading Arnold Silver’s account of the situation, it is easy to see the driving motivation behind Shaw’s creation of the postscript. Shaw, however, gave other reasons for writing it; he wanted to make it clear to actors and audiences alike that Higgins and Eliza would never marry. Yet, as Arnold Silver states:

...these intentions did not require Eliza’s debasement. Nor did they require her to marry Freddy Hill. Nor did they even require the writing of the postscript at all. A few emphatic sentences in the preface could have preserved the fine ambiguity of the play’s ending by insisting on the unpredictability of Eliza’s later relations with Higgins. Shaw’s stated intention, in a word, hardly justify the document’s contents, and thereby license us to seek other motives for its composition (109).
The Film

A Rumanian film producer named Gabriel Pascal, ran into Shaw during the roaring twenties while swimming at Cap d’Antibes on the French Riviera. Pascal was a long time admirer of Shaw’s work. On that sunny day, Pascal mentioned to Shaw that he was not doing well financially in the film business:

‘If one day,’ Shaw said, ‘you are finally driven to the conclusion that you are utterly broke, and there is no doubt that you will be, come and call on me. Maybe you can make one of my plays into a film’ (Garebian 16).

So, many years later in 1935, almost completely broke, Pascal made that fateful trip to see Shaw at Ayot St. Lawrence. Upon arriving at Shaw’s cottage Pascal rang the doorbell. There are many different versions of how Pascal acquired the rights to some of Shaw’s masterpieces, but according to Alan J. Lerner this is how it went:

The maid (or secretary) answered it. He said he wished to see Mr. Shaw. The maid said, ‘May I ask who sent you?’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘Fate sent me.’ Shaw, who was on the stairs, heard this announcement and came to the door himself. ‘Who are you?’ he asked. Pascal answered, ‘I am Gabriel Pascal. I am [a] motion picture producer and I wish to bring your works of genius to [the] screen.’ ‘How much money do you have?’ asked Shaw. Pascal reached in his pocket and took out a few schillings. ‘Twelve schillings,’ he replied. ‘Come in’ said Shaw. ‘You are the first honest film producer I’ve ever met.’ When Pascal left the house he had a paper in his pocket giving him the rights to several of the great man’s works, including *Pygmalion* (qtd. in Lerner 31).

After much struggle to receive financial backing for his film project and a lot of unwanted advice as to why not to do the film, Pascal finally acquired the money he needed to produce his film. Shaw never lost touch with Pascal throughout the making of *Pygmalion*, and even collaborated on the project by adding new scenes; he certainly wasn’t above giving suggestions either. According to Garebian:

Among the many new scenes added were ones of Eliza’s first bath at Wimpole Street, Freddy’s lovesick loitering outside Higgins’s home, a sequence between Freddy and Eliza on the street, and a later Covent Garden scene when Eliza realizes that she cannot go home again (19).
As far as casting goes, Wendy Hiller was approved as Eliza. Pascal desperately wanted Leslie Howard to play Higgins, but Shaw adamantly disagreed, “Shaw felt that Howard’s elegance would endear him to the public and that audiences would probably want him to marry Eliza, which is just what Shaw did not want” (Garebian 19). Alas, Pascal did get his way. After all Howard was already listed as co-director of the film along with Anthony Asquith.

According to Huggett, in 1938, Anthony Asquith asked Mrs. Patrick Campbell, now in her seventies, to play Mrs. Higgins in the film. She declined, apparently for fear of leaving her Pekinese, Moonbeam, in a kennel during the shoot:

‘...how can I leave my darling Moonbeam for six months in one of those cold, horrible kennels where he’ll have to associate with all those nasty, rough, common dogs? Too horrible! To him I’m a goddess, he trusts me implicitly. How can I betray him? I’m sorry, Puffin darling, you’ll just have to get somebody else.’ (qtd. in Huggett 2-3).

She gave her approval of Howard as Professor Higgins, and although she didn’t know Wendy Hiller she was sure she would prove a fine choice for the role. She was set in her decision, and nothing that anyone said or offered her would change her mind. Shaw, not surprisingly, had words for her:

A typical Shavian blast of wrath swept across the channel over Moonbeam: ‘For Heavens sake, Stella,’ he wrote. ‘when that wretched animal is killed by an automobile or perishes in the course of nature, buy a giant Panda or a giraffe or a water buffalo, any of which you can take anywhere.’ Mrs. Higgins and Lady Britomart were eventually played and very well, by Marie Lohr (qtd. in Huggett 3).

Mr. Huggett suggests that the real reason Stella refused the role, was that she couldn’t bear to see any other woman play Eliza (4).

The film’s ending is quite different from the Shaw’s intended ending of the play. Pascal was well aware that he could fight until his death and still never get Shaw to
change his mind, especially after Shaw, in his epilogue, had gone to such pains to make sure Eliza never married Higgins. Pascal decided to change the ending, but managed to keep it a secret until the sneak preview. The following is Valerie Pascal’s account of that night:

...at the sneak preview of Pygmalion a very nervous Pascal was tightly holding Mrs. Charlotte Shaw’s hand...Beside them, the white beard of Bernard Shaw seemed to be fluorescent in the darkness. Pascal was sure enough that the white beard would soon be ruffled with anger, for Shaw had not been told that Eliza was not going to marry Freddy, and there was not going to be a flower shop. Instead the rebellious Galatea would return to her Pygmalion. And entering Higgins’ study, she would have a moment of complete victory; she would see her tormentor...head bowed, listening to her recorded voice from the cockney past. The sight would stir the eternal flame in Eliza; she would turn off the machine and finish the recorded sentence softly: ‘I washed my face and hands before I come, I did.’ But now the victory would belong to Higgins...He leaned back in his chair, stretching his legs comfortably, and then, as if it were the crown of a newly anointed king, he pushed up his hat triumphantly, asking in the words of the master: ‘Confound it, Eliza-where the devil are my slippers?’ When the preview was over, Shaw did not say a word. But there was a faint smile above the white beard. Mrs. Shaw turned to Gabriel. ‘This,’ she said, ‘is the finest presentation of my husbands work’ (85).

Shaw won an Oscar for his screenplay. Shaw wrote the introduction to Valerie Pascal’s book about her husband. The following is part of that introduction and explains exactly what Shaw thought of Pascal and his film:

Until he descended on me out of the clouds, I found nobody who wanted to do anything with my plays but mutilate them, murder them, giver their cadavers to the nearest scrivener without a notion of how to tell the simplest story in dramatic action... the man is a genius: that is all I have to say about him (Introduction).

In the fall of 1950, Shaw was on a ladder pruning an apple tree. He fell and a few days later he died at the age of ninety-four on November 2, 1950. Two years later Alan J. Lerner would get a call from Gabriel Pascal.
CHAPTER IV

MY FAIR LADY

The Idea

In the spring of 1952, Alan J. Lerner was in Los Angeles working on his screenplay for *Brigadoon*, when he received a phone call from Gabriel Pascal. Pascal informed Lerner that they needed to meet for dinner and a few days later they did. The following is Lerner's account of their conversation:

'I want to make musical of *Pygmalion*. I want you to write music.' I hastened to explain to him that I did not write music. 'Who writes music?' he asked. 'The composer,' I replied. 'Fritz Loewe.' 'Good,' he said. 'We will meet again and you will bring man who writes music.' I told him Fritz was in New York. 'Good,' he said. 'You will tell him to come out here' (31).

And so, the collaboration began.

As it turned out, Fritz was planning on going to California to meet with Alan to discuss their next musical theatre project. After the trio met on several occasions, Lerner and Loewe departed for New York and began "mulling it over". Pascal had previously offered the project to Rogers and Hammerstein, who after a year of work on the project gave it up. Lerner had a conversation with Oscar Hammerstein, during which the two discussed the roadblocks both teams had run into. Oscar apparently stating that, "It can't be done" (Lerner 38). In Mr. Lerner's book, *The Street Where I live*, he discussed some of these problems:

...no matter how the play ended, until the last scene it was most definitely non-
love story and how, may I ask does one write a non-love song? These were but a few of the stumbling blocks Fritz and I encountered as we worked on it during those summer months (37).

Three weeks after Lerner’s conversation with Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe left the project.

Their Vision

Lerner and Loewe easily became side tracked. Lerner had been working on another musical called *L'il Abner*, when in the summer of 1954 Gabriel Pascal died. His death rekindled Alan’s interest in *Pygmalion*, so he called Fritz. They got together to discuss the project and soon became enthusiastic about it once again. The ‘rules’ of musical theatre had begun to change and the problems they had previously encountered did not seem as overwhelming as they once had (Lerner 39).

Before *My Fair Lady*, most musicals had to have a comic couple in a comic subplot, as well as a big chorus of townspeople opening and closing each act and showing up periodically throughout the show. By the 1950’s, these conventions were slowly starting to change, and this opened up lots of possibilities for Lerner and Loewe to let the show’s structure serve the story instead of merely serving convention (Miller 176).

As Lerner and Loewe’s collaboration on *Pygmalion* continued, they began to understand that the way to make the conversion of *Pygmalion* into a musical a smooth one, they need not add new characters in order to “beef” up the score. “After all, where could one find wittier characters than those invented by GBS?” (Lerner 34). They realized that they, “could do *Pygmalion* simply by doing *Pygmalion* following the screenplay more than the play and adding the action that took place between the acts of the play” (Lerner 43-44).
Alan and Fritz decided to put together a team even though the show wasn’t written yet. They chose Oliver Smith as the set designer and Cecil Beaton to design the costumes. Lerner and Loewe had never worked on a script that was already written. This, along with the fact that the play was written by such a man as Shaw, allowed them to begin searching for their leading actors:

Although *Pygmalion* had been written for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and Eliza Doolittle had always been considered a star vehicle, to me Higgins was far more interesting, far more complex, for whom empathy came easily to me. There was no doubt in my mind that Higgins was Shaw, and Shaw, as far as women were concerned, was a man of overwhelming shyness. His love affairs existed on paper only...What always moved me so deeply about Higgins was that he, a master in the language of the poets, was incapable of putting together a few words to relieve his own loneliness; a loneliness which he (Shaw and or Higgins) so gallantly and wittily concealed. So the first person we began to look for was not an Eliza Doolittle, but a Henry Higgins. And the first person I thought of was Rex Harrison (Lerner 49).

Julie Andrews was starring in *The Boyfriend* on Broadway the same time Lerner and Loewe were searching for an Eliza. Alan, Fritz and Herman Levin, the producer, went to see her in the show. They left optimistic about their find, “Could she play Eliza Doolittle?” (Lerner 52).

Although Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* for Mrs. Patrick Campbell who was forty-nine years old when she did the part, Shaw states in his stage direction that Eliza is eighteen. He may have written that in to flatter Mrs. Campbell, but nevertheless, there it is. We began to think how refreshing it might be if, for the first time since the play was written, a girl precisely that age played the role (Lerner 52).

The first person Alan and Fritz thought of to play Doolittle was Stanley Holloway. Stanley was as enthusiastic about playing Shaw’s social moralist as Alan and Fritz were to have him do it.

Finally securing the rights, and with the major players in line, Alan and Fritz worked on the music with gusto:

Fritz and I were determined to retain as much of Shaw’s dialogue as possible, which
would automatically mean there would be more dialogue than in any other musical to date. The only way to accomplish this, we felt, was to fill the score with tempo and to search every emotion until we found that aspect of it that demanded it (Lemer 67).

Soon after the completion of “I’m an Ordinary Man” and “Why Can’t the English,” they felt that they had enough music to present to perspective directors. Hermin Levin was quick to suggest Moss Hart. After hearing the completed portion of the score, Moss Hart put off all other projects and gave, what was soon to be called My Fair Lady, his undivided attention (Lemer 71).

We were very fortunate in having Moss Hart to direct the play. He was one of the great figures of the American theatre. He knew the business inside and out, not only from the direction and production angle, but also as a writer...He was a really delightful man, an enthusiastic fan of the theatre, and he genuinely admired actors and encouraged them in their work with enormous patience (Harrison 160).

After acquiring Hart as their director the two composers continued to write with enthusiasm. After they would finish a section they would play it for Hart to secure his stamp of approval.

The Songs

One of the first songs to be completed was “Wouldn’t it be Loverly.” “‘Wouldn’t be Loverly’ gives real insight into Eliza. The song with its tender melody lets us peer beyond her ambition and see a side of her that Shaw never exposes” (Citron 265). Eliza displays passion and emotion throughout all of her songs, “‘Wouldn’t it be Loverly’ reveals her character in sharp contrast to Higgins’. She fantasizes optimistically rather than cynically or satirically” (Garebian 106).

“Just You Wait” follows Higgins relentless repetition of vowel sounds. Eliza’s frustration becomes comical because of what she imagines will happen to Henry Higgins.
Keith Garebian states that, “her fantasy of revenge is exaggeratedly self-promoting and gloriously vernacular” (106). Mr. Garebian goes on to explain that the song can be divided into two parts:

...the first being brisk and hot tempered, and the second, beginning with ‘One day I’ll be famous! I’ll be proper and prim,’ growing balladic in its demands on vocal register before returning to the full measure of cadence of comic Cockney wish-fulfillment: “‘Thanks a lot, King,’ says I in a manner well-bred; / ‘But all I want is ’enry ’iggins ’ead!’” (106).

Eliza’s next song is “I Could’ve Danced All Night.” The section prior to this song is “The Rain in Spain”. The moment that leads up to “The Rain in Spain” is a brilliant moment in the play with a very entertaining story behind it. It is important to note that Shaw and Pascal wrote the phrase “the rain in Spain” for the film version of Pygmalion. Rex Harrison was very particular about the dialogue in the musical. He wanted to make sure that Shaw’s original dialogue was maintained at all costs. Rex kept a Penguin edition of Pygmalion handy so if any speech or dialogue looked suspicious he would call for his Penguin. In The Street Where I Live, Lerner recounts the event:

There is a speech just before ‘The Rain in Spain’ where Higgins says: ‘Oh Eliza, I know you are tired. I know your nerves are as raw as meat in the butcher’s window but think of what you are trying to accomplish? The majesty and grandeur of the English language...’ etc. When Rex got to that scene he said to me: ‘That’s a damn fine speech. Where in Shaw did you find it?’ Like a fool I told him the truth and said: ‘I wrote it.’ From then on he lost respect for it and seldom got it right (95).

Nevertheless it was a fine speech and marked a major dramatic shift in the plot. If Eliza never got it right, they would never have left Wimpole Street. She did get it right, but only after encouragement for the first time from her teacher, Henry Higgins. The following is that scene:

HIGGINS (rising): I am always reasonable, Eliza, if I can go on with a blistering Headache, you can.
ELIZA: I have a headache, too.

HIGGINS: Here. (He plops the ice-bag on her head. She takes it off her head and buries her face in her hands, exhausted to the point of tears) (With sudden gentleness). Eliza, I know you’re tired. I know your head aches. I know your nerves are as raw as meat in a butcher’s window. But think what you are trying to accomplish. (He sits next to her on the sofa.). Think what you are dealing with. The majesty and grandeur of the English language. It’s the greatest possession we have. The noblest sentiments that ever flowed in the hearts of men are contained in its extraordinary, imaginative and musical mixtures of sounds. That’s what you’ve set yourself to conquer Eliza. And conquer it you will. (He rises, goes to the chair behind his desk and seats himself heavily.) Now try it again.

ELIZA: The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain (My Fair Lady 63).

Stephen Citron states that, “The moment is sheer magic. This clever bit of dramaturgy, which never fails to elicit empathetic applause, is infinitely moving. It is brought about not by Higgins’ slave-driving pigheadedness, but by his kindness. At last Eliza sees he has a heart and wants to please him” (270). Before composing the celebratory number, Alan and Fritz decided to call it “The Rain in Spain”. Upon this decision Fritz said that he would then write a tango. And so he did. Following this number, Higgins and Pickering decide that it is time to try Eliza out in public, and they then proceed to bed. Eliza is left “to sing her first song as a ‘lady’” (Citron 271).

After “Wouldn’t it be Loverly” was complete and they were satisfied with its reception, Lerner and Loewe decided to focus their attention on developing the music for Henry Higgins:

In a very short time Higgins and Harrison became interchangeable in my mind, and instead of Rex’s vocal limitations becoming an inhibition, his personality and style seemed to clear away fresh creative paths. I realized that the secret in writing for him was to make certain at all times that the lyrical and musical line coincided exactly with the way one would speak the line. For example, ‘Let a woman in your life and your sabbatical is through’ was composed in such a manner that it could either be spoken or sung without altering the music (Lerner 70).
In his book, *The Wordsmiths*, Stephen Citron suggests that Shaw’s hint for the creation of the song “I’m an Ordinary Man,” is twofold. Shaw had said that when, as a man, you let a woman in your life you will find that you are going along one train of thought and a woman is inevitably on another track. “Then, refuting Mrs. Pearce’s assessment of his character, he adds, ‘Here I am, a shy diffident sort of man...yet she’s convinced that I’m an arbitrary, overbearing bossing kind of person. I can’t account for it’”. Citron continues by saying that, “Lerner reverses the order to far better advantage” (268). Higgins says that, “I’m an Ordinary Man.” However, we have seen that he is not ordinary at all. Loewe, “fills the song with violent contrasts, the misogynist, the lover of quiet and solitude comes through when the song climaxes with the dire consequences of letting ‘a woman in your life’” (268). It is ironic that the moment before Higgins bursts into his anthem, “I’m an Ordinary Man,” ending quietly with, “I will never let a woman in my life.” he has just let Eliza into his life by accepting her as his experiment.

In his Autobiography, Rex Harrison describes his reaction to “I’m an Ordinary Man”:

‘Ordinary Man’, I loved on first hearing. It was a brilliant, long, and complicated number, but with a very easy soft-shoe rhythm, with a lilt to it and an easy delivery, and I enjoyed it very much (158).

Freddy Eynsford-Hill was completely taken with Eliza from the moment he met her at the races. Lerner stated that the inspiration for the song, “On the Street Where You Live” came from a childhood experience of his:

The idea for it had come from a personal experience of preadolescence, which seemed to me about the emotional level of Freddie. When I was ten years old I had been sent to a dancing class on Sunday afternoons...The prettiest girl was, of course the most popular, but I was too shy to make my presence felt. ...every Saturday I would place myself on a bench outside Central Park opposite her house, hoping I would see her come in or out...But she never came by. I found out later I had the wrong address (78-79).
This childhood experience turned song became one of the most popular of the show.

Two worlds are depicted within the music and lyrics of *My Fair Lady*. “The upper-class society is characterized by very controlled, operetta-style music...rhythms are generally more regular, yet the structure of these songs is often intricate and sophisticated” (Miller 183). The “Ascot Gavotte” is an excellent example of this. In contrast the lower-class is expressed through a louder, simpler music line resembling the style of the British music halls (183). One can see and hear the two contrasting worlds very clearly in “Without You.” This is the song Eliza sings to Higgins declaring her independence:

Though the song is predominantly in a graceful, classical style, the music and lyric move completely into the music hall style for the line ‘If they can do without you, Ducky, so can I,’ then goes right back to the more restrained style (183).

Scott Miller also suggests that Doolittle’s music was written in the style of the music hall for two reasons:

First, Doolittle is a member of the working class (despite the fact that he doesn’t work himself) and the British music hall was an entertainment for the masses. This is the kind of music Doolittle would be familiar with and it nicely represents his nature—loud, brash, predictable, comic, lots of fun, and not at all subtle. Second, Stanley Holloway...was himself a veteran of the music halls...(182).

In the second act, *My Fair Lady* strays even further from musical theatre conventions by taking a turn towards the serious and away from the comic. In Eliza’s “Show Me”, which she sings to Freddy, she scolds him for his, “inability to make love to her openly and directly” (Garebian 109). It is clear that Eliza has complete control over this man in contrast to her relationship with Higgins. The question still remains; why would she want to marry Higgins when there is a young, handsome and willing suitor at her...
doorstep? The answer may be as simple as 'we all want what we can’t have.' Keith Garebian suggests something different:

...She is no mere doll, no sweet ingenue, or manipulated puppet. She is a woman in her own right who will not be taken for granted or shrugged off by any man. Unable to be an equal partner as yet with a man who is a real match (in wills) with her, she will subjugate Freddy, her boy-toy (109).

Alfred Doolittle’s “Get Me to the Church on Time” directly follows “Show Me” and allows for a change of pace, but also replaces “Shavian stage-philosophy” with an energetic number:

While this latter function at first seems radically at odds with the seriousness of the musical, Lerner and Loewe cleverly ensure that the roisterous energy and tone translate Doolittle’s philosophy into action: After ‘With a Little Bit O’Luck’ – a song about his belief on easy living – ‘Get Me to the Church On Time’ celebrates Doolittle’s last night of bachelor freedom in a lively production number (Garebian 109-110).

Other than “Show Me” and “Get Me to the Church On Time”, the second act focuses primarily on Eliza and Higgins and the dynamics of their relationship both structurally and musically (Garebian 110). Following the Embassy Ball, Eliza throws Higgins’ slippers at him in a fit of rage. She is hurt and frustrated because both Higgins and Pickering took credit for the success of the evening without recognizing her efforts at all. More than that, she has no idea where she fits in. Her fear is confirmed when she returns to Covent Garden and no one recognizes her.

Throughout Act II, reprises from Act I can be heard. The reprise of “Just You Wait” occurs directly following the argument between Eliza and Higgins about what’s to become of her. In the reprise, Lerner changes the lyric ever so slightly: “You will be the one it’s done to, and you’ll have no one to run to”. When Eliza first sings this song in Act I, she was imagining and fantasizing, here, according to Stephen Citron: “Now she
realizes her desertion will hurt Higgins, and Lerner gives her fresh stinging words” (275). Her anger and frustration from Higgins obvious dismissal of her builds inside and, “feeds into her ‘Show Me’ number when Freddy receives the brunt of her anger (Garebian 111).

Keith Garebian suggests that the musical soliloquy, “I’ve Grown Accustomed to her Face”, is the climax of the play: “The self-imagined misogynist has surprised himself by discovering that he loves a woman, even though he never names his feeling (112-113). “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” provides the play with that moment of self-realization that is essential to a great play (Lees 121). In his book Rex Harrison describes the first time he heard the song:

When I arrived in New York at Christmas, 1955, Alan and Fritz had just finished ‘Accustomed to Her Face.’ They told me they’d got the last number for Higgins, and I went over to Alan’s house, where as usual they played it for me. They knew I couldn’t read a note of music, so Fritz played and Alan sang...I realized the beauty of the melody, as well as its simplicity. It was an acting tour de force, with musical accompaniment, and I was thrilled — I just hoped I could do justice to this marvelous piece of work (158).

In The Making of My Fair Lady, Keith Garebian cites an article Alan J. Lerner wrote in “Shavian Musical Notes” for the New York Times. It explains the way he views Higgins and why he wrote the song: “In a far less tangible way, Higgins goes through as much of a transformation as Eliza, the only difference being that Shaw would never allow the transformation to run its natural course” (qtd. in Garebian 113).

As for his opinion of the songs of My Fair Lady, Lerner states, “The songs of My Fair Lady are good songs, and I know they are, but the quality still falls short of explaining why popularity ascended to such an unprecedented height. I have no answer and I am grateful for my ignorance. It would corrupt my soul and destroy my creative life if I did” (Lerner 135).
Making History

*My Fair Lady* opened on March 15, 1956 at the Mark Hellinger Theatre. It ran on Broadway for 2,717 performances and in London for 2,281 performances. It became an international hit, with companies playing in Australia, Sweden, Mexico, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Holland, Russia, and Israel. "It made Shaw a household word in households which had never been on reading terms with *Pygmalion*, and it made Broadway history by several elements that broke with tradition" (Garebein 99).

Along with the success of *My Fair Lady* came those who were pleased with Lerner and Loewe’s adaptation of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*:

*Pygmalion* manifests Shaw’s mythopoeic powers at their most adroit, and it is certainly Shaw himself who is still central and triumphant both in the film...and in the musical. *My Fair Lady* (Bloom 6).

There were also those who disagreed with their adaptation as well, but who couldn’t help but enjoy the musical:

It will be argued here that neither the directors of the film nor the author of the musical version understood Shaw’s *Pygmalion*...one may protest at the quality of ideas, which are not Shaw’s, but one cannot deny Mr. Lerner’s romantic craftsmanship (Alexander 21).

No matter what the opinion, one cannot argue the impact *My Fair Lady* had on the audience who experienced the show. During a break from performing, Rex Harrison decided to go see the show with his then wife Kay. He had never seen it from the audience so one night they secretly watched from the house. Edward Mulhane was his understudy at that time, "The play looked like a jewel- I couldn’t believe it. Although I’d been playing in it all that time, I’d had no idea how perfect and beautiful it looked (Harrison 166)."
*My Fair Lady* closed on September 29, 1962 after six and a half years on Broadway. It was revived again in 1975. The revival ran for almost a year. It was made into a film in 1964 with Harrison as Higgins and the unforgettable Audrey Hepburn as Eliza. After the film had been running for a year, Warner Brothers decided to add up the gross revenue of all the theatres in which *My Fair Lady* had been performed all over the world, the gross revenue of all the cast albums and soundtrack, and the gross revenue that the film had acquired up to that point. It totaled over $800 million (Lerner 135). Alan J. Lerner could explain the success in only one way:

As far as the play itself is concerned, I believe the right people at the right moment in their lives embarked on the right venture-authors, director, costumer, scenic designer, producer, lighting man, choreographer, and actors- and rather than extending their talents to the limit, expressed them to the limit. *My Fair Lady* was the sum total of its component parts. Without one of those parts it would not have been the same (135).
CHAPTER V

SYNTHESIS

The initial objective of this thesis was to compare and contrast *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* and determine which of the two plays made a stronger statement in favor of women. It was assumed that this would be an easy determination based solely on the fact that in one play the woman leaves her male chauvinistic teacher and in the other she goes back. That initial objective was formulated from the angle that these two plays were in essence the same play with only a few minor differences: one being a slight change in the ending and the other being that one play was set to music. Closer examination, however, leads one to recognize that these "slight" changes make for two very different plays. Determining which play makes a stronger statement about women is not as black and white as one previously thought.

Both Shaw and Lerner no doubt agreed that Higgins was the protagonist of the play; but how is the Higgins in *Pygmalion* different from the Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, and how does the difference change the meaning of the play? There are subtle differences in Higgins’ dialogue throughout *My Fair Lady* that lead an audience to see a Higgins that is not as rough around the edges. His words still bite; but there is a humanness and compassion about him that is not seen in Shaw’s version. For example, the scene previously cited in chapter four in which Higgins is encouraging Eliza to continue after a long day. Through Lerner’s added dialogue, we see that Higgins is sincere in his belief
that Eliza will succeed. We can see Eliza’s immediate reaction to Higgins’ encouragement and at that moment, after weeks of practice, she does succeed. This is never seen in *Pygmalion*. In Shaw’s version we are left to assume that she has made substantial progress because in Act II Eliza speaks poorly and in Act III she is put on display at Mrs. Higgins’ at-home day. We never see the moment Eliza succeeds or how she got there, and we certainly never see Higgins encouraging her that she ever would.

In addition, there is a scene in the play that is non-existent in the musical. The scene contains very colorful dialogue and presents a clear picture of what Shaw intended Higgins to be about. The following scene takes place in Act IV directly following Eliza’s first public appearance at Mrs. Higgins’ at home day. This scene speaks volumes about how these two men view Eliza:

MRS HIGGINS: Be quiet, Henry. Colonel Pickering: don’t you realize that when Eliza walked into Wimpole Street, something walked in with her?


MRS HIGGINS: It would have been more to the point if her mother had. But as her mother didn’t something else did.

PICKERING: But what?

MRS HIGGINS (*unconsciously dating herself by the word*): A problem.

PICKERING: Oh, I see. The problem of how to pass her off as a lady.

HIGGINS: I’ll solve that problem. I’ve half solved it already.

MRS HIGGINS: No, you two infinitely stupid male creatures: the problem of what is to be done with her afterwards.

HIGGINS: I don’t see anything in that. She can go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her.

MRS HIGGINS: The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now! The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own
living without giving her a fine lady’s income! Is that what you mean?

PICKERING (indulgently, being rather bored): Oh, that will be all right, Mrs. Higgins. (He rises to go).

HIGGINS (rising also): We’ll find her some light employment.

PICKERING: She’s happy enough. Don’t you worry about her. Goodbye. (He shakes hands as if he were consoling a frightened child, and makes for the door).

HIGGINS: Anyhow, there’s no good bothering now. The things done. Goodbye, mother. (He kisses her, and follows Pickering).

PICKERING (turning for a final consolation): There are plenty of openings. We’ll do what’s right. Goodbye.

HIGGINS (to Pickering as they go out together): Let’s take her to the Shakespeare exhibition at Earls Court.

PICKERING: Yes: let’s. Her remarks will be delicious.

HIGGINS: She’ll mimic all the people for us when we get home.

PICKERING: Ripping. (Both are heard laughing as they go downstairs) (538-540).

This is male chauvinism at its best. It happens to be lighthearted dialogue between Higgins and Pickering, and they obviously see nothing wrong with how they view Eliza. They are amused with their experiment, but in the process of teaching Eliza they have managed to completely objectify a human being. She is a puppet to them.

Furthermore, there is a scene very close to the end of *Pygmalion* in which Higgins says to Eliza upon her declaration that she will marry Freddy:

HIGGINS: Rubbish! You shall marry an ambassador. You shall marry the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland or somebody who wants a deputy-queen. I’m not going to have my masterpiece thrown away on Freddy (568-569).
Here Higgins is clearly still referring to Eliza as an object and not as a human. He still refuses to acknowledge her hand in her transformation from a flower girl to a lady. His view of Eliza has not changed. This is reiterated in the very end of *Pygmalion*, (previously cited in Chapter III), when Eliza says to Higgins that she will no longer see him, and he then proceeds to tell her to go buy him Stilton cheese and gloves. She tells him to buy them himself and leaves. He then tells his mother not to worry about buying those items for him as she will no doubt buy them anyhow. Higgins does not change in Shaw’s play.

In contrast to the Higgins in *Pygmalion*, the Higgins in *My Fair Lady* has a soliloquy in the form of a song at the end of the play called “I’ve Grown Accustomed to her Face”:

HIGGINS: Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn!
I’ve grown accustomed to her face!
She almost makes the day begin.
I’ve grown accustomed to the tune
She whistles night and noon.
Her smiles. Her frowns.
Her ups. her downs,
Are second nature to me now;
Like breathing out and breathing in.
(Reassuringly)
I was serenely independent and content before we met;
Surely I could always be that way again-
(The reassurance fails)
I’ve grown accustomed to her looks;
Accustomed to her voice:
Accustomed to her face (125-126).

At this moment Higgins has a revelation; his feelings for Eliza have surfaced. In *Pygmalion*, whether he has these feelings or not is never revealed, and we do not see this transformation; this soft, honest side of Higgins.

How does this information answer the question of which play makes a stronger statement in favor of women? As mentioned before it is not a black and white issue. It
was assumed from afar, that *My Fair Lady* was the weaker of the two on the subject of woman because Eliza returns to Higgins in the end. It is the opinion of this author, that if Eliza had returned to Higgins in *Pygmalion*, it would have made a poor statement to women. Eliza should have left and never returned, and for all we know she did. This was a bold statement by Shaw who was an avid supporter of woman suffrage; even though he let Higgins have the last word. In *My Fair Lady*, however, we see Higgins transform. We see a side to him that we do not see in *Pygmalion*, so her return to him is not a weak statement in any sense. Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe set out to put the romance into *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts*. And that’s what they did:

For the published version of *Pygmalion*, Shaw wrote a preface and an epilogue which he called a sequel. I have omitted the preface because the information contained therein is less pertinent to *My Fair Lady* than it is to *Pygmalion*. I have omitted the sequel because in it Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy and — Shaw and Heaven forgive me! — I am not certain he is right. (*My Fair Lady*, Forward).
April 20, 1999

Ms. Jessica L. Raymer

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To Whom it May Concern:

I am currently working on my Masters Thesis at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. My thesis is titled *Pygmalion* vs. *My Fair Lady*: A comparison of the vision of Shaw and Lerner and Loewe on the same play and what each play says about women. Because much of my thesis is a critical analysis of the two plays, I cite scenes from *My Fair Lady*. The first scene I would like to quote from is in Act I, Scene V, p.63 beginning with, "Eliza, I know you're tired..." and goes through Higgins speech until Eliza says, "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain." The other section I would like to quote is the first part of Higgins' song, "I've Grown Accustomed to her Face." This song is in Act II, Scene 6, p. 125, beginning with, "Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn!" and going through p.126 the end of the first section, "Accustomed to her face." Please know that everything in this paper is cited appropriately.

In order to move forward in my studies, I do need permission to quote from *My Fair Lady*. The version I am using was published by Signet Books, copyright 1956. This is an urgent matter. Please fax me a letter stating permission to quote this material at (702) 895-0833. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica L. Raymer

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