

Two Metamorphoses of Eliza in *Pygmalion*

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Introduction

Eliza's metamorphoses start one day with a joke. Professor Higgins, a linguist, and Colonel Pickering, a rich gentleman, make a bet whether Higgins can change a poor flower girl, Eliza into a lady within six months. Higgins will win if he can make people believe Eliza a lady at a party. Then Pickering has to pay Higgins whatever money it took to train Eliza to become a lady.

This bet is like a game played by two fun-seeking gentlemen. Both Higgins and Pickering are so to speak knowledge freaks with abundant time and money. Further, Higgins is a rather childish, naughty gentleman. Though Higgins' housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce warns Higgins that he can not take a girl as he might pick up a pebble on the beach, he does not listen. Instead, both men can not resist the excitement of this new game, and so they launch their experiment.

Eliza's life, in this way, suddenly starts revolving when she visits Higgins and is "picked up" by him. Again, Eliza is too irresistible an experiment for Higgins to ignore. Once the training starts, however, the game is played seriously. It does not take long before the two men are infatuated with this game. They thoroughly enjoy the game until they are confronted by Eliza's sudden revolt.

In the end, Eliza succeeds in changing in two ways: one is physically and the other spiritually. Physical change is all right, because that is all Higgins and Pickering want. She looks very sophisticated, and as a result, she leads Higgins to win the bet. Yet the latter change of Eliza is not exactly what Higgins wants nor Eliza herself expects. In Eliza's sorrow and anger, even after a great success at a party, her original plan that she just wants to be a lady in a flower shop instead of selling at the corner of streets, is revealed. She is surprised at the outcome of this training and perplexed of what this teaching brings to her. She is at a total loss.

There exist mistakes on both sides. Higgins never thinks about the inner change of Eliza when he starts. He just devotes himself to teaching Eliza. Neither does Eliza think about her inner change herself. She is awakened and becomes very independent at the end. She is very beautiful and charming, but not happy. She gets frustrated at what she gains. By exploring the perplexed Eliza, we will see the essence of mistakes both characters make

—what Higgins wants and Eliza expects—through the experiment.

I

The relationship between Higgins and Eliza changes, according to the stages of her development. At first, it starts as one between a flower girl and a strange, arrogant linguist, and then, as pupil and teacher. Finally, their relationship seems to be that of comrades who try to fulfill the same dream.

These changes go together with the progression of their experiment. At the beginning, Higgins damns Eliza's language as "kerbstone English," which will keep her in the gutter. When Eliza is angry at Higgins' tyranny and about to walk out, Higgins immediately tempts her with chocolates, jewelry, dresses, or taxis. Indeed, the carrot and stick tactics of Higgins subdue Eliza's resistance.

As far as Higgins' teaching is concerned, he says to his mother, Mrs. Higgins thus.

"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." (pp.81-82), Bernard Shaw *Pygmalion*, Eichosha-Penguin Books (Middlesex, England:Viking Penguin Inc.), 1986.

Being clearly said, Eliza is used as a tool to satisfy a professional linguist, Dr. Higgins. His excitement genuinely derives from his professionalism as a linguist. His satisfaction is enormous when Eliza performs exactly as told.

Eliza's existence for Higgins, on the other hand, serves as his self-satisfaction and self-intoxication. At a party, she keeps to two subjects, general greetings and the weather. If she starts something else, Higgins will signal her to stop. By presenting Higgins with a victory, Eliza helps quench Higgins' endless thirst for knowledge.

As for Eliza, she wants only to speak proper English, which is good enough to run a flower shop. Overwhelming Eliza, Higgins gives her military-like orders. Threatening, his orders are something like an ultimatum for her to follow.

"Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you are good and do whatever you are told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you are naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you are not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower

of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop." (pp. 45-46)

Fatherly figure appearing, Higgins' Spartan way of coaching starts and continues. The first lesson is the proper pronunciation of the alphabet. Day after day, the repetition of very basic training continues. In the meantime, Eliza's manners and appearance gradually improve too, along with the improvement of lifestyle. Mrs. Pearce feeds her nutritious meals regularly, so that Eliza can lead a normal lady-like life. Thanks to her, she can live in a clean environment for the first time in her life. Also, she does not have to worry about making money for a living. As long as she listens to Higgins, she can lead a carefree life.

Eliza changes rapidly. Her first interview with Mrs. Higgins is successful. Though once Eliza starts talking freely, her true self is revealed. Yet, as Mrs. Higgins assumes, Eliza is indeed "a triumph of your [Higgins'] art and of her dressmaker's." (p. 80) For young Eliza, changing seems not so hard compared to one who has grown up in a rich society such as Miss Emsford Hill. It is an advantage for Eliza to have nothing to lose. Everything she experiences at Higgins' is new: language, food, manners. She even has maids to serve her and help her become a proper lady. Like soaking up water with a sponge, Eliza rapidly absorbs what Higgins teaches.

Eliza's apprenticeship is rewarded when she makes a great success at a grand reception at an Embassy in London one night. Everybody thinks Eliza to be a lady or a princess of royal blood in some country far away. In a way, this is the completion of the training. The game is over, and a new Eliza is born that night. As Mrs. Higgins interestingly remarks, Higgins and Colonel Pickering are a pair of babies, playing with "live doll." (p. 81) And now those two gentlemen are very satisfied with what they have done. The fact that people at the party are easily tricked makes them thrilled and they enjoy their accomplishment. After the big party, the two gentlemen are complacent, which apparently stems from the deep satisfaction in finishing a big business. Higgins says: "It was interesting enough at first while we were at the phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. ... It was a silly notion: the whole thing has been a bore." (p. 98)

In contrast to comfortably tired Higgins, Eliza looks sad. She is frustrated. She is near exploding. A little kindness is what she needs badly. As a little girl who did a good job, she is waiting for candy from an adult. But Higgins, who is occupied with his own success, never cares for Eliza. He just blabs: "... never again for me. No more artificial duchess. The whole thing has been simple purgatory." (p. 99) While listening to him, Eliza becomes furious.

Now Eliza is very worried about her future. Once the training is over, Higgins will have nothing to do with her. She feels she is left out. The comradeship they both created vanishes. As if she were a lost child, she does not know where to go, what to do. Eliza,

who gains beauty, is helpless.

II

If this were all of the *Pygmalion*, the charm of the story would be half gone. She is not as tamed as she appears. However feminine she looks, true Eliza is not dead. In Act IV, the battle against Higgins sparkles. The whole chapter is fighting between Higgins and Eliza.

Liza: "... I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute. Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you?" (p.100)

Liza: "What's to become of me? What's to become of me?"

Higgins: "How the devil do I know what's to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?"

Liza: "You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you—not so much as [those]slippers."

Liza: "I heard your prayers. 'Thank God it's all over!'" (p.101)

Higgins: "Well, don't you thank God it's all over? Now you are free and can do what you like."

Liza: "What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?" (p.102)

Liza: "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me" (p.103)

Liza: "He [Colonel Pickering] might want them for next girl you pick up to experiment on."

Eliza even fights against Higgins as if an equal. It reminds us of the wild, vivid flower girl. Once she learns Higgins' weak point, she attacks. Higgins is furious, saying: "You have wounded me to the heart." (p.104) Eliza's joy increases when she sees Higgins' wounds: "... damn my own folly in having lavished my hard-earned knowledge and the treasure of my regard and intimacy on a heartless guttersnipe." (p.105)

This battle indicates the process which she has to regain her independence that she lost under the apprenticeship of Higgins. As if a warrior who sets out for a battle field, invincible Eliza is thus depicted.

... She goes to the wardrobe; opens it; and pulls out a walking dress, a hat, and a pair of shoes, which she throws on the bed. She takes off her evening dress and shoes; then takes a padded hanger from the wardrobe; adjusts it carefully in the evening dress; and hangs it in the wardrobe, which she shuts with a slam. She puts on her walking

shoes, her walking dress, and hat. She takes her wrist watch from the dressing-table and fastens it on. She pulls on her gloves; takes her vanity bag; and looks into it to see that her purse is there before hanging it on her wrist. She makes for the door. Every movement expresses her furious resolution

Her decision here is an apparent departure from Higgins. Alone, she must live in reality, recognizing and adjusting the new self. This revolt is what she had not expected. Higgins does not like Eliza's revolt at all, either. He once says about the women when asked by Pickering.

"... I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you are driving at another. ... I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other on to the wrong track. One wants to go north and the other south; and the result is that both have to go east, though they both hate the east wind. So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so." (pp. 49-50)

To Higgins, women are always something troublesome. He never thinks of friendship or respect among them. Higgins sees Eliza very useful as a secretary, though. He once says to Mother that Eliza knows where his things are, and remembers his appointments. Yet, Eliza can never be promoted to something more than just a secretary, a lowly subordinate to a chauvinistic man like Higgins.

At Mrs. Higgins', their battle continues. It runs parallel though. To Higgins, Eliza's revolt is a betrayal, thus beyond his comprehension. Yet, he does not want to lose Eliza. As well as a secretarial ability, he also appreciates Eliza's competence to run a household. She can become a wonderful successor of Mrs. Pearce in the future.

Secretly, he admits that Eliza fights brilliantly. Higgins says, "Who cares for a slave?" (p. 128) That is exactly the same idea that Eliza has. Eliza says she does not want to be passed over, which means she wants recognition. She wants proper evaluation as well. She does not stand being ignored. Now Eliza demands identity more than anything else.

Eliza's eloquent speech gradually excels Higgins'. She makes him furious when she says she will become an assistant to Neponmuck, once Higgins' pupil. Higgins explodes in anger: "What! That impostor! that humbug! that toadying ignoramus! Teach him my methods! my discoveries! You take one step in his direction and I'll wring your neck." (p. 131)

Eliza defiantly retorts:

“Wring away. What do I care? I knew you’d strike me someday. Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can’t take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! [Purposely dropping her aitches to annoy him] That’s done you, Enry Iggins, it az. Now I don’t care that for your bullying and your big talk. I’ll advertise it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she’ll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. ...” (pp.131-132)

On purpose, Eliza manipulates language. She knows how to use language effectively now. She finds what words most irritate Higgins. It is here that the difference is clear. Eliza’s first metamorphosis is just imitation from the one Higgins sets. Her second metamorphosis, the spiritual one, is more advanced. Beyond imitation, she can express herself most effectively. This is the art of speech, Higgins’ specialty. This is what Eliza acquires through the training, which neither Higgins nor Eliza expect.

Somehow, Higgins likes her rebellion. While listening to her, he, wondering at her, unconsciously utters, “You damned impudent slut, you! But it’s better than sniveling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn’t it? By George, Eliza, I said I’d make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.” (p.132) He apparently admires Eliza for being so independent, and admits her logical reasoning as splendid and convincing enough. Higgins has to admire her eloquence, and that makes him say “I like you like this.”

Conclusion

Eliza finally regains freedom, vanquishing her despotic master, Higgins. She even learns a profound philosophy on the way. About being a lady, Eliza comments that “the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated.” (p.122)

It is ironical to think that when Eliza is reborn as a lady, she is destined to leave Higgins. When Bernard Shaw wrote this play, he was said to have been influenced by Greek mythology. A king named Pygmalion fell in love with a statue of a woman. He prayed to Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, to give life to the statue. The prayer was answered, and Pygmalion married the girl and lived happily ever after.

Higgins can never become Pygmalion of the Greek myth. So, we wonder about the relationship at the very end of the story. In the epilogue, it reads: “It is astonishing how much Eliza still manages to meddle in the housekeeping at Wimpole Street in spite of the shop and her own family.” (p.147) “... she has never got out of the habit of nagging Higgins that was established on the fatal night when she won his bet for him.” Or “...

that his [Higgins'] indifference is deeper than the infatuation of commoner souls." (p.148) Since the author does not clearly tell the end of the story, we guess from the above quotations and conclude that indispensable kinship such as that of brother and sister is born at the end. With the metamorphoses of Eliza, their relationship varies, and it finally settles as one of kinship—swaying back and forth: at times close, and at other times distant from each other.

Reference

The text used here is Bernard Shaw *Pygmalion*, Eichosha-Penguin Books (Middlesex, England: Viking Penguin Inc.), 1986.