

# Eliza's Journey of Disillusionment—An Interpretation of Pygmalion in the Perspective of Myth Archetype

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**Abstract:** G. B. Shaw names his play *Pygmalion* by a protagonist in *Metamorphoses* Book Ten, so that he connects the enlivened ivory statue with the dramatically changed flower girl. Great culture significance was attached to this play. At the same time, the originality which is different from the original myth displays the author's effort to explore female self-creation.

**Key words:** George Bernard Shaw; *Pygmalion*; myth archetype; disillusionment

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George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) is an outstanding critical realistic dramatist of the 20th century. In his life, he created lots of well-known plays and works. *Pygmalion* is one of Shaw's best-known plays. It is a play based on Ovid's tale of *Pygmalion*. It tells the story of Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics, who makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can turn a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a refined society lady merely by teaching her how to speak with an upper class accent and training her in etiquette. The play is a sharp lampoon of the rigid British class system of the day and a comment on women's independence, packaged as a romantic comedy.

This play gets an enormous success all over the world. This essay will discuss the process of Eliza's changing of image and arising of spirit from the Greek myth archetype. Meanwhile, it will also display the author's effort to explore female self-creation.

## 1 Pygmalion in Greek Myth

In Ovid's narrative, *Pygmalion* was a Cypriot sculptor who carved a woman out of ivory. According to Ovid, after seeing the Propoetides prostituting themselves (more accurately, they denied the divinity of Aphrodite and she thus 'reduced' them to prostitution), he was not interested in women, but his statue was so fair and realistic that he fell in love with it. In the vertex, Aphrodite's festival day came. For the festival, *Pygmalion* made offerings to Aphrodite and made a wish. "I sincerely wished the ivory sculpture will be changed to a real woman." However, he couldn't bring himself to express it. When he returned home, Cupid sent by Aphrodite kissed the ivory sculpture on the hand. At that time, it was changed to a beautiful woman. A ring was put on her finger. It was Cupid's ring which made love achieved. Aphrodite granted his wish. *Pygmalion* married the ivory sculpture changed to a woman under Aphrodite's blessing.

In Shaw's play, Professor of phonetics Henry Higgins makes a bet that he can train a bedraggled Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party by teaching her to assume a veneer of gentility, the most important element of which, he believes, is impeccable speech. The play is a sharp lampoon of the rigid British class system of the day and a comment on women's independence, packaged as a

romantic comedy.

In Greek myth, there are two reasons for the ivory to a beautiful woman. One is *Pygmalion*'s outstanding carving skill; the other is Aphrodite's power to give her life. In Shaw's play, Eliza has changed into a princess from a poor flower girl. It is the result of Higgins' six-month-training. But her arising of spirit is more important. She became a brave resister who dares to pursue her ideal as a poor flower girl.

## 2 The Changing in Image

In the myth, *Pygmalion* was a Cypriot sculptor who carved a woman out of ivory. It is the first change. In the play, this process is Eliza's change in her appearance. Under Higgins's instruct, Eliza has changed a lot in dressing, conversation and behavior. In act one, when Mr. Higgins saw her at first time, "she wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly: its mousy color can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to her waist." "Eliza was droved out of home when she was young, so she has no time and energy to make up herself. When she goes to Mr. Higgins's and wishes to learn a decent accent, she tries to make herself look better. "She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red. She has a nearly clean apron, and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little." "But in the gentlemen's eyes, she is still "so deliciously low- so horribly dirty".

Contrast with this, after taking a bath, she has changed into a dainty and exquisitely clean young Japanese lady. No one recognizes her, including her father. But dressing can only decorate her shallow appearance. Higgins even says: "A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech." Even if Higgins makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering and asks Mrs. Pearce to change Eliza's clothes, Eliza still says to the father: "Garn! Don't you know your own daughter?" After six mouths for an experiment in teaching, her conversation has changed. In act three, Higgins invites Eliza to his mother's home. Eliza expresses quite well. She "is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of

such remarkable distinction and beauty"and "speaks with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone". But her topics are restricted to the weather and health. Especially she says "Not bloody likely"with her elegant tone makes everyone surprised. Mrs. Higgins tells Higgins Eliza's accent and dressing "is a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's", but "of course she is not presentable", because there's something sanguinary element from her conversation.

In the end of Act Three, after six months' training, in the Embassy Ball Eliza learns to behave properly as well as to speak properly. The challenge she faces is increased, however, Eliza is quite presentable. Meanwhile Higgins, the interesting work done, rapidly loses interest in proceedings as he sees that no one will see through Eliza. Someone even has detected that Eliza is not English, as she speaks it too perfectly ("only those who have been taught to speak it speak it well"), and that she is, in fact, Hungarian, and of Royal blood. When asked, Higgins responds with the truth and no-one believes him.

It looks like Eliza gets a great success in appearance and conversation, and her life has also changed a lot. Higgins wins the bet and his friend Pickering gets much fun in the process of training. But for Eliza, it is only a game which makes her exhausted. She wants to be a flower sailor, but now she can only face the reality of being got rid of when the bet is over. But Shaw's play is not over. In Act Four, Shaw pushes her into reality to deal with the questions she must face, and displays the arousing of her spirit.

### 3 The Arousing of Spirit

In the myth, the ivory sculpture was changed into a beautiful woman. But we don't know if she owns her own thought after she gets her life. In Shaw's play, he describes clearly Eliza's courage and determination when she is in trouble.

When Eliza comes to Higgins, she just wants to be a lady in a flower shop instead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. She doesn't want to be a princess. She wants to get a decent job to support herself and what she wants is just the respect from others.

But the reality makes her dream break. When Eliza hears Higgins says, "Thank God. It's over", she flinches violently. Higgins says "It was interesting enough at first, while we were at the phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. If I hadn't backed myself to do it, I should have chucked the whole thing up two months ago. It was a silly notion: the whole thing has been a bore."She finally realizes that it is only a game for the two gentlemen, but she puts all her hope on it. Now game is over and her dream awakes but she has nowhere to go.

Shaw tries to project this picture by portraying the Professor who cares for nothing but his own self-satisfaction and ego. Eliza passes the test as a Princess of some Russian Royal family but in reality she is faced with an emotional breakdown as she has nowhere to go. When she was a flower girl, she had her own slum to call her home but after the Professor is successful in his mission, she for sure knows that she will be thrown out of the house and it is impossible to go back to her place. She is puzzled: "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you have made a lady of me. I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me.

"Eliza tries to control herself and feel indifferent as she rises

and walks across to the hearth to switch off the lights...she sits down in Higgins's chair and holds on hard to the arms. Finally she gives way and flings herself furiously on the floor, raging."" She snatches up the slippers, and hurling them at him one after the other with all her force."It is a turning point for Eliza. The worries in her mind turn up. So she gives a suffocated scream of fury, and asks Higgins: "what to become of me? What to become of me?"Higgins' answer makes her totally awake: "how the devil do I know what to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?"Professor Higgins has only contempt for the social class of the society, and decides to transform a naive flower girl to a society lady and to fool the so-called society people. He does 'not' succeed in his aim but excels in his mission. But what is interesting is the position of the Flower Girl once Higgins succeeds in his ambition. It gives Eliza a heavy blow and makes her desperate. She knows this game is over. She must leave if she wants to get the life she wants.

In the last Act, Eliza realizes what she wants. She is not afraid and scared any more. She is sunny, self-possessed, and gives a staggeringly convincing exhibition of ease of manner all the time. In their last conversation, Eliza tells them her desire: "I want a little kindness...what I did was not for the dresses and the taxes: I did it because we were pleasant together and I came—to care for you, not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us, but more friendly like." Though this conversation breaks up in disagreement, but Eliza realizes herself and determines to insist on her individuality and never give up. Finally Higgins admits Eliza's mature mind in his own way. "You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors together instead of only two men and a silly girl."

### 4 Conclusion

In Ovid's story, the ivory sculpture is the archetype of Eliza. They are made by others and great changes are found in their lives. But in Shaw's play, there are many differences from the Greek myth.

Eliza as a naive girl grows into a woman and realizes her place in Higgins house. The frustration and anger toward him for not recognizing her individuality is well etched. Shaw smashes the social ideology in typical style true of his own. The title is apt but Shaw's sculptor, Higgins unlike the sculptor is not ready to accept his creation as life-blood human being but considers only as a masterpiece of his work. But when Eliza realizes the truth, she does not hesitate to leave, because she doesn't want to be a doll. She is determined to pursue her own freedom and independence instead of depending on a man for his position and possession. At that time she leaves Mr. Higgins and chooses her own life, her opinion of feminism plays a dominant role and shows a profound social significance.

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Pygmalion is one of the most successful plays by Irish playwright Geroge Bernard Shaw. The play has been adapted to a musical, a British movie, a Hollywood movie and several other stage and movie adaptations across the globe. Eliza more. Pygmalion is one of the most successful plays by Irish playwright Geroge Bernard Shaw. It is truly striking that in the reason-driven and principally secular Age of Enlightenment, philosophers, writers and artists had collectively engaged with an ancient myth in their discussion on cognitive and creative capacities of a more. It is truly striking that in the reason-driven and principally secular Age of Enlightenment, philosophers, writers and artists had collectively engaged with an ancient myth in their discussion on cognitive and creative capacities of a man. In our mythic stories, the one who stands between the hero and the treasure often mysteriously becomes, in fact, the gift giver: obstructing dragon guardian transforms into knowledgeable guide. With the treasure come new challenges, however; the hero can project any of these elements outwardly onto people or institutions and become entangled, or the seeker's ego can identify with the successful search and become inflated. Or, following a path of transformation to a higher stage of human development, the hero can integrate the previously hidden and unknown depths of self. This article is organized into the following sections: 1. The hero's journey as a map to psychological healing... In the myth, Pygmalion makes a sculpture of his ideal woman, named Galatea. He falls in love with his beautiful statue, which then comes to life. With his title, Shaw implies that Eliza is a kind of Galatea, molded by Pickering and Higgins into the ideal lady of Victorian society. Pygmalion is Shaw's most popular play and has spawned a number of adaptations (including a film version). Antagonist: While Eliza and Higgins argue with each other, they both cooperate in order to fool London's high society. The rigid hierarchy of social classes in Victorian England can be seen as the antagonist against which all the characters struggle, as they deal with issues of class and wealth. Extra Credit for Pygmalion. Double Threat. This is based on Pygmalion because in a way, Higgins shapes Eliza and falls in love with his creation. Pretty Woman also fits the mold. Richard Gere helps Julia Roberts change and this should not be a spoiler it's 2019. So Cinderella is not a Pygmalion tale. In the Selena Gomez dance version of Cinderella Another Cinderella Story, the prince is directly involved ( with his knowledge unlike movies such as Ever After with Drew Barrymore or A Cinderella Story with Hillary Duff ) in helping Cinderella transform to fully meet her goals. So arguably this might meet both standards although it is called Another Cinderella Story. It's also a TERRIBLE movie. In contrast, a positive self talk influences our perspective and ensuing performance positively. So, watch out your self talk! 897 views. Through the emphasis of Eliza's poor articulation and social grace, Bernard Shaw criticizes the vulgarity of lower class language. Pickering distinctly treats a lowly flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, the in the same fashion as he would treat a lady. He, in fact, eliminates the class distinction through "treatment that does not take such distinctions into account" (288). Higgins treats Eliza just as rudely and inconsiderately as he treats every other character in the play, including his mother and Mrs. Pearce. MacCarthy, a critic, furthermore agrees with Dukore: "The self-absorption of Higgins's makes his behaviour as inconsiderate as lack of education makes Eliza's, but at least he treats everyone alike. He may be rude, but his rudeness is not discriminating" (112).