The musical comedy is, as its name suggests, a dramatic entertainment which abounds with songs and other musical varieties, or as Sylvan Barnet, Morton Bernman and William Burto define it as "a piece with songs, dances, and comedy, integrated into a story."\(^1\) In this case it seems "difficult to say how much a musical comedy differs from an operetta,"\(^2\) they add. Anyhow we can trace some differences between the operetta and musical comedy, since the former has a spoken dialogue and more songs than the latter. On this assumption the musical comedy is closer to the dramatic act than the operetta. The musical comedy, on the other hand, has more dances than does the operetta.

Another definition to the musical comedy is given by Glenn Loney who maintains that it is "a play in which music, lyrics, and possibly dances are interwoven with the plot. Clearly, a play with background music or a few songs and dances, as in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* … is not a musical comedy."\(^3\) Loney elaborates on this point saying that "music has been added to heighten atmosphere, relieve tension, or create diversion, but the play itself is the most important thing."\(^4\) This means it is possible to remove the musical element from a play without causing any damage to it, but conversely, any omission of musical element in a musical comedy will make it fall apart.
As for the origin of the musical comedy, it is variant. It can be specially traced back to the nineteenth century. Four sources are considered its background, namely, the extravaganza, the variety show, burlesque and vaudeville. The extravaganza, as Oscar G. Brockett tells us, "depended upon music, dance, and lavish scenic display for its appeal. Its subject matter was most frequently drawn from myths or fairy tales and … was seldom topical or satirical."^{5}

The variety show is, as its name suggests, an entertainment of various elements including songs, dances and comic scenes loosely connected to each other or related to a unified plot.

While the extravaganza and the variety show are easily defined, burlesque is not easy to define. Burlesque is traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it simply meant a parody of literary works, especially plays. The first burlesque in English literature is Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607-1610) which ridicules the heroic romances. The second was Buckingham's *Rehearsal* (1672) which is a satire of heroic tragedy. The third one is Fielding's *Tom Thumb* (1730) which is a burlesque of playwrights. The fourth one is Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779) which is satirical of sentimental drama. In the nineteenth century burlesque was represented by the travesty which is a retelling of a famous play in a farcical way. Anyhow burlesque reached America in the last decade of the nineteenth century when it "became a collection of monologues, comedy sketches, songs, and dance numbers which featured a female chorus. The emphasis was upon beautiful women and jokes with sensual implications. It rapidly came to be thought of as an entertainment intended only for a male audience,"^{6} to use Brockett's words. This explains why the striptease became its central element in the 1920s.
In regard to vaudeville it "originally… meant a satirical song. Later it was to designate a play which contains songs set to well-known tunes," as Brockett explains. But its real development took place in the nineteenth century and continued as such until the 1930s of the twentieth century when it was overshadowed by the spread of the sound movie. This motion picture can introduce to the audience the same entertainment of the vaudeville with a lower price.

Again the nineteenth century melodrama, which had a lot of musical entertainment, helped the development of the musical comedy. All the so-called illegitimate drama and theatres included a lot of singing and dancing to avoid the Licensing Law then. Even legitimate drama and legitimate theatres, in their competition with the illegitimate drama, had their own singing and dancing given during the intermissions or as the parts of the afterpieces to entertain their audience.

However, the development of the musical comedy at the end of nineteenth century is due to George Edwards's work in London in the 1890s. He is known for his farcical plots with a blend of songs, dances and chorus numbers. His plays and their imitations in Europe had a mythical setting and they were known for their romantic themes. They stood away from actual life.

The twentieth century had its own influence on the musical comedy, as well. The first two decades of the century, especially around World War 1, the vogue of the ballroom dancing encouraged the musical comedy, but still the plot was not an essential part of the entertainment. But in the 1930s there was interest in the plot and psychological motivation of the characters. Thus *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) was the first American musical play to win the Pulitzer Prize. It was written by George S. Kaufman and Maurice Ryskind.
Its setting is in "various places in the United States during a presidential campaign in the 1920s, and Washington, D.C.," as Myron Matlaw tells us. The culmination was in the 1940s when Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers produced such wonderful musical comedies as *Oklahoma* (1943), *Carousel* (1945) and *South Pacific* (1949).

Yet the most popular musical comedy is, as far as the length of its running performances is concerned, *My Fair Lady* produced in New York in 1956. This musical play was written by Alan J. Lerner, and whose music was composed by Frederick Loewe. It "proved to be one of the most successful theatrical pieces ever produced, having a run that continued till 29 September 1962, 2,717 performances. It arrived at Drury Lane Theatre on 30 April 1958 and ran until 19 October 1963," to quote C.B. Purdom.

*My Fair Lady* is based on G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1912). Pygmalion according to legends is a misogynist sculptor who sculptures the statue of Galatea with which he falls in love. He begs the Goddess of love Venus, to turn the statue into a human being in order to marry her. His wish is granted. In Shaw's *Pygmalion* the concern is not about the transformation of the statue into a human being. Shaw is concerned with the transformation of a flower girl into a lady when she changes her speech. He thinks that when people speak the same dialect there will be no social stratification or clear division, or caste. He stresses the power of speech which can make people equal when their speech is one and the same. *My Fair Lady*, on the other hand, is more concerned with the power of love and sentiment than with the power of speech. Thus, while many of Shaw's dialogue passages are kept in *My Fair Lady*, new passages are interpolated for songs. In short *"My Fair Lady* (as its title suggests) is a romance that focuses on the Cinderella story and the
sentimentality of Pygmalion myth. This was accomplished by… making the resolution a happy, romantic one,”¹⁰ as Matlaw puts it.

The opening of *My Fair Lady* is very interesting as it has a lot of coincidences. Thus while people outside the Opera House are waiting in the rain to take taxis, entertainers are ready to amuse them. By accident while a cart-wheeling performer is turning somersaults sideways collides with Freddy. As a result the latter himself collides with Eliza, the flower girl and she falls down on the ground surrounded by the scattered flowers she is selling in her upset basket. Freddy says: "I'm frightfully sorry,"¹¹ and hastens for a taxi. Among the people outside the Opera House is Professor Higgins, the author of *Higgins' Universal Alphabet*. He is suspected by some bystanders to be a detective while he is taking down Eliza's words. Higgins identifies some people including Eliza through their accents. He proudly says: "The science of speech. That is my profession; also my hobby…. I can place a man within six miles; … within two miles in London" (1.1.18).

It is by coincidence when Higgins meets Captain Pickering, "a student of Indian dialects" (1.1.21), and the author of *Spoken Sanskrit*. They introduce themselves to each other. Pickering says: "I came from India to meet you" (ibid.).! Higgins answers: "I was going to India to meet you" (ibid.).

The musical has a lot of themes one of which is transformation which affects Eliza in particular and others in general. This transformation can be traced back to the original legend on which the story of Pygmalion who transformed from a woman's hater to a woman's lover when he falls in love with Galatea's statue which he himself made, and then got married to when it turned through the intervention of Venus, the goddess of love, into a human shape. It is not only Pygmalion is transformed,
but also the inanimate status is transformed into a beautiful woman. Thus according to the legend nothing is immune from metamorphosis. Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is an example for this change. Moreover, as Tony T. N. Hung remarks:

The theme of transformation is a universal theme,... which underlies... plots and characters. More even than Shaw's time, we live in an age of upward mobility and image consciousness. Individuals are no longer predestined to a particular station in life, and transformations are the order of the day. Truck drivers may be transformed into film stars and pop idols, and film stars into politicians and even presidents, there are seemingly no limits to how far a person can be "made over", not only in matters of speech, but in every physical, social and cultural aspects.12

The story of the legendary Pygmalion applies also to Higgins who changes in *My Fair Lady* from a misogynist to a woman's lover when he falls in love with Eliza, his student whose ladyship he has created.

As for Eliza, who looks like "pris'ner of the gutters" (1.1.19), she is mainly concerned with transformation. Before her change she says she is treated as "if I was dirt" (1.3.33), as she is "so horribly dirty" (ibid. 34)! She is first compared to a "draggle-tailed guttersnipe" (ibid.). She has "wretched clothes and dirty face" (1.1.20). Higgins is so disgusted with her clumsy shape that he asks Mrs. Pearce to remove dirt from her and to "clean her, Mrs. Pearce. Sandpapers if it won't come off" (ibid.35). Once more she is looked upon as if she were a "squashed cabbage leaf" (ibid. 21), or just a "baggage" (1.3.32).
However Eliza within six months is different from the Eliza before that time. At the Ascot Race, the minute Freddy sees her, he is immediately infatuated with her. He takes her for a great young lady addressing her politely: "How do you do" (1.7.72)? Others greet her the same way calling her not simply Eliza, but "Miss Doolittle" (ibid.). Freddy also addresses her as such. He and others enjoy the way she refers to the weather. Freddy admires her way of speaking saying: "Ha, ha, how awfully funny" (ibid.). Again at the Embassy Ball, Eliza fascinates the audience. She passes off as an enchanting young lady who is referred to by the Queen of Transylvania as "charming. Charming" (1.10.85). She is requested to have a dance with dignitaries including the Prince of Transylvania, who is captivated by her. When Zoltan Karpathy, Higgins' student who claims: "I speak thirty-two languages. I know everybody in Europe. No imposter escape my detection" (1.10.84), dances with Eliza, he says: "I can tell she was born Hungarian!" (2.1.91)! And adds that she is "not only Hungarian, but of royal blood, she is a princess" (ibid.)! She passes off as a lady in the same place where she used to sell flowers as none of the owners of flower carts and vegetable sellers recognizes her. The first man tells her: "Can I get you a taxi, ma'am? A lady like you shouldn't be walkin' around at this hour of the morning" (2.3.101). To her father she is also a lady now: "You stand on your two feet. You are a lady now" (ibid. 105). Finally to Mrs. Higgins, Eliza "behaved like a princess" (2.5.116). To sum up, Eliza the dirt-like flower girl changed like a lady, the same way as Galatea, the ivory statue, changed into a living woman.

The other transformed character in the musical is the common man, Doolittle, who changes all of a sudden from a dustman into a rich middle-class person. This dustman was not a
respectable person in the society, especially when he goes to the bar to get drunk and not to pay for the drink. Thus the bartender shows no respect for him telling him: "I ain't runnin' no charity bazzar. Drink is to be paid for or not drunk. Come on, Doolittle. Out you go, Hop it now, Doolittle. On the double. On the double" (1.1.25). But when Doolittle becomes rich, the same bartender respectfully and emphatically tells him: "Do come again, Mr. Doolittle. We value your patronage always" (2.3.104). Moreover, the woman Doolittle was going with now urges him to marry her. Thus he tells Eliza: "Your stepmother wants to marry me. Now I'm respectable--she wants to be respectable" (ibid. 105).

The other major theme in the play is concerned with the grandeur and importance of the English language. Good speech is essential feature of language. The musical criticizes those who speak unclearly like mumblers. People should not speak unrefined inarticulate " kerb-stone English" (1.1.20), like that used first by Eliza before her transformation. Higgins' lecture to Eliza is a call to every Englishman who should be proud of his language which he must not abuse. Thus Eliza has to quit speaking a deformed language and must utter only the refined language used by well-known people:

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no rights to be anywhere--no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and divine gift of articulate speech, that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible.

(1.1.18-19)

If money guarantees a kind of prestige, the same is true with good English which ensures a "verbal class distinction" (1.1.20).
Conversely the untransformed Eliza is "condemned by every syllable she utters" (ibid.19). Thus Higgins' song "Why Can't English Learn to Speak" (1.1.21)? addressed to Pickering and concerned with the flower girl is self-explanatory:

Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?
If you spoke as she does, sir,
Instead of the way you do,
Why you might be selling flowers, too….
An Englishman’s way of speaking absolutely classifies him
The moment he talks some other Englishmen despise him.

(1.1.20)

Consequently, if all people speak with one dialect and proper English, there will be no economic or social differences. In this case a flower girl can pass for “a duchess at the Embassy ball, I could even get her a place as a lady’s maid or shop assistant, which requires better English” (1.1.21), as Higgins confirms. The improvement of language is by itself the improvement of appearance, conversation and social status.

This betterment of language makes teachers ambitious to try their dreams. So do the students try their best to achieve their goals. Thus Eliza goes to Higgins’ house requesting him to teach her good English and she is ready to pay him for that, “and if my money is not good enough I can go elsewhere” (1.3.32). Eliza’s ambition now is: “I want to be a lady in a flower shop, ‘stead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won’t take me unless I can talk more genteel; … and I’m ready to pay” (ibid.33).

Before she starts taking lessons Pickering doubts that Higgins will be successful. He defies Higgins and makes a wager that he will pay the expenses: “I’ll say you’re the greatest teacher
alive if you can make that good. I’ll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can’t do it. And I’ll even pay for the lessons” (ibid.34). She dreams in her song “Oh, Wouldn’t It Be Loverly” (1.1.23)? that after being taught the right speech she will be respected and free and independent:

All I want is a room somewhere,
Far away from the cold night air;
With one enormous chair,
Oh, wouldn’t it be loverly?

(Ibid.)

Higgins is also anxious, ambitious and painstaking to let Eliza improve her language. He threatens her: “You will pronounce your vowels correctly before this day is out, or there’ll be no lunch, no dinner, and no chocolates” (1.5.52)! He puts a small alcohol burner on the desk in order to make Eliza watch the flame when she pronounces or drops her aitches (H’s). Thus he asks her: “Now, listen carefully; in Hertford, Hereford, and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly ever happen” (ibid. 52). When she finally succeeds, after many attempts, in pronouncing the aitches correctly the flame is blown out and “the room is plunged into darkness” (ibid.55). She has also managed to pronounce and sing “the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain” (ibid.54). On some occasions Higgins inserts six marbles in her mouth to improve her pronunciation. Having managed to learn properly she and Higgins dance celebrating this overwhelming success which will qualify her to go to the Ascort Race and then to the Embassy Ball. When she goes to bed, she could not sleep for joy and hence she sings her famous joy “I Could Have Danced All Night” (ibid.63). The ambitious Higgins and Pickering gloat over their success in making Eliza pass off as a
princess. Thus Pickering song “You Did It, You Did It” (2.1.90) while dancing with Higgins is a good example of their good achievement.

Indeed this is the lesson we get about good English and refined language. Accordingly, “if the accent is the marker of class, then change your accent, and you can change your class”\textsuperscript{13} to borrow Roger Ebert’s remark.

However, the theme of the power of love is one of the predominant themes in \textit{My Fair Lady}. In the Pygmalion myth, on which the musical is based, the sculptor falls in love with his creation, Galatea whom he sculptured. \textit{In My Fair Lady} Higgins falls in love with the flower girl whom he made to pass off as a lady. No matter how Higgins tries to stay away from Eliza, he falls into her traps at the end, even for a while. His song “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” (2.6.125), in which he openly expresses his love, is a good witness on that:

\begin{verbatim}
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 and her downs
Are second nature to me now,
Like breathing out and breathing in….
I’m a most forgiving man….
But I’m so used to hear her say
Good morning every day.
\end{verbatim}

(ibid. 125-127)
Eliza, on the other hand, is infatuated with Higgins, especially when she completes her elocution lessons. Her love makes her sleepless:

Bed! Bed! I couldn’t go to bed!
My head’s two light to try to set it down!
Sleep! Sleep! I couldn’t sleep tonight!
Not for all the jewels in the crown!
I could have danced all night! …
I’ll never know what made it so exciting;
While all at once
My heart took flight.
I only know when he
Began to dance with me,
I could have danced, danced, danced all night!

(1.5.63)

If Higgins’ love for Eliza is not guaranteed, Freddy’s love for her is genuine. Yet she is inclined to Higgins. When Freddy meets Eliza at the Ascort Race, he is immediately captivated by her. He becomes devoted to her. He takes with him a bouquet of yellow flowers as a gift for Eliza and stands before Higgins’ house where she lives. There he sings his famous love song, “On the Street Where You Live” (1.8.77), in which he says:

I have often walked down this street before;
But the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before …
Does enchantment pour
Out of ev’ry door?
No, it’s just on the street where you live! …
People stop and stare. They don’t bother me.
For there’s nowhere else on earth that would rather be.
Let the time go by,  
I wouldn’t care if I  
Can be here on the street where you live.  

(1.8.77-78)

All that he has sung is unluckily of no avail. When he meets her again at night he tells her: “Darling… I’ve written you two and three times a day telling you. Sheets and sheets” (2.2.99-100). Still she is not responsive, because she wants proofs of love not only “words! Words! I’m so sick of words” (2.8.100)! She starts singing her famous defying song, “Show Me” (ibid. 100), in which she wants him to show his real love:

Don’t talk of stars  
Burning above;  
If you’re in love  
Show me!  
Tell me no dreams  
Filled with desire  
Show me! …  

Here we are together in the middle of the night!  
Don’t talk of spring! Just hold me tight!  
Anyone who’s ever been in love’ll tell you that  
This is no time for a chat!  
Haven’t your lips  
Longed for my touch?  
Don’t say how much,  
Show me! Show me!  

(Ibid.100-101)
Eliza here wants heart-felt love not verbal love. This also shows “her true independence as a woman,” as Tim Dirk points out. Anyhow in Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, Freddy marries Eliza in order not to make the play look strictly romantic, as the real romantic love is that between Eliza and Higgins. Shaw as a matter of fact is anti-romantic. He is didactic in *Pygmalion* in which he is mostly interested in improving the deplorable situation of the English pronunciation when it is not done in the right way.

One other theme of *My Fair Lady* is about the significance of music. Most of the songs in the musical express different attitudes in life, like ambition, liberation, enjoyment, love, defiance, pride and patriotism. Without the musical numbers accompanying the elocution tuition, Higgins might not have been able to succeed in giving his lessons to Eliza. The prose passages of *My Fair Lady* are not so easily memorized as its songs which are better appreciated by the audience. No one attended *My Fair Lady* could not memorize at heart the titles, if not some words of the songs. Many times the phonetical teaching lesson “The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain” has become part of dancing and singing which helped Eliza a lot to make her a lady. The romantic attachment between Higgins and Eliza is better expressed in songs than in plain prose. Eliza’s song “I Could Have Danced All Night” emphasizes the musical enjoyment; and the more she sings and dances the more she improves her language and social status. If the words come from the head, the songs come from the heart through which the real emotions and sentiments are expressed. That is why *My Fair Lady*, which is full of songs, is much better received than Shaw’s play, *Pygmalion* on which the musical depends, whether Shaw and his fans like it or not. The audience of *My Fair Lady* will emotionally or verbally participate with singers, but not with its speakers. What
makes *My Fair Lady* famous is its music not its talks. It is true then when Brooks Atkinson remarks that some of *My Fair Lady’s* “songs… have become most familiar in night clubs and on the air as well as on the screen and in the theatre…. [They] have become part of our musical heritage because they appeal to the heart rather than the mind”\(^\text{15}\).

Another theme about *My Fair Lady* is the case of misogyny. The legendary Pygmalion himself is a misogynist who is not inclined towards women. His first love is not with a flesh and blood woman, but only with a statue, which he named Galatea and wanted to turn into a woman, because he created her. Thus he falls in love not with a natural woman, created by God, but of his own creation. In other words, he selfishly finds fault with God’s created women, but not with his own make. Almost all of the main male characters hate marriage. Higgins takes pride in saying: “I am a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so” (1.3.39). In his reservation from women, he thinks: “I’m an ordinary man, …/ An average man am I” (ibid.). It is no surprise when he warns us of women:

But let a woman in your life  
And your serenity is through! …  
Make a plan and you will find  
She has something else in mind;  
And so rather than do either  
You do something else that neither  
Likes at all.  
You want to talk of Keats or Milton;  
She only wants to talk of love.  
You go to see a play or ballet,  
And spend it searching for her glove….
I’d be equally as willing
For a dentist to be drilling
Than to ever let a woman in my life!

(Ibid. 40)

Again when Eliza deserts Higgins because of the maltreatment of her, he becomes infuriated about women:
Woman are so irrational, that’s all there is to that!
Their heads are full of cotton, hay, and rust!
They’re nothing but exasperating, irritating,
Vacillating, calculating, agitating,
Maddening, and infuriating hags!...
Why can’t a woman take after a man?
Men are so pleasant, so easy to please.

(2.4.121-131)

It is true that Higgins once for all falls in love with Eliza. Yet it is not certain they will get married at the end. When she comes back to him, he is more interested in his slippers than in embracing her. He asks her, as he has always done before, to fetch his slippers. Thus when she tells him: “I washed my face and hands before I come. I did” (2.7.128), he replies: “Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers” (ibid.)? It is no wonder that Dirk is surprised remarking that “this is a tacked-on compromising insulting, misogynistic ending.”

As for Pickering he is also a bachelor and has no plans to get married. Nevertheless he is not completely a woman’s hater, but surely a marriage hater. He has more interest in spoken language than in women, which means that he prefers reading and writing to
women. Indeed he is Higgins’ foil as far as their treatment to Eliza is concerned.

Doolittle is against conventional marriage. He would rather have affairs with women than keep a wife. He decides to get married only when he gets rich, as he does not want to spend money on a wife. Money, even if it is five pounds, is better than his daughter’s good reputation. He does not care for what might happen to her while she is taking lessons from a bachelor, Higgins, at his house when she also meets another bachelor, Pickering. On the contrary, he is glad about it so that he can blackmail Higgins for keeping his daughter. He asks only “five-pound note” (1.5.49) when he knows that “Higgins’ intentions are honourable” (ibid.); otherwise “I’d ask fifty” (ibid.). His affairs with the “gentle sex” (1.2.27) are only for pleasure and exploitation so that he will “not get hooked” (ibid.) in marriage. Unwedded life is better than taking the responsibility of wedlock. He drunkenly and explicitly sings that he will get married at the church. He feels, on the other hand, that he will lose his freedom after he has been “bought up” (2.3.105) to his obligatory situation.

Still the theme of revealing and unmasking the hidden realities of people is one of the important themes in the play. In this regard no matter how Higgins pretends, after Eliza’s escape from him, that he is anxious to hear her voice when “she whistles night and noon.” (2.6.125), and longs for “Her smiles. Her frowns / Her ups, her downs” (ibid.) He dreams to see her again, but soon he retracts claiming that even if she returns, she has to atone for her desertion of him, or else he will slam the door in her face:

But I will never take her back,
If she were crawling on her knees.
Let her promise to atone!
Let her shiver, let her moan!
I will slam the door and let the hell cat freeze

(Ibid. 127)

Surprisingly enough, even when she repentantly comes back to him saying jubilantly: “I washed my face and hands before I come. I did” (2.7.128), he amazed her and us by saying: “Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers” (ibid.)? Thus he unmasked himself and his pretentious love, revealing himself as an unchangeable and incorrigible misogynist. He is one and the same confirmed bachelor who is unalterable. His final speech is self-explanatory.

Doolittle, despite the wealth he unjustly inherited, does not want to change his attitude towards the middle class even when he lately belongs to it. To him, a dustman, as he was, is better than a middle-class man, as he is now. He grumbles now because Higgins, whom he calls “the Wimpole street devil” (2.3.104), has made him “miserable all night” (ibid.) when he asked Wallingford to help him financially! He is no longer a happy dustman but unjustly “delivered into the hands of middle-class morality” (ibid.)! He still finds fault with that American: “The bloke died and he left me four thousand pounds a year in his bloomin’ will” (ibid.)! He feels now he has been cheated by Higgins who “ruined me, that’s all, destroyed me happiness. Tied me up” (ibid.104). Is it credible that a poor man would rather perpetually remain a dustman than be a rich man? If so then there are two reasons. First of all, Doolittle is associated with a kind of irresponsible fellow-drunkards who are not easily found among middle-class people. He can gatecrash bars, blackmail and beg people to get money without the slightest compunction. He is not forced by obligations but when money comes to him, he believes he is no longer free! The second reason is a political or
social reason concerned with the caste. Here this section is based on Shaw’s views, since *My Fair Lady* draws on Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. Shaw hates social stratification and to him there is no difference between a dustman and a rich man. He is more interested in common people than higher-class ones. Anyhow the point here is that Doolittle’s strange notions are exposed and revealed when he gets rich. Doolittle is consistently immoral trying not to behave well. When asked by Pickering: “Have you no morals, man” (1.5.49)? He immediately replies: “No, I can’t afford ’m” (ibid.). Thus to be moral is beyond his mentality.

Now we go to Zoltan Karpathy and see how he is uncovered and how his pretensions are disclosed. This man claims: “I speak thirty-two languages. I know everybody in Europe. No imposter escape my detection” (1.10.84). But when he meets the transformed Eliza at the Embassy Ball and dances with her, he is reported to have said: “I can tell that she was born Hungarian!… not only Hungarian, but of royal blood, she is a princess” (2.1.91)! He is only bragging and undependable. It is true then when Higgins speaks of this character saying: “That blackguard who uses the science of speech/ More to blackmail and swindle than teach” (ibid.90).

Karpathy claims that people will not recognize him if he shaves off his beard, as appearance is very important to him: “Nobody notice me when I shave” (1.10.84). Yet with or without his beard on he can be easily discovered as when Higgins unmasked him.

Interestingly enough that even Eliza, who has been trained for six months to behave like a lady and used refined and decent language, is easily discovered at the Ascort Race, when she speaks vulgarly urging Dover, the horse, to speed up: “Come on, Dover!!!
Move your boomin’ arse” (1.7.75)!!! Thus however a person tries to hide his shortcomings and misconduct, he or she will be sooner or later discovered. Fraud cannot be kept unchecked since refined language is only skin-deep.

Again *My Fair Lady* demonstrates to us the theme of defiance, challenge and self-esteem. This is especially represented by Eliza. She has the courage to argue with Higgins, her tutor, when he shows her no respect and keeps looking at her as a flower girl even after her transformation. She defiantly tells him: “I’m not dirt under your feet…. But don’t you be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down” (2.5.120-121). She challenges him by making him jealous of Freddy: “I’ll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as I’m able to support him” (ibid.121). Then she arrogantly sings with more defiance in her famous song, “Without You”:

> There’ll be spring ev’ry year without you.  
> England still will be here without you.  
> There’ll be fruit on the tree,  
> And a shore by the sea,  
> There’ll be crumpets and tea  
> Without you.

(Ibid.122)

She cleverly challenges Higgins and remarks how he treats her differently from Pickering:

The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is 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 that I shall be a lady to Colonel Pickering because he always treats me as a lady, and always will.

(Ibid.117)

She has already defied Freddy who, according to her, does not seem serious in his love for her. In her well-known song, “Show Me”, she tells him he is not a man of deeds, but only of words: “Words! Words! I’m so sick of words” (2.2.100)!

Concerning the structure of *My Fair Lady*, it is related to London, in 1920. It is divided into two acts having eighteen scenes, altogether. Upper-class characters are actually seen at the Ascot Race and the Embassy Ball. The lower-class people are seen at the flower market, tenement houses, slums and bars. This work is a blend of drama, lyrics and music. It is considered a romance, and a Cinderella-like story. Many of the dialogues in Shaw’s *Pygmalion* have been taken away to be replaced by songs, dances and choruses. Its songs have a variety of motivations and most of the major characters have singing roles. It is more theatrical than realistic. There is a mixture of songs and dialogues.

Eliza is a girl between eighteen to twenty. Freddy is twenty years old. Higgins is almost forty. Pickering is an elderly man. The duration of the elocution is six months.

*My Fair Lady* abounds with comic scenes especially those at the Ascot Race where Eliza keeps talking about the weather and people’s health so that her absurd reality will not be discovered. The scenes concerning Karpathy’s pompous and arrogant speech and his failure to detect Eliza are also comic. Doolittle’s feeling miserable for having money is rather funny. Eliza’s forgetting herself by using indecent statements at the Ascot Race arouses laughter. The same is true when we see Higgins more interested in his slippers than
Eliza’s attempts to entrap him. Eliza’s passing off as a lady or princess excites mirth and delightful scenes.

There is also a suspense scene when Karpathy dances with Eliza making the audience feel that she will soon be unmasked. He meets and dances with her around the end of act one. When the curtain falls, the audience is kept in suspense during the intermission thinking that Eliza’s affectations might have been discovered. They are relieved at act two when they learn that she has not been detected, but conversely she has been taken as a princess.

In conclusion My Fair Lady has been one of the most successful musicals in the world. It delighted people when it was first performed in 1956 and has been doing the same thing since that date. It will keep entertaining people as long as there are theatres and as long as theatre-goers are interested in musical drama.

NOTES


2 Ibid.


4 Ibid.


6 Ibid., 331.

7 Ibid., 332.
The Making of a Lady and Other Themes in Alan Jay Lerner and ...
Prof. Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij / Asst. Inst. Harith Turki


10 Matlaw, “My Fair Lady” in Matlaw, 549.

11 Alan Jay Learner and Frederick Loewe, My Fair Lady (Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark Ltd., 1956), 1.1.15. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text between parentheses showing acts, scenes and pages numbers respectively.


16 Dirk, 25.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


An article of 3 pages.


