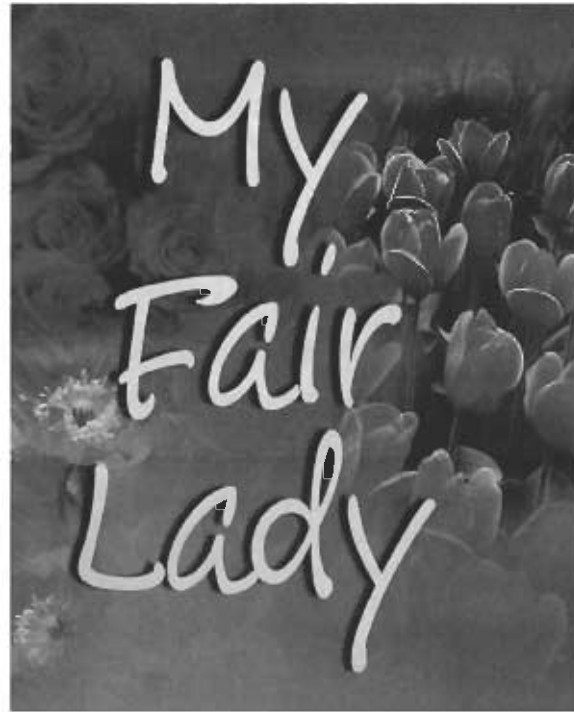


STUDY GUIDE

THE REPERTORY THEATRE OF ST. LOUIS



BOOK AND LYRICS BY ALAN JAY LERNER • MUSIC BY FREDERICK LOEWE
ADAPTED FROM GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S PLAY AND GABRIEL PASCAL'S
MOTION PICTURE *PYGMALION*
DIRECTED BY SUSAN V. BOOTH
CHOREOGRAPHED BY DANIEL PELZIG

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Words to the Wise

Covent Garden—The area in London long noted for its produce market (established in 1671) and its Royal Theater (first built in 1731–1732) is called Covent Garden. The market was moved to a site on the Thames River in 1974. The play opens in Covent Garden, outside the opera house.

busker—A busker is an entertainer that performs in a public place, usually while soliciting money.



Old time and present day buskers

phonetics—This is a branch of language study (linguistics) that deals with the sounds of speech, including their production, combination, description, and representation by written symbols.

Cockney—Cockney refers to a person from the East End of London or the dialect or accent with which the natives of the East End of London speak. Eliza is a Cockney.

pence, tuppence, shilling, crown, farthing and

pound—These were all types of British currency.

Pence is the plural for penny, and before decimalization there were 240 pence in a pound. A pound was the standard unit of British currency before the Euro, like the dollar in the United States. Tuppence is a variant of two pence, and one shilling equaled twelve old pence. The crown was worth five shillings.

phonograph—A phonograph is an old device for playing records. Higgins has a phonograph that is also capable of recording sound using cylinders, and he uses it to record Eliza.

Bell's Visible Speech and Broad Romic—

These are both systems for writing the true sound of letters and syllables.

Lisson Grove—This part of London is where Eliza was born.

guttersnipe—Higgins calls Eliza by this very uncouth and insulting word for a person of the lowest class.

Buckingham Palace—This is the royal palace in London. The Embassy Ball for which Eliza is preparing will be held there.

Governor—The title Governor was often used in Britain as a term of respect.

"licks of the strap"—Alfie is telling Higgins that if Eliza gets out of line he should spank her.

Demosthenes—Demosthenes was a Greek orator whose reputation is based mainly on his

Philippics, a series of orations exhorting the citizens of Athens to rise up against Philip II of Macedon. Like Eliza, Demosthenes developed part of his enunciation ability by talking with marbles in his mouth.

metronome—A metronome is a device used to mark time by means of regularly recurring ticks or flashes at adjustable intervals.

"pinched it"—When Eliza says somebody pinched her aunt's straw hat she means they stole it.

moralist—A moralist is a teacher or student of morals and moral problems. For Higgins to pass Alfie off as a moralist is quite ironic.



Who's Who?

Eliza Doolittle is a poor girl in her early twenties that sells flowers in England's Covent Garden district but dreams of working in a real flower shop.

Mrs. Eynsford-Hill is a respectable middle-aged lady of the wealthy middle class.

Freddy Eynsford-Hill is her son. Like Eliza, he is also in his early twenties.

Colonel Pickering was a military man but is now retired. He is kindly man

in his middle-ages and shares Higgins' passion for phonetics. He wrote a book on Indian dialects.

Henry Higgins is a middle-aged confirmed bachelor, a professor of phonetics and an expert on pronunciation. He has no desire to have romance or a woman in his life.

Alfred ("Alfie") P. Doolittle is Eliza's father and a dustman, or trash collector. Alfie has a very unique 'morality', in that he is very happy to be a freeloader.

Harry and Jamie are friends of Alfie.

Mrs. Pearce is Higgins' housekeeper.

Mrs. Higgins, Higgins' mother, is in her sixties and a very refined lady of the upper-middle class.

Professor Zoltan Karpathy is a Hungarian and a former student of Higgins. He is also a rival phonetics expert, in his own mind if not in Higgins', and quite proud of his linguistic accomplishments. He hires out his services to the queen of Transylvania.

ace—the best (juvenile)
ain't half—very (As in it ain't half hot)
'andsome—very nice!
barmy—extremely foolish; mad
be lucky—a parting salutation
bit of alright—something approved of (As in she's a bit of alright)
bird—girl, girlfriend
bleedin'—mild swearing used for emphasis (As in *what a bleedin' game, ay?*)
bloke—man
bloomin'—very mild swearing used for emphasis (As in *it's a bloomin' lark, innit?*)
bob—shilling(s)
boozer—public house
bubble (and squeak)—fried leftover potatoes with other vegetables (esp. cabbage)
(the) business—seriously good
cakehole—mouth

cheeky—used in phrases like 'cheeky sod'
choked—very disappointed
to clock—to see and recognize (As in 'Old Bill's clocked us!')
diamond geezer—high praise reserved for loyal and trusted mate
ding-dong—argument, fight (Often rendered as 'right old ding-dong')
dip—pickpocket
doolally tap—crazy
duck, ducks—another all-purpose form of address to male or female
fair go—an even stand-up fight
fourpenny one—a blow well landed (As in 'give 'im a fourpenny one')
gaffer—boss
go down a treat—enjoyable

Oh, Be-have!
 an abbreviated guide to
 (mostly Cockney)
 English slang



jammy—lucky (As in 'jammy bleeder!')
knackered—exhausted
(the) Knowledge—knowledge of London streets a cabbie must learn to get a license
lah-di-dah—affecting a superior air
lark—fun (As in 'it was only a lark')
laugh to see a pudding crawl—easily amused
luvverly—very nice
missus—wife (usually 'the' missus)
musn't grumble—typical response to 'how are you?'
nice one—well done
nipper—child
palaver—a fuss or bother, usually prolonged
plonker—inept person
poncing abaht—behaving (a) effeminately or (b) generally ineffectively
right—word often used to give emphasis (As in 'a right good hiding')

sarky—sarcastic (Often 'sarky git, innit?')
skint—penniless
spondulicks—money (antique)
spot of bother—some trouble (Often used as an understatement)
squire—form of address to male, not usually used as deferentially as it might sound
strides—trousers
tasty—(a) very good, or very capable
two and a kick—two shillings and sixpence (old money)
up for it—willing, game
watch it—be careful
wind-up—something done or said deliberately to annoy or upset
wind-up merchant—someone habitually perpetrating the above
you're a scholar and a gent—typical polite compliment to someone viewed favourably

What's the Story?

On a cold, March night after an opera performance at Covent Garden in London, Mrs. Eynsford-Hill and her son Freddy are waiting for a taxi along with several other people. There is a great deal of confusion due to the buskers, or street entertainers.



One busker does a cartwheel into Freddy, causing him to bump into Eliza Doolittle, a poor girl selling flowers on the street. Her flowers fall to the ground but she picks them up and tries to

sell them to Colonel Pickering, who warns her that someone is writing down everything she says. Eliza and others in the street mistake the person taking the notes, Henry Higgins, for a policeman. Eliza begins to make a scene, until Higgins shocks the crowd by telling each person from which part of England he or she comes. He is able to accomplish this feat because of his study of dialects and phonetics. He can identify where any British person has lived by listening to their accent and the way they speak. He expresses his disdain for the way most British undervalue the importance of proper speech in the song "Why Can't the English Learn to Speak?" Everyone is amused by his performance except Eliza, who is still angry with him for taking notes about her.

Pickering and Higgins discover each other's names and are amazed. They had been planning to travel in order to meet one another as they are both interested in language and phonetics and have read one another's books. Higgins explains to Pickering that it is only Eliza's way of speaking that makes her a flower girl, and he boasts that he could pass Eliza off as a queen by simply teaching her to speak correctly. Higgins invites Pickering to stay at his house and they leave together, but not before Eliza overhears him tell Pickering his address. Eliza makes a final effort to sell the two men her flowers, and Higgins throws money at her. Her fellow peddlers tease her about her newly gained wealth, and Eliza sings of her dreams of a better life in "Wouldn't It Be Lovely?"

In another scene Eliza's father, Alfred P. Doolittle, and two of his friends are getting tossed out of a bar for being drunk,

disorderly and not paying their bill. Alfie explains his disreputable philosophy of life in the song, "With a Little Bit of Luck."

The next day, Higgins and Pickering are talking in Higgins' study when his housekeeper announces that a young woman wants to see him. Eliza enters and asks Higgins to give her speaking lessons so she can get a job in a flower shop. Higgins and Pickering are intrigued and make a bet that in six months, at the Embassy Ball, Higgins will be able to pass Eliza off in society as a young lady from a wealthy background. She is turned over to Mrs. Pearce to be cleaned up and dressed properly. Higgins explains to Pearce that he has no interest in Eliza as a woman, only as the subject of his experiment. He then sings "I'm an Ordinary Man," a song about the superiority of the bachelor lifestyle.

Eliza's father hears gossip that his daughter is being "kept" by a wealthy gentleman. He sees this as an opportunity to make money and goes to confront Higgins. Initially Higgins is dismissive of Doolittle's attempts to blackmail him and to "sell" his daughter, but Doolittle's argument that he is one of the "undeserving poor" amuses Higgins enough that he gives Doolittle five pounds to get rid of him. Higgins begins to tutor Eliza on her pronunciation, constantly bullying and mocking her. She expresses her rage over his attitude in the song "Just You Wait, Henry Higgins." Eventually, she has a breakthrough in her speech lessons, and Eliza, Higgins and Pickering dance for joy while singing "The Rain in Spain."

Higgins and Pickering decide to test Eliza's progress by taking her to the horse races at Ascot, to see if she can pass in the company of the wealthy and fashionable. Eliza is overjoyed that Higgins has finally shown approval of her and she sings "I Could Have Danced All Night." To the horror of Higgins' mother, Pickering and Higgins bring Eliza to her box seats at Ascot. Despite being told to stick to small talk, Eliza soon begins to improvise, and although her pronunciation is perfect, she uses the grammar and vocabulary of the streets. Among her amused—and slightly confused—audience is Freddy, who does not recognize her as the flower girl he bumped into months before. Freddy, who has developed a crush on her, shows up at Higgins' house later that day with a bouquet of flowers for Eliza and he sings "On the Street Where You Live."

Six weeks later, Eliza is ready for her final test at the Embassy Ball. Both her speech and her manners charm the distinguished guests, and even Higgins' rival Zoltan Karpathy is fooled as to her origin. At three in the morning, they return to Higgins' house, where Pickering and Higgins congratulate one another on their success.

Pickering sings "You Did It" to Higgins. The exhausted Eliza is crushed by the fact that both men ignore her completely, discussing her as if she was not a person but an object Higgins molded. When she discovers Higgins is simply glad the whole affair is over, she runs out of the house in tears, colliding with Freddy on the steps. He professes his love to her, and Eliza, tired of words, hits him with her suitcase. She sings "Show Me" and leaves him on the street corner.



Higgins awakes to discover Eliza has left in the night. He cannot imagine where she has gone and has Pickering call a friend at Scotland Yard to help them find her. He complains about the irrationality of women in the song "A Hymn to Him." Higgins goes to visit his mother and finds his mother and Eliza having tea together. His mother criticizes him for being so cold

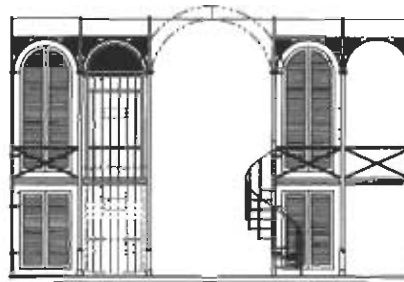
Eliza returns to her old neighborhood in Covent Garden. She runs into her father, who has been transformed into a middle-class gentleman. He explains to his daughter that Higgins wrote to an American philanthropist and told him that Alfred P. Doolittle was "the most original moralist in England." Therefore the philanthropist left Alfie a small fortune in his will, and has now become a respectable gentleman on the verge of marriage. As Alfie goes out for one more wild night of drinking and roughhousing, he sings "Get Me to the Church on Time."

and rude to Eliza. He makes an attempt to apologize to her but only succeeds in insulting her again. Eliza tells him she has had enough of both him and his rudeness. She sings "Without You" and walks out again.

Back in his study Higgins realizes he can no longer live without Eliza and he sings "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face." As he sits and listens to the recording of her voice, she walks back into the study, but behind him where he cannot see her. He straightens up in surprise when he hears her voice then sinks back into his chair, pulls his hat over his eyes and says, "Eliza, where the devil are my slippers?" She smiles.

Photographs on these two pages by Sandy Underwood.

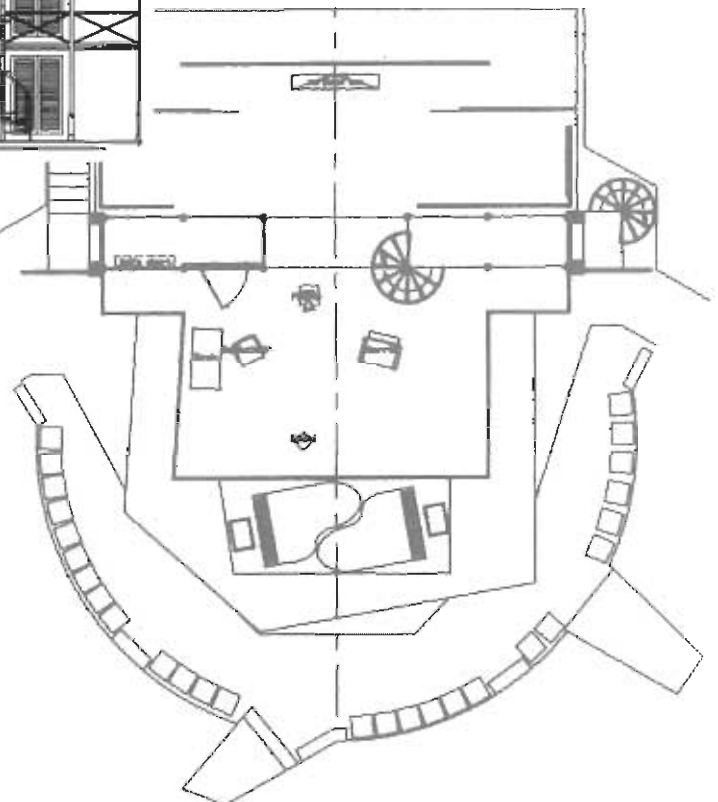
Shop Talk



One of the primary concerns in the set design for *My Fair Lady* was that most set pieces be mobile. As various locations must be represented, the transitions between scenes needed to happen both easily and quickly. The appearance of the set also had to reflect the architectural style of Victorian England in 1912. The most obvious stylistic element of the period can be seen in the arched windows and doors and the domed ceilings. The spiral staircase was chosen not only for its elegance but for its practicality in a theater: it allows for a better view from every seat in the house.

Also notice the pianos are far downstage and close to the audience. This version of the show is accompanied by two pianos rather than a full orchestra, so this location is mandatory for everyone to hear the beautiful music of the play. The pianos are also as high in the pit as possible, without blocking the view of the audience, for the same reason.

The slightly lower part of the stage that goes around the pianos, the walk around, has two functions: to incorporate the pianos into the set and to serve as a separate location for the actors in the show.



Bio and Beyond

Frederick Loewe, an unheralded Vienna-born composer, and Alan Jay Lerner, the lyricist-playwright son of the proprietors of an American chain of women's clothing shops—with sketches and lyrics for two Harvard Hasty Pudding shows among his major credits—met by chance at New York's Lambs Club in 1942. Had they not, *Brigadoon* would never have emerged from the mists of the Scottish Highlands to make the world feel "Almost Like Being in Love." No one would have been there to *Paint Your Wagon* and *My Fair Lady* would still be a less than lyrical English girl from George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* who could not sing a note. We might never have thought to "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" like *Gigi*, and *Camelot* would most likely have stayed within the pages of Arthurian legend.

When the two had that chance meeting more than 50 years ago, neither was widely known. Loewe's *Great Lady* had had a brief run on Broadway in 1938. Lerner had added radio scripts to his Hasty Pudding Club show credits. But later collaborations after one brief failure, *What's Up?* (1943), and the moderately successful *The Day Before Spring* (1945), which ran five months on Broadway, made musical history.

Alan Jay Lerner was one of three sons of Joseph J. Lerner, who founded Lerner Stores, Inc. He was educated in England before entering Harvard. He studied at the Juilliard School of Music during vacations from Harvard. After graduating in 1940 with a B.S. degree, he wrote advertising copy and radio scripts for such programs as the "Philco Hall of Fame."

Frederick "Fritz" Loewe was the son of Edmund Loewe, an eminent operetta tenor. The youngster played piano at four and, at nine, composed the tunes for a music hall sketch in which his father toured Europe. At fifteen, he wrote "Katrina," a popular song that sold 3,000,000 copies in Europe.

The first Lerner-Loewe collaboration was a musical adaptation of Barry Connor's farce *The Palsy* for a Detroit stock company in 1942. They called it *Life of the Party* and it enjoyed a nine-week hit that encouraged them to continue with the musical comedy *What's Up?* which opened on Broadway in 1943. Lerner wrote the book and lyrics with Arthur Pierson, and



Alan Jay Lerner—playwright; born August 31, 1918; New York, New York; died June 14, 1986.

Frederick Loewe—composer; born June 10, 1904; Vienna, Austria; died February 14, 1988.

Loewe composed the music. It ran for 63 performances and was followed in 1945 by their *The Day Before Spring*.

It was when the curtain went up and the mist-shrouded Scottish Highland village of *Brigadoon* first appeared, that the team of Lerner and Loewe also emerged as potentially legendary. The musical boasted 581 performances on Broadway and won the "best musical" award from the New York Drama Critics Circle the year it opened, 1947.

Between *Brigadoon* and *Paint Your Wagon*, the next team effort by Lerner and Loewe, Lerner wrote *Love Life*, with music by Kurt Weill, which was selected as one of the best plays of the 1948–49 Broadway season, plus the story, screenplay and lyrics for the films *Royal Wedding* and

Brigadoon and the story and screenplay for *An American in Paris*, for which he won an Oscar in 1951.

Paint Your Wagon rolled in 1951, and then, five years later, on March 15, 1956, *My Fair Lady* opened and became one of the most spectacular successes—artistic and financial—in the history of the American theater. Playing a record 2,717 performances on Broadway alone, it went on to break all other existing world records. This musicalization of Shaw's classic *Pygmalion* was named "outstanding musical of the year" by the New York Drama Critics Circle—and by millions of theatergoers.

Lerner and Loewe's next collaboration was on the film adaptation of the Colette novel *Gigi*, another success filled with songs destined to become standard.

There was more collaborating to come, but the 1960 Broadway hit *Camelot* which brought Arthurian England to life for its most shining hour, rang the curtain down on the phenomenon of Lerner and Loewe. Loewe, who had suffered a heart attack in 1958, went into retirement.

In tribute to his long time former partner, Lerner wrote, "There will never be another Fritz.... Writing will never again be as much fun. A collaboration as intense as ours inescapably had to be complex. But I loved him more than I understood or misunderstood him, and I know he loved me more than he understood or misunderstood me."

G. Bernard Shaw (he hated the "George" and never used it, either personally or professionally) was born in 1856 in Dublin, in a lower-middle class family of Scottish-Protestant ancestry. His father was a failed corn-merchant, with a drinking problem and a squint (which Oscar Wilde's father, a leading Dublin surgeon, tried unsuccessfully to correct); his mother was a professional singer, the sole disciple of Vandeleur Lee, a voice teacher claiming to have a unique and original approach to singing.

When Shaw was just short of his sixteenth birthday, his mother left her husband and son and moved with Vandeleur Lee to London, where the two set up a household, along with Shaw's older sister Lucy (who later became a successful music hall singer). Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, completing his schooling (which he hated passionately), and working as a clerk for an estate office (which he hated just as much as school).

It may not be accidental, then, that Shaw's plays, including *Misalliance*, are filled with problematic parent-child relationships: with children who are brought up in isolation from their parents; with foundlings, orphans, and adopted heirs; and with parents who wrongly presume that they are entitled to their children's obedience and affection.

In 1876, Shaw left Dublin and his father and moved to London, moving in with his mother's menage. There he lived off of his mother and sister while pursuing a career in journalism and writing. The first medium he tried as a creative writer was prose, completing five novels (the first one appropriately titled *Immaturity*) before any of them were published. He read voraciously, in public libraries and in the British Museum reading room. And he became involved in progressive politics. Standing on soapboxes, at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park and at socialist rallies, he learned to overcome his stage fright and his stammer. And, to hold the attention of the crowd, he developed an energetic and aggressive speaking style that is evident in all of his writing.

With Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Shaw founded the Fabian Society, a socialist political organization dedicated to transforming Britain into a socialist state, not by revolution but by systematic progressive legislation, bolstered by persuasion and mass education. The Fabian society would later be instrumental in founding the London School of Economics and the Labour Party. Shaw lectured for the Fabian Society, and wrote pamphlets on the progressive arts, including *The Perfect Wagnerite*, an interpretation of Richard Wagner's *Ring cycle*, and *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, based on a series of lectures about the progressive Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. Meanwhile, as a journalist, Shaw worked as an art critic, then as a music critic (writing under the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto"), and



George
Bernard Shaw
(1856–1950)

by Cary M. Mazer

finally, from 1895 to 1898, as Theatre Critic for the *Saturday Review*, where his reviews appeared over the infamous initials "GBS."

In 1891, at the invitation of J.T. Grein, a merchant, theatre critic, and director of a progressive private new-play society, The Independent Theatre, Shaw wrote his first play, *Widower's Houses*. For the next twelve years, he wrote close to a dozen plays, though he generally failed to persuade the managers of the London Theatres to produce them. A few were produced abroad; one (*Arms and the Man*) was produced under the auspices of an experimental management; one (*Mrs. Warren's Profession*) was censored by the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays (the civil servant who, from 1737 until 1967, was empowered with the prior censorship of all spoken drama in England); and several were presented in single performances by private societies.

In 1898, after a serious illness, Shaw resigned as theatre critic, and moved out of his mother's house (where he was still living) to marry Charlotte Payne-Townsend, an Irish woman of independent means. Their marriage (quite possibly sexually unconsummated) lasted until Charlotte's death in 1943.

In 1904, Harley Granville Barker, an actor, director and playwright twenty years younger than Shaw who had appeared in a private theatre society's production of Shaw's *Candida*, took over the management of the Court Theatre on Sloane Square in Chelsea (outside of the "Theatreland" of the fashionable West End) and set up it up as an experimental theatre specializing in new and progressive drama. Over the next three seasons, Barker produced ten plays by Shaw (with Barker officially listed as director, and with Shaw actually directing his own plays), and Shaw began writing new plays with Barker's management specifically in mind. Over the next ten years, all but one of Shaw's plays (*Pygmalion* in 1914) was produced either by Barker or by Barker's friends and colleagues in the other experimental theater managements around England. With royalties from his plays, Shaw, who had become financially independent on marrying, now became quite wealthy. Throughout the decade, he remained active in the Fabian Society, in city government (he served as vestryman for the London borough of St. Pancras), and on committees dedicated to ending dramatic censorship, and to establishing a subsidized National Theatre.

The outbreak of war in 1914 changed Shaw's life. For Shaw, the war represented the bankruptcy of the capitalist system, the last desperate gasps of the nineteenth-century empires, and a tragic waste of young lives, all under the guise of patriotism. He expressed his opinions in a series of newspaper articles under the title *Common Sense About the War*. These articles proved to be a disaster for Shaw's public stature: he was treated as an outcast in his adopted country, and there was even talk of his being tried for treason. His dramatic output ground to a halt, and he succeeded in

writing only one major play during the war years, *Heartbreak House*, into which he projected his bitterness and despair about British politics and society.

After the war, Shaw found his dramatic voice again and rebuilt his reputation, first with a series of five plays about "creative evolution," *Back to Methuselah*, and then, in 1923, with *Saint Joan*. In 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. (Not needing the money, he donated the cash award towards an English edition of the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, who had never been recognized with a Nobel Prize by the Swedish Academy). Shaw's plays were regularly produced and revived in London. Several theatre companies in the United States began producing his plays, old and new, on a regular basis (most notably the Theatre Guild in New York, and the Hedgerow Theatre, in Rose Valley, PA, which became internationally known for its advocacy of the plays of Shaw and the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey). In the late 1920s, a Shaw festival was established in England (in a town, coincidentally, named Malvern).

Shaw lived the rest of his life as an international celebrity, traveling the world, continually involved in local and international politics. (He visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of Stalin; and



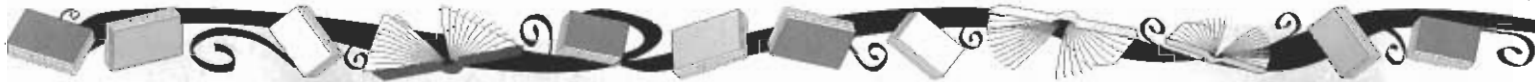
George
Bernard Shaw
1923

he came briefly to the United States at the invitation of William Randolph Hearst, stepping on shore only twice, for a lecture at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and for lunch at Hearst's castle in San Simeon in California). And he continued to write thousands of letters and over a dozen more plays.

In 1950, Shaw fell off a ladder while trimming a tree on his property at Ayot St. Lawrence in Hertfordshire, outside of London, and died a few days later of complications from the injury, at age 94. He had been at work on yet another play (*Why She Would Not*). In his will, he left a large part of his estate to a project to revamp the English alphabet. (Only one volume was published with the new "Shaw Alphabet": a parallel text edition of Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*).

After that project failed, the estate was divided among the other beneficiaries in his will: the National Gallery of Ireland, the British Museum, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Royalties from Shaw's plays (and from the musical *My Fair Lady*, based on Shaw's *Pygmalion*) have helped to balance the budgets of these institutions ever since.

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Read More About It

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books, websites and videos.

The Street Where I Live by Alan Jay Lerner. Da Capo Press, 1994 (Reprint). Written by Alan Jay Lerner himself, this is a personal history that covers *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot* and *Gigi*.

The Best of Lerner and Loewe by Alan Jay Lerner et al. Hal Leonard, 1998. This book contains the music and lyrics to many of Lerner and Loewe's best show tunes.

Bernard Shaw: Man and Writer by A. Williamson. New York, 1963. This is an excellent biography of George Bernard Shaw. It covers his plays, his talent, his opinions and his very outspoken political viewpoints.

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw. Dover Pubns, 1994. *Pygmalion* is the original Shaw play on which *My Fair Lady* was based.

The Metamorphoses by Ovid, translated by Horace Gregory. New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1958. *Pygmalion* was in turn influenced by the tale of *Pygmalion and Galatea* in Ovid's classic compendium of Greco-Roman myths. Gregory's translation of Ovid's masterpiece captures not only the poet's content but his humor and lighthearted tone. It is written primarily in unrhymed blank verse.

The 1964 film *My Fair Lady* starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison is a classic and worthy to be in any home video collection.

www.musicals.net and www.musicals101.com are great sources of information for anyone who loves musicals.

For Covent Garden history, go to www.cgma.gov.uk/history.htm.

The Mythography website has the myth of *Pygmalion and Galatea* along with an art gallery: www.loggia.com/myth/galatea2.html.

Linguists the world over have always found Henry Higgins a somewhat anomalous character. Occupying a position somewhere between a phonetics researcher and a speech therapist, there was no one quite like him in either counseling or in academia. Too lofty for Katharine Gibbs, too lowdown for Noam Chomsky, it appears on the surface he would have had a hard time making a living had he not been independently wealthy.

Higgins' enterprise in *My Fair Lady* (and in its origin, Shaw's *Pygmalion*), the transformation of a "guttersnipe" into a duchess by changing the way she talks, is difficult, but as feasible today as in the 20th Century. And surprise! If one looks hard enough, one can find modern-day Higginses ready to erase accents, elevate vocabularies, and modify discourse patterns for people willing to pay.

This need for Professor Higgins and his ilk arises because no population has a uniform speech variety. Every division of society is marked by a linguistic difference. Speech is one way groups that feel an affinity for each other mark their "groupness." Gender, ethnicity, social class, and age are just a few of the social differences universally marked by speech.

All of us have experienced special language varieties for groups as small as two. We have special ways of speaking with our spouses, friends and lovers. The special speech characteristics common to larger groups are "accents" or "dialects," and can be used as a kind of identity tag. In the recent internal conflicts in Bosnia and other states in the former Yugoslavia, people moving from region to region often had to pass "pronunciation tests" to determine to which regional or ethnic group they belonged. If they couldn't pronounce certain key words with the right local sound they risked being denounced as spies.

Speech varieties are variously elevated or stigmatized in the eyes of the broader public of a nation. This creates a fascinating push-pull effect in social life. People who see themselves as upwardly mobile try to shed their stigmatized speech and assimilate prestige speech as a way to symbolically join a more elevated social class. They may, in fact, "hyper-correct" their speech and use certain prestige variables even more frequently than the upper-class people they wish to emulate.

Which speech forms are stigmatized and which are prestigious varies from group to group, so there is no set formula. It takes a linguistic anthropologist to discover how these varieties play out in any given community. For example, "post-vocalic r," or the sound "r" following a vowel is a prestige variable in New York City. In Boston even the wealthiest people can leave the "r" out of their



Can You Change What You Are If You Change the Way You Speak?

By William O. Beeman

speech and "Paak the caa in Haavaad Yaad" with impunity.

Those that want to change their speech need a Henry Higgins because starting at the age of six; human neural pathways begin to calcify. Before that age, a child can learn and number of speech varieties automatically, and with perfect accent-free fluency. After the age of 15 or so, the plasticity of speech diminishes greatly. It is nearly impossible to learn a foreign tongue without an accent as an adult, and it is just as hard to modify the pronunciation of one's own language. To make these changes as an adult, it is necessary to work for hours with a tape recorder or a therapist repeating endless iterations of "The rain in Spain" until the clumsy adult muscles and nerves slowly yield to the practice.

Few people can be bothered with such torture. They feel that their accomplishments will speak for them, and that the world will overlook irregularities in their speech. Alas, it is not true. Stigmatized speech produces an unconscious effect on hearers, stigmatizing the individual using it. It is hard for people to accept the authority of individuals speaking with accents that are deemed sub-standard.

For this reason, savvy professional people whose first language is something other than American English flock to the studios of New York's modern day Higgins, Sam Chwat, to have their accents "erased," as a step toward social and economic success.

Whether such therapy truly has the desired social effects is of course the whole point of Higgins' bet with Colonel Pickering. Eliza can be taken as royalty if she can be coached to speak a prestigious variety of English. However, one wonders whether modern day Elizas have better chances of being accepted to Ivy League schools, hired in Wall Street firms, or joining the Junior League. Certainly today Americans tolerate a wider variety of speech forms. Media figures speaking regional varieties of English broaden the palate of acceptable educated speech. Princeton English is no longer the only accepted variety for educated U.S. citizens. Nevertheless, despite this modest democratization, the drive to hierarchy still lurks in America (and England) today. Professor Higgins will likely have customers for some time to come.

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Article is excerpted from the Trinity Repertory Theatre Study Guide for *My Fair Lady*.



These questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theatre. The activities and questions are divided into “**Before the Performance**” and “**After the Performance**” categories. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs. To assist you in incorporating these materials into your existing curriculum, we have provided the numbers of some of the corresponding Missouri Knowledge Standards and Illinois Learning Standards. In addition, the majority of the content integrates or allows demonstration of the following Missouri Performance Goals: 1.5, 1.9, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 4.1.

Communication Arts

Before the performance

1 Write a letter to a close friend in which you describe your personality—what you like to do, your skills, and any other information you find interesting about yourself.

Now write the same letter to a potential employer. How are the two letters different? Do the letters have the same tone or do they use different language and expressions? Why do you believe this is the case? (MO: CA1, CA4, CA7 IL: 1, 3, 5)

2 The works of Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw showed the environment and social conditions of 19th and early 20th century England. Find authors and playwrights whose works reflected these historical periods: the French Revolution, the Renaissance, the American Civil War, the Roman Empire (50 BCE–100 CE), and the modern day United States. (MO:

CA1, CA2, CA3, CA7, FA4, FA5, SS2, SS4, SS6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 16, 18, 27)



Workhouse boys

After the performance

3 In the first half of the play, Eliza speaks with a cockney accent and vocabulary. In her speech at Ascot about her Aunt getting “done in”, she has shed her accent but not her street vocabulary. Close friends often talk with a unique vocabulary and use personal expressions as well. Rewrite the

following lines from the play using the expressions you would use with your close friends and read it to the class.

ELIZA: My aunt died of influenza, so they said. But it's my belief they done the old woman in.

MRS. HIGGINS: Done her in?

ELIZA: Yes, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza when she come through diphtheria right enough the year before? Fairly blue with it she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father, he kept laddling gin down her throat. Then she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.

MRS. HIGGINS: Dear me!

ELIZA: Now, what call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza, and what become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it. And what I say is, them as pinched it, done her in.

LORD BOXINGTON: Done her in? Done her in, did you say?

HIGGINS: Oh, that's the new small talk. To do a person in means to kill them.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: You surely don't believe your aunt was killed?

ELIZA: Do I not! Them she lived with would have killed her for a hatpin, let alone a hat.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: But it can't have been right for your father to pour spirits down her throat like that. It might have killed her.

ELIZA: Not her. Gin was mother's milk to her. Besides, he'd poured so much down his own throat that he knew the good of it. (MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA6, CA7, FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 26)

Fine Arts

Before the performance

1 Split into groups of two or three and have one person pick a song that has lyrics he or she can sing to another person in the group. You can “talk” the lyrics if you do not feel comfortable singing them. The song can be about almost anything, and it is not necessary to have the entire song, just a few lines. After hearing the first song, each other member of the group picks a song he or she can sing or “talk” to the first person in response. Once everyone has a song, turn your songs into a scene for your own musical or play. If you need to write a few lines to introduce your scene or connect the songs together, do so as a group. Rehearse singing or saying your lines to one another and then perform your scene for the class. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, 26)

2 My Fair Lady was based on the play *Pygmalion*, and that play in turn was inspired by the myth of *Pygmalion* from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Go to the following website and read the story of *Pygmalion*: www.loggia.com/myth/galatea2.html.



A major topic in all these stories is transformations, and that subject continues to be prevalent in art and popular culture today. A few examples are *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, or the movies *Mannequin* and *The Hulk*. Find two other stories (in books or movies) where one of the characters transforms or is transformed by another. Create a chart and answer these questions about *Pygmalion* and your two stories. What changes

about the person in the story? Does the person transform of their own volition or does someone else cause the change in them? Is the transformation perceived as good or bad? What makes it a good change or a bad change? (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA2, CA4, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 27)

After the performance

3 Higgins “talked” most of his songs in *My Fair Lady* rather than sang them. One reason for this was that Rex Harrison, the first actor to play the role in the original musical, could not sing. Another reason is simply that Lerner and Loewe were such talented composers they could make spoken lyrics entertaining and integrate them into an amazing musical. Spoken lyrics are also characteristic of Rap music. Look at this excerpt from Higgins’ song, “A Hymn to Him,” in which Higgins explains the differences he sees between women and men.

Why does ev’ryone do what the others do?
Can’t a woman learn to use her head?
Why do they do ev’rything their mothers do?
Why don’t they grow up—well, like their father instead?
Why can’t a woman take after a man?

Why can’t a woman behave like a man?
Cause men are so friendly, good natured and kind.
A better companion you never will find.
If I were hours late for dinner, would you bellow?
If I forgot your silly birthday, would you fuss?
Would you complain if I took out another fellow?
Well, why can’t a woman be like us?

Divide a page in half and answer the following questions on the left-hand side. What is this song about? What is the tone of the song: is it compassionate or intolerant? Do you find the point of view expressed to be insightful or narrow-minded? What methods does the song employ to establish a rhythm (rhyming, number of syllables on a line, alliteration)?

Now, think of a song that has a similar topic—pick a rap song if you know one—and answer the same questions about it on the right-hand side of your page. Compare the two. Try to think of other differences and similarities

between the two songs. Do you feel one song is more effective than the other? How are the lyrics different? Who is the intended audience of each song? Do you believe the intended audience accounts for the differences in the songs, or would the year they were written in be a stronger influence? Why? (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA2, CA3, CA4, CA5, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 27)



Social Sciences

Before the performance

1 In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza tries to improve her social and economic standing by changing the way she speaks. Read the essay "Can You Change What You Are If You Change the Way You Speak?" by William O. Beeman printed earlier in this study guide. Do you think an accent would prevent someone from being hired in certain occupations? Which ones? Are there any positive things about having an accent? If you had an accent, which one would you choose? Why? (MO: SS1, SS2, SS3, SS5, SS6, CA3 IL: 1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18)



Street performers in Paris

3 There are laws in many states that govern where public entertainers who solicit money can perform without invitation—in front of stores, for instance, they are rarely seen. Research the laws of your state and municipality to find out what rules public entertainers must follow and what locations they must avoid. Observe your community to see how strictly these laws are enforced. (MO: SS3, SS4, SS6, CA3, CA5, CA6, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5 IL: 4, 5, 15, 18, 27)

After the performance

4 In India, a person's social class is determined by birth: not by accent, occupation or any other social factor. Had Eliza been born in India she would have been powerless to change her social standing. Research another country and write an essay or short story about how Eliza could change her social and financial standing in that culture. (MO: SS1, SS2, SS3, SS5, SS6, CA1, CA2, CA3, CA4, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18)



5 In addition to the love story and wonderful music of *My Fair Lady*, the play also reflects the socioeconomic realities of 1912 England, such as class separation and upward mobility (or the lack of it). These topics come from the original play on which *My Fair Lady* was based, *Pygmalion*. George Bernard Shaw never hesitated to question an aspect of society regardless of how ingrained it was in the culture.

Do you believe class separation is as much a problem in the modern day culture of the United States as it was in the period and location of the play (London, England, 1912)? What are the factors that separate us into different groups? For example, does skin color separate us? Does occupation? Do you think these same factors were present in the time of the play? When someone is identified as part of a different "group", how are they treated differently in our society? What groups are perceived as better than others? (MO: SS1, SS2, SS3, SS5, SS6, CA2, CA5, CA6, CA7, FA5 IL: 5, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 27)

6 Does the area of the country in which one is born make him or her different from a person born in another part of the country? If you were born in Georgia, how would that make you different than if you were born in Missouri, New York or California? When you meet someone, how do you know the part of the country in which they grew up? Does this lead you to make any assumptions about them? What are they?

(MO: SS1, SS2, SS3, SS5, SS6, CA2, CA5, CA6, CA7, FA5 IL: 5, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 27)