ADVOCATING FOR THE NEW WOMAN: THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT OF ELIZA'S SPEECH IN THE MARIBOR PRODUCTION OF *MY FAIR LADY*

NASTJA PRAJNČ KACIJAN, TOMAŽ ONIČ
University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Maribor, Slovenia
nastja.prajnc1@um.si, tomaz.onic@um.si

Lerner and Loewe's 1956 musical *My Fair Lady* is based on the famous 1913 play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw. The central feature of the plot is the transformation of Eliza Doolittle, a simple-mannered flower girl who speaks Cockney dialect, into a well-behaved and independent individual who becomes a prime materialization of the late 19th century feminist ideal of the New Woman. The musical introduces several plot and character modifications, which affect the intensity of the New Woman advocacy, yet this aspect still greatly depends on each individual production. This paper focuses on the 2015 Maribor National Theatre production, comparing it to the 1964 Warner Bros film version of the musical. Judging from our analysis, the Maribor production unwillingly downplays Eliza's transformation into the New Woman, owing to her initial exaggerated characterization and the omission of several parts of the libretto that promotes Shaw's feminist ideas.

DOI
https://doi.org/10.18690/um.ff.3.2025.13

ISBN
978-961-286-994-6

Keywords:
New Woman, *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle, George Bernard Shaw, linguistic analysis

University of Maribor Press

1 Introduction

The musical *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe has been a success ever since it first appeared on Broadway in 1956. It is based on *Pygmalion*, a play by George Bernard Shaw, who, ironically, claimed that his play had "its own verbal music" (Holroyd 1991, 333) and did not "allow a musical version of his play" (Reynolds 2019, 40) during his lifetime. The original play reflects Shaw's feminist ideas, which most prominently materialize in Eliza Doolittle, the female protagonist of the piece. Eliza's desire for education and hard-earned (financial) independence distinctly support the concept of the New Woman, which appeared in the 19th century as a strong contrast to the traditional Victorian woman, who was ideally subservient to her husband and tied to the domestic sphere. The discussion of whether the musical alters the original play too severely or if it still reflects Shaw's ideas from the play (see Reynolds 2019) is an ongoing one. In this chapter, which is primarily interested in Eliza's characterization and transformation, we argue that, in this respect, the musical closely follows Shaw's original. Her metamorphosis in Lerner's libretto is still prominent, and her relationship with Higgins is not altered until the very last scene, in which she appears at his house in Wimpole Street, (arguably) implying a romantic aftermath.

Our analysis compares the 1964 Warner Bros film version of *My Fair Lady*, starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison (Cukor 1964), with one of the stage performances of the 2015 Slovene National Theatre production of the musical (Fourny 2015). We investigate Eliza's characterization and transformation in each version, specifically focusing on the question of how effectively the Maribor version promotes Shaw's feminist views and the concept of the New Woman. For the analysis to be comprehensive, we conducted it on several levels. First, we considered the linguistic aspect, since language used by a character is among the most notable social class markers. Having the advantage of a video recording, however, we were also able to acknowledge the way in which individual utterances are delivered, particularly the intonation, and furthermore, the characters' movement on stage, their gestures and facial expressions, as well as the costumes and the scene. Our focus, however, remains on Eliza and the selection of scenes where her growing emancipation and independence are most notable.

2 Eliza Doolittle as the New Woman and Shaw's Feminist Propaganda

Shaw's progressive social ideals and feminist tendencies are, in many ways, reflected in his *Pygmalion*. As a member of the Fabian Society,[1] Shaw promoted its core ideas, prominent among which are women-related reforms (Arrington 2015, 13). These were widely discussed at the end of the 19th century, which "brought that revolution in female behaviour that is called the New Woman" (Gadpaille 2010, 83) and challenged Victorian norms. In her paper, Hadfield describes these norms by referring to Coventry Patmore's poem cycle *The Angel in the House*, its first book published in 1854 and the last in 1862 (Hoffman 2007, 268), which "presented the ideal wife as a woman who lived only to serve her husband and children, and was thoroughly dependent on men for her very identity and survival" (Hadfield 2015, 217). The New Woman, however, matched the new views on several important issues: she was independent in many ways, "educated, physically fit, rationally dressed . . . She smoked, sought career opportunities, and demanded an end to a gendered double standard" (Hadfield 2015, 215). There was "a new generation of career women . . . who made a conscious decision to stay single," while other women decided "to remain single from an ideological opposition to marriage" (Gleadle 2001, 184).

These ideas can be seen in *Pygmalion*, where the female characters are far from inferior to the male characters. Mrs. Higgins seems superior to her son, talking to him as if he were a child: "Now, Henry: be good," or "Please don't grind your teeth, Henry" (Shaw 2021, 105, 109). Her attempts to scold her misbehaving son turn the brilliant phonetician into a pathetic contrast to a typical patriarchal man; this is both a source of humour and a critique of traditional assumptions about gender roles. Moreover, at the end of the play, when after the fight with Higgins, Eliza visits Mrs. Higgins, the latter supports her and even defends Eliza's "irrational" behaviour of the day before ("And then you i.e., Henry were surprised because she threw your slippers at you! *I* should have thrown the fire-irons at you" (Shaw 2021, 103)), which differs from Victorian ideals of a woman's respectful and humble behaviour towards men. Similarly, Higgins's housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, although aware of her lower

[1] The Fabian Society was formed at the end of the 19th century by "a small group of middle-class intellectuals set about the reconstruction of civilisation" (Arrington 2015, 12). Their ideas supported the shift of society to socialism and, according to one of the society's founding members, Edward Pease, were originally interested in "social as well as psychical progress" (1963, 28).

social status, often expresses her disagreement with Higgins and even lectures him about his behaviour, as in this scene in Act II:

> Mrs Pearce: Will you please keep to the point, Mr. Higgins. I want to know on what terms the girl is to be here . . . You must look ahead a little.
> Higgins [*impatiently*]: What's to become of her if I leave her in the gutter? Tell me that, Mrs. Pearce.
> Mrs Pearce: That's her own business, not yours, Mr. Higgins. (Shaw 2021, 32)

Of course, the most notable female character of the play is Eliza, who defies traditional Victorian society the most. Shaw's feminist views are expressed through her transformation from a flower girl to a lady, which can be perceived as the central theme of the play, as suggested by the title with its allusion "to its classical source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (Fabriczki 2021, vii). This transformation is twofold: she undergoes a physical makeover, and she changes her speech and behaviour.

At the beginning of *Pygmalion*, Eliza is characterized as an uneducated, rough-mannered girl with a limited sense of appropriate social behaviour, particularly unaware of the proper usage of upper-class manners. Her lack of refined behaviour is primarily shown at the level of discourse, since she speaks the Cockney dialect typical of the London working class. She is also described as "not at all an attractive person" and "no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies . . . very dirty" (Shaw 2021, 3, 4). Her physical contrast to the high-society ladies is immediately spotlighted, yet she is not portrayed as someone who neglects her appearance on purpose. At the same time, she is characterized with "excessive sensibility" (Shaw 2021, 7), shown when she fears Higgins might be a police officer. However, even though Eliza is sensitive, she already possesses many crucial characteristics of the New Woman. In this scene, she shows survival mechanisms by doing her best to stand up for herself when she feels threatened, and this is later amplified when she visits Higgins's house in Wimpole Street. Her intent to be respected is prominent when she introduces her business proposal to Higgins, and her desire to become educated and improve her language is the central theme of the play. By refusing to be treated as an inferior in the business proposal, she shows defiance of traditional gender roles; she shows self-respect and dignity, and she only sits down when Pickering asks her politely. Her intentions are honest, so she feels she deserves to be treated respectfully. Despite the fact that Eliza is rough-mannered and impulsive, she shows interest in behaving in an appropriate way, since being

polite (or at least showing attempts at it) is crucial for her success in selling flowers (she calls Higgins "Sir", or Pickering "colonel", since they are potential customers – while she is quite strict towards Mrs. Eynsford-Hill and "teaches her" about the bad manners of her son). This feature of her character is a prerequisite for becoming a lady later in the play, and, consequently, her transformation is more plausible because of her earlier characterization. Despite her quick-tempered behaviour at the beginning, she is a likeable character; a considerable part of her likability – as well as humour – lies in her lack of appropriate manners. What she does not lack, however, is the predisposition to master such behaviour, and it is crucial that Eliza's initial characterization display it clearly.

After her transformation, she is clean, well-dressed, and far from unattractive: when she is first introduced to Mrs. Higgins and her guests, she is described as "exquisitely dressed" (Shaw 2021, 66), and she "produces an impression of … remarkable distinction and beauty" (66); even in the epilogue, she is paralleled with "a good-looking girl" (125). She is not pitiful but gains self-respect, becomes (at least partly) educated, still desires financial independence, liberates herself from Higgins's control, and is now even more aware of how she deserves to be treated. She thus transforms into the New Woman. Even though she marries and cannot incorporate every characteristic of the New Woman concept, she avoids becoming a typical Victorian "lady" by not accepting an inferior role to her husband; she marries into an equal marriage where both partners earn their living. As the epilogue claims, Freddy "is not her [i.e., Eliza's] master, nor ever likely to dominate her in spite of his advantage of social standing" (Shaw 2021, 128). It is important to add that when she asserts her power at the end of the play, confronting Higgins, he does not contradict her but rather praises her change – not without giving himself a pat on the back, of course: "By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this" (Shaw 2021, 123). He, however, completely fails to recognize her own role in the transformation, and they do not become romantically involved. Considering Shaw's activist background, it is impossible to overlook Eliza's quest to become the New Woman; one could even go as far as to see the character as a prime example of his feminist propaganda, promoting and advocating for the concept of the New Woman.

3 From *Pygmalion* to *My Fair Lady*

In the musical *My Fair Lady*, the characterization of the protagonists follows, for the most part, their features in *Pygmalion*. Even though some parts of the plot are changed, and some characters have been excluded (such as Clara Eynsford-Hill) or added (Higgins's Hungarian student, Professor Zoltan Karpathy), the relationship dynamics between the characters, particularly between Eliza and Higgins, is preserved till the very end of the musical. Most importantly, Eliza's characterization and transformation into the New Woman follow Shaw's play; therefore, the musical can be seen as advocating for the New Woman with equal intensity.

The only disruption of the original plotline is the ending, which seems to make an effort to conform to the genre of the musical. A likely romantic involvement between Higgins and Eliza is implied, yet – unfortunately – at the expense of Eliza's independence, autonomy and the incomplete transformation. Closely connected to this, the social critique of male superiority and dominance, as well as the class system, gives way to the Cinderella story, where the happily-ever-after ending is guaranteed. This is the opposite of the original ending, where the "inversion of expectations allows for a feminist reading of the play: Eliza does not become moulded by Higgins in order to become a suitable mate for him" (Fabriczki 2021, vii). Shaw himself was annoyed by any attempts to put the two characters together, even though "the first actor to play Higgins, Sir Herbert Tree, circumvented the playwright's explicit instructions, and ended his shows by throwing Eliza . . . a bouquet, implying that the two had a romantic future off-stage" (Fabriczki 2021, vii–viii). However, as Reynolds observes, we can interpret this ending as Eliza returning to Higgins for other reasons, perhaps "only for the sake of friendship" (2019, 51); after all, the epilogue of *Pygmalion* clearly states that Eliza's life was still connected to both Higgins and Pickering. Moreover, the ending of the musical was based on the 1938 film version of *Pygmalion*, which was "approved by Shaw" (Reynolds 2019, 51).

In general, the adaptation into a musical might suggest a "lighter" take on the serious theme of female emancipation, yet the romance is not in the foreground of *My Fair Lady*. Eliza's transformation is still a salient element of the plot, which supports the hypothesis that the musical, following in the footsteps of the play, still strongly advocates for the New Woman. Audrey Hepburn's character in the 1964 Warner Bros movie version of the musical elegantly displays these characteristics, while the

Maribor production seems less successful in this respect, primarily owing to Eliza's characterization. Having identified this as a relevant research question, in the next section, we will investigate how well the Maribor production advocates for the New Woman and what theatrical means it employs to do so. To answer this, we will analyse Eliza's stage appearance – particularly her actions and her language – and compare it to the 1964 movie version.

4 Maribor production of *My Fair Lady*

In the 2015 Maribor production of *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle diverges considerably from what seems to be the generally accepted idea of Shaw's independent female character, who is originally rough and later gentle – yet overall likeable. As such it represents a breakaway from the traditional Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house". We compared a video recording of the 2015 Maribor National Theatre production (Fourny 2015) to the 1964 Warner Bros film version of *My Fair Lady*, starring Audrey Hepburn (Cukor 1964), partly because the film itself – having won numerous accolades, including 8 Academy Awards – is a classic and a celebrated achievement in the film world, but also because it allows comparison of the two performed pieces on two levels relevant for our research: the level of the performance as well as that of the language. For the linguistic comparison, we relied on an audio transcript that we extracted from a video recording of the musical. For additional comments and references, we also included the original libretto of *My Fair Lady* (Lerner 1956), an earlier Slovene translation from 1990 (Hartman 1990), and Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Shaw 2021), which served as the basis for the musical. Our textual and multimodal analyses pursue a double focus regarding Eliza's character in the Maribor production of the musical: first, we show that she lacks some of the crucial character features to credibly undergo the transformation envisaged by the dramatic plot of the musical. Secondly, we demonstrate that she is considerably less effective in promoting the concept of the New Woman than her character in the original musical libretto or in *Pygmalion*.

In the Maribor production, Eliza's character appears to lack certain features that would be essential for her evolution into a lady and which the protagonists in *Pygmalion* and in the original *My Fair Lady* both possess. Among these are her coarse and often disrespectful communication, her noticeably aggressive body language, and her substantially rude behaviour. These features stand out even more because

most of her interaction occurs with upper-class characters, who – with the exception of Henry Higgins – maintain a high level of politeness in their communication and behaviour, even towards a common flower girl. The other downside of the Maribor production is the omission of several of Eliza's (and occasionally other characters') lines that characterize her as an independent and autonomous woman with self-respect, internal decisiveness and defiance of traditional gender roles. She promotes Shaw's New Woman to a considerably lesser degree than her counterparts in other versions of the play/musical. Our focus is to examine the aspects of Eliza's character that declare her to be the embryonic New Woman, as well as Shaw's promotion of feminist ideas.

In the opening scenes of *My Fair Lady*, Eliza's vocabulary and pronunciation are a clear indication of her lack of basic formal education. Similarly, her use of the Cockney dialect exposes the gap between her status and that of the upper-class characters with whom she converses. Despite her roughness, however, she is never impolite or unobservant of the way the upper class behaves, since this would be in discord with the character she becomes after the subsequent six-month transformation. Her attempts to adapt by following the example of other upper-class characters, although predominantly unsuccessful, indicate modesty and respect, possibly also secret admiration and ambition. These features of her character can be perceived in the 1964 film version, and they also comply with Shaw's description and characterization of Eliza in *Pygmalion*. The Maribor production, however, presents Eliza as considerably ruder, even aggressive, from the opening scene onwards when Freddy Eynsford-Hill knocks over her flower basket:

> Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah. /…/ *[picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket]* There's menners f' yer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad. (2021, *Pygmalion*)

> Two bunches of violets trod in the mud. A full day's wages. Why don't you look where you're going?
> (Lerner 1956; original musical libretto)

> Look where you're going, dear. Look where you're going. /…/ Two bunches of violets trod in the mud. A full day's wages.
> (Cukor 1964; WB movie version)

> Dva puščeljca vijolic pa kar takle v blato! Fse, kaj sen gnes zaslužila, je šlo po vodi! Ka pa ne gledate, ge hodite!
> (Hartman 1990; 1990 Slovene translation of the musical libretto)

> Ti'm jes dala oprostite! Rajši glej, ki hodiš, trotl! Dva šopka si mi potanco! Ka te misliš, da jas dnar na cesti pobiram al kaj?
> (Fourny 2015; audio transcript of the 2015 Maribor stage production, adapted by R. Vilčnik from the 1990 Slovene translation)

In the play, as in the musical, Eliza's complaints and grumbling are said more or less to herself. Only one remark is directed at Freddy, and, although assertive, it is not impolite or intended *ad personam*. It seems that she tries to awaken his guilty conscience and thus gain compensation for the two spoiled bouquets through his sense of moral responsibility rather than by a directly expressed demand. She even softens the complaint with the expression *dear*, and she seems to acknowledge Freddy's apology (which is "Sorry" in the play and "I'm frightfully sorry" in the musical). Apart from picking up the basket and the bouquets, she is fairly static, dedicating most of her attention to her props.

In the Maribor production, however, the rudeness of the utterance shows at the verbal as well as the non-verbal level. Firstly, Eliza directs her whole utterance at Freddy, thus shifting the focus of her attention from restoring the basket and its contents to the verbal complaint. The latter starts with a threat ("I'll show you 'Sorry'") and continues with a strong insult ("idiot"), a direct accusation ("You trampled two of my bouquets!") and a sarcastic rhetorical question ("Do you think I pick money off the street or what?"). This loosely translated Slovene utterance contains many translation shifts, particularly stylistic ones, which are utterly at odds with the Eliza's character. Additionally, she addresses Freddy using the T-form (Slov. *tikanje*), which is highly informal and signals the speaker's disrespect or insensitivity to politeness and etiquette. The semantic aspect of her utterance is additionally supported by her aggressive manner of speaking – she shouts the whole time –, as well as her threatening body language – she makes brisk, physically aggressive motions directly towards Freddy, pushing his arm, then coming as close as 20 centimetres from his face so that he instinctively retreats and apologizes.

Eliza's next remark, addressed to Mrs. Eynsford-Hill, continues the discrepancy with her character as introduced by Lerner's original libretto, which in this utterance closely follows Shaw's play:

> - Oh, he's your son, is he? Well, if you'd done your duty by him as a mother should, you wouldn't let him spoil a poor girl's flowers and then run away without paying.
> - Oh, go about your business, my girl. (Cukor 1964)

> - A ovi pubec je vaš? Ka te nea gleda, ki hodi?
> - Ja, kako se pa obnašate? (Fourny 2015)

The neutral expression "your son" is replaced with a pejorative counterpart "pubec" (Engl. "lad", "brat"), and the oversimplified translation of the utterance's last part ("Why does he not look where he is going?") shifts the object of Eliza's complaint: in the original, she questions Mrs. Eynsford-Hill's upbringing of her son, while in the translation the futile rhetorical criticism is directed at Freddy, who is gone by the time Eliza speaks to his mother. Like Eliza's previous exchange with Freddy, her shouting and aggressive body language in this part of the dialogue may have been added as a humorous hyperbole intended for comic effect, but the exaggeration is too strong and interferes with the characterization of Eliza. Another indication that the free Slovene wording has been overdone is the reply of Mrs. Eynsford-Hill, who openly reacts to Eliza's inappropriate behaviour ("What manners you have!?"), which is much less direct in the original. The Maribor Eliza's rude and obnoxious behaviour continues in the following few lines, since she continues to shout at the departing Mrs. Eynsford-Hill – another addition to the Slovene translation ("Jaz, a se ni toti vaš gelipter zaleto? /…/ Hálo, pol krone ste mi dolžni! etc.").

The scene in the film and in the Maribor stage version continues with Eliza turning to Colonel Pickering and offering him a flower. A considerable part of the Slovene text fails to follow the original libretto, resulting in Eliza's continued excessive boldness that is inappropriate for her character:

> - Cheer up, captain. Buy a flower off a poor girl.
> - I'm sorry, I haven't any change.
> - Oh, I can change half a crown. Here, take this for tuppence.
> - I told you, I'm awfully sorry, I haven't-- Oh, wait a minute. Oh, yes. Here's three ha'pence, if that's any use to you.
> - Thank you, sir. (Cukor 1964)

- Čujte, gospod, ne bi vi kupli kako rožo za svojo ženo? Vete, kak so lepe, frišne, ko nove. Dans sn jih nabirala.
- Nimam drobiža.
- Ja, kolk pa te mate?
- To se pa vas nič ne tiče.
- Dajte, no, nea boite tečni, no. Saj bi tudi velki dnar zamejala.
- Res nimam nič. Čakajte. (Fourny 2015)

The translator's ungrammatical use of the accusative ("kako rožo") instead of the genitive case ("kake rože") is welcome, since failing to use the genitive case in negative sentence formulations is a common mistake, typical of uneducated users (see Onič 2008). The following two sentences are an ungrounded addition to the conversation, possibly aiming for a humorous effect, but Eliza's response to Pickering's "I'm sorry, I haven't any change" is shifted into a totally different sentence, stylistically as well as semantically ("Well, how much do you have, then?"). This steers the conversation away from the original, so Pickering's answer is defensive and less polite ("This is no concern of yours.") and, consequently, leads to Eliza's rude remark involving an insult ("Oh, come on, don't be a pain."). Her singularly inappropriate discourse is exacerbated by a hostile tone (shouting), disrespectful, nearly barking intonation, and aggressive body language: sudden assertive moves towards Pickering, entering his personal space – even as close as a few inches, violating his personal zone – tapping his arm in a seemingly friendly way, as if they were old buddies. Such exaggerated and thus probably stylized behaviour might be appropriate for a lighter comedic genre, such as slapstick or farce but is problematic if the plot requires character development, as is the case with Eliza. Even an uneducated girl with rough manners should know that such behaviour is unacceptable, so the later transformation cannot be perceived by the audience as genuine.

Apart from the considerable unwanted impact on Eliza, the heavily changed dialogue also negatively affects the character of Pickering, who in the Maribor production lacks the requisite English politeness. In the original version, he is contrite and apologizes directly (twice in the film version) for not buying a bouquet owing to the lack of change. The Slovene production leaves out both these expressions and adds the response, "This is no concern of yours", which makes him less gentleman-like, thus diminishing his most important characteristic, crucial for the plot development

as well as for establishing the relationship between him and Eliza, based on mutual respect and confidence.

Eliza's inappropriate and unladylike behaviour in the Maribor production continues when she comes to Higgins's residence to ask for language lessons. Her tone of voice is bossy and pretentious, showing no sign of modesty – or the "innocent vanity" attributed to her by Shaw in the stage directions of the play (2021, 21). When she reports (to Pickering and Mrs. Pearce) that the day before Higgins bragged about being able to teach her, she refers to him with a rude and insulting expression ("Ovi gimpl je reko, da bi me naučo.") and then continues to suggest that the money he gave her upon leaving Covent Garden was to pay her "to go home with him", a reference that does not exist in the original text. When she makes the financial proposal to Higgins, she sits on his desk. She then parades around the room with her umbrella, touches the phonograph and other equipment, and takes off her shoe and puts it on the desk, showing no indication of awareness that she is only visiting and therefore cannot behave in this way. When Pickering finally invites her to sit down, she does so and then crosses her legs by putting her ankle on the opposite knee, which is inappropriate under any circumstances, let alone during the visit of a flower girl to an upper-class residence.

We contend that the Maribor National Theatre production almost completely overlooks the theme of the musical (and the play) showing Eliza as the New Woman. This occurs mainly at the textual level, owing to the omission of parts of Eliza's utterances that contextualize her decisions and actions. The Slovene production abridges some of Eliza's longer, more philosophical, discourse for no obvious reason but to shorten the dialogue that contributes less to the plot but leads the audience to understand the renovation of the protagonist's life philosophy. A notable omission of this kind occurs in Eliza's conversation with Mrs. Higgins, where the Slovene Eliza skips the well-known quote about the difference between a lady and a flower girl:

> I should never have known how ladies and gentlemen behave if it hadn't been for Colonel Pickering. He always showed me that he felt and thought about me as if I were something better than a common flower girl. You see, Mrs. Higgins, **apart from the things one can pick up, 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 I shall always be a lady to Colonel Pickering **because he always treats me as a lady, and always will.** (Cukor 1964; our emphasis)

> Nikoli se ne bi naučila, kako se vedejo dame in gospodje, če ne bi bilo polkovnika Pickeringa. Zmeraj mi je dal vedeti, da me ima za nekaj več kot samo za ubogo cvetličarko. Za gospoda Higginsa bom zmeraj samo cvetličarka. Vem pa tudi, da bom za polkovnika Pickeringa zmeraj dama. (Fourny 2015)

In the original libretto, which in this respect closely follows Shaw's play, Eliza refers to the difference in the treatment she received from Higgins and Pickering. However, this is more than a simple observation about how each of the two gentlemen behaved towards her and which of them provided certain parts of her education; it shows Eliza's broad understanding of social relations, (in)equality, dignity, empathy, and the right to respectful treatment. It also criticizes the perception of these issues by the upper society, but, most of all, it demonstrates the profound internal transformation that Eliza has experienced in the course of the experiment. It shows that not only has she learned to speak standard English and acquired the accepted behavioural norms, but that she has expanded and developed her former understanding of society and that she is a genuine New Woman – in both senses. The Slovene production loses most of these dimensions, which the adaptation into the (original) musical has managed to preserve from Shaw's drama.

Several excerpts from the original libretto demonstrate Eliza's independence, self-respect, and internal determination to pursue a new philosophy of life. The parallel passages from the Slovene production, however, show that many of the crucial parts of her discourse have been omitted, causing a decrease in the interpretative potential of the staging of the Slovene musical. One of the omitted sentences is Eliza's statement, "I won't be passed over," from the exchange with Higgins near the end of the play in Mrs. Higgins's residence:

> H: The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better.
> E: I don't care how you treat me. **I don't mind your swearing at me. I shouldn't mind a black eye: I've had one before this. But I won't be passed over.** (Cukor 1964; our emphasis)

> H: Ni vprašanje, ali sem trdo ravnal s tabo, pač pa ali si me že sploh kdaj slišala, da bi s kom lepše ravnal.

E: Ni mi mar, kako ravnate z mano. (Fourny 2015)

A similar omission takes place later in this same conversation when Eliza stands up for herself again and even more directly ("I'm not dirt under your feet."):

H: Oh, in short, you want me to be as infatuated about you as he [i.e., Freddy] is; is that it?
E: No, I don't. That's not the sort of feeling I want from you. I want a little kindness. **I know I'm a common ignorant girl, and you're a book-learned gentleman**; but **I'm not dirt under your feet**. What I done – what I did was not for the taxis and the dresses … (Cukor 1964; our emphasis)

H: Torej ti bi rada, da bi bil tudi jaz tako, tako zatreskan vate kakor on. A ni res?
E: Ne, ni res. Ne želim si, da bi tako čutili do mene. Vse kaj sn delala . . . kar sem počela, nisem za obleke ali pa za taksije … (Fourny 2015)

Later, when insulted by Higgins again ("That's just how I feel. And how Pickering feels. Eliza; you're a fool."), her response ("That's not a proper answer to give me.") shows that she is no longer the Eliza who would immediately have lost her temper and argued over such a statement, perhaps even returning a similar insult, but that she is able to control herself and respond with a sensible argument in an appropriate tone. This is a sign of self-respect as well as of independent thinking, salient characteristics of the New Woman. This response, too, is skipped in the Slovene translation, as well as the 2015 Maribor production.

The final example of omission that we wish to comment on from the Maribor production of the musical concerns Eliza's telling Higgins that she intends to marry Freddy. This information is preserved in the Slovene version; however, the addition that she will do so when she earns enough to support him is not:

Oh, I can't talk to you: you always turn everything against me. I'm always in the wrong. But don't be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down. **I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as I'm able to support him**. (Cukor 1964; our emphasis)

S Freddyjem se bom poročila! (Fourny 2015)

From the point of view of the New Woman, this bit of information reveals a great deal about Eliza, her intention to gain financial independence, and the extent to which her new worldview has changed from Higgins's traditional one. It is worth mentioning that in this scene, in fact, the musical contributes even more to characterizing Eliza as the New Woman than Shaw's play, where the last part of Eliza's utterance (above, in bold) is "I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as he's able to support me." At the end of the musical, of course, she does not marry Freddy; the story ends with Eliza's return to Higgins's house. A detail worth mentioning here is that Eliza in the film version says her final sentence ("I washed my face and hands before I come, I did.") in Cockney. Even though a relationship with Higgins is implied, she keeps her independence by using her original dialect. In the Maribor production, however, she says it in standard Slovene. This implies that she has been successfully "moulded" by Higgins (and, perhaps, for Higgins) by speaking the way he taught her, showing less autonomy that the Cockney version offers.

5 Conclusion

Compared to the WB musical *My Fair Lady*, the Maribor production shows a distinct diversion from Eliza's character at the beginning of the play. Her exaggerated behaviour overshadows her predisposition to become a lady, and so her transformation seems abrupt. There is no sign of the innocent flower girl from *Pygmalion* or the musical, and as linguistic analysis shows, her speech is ruder and more inappropriate because of several linguistic changes that were made. Even though Eliza shows all the necessary characteristics of a lady in the second part of the musical, when her speech shifts to standard Slovene and her manners are poised and elegant, the viewer seems to question whether such a transformation is plausible, based on her initial behaviour.

Similarly, Shaw's depiction of the New Woman reflected in the musical version of his play is not as successful in the Maribor production. Although the Maribor musical follows the plot of the original libretto, and Eliza still successfully demonstrates her newly gained self-confidence and poise, it omits parts of the text that are crucial for promoting the New Woman concept. Thus, the Maribor production loses the opportunity to portray Eliza as a socially engaged and dynamic character, aware of (and critical of) the way that society works, and how she wants to be treated within it.

References

Arrington, Lauren. 2015. "The Fabian Society." In *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, edited by Brad Kent. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cukor, George, director. 1964. *My Fair Lady*. Warner Bros.

Fabriczki, Fran. 2021. "Life and Times." In *Pygmalion*. London: William Collins.

Fourny, Paul-Émil, director. 2015. *My Fair Lady*. Stage production video recording. Slovene libretto adapted by Rok Vilčnik from the 1990 Slovene translation by Bruno Hartman. Maribor: The Maribor Slovene National Theatre.

Gadpaille, Michelle. 2010. *'As She Should Be': Codes of Conduct in Early Canadian Women's Writing*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg.

Gleadle, Kathryn. 2001. *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave.

Hadfield, Dorothy. 2015. "Feminism." In *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, edited by Brad Kent. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hartman, Bruno, translator. 1990. *My Fair Lady*. Unpublished translation of the musical libretto. Maribor: The Maribor Slovene National Theatre.

Hoffman, Joan M. 2007. "'She Loves with Love That Cannot Tire': The Image of the Angel in the House across Cultures and across Time." *Pacific Coast Philology* 42 (2): 264–271.

Holroyd, Michael. 1991. *Bernard Shaw: The Pursuit of Power 1898–1918*. New York: Random House.

Lerner, Alan Jay. 1956. *Libretto Vocal Book: Lerner & Loewe's My Fair Lady*. New York: Musical Theatre International.

Onič, Tomaž. 2008. "Pogovorni in narečni izrazi v slovenskih dramskih prevodih – soočanje s prevajalskimi zagatami." *Jezikoslovni zapiski* 14, no. 1: 139–150.

Pease, Edward R. 1963. *The History of the Fabian Society*. London: Frank Cass & Co.

Reynolds, Jean. 2019. "Can a Shavian Love *My Fair Lady*?" *Shaw* 39 (1): 40–55. https://doi.org/10.5325/shaw.39.1.0040.

Shaw, George Bernard. 2021. *Pygmalion*. London: William Collins.