

SYNOPSIS

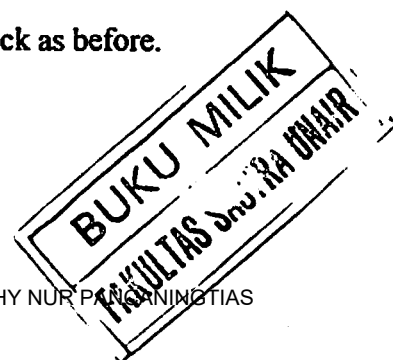
A poor flower-seller from the slums of London hears a conversation between two linguistic scholars (phoneticians) in a crowd sheltering from a rainstorm after the opera. One of them has demonstrated his skills in identifying local dialect and boasts of his ability to teach people of lower class origin to talk like ladies and gentlemen. The flower-girl, Eliza Doolittle, decides to use the excessively generous tip she had to buy herself some lessons, and she turns up at Professor Higgins' house next day to make the necessary arrangements. Higgins is with Colonel Pickering, the friend he met the previous night, and the two bet on his chances of so transforming Eliza's speech in six months that she can pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. Higgins and Pickering are bachelors, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, has misgivings about the irresponsible way in which they are proposing to amuse themselves without thinking out the consequences of Eliza. However, when Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, arrives to protest at the immorality of their abduction of his daughter, it soon becomes evident that he has no real objection, but merely wants to gain something for himself from the situation. They easily buy him off and he, who would naturally and legally have the main responsibility for Eliza, is happy to leave her in their hands. The transformation of Eliza starts with cleaning her up and dressing her nicely, this involves her first introduction to the way of life of the well-to-do middle and upper classes. Speech lessons follow and she proves herself to be a quick, intelligent, hardworking student.

Higgins organizes her first public test by having her attend his mother's 'At-Home'. Apart from Pickering and himself, the other visitors are a widow and her son and daughter of the names of Eynsford Hill. Mrs. Eynsford Hill is a gentlewoman with very little money, thoroughly respectable but acutely aware that she can barely keep up her appearances and that her son and daughter have lacked the usual advantages of the upper class. The son, Freddy, falls in love with Eliza on seeing her beautifully dressed and now most attractive. The daughter, Clara, is dazzled, too, and accepts her as a young woman of high fashion. Mrs. Eynsford Hill knows better, as does Mrs. Higgins, for Eliza's conversation veers between ridiculously formal and stilted banalities, such as remarks about the weather, and beautifully pronounced expression of low class ignorance and superstition. The clash between Eliza's new manner and her life teaches Higgins the lesson that he cannot create a lady without paying attention to her mind and soul. He still does not realize, as his mother does, that the consequences of training Eliza in ladylike habits and tastes may be disastrous for her.

He wins his bet with Colonel Pickering: at the end of the six months, the two of them take Eliza into high society (to a garden party, followed by a dinner party and a visit to the opera, in the original play; to an embassy ball in screen version), where she is universally admired. (In the screen version, she was suspected to be a foreign princess whose English is perfect). Shaw does not indicate precisely how the change has been brought about. There is something miraculous about the transformation of the sham lady who went to visit Mrs. Higgins into the real lady Eliza has now become. Higgins takes all the credit to

himself, and even Pickering sees Eliza's triumph as reflection of Higgins' professional skills. This anger Eliza, who sees that her own efforts are undervalued and that Higgins does not regard her as a human being with real feelings, but as something inert, a doll that it has amused him to pass of as a leaving woman. He seems scarcely aware of her presence. Provoked, she ceases to be obedient and rebelliously asserts her independence. By leaving the house in Wimpole Street, Eliza forces Higgins to realize how much he has come to rely on her. He traces her to his mother's apartment, where she has taken refuge, and tries to persuade her to come back.

At this juncture Eliza's father put in another appearance. He, too, is transformed: outwardly from poverty to prosperity; inwardly, from cheerfulness to misery. It is a change that parallels Eliza's, but in his case it is the result of legacy from deceased millionaire, obtained for him through some careless words written by Higgins. The practical solution to the problem of Eliza's future is thus easily found: her father can do the conventional thing and keep her in the comfort to which leaving in Wimpole Street has accustomed her. Eliza recognizes that she has the alternative of marrying Freddy Eynsford Hill. Higgins wants her back but, being a confirmed bachelor, makes no over of marriage to her. Eliza herself is determined that she will never again go back to being subservient to him. The play has a teasingly inconclusive end: Eliza goes off with Mrs. Higgins to church to see Alfred Doolittle properly married as a respectable plutocrat should be. Higgins stays behind, obviously confident that Eliza will come back as before.



FINDING A VOICE OF HER OWN IN ZORA NEALE
HURSTON'S THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD :
A GENETIC STRUCTURALISM READING

A THESIS



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2000 - 2001

