

Andrea Morrison

Ms. Hittel

English 1102

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Creation

Exhibit One: Drama Project

Iceberg: Beneath the Surface



(Scambos)

Introduction

On the surface of the water, icebergs often appear small and non-threatening. However, the true scope of an iceberg's power and magnitude hides beneath the surface - beneath visibility. Similarly, a woman's true potential is masked by superficial features such as race, attire, and language. In his play *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw confronts English society's attitude towards women, specifically calling attention to the upper class's predilection towards ignoring a woman's feelings and only accepting her value if she presents a convincing facade painted with beauty and ignorance. The female protagonist in his play, Eliza Doolittle, must give up her independence in order to get society to see her as an acceptable, respectable woman, as

evidenced by her telling Henry Higgins, the male protagonist, that "you've made a lady of me [and now] I'm not fit to sell anything [other than myself]" (Shaw 48). Concurrently, Higgins spends the entirety of the play reforming Eliza to be fit for high society, but he sees her "only as an object for experiment" (Lihua 41). In order to demonstrate the significance of Shaw's commentary on the role women in society, I am adapting *Pygmalion* to a film of a different time and place, transforming Eliza Doolittle into a Mexican immigrant in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. By creating an adaptation with an ethnic element, I expand upon Shaw's initial commentary and show the additional struggles of women of color as well as add a visible representation of Eliza's transformation.

Context and Setting

As a Mexican woman in the 1930s in the American south, Eliza Doolittle faces many struggles regarding her race and gender. Her family adopted the last name Doolittle in an attempt to assimilate into American society, meaning that Eliza and her father speak with a heavy accent that limits their employment and status potential. In the beginning of the adaptation, Eliza works as a flower girl, and because of her accent and the indignity associated with her job and heritage, many people refuse to hire her. Eliza hopes that by learning to speak as a southern debutante, she will be able to get a stable job.

Henry Higgins, on the other hand, remains truer to Shaw's original character. He is British and makes a living as a phonetics expert. However, in order to explain his involvement in America, the film adaptation shows that his mother has retired to Baton Rouge in hopes of the warmer weather easing her arthritis pain. Higgins has a manor in Baton Rouge so that he may check on his mother from time to time, as well as learn more about the dialects of the American south. In the context of the film, Higgins and Pickering have arranged to meet at Higgins's study in Baton Rouge.

Time Period

The film takes place in the mid-1930s. During this time, immigrants living in the United States (particularly Hispanic immigrants) were forced to pass a literacy requirement ("Timeline of Important Dates"). Several years later, the United States government placed a limit on the number of immigrants allowed into the United States and simultaneously created Border Control to prevent these immigrants from entering the country. In addition to these events, the United States was just beginning to recover from the Great Depression. This time in history allows for the greatest struggles, for Eliza as a Mexican woman in America:

she knows English, but she doesn't speak it very well, and people will only accept her in society as an inferior member of the proletariat. Eliza initially believes that correcting her accent means enhancing her prestige, but upgrading her social status doesn't change the inequality she faces. With the United States healing from the Great Depression, businesses and proprietors won't hire a woman to do a man's job, and they won't allow a Hispanic woman to hold the same position as a white woman. With a new accent, she's respected, but she's no longer free.

Place

This particular production occurs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for two primary reasons. The class issues are often extreme (even if dramatized) in the American south, which will allow the director to capitalize on the hardships Eliza faces as a poor, Hispanic woman. In addition to the class issues present, there are many dialects there that would attract Higgins and Pickering such as typical southern dialects, Cajun English/French, and creole.

Sets

The scene takes place entirely in the study of Higgins's manor. The appearance of the room very closely resembles the description given in the written play at the beginning of Act II, especially in having the basic amenities of a drawing room such as a fireplace and an easy chair while being mostly cluttered with work materials such as "a phonograph, a laryngoscope, a row of tiny organ pipes with bellows, [etc.]" (Shaw 14). There are two large windows facing the front of the house that allow the audience to see that this scene occurs at night, and that it is raining.

Lighting

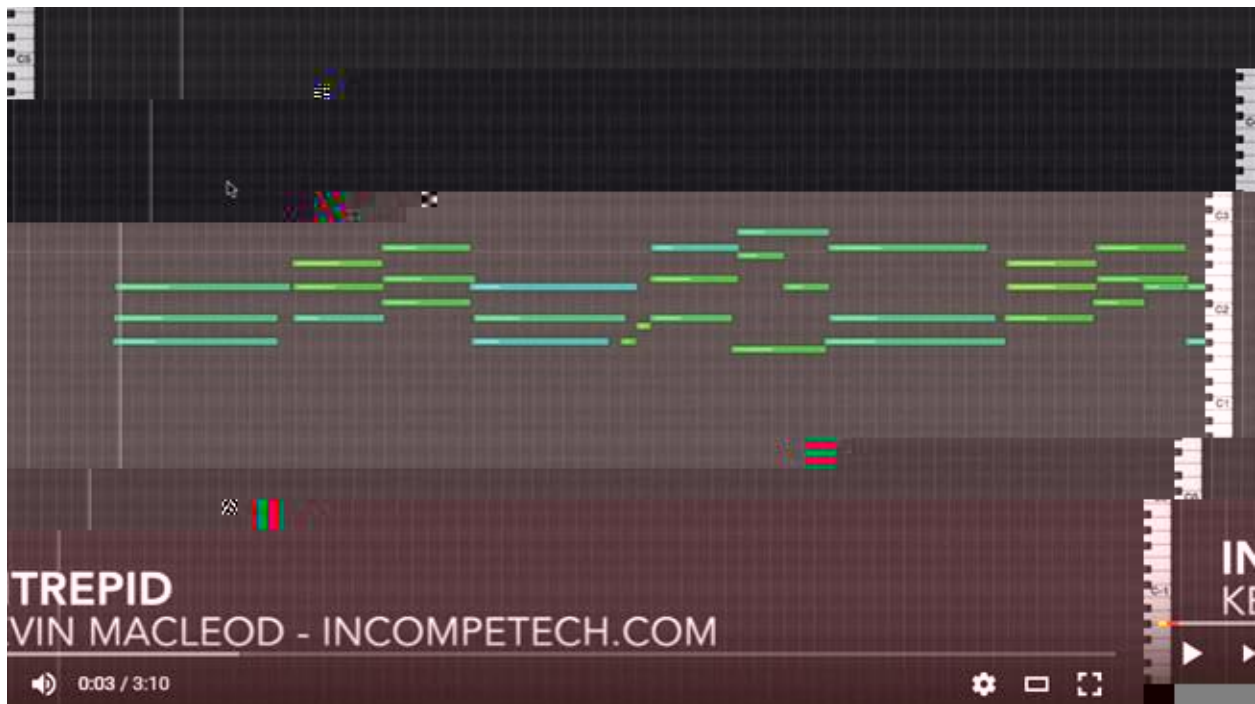
The central source of lighting for the scene comes from the hearth. Just before this scene occurs, Higgins turns off the main lighting to the room, completely oblivious to Eliza's presence. The hearth acts as directional lighting in order to cast dark shadows and create heavy contrast, which adds ambiance and ominousness to the set (Zettl 160, 162). Furthermore, changing which character is better illuminated throughout the scene allows the lighting to allude to the battle for equality between Eliza and Higgins.

Camera Shots and Angles

At the beginning of the scene, the audience sees Higgins with a low angle shot, which gives him a sense of power and dominance (Freer). The low angle shot of Higgins pairs with a high angle shot of Eliza to showcase Eliza's perceived inferiority. Furthermore, having the camera angles capitalize on solely Eliza or solely Higgins demonstrates their differences (Marcotte). As the scene continues, the camera angle adapts to an eye-level shot that features Eliza and Higgins together in order to give the audience a subtle hint of Eliza's rise to equality.

Music

The selection below plays quietly in the background as the scene progresses. The slow tempo and somber tones of the selection give the audience a heightened sense of sorrow and fragility, which mimic Eliza's feelings during the scene. The long, full notes allow the music to add to the scene without overpowering it, and the tempo and melody of the music embody the essence of the intense argument between Higgins and Eliza.



<https://youtu.be/gkSU5RPeh-o>

(Intrepid)

Furthermore, rain and thunder sounds improve upon the tension of the moment. Rain often signals despair and discontinuity, two sentiments that epitomize this scene, and the thunder adds power and anger to their argument by providing loud, chaotic bursts of noise. Furthermore, Eliza and Higgins first met in the rain, so adding rain to their argument gives the idea that their relationship has come full circle and shows that a relationship cultivated from desperation can only end in desperation.



<https://youtu.be/5fNLEPrNi2A>

(Thunder Sound FX)

Costumes

Eliza Doolittle

Eliza is wearing very extravagant attire. However, during this scene, she realizes that becoming a well respected woman in society means losing her independence and her identity. To demonstrate Eliza's torn feelings between her freedom and her social standing, she rids herself of extravagances throughout the scene. She takes her jewelry off and gives it to Higgins. Her hair begins in an updo at the beginning of this

scene so that she can tear it down as she realizes she has been viewed as a doll. She may *look* better off under Higgins's teachings, but because of how society functions towards women and towards Hispanics, he takes more from her than she's willing to lose, and her exterior finally begins to reflect her emotions instead of the desires of society.



(Photograph of Hair)



(Photograph of Jewelry Set)



(Evening Dress)

Henry Higgins

Based on the fact that Higgins has no manners or subtlety, not having a sense of style will enhance his character by providing a visual demonstration of his apathy towards social protocol. Throughout his conversation with Eliza, he remained poised. While Eliza discovers herself and her worth, he fails to discover anything. Higgins has given Eliza what she wanted, but he has not helped her, and he does not understand her feelings of inequality because he is not in the same situation as her. His position

in society is secure, and unlike Eliza, he doesn't have to choose between independence and respect. He doesn't have to "dress to impress." In order to reflect his static characterization, his appearance, while not fashionable, remains fairly tidy and consistent throughout the scene.



(Murawski)

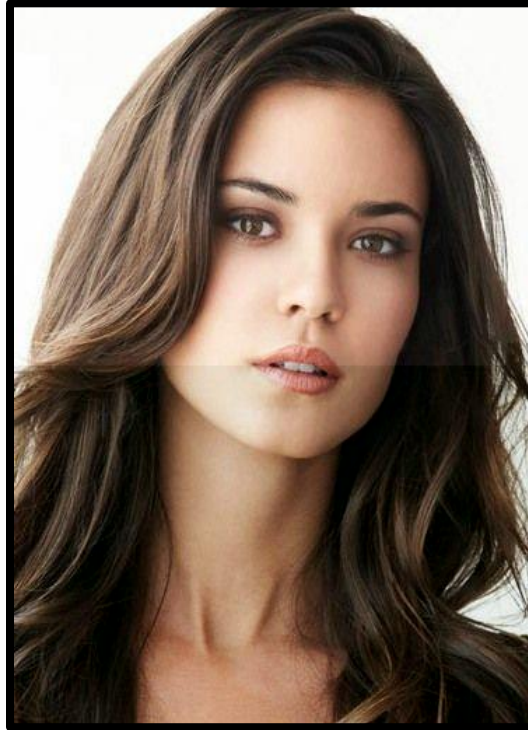


(Vintage Smoking Jacket)

(Men's Slippers)

Actors

Eliza Doolittle



(Photograph of Odette Annable)

Odette Annable speaks Spanish and English fluently, so she can easily demonstrate Eliza's vocal transformation by turning a heavy Spanish accent into a proper English one. Furthermore, her appearance can be easily altered (with the help of makeup) to place emphasis on her more Hispanic features or on her more Caucasian features. The more "sophisticated" Eliza becomes, the more "white" she appears, demonstrating that social status, especially in the American south, is predominantly based on race. This modification of her appearance acts as a visual representation of Eliza losing her identity. The more Caucasian Eliza looks and sounds, the more value the average person sees in her because many people of this time and place have been conditioned to view "white" as synonymous with "better." In addition to these characteristics, Odette Annable is fairly tall for a woman, and with the heels she will be wearing in the scene, her height advantage gives her leverage to help illustrate her desire for and rise to equality.

Henry Higgins



(Photograph of Hugh Laurie)

Henry Higgins is straightforward, pretentious, and insensitive; he is not quick to anger, does as he wishes, and has no manners. Hugh Laurie portrays his character on the television program *House, M.D.* with these exact characteristics, as seen in the following clip:



<https://youtu.be/3s09m8ZoHP0>

(Video of Hugh Laurie)

Furthermore, as an Englishman who can give credence to a variety of English accents and dialects (including American English), Laurie can easily portray a phonetics expert with the ability to teach Eliza how to speak like a proper southern belle.

Conclusion

The fact that a film adaptation can embody the same core values and ideas Shaw established in his play *Pygmalion* (even when key elements are modified) proves how universally these issues are ingrained into human society. The elite class only views Eliza as a woman of value when she tailors her accent, presents herself as a possession to be acquired, and becomes suitable for "the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or somebody who wants a deputy-queen" (Shaw 55) . Unfortunately, according to many societies and cultures throughout history and throughout the world, a valuable woman is not allowed to be an independent woman. To be accepted as a woman of worth, Eliza must accept a role as an inferior, which epitomizes global attitudes towards women as, at best, secondary. Often, the genteel members of society only value a woman based on how she appears while her true, hidden potential is allowed to wither away. She is an iceberg obscured by the water- strong and powerful, but only valued based on the small portion of her that her observers can see. Eliza Doolittle is determined to change this perspective. She is determined to prove that freedom and respect aren't mutually exclusive, and she proves her point by standing up to the man who turned her into an object, by standing up to Henry Higgins, and consequentially, standing up for all women.

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