AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF ELIZA DOOLITTLE
IN BERNARD SHAW'S PYGMALION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Acting is an experience. It can be described in terms of him who experiences it and of him who witnesses it. The descriptions by witnesses are fairly numerous; those by actors, more rare. A witness's comments are important in evaluating the worth of the actor's experience. The actor's comments should be important in determining the nature of his experience. Sometimes they are. Sometimes they are not.

An actor may not know what occurs when he acts; or he may know, but may not be able to give a comprehensible description to another person. An actor who can describe intelligently what happened to him as he performed a certain scene or role is much more likely to be able to do another role well. He is also better able to assist someone else to do a role. An actor who reads an accurate description of the acting experience of someone else may have his own experience illuminated and objectified for him in a way that will increase his skill with his art. It is probable that the person who remembers how he did a certain role has a pattern he followed to develop the role. An established pattern presents the possibility of evaluation.
ting techniques, step by step.

Acting is highly subjective. The more one can objectify it, the more easily it can be taught. The anatomy of acting can be scrutinized without reducing it to a static formula. The very facts of change and movement are a part of that anatomy. The nature of acting as an equation in equilibrium is what makes it susceptible to analysis and, at the same time, vital with change.

The implication is not that acting is the same experience for everyone, but that, though different actors have different experiences, there are points in common that indicate what the nature of acting is.

The purpose and structure of this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate in detail the acting of one role by one actor, to the end that, by the dissection of one acting problem, a broader understanding of the craft and art of acting in general may result. The approach to the acting problem used was primarily that of Stanislavski. At the core of Stanislavski's method is his technique for dealing with and controlling emotion. As a foundation for understanding Stanislavski's philosophy without going into his techniques (and incidentally for getting an accurate picture of a problem that is of vital importance to actors) Diderot's Paradoxe Sur le Comédien is introduced. This book discusses the question of whether
or not an actor should feel his part. Pro and con arguments by great actors are presented with a final summary and evaluation by Stanislavski. A statement of the psychological basis for Stanislavski’s theories concludes the discussion on emotion.

The role under investigation is Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion. Chapter III will present as thorough a picture as possible of the performance of the role by four important actresses. This picture should supply the historical concept of the role and imply some of the problems inherent in the part.

Chapter IV is an action and character analysis of Eliza. Its importance lies not only in its defining the central meaning of the play, but also in its use as a vital technique in the portrayal of the role by the author of this study.¹

¹ During the 1954 summer season of Ohio State University’s Stadium Theatre, sponsored by the Speech Department.

Chapter V will be the detailed history of the manner in which this investigator prepared and performed the role of Eliza, the problems she met, the ways in which she dealt with them, and her evaluation of what she did in terms of what she learned through past experience and this study.
CHAPTER II

EMOTION

The Diderot dialogue. Some of the acknowledged great artists in the field of acting have expressed themselves on the nature of acting. Very often they disagree. Frequently these disagreements are merely a matter of definition. However, they are often founded on actual and fundamental differences in philosophies. One of the most constant of controversies has been on the subject of what the actor does or does not, should or should not, feel. Joseph Jefferson (1829-1905) defines the question and states the three general positions on it concisely and vividly in his following observation on the controversy between Henry Irving (1838-1905) and Constant Coquelin (1841-1909):

I have no doubt that the Englishman could not act if he did not feel, and that the Frenchman would be very inferior if he did feel. . . . For my part, I like to have the heart warm and the head cool. 1


The basis of the disagreement between Irving and Coquelin was Diderot's (1713-1784) Paradoxe Sur le Comédien, The paradox of the actor. The book is in the form of
a dialogue on the subject of acting and might well have been titled, "Sense and Sensibility." Actors used the term sensibility much more in the nineteenth century than they do now. In fact, the term is practically obsolete and the word sensitivity is used instead. However, sensitivity is not a perfect synonym for sensibility. Sensibility implies not only an appreciation of impressions but an actual emotional participation in them—a more active thing than sensitivity which is concerned with reception of impressions.

Diderot was expressing himself on the actual extent of an actor's emotional involvement in a role. He took an unequivocal position and spoke in no uncertain terms.

Extreme sensibility makes middling actors; middling sensibility makes the ruck of bad actors; in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor.2

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He presented the opinion that actors do not feel as strongly as other people3—that, in fact, all great artists, though gifted with imagination, judgement, tact, and taste, are highly insensitive:

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3 Ibid., p. 63.
They are too apt for too many things, too busy with observing, and reproducing, to have their inmost hearts affected with any liveliness. 4

Diderot gives some specific examples to prove his contention. He tells of an incident that once happened to Le Kain (1728-1778 - Tragic actor at the Comédie Française).

Lekain-Ninias* [sic] enters his father's tomb, and there cuts his mother's throat; he comes out with blood-stained hands. He is horror-stricken; his limbs tremble, his eyes roll wildly, his hair stands on end. So does yours to see him; terror seizes on you, you are as lost as he is. However, Lekain-Ninias sees a diamond drop which has fallen from an actress's ear, and pushes it towards the wing with his foot. And this actor feels? Impossible. You will not call him a bad actor? Of course not.

*That is, of course, Le Kain as Ninias in Semiramis.5

Diderot says not only that the actor does not feel, but that the actor should not feel. His reason is that the stage is not life.

Let me repeat it, whether for good or ill, the actor says nothing and does nothing in private life in the same way as on the stage; it is a different world.6

5 Ibid., p. 47.
6 Ibid., p. 81.
The likeness of passion on the stage is not then its true likeness; it is but extravagant portraiture, caricature on a grand facade, subject to conventional rules.7

7 Ibid., p. 74.

One of his most telling remarks is, "People come not to see tears, but to hear speeches that draw tears."8

8 Ibid., p. 102.

Diderot's analysis of acting arrives at this:

What, then, is the true talent? That of knowing well the outward symptoms of the soul we borrow. . . . He, then, who best knows and best renders, after the best conceived ideal type, these outward signs, is the greatest actor.9

9 Ibid., p. 74.

Diderot's ideas have been both challenged and defended. The controversy between Coquelin and Irving has already been mentioned. Coquelin sided strongly with Diderot:

Well, I hold this paradox to be literal truth; and I am convinced that one can only be a great actor on condition of complete self-mastery and ability to express feelings which are not experienced, which may never be experienced, which from the very nature of things can never be experienced.10
Coquelin, op. cit., p. 56.

He used a vivid image to convey his concept:

The artist's brain must remain free, and all emotions, even his own, must expire on the threshold of his thought. 11

Salvini (1829-1916) illustrated his own experience relative to feeling a part.

If you should get me out of bed at night and tell me to recite the monologue before the murder of 'Desdemona,' I should recite it exactly as I do in the evening on the stage, and should have the same emotions while doing it, namely, none. It is only that I know how to say it so as to make others believe in my sincere emotion. And once I did feel it, too... when I studied the role! Then I felt it completely, even to the point of physical pain. But after I have mastered it, I no longer worry about anything. I have it at my fingers' ends. I play the emotion the way the pianist plays the piano, without looking at it. Acting is a physical exertion only, not in the least a mental or spiritual one. 12


This introduces the idea that the actor does at one stage in his development of a character experience strong emotion, but that it should be gone by the time he gets in front of an audience.
Talma, on the other hand believed not only in experiencing the emotion while preparing the part, but in carrying it onto the stage. He was on the "Sensibility" side of the argument.

I call sensibility . . . that faculty of exaltation which agitates an actor, takes possession of his senses, shakes even his very soul, and enables him to enter into the most tragic situations, and the most terrible of the passions, as if they were his own.13

13 Pollock, op. cit., p. xvi.

H. C. Fleeming Jenkin interprets Talma to agree with Salvini in part, but only in part:

Talma, as we understand him, only felt the emotion once in its full intensity—that is to say, at the moment of creation during the solitary rehearsal. Subsequently the effect was produced by the aid of memory; but the body is so constituted that if by the aid of memory we perfectly reproduce a tone or cry, that tone or cry brings back simultaneously a close reproduction of the feeling by which it was first created . . . The representations night after night of these great feelings may come to be almost mechanical, or, rather the feelings of the actor can be almost mechanically reawakened by the excellence of his own art.14


It is important to point out the difference between Salvini's concept and Talma's. Both men said that in the preparation of a role they experienced intense emotional
involvement. Salvini denied, however, that it persisted and claimed that during performance he felt no emotion whatever. Talma, according to Mr. Jenkin, admitted a lessening of the intensity of the emotion, but felt the necessity of experiencing it during each performance. There is a great difference between saying that an actor acts mechanically and experiences no emotion, and saying that an actor experiences emotion which he induces mechanically.

A very significant thing about the actors who defend emotional experience during a performance is that they do not deny the importance of intelligence and judgment. They not only recognize its importance but urge its application during the performance—at the same time as the emotional experience they say is necessary! Diderot says of the actor, "At the very moment when he touches your heart he is listening to his own voice,"\(^{15}\) and, "He plays it so well that you think he is the person; the deception is all on your side; he knows well enough that he is not the person."\(^{16}\) Irving replies:

\(^{15}\) Pollock, op. cit., p. 16.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 17.
But it is quite possible to feel all the excitement of the situation and yet be perfectly self-possessed. . . . It is necessary to this art that the mind should have, as it were, a double consciousness, in which all the emotions proper to the occasion may have full sway, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method.17


Here is paradox indeed. Diderot says that an actor only seems to feel, that he is really constantly analyzing and evaluating his part while giving the appearance of feeling it. His disputers counter that the actor should actually feel the emotion he manifestes while analyzing and evaluating. Diderot cited Le Rain's rescuing a diamond earring during a scene of high emotion, and said that it was impossible that this actor should be actually feeling.18 In defence of Diderot's theory Coquelin related an experience of Talma's.19 Strangely enough on the other side of the question Irving referred to the same experience.20

18 *Supra* p. 6.


It is said that when he [Talma] learned of the death of his father, he uttered a piercing cry; so piercing, so heartfelt, that the artist always on the alert in the man, instantly took note of it, and decided to make use of it upon the stage, later on.21

21 Coquelin, op. cit., p. 59.

This example does not seem to reinforce the idea that a man who is thinking and judging cannot feel, but to confirm the idea that a man who is feeling deeply may exercise reason and judgment. Talma himself elaborates on this idea:

I scarcely know how to confess that in my own person, in any circumstance of my life in which I experienced deep sorrow, the passion of the theatre was so strong in me that, altho oppressed with real sorrow, and disregarding the tears I shed, I made, in spite of myself, a rapid and fugitive observation on the alteration of my voice, and on a certain spasmodic vibration which it contracted as I wept; and I say it, not without some shame, I even thought of making use of this on the stage, and, indeed, this experiment on myself has often been of service to me.22

22 Talma, op. cit., p. 39.

Stanislavski's definitions and evaluation. Stanislavski (1863-1938) defines the two different schools of thought not as two ideas on the same subject, but as two different arts. The school of which Diderot and Coquelin were proponents he calls the art of representation and says its objective is the perfecting of an external
form. The other, he says, is "the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in artistic form." Describing the approach of actors of the school of representation, Stanislavski says,

At first they feel the part, but when once they have done so, they do not go on feeling it anew, they merely remember and repeat the external movements, intonations, and expressions they worked out at first, making this repetition without emotion. Often they are extremely skilful in technique, and are able to get through a part with technique only, and no expenditure of nervous force. In fact, they often think it unwise to feel, after they have once decided on the pattern to follow. They think they are surer to give the right performance if they merely recall how they did it when they first got it right.

Stanislavski's bias in favor of "living the part" cannot be ignored; but his evaluation and comparison of the two methods may be considered to have helped develop the bias rather than that the bias influenced the evaluation. He makes a pointed and specific analysis:

This type of art [art of representation] is less profound than beautiful, it is more immediately effective than truly powerful; in it the form is more interesting than its content. It acts more on your sense of sound and sight than on your soul. Consequently it is more likely to delight than to move you.
You can receive great impressions through this art. But they will neither warm your soul nor penetrate deeply into it. Their effect is sharp but not lasting. Your astonishment rather than your faith is aroused. Only what can be accomplished through surprising theatrical beauty, or picturesque pathos, lies within the bounds of this art. But delicate and deep human feelings are not subject to such technique. They call for natural emotions at the very moment in which they appear before you in the flesh. They call for the direct co-operation of nature itself. Nevertheless, 'representing' the part, since it follows our process in part [living the part at some time in the preparation] must be acknowledged to be creative art. 25

25 Ibid., p. 23.

We cannot conclude from this, as many have, that Stanislavski believed that an actor did not have an objective and calculating attitude at the very moment when he was living the part. The Russian director is very clear about this objectivity.

Suppose an actor is in perfect possession of his faculties on the stage. His mood is so complete that he can dissect its component parts without getting out of his role. They are all functioning properly, facilitating one another's operations. Then there is a slight discrepancy. Immediately the actor investigates to see which part is out of order. He finds the mistake and corrects it. Yet all the time he can easily continue to play his part even while he is observing himself. 26

26 Ibid., p. 252.

The actor's emotional limitations. If emotion is to be used in a role, either during the preparation or the
performance, the actor must have a source for it. The only source he has is himself. An actor may observe others, study their reactions and experiences; but their emotions become his or a part of him only to the extent that he can understand or appreciate them. An actor may portray an experience that has never occurred to him, but he cannot portray one that he cannot understand. Stanislavski says, "The roles for which you haven't the appropriate feelings are those you will never play well . . . . They will be excluded from your repertory." 27 Charles McGaw says, "You

\[27 \text{Ibid., p. 167.}\]

cannot play a character which you cannot understand in terms of your own experience." 28


Talma explained that many things that an actor has never experienced but understands ("in terms of his own experience"), he "may paint by analogy." Vices are often extremes of virtue; Talma derives from lofty emulation an understanding of envy, turns just resentment into hatred and vengeance, reserve and prudence into dissimulation. He says that the desires, the torments, and the jealousies
of love enable one to conceive all its frenzies and initiates him in the secrets of its crimes.\(^{29}\)

\(^{29}\) Tulma, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 40.

\textbf{Psychological basis for the use of personal emotions in acting.} An actor uses his own emotions in the playing of a role. A noted psychologist, Hanns Sachs, wrote, "There are not two kinds of emotions, one reserved for reality and the other for play."\(^{30}\) The actor does not assume an emotion foreign to himself and put it on like a garment for a certain role. He takes his own emotions and modifies, adapts, and displaces them to the role. The knowledge of the technique of that displacement is a vital element in an actor's skill. The basis of that technique lies in the psychological principle of conditioning applied in a specific way. One important fact is that, "Emotional responses can be attached to verbal cues."\(^{31}\)

. to two distinctive stimulus objects increases the general-
ization of emotional and instrumental responses from one
to the other."32 This gives the actor something practical

32 Ibid., p. 124.

with which to work. If he must manifest a certain emotion
upon a cue in the play, he may relive in his mind an experi-
ence which at one time produced a similar emotion in him.
At the height of the strength of his memory, if he puts
himself on cue into the scene he is to play, he will find
himself playing it with the emotion he felt in the original
experience. This is in accordance with the principles
already quoted that emotional responses can be attached to
verbal cues, and that they can be generalized from one
stimulus object to another. This generalization will be
increased if the same label can be given to the two distinc-
tive stimulus objects: the cue -- in this case the situa-
tion or the lines in the play -- and the original emotion
producing situation. The giving of the same label might
involve the use of words or phrases common to both the
original situation and the play situation. Gestures can be
considered labels. Using in a play a gesture that was used
spontaneously in the original situation can reinforce the
transfer of the emotion even more. By the use of these
psychological principles, the actor is able to accomplish his purpose in a scientific, orderly manner.
CHAPTER III

FOUR INTERPRETATIONS OF ELIZA

*Pygmalion* was first produced in London in 1914. It was a brilliant success then and has since had a long list of successful productions. The commercial theatre has seen fit to produce it in New York four times; a movie has been made of it; stock companies use it again and again; and university and community theatres find it a rewarding and extremely enjoyable experience. This chapter will discuss the acting of the role of Eliza by the actresses appearing in the three New York productions and the movie.

Bernard Shaw wrote the role of Eliza for Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Mrs. Campbell was one of the leading actresses of England at that time and therefore one of the leading actresses of the world. She appeared in the first London production of *Pygmalion* in 1914 and in New York the same year. She toured both England and America with the play and appeared in various revivals of it in England until well into 1921.

Lynn Fontanne played Eliza in a successful revival in New York in 1926. Wendy Hiller took the lead in the movie which Shaw supervised in 1938. In 1945 Gertrude Lawrence brought the role to the New York stage again.
These four productions are the most significant in the history of the play.

The critical material used in this discussion deals with the acting of the role of Eliza. Material relating to actors of other roles and to the over-all effectiveness of the play has been eliminated except as it related to the actresses' performances of Eliza. The end product of this elimination is often meagre. A critic may have said that Mrs. Campbell was brilliant, but unless he specified the various facets of her brilliance, we know very little of what her Eliza was like.

Discovering the way in which an actor approached and performed a role is a difficult problem and one that is in certain aspects impossible. Of the four productions it is possible to know exactly how Wendy Hiller performed the role, for we have the movie to see. The movie, however, cannot tell us how she approached certain problems or what techniques she used to achieve her final results. For the other productions we have critics' comments. These are seldom specific and often give only general impressions. On occasion, however, a critic will make a remark that is particularly illuminating. It is upon these comments that we have to rely for the most part. Specific material on Lynn Fontanne and Wendy Hiller is particularly scarce. That for Gertrude Lawrence is fortunately more abundant,
and in Mrs. Campbell's case there is a source of information that is particularly valuable. The published correspondence between Shaw and Mrs. Campbell gives some of their own remarks on the role and how it should be done. Shaw gives Mrs. Campbell specific instructions on certain scenes, and Mrs. Campbell comments on some of her problems.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Although Shaw wrote the role of Eliza for her, Mrs. Patrick Campbell did not consider herself suited to it. Eliza is about eighteen. Mrs. Campbell was in her forties. Years later she wrote to Shaw:

I was 25 years too old for the part—something about my figure, my movements, my voice, my natural Italian grace annoyed you, you wanted to break it up—the girl wasn't common enough to amuse you.  


There is some evidence that Mrs. Campbell allowed her natural reluctance to permit herself to be ugly and unattractive to interfere a little with her presentation of the character. "Madam Critic" of the New York Dramatic Mirror did not think her well costumed for the role:

It would have been too much to expect, I suppose, that Mrs. Pat would actually look the part when she is described by Higgins as being "filthy, dirty."
She did concede much to the playwright by wearing a long slightly-off-color white apron on which a few smudges had been placed, but her amethyst colored silk-velvet dress and skirt did not seem quite the thing to be worn by a common but perfectly good flower girl. Mrs. Campbell as Eliza could not refrain from carrying out the same color scheme in a silk-velvet hat of amethyst. True, it was trimmed with cheap feathers of speaking huss. A pink—apparently silk-waist, over which was a delicate shawl of a shade which made the waist harmonize with the amethyst skirt and hat, completed the costume.²


Mrs. Campbell worked in the tradition of the star system. Her idea's about costume were a logical component of that system. Shaw tried to persuade her away from it but never succeeded.

It is worth noting that while Mrs. Campbell may not have been costumed realistically as Eliza, only one of the criticisms examined took notice of it. The others seemed to have become so involved in her performance that they forgot any little incongruities of dress or makeup. Some of the phrases used to describe Mrs. Pat's gutter girl are particularly helpful in recapturing her performance: "a marvel of slovenly inarticulateness;"³


"her lachrymose humility, her protests of virtue, her
indignant outbursts." These words are particularly helpful in picturing the moistly weeping, sniffling creature of strong character and mercurial emotions that Mrs. Campbell's Eliza must have been.

The critics seemed to take for granted the high quality of her performance of any emotional scene. One said, "She is complete mistress of such emotionalism as the play requires." Another, "In all the manifestations of passion she was, of course, exceedingly effective."

Descriptions of the "tea scene" -- the third act -- give clear indications of how Mrs. Campbell handled it: "laboriously correct elocution . . . affectation of strained and anxious propriety." and "Her careful enunciation, her tender solicitude for her h's, the mellow roundness of her oo's . . ." This is the funniest scene
in the play. The *Evening Post*: "This as an exceedingly clever bit of artistic acting, and the hilarity which it provoked in the house almost upset her own gravity [Mrs. Campbell's]."9


Observations on the over-all effect of Mrs. Campbell's performance were all commendatory. Some of them are revealing. Several writers mentioned the skill with which she progressed from one stage in Eliza's development to another. The *New York Times* adds that she "with the deftest touch suggests the lingering impression that the old Eliza is not very far below the surface after all, and that that does not matter."10


Two writers observed the effectiveness of Mrs. Campbell's comic sense.11 *The World*'s all out endorse—

ment of her performance ran as follows: "Here was an unforced, brilliantly conceived, skillfully executed, and admirably sustained performance."¹²


Some of Mrs. Campbell's words in letters to Shaw give slight glimpses into her concept of Eliza and a great deal of insight into the sincerity with which she approached the role. She wrote him, "I realize what you want, and I will give you a simple sincere and human girl."¹³ She told Shaw that he could have found many actresses who could play the part better than she, but she felt that she did bring something unique to it:

What I bring to it that is my own you couldn't give nor take away. . . . you will only find one who will put the touch of song into her—the touch of the universal rythym[sic].¹⁴

¹³ *Dent, op. cit.*, p. 176.


One of the specific problems of the role is managing Eliza's change of speech. Mrs. Campbell was well known for her elegance of speech. Just before opening night she wrote to Shaw, "The accent will always trouble me a
little I expect."15 In a letter to the author she

15 Ibid., p. 179.

explained more fully: "I was having infinite trouble with
the accent, I wanted to get rhythm into it, and no comic
adenoid effects—nothing to worry the audience."16

16 Ibid., p. 377.

Mrs. Campbell did not find the role easy, and she was
not sure of the success of the show. The night of the
final rehearsal she wrote to Shaw, "For myself the last
three months and more particularly the last five days have
been full of anxiety."17

17 Ibid., p. 178.

Shaw was very closely associated with this pro-
duction and had a strong hand in its direction. Before
the opening night he sent Mrs. Campbell a letter which
he headed "Final Orders." It is so specific and gives
such a clear reflection of the kind of direction that Shaw
must have been giving Mrs. Campbell that it is worth
quoting almost in its entirety.

The name Nepean is in two syllables, not three;
and the first "e" is an obscure vowel, and is not
to be pronounced "e" but as "a" in the phrase "a bean."

If you have ever said to Stella [Mrs. Campbell's daughter] in her childhood "I'll let you see whether you will obey me or not," and then inverted her infant shape and smacked her until the square (not to mention the round) rang with her screams, you will . . . know how to speak the line "I'll let you see whether I'm dependent on you." There is a certain dragging intensity, also used in Act IV in "You thank God etc.," which is wanted here to re-establish your lead after Higgins’ long speech about science and classical music and so on. The author took care to re-establish it by giving Eliza a long and energetic speech in reply to him; but the ignorant slave entrusted with the part thought she knew better than the author, and cut out the speech as useless. Now she has got to do it the other way.

On the grand finish "I could kick myself" you retreat. The effect last night was "Now I've spoke my piece; anitz your turn, Szerbert." You must plant yourself in an unmistakable attitude of defiance, or in some way or other hold him for his reply.

At the end when Higgins says "by the way, Eliza," bridle your fatal propensity to run like Georgina [Mrs. Campbell's dog] to anyone who calls you, and forget everything in an affectionate tête à tête with him. Imagine he is the author, and be scornful. All that is necessary is to stop on the threshold. If you find it impossible not to come back, at least don't look obedient and affectionate. And start going away on the cue "Fale & Bimmans" so that he can shout the last sentence after you and give you an effective cue for your last word.

That smile on "More friendly like" is developing to excess. It should be the ghastliest wamnest thing, because you are just about to burst into tears; and the smile must be that sort of smile. What you have to express above all things in that speech is the torment of a woman who wants to express something that she cannot (she thinks) express properly. . . .

I give up in despair that note of terror in the first scene which collects the crowds and suddenly
shows the audience that there is a play there, and a human soul there, and a social problem there, and a formidable capacity for feeling in the trivial giggler of the comic passages. But until you get it I shall never admit that you can play Eliza, or play Shaw. 18

18 Ibid., pp. 179-80.

That is all that Shaw says about particular things in Pygmalion. He does have some general opinions about Mrs. Campbell's total approach to this role, or any role, that gives more understanding to her acting.

You are not like me, a great general. You leave everything to chance, whereas Napoleon and Caesar left nothing to chance except the last inch that is in the hands of destiny. I could have planned the part so that nine tenths of it would have gone mechanically even if your genius had deserted you, leaving only one tenth to the Gods. Even as it is, I have forced half the battle on you; but winning half the battle will not avert defeat. You believe in courage; I say "God save me from having to fall back on that desperate resource," though if it must come to that it must. I don't like fighting; I like conquering. You think you like fighting; and now you will have to succeed sword in hand. You have left yourself poorly provided with ideas and expediants; and you must make up for them by dash and brilliance and resolution. And so, avanti! 19

19 Ibid., pp. 180-81

Whatever Shaw thought about Mrs. Campbell's having to resort to "dash and brilliance and resolution," he evidently had faith in her or he would never have
insisted that she play the part. Opening night was the final justification for both of them. In Mrs. Campbell's autobiography she wrote, "Surely no first night has ever gone with more success, and with such joyousness. The 'bloody' almost ruined the play; people laughed too much."20

20 Loc. cit.

Actors and directors are aware of the fluctuations and changes that occur in a play during a protracted run. However, in discussing a portrayal we are likely to assume that what it was on opening night fixes for all time what a roll will be. How wide these fluctuations are and how significant the changes are is hard to judge. Mrs. Campbell played Eliza many times over a period of several years. During that time she and Shaw exchanged comments on her portrayal that may shed some light on the question. This is an actor's problem in any roll and well worth considering in the light of Mrs. Campbell's experience.

From one remark of Mrs. Campbell's it is obvious that changes in her performance were sometimes occasioned by her fellow actors:

Trees21 takes five minutes between each word and
Herbert Beerbohm Tree who played Higgins in the first London production of Pygmalion.

each bite of the apple in Act 4. I have facial paralysis from trying to express some sort of intelligent feeling so now I hide my face until it is well again.22

22 Dent, op. cit., p. 182.

She evidently reached a stage where she did not feel "truth" in her acting: "Tree's performance is a most original and entertaining affair and most popular with his friends and admirers. Mine is a mere masquerade."23

23 Loc. cit.

Mrs. Campbell evidently experienced that period known to actors where they have made changes, or fear they have made changes, but are unable to detect them, much less to evaluate them. She wrote to Shaw at one time: "I am nervous about my part for E. G. Smith and Sheldon said they liked my pathos best of anything in the play!!! God know what maudlin stuff I have let into the part."24

24 Ibid., p. 183.
After seeing a performance of *Pygmalion* during the 1920 revival, Shaw wrote to Mrs. Campbell complimenting her in his own inimitable way on what he liked and criticizing her just as brilliantly on what he didn’t like. His words are too vivid to try to paraphrase:

You now play the second act (the first part) and the fifth act so very cleverly and nicely that I damned you up hill and down dale for doing it so badly for me when you could do it so well for yourself.

The fourth act was a failure. You really might have given me a turn there with advantage. You looked like the loveliest of picture post cards blinking there at the piano whilst Higgins was talking daggers—"Thank God it's over"—"the whole thing has been a bore" etc., etc., --without turning a hair, making your eyes twinkle like stars all the time—no shadows, no spasms of pain, nothing but Stella. How carefully you avoided hurting him with the slippers; and how tenderly he raised you and reciprocated your gentleness! I almost slept "J’aime la musique qui me berce." You certainly can boil a scene in bread and milk better than anyone I know. But this, beloved, would better be boiled in brandy.26

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Mrs. Campbell deliberately added some gags and changed some things that she thought would be helpful. Shaw pointed them out to her and gave her specific reasons for wanting them the way he had originally written them. One can see here the great dramatist’s technique of constructing the play for the actor’s best advantage:

Your gag about the stays is a mistake. It chills the audience at the end of the act, because half of
them know that it is a gag, and the other half are
jarred by the inept attempt to repeat the effect about
the night dress. Also your "Don't e smell orrid?" is
bad because Higgins has already got all the fun
possible out of the dustiness of Doolittle. If these
things had been needed I should have supplied them. Try
a wild rush off stage ahchooing for all you're worth
the moment Mrs. Pearce says the clothes have come, and
you will get a much more cordial curtain. 27

27 Ibid., p. 240.

From these pieces may be built the picture of a
great actress in a great role. Many of her strengths
and some of her weaknesses are revealed in her approach
and portrayal of a role in which she was an unqualified
success.

Lynn Fontanne. John Anderson's comment on Miss
Fontanne's performance links it in quality with Mrs.
Campbell's. He said, "She does all of these things [the
actions of the play] with insight and gusto." 28 The word

28 Evening Post [New York], Nov. 16, 1926.

"gusto" carries the feeling of the vitality and vigor with
which both of the women must have approached the role.

At least two critics mentioned the excellent quality
of Miss Fontanne's diction, and one praised her Cockney
dialect. 29 Brooks Atkinson, however, found the general use
of an American accent disconcerting and added, "Nor did
Miss Fontanne's gutterish intonations convey the indigenous
vulgarity proper to the play."30


It is obvious that Miss Fontanne was very much aware
of the use of the body in portraying Eliza. "Miss
Fontanne's mastery of bodily control in suggesting this
flower girl's social advance, is as complete as Liza
Doolittle's own mastery of diction."31


The picture accompanying this comment shows the actress
as Eliza the guttersnipe. Her feet are spread, her body
slightly twisted, her hands awkwardly vigorous. She is
the physical embodiment of an untutored, graceless child
of the streets.

Certainly Miss Fontanne must have used both voice
and body with great distinction. What the total quality
of her performance was is difficult to say, and one hesi-
tates to take as final the opinion of only one man.

But, keeping this in mind, Brooks Atkinson's summary is worth consideration in the over-all picture.

Especially in the first scenes, to be sure, one misses the infectious high spirits and passionate righteousness with which Mr. Shaw goes about even a minor tiff in the newspapers. Perhaps the current performance is a little frozen, but it would be capacious to sigh dolorously about that in view of the fluid and supple last act, with Miss Fontanne and Mr. Mason[Reginald Mason played Higgins] acting their parts splendidly.32


Wendy Hiller.33 Wendy Hiller's Eliza was an Eliza designed for the screen. A more subtle medium offers, if it does not demand, opportunities for a more subtle treatment. Miss Hiller took advantage of the possibilities presented in a screen presentation of Pygmalion. Her Eliza is an interesting and vital personality. She is a more delicate, vulnerable girl than any of the other portrayals discussed in this study. This is only comparative, however. Wendy Hiller's Eliza could hardly be considered fragile. Her self-assertion is not quite so forceful, and there is just a touch of the pathetic about her. Time magazine
described her performance this way:

Wendy Hiller plays Eliza with a minimum of frills, and complete sincerity. To her, as much as to Playwright Shaw and Producer Pascal, goes the credit for making Pygmalion come to life on the screen more completely than it ever did upon the stage.34


Miss Hiller's phrasing of the Cockney was quick and buoyant. The pattern was rhythmic, but paced quite rapidly without much pausing. Even the tea scene lines were spoken rather quickly. They were very precise and somewhat stilted, almost bird-like, and did not have the slowed, labored quality that Mrs. Campbell is described as having used. This is interesting because Shaw supervised both productions. It is possible that a living actor can sustain the interest of the audience during the slow, labored speeches, whereas an actor on film cannot. The technique used may have been a concession to one of the limitations of the medium.

Miss Hiller was able to combine comedy and warmth in a performance that was abundant with unobtrusive technique. Newsweek expressed this by saying:

Her interpretation of Eliza—deftly comic as the little Cockney girl tries her new-found vocabulary at a social gathering; deeply moving as she realizes her reclamation complete, that she is cut off from her old world and the new—is a brilliant and fascinating
"G. B. Shaw's 'Pygmalion' is the Best Motion Picture G. B. Shaw has ever Seen," *Newsweek*, 12:24-25, Dec. 5, 1938.

The Eliza Doolittle that Wendy Hiller created was what Mrs. Campbell had said Shaw wanted her to be: "A simple, sincere, and human girl."

**Gertrude Lawrence.** Gertrude Lawrence gave Eliza the bolisterous quality that had characterized previous stage interpretations. Harrick Brown calls her a "snivelling and rough-voiced Eliza." *The Sun* [New York], Dec. 27, 1945.

her accent at the start a little difficult to understand, but admired her sensitiveness and humor. **New York Journal American**, Dec. 27, 1945.

admired by the critics for the skill with which Miss Lawrence handled its comic qualities was the "tea scene." William Hawkins strongly preferred Miss Lawrence as "Eliza the lady" rather than as "Eliza the guttersnipe."

He said:

It is impossible not to prefer swan to duckling in Miss Lawrence's shifts of character. . . .
Miss Lawrence is so exquisite in the later scenes where every movement or modulation of tone is so finely calculated that they far overshadow those earlier scenes where she played the street urchin.  

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It is interesting that two critics discussed as important Miss Lawrence’s personal attitude toward the role. Seymour Peck had this to say:

Her performance is a remarkable one, as much for its avoidance of the pyrotechnics of The Great Actress Running the Gamut as for the sincerity and skill with which she illumines every facet of Shaw’s heroine. Whether she is the Cockney girl whining self pityingly over an imagined wrong or the handsome lady rebelling over emotional complications arising out of her transfiguration, everything Miss Lawrence does is of a piece and suits properly the play to which the character belongs. Miss Lawrence does not consider Pygmalion a “vehicle”.

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39 PM Exclusive, Dec. 27, 1945.

John Chapman says with great candor that Miss Lawrence... has almost always, [sic] displayed a physical bounce and a penchant for snatching any scene within reach that are somewhat alarming to a man of my sedate beliefs.

In “Pygmalion” Miss Lawrence works quietly and with steady purpose as... she transforms herself from a gamin to a woman of beauty and poise. She is funny—very funny—every moment she is supposed to be; she shows heart and tenderness and grace;... she is gallant when gallantry must triumph, and she is beautiful.
John Gassner in *The Theatre in Our Times* discusses Miss Lawrence's interpretation of Eliza in a manner that gives an understanding of its significance.

It is not perfection but a general rightness of interpretation with respect to the central essence of the work that matters.

Gertrude Lawrence's Eliza Doolittle was a thoroughly intelligent performance, brilliant in its virtuosity but also undeviating in its service to the central concept of the comedy.

The production actually showed the "spine" expressed in Shaw's memorable line to the effect that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl's not how she behaves but how she's treated."  


An actor can have no greater praise of a performance than this.

**Conclusion.** The historical picture of Eliza emerges as a girl of vigor and strength—"gusto," yet with delicacy and sensitivity. She is warm and at the same time appealingly comic. She is, above all, sincere.

This review of Eliza's stage history indicates that one of an actress's problems may be the Cockney accent; another, the proper balance between comedy and tenderness.
Of course, the drastic change in Eliza's language and social skills is the challenge that excites any actress contemplating the part.

That each of the productions discussed was a major success is a tribute to Shaw's play and to the artistry and skill primarily of the actress playing Eliza. The role is often considered a difficult but desirable one, for it can challenge and absorb an actress's entire attention. Mrs. Campbell no doubt had the hardest problem. Once her success was assured, however, she found the role one of the most rewarding of her entire theatrical experience. Those who followed her knew what had already succeeded and could proceed with confidence. Of the actresses studied there is not one but has had her career enhanced by its contact with Eliza.
CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER AND ACTION ANALYSIS OF ELIZA

In approaching a role an actor must know three things about the character he is to portray: he must know who the character is; he must know what the character wants; he must know what the character is willing to do to get what he wants. Once he knows these things, he uses all of his talent and technique to convey them to the audience.

The following analysis is divided into two parts for the sake of a better understanding of the acting techniques involved. The Character Analysis is a method of understanding the role. The Dramatic Action Analysis is a technique for expressing the role on stage.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Steps in the character analysis. The first step in the analysis is a thorough reading of the play for an understanding of the nature of it and what happens to the character to be played. The second step is a line by line study of the role. Two things are taken into consideration in the analysis of each line. One is what the line says the character is—that is, the face value of the line; the other is what the line reveals or implies about the
character. The third step is a study of the lines of the other characters in the play. These lines are approached in the same manner.

**The play Pygmalion.** In *Pygmalion* Eliza changes from a "draggle-tailed guttersnipe" into a gracious, socially acceptable young woman. The significant thing about the change is that while Eliza changes in her manner of speech, in her cultural appreciations, and in her knowledge of the world, she does not change a bit in character. Her behavior changes to conform with the standards set by her tutors, Colonel Pickering and Professor Higgins; but what she is fundamentally remains the same. One of the challenges of the role is accomplishing the surface changes in Eliza as the play progresses without disturbing the structure of her personality as established in the first two acts.

During the time of her association with Higgins, Eliza develops an attachment for him for which he refuses to acknowledge any responsibility. Realizing him for the cold intellectual that he is, she frees herself from her dependence upon him and goes out to make a worthwhile life on her own initiative.

**Analysis of Eliza's lines.** Each line that adds something new to the interpretation of Eliza's character or attitudes is quoted and the meaning and implication of
the line commented upon.¹

¹ The page on which the line appears is noted at the beginning of the quotation. This device is used to eliminate excessive footnoting. The punctuation and spelling are Shaw's.

P. 12: "Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah."

Eliza's freedom of comment and lack of rancor indicate an outgoing, extroverted, amiable person.

P. 13: "Will ye-oo py me f'them?"

She is quick to seize an opportunity and to ask for what she considers rightfully hers.

P. 14: "I called him Freddy or Charlie same as you might yourself if you was talking to a stranger and wished to be pleasant."

She expresses her natural intention to be polite.

P. 14: "If it's worse, it's a sign it's nearly over. So cheer up, Captain; buy a flower off a poor girl."

She is friendly in her contacts. This is another indication of the extroverted personality.

P. 15: "I aint done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman. I've a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. (Hysterically)"

Her strong reaction indicates an impulsive, emotional individual.

P. 17: "I had to pay four-and-six a week. (In tears) Oh, boo--hoo-oo--."

Her willingness to cry aloud in public indicates
a freedom of emotional expression.

P. 17: "I'm a good girl, I am."

She is virtuous and proud of it. It is very important to her.

Ep. 17-20: "Aint no call to meddle with me, he ain't." ... "Let him say what he likes. I don't want to have no truck with him." ... "He's no gentleman he aint, to interfere with a poor girl." ... "He's no right to take away my character. My character is the same to me as any lady's." ... "Frightening people like that! How would he like it himself?" ... "Poor girl! Hard enough for her to live without being worried and chivied." ... "Ought to be ashamed of himself, unmanly coward." ... "Let him mind his own business and leave a poor girl--"

She will not forget immediately when aggrieved or wronged when no apology is made.

P. 20: "(Laughing in spite of herself) Garn!"

Being able to laugh at Higgins' mimicry of her indicates that she has a sense of humor, can laugh at herself, and is changeable emotionally.

P. 21: "(Flinging basket at his feet) Take the whole blooming basket for sixpence."

She is angry at this interfering stranger more for having frightened her than anything else.

P. 22: "Never mind, young man. I'm going home in a taxi."

She is happy and moved to extravagance in the face of good fortune.

Eliza appears the next day at Higgins' home to ask for speech lessons.
P. 26: "If my money's not good enough I can go elsewhere."

She is sure of herself.

P. 26: "I've come to have lessons, I am. And to pay for 'em te-oo: make no mistake."

Eliza is a person of pride.

P. 26: "I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of sellin' at the corner of Tottenham Court Road."

She is ambitious; she wants to improve herself.

P. 29: "He said he could teach me. Well, here I am ready to pay him--"

Eliza has a quick mind and is very imaginative to seize upon Higgins' casual comments about teaching speech.

P. 29: "Now you're talking! I thought you'd come off it when you saw a chance of getting back a bit of what you chucked at me last night."

She enjoys getting the better of an opponent.

P. 29: "Dont mind if I do."

Her reaction to Higgins' rudeness and Pickering's courtesy indicates a highly feminine quality.

P. 30: "Well, you wouldn't have the face to ask me the same for teaching me my own language as you would for French; so I won't give more than a shilling. Take it or leave it."

She has no fear of speaking her mind.

P. 31: "Here! You give me that handkerchief. He gave it to me not to you."

Her regard for the handkerchief indicates that she secretly is much more admiring and respectful of Higgins than she pretends.
P. 31: "Oh, you are real good. Thank you, Captain."

She seizes an opportunity quickly. This is evidence of her gutter training.

P. 31: "I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did."

She lives up to what she knows.

P. 32: "Your no gentleman, your not, to talk of such things. I'm a good girl, I am: and I know what the like of you are, I do."

Eliza's reaction to Higgins' orders to Mrs. Pierce that she remove all of Eliza's clothes and burn them indicates a modesty carried to the point of prudery.

P. 32: "(Liza, reassured, steals back to her chair.)"

She responds readily to reassurance. This seems to indicate a warm affectionate nature.

P. 33: "I didn't want no clothes. I wouldn't have taken them."

She is proud and tries to hide her disappointment.

P. 34: "I aint got no mother. Her that turned me out was my sixth stepmother. But I done without them. An I'm a good girl, I am."

This indicates strength of character. She has clung to her ideals despite hardship.

P. 35: "Oh, you've got no feeling heart in you; you don't care for nothing but yourself."

She recognizes Higgins' lack of emotional sympathy with her and his coldly intellectual viewpoint.

P. 35: "How do I know what might be in them?"
She is wary. This more evidence of her gutter training.

P. 35: "I wouldn't have ate it, only I'm too lady-like to take it out of me mouth."

Eliza conforms to what she knows of manners.

P. 35: "What if I did? I've as good a right to take a taxi as anyone else."

She has been made to feel very insecure here and as a result has become very defensive.

P. 36: "No, I don't want no gold and no diamonds. I'm a good girl I am."

She will not be bribed. Her constant return to the point of being a good girl indicates its importance to her, her pride in her virtue, and perhaps the difficulty she has had in maintaining her standards. There is no indication to the contrary, and every indication to the point, that she is the "good girl" she says she is.

P. 37: "I won't stay here if I don't like."

She agrees to what Higgins wants but leaves a way out.

P. 51: "I should look all right with my hat on."

She gains reassurance from familiar things.

P. 51: "I tell you, it's easy to clean up here. ... Now I know why ladies is so clean. Washing's a treat for them. Wish they could see what it is for the like of me."

She would be fastidious if given an opportunity.

P. 52: "I had a good mind to break it. I didn't
know which way to look. But I hung a towel over it, I did."

Her attitude toward seeing herself in a mirror while nude is another indication of her prudery.

P. 52: "Not him. You don't know my father. All he come here for was to touch you for some money to get drunk on."

She has no illusions about her father.

P. 53: "Not me. I don't want never to see him again, I don't. He's a disgrace to me, he is, collecting dust, instead of working at his trade."

This line reflects the casualness of her family ties. She is not encumbered by any particular affection for her father and can view him as objectively as anyone else. Shaw does not give any indication that she is hurt by this lack of family unity.

P. 53: "They've took it out on me often enough with their ridicule when they had the chance; and now I mean to get a bit of my own back."

Her training has been that of rude justice--an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

P. 54: "But if I'm to have fashionable clothes, I'll wait. I should like to have some .... Ah-ow-oo-oo-oo-oh. (She rushes out to try on new clothes.)"

She has a feminine liking for new and pretty clothes. Eliza at a tea has her first initiation into "proper" society.

P. 62: "How do you do."

She says this line a great many times. She in unsure
of herself in her new area of learning.

P. 63: "What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right."

However, she is still sure of herself as a person.

P. 63: "My aunt died of influenza; so they said. But it's my belief they done the old woman in."

Eliza is very willing to enter the conversation. The freedom of what she says, although stilted in manner by her insecurity in her new speech, indicates that she socializes well and makes friends easily. The whole tea scene indicates her ability to mimic and adapt.

After six month's training Eliza is a success at an ambassador's reception. The next scene occurs late in the evening after the reception.

Pp. 78-81: Eliza has no lines here. Instructions from Shaw indicate her growing restrained fury. Her emotion is the result of Pickering's and Higgins' complete unconsciousness of her. She is of no significance or sensitivity except as an instrument for their manipulations for the satisfactions of their own egos. Higgins regards her less than does Pickering; as Higgins is more important to Eliza than Pickering, this is a greater source of hurt. What she feels is a combination of pain, indignation, and fury.

P. 81: "There are your slippers. And there. Take your slippers; and may you never have a day's luck with them."
Her outburst of fury is all the greater for having been restrained for so long.

P. 81: "I don't matter, I suppose."

She expresses her feeling of not being considered and of being neglected.

P. 81: "Because I wanted to smash your face. I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute."

She wants to hurt him because she has been hurt.

P. 81: "Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you?"

The immediate is not the most important grievance. She is thinking of the future.

P. 81: "What to become of me? What to become of me?"

She voices her fear.

P. 81: "You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you—not so much as them slippers."

The heart of the matter comes to the surface—the fact that she means so little to him. Higgins suggests that she open a flower shop, that Pickering can finance it. This is a logical solution, but Eliza's lack of response to it indicates that she is concerned more with what is to become of her relationship with Higgins than how she is to earn a living.

P. 85: "I want to know what I may take away with me. I don't want to be accused of stealing."
She takes the opportunity to needle Higgins.

P. 85: "Will you take these to your room and keep them safe: I don't want to run the risk of their being missing.

Seeing Higgins' reaction she savors it to the full, twisting the knife in the wound.

P. 86: "You'd better leave a note for Mrs. Pearce about the coffee; for she won't be told by me."

She has burned her last bridge and now, masochistically enjoying the freedom she doesn't really want, she flings her last defiance.

Higgins finds her the next day in his mother's home.

P. 97: "How do you do, Professor Higgins. Are you quite well? ... But of course you are; you are never ill. So glad to see you again, Colonel Pickering. Quite chilly this morning, isn't it?"

She will show Higgins how little he matters and how a real lady behaves. In her next lines, speaking to Colonel Pickering, she tells Higgins a few of the fundamental truths of human relationships:

P. 104: "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."

She is not concerned with the disagreements of a moment, but cannot stand indifference from those she cares for.

P. 105: "I won't care for anybody that doesn't care for me."

She is too level headed to give her regard where
the warmth and affection she needs will not be returned.

P. 106: "I'm no preacher; I don't notice things like that. I notice that you don't notice me."

She has a very personal approach to life. She does not deal in generalities but in specifics.

P. 106: "I wouldn't marry you if you asked me; and you're nearer my age than what he is."

Shaw says that this is exactly what she means and is a well considered and thought out opinion.2


P. 107: "That's not what I want; and don't you think it. I've always had chaps enough wanting me that way. Freddy Hill writes me twice and three times a day, sheets and sheets."

She has been flattered by this and likes it, but it is not what she really wants from Higgins.

Pp. 107-108: "I want a little kindness. What I done, what I did, was not for the dresses and the taxies: I did it because we were pleasant together and I come--came--to care for you; not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us, but more friendly like."

This is completely true. She is saying exactly what she wants.

P. 108: "That's not a proper answer to give me."

She wants the respect and dignity due a human being and some of the softness that should exist between persons of close personal relationships.
P. 108: "Oh, you are a cruel tyrant. I can't talk to you; you turn everything against me; I'm always in the wrong. But you know very well all the time that you're nothing but a bully. You know I couldn't bear to live with a low common man after you two; and it's wicked and cruel of you to insult me by pretending I could. You think I must go back to Wimpole Street because I have nowhere else to go but father's. But don't you be too sure you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down. I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as he's able to support me."

She knows now that she will never have from Higgins what she asks. Realizing this, she strikes off her fetters with a declaration of independence.

P. 109: "Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can't take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That's done. you, Enry Iggins, it is. Now I don't care that for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself."

She is intoxicated by her new-found freedom and revelling in it.

P. 111: "Buy them yourself."

She savors her independence.

Analysis of lines other than Eliza's. Lines of other characters that add something to the understanding of Eliza's character or attitudes are quoted and the meanings and implications of the lines commented upon.
P. 20: "A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere... don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon."

Eliza, from these lines of Higgins' is obviously lacking in the refinements of cultured speech.

P. 21: "Liar. You said you could change half-a-crown."

Spoken to Eliza by Higgins. She will evidently stoop to something less than the pure truth in order to sell her wares. This no doubt in accordance with her concept of practicality.

P. 27: "She's quite a common girl, sir. Very common indeed. [And of her accent] Oh, something dreadful sir."

Mrs. Pearce's description of Eliza.

P. 28: "To wipe your eyes. To wipe any part of your face that feels moist. Remember that's your handkerchief; and that's your sleeve. Don't mistake the one for the other if you wish to become a lady in a shop."

Higgins explains a handkerchief to Eliza. The implications of the line are self-apparent.

P. 29: "She's so deliciously low--so horribly dirty."

Higgins comments on Eliza. This line also explains itself.

P. 30: "We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You've got to learn to bear a like a duchess."

Eliza is affected by the type of modesty that at least one study has shown is characteristic of lower
social groups.  


P. 46: "The girl took a boy in the taxi to give him a jaunt."

Eliza is thoughtful and generous.

P. 47: "She talks English almost the way you talk French."

This is a good clue to the way Eliza handles her newly acquired grammar.

P. 67: "She's a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's."

Eliza turns into a stunning, fashionable, young woman.

P. 68: "I'm worn out, thinking about her, and watching her lips and her teeth and her tongue, not to mention her soul, which is the quaintest of the lot."

Higgins' mention of Eliza's soul is an indication of her depth as a person and of her individuality.

P. 71: "Her remarks will be delicious . . . . She'll mimic all the people for us when we get home."

This seems to indicate insight coupled with a quick wit. Her ability to mimic is one reason for her quick success with the improvement of her language.

P. 72: "The girl is naturally rather affectionate, I think."

Mrs. Higgins' opinion of Eliza is correct.
P. 73: "Very tender-hearted, maam."

Mr. Doolittle confirms Mrs. Higgins' judgement.

P. 108: "If you can't stand the coldness of my sort of life, and the strain of it, go back to the gutter."

This is exactly what Eliza can't stand.

P. 110: "Now you are a tower of strength; a consort battleship."

Higgins recognizes Eliza's new-found strength in her independence.

ACTION ANALYSIS

A play must be dominated by one ultimate purpose, and all the elements of a play must work toward the fulfillment of that purpose. Stanislavski defines the ultimate purpose of the play as the "super-objective."

In his words:

Larger, vital purposes of great writers have the power to draw all of an actor's creative faculties and to absorb all the details and smaller units of a play or part.

In a play the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings, and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the super-objective of the plot.

... 

The greater the literary work, the greater the pull of its super-objective. But if a play lacks the touch of genius... then the pull will be distinctly weaker... and in a bad play... the actor has to point the super-objective himself...

4
Boleslavsky compares the structure of a play to a tree:

It is an ideal structure of action. . . . Look at the trunk—straight, proportioned, harmonious with the rest of the tree, supporting every part of it. It is the leading strain, the "spine."  

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Stanislavsky's super-objective is the motivating force, the prime spring of action. As such it is synonymous with Boleslavsky's spine.

In order that the analogy be carried further, the center core of each action, that part which points toward the super-objective, may be thought to form the long slender spine on which all the actions pivot. It was called by Stanislavski "the through line of action" and once by

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6 Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 200.

Boleslavsky the "thread of action."  

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7 Boleslavsky, op. cit., p. 60.
Just as a play has a super-objective, so each character has his own super-objective aimed at accomplishing the super-objective of the play or at providing a counter action.

Each super-objective, spine, or through line of action, is subject to division into smaller actions with their own objectives. Stanislavski mentions individual, minor objectives.\(^8\)

\[\text{8 Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 256.}\]

Boleslavsky explains that the director expresses the super-objective through interpretation of the play, and through ingenious combinations of smaller secondary or complementary actions that will secure the interpretation.\(^9\)

\[\text{9 Boleslavsky, op. cit., p. 56.}\]

He advises the actor:

Having the main trunk, or thread of action in mind, . . . string on that thread the secondary, or complementary actions like beads on a string, one after another, sometimes overlapping each other but always clear and distinct.\(^10\)

\[\text{10 Boleslavsky, op. cit., p. 60.}\]

These "beads on a string" are a series of units
which make up an actor's role. Each unit is a portion of
the play in which something specific happens. The character
has a purpose which is his objective for that unit. These
are the minor objectives, the beads on the string. Each
objective is specific for its unit, but each one is in
direct line with the other objectives and in turn with the
super-objective to form the through line of action, the
thread of action, the spine.11

11 Stanislavsky, op. cit., p. 105.

Stanislavski's method of discovering the objective
of a unit is to name it.

Have you any conception of what a really good name
for a unit represents? It stands for its essential
quality. To obtain it you must subject the unit to a
process of crystallization. For that crystal you find
a name. The right name which crystallizes the essence
of a unit, discovers its fundamental objective.12

12 Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 115.

Stanislavski permits the use of a noun to name a
unit, but he demands that the objective be expressed with
a verb. He gives as his reason, "Every objective must
carry in itself the germ of action."13

Boleslavsky agrees with him, saying, "A verb is action in itself." He explains the value of this technique:

You would have to memorize your actions as you memorize the music. ... Moreover, when you know action by heart, no interruption or change of order can disturb you. If you have your action confined within one single word and you know exactly what that action is, you have it inside of you on the call of a split second, how can you be disturbed when time comes for its delivery? Your scene, or part, is a long string of beads--beads of action. You can play with them as you play with a rosary. You can start anywhere, anytime, and go as far as you wish, if you have a good hold on the beads themselves.14


Eliza Doolittle's Super-objective. If Eliza Doolittle had expressed her super-objective in specific words, she would have said, "I want to be treated like a lady." John Gassner15 says that Eliza carries in Pygmalion two related themes; one--flower-girl into duchess, a social satire; the other--variation on the Pygmalion-Galatea myth, a scrutiny of the irony of human relations. The simple statement, √4I want to be treated like a lady," encompasses both these themes.

√ Eliza knows her own innate value as a human being. She resents anything that assaults the dignity of the
individual. This attitude is the source of her preoccupa-
tion with manners. She knows their purpose instinctively.
She knows that they are intended to protect the individual
personality from violation, that human beings need manners
to lubricate their contacts with one another. Her intui-
tive knowledge colors everything she does. It is what she
means by being treated like a lady. It tells her immedi-
ately that by her definition, Higgins is no gentleman, and
that contact with him in the absence of the lubricating
effect of manners will be a lacerating, excoriating experi-
ence. Eliza's knowledge of the meaning of manners colors
everything she does. It is the "spine," the center of
every action, and motivates her from beginning till end.

Individual actions. Strung upon Eliza's through
line of action are the individual actions demanded by the
moment, each action separate in its immediate purpose, but
all with their cores pointed to the same ultimate goal,
each core articulating with the cores immediately preceding
it and following it to form that straight center spine.

In this analysis the actions are titled in terms of
Eliza's desire during the actions. The actor reading the
lines should consider them in respect to how they serve
Eliza to achieve her motivating desire.

The actions are numbered consecutively throughout
the play.
1. I want to get out of the rain. This purpose is accomplished after a collision with Freddy Eynesford-Hill.

2. I want to sell my flowers. Eliza sells flowers to Mrs. Eynesford Hill and tries to sell them to a man with an umbrella, Colonel Pickering.

3. I want to protect myself. When she thinks herself threatened by a stranger taking notes on her she says, Eliza leaps to protect herself vociferously.

4. I want to reassure myself. After learning that the note-taking stranger, Henry Higgins, is not a threat, Eliza tries to calm herself and smooth her ruffled feelings by derogatory and criticizing remarks about the stranger.

5. I want to sell my flowers. Having regained her equilibrium, Eliza returns to making a living.

6. I want to do something extravagant. When Higgins tosses a large amount of silver her way, Eliza expresses her joy at such good fortune by taking a taxi home.

At the beginning of the next act, Colonel Pickering and Henry Higgins are in Higgins' apartment discussing phonetics when Eliza appears.

7. I want to arrange for speech lessons from Higgins. Having learned that Higgins is a speech teacher, Eliza decides that here is the man to teach her to talk like a lady in a flowershop. She arrives armed with her
pride and money to pay for the lessons.

8. **I want to protect my personal dignity.** Eliza is offended when Higgins does not treat her with the courtesy she considers due her, and she tells him so.

9. **I want to accept the speech lessons and still maintain my integrity.** When Colonel Pickering makes a wager with Higgins and offers to pay for lessons, Eliza accepts but makes it very clear that she is free to leave when she pleases.

10. **I want to show off my newly scrubbed self with modest pride.** Eliza is proud of this new experience of being clean all over at the same time, but a trifle awed by it.

11. **I wish to explain my father.** She does not apologize for him. She just does not want Higgins to be deceived or taken advantage of.

12. **I want to delight in anticipated pleasures.** She is beginning to relax and enjoy the prospects ahead.

After three months of speech training, Higgins gives Eliza a tryout at an afternoon tea in the home of his mother. Eliza's diction at this time is perfect if labored. Her conversation is nothing short of devastating.

13. **I want to convince people that I am a lady.** Eliza's purpose can be divided into three smaller objectives: (a) I want to meet people gracefully. (b) I
want to converse well. (c) I want to take my leave gracefully. As far as Eliza knows she accomplishes her purpose beautifully.

At the end of six months Eliza makes a highly successful appearance at an ambassador's reception. Upon returning home that night, instead of praising Eliza for her achievement, Higgins tells Pickering how tired he is of the whole project and what a bore it has been.


15. I want to hurt Higgins physically. Eliza, upon an atavistic impulse, throws Higgins' slippers at him and tries to scratch his face.

16. I want to accuse Higgins. Higgins has taken Eliza out of her old life and made it unbearable for her, and at the same time he has failed to equip her for the new one. However, the thing that really hurts her is that he has put her into a position where she has become attached to him, and now he is completely unaware of any sort of personal relationship between them.

17. I want to make Higgins angry. When Eliza discovers that Higgins is not just indifferent, but really unaware—which is worse--, she needles him and succeeds in breaking the surface of his untroubled emotions by making
him furious.

Following the scene with Higgins, Eliza leaves. Higgins finds her the next day at his mother's home. She is the epitome of serenity.

18. I want to tell Higgins that I am a lady in spite of him. She tells him in action and in words. In conversing with Pickering she explains why it was from him rather than from Higgins that she learned the ways of a lady.

19. I want to maintain my dignity. When Higgins maneuvers and succeeds in getting her alone, Eliza remains cool and in charge of the situation.

20. I want to force Higgins to consider me personally. Higgins has forced this interview, so now Eliza is determined that he will focus his attention on her as an individual just once.


22. I want to show Higgins that I do not need him. Realizing that Higgins is counting on her having no alternative to returning to him, she tells him that she will marry Freddy Eynesford Hill.

23. I want to rejoice in my freedom. Tasting the sweetness of freedom, Eliza revels in it for a moment.
24. I want to make a final statement of my emancipation. When Higgins tells her to buy him some gloves, she tells him to buy them himself. This does not say that Eliza will not come back, but that now she is free to choose what she wants to do, not just whatever Higgins tells her.

The character and action analyses are not just academic exercises. They are vital and necessary parts of the preparation of a role. Their specific function in the creation of the role of Eliza is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

THE CREATION OF THE ROLE OF ELIZA

The purpose of this chapter is to present as clearly and honestly as possible a detailed account and evaluation of the author's preparation of the role of Eliza Doolittle. The material could be organized in one of two ways. The role could be discussed in terms of the problems that confront an actress: physical, emotional, technical; characterization, communication with and adaptation to fellow actors; and other problems peculiar to the particular person and play. After consideration, however, it was decided that a chronological organization would be better, discussing the problems in the order in which they appeared. The picture will thus be one in which developmental relationships are apparent. Various problems appeared at certain stages in the preparation and were dependent upon what went before and influenced what came after. By a chronological approach the total picture is much more easily grasped, and a much better sense of the actor's building of the role is conveyed.

The account must inevitably be made in the first person. It is a report and evaluation of a personal experience by the person to whom it occurred. The third
person would be an affectation that would hinder the sincerity of the report and to that extent invalidate it. In addition, the third person would make many things that need to be said awkward in the saying. In this case it is the author's belief that scholarship is aided by the introduction of the personal element.

**Tryouts.** The production of *Pygmalion* at Ohio State University was directed by Elton Winkler, a guest director for the 1954 season of Stadium Theatre. I had discussed with my advisor the possibility of using the role of Eliza as the basis of a thesis and decided to try out for the part. At the first session I read without telling Mr. Winkler what I hoped to do with the part if I should be cast. Tryouts were private with only Mr. Winkler, his assistant director, and the reader present. The assistant director read with the persons trying out.

My approach to tryouts is to understand the lines and read them with the purpose of conveying their meaning with a suggestion of characterization. If I can get a feeling of the style, I like to add that, too; but I concentrate primarily on conveying meaning in a manner suitable to the character. I then like to have the
director give me some instructions on characterization and interpretation. This gives me an opportunity to show him that I can understand direction and respond to it in a constructive way. This was the way I read for Eliza, using enough Cockney so that the director could tell, I hoped, that I would not have difficulty with the accent. Mr. Winkler listened to my reading, asked me some general questions about my background, and did not appear to think of me to be particularly impressed. I left the reading feeling that there was a hearty chance that I would not get the part, hoping that I would be asked back for a second reading. I was.

At the second reading Mr. Winkler talked a little about Eliza and asked that I make her a little more Cockney in quality, a little dirtier, and more sniffley. I did what he asked and he seemed very pleased, saying, "Now that's more like it." This encouraged me to believe that I was still in the competition, but I was still very much in suspense.

The next day Mr. Winkler stopped me and told me that I had been cast in the part. He explained that readers for Eliza usually varied one of two ways. Either they read the Cockney gutter-girl better and were weak with the society Eliza, or they read the society girl better
and were weak with the gutter-girl. My reading he had found pretty well balanced: I read one with about the same facility as the other. He felt that this balance promised to make the preparation of the role easier.

Beginning preparation. The first step in preparing my part was to read the play several times. I tried to get my own impression of it but not to establish rigid opinions. I wanted to wait until I knew what the director thought about the play, its meaning, what the tone of it should be, the level of the comedy, the breadth with which it could be handled, and particularly, of course, the quality of Eliza.

Mr. Winkler directed the play in a very business-like, practical manner. In the first week he blocked the play and rehearsed Acts I, III, and IV three times; Act II, four times; and Act V, twice. There was need for the rapid pace. The play had three weeks for preparation. Each act was blocked before it was read in rehearsal, so that at the first reading the actors were on their feet.

During this time I permitted myself to run through the part in a fairly mechanical manner, following Mr. Winkler's suggestions and developing the technical basis for the performance. In this way I hoped to take advantage of the director's ideas and let my own develop on the foundation of his. This plan was probably sound, but I
believe now that I permitted it to go on too long. It was well over a week and a half before I began to consider the use of inner resources on which to build my character. In a five or six-week rehearsal schedule a week and a half would be a sensible length of time for this delay, but our production was well into the middle of the rehearsal period by then.

I say that a week and a half under a slower rehearsal schedule would not have been too long to wait to start using inner resources—motivating in detail, finding parallels in personal experience. That is true if the director is using Mr. Winkler's method. If a director should postpone blocking and spend the early portion of a rehearsal period in exploring the meaning of the play and the emotional color, I believe the finding of inner resources on which to build the character should start immediately. The discussions with the director would reveal his ideas about the character at once and no conflict would be likely to develop.

The reason for believing that I waited too long is that when I started these inner techniques, I found them more difficult to apply than I had in former experience. The habit of mechanical acting had established itself too strongly. This is a trap that it is very easy for a facile actor to fall into. If he is at ease with stage
conventions of movement and position, if he reads lines easily with meaning, variety, and energy, if he has a good sense of rhythm and timing, he can pick up a script with little thought, with no more understanding than the obvious surface meaning, and with no inner preparation at all and deceive himself that he is doing an adequate job. But he is not creating any of that "inner life of a human spirit" that Stanislavski says is the fundamental aim of the art of acting. When I realized in the middle of the rehearsal period that this was my situation, the guilty feeling I had was a just reward for having permitted it to happen, however well-intentioned I had been. I had to work very hard, then, to recoup my losses. I am not sure that I ever completely made up for them.

I do not mean to imply that in the first week and a half much necessary and vital work was not accomplished. Certainly the mechanics of the play had to be worked out. I discovered that the level of the play was to be strong, forceful humor. The conception was not realistic. What Athens Sayler wrote in *The Craft of Comedy* helped me to understand what the approach to comedy must be.

Having drawn the character a little out of proportion you must passionately believe in the measurement as the correct one. I think your true comedian does both these things at once; that is to say, he is always instinctively that the emphasis he is laying on one side of this portrait distorts it, and yet he offers it as a true likeness.
And, of course, if the distortion is to be right, it must be based on a true and proper concept in the beginning.

The accent. The most obvious mechanical problem to be dealt with was the Cockney accent. I have never known anyone who was Cockney nor heard a true Cockney speak. I did not see the Wendy Hiller movie until after our production of the play. My imitation had to come from Cockney characters I had seen in movies, heard on the radio, or encountered in books. Shaw gave Eliza's first two speeches in a phonetic speaking that was very helpful, but then abandoned the attempt as unintelligible outside of London.

Mr. Winkler suggested that I secure a book on dialects. He felt that the most important part of the accent was the melody line. Having secured a book, I learned from it that

a's are pronounced like long i's, i's are pronounced like
oi's, and that there is a melody line peculiar to the Cockney accent. What that melody line was I couldn't determine from the book. Fortunately, I have a certain lingual facility and have always found accents fairly easy. In addition, the word order that Eliza uses implies, and almost imposes on the lines, a certain pattern that made developing a melody pattern almost inevitable. What I finally did was use an English accent and impose on it the distortions that the phonetics book had indicated and that I had gathered from the little contact I had had with the accent. Coupling this technique with the kind of expression that the character of Eliza seemed to indicate, I came up with what I considered a creditable Cockney accent. The accent is very important to the play. Eliza's personality and her accent reinforce each other. In the first two acts, they are so inextricably interwoven that I firmly believe that one cannot be well done if the other is not.

Using the body. Another facet of the problem of producing the proper accent is one associated with producing the proper physical movement and posture. It has to do with a subtle co-operation of the mind and body, what Michael Chekov calls the sensitivity of the body to the psychological creative impulses.5 For a number of years I

have termed this quality "kinesthetic imagination." Kjer-
buhl-Peterson's *Psychology of Acting* describes it very well:

Some of the gestures ... the actor has at his
command at all times, he can make them when he will,
these are the changes in the parts of the body, for the
various modifications of which the will alone is suffi-
cient. But for a large number of gestures, and in fact
for those by means of which we recognize most surely
the true actor, more than the will is needed, namely a
certain condition of mind which those changes of the
body result of themselves without effort on his part. 6

6 Lorenz Kjerbuhl-Peterson, *Psychology of Acting*

The Cockney accent may be considered a gesture.
Assuming the proper condition of mind—that is, the idea
of being a Cockney—means that much of what is right about
the Cockney accent and personality will occur without
conscious effort. This is true of the use of the body, too.
Eliza was used to scrambling and scuttling. She might not
do it gracefully, but she could avoid a car or duck a
blow with great agility. Her feet were planted firmly on
the ground; she knew what she was doing. Her mercurial
emotions and volubility of expression were not indications
of instability, but of the manner which she had learned
best achieved her desires in the world in which she lived.
The actor, going back to what Kjerbuhl-Peterson has said,
by assuming this condition of mind will discover his body
and voice doing many of the necessary things without effort
on his part. By attention to what naturally results, that is, by attention to intellectual evaluation, he can reinforce the good, enlarge on it in the direction indicated, and correct any errors that may occur. This is a method of permitting the body to work for one. I found it one of the most reliable techniques I could employ.

**Eliza's transition period.** The next problem relative to Eliza's speech was the one of indicating the transition between her Cockney and her mastery of the language and its social uses. In the "tea scene" Eliza is in that stage of over-preciseness that must come before naturalness and ease can be achieved. The comic element in this scene is the insongruity. The contrast between the over-perfection of her manner of speaking and the remarkable content of what she says is devastating to an audience and little short of that for the actress. The thing that still surprises me is that I was not immediately aware of the giant quality of the humor of this scene. In reading it myself I had thought it very amusing, but really had no concept of how funny it actually is. That knowledge forced itself on me at the first rehearsal of that act when the whole cast, including myself, found it impossible to control our laughter. One reason for the surprise may have been that I had not anticipated saying the lines as slowly as the director instructed me that I should. Eliza's pace in this
scene contributes strongly to the comic quality. As the rest of the cast and I grew accustomed to the scene, we forget how funny it had been. Higgins had told his mother that Eliza spoke English the way she spoke French. Taking a cue from that statement, I tried to speak the lines with the same quality that Spanish has when I speak it: searching for words, speaking familiar groupings more easily, going more rapidly as I gain confidence, and then, finishing a sentence with a little burst of speed when I feel that I have navigated the course through the sentence successfully to the end. Not only did Eliza’s words need to be pronounced correctly in this scene, but Mr. Winkler said that they should be spoken with the most beautiful, dulcet tones possible. He was not satisfied with what I was achieving, so we had a special session to help me to realize the possibilities of my voice more fully. I had believed that I was using diaphragmatic breathing and the proper techniques for as full and rich a voice as I could produce. A short period of closer attention to proper methods and particularly to relaxation, however, revealed that he was correct, and I was soon able to supply the richer, mellower quality that he wanted.

As rehearsals progressed, I felt that I was achieving the quality that the speech needed, but I still thought the whole thing too slow. During the first dress re-
hearsal I was disillusioned on that score. A number of people were present who had never seen a rehearsal. Their reaction was so unexpected and so violent that the whole cast broke out of character. I was amazed and very thankful that it had not been opening night. It is interesting that this is not a unique occurrence for this scene. After a run in London, when Mrs. Campbell opened in New York, the Evening Post said of her and the tea scene, "The hilarity which it provoked in the house almost upset her gravity."  

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Eliza's posture and carriage in this scene are of a piece with her speech. She is grace personified. Every movement is lovely and calculated. The turn of her head is a volanette. She is too perfect. She has not yet reached the stage of relaxed grace that will come with experience. The same technique of permitting rather than forcing the body to express the condition of the mind served me here as in the first two acts.

**A technical trick.** It was in this scene that a little trick of technique bothered me which I never mastered. Eliza says the line, "Why, gin was mother's milk to her." Mr. Winkler instructed me to lift my teacup, sip from it, and swing my glance from side to side over the cup. The
first time I tried it it went very well and the results were very amusing. Eliza seemed to be saying to the assembled company, "See, I can talk as well as you," right at the moment when she made her most flagrant faux pas. The second time I tried it it did not work. I decided that I needed to discover just the proper technique for rolling my eyes. Sometimes I hit it right; sometimes I did not. I never during the play was able to decide what the solution was. Since then I have come to the conclusion that I made an error that is only too common. I was working with the physical action rather than the purpose of the action. Eliza was looking from side to side to see the persons in the room. I was moving my eyes in a certain sweeping arc in an effort to provoke laughter. It did not work. Stanislavski explained why in Building a Part.

In acting no gesture must be made merely for the gesture's sake. Your movements must always have a purpose and be connected with your part.8

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Using the analysis. When I decided to begin doing more than the mechanical acting I had been doing, I reconsidered the role of Eliza. I examined it carefully line by line and scene by scene. There is a formal outline in
Chapter IV of what the complete examination of the lines revealed. The analysis is divided into two parts; the action analysis and the the character analysis. The significance of these analyses was discussed at the time they were presented. This is the proper place, however, to give examples of how they were used to help in performing the role.

There is a part of a scene in Act II in which Eliza has an action entitled, "I want to protect my personal dignity." During this part of the scene Eliza is told to sit down and do as she is told. She yowls in return. She is asked politely to sit down and says, "Dont mind if I do." When she hears the shilling she has offered for speech lessons compared to sixty pounds, she misunderstands and cries in alarm that she does not have sixty pounds. When Higgins says that all her clothes should be burned, she wraps her shocked dignity around her and replies that she is a good girl, she is, and knows what the likes of him is. I could play this scene without thought of Eliza's underlying motive in it. Played that way it would be a series of steps, connected only by time and place, which lead nowhere. If I remember that all through it I, as Eliza, am trying to protect my personal dignity, then everything I do or say has purpose. I have reason for doing and saying the things I do; they all lead in a single direc-
tion. They are unified in the small scene and they are a part of Eliza’s super-objective, “I want to be treated like a lady.”

A portion of Act IV contains Eliza’s action, “I want to accuse Higgins.” At this moment her training is over, Higgin’s wager with Pickering is won, and Eliza realizes that Higgin has no concept of what he has done to her. She has no particular hope that he will offer a future that she will consider satisfactory, but she is determined that he will not remain in blissful ignorance of what he has done. When she asks, “What to become of me?” she is not just asking a question, she is saying, “See what you have done to me!” When she says, “You don’t care,” it is not just a statement of fact, it is an accusation; he should care. “Oh, God! I wish I was dead,” is not only an expression of her feelings, it is an accusation that Higgin has made life unbearable for her. She accuses him outright when she says, “What am I fit for?” “What have you left me fit for?” The lines all press toward revealing to Higgins his culpability. They are accusations. As accusations they serve Eliza to achieve her super-objective, “I want to be treated like a lady.”

If the entire analysis is used in this way, the character has a purpose at every moment in the play. The actor then has something to do at every moment in the play,
and there are no empty actionless spots. In addition, the play always has a forward movement, a pressure toward the accomplishing of the super-objective.

**Using Inner Resources.** What now remained was for me to give actual life and breath to the role by tapping my own emotional resources to supply Eliza. Sometimes all that is needed to give a scene the impact of truth is simple sensory recall. Eliza's first purpose in the play is to get out of the rain. Waiting at the entrance for my cue to go on, I would draw my collar up around my neck and hunch down into the old sweater I wore, squinting my eyes up as if to protect them from lashing rain. In real life a sudden cold shock to the skin produces by an involuntary nerve reaction a spasm of the diaphragm which forces one to gasp. By gasping as though I were really being rained on, I was much better able to believe the sensation of icy rain, and my purpose, to get in out of the rain, was strongly motivated.

Making Eliza's Ah-ah-ow-ow-oo believable was a more complicated matter. She uses it under many varying circumstances as a reaction or response to pressures. It can probably be described best as a yowl. Eliza the gutter-girl is not an inhibited person. She is accustomed to expressing herself freely and fully. The exclamation she uses is most frequently, "Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo." The
color and inflection of it depends upon the motivating emotion. It may at different times convey alarm, fear, shock, protest, joy, and any other emotion demanding uninhibited expression that Eliza may chance to experience. Even after her transformation into a society girl, during a moment of extreme shock Eliza gives voice to this exclamation. At first I found it very difficult to do. I could not get the release, the good loud howl it demanded. I am probably no more inhibited on stage than anyone else, but the factor working was a hard one to overcome—a natural reluctance to permit oneself to appear ridiculous. In searching my memory for a personal experience to parallel this stage situation, I decided that the element I needed to look for was uninhibited expression. The incident which stands out most clearly in my mind as an example of uninhibited expression on my part occurred when I was in college. One more I became ill in class. By the time I had returned to my room I had a violent pain in my right side. It quickly turned into the worst pain I had ever experienced. The doctor was not immediately available, so the nurse put me to bed until he came. For a while I was normally restrained, not permitting myself to express my discomfort, as befitted a civilized person. After a while, however, with no one in the room, I began to emit small moans. It was not long until the little moans had given way to full stature groans. I told myself
at the time that I could not help it, but it may have been
that groaning was such a satisfying method of expression
that I could not resist the temptation to continue. I was
permitting the pressure of the moment full and adequate
expression. That is exactly what Eliza does when she voices
her "Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo." The personal experience and the
stage experience were not exact parallels, but the desires
in both cases were the same. The release I permitted my-
self in a moment of pain was the same kind of release I
needed to give voice to Eliza's yowl.

In another instance I found a personal experience
that paralleled the stage situation very closely. I had
been having trouble motivating Eliza's perturbation at no
longer having a niche in the world into which she would
fit. At first I thought the reason was that we were doing
the play in modern dress, and any modern girl would just
go out and get herself a job. Then I realized that that
could not be the reason. Eliza did have an alternative.
Higgins was perfectly right. The logical thing for her to
do was let Pickering establish her in a flower shop. Eliza
was not willing to do this, however. Therefore the thing
that was really bothering her was her relationship with
Higgins. I felt much better about the scene in Act IV
after that, but Mr. Winkler was not completely satisfied
with it. He felt that it lacked depth, particularly
beginning where the two men leave the room and Higgins
comes back for his slippers.

One afternoon Mr. Winkler, a friend who was holding
script, and I got together in our rehearsal room. He asked
me to try to remember the time in my life when I had been
the angriest. This wasn’t as easy as might be imagined.
There were two things working against me in trying to do
it. The first was that I do not get angry easily—
irritated, annoyed, indignant, yes; but actually wrathful,
very seldom. So, in searching my mind, instances of strong
anger were not readily available. One might think that
that very fact would cause the times that did occur to
stand out very clearly. That idea, however, brings me to
the second obstacle. The incident I finally used, the very
one I should have used in the beginning, was one I did not
want to use. It had been a very painful circumstance at
the time of its occurrence, and my only desire had been to
put it from me. So when I did think of it, my mind just
skirted it and did not give it any real consideration. I
have since become aware in working with acting students
that an actor’s aversion to reopening an unpleasant ex-
perience may be a real block to his motivating a certain
scene. The actor may even think he is using the unpleasant
personal experience fully, but really be going through only
the mechanics of memory and subconsciously blocking the
return of any of the emotional content. After I had pursued a student from one point to another in a situation such as I have just described, she finally burst out, "But I don't want to feel that way again." Immediately her problem was revealed and she was well on the way toward solving it. In the fourth act in Pygmalion I finally realized that I had no choice. I would have to use the experience I wished to avoid.

Following Mr. Winkler's instructions, I began to recall my own experience in as great detail as I could. I remembered where I had been, the weather, the surroundings, what I had been wearing, whom I was with, where I was sitting, the colors around me, the smell of the air, I brought back the sounds in the distance, the texture that surrounded me. When I had remembered all that I could of my environment, I began to recall the situation, the thing that had made me unhappy and angry.

I was startled to find how, by fortunate coincidence, it paralleled things in the scene I was to act. I could recall words I had said that Eliza paraphrased perfectly, and others that she didn't even bother to paraphrase. There is a point in the script which calls for Eliza to pound her fists on the floor. I could recall the point at which I pounded my fists on my knees. At the moment when I had
brought back most intensely the memory of my own personal experience, I stepped into Eliza's scene. I can remember how at that very moment the actor in me, watching me perform the scene, was amazed. Instead of the emotion I had gathered by memory dissipating in the play scene, or just remaining the same, it swelled and increased in response to the motivation of the scene. Pounding with my fists became for the scene what Chekhov calls the psychological gesture. It contained the frustration and rage that Eliza was feeling.

Using it did three things. It helped me express the proper emotion, it induced in me the proper emotion, and it served as a psychological trigger for the emotions, proper to the scene, which I already associated with the gesture in my personal experience. The gesture had all the qualities that Chekhov says it should have. It was strong; it was simple; it had form; it had a quality of tempo. In addition it had a rhythmic quality that always exerts a powerful influence.

I never felt that I ever did the scene as well again as I did then, alone on the stage, the director watching, our friend reading the lines that were not mine. The

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director was satisfied after that that the scene was what it should be. I had learned what memory of emotion actually means.

**Discovering a comedy.** One problem continued to bother me. It bothered me during the latter stages of rehearsal and all through performance. It was not until later that I realized that what had bothered me was not a problem at all.

I am aware as I act of the functioning of the dual nature of the actor. (This was discussed at length in Chapter II.) I see the actor watch me the character as I perform a role. I have always been aware of it in any role that I have ever done. But I have never had that duality pressed upon me so forcefully as in *Pygmalion*. I was much more aware of watching the role, of standing back and measuring it. I could not force myself into a complete absorption in the character, forgetting that observer standing in the back of my mind watching. The thing that did not occur to me for a long time was that this was the first comic role that I had played. The nature of comedy was making itself known to me without my realizing what was happening. The worst thing that could have happened would have been for me to succeed in my efforts to submerge myself in the character of Eliza. Her comic quality would have been destroyed. Athene Seyler defines this phenomenon
in this way:

I should say that comedy is simply a point of view. It is a comment on life from outside, an observation on human nature... Emotional acting of a serious part involves absorption in the character—identification with it, losing one's own self in another's... On the other hand, comedy seems to be the standing outside a character or situation and pointing out one's delight in certain aspects of it.

Comedy is the sparkle on the water, not the depths beneath; the gay surface, the glint of sunlight—any other pretty metaphor. But note, the waters must run deep underneath. In other words, comedy must be founded on truth and on an understanding of the real value of a character before it can pick out the highlights. 10


The exact mechanics of "standing outside a character or situation and pointing out one's delight in certain aspects of it" are a bit difficult to describe. The audience is permitted to observe the duality of the actor as that duality functions. Miss Seyler was quoted earlier as saying that having drawn the character a little out of proportion the actor must believe passionately in the measurement as the correct one. 11 The audience must be

11 Supra, p. 72.

aware—subtly, almost below the surface of conscious
thought—that though the character believes completely what is going on, the actor knows he is presenting a distortion, an exaggeration. The audience must know that when Eliza is violently alarmed to find a stranger writing down her words, she really is alarmed; they must also realize that the actor knows that her alarm is drawn out of proportion. Eliza is terrified. The actress knows that Eliza is in no danger at all. I did not make Eliza's yowl realistic; it was over-drawn, almost caricatured. But I had to motivate it just as thoroughly and believe in it as surely as if it had been realistic. At the same time, the audience and I together knew it was a caricature. It was the glint of sunlight on the surface of deep waters.

Conclusion. My experience in acting Eliza Doolittle was not an unusual one. It was unique in that it was mine. It was universal in that it held for me the same challenge any role holds for any actor, the possibility of creating a character. The problems I have discussed are not the only problems present, nor my methods the only ways of coping with those problems. I have tried to present here, however, the experience of one actress and an evaluation of that experience. If someone else, by an examination of this study, should have his own experience clarified or should see the possibility for a more satisfactory acting experience, this thesis will be justified.
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