

# Transformations in the musical, my fair lady

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My Fair Lady includes a central theme of transformation that cannot be overlooked. Riddled throughout the story are examples three distinct types; self-motivated transformation, voluntary transformation, and unintentional transformation. Examples of this are shown in the personal journeys of Eliza, Doolittle, and Higgins.

The play portrays circumstances and attitudes that have a large role in affecting one's station in life. The transformation of Eliza Doolittle is a great example of self-motivated change. In the beginning of the story we learn Eliza is not happy in her current station in life. She sings, " Loverly" (Pg. 127) to express simple words of longing in a playful ballad. Eliza does not want a whole lot out of life.

All she strives to achieve in life is to have a steady job, a warm bed, someone to love, good food, and maybe some chocolates every once in a while. When you look at some of the more worldly people in society longing for 8 more red Lamborghinis, a private island shaped like a starfish, and another mansion in Peru it is clear that Eliza is not really asking a whole lot. She wishes to improve her status as a woman. When she realizes she cannot get a better job because of how she speaks she goes to Higgins to ask for help. This is a huge step for Eliza. She is very proud and does not ask people for help very often.

Usually she is the one being asked for help. Even her own father begs her for money to support his drinking habits (Pg. 131) Eliza is driving outside of her comfort zone by her dreams. She knows she needs to get lessons from Professor Higgins. She spends money, which she probably doesn't have, to

ride to his house in a taxi in hopes of impressing him and increasing the chances of him agreeing to give her lessons. (Pg.

135). She is even willing to pay him a large percent of her wages for the lessons. She says to Higgins, “ I won’t give you more than a shilling. Take it or leave it.” To which he replies, “ You know, Pickering, if you consider a shilling, not a simple shilling, but as a percentage of this girl’s income, it works out as fully equivalent to sixty or seventy pounds from a millionaire.

By George it’s the biggest offer I’ve ever had?” (Pg. 137) Eliza asserts herself and because of her hard work and determination she pulls off an almost impossible feat. She learns to speak proper English, use manors, and use conversation techniques in about 6 months and then proceeds to trick a world known linguistic with her fluid speech. By the end of the book Eliza’s perseverance has placed her in a position of empowerment where she can make something of herself and be successful a young woman. This is what the show has to say about self-motivated transformation.

Likewise, there is much explored on the topic of voluntary transformation. Doolittle is a prime example of voluntary transformation. He, unlike Eliza, is completely content with where he is in life. He has achieved a balance of happiness and humility which allows him to live simply and richly. However, when serendipity occurs he decides to let it take its course. Doolittle’s philosophy in life is to mooch off others and skate by without responsibility and rules.

He expressed this is “ A Little Bit of Luck” (Pg. 131). He talks about letting other do the work and then tricking them into sharing their success. Doolittle  
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does not want to be tied down by a job, his own children, or even a woman. He says, “ The gentle sex was made for man to marry, to share his nest and see his food is cooked.

The gentle sex was made for many to marry- but with a little bit of luck. With a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck you can have it all and not get hooked.”(Pg. 132). He begs Eliza to give him money so that he can drink before going home to his current girlfriend.

He tries to guilt her saying, “ You wouldn’t have the heart to send me home to your step mother without a bit of liquid protection, now would you?...I’m a slave to that woman.” (Pg.

130). Doolittle is perfectly happy in his place in society, but then he is knocked off his feet by an opportunity he cannot refuse. He comes into money from a millionaire, after his untimely death, who left him 4 thousand pounds a year. Higgins had recommended Doolittle to the millionaire as the ‘ most original moralist in England’ (Pg. 198).

The man employed Doolittle, but then suddenly died leaving a large sum of money to Doolittle in his will. When Eliza sees her father again he is in a nice suit and the bartender who is usually throwing him out, is telling him what a joy it was to have him as a customer. She is shocked when she hears he has come into money. She expects him to be happy about it and is somewhat confused when he explains how his recent good fortune has ruined his life. Doolittle says on page 198, “ He’s (Higgins) ruined me, that’s all. Destroyed my happiness.

Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle-class morality.” Now that Doolittle has money he is expected to follow the rules laid forth by high society. One example of this is the marriage to his girlfriend. He is now being forced to marry Eliza’s step-mother, which he sees as his own funeral rather than his wedding. Eliza asks him why he doesn’t just give the money back and he replies, “ That’s the tragedy of it, Eliza it’s easy to say chuck it, but I haven’t got the nerve.

” (Pg. 198). His greed influences him to keep the money and live with the consciences. Doolittle’s transformation is one of voluntary circumstances. He has the opportunity to leave the money behind and carry on with his life that he previously enjoyed, but now that he’s has experiencing all these new, wonderful things he won’t give it up. This particular part in the play says a lot about human nature as it relates to new possibilities.

It seems human beings cannot be content with a life currently led if other possibilities are discovered. Doolittle’s transformation over My Fair Lady is voluntary because he could have chosen not to accept the money which would have left him to live as he did before. Instead however, he relinquishes his bachelor freedom for wealth. This is expressed in the song “ Get Me to the Church on Time” (pg. 201). This particular part of the theme is explaining that changes within your control often influence the way you relate to certain things, such as money, and certain people, such as the step mother to your children.

Another type of transformation in My Fair Lady is unintentional. The last form of changed explored in My Fair Lady’s theme of transformation is the

unintentional transformation of main character, Professor Henry Higgins. Of the three, Higgins' changes are definitely the most subtle, but also the most dramatic. As explained in earlier paragraphs Higgins experiences a momentous change in the way he perceives the value of human emotions such as kindness and compassion. In the beginning of the play Higgins is extremely insensitive and scientific. He speaks the truth without thinking about what he is saying and ends up hurting the feelings of the people around him.

Whenever he talks to his mother's friends they don't even want to hang out with her anymore because of how rude he is to them (Pg. 166). This all changed, however, when he realizes that being sensitive to the feelings of others can be useful and good. This change in Higgins is very interesting because he really doesn't ask for it, it just happens. It is completely involuntary.

He goes into this bet to teach Eliza to be proper thinking only of winning. And likewise, Eliza goes into this experience selfishly too. Her only motivation is to learn then move on and get a better job. However, they both come out of it learning much, much more than English. Eliza changes Doolittle.

She is not afraid to stand up to him and tell him like it is. And for some wonderful reason Higgins subconsciously hears her and acts on it without even meaning to. He is positive to her once and she responds well so he unconsciously sees that being nice can affect relationships and progress. It is shown that this comes as a surprise to him when he sings "I've Grown Accustom to Her Face" (Pg. 217) The tone of the entire song is surprise. He is

utterly shocked that all this time he had feelings for her and didn't even know it.

This shows how Higgins change is unintentional. The central theme of transformation can be broken down into three distinct types; Self-motivated, Voluntary, and Unintentional. Each of these examples of transformation ultimately led the characters down the same path. They each experience encounters with people and things they have never known and are altered slightly by the contact. Lerner and Loewe's My Fair Lady certainly has value as a musical, script, and story.

It reflects truths that cannot be disputed; We change one another. And that is the beauty of being human.