

## THE OTHERING OF WOMEN IN *PYGMALION*

Priandini Melania

Faculty of Literature and Cultural Science, Universitas Padjadjaran  
*priandini18001@mail.unpad.ac.id*

### Abstract

*Since the beginning of time, there have been two fractions created in this world. They are women and men. Starting from the biological differences, those fractions become an essential aspect of life. It created the social system that human beings subconsciously follow. Because of that social system, women are treated differently. As Bhabha said, “almost the same but not quite” as a mockery to the African American people. I believe that saying is also applicable to how women are treated.. Pygmalion is a play, first performed in 1913. At that time, women were in the middle of the first wave of feminism and they were fighting for their rights to vote. Independence is a famous theme for women at the current time and I believe that is why independence is one of the themes in Pygmalion. This play is written by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw was an Irish author and playwright. He received a Nobel prize of literature in 1925 and had written more than 60 plays. Eliza Doolittle is the main female character in Pygmalion. She is a simple girl, trying to learn how to speak properly so that she can sell flowers in a flower shop. She came to Professor Higgins and Mr. Pickering for help, expecting to get a normal, civilized course about proper English, instead she is being treated like an object. This paper talks about how Eliza Doolittle is being treated like the other, the different forms of othering and objectifying of women in reference to Simone de Beauvoir’s theory, second sex. This paper also talks about Eliza’s awareness of the importance of independence and how she responds to the othering that she experienced. The conclusion of this paper is to see the forms of othering that Eliza has experienced.*

**Keywords:** *othering; pygmalion; beauvoir; feminism*

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### A. Introduction

As we are familiar with othering from other literary works such as how Grendel described in Beowulf, or how Celia described in The Lady’s Dressing Room, Eliza Doolittle also experienced Othering in the play, Pygmalion. The Othering in Pygmalion is different from Beowulf and The Lady’s Dressing Room. She is rather treated like an object, more subtle, but it is quite clear that Eliza is not the Subject or the absolute. It is the law of nature that humans cannot be equal, there is always something or someone above or below the other, they are in a constant struggle to maintain a balanced position. Beauvoir said in her book The Second Sex, “... when two humans catagories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other.” (1956, page 87). One will become the Subject and the other will become the object.

The social construct that benefits men plays a big part in this scenario. In spite of the fact that men play a big part in Othering, women also take part in it. “And she is simply what man decrease; thus she is called “the sex”, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is Absolute - she is the Other!” (1961, page 8). In that quote, Simone de Beauvoir talks

about how women become the Other. Hence the process of othering appears. Based on Macmillan Dictionary, Othering is treating other groups as different and mostly view them inferior to the group they belong to. The way she defined herself with how she has a connection to a man, and not just to herself. This research is essential to provide the information about Othering of women in literary works when women are just starting the first wave of feminism.

## **B. Forms of The Othering of Woman**

Eliza Doolittle, she is a woman, a member of the working class, and speaks in a cockney accent, living in London in the early 1990s. In contrast with what Beauvoir said about defining women, I believe she doesn't define herself as a dependent being to men. She keeps repeating the sentence, "I am a good girl. I am" (Act II). She knows exactly her place in the world, which is equal to men. She acknowledged her independence as a woman.

When Higgins asked for Eliza's name, he and Pickering started to make fun of her name. She stands up for herself by saying those men are being silly and when Mrs. Pierce says that she mustn't talk to gentlemen like that, Eliza stood up for herself and said, "Well, why won't he speak sensible to me?" (Act II). From that quote I can conclude that she expects the same respect that she gives. Even though she expects to be treated respectfully, Higgins doesn't care for it. He still treated Eliza with no respect and as if she was the Other. As you can see from this quote towards the end of the play, "HIGGINS [sitting down beside her] Rubbish! you shall marry an ambassador. You shall marry the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or somebody who wants a deputy-queen. I'm not going to have my masterpiece thrown away on Freddy." (Act V). Higgins referred to Eliza as the masterpiece that he created. Beauvoir said, "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him" (1961, page 8). As you can see from the quote, Higgins claims that Eliza is the way she is right now because of him and she should not waste herself for someone like Freddy. The way Eliza responds to this is interesting, she said, "You think I like you to say that. But I haven't forgot what you said a minute ago; and I won't be coaxed round as if I was a baby or a puppy. If I can't have kindness, I'll have independence." (Act V). Instead of getting angry because she was objectified, she saw that sentence as flattery because she was called his masterpiece. However, she got mad because of the way Higgins tried to flatter her. I think it is because, at that time, being called a masterpiece by men was not considered an insult. It is considered a praise, hence it proves at that time, most women are being objectified by men and women didn't see it as wrong behavior.

Another example of the othering in Pygmalion is when Higgins said, "The girl doesn't belong to anybody—is no use to anybody but me." (Act II). From that sentence we can see that Higgins believes that a woman 'belongs' to somebody, they can't stand alone by herself to have meaning and because at that time Eliza did not belong to anyone, he could just take her and claim that she is his like an object. In response to that, later on Eliza also stated her view on the importance of being independent from the conversation he had with Professor Higgins that goes,

"HIGGINS. Independence? That's middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.

LIZA [rising determinedly] I'll let you see whether I'm dependent on you. If you can preach, I can teach. I'll go and be a teacher." (Act V)

I believe by saying that she is not dependent on Higgins, she asserts her place as a woman, that she can go on without Higgins's help. And by doing so, she asserts that she is not an object, that she is not The Other. The discussion about being the other will always be related to Independence. As I quote in an article titled, Beauvoir on Women's Complicity in Their Own Freedom, "Here Beauvoir offers a material account of women's unfreedom, explained in terms of their unequal position in society and their subordination to and dependence on men. This idea finds its philosophical articulation in the notion of woman as "Other." (2019, page 3).

The only reason Professor Higgins wants to teach Eliza Doolittle is because a little bet he made with Colonel Pickering. The bet was he can pass her as duchess at the ambassador's garden party in six months, and because of that bet, Eliza is no longer viewed as a human being, but rather an object. Since the beginning of the play, Higgins did not treat her as a human being. He said horrible words to describe Eliza. He used words like, "creature", "draggletailed guttersnipe", and "slut". Higgins stated that he treated everyone the same, as you can see from this quote,

"HIGGINS [grinning, a little taken down] Without accepting the comparison at all points, Eliza, it's quite true that your father is not a snob, and that he will be quite at home in any station of life to which his eccentric destiny may call him. [Seriously] The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another." (Act V).

I found it interesting the way he said 'the same manner for all human souls', but Higgins never treated Colonel Pickering or in fact Mr. Doolittle in the same manner as he treated Eliza. Hence, the word "human souls" in that sentence only refers to women.

At the end of the play Eliza Doolittle walks away from Higgins to go to her father's wedding. However, Higgins still insists on asking Eliza to get him his food and clothes for the following day. However, Eliza replied by saying, "get them yourself" (Act V). To make certain that she is not coming back. By doing so, she gained her independence back, as before she claimed that she had given Higgins and Pickering her independence. She is no longer the object, she has become the subject, the absolute.

## C. Conclusion

From the discussion and research that was explained above, the conclusion is that Eliza Doolittle was being treated like the Other because she is a woman. We can see that in the way Professor Higgins talks to Eliza throughout the play. She was treated like an object. Professor Higgins mostly use verbal abuse as a form of discrimination against woman. He also thinks that he owns Eliza. In spite of the fact that she is treated like an object, Eliza Doolittle did not let them define her worth. She knows exactly what she deserves and how she needs to be treated and she won't settle for less. She understands her independence and she left after realizing that Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering are no longer needed. Therefore, by claiming her power and asserting her position, that she is no longer dependent on those men, she is no longer the Other, she has become the subject, the absolute.

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