

## Bernard Shaw and *The Simpsons*: The *Pygmalion* Effect

Sílvia Maria Guerra Anastácio (ILUFBA)

Célia Nunes Silva (FAMED/UFBA)

### Resumo

A comédia *Pygmalion*, do escritor George Bernard Shaw, que data de 1913, foi levada ao cinema em 1938, com um filme do mesmo nome. Posteriormente, inspirado também na obra de Shaw, surgiu em 1956, o musical “My Fair Lady”, por mais tempo em cartaz na Broadway e refilmado em 1964. O efeito “Pigmaleão”, reaproveitado pela cultura de massa foi, então, tema de episódios mais recentes de *Os Simpsons*, dentre eles, “Pygmoelian” e “My Fair Laddy”. Como a televisão dá acesso a mitos clássicos e obras canônicas, de uma maneira divertida, e até mesmo polêmica é o alvo de nosso trabalho, que também se propõe a falar do fenômeno dos “sequels” ou seqüências, que tem sido recorrente nesta obra de Shaw.

### Abstract

*The comedy Pygmalion by the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw dates from 1913. It was made into a film in 1938. Later on, also inspired by Shaw's work, the musical My Fair Lady appeared on Broadway in 1956 and became one of the most famous Broadway musicals ever. A second film was made in 1964. In the contemporary world, the Pygmalion effect is part of the mass culture and has been revisited several times in The Simpsons, particularly in the episodes Pygmoelian and MyFair Lady. The proposal of this work is to observe how the television medium can give access to classical myths and to canonical works in a funny and even controversial way. Moreover, the sequel phenomenon, which is recurrent in the representations of Shaw's work, will be part of the present analysis.*

### Introductory questions.

Considering that in the domain of the semiotic approach, effect is an important link in the communicative chain, the relevance of studying the *Pygmalion* effect and the way this motif has evolved through the centuries seems quite challenging. How have different cultures and *loci of enunciation* dealt with such an effect, taking into account that each reframing is a way of revisiting the source by shedding new light on it? And how could a hypotext such as the myth of *Pygmalion* have given rise to such a variety of hypertexts that resignify the old motif over and over again, especially in contemporary media where, for example, in the episodes of the animated television series *The Simpsons*, the hypertexts interact with Bernard Shaw's masterpiece in surprising ways? Intersemiotic translation, which reframes texts and proposes transmutations in different languages, is not a new practice. The mediatic era, however, intensifies this phenomenon since it relies on the power of technology that captures experience as systems of interrelated actions and challenges the old notions of authorship.

No doubt it was the author himself who set the precedent for his work to be revisited when he produced a sequel (1916) to his work *Pygmalion* (1913). The importance of the sequel and how it opened up different possibilities for each reader to deconstruct the *Pygmalion* sign will be analyzed in this article. Who was Bernard Shaw and why is he considered such an important playwright in the English language?

Presenting the author behind the scenes, the times in which he lived and his main concerns.

A famous quote from the playwright Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was: “Things have not happened to me; on the contrary it is I who have happened to things” (Shaw, 1949, s.p.). It was a typical saying of Shaw who showed subtle humor and wit in his discourse whose tone was set by social criticism. For more than fifty years he criticized snobbish people, ridiculed values and topics considered sacred in his time, such as marriage, parenthood and social differences.

Shaw used his gift to ridicule as a weapon to show his twentieth century contemporaries the inconsistencies of social life. He lived through the transition from the Victorian Age (1837-1900) to modern times and he once said to a friend:

Being naturally of a serious disposition, I soon saw the world for what it was and was not in the least deceived by the peace and prosperity of Victorian days. The peace was the peace of a lunatic living in the world of fantasy, and the prosperity was the prosperity of the vulture. I laughed Victorianism out of existence (Shaw, 1949:s.p.).

It is quite evident that Shaw despised the wealthy business people of the Victorian Age who were satisfied in their comfortable positions and their “lunatic (...) world of fantasy” and who looked upon poverty with disdain and regarded it as a consequence of immorality or even laziness. The Victorians, who felt superior with their strict code of morality, glorified the British Empire. The supreme symbol of respectability was Queen Victoria (1837-1901) who gave her own name to the age. She strongly defended the reading of the Bible as well as the preaching of religious sermons.

On the other hand, however, the seven sins of the Industrial Revolution were all there: “filthy, dangerous factories; inhuman long hours of work; child labor; exploitation of women workers; low wages; slums; and frequent unemployment” (Pooley, 1949: p. 413). In that world, women were expected to be respectful, frail and useless creatures and thus they could teach, do some kind of social work or work in a shop where the feminine sensibilities would be safe. Women were treated as inferiors and the exploitation of the poor by the rich was a social disgrace since the gulf between the social classes was enormous.

Shaw was there to witness it all, including in the twentieth century, the fall of England from the pinnacle of power it reached during the Victorian Age. The working class started to share new opportunities in business and the British colonies as symbols of the old power were shattered. Nationalist movements increased in India and other parts of the Empire, including Ireland where the Irish agitation for home rule influenced Irish politics and literature.

Shaw was from Ireland. He was born in Dublin into a middle-class English family who moved to London in 1876. From the 1880's until 1911 Shaw played an important role as a social leader who claimed gradual reform through legislation. He believed that man

could solve his problems by controlling the productive forces in the interests of the common good.

His first play appeared in 1893 but soon Shaw found out that the target audience did not like to be ridiculed. Then he began to move away from the stage and started publishing his plays with detailed directions, expecting that he might reach a reading public. The fact was that his powerful argumentation and sense of the comic caught the public attention and people were interested to see such works performed (Pooley, 1949).

Famous for his humor, Shaw wrote about social classes in such a witty way that rendered him relevant awards, including a Noble Prize for Literature in 1925. He had two important concerns in life, and those were the theater and his desire for a reformed alphabet. In his play *Pygmalion* (1913), which deals with the illusions of class distinction, the male protagonist was a Phonetics teacher who transformed a poor florist girl speaking cockney (a dialect spoken in the East End district of London) into a lady. He managed to accomplish that by using a Phonetic alphabet with forty-four letters, each representing a sound. Shaw believed that would be the only solution for the Englishmen to communicate properly and when he died his will stipulated a large sum of money should be used to promote such reform.

Reflecting on the myth *Pygmalion* as a fertile hypotext

Shaw's source of inspiration for the play *Pygmalion*, which deals with Phonetics reform, was an ancient Greek myth. One of the favorite myths of all times, it is the story of *Pygmalion*, a Greek name, probably going back to Phoenician roots. The myth tells the reader about a sculptor and a king of Cyprus (an island in the Mediterranean, near Turkey, formerly a British colony) who found so much fault in women that he decided to live unmarried. But after carving an ivory statue of a beautiful woman that he named Galatea, he thought that his creation was so perfect that he fell in love with it. It was then brought to life in answer to his prayers to the goddess Venus and *Pygmalion* married (Civita, 1973: p. 150).

In fact, at the basis of human cognition are the primitive myths or the first narrative descriptions that have helped people to make sense of the world or gain knowledge about it. Indeed, it is possible to argue that:

The essential nature of myth can be found in an unconscious 'grammar of experience' whose categories and thoughts are those not of rational thought, but of a creative imagination that has power over even our most rigorous thought patterns (...). The categories of myths are to be viewed as the conceptual tools for coming to grips with the more abstract concerns with which human beings must grapple (Danesi, 1994: p. 101-102).

Shaw decided to use this myth to write a play (1913) about a cranky man, called Professor Higgins, to whom Phonetics was the dominant interest in life. In the preface to the play the author emphasized the importance of Phonetics:

The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like. It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him. German and Spanish are accessible to foreigners. English is not accessible even to Englishmen. The reformer England needs today is an energetic Phonetics enthusiast and that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play... if the play makes the public aware that there are such people as phoneticians, and that they are among the most important people in England at present, it will serve its turn (Shaw, 1916).

So the theme of the play is the transformation of someone through teaching this person how to speak English properly using the tool of Phonetics. Shaw's play is about a professor of Phonetics, Higgins, who makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can turn a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a refined society lady by training her in etiquette and teaching her how to speak with an upper class accent. In the process, Higgins and Doolittle grow close, but as the professor mistreats her and bombards her with his bad manners and selfishness, she ultimately rejects his behavior. Then she decides to marry Freddy Eynsford-Hill, a poor young gentleman who is in love with her.

It is interesting to observe that, together with this story, so many others have sprung up under the influence of the same hypotext (Genette, 2003), the Greek myth *Pygmalion*, which has served as the umbrella term that has inspired homonymous hypertexts. It is possible to point out the following:

*Pigmalion* (opera), a 1748 opera by Jean-Philippe Rameau

*Pygmalion* (opera), a late 18th century drama by Georg Anton Benda

*Pygmalion* (play), a 1913 play by George Bernard Shaw

*Pygmalion* (film), a 1938 movie based on the play by George Bernard Shaw, by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard

*Il Pigmalione*, a 1816 opera by Donizetti

*Pygmalion* (album), a 1994 music album by the Slowdive Band

*Pygmoelian* (animation), a 2000 *Simpsons* episode.

Apart from those works, many plays have been put on stage or stories on screen under the *Pygmalion* effect. Due to delays in mounting a London production, the first English presentation on stage took place only after *Pygmalion* premiered in Vienna, 1913, in a German translation by Shaw. The first production in English finally occurred in 1914, directed by Shaw.

Famous adaptations followed and in 1956 the Broadway lyricists Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe added songs for the characters. It became a hit with box-office records in New York, in London, and when brought to the screen in 1964, the movie version "My Fair Lady", with Audrey Hepburn as Eliza, would win eight Oscars. As for the

reception of this work in Brazil, in 1962, the famous actors Bibi Ferreira and Paulo Autran played the roles of the main characters in the play, and from then on, the musical has intermittently been on stage in this country.

It is worth emphasizing that the ending of Shaw's play has suffered modification over the years. The 1913 play ends with Higgins and Pickering perturbed at discovering that Eliza has run away from the house after discovering that Professor Higgins has no feelings for her and that she has been involved in a bet of an arrogant Phonetics teacher who boasted that could transform her into a lady. Doolittle returns now dressed in wedding attire and the scene ends with another confrontation between Higgins and Eliza. Then everyone goes to see Doolittle getting married and Higgins is left on his own. This version ends with Eliza leaving to marry the eager Young Freddy Eynsford Hill.

Shaw was terribly annoyed by audiences that sought romantic re-interpretations of his ending. In 1916 he wrote an essay in which he explained precisely why it was impossible for the story to end with Higgins and Eliza getting married. Moreover, it is Eliza who bullies Higgins in the end and not the other way round as at the beginning of the story:

*Pygmalion* – SEQUEL  
Bernard Shaw, 1916  
What Happened Afterwards

It is astonishing how much Eliza still manages to meddle in the housekeeping at Wimpole Street in spite of the shop and her own family. (...) she has never got out of the habit of nagging Higgins and that was established on the fatal night when she won his bet for him. She snaps his head off on the faintest provocation, or on none. He no longer dares to tease her by assuming an abysmal inferiority of Freddy's mind to his own. He storms and bullies and derides; but she stands up to him so ruthlessly that the Colonel has to ask her from time to time to be kinder to Higgins (...) She knows that Higgins does not need her (...) he had become used to having her there, and dependent on her for all sorts of little services, and that he should miss her if she went away (...) she is "no more to him than them slippers", yet she has a sense, too, that his indifference is deeper than the infatuation of commoner souls. She is immensely interested in him. She has even secret mischievous moments in which she wishes she could get him alone, on a desert island, away from all ties and with nobody else in the world to consider, and just drag him off his pedestal and see him making love like any common man. We all have private imaginations of that sort. But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished from the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel; and she does not like Higgins and Mr. Doolittle. Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable (Shaw, 1916: s.p.)

Subsequent adaptations have changed this ending in a way or another. Despite Shaw's insistence that the 1913 ending of the play should remain intact, he ended up providing a more ambiguous end to the 1938 film: instead of marrying Freddy, Eliza reconciles with Henry in the final scene and returns to him, much to his satisfaction, leaving open the possibility of their marriage. The musical version of *My Fair Lady* on stage and its 1964 film have similar happy endings.

It is interesting to see that the same motif of metamorphosis continues to fascinate people of all times. It has also gained entirely new garments and appeared again in the adaptation of the *Pygmalion* effect in a British film called “Educating Rita”, dating from 1983, by Director Lewis Gilbert. It is about the relationship between a hairdresser Rita and Dr Frank, an alcoholic university professor. In order to broaden her horizons, Rita joins the university to study English Literature and her life changes as the life of her professor also changes. So the idea of metamorphosis showers its magic on the public audience once again and new effects are created from an old recipe, repeatedly deconstructed and completely rearranged.

Proposing new effects out of a mythical sign in *The Simpsons*.

The science of signs is vital in the study of communication and a *sign* can be understood “as any mark, bodily movement, symbol, {or whatever} (...) used to indicate and convey thoughts, information, commands” (Danesi, 1994: p. xi). The science that deals with *semiosis* or the action of signs in verbal and non-verbal communication is called *Semiotics*, a term used to refer to the study of the capacity to understand and produce signs of all kinds. The most relevant semiotician, the American Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) coined the term *interpretant* to refer to the effect of a sign on the mind, considering that when a sign is addressed somebody, it searches “to create in the mind of that person an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign” (Peirce, 1955: p. 99).

This definition of *interpretant* or the effect caused on the mind is not taken in a prescriptive but rather in a descriptive way. And as for the phenomenon of equivalence, it is seen as a search in itself and not as a must to be fully attained because, considering that human beings are fallible, the action of the sign is in a *continuum*. So the process of *semiosis* is always in progress and is never entirely fulfilled. Concerning the new developed sign, it does not have to be better than the previous one or its source but just be a new way to reread or revisit an existing sign.

The fact is that the aesthetic sign *Pygmalion* continues to be deconstructed and there is a game of stability and *différences*, to use Derrida’s words, that must be taken into account because each sign:

Would take its meaning not only from its differential relation to other elements in the language system, but also from the history of its own repetition (...). Each of its repetitions would also have been *different* from all the others, since each occurred in a new context and therefore produced its effect within a different set of systemic relations. The same repetition that builds stability, then, also builds up a history of differences, so the ‘original’ use {of the sign} (...) is already polysemous (Kathleen, 2001: p.32-33).

It is important to deconstruct a sign to be increasingly aware of what it implies. As Derrida explains in ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’, the word deconstruct, in spite of its negative prefix, has a positive connotation because it is important “to disassemble the parts of a whole (...) to decompose and desediment structures” to know them better and how to rearrange them again (*apud* Kathleen, 2001: p. 56-57).

Considering these reflections, how do *The Simpsons* episodes, *Pygmoelian* and *My Fair Laddy* present the old myth by suggesting new effects to the contemporary viewers? Observing the titles of the animation, there is a dialogue between such titles, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the play by Bernard Shaw (1913) as well as the musical adaptation for the cinema (1964). Genette would call this *architextuality* (Genette, 2005: p. 17), a relationship between different texts that provokes a web of associations in the viewer.

The title of the animation with the word *Pygmoelian*, a twist to Shaw's *Pygmalion*, could allude to the protagonist of the sixteenth *The Simpsons* episode of the eleventh season, aired on February 27, 2000. Moe Szylak is a fictional character who is probably an immigrant who tends to hide his ethnicity. He could be Albanian or Slavic, considering his last name.

Moe has opened up his own drinking establishment where he serves Duff beer and is often engaged in illegal activities, such as serving liquor without a license. He is very ugly and his appearance is described in *Pygmoelian* as "cauliflower ear, lizard lips, little rat eyes, caveman brow and fish snout".

In this episode, the Simpsons go to a festival sponsored by Duff Beer and see Moe Szylak enter a "Beer-tender" competition. The idea of competition in Shaw is recurrent here. Moe wins the competition and his face is photographed to appear on the Duff calendar, but he is considered so ugly that his face is covered with stickers and nobody can see it on the calendar. He then undergoes plastic surgery and becomes handsome. He is offered the part of the protagonist in a soap opera but Moe learns from top-secret future plot lines that his character is to be killed off. He and Homer decide to reveal the plot lines on the air but afterwards the producers angrily tell Moe that his character was only supposed to die in a dream. He is fired and the moment he leaves the studio, a heavy part of the film set falls on him and his face is ruined. Moe goes back to his original appearance and returns to his old beer tavern.

As for the title of the other episode inspired by the *Pygmalion* effect, this is called *My Fair Laddy*. It interacts with the musical adaptation to the screen, *My Fair Lady*. Again there is a pun and the viewer might associate the fact that this story is not about a young *lady*, as in the case of Shaw's play, but a *lad* that is a male person, a boy, a fellow, a chap.

In the seventeenth season aired on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, in an attempt to pay back an aggressive substitute gym teacher, Bart accidentally destroys the school groundskeeper Willie's shack with a ball. Marge takes Willy home and Lisa decides to help him have a better life. She seeks to transform the brutish groundskeeper/janitor of Springfield Elementary School into a perfect Scottish gentleman. This is the project that Lisa will present at the school's next science fair. She changes his speech, behavior and dress and teaches him etiquette. Her social project wins first prize at the fair. Willie starts working at a fancy restaurant where he learns that he was happier working at the elementary school and goes back to his old life and shack. Meanwhile, as the subplot of the story, Homes also faces an identity problem that has to do with his blue old trousers. Homer fears changing his trouser style when he discovers that the factory that makes his classic blue pants is going out of business. Homer saves the day by walking around with "blue

pants” painted on his head which creates a demand around town and the factory is saved.

As it is evident, there is a change in gender, from the female protagonist who suffers a metamorphosis in Shaw’s work to the male ones in *The Simpsons* who go through such a process. In *Pygmoelian* it is Moe who changes radically and in *My Fair Laddy*, Lisa intends to reform a Scottish lad: “I bet I could turn him into a proper gentleman and I’ll do it in time for the school science fair” (07:12). So the condition of women appears revisited in the contemporary world.

One might ask what kind of ideological questions are there behind such a reframe of the old icon *Pygmalion* in the Greek myth? The myth presents the story of man’s *voyeurism* that is adapted by Shaw in his text. The object of the sculptor *Pygmalion*’s gaze is a woman in the form of an ivory statute with no identity, no soul, no voice and that finally becomes alive as the result of a spell. Considering that Shaw lived in a period of transition, the end of the Victorian Age, that is the second half of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century, he saw the way women were treated at that time. In a patriarchal world where women had no access to discourse, that condition has been translated in the play to the relationship of the bullying Professor Higgins and his pupil Eliza. Shaw criticizes the condition of women in those times, besides being aware of the distance between the classes who could hardly express themselves without “making some other English man hate or despise” them (Shaw, 1916, p: 1).

The bullying effect of the male chauvinist Higgins, with his ill manners that even threaten Eliza with starvation if she does not say vowels correctly, is translated into animation through the scene of the gym professor attacking his pupils at the beginning of *My Fair Laddy*. In *The Simpsons* episode, the word ‘bullying’ is uttered 3 times in the animation and the word ‘bombard(ment)’ 15 times. So this motif of bullying is updated to contemporary times when the question of young people being bullied is a serious concern. Sexual bullying of youth is part of *The Simpsons* world.

In the contemporary times, *The Simpsons* also shows that both men and women consider plastic surgery to change or improve their appearance but then they face identity problems as a result. This metamorphosis happens not only in *My Fair Laddy* where at the very beginning, the gym teacher at the elementary school leaves to have a sex-change operation, thus interfering with her identity. Even Homer has identity problems because the funny old blue pants he has been wearing for a lifetime are not being manufactured any more: “Marge, I ripped my pants- the only pants that understand my complex whining” (01:33). So the question of identity is recurrent in all the *Pygmalion* effect.

This also happens in the *Simpsons Pygmoelian* where the protagonist Moe decides to undergo plastic surgery because of his ugliness and then faces identity problems, because “plastic surgery might make you look good on the outside, but you might feel bad on the inside”(7:35). At the very end, when the character has his face smashed, he says: “That handsome face was nice but it was too much maintenance” (19:59). Shaw’s play suggests in a funny, subtle way that identity problems always arise, as does the animated episodes of the *Simpsons*, in the contemporary world.



Another effect in Shaw's play that is adapted to the American culture and to modern times is the idea of competition present in both *The Simpsons* episodes. In *Pygmoelian*, the competition of bar tenders is an opportunity to bring up questions related to alcoholism that are inherent to American culture, such as the necessity to drink beer "responsibly" and also to have a "designated driver" or a person who will go to the Beer Festival but won't drink because he or she will be responsible for driving everyone back home. Even the children must be taught that drinking is not good at all. They are invited to joint a spinning wheel to know "what's like to get drunk" (01:25). As a result they feel dizzy and disgusted. 'The Greek Potato Pub' also alludes to the Greek myth of *Pygmalion*. There are other allusions to drinking problems in the USA, such as the fact that Moe's "liquor license" has expired (6.33) and the episode also shows great drinkers in American History, such as: The American General and later president of the United States Ulysses Grant and the statesman Benjamin Franklin (01:57). Serious matters are thus shown in the film in a funny and witty way. The problem of alcoholism is also alluded to in *My Fair Laddy* when the gym professor mentions the "AA", or 'Anonymous Alcoholic' Organization (03:43).

Shaw is the master of this comedy of ideas where humor seems to be created for a serious purpose. He makes fun of the Victorian ideals of marriage, morals, and the absurdity of the social manners of the middle and upper classes. In this way, Shaw makes fun of Eliza and of his audience too, in the same as the director of *The Simpsons* uses humor to satirize contemporary society, focusing on American problems.

Much of Shaw's humor is connected with the use of aphorisms that also make the audience think. They are shrewd insights expressed concisely and observations about life. They are similar to proverbs that teach a moral, but proverbs are the anonymous product of folklore whereas the author of an aphorism is generally known and may not necessarily be teaching a moral. If such a statement is instructive, it is likely to be in an ironic way.

In Shaw's play, Eliza says that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated" (*Pygmalion*, 1916: 59). This is a good example of aphorism in Shaw, while in *The Simpsons*, this tendency is recurrent too.

In the episode *My Fair Laddy*, some examples of aphorisms could be:

Moe's friend - Plastic surgery might make you look good on the outside, but you still might feel bad on the inside (07:35)

Willie- My dad told me: "You'll never amount to anything. You were born trash and you will be lucky if you grow up to be garbage" (09: 24).

Willie's father - Let him cut it {umbilical cord} himself. It's time he learnt life ain't one big party (09.24).

In *Pygmoelian* one can read:

Doctor- I've dedicated my life to diseases in the head holes, but the one hole I've never been able to fix is the one in my soul (16.21).

So aphorisms are present in Shaw and in the Simpsons. They teach the target audience something about life. Either referring: to matters of appearance (people give too much importance to it and sometimes neglect the inside); or to the need to be pragmatic and take care of oneself because life is not easy; or to a deterministic view of life that Shaw criticizes and is recurrent again in the Simpsons; or still to lack of emotion from the part of people who might not be sensitive to the suffering of the other (as in the case of Prof. Higgins who has no empathy toward Eliza's feelings).

This posture of lack of inner feelings that is present in Professor Higgins also appears in a very economic way in a take in *Pygmoelian*, when Moe is touched to see his handsome image after the operation and cries. As an objective correlative (when the image shows what the character thinks or feels), the doctor interprets it as a leakage and quickly cauterizes it. His lack of sensibility might be associated with Higgins's cool way of behaving toward Eliza (11.24).

Another objective correlative, still in *Pygmoelian*, that shows the inner feelings of the character in an economic and intense way is when Willie sees himself in the mirror during the process of becoming a gentleman and can't recognize himself. Then he exclaims to himself: "A talking mirror" (10.26). That could also be associated with Eliza's attitude towards language because when she was working with Professor Higgins, there was a time when she could only mimic the way upper class people behaved and imitated them in a very mechanical way.

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Indeed, the reframes of the *Pygmalion* effect in both *Simpsons* episodes evoke signs of the mythical source without any obligation to reproduce the story from which they evolved. Such hypertexts are predominantly indexical of Shaw's play since they retain

traces of the work that inspired them. There are references to bets, competitions, sculptures, carvings, trophies, identity issues, metamorphoses, bullies, countesses, esquires, etiquette books, musical instruments throughout the episodes that work as vestiges of the texts that inspired them.

On the iconic level, that is, on impressions conveyed by the animation that make the audience associate different texts on account of similarities amongst them, it is important to emphasize the rhythm in the episodes. The repetition of words in both episodes reminds the audience of the phonetic drills and rhymes in Shaw's play. But it is in *My Fair Laddy* that this iconic effect dominates especially because of the rhymes and alliteration in it.

According to the semiotician Lucia Santaella (1996), music is the most remarkable language on the iconic level of perception because it transports the receiver of the message to all kinds of places and times, provoking the most varied impressions. And it is rhythm and melody that makes the audience associate the *Simpsons* episode with *My Fair Lady*.

In fact, that music and literature spring from the same origin is an ancient belief and William Austin would say that: "To find a true word in music is as lucky as to find true music in words" (Austin *apud* Scher, 1982:225). In *My Fair Laddy* key melodies and rhythms of the famous musical are parodied in the words of the episode. Funny and nonsensical alliterations in *The Simpsons* resemble those in the well-known musical play. While in the classical musical the famous lines are often quoted: "The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain", in the episode one hears: "What flows from the nose does not go on my clothes". As for the pieces of music that appear throughout the episode, the following are illustrative: "All I want is a room somewhere" in the classical "My Fair Lady" turns out to be "All I want is a place somewhere..." (05:15); "She's got it" becomes "I think he's got it..." (10:26); "I could have danced all night" is changed to "I could be indoors all night" (12:52) and there is waltz in *My Fair Laddy* that reminds the audience of the ball in *My Fair Lady*. So musicality on the iconic level plays its part in making the audience associate different hypertexts with their hypotext and vice-versa.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

The assumption that mass communication can give access to literary texts has proven to be true and not only the famous musical but also *The Simpsons* episodes have contributed to this affirmation. It is relevant to emphasize that each adaptation raises new questions and demands fresh interpretations or analyses because a new historical and political system contextualizes each new work of art that is added to the web of existing ones.

The fact that Shaw himself reworked the plot of his play again and again shows that there is no such thing as a sacred text that cannot be questioned or changed or reinterpreted in some way or another. Shaw raises questions that are recurrent in all generations or cultures or in different communities or each person. Even the same person at different times will interpret the work in a private way, depending on the context. So the respect that each individual must have for the language he or she speaks; or questions of social class; or morals and values; or the fact that appearance is

deceiving and reality difficult to define are all questions that are part of Shaw's world, asked and answered differently each time the play is revisited.

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