**Writing for Laymen: Readings and Questions**

Posted on the course site you will find four articles from three different theater programs, all relating to productions of Pygmalion or a related play. These are not all appropriate models for your own research projects, as most are hybrids, but all offer some context to playgoers at these particular performances.

I’m not sure how many theatergoers collect these, as I do, but they are often quite thoughtful and scholarly, and the photos they include from their respective performances can be a great resource for those doing research on a play’s production history. For instance, if you wanted to study the vexed question of whether Eliza and Higgins would be a plausible romantic pairing, it is useful to see visuals of the couple. It will also show when the casting director makes an unexpected choice in terms of gender or race, which can add some extra layers to the audience’s understanding of the play’s power dynamics.

Below is a list of the articles I’ve posted and some questions to think about as you read.

1. **“A Myth of Transformation, Transformed Again,”** by Julie Sparks (yes, the one you know), was written for a new German adaptation of *My Fair Lady*—*Meine faire Dame-ein Sprachlabor--*performed at the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland, summer of 2012. I’m starting with this one because I can give you the whole backstory. I have included the **correspondence related to this piece** so you can see how the “job offer” resembles an assignment sheet and my initial response resembles a topic proposal. The article itself contains several varieties of context. It begins by offering some biographical details related to the play’s genesis, sets the play within a context of Shaw’s career, and then briefly discusses its production history, reception, and some adaptations before returning to the biographical context.
2. **“Changing on the Inside”** by Philippa Kelly, Resident Dramaturg for Cal Shakes, AKA the California Shakespeare Theater, based in Orinda. This is a discussion of a central theme of the play, the tension between superficial external change and genuine internal transformation.
3. **“From Mansplaining to Leaning In: Shaw’s Feminism Today”** by Kaya Oakes, also written for the Cal Shakes 2014 production. Obviously, this is an analysis of the feminist ideas in the play. It offers historical and cultural context.
4. **“Liza’s London”** by Denis Johnston, writing for the Shaw Festival held annually at Niagara-on-the-Lake. This is to premier Shaw Festivals on the continent, and its programs are quite well developed and well written. In addition to this piece, which provides historical context, particularly on the setting, also included an article called “Shaw’s Linguistic Comedy,” which provides in-depth background on the theme of social class as exposed by language, a profile on Shaw, short commentaries from the composer and director, a production history of the play, and copious photos from this and other productions. Warning: this one is a bit dry in the beginning, but it picks up.

**Study Questions**: Again, you don’t need to write out the answers, but we will be discussing these questions, and they should help you see how these readings relate to the research project you are working on.

1. **Relevance:** How (and how much) does each essay try to relate this 100-year-old play to its audience’s own times and our own interests and values? Note what country each production is set in—the US, Canada, or Scotland. With the latter two you can assume a certain international component to the audience, as well.
2. **Variety of contexts**: You will notice that most of these are offering readers more than one kind of context with which to better understand the play—historical, biographical, reception, performance history, even “literary conversation” background, since Pygmalion itself adapts Ovid and many others have adapted Shaw’s play further.
3. **Citations**: You might be surprised by the almost total lack of formal citations, even where there are quoted passages from sources other than the play. Consider how the other ways these writers give their readers information about their sources and how they establish their own scholarly credibility.
4. **Alternative Formats**:It will not surprise you that the program article has gone multi-media. To see just one example, click on this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHkUK4v0uR0&feature=youtu.be> to see a study guide to one of the Shaw plays that was performed this year at the Canadian Shaw Festival: ***Mrs Warren’s Profession***. It’s on the “Just For Teachers” page, though the link takes you to You Tube.

Here’s a more in-depth one, a PDF file from our local Cal Shakes with bountiful supporting material about Loraine Hansberry’s classic American play, ***A Raisin in the Sun****.* <http://www.calshakes.org/v4/media/teachers_guides/2014_RITS_TeachersGuide_final.pdf>