Pygmalion Versus Persepolis

‘Pygmalion’ is a book written as a play by George Bernard Shaw. It was first presented on stage in 1913 and was named after a Greek Mythological character. Pygmalion is a legendary figure of Cyprus who falls in love with one of his sculptures and brings it to life. The play is about Higgins, a phonetics teacher, and Pickering teaching a flower girl called Eliza how to be a duchess, by dressing up in fancy clothes and learning to speak ‘properly’. At first, Eliza searches for Higgins to teach her lessons, because she has a dream of becoming a lady in a flower shop. In order to become one, she has to conform to society's norms and learn from Pickering and Higgins.

‘Persepolis’ by Marjane Satrapi is a memoir in the form of a graphic novel about the authors’ life, being brought up during the Iranian Revolution. It was originally published in French and in two volumes, published in 2000 and 2004. The book portrays Satrapi’s life in a black and white comic that depicts her personal life story and the history of Iran. Marjane wanted the book to be accessible to people from around the world, from multiple cultures in order to explain Iranian culture and history.

The expression “Ignorance is bliss” is an idiom that explains that sometimes going through certain experiences and having knowledge of something may be detrimental and that sometimes “not knowing” may be an advantage in some situations. ‘Pygmalion’ by Bernard Shaw proves that the statement is valid, while the graphic novel Persepolis’ disagrees with that theory.

In “Pygmalion”, through characters such as Eliza and Alfred Doolittle wishing to not have changed their social class, Pygmalion is able to defend the theory that “ignorance is bliss”, by making the characters complain about having gone through certain experiences that they claim have made their life worse. Eliza studies in order to be able to own a flower shop and hopes that people will treat her with more respect if she spoke in a correct manner and she acted like someone from a higher social class. “LIZA: That’s not true. He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess”,” HIGGINS: And I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl”. In this extract, Eliza comments on how polite Pickering treated her with respect since the beginning when she was a flower girl and she admires him for that. Then, Higgins comments on how he treats everyone in the same manner and that appearances do not change the amount of respect he has towards people. Eliza studies a lot to become someone who she thinks would be respected by everyone, only to find out that appearances do not matter as much as she thought they did.

Mr. Doolittle, Eliza’s father, becomes rich after gaining a large inheritance from a millionaire and is forced to follow the morality of the middle class. “I was free. I touched pretty nigh anybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Enry Iggins. Now I am worrited: tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money” (page 89). Eliza’s father had a simple life before, even though he was of a lower social class, he was able to survive through other people. He becomes rich and therefore becomes independent, however, he notices that now other people need his help in order to survive and becomes the person he never wanted to be.

Eliza Doolittle goes from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge with the help from Higgins' lessons, however, she ends up as someone who she did not want to be. "I have forgotten my own language and can speak nothing but yours. That is the real break-off with the corner of Tottenham court road.' page 94. Eliza learns how to act like someone from a higher class but realizes that appearances do not matter as much as she thought it did and she misses being a flower girl. She notices that it was not worth the struggle and it made her life worse, more centered in appearances and superficial. Eliza used to have a very simple life, selling flowers. She does not identify with the person she has become.

In contrast with 'Pygmalion, 'Persepolis' was made to explain the Iranian culture and history to people who are not familiar with it. The book demonstrates that it is important to educate yourself in history and politics and that being able to have a firm political belief is very important. Marjane was brought up by a very modern couple during the Iranian Revolution. Throughout the book, the reader is able to notice that they incentivize her to have her own beliefs. Marjane presents herself as being very rebellious, even though it could bring her trouble. For example, Marjane's parents were able to smuggle from Turkey posters from her favorite musicians, a Michael Jackson pin, a denim jacket, and Nike shoes. They put themselves at risk in order for her daughter to have access to objects from people she admired. It was not just about the objects themselves, but what they represented. Marjane is influenced by her parents to find out about other cultures and learn about other countries' histories so as to be able to have a firm political view.

"Persepolis" is a bildungsroman showing the evolution of Marjane from a child to a young adult. She writes about a lot of very tough experiences she had to go through, but every obstacle was able to make her who she becomes. For example, Marjane is cheated on by her boyfriend, Markus on her birthday. "How could I have been so blind? What relationship? What love? What support?" page 238. Some people may argue that it caused a lot of suffering, however, that suffering made Marjane notice his flaws and she evolved as a person. Through pages 236 and 242, Satrapi presents herself alone in almost every panel, except for the ones that show her memories. Being alone in the panel reveals self-reflection and introspection. Marjane demonstrates that some bad experiences may be turned into something people can benefit from and learn from.

"Persepolis" is a graphic novel memoir, unlike 'Pygmalion', which is a text of a play containing fictional characters. It being a very personal true story containing strong visual aspects makes it more emotional and stronger and has a more profound effect on the reader. Besides that, 'Persepolis' uses much more modern language and it was written in more recent years, so it is more appealing and closer to today's audience.