# Pygmalion

## George Bernard Shaw

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# Introduction

*Pygmalion* is a comedy about a phonetics expert who, as a kind of social experiment, attempts to make a lady out of an uneducated Cockney flower-girl. Although not as intellectually complex as some of the other plays in Shaw's "theatre of ideas," *Pygmalion* nevertheless probes important questions about social class, human behavior, and relations between the sexes.

Hoping to circumvent what he felt was the tendency of the London press to criticize his plays unfairly, Shaw chose to produce a German translation of *Pygmalion* in Vienna and Berlin before bringing the play to London. The London critics appreciated the acclaim the play had received overseas, and, after it opened at His Majesty's Theatre on April 11, 1914, it enjoyed success, firmly establishing Shaw's reputation as a popular playwright.

Accompanying his subterfuge with the London press, Shaw also plotted to trick his audience out of any prejudicial views they held about the play's content. This he did by assuming their familiarity with the myth of Pygmalion, from the Greek playwright Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* encouraging them to think that *Pygmalion* was a classical play. He furthered the ruse by directing the play anonymously and casting a leading actress who had never before appeared in a working-class role. In Ovid's tale, Pygmalion is a man disgusted with real-life women who chooses celibacy and the pursuit of an ideal woman, whom he carves out of ivory. Wishing the statue were real, he makes a sacrifice to Venus, the goddess of love, who brings the statue to life. By the late Renaissance, poets and dramatists began to contemplate the thoughts and feelings of this woman, who woke full-grown in the arms of a lover. Shaw's central character—the flower girl Liza Doolittle—expresses articulately how her transformation has made her feel, and he adds the additional twist that Liza turns on her "creator" in the end by leaving him.

In addition to the importance of the onginal Pygmalion myth to Shaw's play, critics have pointed out the possible influence of other works, such as Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (which similarly involves a gentleman attempting to make a fine lady out of a "coarse" working girl), and a number of plays, including W.S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House*. Shaw denied borrowing the story directly from any of these sources, but there are traces of them in his play, as there are of the well-known story of Cinderella, and shades of the famous stories of other somewhat vain "creators" whose experiments have unforeseen implications: Faust, Dr. Frankenstein, Svengali.

The play was viewed (thankfully, by many critics) as one of Shaw's less provocative comedies. Nevertheless, *Pygmalion* did provoke controversy upon its original production. Somewhat ironically, the cause was an issue of language, around which the plot itself turns: Liza's use of the word "bloody," never before uttered on the stage at His Majesty's Theatre. Even though they were well aware of the controversy from its coverage in the press, the first audiences gasped in surprise, then burst into laughter, at Liza's spirited rejoinder: "Not bloody likely!"

# Author Biography

George Bernard Shaw was born into a poor Protestant family in Dublin, Ireland, on July 26, 1856. Despite childhood neglect (his father was an alcoholic), he became one of the most prominent writers of modern Britain. His mother introduced him to music and art at an early age and after 1876, when he moved to London to continue his self-education, she supported him for nine more years. During this period Shaw wrote five unsuccessful novels, then, in 1884, he met William Archer, the prominent journalist and drama critic, who urged him to write plays. Through Archer, Shaw became music critic for a London newspaper. With a strong background in economics and politics, Shaw rose to prominence through the socialist Fabian Society, which he helped organize in 1884. He also established himself as a persuasive orator and became well known as a critic of art, music, and literature. In 1895 he became the drama critic for the Saturday Review.

Shaw's socialist viewpoint and penetrating wit show through in his journalism, economic and political tracts, and his many plays. An articulate nonconformist, Shaw believed in a spirit he called the Life Force that would help improve and eventually perfect the world. This hope for human and social improvement gave a sense of purpose to much of Shaw's work and had a broad range of effects across many facets of his life, from his vegetarian diet to his satirizing of social pretensions. It also led to his rebellion against the prevailing idea of "art for art's sake" (that is, works of art that did not also have an explicit social purpose).

Shaw's plays were frequently banned by censors or refused production (both their themes and their expansive scope made them difficult to stage), so he sought audiences through open readings and publication. He published his first collection, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, in 1898, which included the combative, "unpleasant" works Widowers' Homes (his first play), Mrs. Warren's Profession, and The Philanderer; and the milder, more tongue-in-cheek plays Arms and the Man, Candida, The Man of Destiny, and You Never Can Tell* Also in 1898, Shaw married the wealthy

Charlotte Payne-Townsend. The year was a turning point in Shaw's life, after which he was centrally associated with the intellectual revival of the English theatre.

After the turn of the century, Shaw's plays gradually began to achieve production and, eventually, acceptance in England. Throughout his long life, his work expressed a mischievous delight in outstripping ponderous intellectual institutions. His subsequent plays include *Man and Superman* (written from 1901 to 1903), a complex idea play about human capability; *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), a satire of British opinions concerning his native Ireland; *Major Barbara* (1905), a dazzling investigation of social conscience and reform; *Pygmalion* (1914); *Heartbreak House* (1920), an anguished allegory of Europe before the First World War; *Back to Methuselah* (1922), a legend cycle for Shaw's "religion" of creative evolution; *Saint Joan* (1923), a startling historical tragedy; *The Apple Cart* (1929), one of three later plays Shaw termed "political extravaganzas"; and *Buoyant Billions* (1948), hjs last full-length play.

Shaw received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925, which was considered to be the high point of his career (although he was still to write seventeen more plays). In later life, he remained a vigorous symbol of the ageless superman he proclaimed in his works, traveling extensively throughout the world and engaging in intellectual and artistic pursuits. In September, 1950, however, he fell from an apple tree he was pruning, and on November 2 of that year died of complications stemming from the injury.

# Plot Summary

## Act I

The action begins at 11:15 p.m. in a heavy summer rainstorm. An after-theatre crowd takes shelter in the portico of St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden. A young girl, Clara Eynsford Hill, and her mother are wailing for Clara's brother Freddy, who looks in vain for an available cab. Colliding into flower peddler Liza Doolittle, Freddy scatters her flowers. After he departs to continue looking for a cab, Liza convinces Mrs. Eynsford Hill to pay for the damaged flowers; she then cons three halfpence from Colonel Pickering. Liza is made aware of the presence of Henry Higgins, who has been writing down every word she has said. Thinking Higgins is a policeman who is going to arrest her for scamming people, Liza becomes hysterical, Higgins turns out, however, to be making a record of her speech for scientific ends. Higgins is an expert in phonetics who claims: "I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets." Upbraiding Liza for her speech, Higgins boasts that "in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party." Higgins and Pickering eventually trade names and realize they have long wanted to meet each other. They go off to dine together and discuss phonetics. Liza picks up the money Higgins had flung down upon exiting and for once treats herself to a taxi ride home.

## Act II

The next morning at 11 a.m. in Higgins's laboratory, which is full of instruments. Higgins and Pickering receive Liza, who has presented herself at the door. Higgins is taken aback by Liza's request for lessons from him. She wants to learn to "talk more genteel" so she can be employed in a flower shop instead of selling flowers on the street. Liza can only offer to pay a shilling per lesson, but Pickering, intrigued by Higgins's claims the previous night, offers to pay for Liza's lessons and says of the

experiment: "I'll say you're the greatest teacher alive if you make that good." Higgins enthusiastically accepts the bet, though his housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, pleads with him to consider what will become of Liza after the experiment. Liza agrees to move into Higgins's home and goes upstairs for a bath. Meanwhile, Higgins and Pickering are visited by Liza's father, Doolittle, "an elderly but vigorous dustman." Rather than demanding to take Liza away, Doolittle instead offers to "let her go" for the sum of five pounds. Higgins is shocked by this offer at first, asking whether Doolittle has any morals, but he is persuaded by Doolittle's response, that the latter is too poor to afford them. Exiting quickly with his booty, Doolittle does not at first recognize his daughter, who has re-entered, cleaned up and dressed in a Japanese kimono.

## Act III

The setting is the flat of Mrs. Higgms, Henry's mother. Henry bursts in with a flurry of excitement, much to the distress of his mother, who finds him lacking in social graces (she observes that her friends "stop coming whenever they meet you"). Henry explains that he has invited Liza, taking the opportunity for an early test of his progress with Liza's speech. The Eynsford Hills, guests of Mrs. Higgms, arrive. The discussion is awkward and Henry, true to his mother's observations, does appear very uncomfortable in company. Liza arrives and, while she speaks with perfect pronunciation and tone, she confuses the guests with many of her topics of conversation and peculiar turns of phrase. Higgins convinces the guests that these, including Liza's famous exclamation "not bloody likely!" are the latest trend in small talk. After all the guests (including Liza) have left, Mrs. Higgins challenges Henry and Pickenng regarding their plans; she is shocked that they have given no thought to Liza's well-being, for after the conclusion of the experiment she will have no income, only "the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living." Henry is characteristically flip, stating "there's no good bothering now. The thing's done." Pickering is no more thoughtful than Higgins, and as the two men exit, Mrs. Higgins expresses her exasperation.

A following scene, the most important of the "optional" scenes Shaw wrote for the film version *of Pygmalion* —and included in later editions of the play—takes place at an Embassy party in London. Higgins is nervous that Nepommuck, a Hungarian interpreter and his former student, will discover his ruse and expose Liza as an aristocratic imposter. Nepommuck, ironically, accuses Liza not of faking her social class, but her nationality. He is convinced Liza must be Hungarian and of noble blood, for she speaks English "too perfectly," and "only foreigners who have been taught to speak it speak it well." Higgins is victorious, but finds little pleasure in having outwitted such foolish guests.

## Act IV

Midnight, in Henry's laboratory. Higgins, Pickering, and Liza return from the party. Higgins loudly bemoans the evening: "What a crew' What a silly tomfoolery!" Liza grows more and more frustrated as he continues to complain (' Thank God it's over!"), not paying attention to her or acknowledging her role in his triumph. Complaining about not being able to find his slippers, Higgins does not observe Liza retrieving them and placing them directly by him. She controls her anger as Higgins and Pickering exit, but when Higgms storms back in, still wrathfully looking for his slippers, Liza hurls them at him with all her might. She derides Higgins for his selfishness and demands of him, "What's to become of me?" Higgins tries to convince her that her irritation is "only imagination," that she should "go to bed like a good girl and sleep it off." Higgins gradually understands Liza's economic concern (that she cannot go back to selling flowers, but has no other future), but he can only awkwardly suggest marriage to a rich man as a solution. Liza criticizes the subjugation that Higgins's suggestion implies: "I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else." Liza infuriates Higgins by rejecting him, giving him back the rented jewels she wears, and a ring he had bought for her. He angrily throws the ring in the fireplace and storms out.

In the next important "optional scene," Liza has left Higgins's home and comes upon

Freddy, who, infatuated with the former flower girl, has recently been spending most of his nights gazing up at Liza's window. They fall into each other's arms, but their passionate kisses are interrupted first by one constable, then another, and another. Liza suggests they jump in a taxi, "and drive about all night; and in the morning I'll call on old Mrs Higgins and ask her what I ought to do."

## ActV

Mrs. Higgins's drawing room, the next day. Henry and Pickering arrive and while they are downstairs phoning the police about Liza's disappearance, Mrs. Higgins asks the chambermaid to warn Liza, taking shelter upstairs, not to come down. Mrs. Higgins scolds Henry and Pickering for their childishness and the careless manner in which they treated another human. The arrival of Alfred Doolittle is announced; he enters dressed fashionably as a bridegroom, but in an agitated state, casting accusations at Higgins. Doolittle explains at length how by a deed of Henry's he has come into a regular pension. His lady companion will now marry him, but still he is miserable. Where he once could "put the touch" on anyone for drinking money, now everyone comes to him, demanding favors and monetary support. At this point, Mrs. Higgins reveals that Liza is upstairs, again criticizing Henry for his unthoughtf ul behavior towards the girl. Mrs. Higgins calls Liza down, asking Doolittle to step out for a moment to delay the shock of the news he brings. Liza enters, politely cool towards Henry. She thanks Pickering for all the respect he has shown her since their first meeting: calling her Miss Doolittle, removing his hat, opening doors. ' The difference," Liza concludes, "between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves but how she's treated."

At this point, Doolittle returns. He and Liza are re-united, and all the characters (excepting Henry) prepare to leave to see Doolittle married. Liza and Higgins are left alone. Higgins argues that he didn't treat Liza poorly because she was a flower girl but because he treats everyone the same. He defends his behavior by attacking traditional social graces as absurd: "You call me a brute because you couldn't buy a claim on me

by fetching my slippers," he says. Liza declares that since Higgins gave no thought to her future, she will marry Freddy and support herself by teaching phonetics, perhaps assisting Nepommuck. Higgins grows furious at Liza and "lays his hands on her." He quickly regrets doing so and expresses appreciation of Liza's newfound independence. At the play's curtain he remains incorrigible, however, cheerfully assuming that Liza will continue to manage his household details as she had done during her days of instruction with him.

# Preface to Pygmalion. A Professor of Phonetics

Preface to Pygmalion. A Professor of Phonetics Summary

Shaw starts out telling his readers that the English do not value their language and do not teach their children to speak it properly. Part of the problem is that the language is not spelled the way it is pronounced. For this reason, phoneticians are needed to reform the English language. Among the great phoneticians, Shaw mentions Alexander Melville Bell, Alexander J. Ellis and Tito Pagliardini, but holds none in higher regard than Henry Sweet.

Sweet was not an amiable man and detested academics who did not respect his field of study. Shaw tried to foster Sweet's career by helping him publish an article, but the article Sweet produced was merely accusatory and defamatory of his fellow academics, and could not be published. Sweet was not malicious for the sake of being that way; he simply believed that those who did not agree with him about the importance of phonetics were fools.

Shaw describes Sweet's system of shorthand, Current Shorthand, and notes that there are references to it in the play, as, for instance, in Act 3 when Mrs. Higgins describes postcards Higgins wrote her in shorthand. A discussion of shorthand methods follows. Sweet, of course, preferred his own Current Shorthand, yet the method never became popular like others such as the Pitman and Gregg systems.

Shaw reveals that the character of Higgins is loosely based upon Sweet, although there are some very important differences. He laments the fact that Sweet's own country and university, Oxford, did not appreciate his greatness, yet Europe did. Shaw, however, acknowledges that it was Sweet's own fault; Oxford quite reasonably expected appropriateness and discretion, and Sweet could not expect to be recognized when he

did not abide by that.

G. Bernard Shaw hopes his play will make people aware that phoneticians exist and provide valuable services. He also hopes his play instructs, for he sees that as the job of literature. He wants readers to know that such a transformation that occurs in Eliza is possible if done "scientifically." In Shaw's opinion, untrained imitation of a dialect is far worse than an authentic coarse speech pattern.

Preface to Pygmalion. A Professor of Phonetics Analysis

Shaw takes the soapbox here, so to speak, just as he feels he does in his play. He sees literature as instructive, teaching a lesson. He shares with his readers the importance of proper pronunciation and speech patterns. He wants everyone to know of a Henry Sweet, whose lack of diplomacy kept him from being able to effectively popularize the subject of phonetics. He further shares that the character of Higgins is partly based on Sweet, which readers may be able to recognize after they begin reading the play and are acquainted with the brusque and often offensive personality of Higgins.

# Act 1

Act 1 Summary

It is 11:15 P.M. in London. People are running for cover from the rain, and cab whistles are echoing throughout the area. A woman and her daughter have found cover under the overhang of a church in Covent Gardens. The daughter introduces readers/audiences to her brother Freddie who has been gone some time looking for a cab. The daughter does not have much faith in her brother, but her mother defends the missing child. Someone nearby comments that a cab will be hard to find; most cabs have already gone to theatergoers.

Freddy, a young man of twenty joins his family and informs them that it is impossible to find a cab. He says that he had been to stations in two directions in search of a cab and could not find one. His sister questions how much effort he actually gave this search; the mother insults her son and orders him to search again.

Freddy darts into the rain and collides with a flower girl. Thunder and lightning mark the event. The flower girl tells Freddy to watch where he is going, calling him by name. The girl then picks up the flowers knocked known. She is about eighteen with dirty, unkempt hair and a hat soiled from London. Her coat is knee length and fitted at the waist. Under it, she has on a brown skirt and an apron. Her appearance reflects her life on the street, neglected and dirtied. Her teeth show the lack of care.

The flower girl asks the mother to pay for the strewn flowers caused by the son. She asks her daughter Clara for any pennies, but Clara only has a sixpence. The flower girl promises change, and the mother orders Clara to give her the money. The mother hands it to the poor girl and tells her to keep the change, but the mother does want to know how the flower girl knew Freddy's name. The dirty flower girl tells the mother that she just called the son any name to be pleasant. The daughter doubts this and believes her mother a fool. Clara moves away from the flower girl.

A military looking gentleman soon joins the waiting family. The mother commiserates with the gentleman regarding the weather, and the flower girl approaches him to buy some flowers. The gentleman does not have any change but manages to give the girl three halfpence. She is grateful, but a bystander warns her to give the man flowers because there is someone nearby taking down every word that is being said.

The flower girl panics and defends herself as "'a respectable girl'" creating a scene in her elevated tones. The surrounding group of rain dodgers try to hush her, some kindly, others rudely. Some believe the note taker to be a detective, and the flower girl begs the gentleman to defend her; she did nothing wrong. The bystander sees that the note taker is a gentleman by his boots and tries to reassure the flower girl. She is still convinced police are watching her, and the note taker tells her to shut up. She still cannot believe he means her no harm; she wants to know why he took down her words.

The note taker realizes he will have to show this girl what he has written, but she does not recognize anything. He then goes on to reproduce her words exactly. This upsets her even more, as she believes her use of the word "Captain" could result in charges against her. The gentleman intervenes on the flower girl's behalf, telling the note taker that the girl is innocent, and that the gentleman does not need protection from young women. A group of bystanders supports the flower girl against this seeming covert police activity. They escort her to the column base she started from, and the bystander, who noted the man's boots originally, calls the note taker "'a busybody.'"

The note taker astonishes the man by referring to his family in Selsey. The bystander wants to know how the man in the fine boots knows that and the note taker ignores him. Then the note taker turns to the flower girl and refers to her being born in Lisson Grove. She validates his assessment by saying that she had to get out of that filthy place, and begins to cry. The note taker tells her to stop, and the gentleman sympathizes with the girl. Another bystander challenges the note taker to identify his place of origin, and again the man taking notes is correct. This gains the interest of others, and the note taker continues his "performance" of identifying a variety of other

people's origins. The gentleman asks the note taker if he is in fact a performer, and he responds that he has thought of it. While this goes on, the flower girl broods and talks to herself.

The note taker's ability to tell where each speaker is from entertains the crowd, and he grows in popularity. The flower girl resents this and says that he is no gentleman. The rain stops and Clara pushes to the front of the crowd in search of Freddy. The note taker identifies Clara's background, and the young woman tells him to keep his forward comments to himself. The note taker then correctly identifies where Clara's mother is from, and mother and daughter leave to get a motorbus.

Under the church portico remain only the note taker, gentleman and flower girl who is lost in tidying her flowers and self-pity. The gentleman is curious about the note taker's ability to identify where anyone is from and asks him how he accomplishes it. The note taker tells him that he teaches phonetics to those wishing to better themselves, and it is quite lucrative. While the two men speak, the flower girl is moaning and complaining about her recent experience with the note taker. The note taker tells her to shut up, that she can go elsewhere or cease to exist completely. He feels a betrayal to the language of great authors when he hears her speak. The flower girl makes a series of loud vowel sounds in wailing, and the note taker immediately takes them down.

The note taker then tells the gentleman that he could remake "'this creature with her curbstone English'" in three months. He further boasts that he could pass her off as royalty at a formal garden party and get her a job in service to lesser royalty, requiring formal English. The note taker tells the gentleman that he makes quite a comfortable living out of doing just this thing. The gentleman informs the note taker than he is himself a dialectician of Indian languages. This sounds somewhat familiar to the note taker, and he asks the gentleman if he knows the author Colonel Pickering. The gentleman happens to be that very man, and Pickering asks the note taker if he knows a Henry Higgins, another famous author and phonetician. The note taker identifies himself as that man.

They had planned to meet each other while Pickering was in London anyway, so they schedule an appointment for the next day at Higgins's address, 27A Wimpole Street. The two leave to have supper and the flower girl tries to sell flowers to Pickering, who has no change. Higgins calls the flower girl on her earlier offer of change, and the flower girl is angered by Higgins's exposure of her lie. She throws the basket at his feet.

The clock indicates that it is now 11:30 P.M., and Higgins is reminded of his Christian responsibility. He throws coins at the girl, who shrieks with delight. After the gentlemen leave, Freddy returns with the sought after cab. The flower girl tells him they have taken a bus, and she approaches the cab herself. The driver secures the door against her entry, and when she produces coins, he lets her in. She tells the driver to take her to Angel Court in Drury Lane. Freddy is amazed at this turn of events, securing a cab for a gutter rat.

## Act 1 Analysis

The play's title is an allusion to Greek mythology. Pygmalion was a Cyprian king who was disgusted by the immorality of women, so he poured his affection into a beautiful marble statue. He prayed to Aphrodite, and she gave the statue life. Pygmalion married his beautiful "new" woman. This allusion foreshadows the play itself, the remaking of the imperfect into a more socially acceptable form.

Shaw establishes the setting as late night London in the rain. Two women, mother and daughter, have sought shelter from the weather in front of a church in Covent Garden, an area still known today for its markets. Freddie and his sister have a typical sibling relationship, one thinking the other inadequate. The flower girl contrasts the appearance of the two waiting women. The stage directions say, "[h]er features are no worse than theirs," indicating the superficial differences between the two classes.

The flower girl also represents an important lesson the playwright wanted to make in his writing. Her language is spelled phonetically, as best the apologizing playwright

can. George Bernard Shaw wanted to convey to his readers, in particular, that language breaks down barriers of class, and proper speech should be taught. According to Shaw's "Prologue," "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." By refusing to continue spelling the flower girl's speech phonetically, Shaw is making the point that if it cannot be spelled phonetically and understood, it is no language at all. He stops spelling her crude speech that way and uses traditional phonetics to record her speech from this point on in the play.

It is in dealing with the flower girl that Shaw makes his case about crowds. They quickly shift from sympathizing with the flower girl to admiring the note taker for his entertainment provided. He is able to identify where people are from by listening to their speech. Shaw also makes an important point about human beings in this first act. In referring to the note taker, the flower girl says, "'He's no right to take away my character. My character is the same to me as any lady's.'" The flower girl, whose features "'are no worse than theirs'" (referring to the mother and daughter), is, according to the playwright, distinguishable only by a little dirt and language. That language, Shaw proposed in his "Prologue," is correctable, making markers of class distinction removable.

In this first act, Shaw introduces readers/audiences to the setting, several characters and the theme. The setting is an area in London where theatergoers gather to await transportation home. Knowing this area to be such, the flower girl taps into the rich theatergoers. She is in fact successful in this endeavor and in so doing, interacts with several of the key characters in this play.

The characterization of the flower girl herself begins in this act. She has poor language skills, is dressed commonly and is unkempt. Her character introduces a theme. She and her description convey that she is no different from others around her other than her language and superficial appearance. She makes the point that no one has the right to take away her identity, and she does not defend that identity. She shrieks for her rights.

The characterizations of Higgins and Pickering are also begun in this act. Higgins is an arrogant, impatient professional who baits his audience with his knowledge and performance skills. Readers/viewers learn he is a successful author and dialectician, as is Pickering. He is a much more patient and sensitive man as seen in his defense and interactions with the flower girl. The two meet in a chance encounter and leave at the end of this act to share a meal. Higgins propels the plot forward with his boast to remake someone with poor speech patterns.

The Eynsford Hills are also introduced in this act. They are a family who travel in upper social circles, and the daughter is impatient and arrogant. Readers/viewer do learn, however, that money is an issue for this family, something that will be relevant in the final acts. The symbolism of the thunder and lightning when Freddy Eynsford Hill runs into Liza represents a cosmic force that will intrude into their lives.

The theme of language being a barrier to social acceptance is seen in the flower girl's character, in particular her speech patterns. Her moral character is never in question nor is her attire, but it is her pronunciation of words that classifies her as poor and uneducated. In a time of post-industrialization in England where the old order of class still holds archaic values and perceptions, Liza represents a reeducated and trained element into that order. Her soon-to-be-acquired language skills guarantee her entrance into any social circle even though she continues to be penniless. The emerging industrialized middle class could benefit from formal speech instruction, such as Liza received.

# Act 2

Act 2 Summary

It is 11:00 on the next day in Higgins's laboratory at his home. In one corner are file cabinets and a table with several instruments used for his work with speech. This includes an image of the vocal organs. A very comfortable chair and another chair flank the fireplace. A clock sits on the mantelpiece and a phonograph table with two chairs is nearby. A grand piano with its bench graces another part of this room but remnants of a previous meal sit on its keyboard. Pickering sits at the table, investigating some of Higgins's paraphernalia. Higgins is nearby.

In the morning light, Higgins presents himself as a healthy, attractive man of perhaps forty. He appears wealthy and professional. His focus is on his work, never on people and their feelings. He can be unintentionally rude and abusive in his rather excited pursuit of knowledge. Shaw compares him to "a very impetuous baby."

Pickering has just listened to Higgins's one hundred and thirty vowel sounds, and Pickering laments that he has only identified twenty-four. Higgins's housekeeper Mrs. Pearce enters and tells her employer that a "common girl" is asking to see him. Mrs. Pearce thinks the professor will want the low classed young woman to speak into one of his recording devices. Higgins thinks this will be a wonderful way to model his research on vowel sounds for Pickering.

The somewhat cleaned-up flower girl from the previous evening enters the laboratory, and Higgins is disappointed she is his guest as he already has recorded her. It is apparent that he has little use for women other than what they can do for him. Higgins refers to her as "'baggage,'" and threatens to throw her out. The flower girl counters with the fact that she is there to pay for speech lessons. Mrs. Pearce finds the girl unreasonable as she belittles the fact that the girl arrived in a cab and berates the girl for being unable to afford lessons from such a man as the professor. The host and

housekeeper repeatedly order the flower girl to sit down, and it is only after the conciliatory tone of Pickering that she does so.

When the flower girl tells her name to be Liza Doolittle, the gentlemen recite a poem about the various nicknames to which her name lends itself. Liza tells them not to be silly and Pearce reprimands her for speaking to a gentleman like that. Liza responds that he should speak to her respectfully too. Liza offers the professor about a shilling for her lessons, and he does the computation to decipher that that is an enormous percentage of her income, making this one of the most lucrative offers he has received. When the professor compares the amounts to what millionaires pay, Liza panics that her money will be taken from her, and Higgins threatens her after Pearce yells at her. Higgins offers the frightened and crying Liza a handkerchief, and instructs her on its use, contrary to the use of her sleeve. Pearce belittles Liza's appreciation for the professor's lesson and tries to take away the handkerchief, but Liza will not give it up.

Pickering has been listening to Liza's proposal and now makes a proposition to Higgins himself. He will pay for all the expenses, including lessons, for Liza's makeover if Higgins cannot successfully pass the girl off as upper class at the ambassador's garden party. Pearce tries to discourage her employer, but he finally commits to "'make a duchess of this draggle-tailed guttersnipe.'" In six months, perhaps as early as three if she is trainable, Higgins promises to be able to take her anywhere and she will be socially acceptable.

Higgins wants to begin immediately, so he orders Pearce to strip the girl down, burn her clothes and clean her up. Liza declares that she is a good girl, feeling quite compromised by the gentleman's words, and Higgins orders Pearce to beat the girl if she resists. Liza wants to run, and Pearce and Pickering question the professor of his right to do this so spontaneously, without even any place for her to stay.

Mrs. Pearce believes Higgins has no right taking this girl in without knowing anything about her. The housekeeper believes no creature is simply to be used, but Higgins eloquently informs her that he is preparing this woman for betterment; she will be

prepared for a new way of life in a new socio-economic class. When confronted with family connections, Liza tells them all that she is unmarried, and Higgins promises that she will have many offers of marriage when he is done with her.

Mrs. Pearce tells Liza to return to her family, and Liza tells them all that she is on her own, kicked out by her sixth stepmother. Higgins proposes Pearce adopt Liza, and, disregarding this idea totally, the housekeeper asks specific questions of the professor. She wants to know if Liza is going to be paid and what is to become of her when the experiment is finished. Liza is outraged by the way the housekeeper and Higgins are talking about her, especially when Higgins suggests that any money Liza should receive she would spend on liquor. At this, Liza implores Pickering for his intercession. Pickering tries to convince Higgins of Liza's feelings, but the professor disregards the Colonel's kind words. According to Higgins, Liza has "'not any feelings that we need bother about.'"

Liza has had enough and darts for the door when Higgins grabs a chocolate and baits her with it. She is afraid that there could be a drug in it, and Higgins slices it in half, eats one half and pops the other half into Liza's mouth. He coerces her with the fact that she can have daily rides in taxis and endless chocolates. Mrs. Pearce recognizes what he is doing and chastises him. Higgins does not relent; he throws gold and diamonds into the enticements, and Liza again says, "'I'm a good girl, I am.'"

Higgins reassures Liza that her virtue will remain intact with Pearce's supervision. Higgins paints a beautiful and successful future for his prospective student, and Pickering supports Mrs. Pearce's continual objections. He tells Higgins that Liza must have full understanding of what is about to occur. Higgins again berates the flower girl and responds that she is unable to comprehend what is happening. In an unusual twist of characterization to humility and human commiseration, Higgins shares that none of us fully understand what we are doing.

Higgins explains to Liza his proposal. He will meet all her living needs for the next six months while she stays at his home. In that time, he will teach her how to speak and

act beautifully, so much so that at the end of that time, he will take her to Buckingham Palace. If she is then discovered as a fraud, she will be beheaded, but if she is successful, Higgins will help her be established in a position in a lady's shop. Mrs. Pearce feels she should again explain all this to Liza, and takes her upstairs to her new bedroom.

When Liza reaches her new room, she feels unworthy of it and tells Pearce as much. Pearce patiently talks Liza through the modern conveniences in her room, such as a bath unit. Pearce tells Liza to strip down for a bath, and Liza believes she is about to be killed through taking chill. Liza confesses she has never taken a formal bath and has never taken off all her clothes. The housekeeper tries to convince Eliza that she needs to be clean on the inside and outside if she is to be the company of the gentlemen downstairs. After all, Higgins bathes every morning himself, which Liza finds unfathomable.

Liza approaches Mrs. Pearce and the bathtub with much trepidation in her dressing gown, a bathrobe-like article of clothing. Pearce tells her to test the water and shed the gown, but Liza is terrorized with the thought of being naked and freezing. Liza resists and Pearce throws the flower girl into the tub. Mrs. Pearce scrubs and Liza screams.

Downstairs Colonel Pickering and Higgins discuss Liza. The Colonel wants Higgins's assurance that he has no unseemly intentions toward the girl. Higgins assures his guest that he has instructed several beautiful women and they were nothing to him. He is sure he can treat this pupil the same way.

Mrs. Pearce is next seen entering the room where the gentlemen are with Liza's hat, which the housekeeper says must be put in the oven for a while, and tells the professor that Liza does not want the hat destroyed. Higgins agrees to keep it "'as a curiosity.'" Mrs. Pearce then asks Higgins that he watch his language around the girl. Pearce tells Higgins that when he loses something or is agitated, he is prone to use a word "'that began with the same letter as bath'" Higgins, of course, denies such usage, but Pearce brings back that morning's colorful language, and Higgins dismisses his words as

poetic demonstrations of alliteration.

The housekeeper continues with her criticism of the professor. She asks that he watch how he dresses at the breakfast table and what he actually uses for a napkin. She further adds that he should watch how he eats. Higgins does not quite see it the way his housekeeper does, but he agrees to be more aware in front of the girl. Pickering enjoys this interchange between Higgins and his housekeeper.

Mrs. Pearce leaves but returns shortly announcing the arrival of a garbage collector, Alfred Doolittle, who claims to be Liza's father. A dirty man dressed in the clothes of his trade enters. After introductions, Higgins offers Liza to her father, telling him to take her away. Higgins accuses Doolittle of sending Liza to his home in hopes of blackmailing the professor. Doolittle assures Higgins that he does not want his daughter back, nor did he come for money. Even Pickering wonders how Doolittle knows his daughter is there, and the father tells them that a boy coming for Liza's luggage informed him. Mrs. Pearce enters again and assures Doolittle that his daughter will be ready for travel as soon as her new clothes arrive. She tries to usher him into the kitchen, but he stops and attempts to discuss Liza once again with Higgins.

It is then that Doolittle offers his daughter to Higgins for five pounds. He makes a good case of having a father's investment paying off. Higgins offers Doolittle ten pounds, but the garbage collector refuses. He assures the men that the money will not be wasted; in fact, it will not be around come Monday and any more than what asked for will ruin Doolittle's chance for happiness. Liza's father perceives money as too controlling, and he will not have his fun ruined.

Pickering, who has been listening the whole time, suggests Doolittle marry the woman with whom he lives, but Alfred tells him that the woman is the hold up, and if you do not marry a woman young, she will never be fit to marry again. A man will pay for her experience and self-assuredness. Alfred commiserates with the men in the room that a woman will never be happy, so it is the man's wellbeing that should be the objective in relationships.

Doolittle starts to exit the room and he encounters a lovely, young woman in a Japanese kimono. He does not recognize her at first, and all the men present exclaim surprise at her attractive appearance. Liza feels uncomfortable and puts her hat on her head with an air of formality and familiarity. Pearce instructs Higgins not to flatter the girl and he agrees. Liza is angered that her father came for money to drink away, and Doolittle responds that the money certainly would not go in a church's collection plate. Pickering moves in between father and daughter as it becomes apparent the father's anger is rising, especially since Liza has already expressed her father's brutality in discipline. Doolittle leaves, threatening his daughter with physical punishment if she does not obey Higgins. The professor asks that Doolittle come to visit his daughter out of obligation and suggests that Higgins's brother, the clergyman, help father and daughter communicate. Doolittle leaves, promising to come in the future.

Liza informs the gentlemen that they will not see her father again since he will not come around a clergyman. Neither Higgins nor Liza wants to see him again. Liza tells Higgins and Pickering that she would like to take a cab to her old neighborhood and stand there for a while. She wants to show up those who once surrounded her. Higgins instructs her that it is snobbery to forget old friends when a station in life changes, but Liza tells her instructor that those friends of old mocked her. She feels no affinity for them. Mrs. Pearce announces the arrival of Liza's new clothes, and the women exit.

The next scene depicts Liza's lessons. Her stomach is out of sorts from the regular and rich meals she now eats, and she is afraid of her agitated, pacing instructor. The Colonel's presence calms the girl. Higgins tells the girl to say the alphabet, but her pronunciation is far from his desired sound. He does not relent. Liza shows some promise but tries to explain to her instructor that she cannot hear the difference he wants her to recreate. Higgins loses his patience with the now crying girl and tells Pickering to appease her with a chocolate. Pickering reassures Liza that Higgins will not drag her around the room. Higgins sends the distraught girl off to Mrs. Pearce, instructing her to practice and return later for another lesson. They repeat this pattern for months until Liza is ready for her first public appearance.

Act 2 Analysis

Pickering is visiting Higgins, and Eliza comes to secure speech lessons from the professor. Considering her an exceptional challenge, Higgins makes a bet with Pickering that he can have Eliza prepared for any social situation in six months. At first, Liza resists, thinking Higgins has questionable intentions, but when he lures her in with sweets, taxis and gems, she is hesitant to leave. Through the dialogue of this scene, readers/viewers learn more of the characterizations of Pickering, Higgins and Liza, and are introduced to Mrs. Pearce.

Pickering continues to be a gentleman in the truest sense in this scene. He serves as a foil to Higgins, who is brutish and insensitive in his dealings with Liza. Liza beseeches Pickering for his intervention with Higgins, and Pickering defends the visiting "lady." Eliza keeps repeating that she is a good girl, and this obviously is important to her. This implies that her virtue is in tact, and this, ironically, makes her a lady, according to the social mores of this time. When Eliza speaks, it is a common dialect, indicating lack of refinement and education. Her speech patterns are strongly contrasted with everyone else in the room, even Mrs. Pearce, a household servant. Mrs. Pearce clearly has been trained to serve someone of fine breeding and wealth. She knows her social status is subservient to Higgins but better than Eliza's is. Her allegiances shift from her employer to Eliza eventually. She is appalled by the audacity of the proposal to take someone in, remake her and then turn her out again.

Liza finally agrees to be led away. Pickering questions Higgins's character, and, in a thoroughly delightful dialogue with Pickering, Higgins asserts that men lose all sense when it comes to women. He further claims that men and women are decidedly different and should not try to cross those lines. Higgins is a confirmed bachelor and apparent misogynist.

It is not too much later that another character is introduced into the play. While Liza is upstairs bathing, her father, Alfred Doolittle, a garbage collector, arrives. He tries to blackmail Higgins for his daughter's honor. Higgins strategically offers Liza back to

Alfred, and the men engage in a witty conversation about the poor and their needs. Alfred is a very sensible and intelligent man. He argues his case well, and Higgins entertains the prospect of preparing him for Parliament or pulpit. By joining these two professions after hearing the manipulative words of Doolittle, the playwright suggests the fraud and misrepresentation that often occur in both professions. Doolittle also sees the acquisition of too much money as a threat to his fun. He feels too much money brings a certain responsibility and knowledge with it, and he wants no part of that. He wants only the five pounds he asks in trade for his daughter. Doolittle is witty and sharp, and he is entertaining. He is almost the socio-economic foil of Higgins. Both men are arrogant, sharp, manipulative and self-serving.

When Liza enters the room after her bath, her father barely recognizes her and the gentlemen are spellbound. She spars verbally with her father and readers/viewers find out she was raised "by hand." Her father continues to threaten her physically if she does not obey Higgins. There is no respect for Doolittle from his daughter as he is a garbage collector who does not work in his trade for more money, and there is little respect for Liza from her father as she is a woman.

# Act 3

Act 3 Summary

It is just before evening and a lady, who is over sixty, is writing in her fashionably and comfortably decorated room. This room is in direct contrast in furnishings and design to her son's, Professor Higgins. The son bursts into the room, much to his mother's anger. She has asked Henry not to come on her at-home days when she entertains other ladies because he offends her visitors.

Henry broaches the subject of Liza with his mother, and Mrs. Higgins hopes it is finally a love interest for her son, especially a young love interest. She admonishes him for not falling in love with anyone under forty-five, but he explains that he only finds women like his mother lovable. Henry has brought Liza to his mother's gathering to try out Liza's new language skills with her friends. The visitors arrive and there is no time for Henry to escape without an introduction to Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her daughter.

Henry is rather abrupt with his mother's guests when Colonel Pickering enters. Introductions are made, and Mrs. Eynsford Hill's son joins the group. It seems that this is the Freddy from the first act who was sent by the same mother and daughter to secure a cab for them on that rainy night. Higgins shares with the family that he recognizes them but cannot place them.

Henry tries to engage in small talk and then he and Miss Eynsford Hill share that they really wished people to speak what they really think. Higgins, however, knows better and tells the guests that 'we're all savages, more or less.'" Higgins shares that he believes that people do not know enough of life and the arts to discuss them properly. His mother warns him about his manners, and introduces Liza.

Looking stunning and speaking articulately, Liza makes her way to Mrs. Higgins, Pickering and the rest, as introductions are made. It is while the elegant and impressive Liza makes her way around the room that Mrs. Eynsford Hill recognizes something in Liza's eyes, and Henry remembers where he has seen his mother's guests before. Henry shares that it was in the rain at Covent Garden that he saw the family, and finds it ironic that they should be his first trial for Liza.

Mrs. Higgins moves the conversation along with talk of the weather. It quickly becomes a forum for Liza to tell the story of her aunt who was '"done in,'" a phrase with which the Eynsford Hills are unfamiliar. Liza claims that those around her aunt killed her to get her hat, a hat that should have come to Liza. Liza also tells the ladies and gentlemen of refinement that her father poured gin down this aunt's throat to get her over the flu, and it worked. Mrs. Eynsford Hill sympathizes with Liza over having a drinking father.

Liza assures the family that the drink did not really hurt her father; in fact, it made him easier to live with. Liza philosophizes that drink takes the sting out of a man's conscience, so he is easier to be around if he has been drinking. Through all this dialogue, Liza slips in and out of dialectic expressions. Professor Higgins sloughs it off as '"the new small talk,'" and this beautiful young woman charms Freddy, in particular.

Before she can say too much more, Higgins gives a sign for Liza to leave. In her departing words, she uses the word "bloody," a vulgar expression at that time. The other guests still attribute it to the new talk, and Mrs. Eynsford Hill tells her daughter she hopes Clara, the daughter, will not start using such terms. Mrs. Eynsford Hill looks to Pickering for support but he pleads ignorance since he has been in India so long. Clara finds the new language wonderfully fresh and '"quite innocent.'"

After that generational disagreement, Clara and her mother prepare to leave to attend three more at-homes. Pickering encourages Clara to use this new language heard from Eliza as they visit others. Clara tries out her "bloody" new word on Higgins as he

encourages her.

After they leave, Higgins asks his mother how Liza did, and Mrs. Higgins tells her son that his pupil cannot pass in society. She believes that living with and learning from her son is not an ideal environment for Liza. Pickering agrees with Mrs. Higgins that her son's language is abominable. Mrs. Higgins wants to know specifically what the relationship is between her son and Liza, implying something Higgins either wants to deny or does not comprehend.

Henry tells his mother that he has worked with the girl daily, and she is around now to find his things and remind him of appointments, taking some of the work off Mrs. Pearce. The two men praise Liza's sharpness and abilities, yet Mrs. Higgins tells both men that, "'You certainly area pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.'" She does not believe her son and his friend have acknowledged the gravity of the situation: what is to become of Liza when she is done. They assure her they will find Liza work as they prepare to leave, discussing their next trial for Liza and amusement for them. This infuriates Mrs. Higgins who cannot focus on her writing even after they leave.

More time passes and another test for Liza is about to happen. Eliza and her two gentlemen exit a cab in grand style and mount the steps to the Embassy in London. After hanging up their wraps, the three enter the gathering, and Professor Higgins is approached by a rather pleasant but hairy faced man. It is Nepommuck, a former student of Higgins' who is now an interpreter. Nepommuck sees himself as a great dialectician throughout all of Europe whereas Doolittle focuses on London. Nepommuck is summoned upstairs to use his skills and tells the trio that he is extorting money out of a Greek diplomat to keep quiet about his origin.

Pickering and Doolittle see Nepommuck as the ultimate challenge for their student. They ascend the stairs and join the reception line. The hostess instructs Nepommuck to find out everything he can about Eliza. Meanwhile Eliza circulates, drawing the admiration and stares of many. The hostess approaches the professor, who is disgusted with such a gathering of prudery and snobbery, and asks him about Eliza.

Nepommuck joins the group and exposes Eliza as a fraud. He knows her to be Hungarian, like himself, and of royal blood. He bases this on the fact that only a foreigner learns English so well. Higgins counters that Eliza is "'a London girl out of the gutter and taught to speak by an expert.'" Nepommuck and the hostess reject this.

Eliza joins her two mentors and apologizes for her apparent loss of the bet. It seems everyone is staring at her, and Eliza interprets this to mean that people think she is an oddity. She is in fact that, but as someone exceptional and not an oddity. She is recognized as a beautiful lady. Pickering tells Liza she has won the bet and the three leave to enjoy themselves over dinner somewhere else.

## Act 3 Analysis

Mrs. Higgins is in her drawing room when her son arrives. She chastises him because it is her at-home day, a day when ladies receive visitors. This is important to the setting of this play. It must be noted that the social structure of this time, a play completed in 1913, was extremely rigid for those of upper class. Their days were allotted for specific social and political purposes. Ladies often did charitable work and entertained other ladies, usually to solicit funds or to further their husband's careers. Of course, gossip loosened lips and pocketbooks.

When Liza joins Mrs. Higgins and the Eynsford Hills, she charms them all. Her son dismisses Liza's crude topics and awkward expressions as trendy language, shaming those who do not adopt it. Clara Eynsford Hill embraces the new expressions and plans to continue using them. Higgins encourages Clara to spread the word around, so to speak. Clara is very happy to oblige him. Clara wants to be on the cutting edge and willing to buy into anything new for social acceptance. This demonstrates the stupidity and superficiality of this class, a social commentary by Shaw. In this act the use of such sarcasm, as used by Higgins in this case, is a tool of satire.

Another character is introduced in this act, Henry's mother. She apparently knows her son well enough to keep him away from her guests because he is offensive. She is also

sensitive enough to know that Liza's well being might be in jeopardy in the hands of her son. She hears Henry and Pickering discuss Liza as an object of amusement and fears for the girl. She creates the metaphor of calling both men babies and Liza a doll, implying a period of play and then discard, a thing of entertainment, a toy. Mrs. Higgins also knows she cannot change her son.

Time passes and another test occurs for Liza. She passes it, even though Higgins acknowledges her background. His hostess and the hairy-faced former pupil of Higgins reject his words. They will not even entertain the thought that such grace and charm can be taught to anyone of a lower class. This again attests to the snobbery of this society using sarcasm.

# Act 4

Act 4 Summary

Eliza, Higgins and Pickering have obviously returned from an evening of social significance. Eliza is dressed elegantly, as are the gentlemen, but "her expression is almost tragic." Pickering admits to being a little drunk, and leaves to get the mail. Higgins inquires as to where his slippers are, and Liza dutifully gets them for him. Higgins does not even notice this act of kindness and suddenly realizes where his slippers are, as if they had been there all along.

As soon as he returns with the mail, Pickering wants to go to bed after this night of garden party, dinner party and opera. It is the final trial for Eliza and the men are gloating. Higgins's response to their victory is "'Thank God it's over!'" The two men discuss how the evening went, and Higgins laments the fact that he had to go through all these social conventions just to test Eliza. Higgins also refers to how tedious and eventually boring this whole project of creating an "'artificial duchess'" became. Liza listens to the men discuss her as a symbol of their greatness.

Pickering goes to bed, and when Higgins approaches the door, Eliza sits in his chair, grabbing the armrests. Higgins again inquires as to his slippers' whereabouts and Liza hurls them at the professor, finally breaking her silence. Higgins returns to Eliza and pulls her up, inquiring as to what is wrong. Eliza tells him that she has won his bet for him, and he calls her a "'presumptuous insect'." Liza tells Higgins she actually would like to kill him for taking her out of the gutter with no future after this bet. Liza shrieks and Higgins physically pushes her back into his chair.

Liza wants to know what is to become of her now. Higgins tells her he does not care, and Liza sees him as a brute for taking her off the streets, transforming her and then throwing her back onto the streets. Higgins asks her if the residents of the house have treated her badly, and Liza tells him they have not. He thinks she is just reacting to a

stressful evening, and he believes the end of the bet brings freedom to Liza. Liza recalls Higgins's statement, "'Thank God it's over,'" and feels so used by the professor. It is clear to her that she is just a pawn in this game the gentlemen played.

Liza keeps asking Higgins what is to become of her now. He responds that he believes she will find some employment or marry. He also comments that he had not realized that she would be leaving. He even confesses that she is "attractive" to men who consider marriage. He tells her things will look better in the morning. Liza glares at Higgins.

The professor then proposes that his mother might find someone for Liza, but she immediately responds that she sold flowers on the street not herself, and now that she is a lady, that is all she has left to sell. She wishes he had left her in the gutter. Higgins tells her she does not have to marry; perhaps Pickering will set her up in a florist shop. After all, according to Henry, the Colonel paid for her finery this night, and he is out a lot of pounds. It is now Higgins tells Liza he must get to bed.

As he leaves, Liza reminds him of his slippers and asks who owns the clothing she has acquired during this "'experiment.'" He is clearly angered at this question, but Liza pushes him harder. She tells him she does not want to be accused of taking what is not hers, and Higgins responds she can take the house but not the jewels; they are borrowed. She hands him the jewels she is presently wearing and gives over to him a ring he'd bought for her. Higgins tosses it into the fire and is outraged that she should appear so ungrateful and so hurtful. He loses his temper and turns on her threateningly. Liza tells him not to hit her, and Higgins tells Liza that she has hit him. He has lost his temper and that is a rarity. He is going to bed.

Liza tells the professor to leave his own note for Mrs. Pearce for coffee in the morning, something she was instructed to do earlier in this conversation. Higgins turns to Liza and formally damns Pearce, the coffee, Liza and his own stupidity for having shared his knowledge and feelings on this girl. Now it is time for Liza to gloat, and after he is gone, she retrieves her ring from the ashes.

Eliza goes to a room, a room even more beautiful than before with the addition of some large furniture, and changes her eveningwear into comfortable travel clothes. She takes only what she is wearing and leaves the house, sticking out her tongue at herself in the mirror before exiting her room. Freddie Eynsford Hill watches the second story light and says good night to his darling.

When Liza sees Freddy outside, she asks him what he is doing, and he tells her he is happy just waiting for her. She asks him if he thinks she is a guttersnipe, and Freddy tells her she is "'the loveliest, dearest-.'" Then Freddy smothers Liza in kisses, and she is so eager for acceptance and solace that she responds. A constable hurries them along, and Freddy tells him that they were just engaged. The couple flees.

When Liza and Freddy stop to talk, Liza tells Freddy she was headed for a hole in the river. He questions her and Liza reassures him there is no one else but the two of them. They hug and another constable interrupts them. They run again. Liza tells Freddy they can amble all night through the streets but a taxi brings another option. Freddy has no money but Liza offers to pay, as Pickering always made sure she had ten pounds on her when she left the house.

## Act 4 Analysis

Higgins's diction is extremely important in this act for creating tone. He uses such words as "bore," "simple purgatory," and "presumptuous insect" to convey how he feels about Liza and his bet with Pickering. Higgins cannot understand why Liza goes into a tirade. He believes it is just the aftermath of worry. He cannot understand that Liza is afraid she will end up on the street again selling flowers after having tasted such a wonderful way of life. Higgins sees the end of this bet as liberation for Liza; she can now pursue her interests, but Higgins is speaking as a man and a wealthy Londoner. Gender and money contribute to give Higgins endless choices, but Liza is still limited by societal conventions. She has no money and no background. Old money is still revered in London society, and Liza will never have that.

It is in this act at its very end that readers/viewers learn through Higgins's temper and dialogue that he does in fact care for Liza. Liza has verbally pushed him. She finishes her triumphant evening covering all the business aspects of the professor's bet. She not only wants to know what is to become of her, but also what is hers to take. The professor is offended that she should reduce the previous six months to an exchange of clothing. It is at his point that readers/audiences learn that, according to Higgins, he has indeed poured his "'regard and intimacy'" on Eliza.

This concluding scene is important for Liza as well. It shows the return of some of that independent spirit with which she arrived at the professor's six months earlier. It also shows her growth as a character. She is now aware of the complexity of her situation. She has been removed from one social class and placed into another under false pretenses. To which class does she now belong?

Liza's retrieval of the ring also hints at two other aspects of her characterization. She is still the practical flower girl, yet she is also the woman who has possibly been enamored by the professor and/or his lifestyle. She digs into the fading embers for the ring given her by the professor before she leaves his home.

As she exits the house, she runs into the lovesick Freddy. He lingers outside her window, and cannot control his passion when Liza is so forlorn. He wants to take care of her; yet, he cannot even afford to pay the cab fare for the two of them to ride around London all night. This adds another dimension to class structure and expectations. Ironically, Freddy, a young man of supposed substance, cannot afford to pay for a cab, but Liza, a former penniless guttersnipe, pays for the cab. The old order of social structure ran deeply in Victorian England. Freddy has the name and background but his situation appears direr than Liza's does.

# Act 5

Act 5 Summary

The setting shifts to Mrs. Higgins's home once more. Her maid announces that the professor and Colonel Pickering are there. The men are calling the police. Henry's mother tells the maid to tell Liza to stay upstairs until summoned.

Henry is distraught and tells his mother that Liza did not sleep in her bed last night. She returned early this morning, unbeknownst to him, to get her belongings, and Henry is angry that Mrs. Pearce did not tell him. Henry confesses he does not know his appointments without Liza, and Pickering enters to discuss the conversation with the police. Mrs. Higgins tries to imply that this is not a police matter. She tells them that they are treating Liza as if she were a thief or a lost article.

It is during their conversation that the maid enters to introduce Mr. Doolittle. Based on his appearance, the maid believes this visitor to be a gentleman. Henry does not think it is Liza's father, and he hopes to secure some information about Liza from this new relative.

Liza's dad enters the room dressed as a gentleman and accuses Henry of making him look like this. Pickering asks if Liza bought Alfred these clothes of gentility, but Doolittle tells him she did not. Henry inquires as to Liza's whereabouts, and Doolittle responds that he does not know where she is, and isn't Higgins the lucky one for having lost a woman.

Doolittle then tells his listeners why he feels Henry has "'Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality.'" It seems that Henry wrote Ezra D. Wannafeller, founder of Moral Reform Societies worldwide, telling him that Alfred Doolittle, a garbage collector, was "'the most original moralist at present in England.'" Wannafeller died but left in his will "'a share in his predigested Cheese Trust worth

three thousand a year on condition that I lecture for his Wannafeller Moral Reform World League as often as they ask me up to six times a year.'" Being an American, Wannafeller did not care about Doolittle's low class existence, so Doolittle immediately became someone of interest to Wannafeller.

Liza's father does not mind the lecturing but it is living a middle class life to which he objects. Now that he has money, he has more relatives, lawyers and doctors, all wanting some of his wealth. He used to get money from anyone he could, but now he is expected to give it out to others. According to Alfred, "'I have to live for others and not for myself: that's middle class morality.'" Doolittle is afraid he will soon become one of Higgins's students requiring betterment through speech, since his new economic status will put him in better social circles.

Mrs. Higgins tells Mr. Doolittle that he does not have to accept his newfound wealth, but he admits that he does not have the strength to turn it down. He already has to dye his hair to keep his job, and he cannot keep working forever. No, he knows he has to accept it at his age.

Professor Higgins feels he has paid Doolittle properly for the ownership of Liza, five pounds. Doolittle is relieved that Higgins still wants Liza because he sees her as one more relative trying to drain him financially. Having settled that, Higgins returns to wondering where she is. His mother tells Henry that Liza is upstairs, which astonishes him, and he tells his mother that he will go get her.

Mrs. Higgins then questions her son and Pickering as to their treatment of Liza on the previous night. At first both men agree that they said and did nothing offensive, but. Mrs. Higgins tells them that they gloated the previous night without recognition to Liza's talent and development. The professor's mother sees Liza as a sensitive woman who has worked very hard for not only her own social improvement but also their acceptance and respect, yet they shared with her last night that they were "'bored with the whole thing.'" Pickering begins to understand the complexity of Liza's feelings and situation, but Higgins continues to see the girl as ungrateful.

Mrs. Higgins tells Henry that Liza will not return to his home, and asks him to be on his best behavior if the girl comes down. Henry agrees and says, "'Let us put on our best Sunday manners for this creature that we picked out of the mud.'" Alfred defends his daughter at this point and asks some consideration for her. His wishes are momentarily respected, but then he is asked to go onto the balcony. Mrs. Higgins believes Liza could be overwhelmed by Henry's arrogance and Alfred's newfound wealth.

When Liza enters the room, Pickering admires this beautiful, poised young woman. Henry, who has been told to stop whistling by his mother, is ready for battle with Liza. She engages in pleasantries and Henry will have no part of it. He throws at her the belief that he is the one who gave her all the social skills. The agitated Henry boasts that he has "'created this thing,'" but he knows who she really is.

Liza will not be defeated and continues to be gracious, especially in thanking Colonel Pickering for his training in good manners and respectable language. Liza acknowledges that she never would have been able to behave and react acceptably if she followed Higgins's example. He swears, is hotheaded and impulsive. She thanks Pickering for calling her Miss Doolittle when she first arrived at Higgins's home. She explains that it was Pickering's respect for her that instilled respect in her. Higgins, on the other hand, will always see her as a flower girl and respond accordingly.

It is time for Alfred Doolittle to make his presence known to his daughter. He touches her shoulder, and she shrieks like in days of the not too distant past. Higgins mocks her sound and her quick retreat to those patterns when shocked. Alfred tells everyone he is about to marry Liza's "stepmother," and requests his daughter join them at the church. Doolittle also invites Pickering, who kindly accepts, and Mrs. Higgins says she would like to join them as well. Doolittle knows her presence will flatter and console his bride, a woman who has to be respectable now as part of that middle class mindset. Mrs. Higgins leaves to prepare for the wedding.

As they prepare to leave, Pickering asks Liza's forgiveness and inquires if she will come back to Wimpole Street. She responds that she doubts her father will allow it, but Alfred compliments the men in that there were two of them, so one will always support the other in whatever is said. They can also claim one chaperoned all the time. Doolittle wishes he had thought of that long ago. With that, Pickering and Doolittle leave to go to the church.

Liza and Henry are alone now for the first time since she left his home, so she darts for the balcony. Henry follows her, so she moves to the door where Henry awaits her. He asks her if she has had enough, and Liza tells him she will not return with him to wait on him. He responds that he never asked her to come back, but if she did, he would not change. Henry believes he treats everyone equally rudely, and Liza compares the professor to her father, who would continue to treat her abusively.

In a moment of surprising tenderness, Henry says to Liza, "'You never asked yourself, I suppose, whether I could do without you.'" Liza is afraid Higgins is manipulating her because Mrs. Pearce told her that she wanted to leave several times, but the professor worked his charm on her. Higgins elaborates on her possible return. He tells Liza that he does not want her to fetch for him, as that is no relationship. He would rather she return "'for the sake of good fellowship.'"

Liza tells Higgins she wishes she were left to sell her flowers because, like her father, Higgins is responsible for taking away her freedom, her independence. Henry offers to adopt her with a settlement of money for her, and then offers that Pickering marries her. Liza tells the professor that Freddy has been writing her and that he loves her. Higgins is angered, but Liza tells him "'every girl has a right to be loved.'" He challenges her that she just wants him to fawn over her, but Liza is clear when she tells him that she just wants some respect from him. She tells him honestly that she could have manipulated many a rich man sexually, given what she has learned on her own, but she has grown fond of Pickering and Higgins and wants some kindness returned to her. Henry agrees that theirs is not a sexual relationship, but finishes by calling her a fool.

He further challenges her to return to her former life and suffer the hardships of it. If she is lucky, she will get a rich man and blackened eyes. The cold, the violence, the stench and the strain cannot conceivably be preferable to a life around Henry Higgins. Liza agrees that she cannot go back to such a life; she has only the two gentlemen as friends and cannot live with someone low. She tells him she will marry Freddy when he can support her. This outrages Higgins because he cannot stand to see "his masterpiece" wasted on Freddy.

Eliza next proposes to Higgins that she become a teacher of phonetics, offering herself as assistant to another phoneticist. This infuriates Henry and he puts his hands on Liza. Seeing that she has finally broken through on some level to this man, she continues with her assault on the professor. She tells him that she will take out an ad, boasting her success in the transformation and offering the same assistance to wannabe duchesses. Higgins rather enjoys this feisty girl and again flatters himself on his achievement in her new persona. He concludes that she is in fact ready to take her place with the other two bachelors.

Henry's mother returns, ready to attend Doolittle's wedding. Liza asks if Henry will attend the wedding as well, but Mrs. Higgins explains that he cannot behave himself in church and will not be coming. Liza says goodbye to the professor, telling him she will not be seeing him again, and he smugly gives her an order of food and clothing she is to get. She tells him to purchase them himself as she leaves. Mrs. Higgins says she will get the items for his son, but with a high degree of certainty, Henry tells her Liza will get them. Henry Higgins is left alone as he "'chuckles; and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner.'"

## Act 5 Analysis

This is a very interesting act as the thematic thrust is further conveyed and characterization continues to be developed. Higgins is obviously distraught at Liza's absence. . He feels lost without her, as he cannot keep his appointments straight. As upset as Henry is, it is Liza's father who enters the room downtrodden and angry with

Henry. He resents Henry's intervention in Alfred getting middle class morality. Alfred sees having to live a middle class life as an infringement on his personal liberties. Doolittle now feels prisoner to middle class conventions and can no longer enjoy a life free of worries, obligations and expectations. Shaw does make the point here that the further one climbs the social ladder, the more one's freedom to be oneself is compromised.

When Liza finally confronts Henry at his mother's, she is exemplary in her self-control and deportment. She graciously thanks Pickering but Higgins remains aloof and arrogant. In thanking Pickering, Liza makes the statement that "'  from you that I learnt really nice manners; and that is what makes one a lady, isn't it?'" His calling her "Miss Doolittle" started her education. She felt some self-respect, and says, "'the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated.'" From the mouth of Eliza Doolittle comes the dominant theme in *Pygmalion*.

In keeping with the theme of class distinction and its pitfalls in Elizabethan society, Liza adds dimension to the playwright's assessment of a gentleperson. Through the dialogue between Liza and Henry, readers/viewers see the professor is one entrenched in upper class mentality. For Henry, that mentality gives him the right to be course and rude. He is also educated and that gives him an air of superiority and arrogance. He continues to refer to Liza as a "thing" completely reconfigured to his own specifications. He is the Pygmalion to Galatea, another thing, a statue.

When Alfred enters, he bemoans the fact that he must now live by middle class morality, and he is getting married. He laments the loss of his freedom and blames the professor for her newfound wealth. Ironically, these two gentlemen, Doolittle and Higgins, are both now prisoners to some form of morality. Doolittle must live a respectable life in his new socio-economic class and Higgins must now grow to accept what he has done to Liza and his dependency on her. Some form of mentality imprisons both men. Likewise, Liza is now less independent. By improving her status, Higgins, too, has imprisoned the daughter. She is now more dependent on others for her wellbeing since she cannot go back to selling flowers.

This is not the only issue between the professor and Liza covered in this play. Gender roles have pervaded throughout the text. Higgins has seen Liza as a possession. She is also seen that way when her father sells her to the professor. Now, as Higgins tries to entice her to return to his home, Henry again barters for her. This is not what Liza wants. In one of the most profound quotes in the play, encompassing social and gender themes, she says, "'Every girl has a right to be loved.'"

Again, Liza offers some of the most poignant lines in the play while talking about Freddy. Higgins wonders if Freddy can make anything of Liza, but Liza counters with, "'Perhaps I could make something of him. But I never thought of us making anything of one another, and you never think of anything else. I only want to be natural.'" Liza wants to enjoy a healthy relationship where man and woman can be themselves and not remake each other, profound wisdom that transcends generations and classes.

In keeping with his characterization, Henry again refers to Liza as his possession, his accomplishment, his trophy, his "masterpiece." She cannot tolerate such cruel degradation and proposes Freddy as an alternative to her present situation. Freddy, though having lived as a gentleman is another generation and open to new ideas and change. Higgins, on the other hand, is from the old order where ideas are firmly rooted. He is not as open to social mobility as a younger man is; he will always see Liza as a flower girl, and she knows this. She does not see herself returning to his domination.

# Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Shaw concludes his work in his "Epilogue." He tells what happens after Doolittle's wedding. He states that it is likely that the heroine of the romance would marry the hero, but this would not be in keeping with the characterizations. That Liza is remade is plausible, but that she would marry Higgins is unthinkable. Anyone with any knowledge of human nature and women know this to be the case.

When Liza told Higgins that she would not marry him, she was not baiting him; she meant it after careful thought. She knew Higgins was unfit to marry: only a woman in need of financial security and threatened by age would marry this confirmed old bachelor. Eliza, being young and perhaps idealistic, saw more choices. She did want a man too close to his mother, who set quite a high standard. Even if Mrs. Higgins were to die, Higgins would find literature or his work to channel his love and passion. With Henry an unlikely marital prospect, that left Freddy.

Freddy Eynsford Hill was a gentleman. He dressed nicely, had respectability and worshiped Liza. He knew her background and still loved her unabashedly. In fact, Freddy is likely to wait on Liza as she did Higgins. Even though they married, life was not easy for the couple. Freddy was poor and lacked education and training to secure a good job. Freddy kept up his appearance and manner in hopes of impressing some prospective wealthy patron, and Mrs. Eynsford Hill had hoped her son would marry well. He did just that.

Eliza's father quickly rose to social acceptance in the upper class. The middle class rejected him, but the wealthy were amused by him and courted his company. However, he could not support his own lifestyle and Liza's, so she considered other options. Liza even thought she might return to Wimpole Street with Freddy, but Higgins made it clear to her that Freddy was worthless, "'an extra piece of bedroom

furniture.'" Eliza thought she might teach phonetics, but Higgins told her she was not ready. She respected his and Pickering's advice more after her marriage than before.

The Colonel finally aided the struggling couple. The flower shop idea arose again and Pickering funded it for her. Higgins, of course, again saw Freddy as useless, "'an ideal errand boy.'" It just so happened that Freddy had thought of some commercial enterprise as well, but his was more in the line of Liza selling tobacco and he selling newspapers. Freddy was hesitant to broach this subject with Liza for fear of reprisal on his sister who was seeking matrimony with someone of substance in social circles. With that concern and the appearance of working class, the couple feared telling Mrs. Eynsford Hill about the venture and risk suffering her wrath, but that was not the case.

It seems that Clara bridged the way for their news. Clara, for some time, had been quite a snob keeping up the appearances of someone she was not. "She was, in short, an utter failure, an ignorant, incompetent, pretentious, unwelcome, penniless, useless little snob," according to Shaw. She was mocked, resented, ignored and excluded, but it was reading the work of H.G. Wells that gave her access to new people and new experiences. She was no longer laughed at but rather with, and when given the possibility of meeting Wells through employment, she took it. She accepted a position in a furniture shop, so Liza and Freddy were not the first to approach Mrs. Eynsford Hill regarding such work.

Liza and Freddy started their business venture with the help of the Colonel and the derision of the professor. The young couple was not adept at business and attended school to improve their skills. That was an arduous task and required Higgins' assistance in teaching Liza to write. He did so begrudgingly, and with time, the business took off. Unfortunately, however, "It is true that there was not quite fair play between them and their competitors in trade."

Liza continued to intrude in Higgins's housekeeping. She never got over the night she won the professor's bet, and continued to browbeat him in everything. Pickering would even ask her to relent some times, and she did. Liza knew the professor did not

need her but, according to Shaw, "she has a sense, too, that his indifference is deeper than the infatuation of commoner souls." He continues to fascinate her, and she imagines him with her on a desert island, having sex "like any common man." Even if she has this fantasy, the truth is that she does not like him or her father. She does, however, like her husband and Pickering.

Shaw's concluding words make reference to Galatea and her not liking Pygmalion, her sculptor. He is too much of a deity and she too respectful of that ever to be anything more than his creation.

## Epilogue Analysis

When the play concludes, readers/viewers do not really know Liza's fate. In a retrospective look, Shaw fills readers in on the story's conclusion. Does she return to Wimpole Street, or does she join Freddy? This is resolved in the "Epilogue." The last act would indicate from Higgins's smug look that Liza does return to him, but that is not the outcome. Shaw makes the case that the characterizations he has established for Liza and Henry could not be betrayed by their marriage. Liza is far too independent and, ironically, far too wise to marry Henry. Henry is too much a confirmed old bachelor, too enamored with his mother's image. Liza will take the choice of the man who accepts who she is and respects her.

It is Freddy Liza chooses to marry. He is an interesting character. In Act V, Liza told him of her background as they drove around in the taxi the night she ran away from Higgins. He does not care, yet it is his own social appearance that taxes him. His family could not afford an upper class education for this young man, so he is at a loss for skills to find employment. He keeps up appearances for himself in hopes of impressing perspective employers of upper class. Shaw refers to Freddy's mother as "a last relic of opulence of Largelady Park." She is quickly becoming a vestigial organ in the changing world. She holds fast to what was and not what is; she is associated with the old order and feels impregnable.

It is believed by some that Shaw wrote the part of Liza for a particular woman he was seeing and when she left him, Liza's choice was clear. Whatever the reason, Shaw's explanation of consistency of characterization works stylistically.

It is also interesting stylistically that the playwright put his denouement in an epilogue. After the climax, the confrontation of oppositional forces, who happen to be Liza and the men who use her, the reader/viewer has no sense of completion. The "Epilogue" not only settles any unknown outcome for protagonist and antagonist but also shares outcomes for two secondary characters, Freddy and his sister, Clara.

After so many acts, Clara becomes important in the "Epilogue." She is the one who paves the way for Liza and Freddy in their commercial enterprise. Mrs. Eynsford Hill might not have been as accepting of his son and daughter-in-law as merchants if her daughter had not gone through a tremendous transformation to end up in a furniture shop. Clara starts the play as an arrogant child living off the reputation of an era gone and a family name long impoverished. In fact, it is in the final words of this epilogue that Shaw informs his readers that the name of status, Eynsford Hill, is not the Freddy's christened name at all; it is, in fact, Freddy Challoner.

When Clara tries to catch a man of wealth, she keeps up appearances of something she is not. This brings to the forefront another of Shaw's themes, appearance vs. reality. Liza is someone she is not; her father is someone at the play's end he is not; and Clara and her brother have both posed as people of another social class of which they are no longer a part.

For as much as romantics want Liza with Higgins, this is impossible for Shaw. He found the common romantic solution, as shared in the beginning of the 'Epilogue," trite. In addition, he would not compromise the individuals of Higgins and Liza in a union doomed to fail. In comparing Liza and Higgins to Galatea and Pygmalion, Shaw sums up their relationship perfectly in saying that the "relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable." Thank you, Mr. Shaw, for making literature real, and not selling out to any literary period's need for romanticism.

# Characters

## Clara

See Miss Clara Eynsford Hill

## Doolittle

See Alfred Doolittle

## Alfred Doolittle

Alfred is Liza's father, whom Shaw describes as "an elderly but vigorous dustman. ... He has well marked and rather interesting features, and seems equally free from fear or conscience. He has a remarkably expressive voice, the result of a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve." Doolittle describes himself as the "undeserving poor," who need just as much as the deserving but never get anything because of the disapproval of middle-class morality. Nevertheless, he is a skilled moocher who is capable of finessing loans from the most miserly of people. He is miserable when he comes into money during the course of the play, however, because people then come with hopes of borrowing money.

## Eliza Doolittle

A cockney flower girl of around 18 or 20 years of age, Eliza is streetwise and energetic. She is not educated by traditional standards, but she is intelligent and a quick learner. As she presents herself in her "shoddy coat" at Higgins's laboratory, Shaw describes the "pathos of this deplorable figure, with its innocent vanity and consequential air." She learns a genteel accent from Higgins and, washed and dressed

exquisitely, passes in society for a Duchess. In this transformed state, she is shown to be capable of inspiring awe in the observer. While she wins Higgins's wager for him, she is shocked to find him lose interest in her once the experiment is complete; she cannot believe that he's given no thought to her future well-being. Pickering, by having been polite to her from the very beginning, provides a contrast, from which Liza is able to realize that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated." She learns from Higgins's behavior an even deeper truth, that social graces and class are not the true measure of a person's worth.

## Miss Doolittle

See Eliza Doolittle

## Freddy

See Frederick Eynsford Hill

## Henry Higgins

Henry Higgins is an expert in phonetics and the author of "Higgins's Universal Alphabet." Shaw describes him as "a robust, vital, appetizing sort of man of forty or thereabouts... .He is of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings-----His manner varies from genial bullying... to stormy petulance... but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likeable even in his least reasonable moments." In his book *Shaw: The Plays*, Desmond MacCarthy observed that "Higgins is called a professor of phonetics, but he is really an artist—that is the interesting thing about him, and his character is a study of the creative temperament."

For many, this temperament is a difficult one. His housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, observes of Higgins that "when you get what you called interested in people's accents, you never think of what may happen to them or you." Certainly, Higgins gives no thought to Liza's future after his experiment, and when he gradually loses interest in it, he seems, at least from her perspective, to have disposed of her as well. He is shaken by the independence Liza demonstrates and thus by the end of the play is able to show a kind of respect to her. It is on such terms and presented in such a way, however, that a romantic ending between himself and Liza is never really feasible.

## Mrs. Higgins

Henry's mother, a generous and gracious woman. She is frequently exasperated by her son's lack of manners and completely sympathizes with Liza when the girl leaves Higgins and takes shelter with her. She is perceptive and intelligent, and capable of putting Henry in his place. It is indicative of Mrs. Higgins's character that after the conflict between her son and Liza, both characters choose to come to her for guidance.

## Frederick Eynsford Hill

Freddy is an upper-class young man of around 20, somewhat weak although eager and good-natured. Proper and upstanding, he is infatuated with Liza and thoroughly devoted to her both before and after she takes shelter with him in an all-night cab after leaving Higgins. Liza claims to be going back to him at the end of the play, an idea which Higgins finds preposterous. Freddy does not have the money to support them both (and from Liza's perspective seems unfit for difficult work), which prompts her idea to earn a living by teaching phonetics.

## Miss Clara Eynsford Hill

A pampered socialite of around 20, she is somewhat gullible and easily disgusted.

Shaw writes that she "has acquired a gay air of being very much at home in society; the bravado of genteel poverty." Her social position is not secured, however, and this anxiety drives much of her behavior.

## Mrs. Eynsford Hill

The middle-aged mother of Freddy and Clara, whom Shaw describes as "well-bred, quiet" and having "the habitual anxiety of straitened means." She is acutely aware of social decorum and highly invested in finding proper spouses for her two children.

## Liza

See Eliza Doolittle

## Nepommuck

Higgins's first pupil and later his dupe, a Hungarian of around 30. The mustachioed interpreter, according to Higgins, "can learn a language in a fortnight—knows dozens of them. A sure mark of a fool. As a phonetician, no good whatever." He is completely fooled by Liza's performance as a lady of high society and declares that she must be a European duchess.

## Mrs. Pearce

Higgins's middle-class housekeeper. Very practical, she can be severe and is not afraid of reproaching Higgins for his lack of social graces. She is conscious of proper behavior and of her position, and quite proud. She is taken aback by the seeming impropriety of Liza coming into the Higgins household but quickly develops a bond with the girl, often defending her from Higgins.

# Pick

See Colonel Pickering

# Pickering

See Colonel Pickering

# Colonel Pickering

A phonetics expert like Higgins, this "elderly gentleman of the amiable military type," meets the latter in a rainstorm at the St. Paul's Church. The "author of Spoken Sanskrit," Pickering excels in the Indian dialects because of his experience in the British colonies there. Courteous and generous, as well as practical and sensible, he never views Liza as just a flower girl and treats her with the respect duealady of society. "I assure you," he responds to a challenge by Mrs, Higgins, "we take Eliza very seriously." Open-hearted, he finds it easy to sympathize with others and, decidedly unlike Higgins, is conscience-stricken when he fears he's hurt Liza.

# Themes

## Appearances and Reality

*Pygmalion* examines this theme primarily through the character of Liza, and the issue of personal identity (as perceived by oneself or by others). Social roles in the Victorian era were viewed as natural and largely fixed: there was perceived to be something inherently, fundamentally unique about a noble versus an unskilled laborer and vice versa. Liza's ability to fool society about her "real" identity raises questions about appearances. The importance of appearance and reality to the theme *of Pygmalion* is suggested by Liza's famous observation: "You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated."

## Beauty

*In Pygmalion,* Shaw interrogates beauty as a subjective value. One's perception of beauty in another person is shown to be a highly complex matter, dependent on a large number of (not always aesthetic) factors. Liza, it could be argued, is the same person from the beginning of the play to the end, but while she is virtually invisible to Freddy as a Cockney-speaking flower merchant, he Is totally captivated by what he perceives as her beauty and grace when she is presented to him as a lady of society.

## Change and Transformation

The transformation of Liza is, of course, central to the plot and theme *of Pygmalion*. The importance at first appears to rest in the power Higgins expresses by achieving this transformation. "But you have no idea," he says, "how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a

new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul." As the play unfolds, however, the focus shifts so that the effects of the change upon Liza become central. The truly important transformation Liza goes through is not the adoption of refined speech and manners but the learning of independence and a sense of inner self-worth that allows her to leave Higgins.

## Identity

The indeterminacy of appearance and reality in *Pygmalion* reveals the significant examination of identity in the play. Shaw investigates conflicts between differing perceptions of identity and depicts the end result of Higgins's experiment as a crisis of identity for Liza. Liza's transformation is glorious but painful, as it leaves her displaced between her former social identity and a new one, which she has no income or other resources to support. Not clearly belonging to a particular class, Liza no longer knows *who she is.*

## Language and Meaning

In an age of growing standardization of what was known as "the Queen's English," *Pygmalion points* to a much wider range of varieties of spoken English. Shaw believed characteristics of social identity such as one's refinement of speech were completely subjective ones, as his play suggests. While Shaw himself hated poor speech and the varieties of dialect and vocabulary could present obstructions to conveying meaning, nevertheless the play suggests that the real richness of the English language is in the variety of individuals who speak it. As for the dialect or vocabulary of any one English variety, such as Cockney, its social value is determined in *Pygmalion* completely by the context in which it is assessed. While Liza's choice of words as a Cockney flower merchant would be thought as absurd as her accent, they are later perceived by the mannered Eynsford Hill family to be the latest trend, when they are thought to emanate from a person of noble breeding.

## Sex Roles

Sex and gender have a great deal to do with the dynamics between Liza and Higgins, including the sexual tension between them that many audience members would have liked to see fulfilled through a romantic union between them. In Liza's difficult case, what are defined as her options are clearly a limited subset of options available to a woman. As Mrs. Higgins observes, after the conclusion of the experiment Liza will have no income, only "the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living." To this problem Higgins can only awkwardly suggest marriage to a rich man as a solution. Liza makes an astute observation about Higgins's suggestion, focusing on the limited options available to a woman: "I sold flowers, I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else."

## Ubermensch ("Superman")

Shaw's belief in the Life Force and the possibility of human evolution on an individual or social level led him to believe also in the possibility of the Superman, a realized individual living to the fullest extent of his or her capacity. (The naming of the concept is credited to the influential German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 1844-1900). Shaw addresses the topic explicitly in his play *Man and Superman* and in many other works, but he also approaches it in *Pygmalion*. Higgins, for example, represents the height of scientific achievement in his field, though he may be too flawed as an individual to continue evolving towards a superhuman level. Liza, proving herself capable of one type of transformation, also makes an important step towards self-awareness and self-realization, which for Shaw is the beginning of almost endless possibilities for personal development.

## Wealth and Poverty

One of the many subjects under examination in *Pygmalion* is class consciousness, a

concept first given name in 1887. Shaw's play, like so many of his writings, examines both the realities of class and its subjective markers. The linguistic signals of social identity, for example, are simultaneously an issue of class. Economic issues are central to Liza's crisis at the conclusion of Higgms's experiment, for she lacks the means to maintain the standard of living he and Pickering enjoy. Doolittle's unforeseen rise into the middle class similarly allows Shaw to examine wealth and poverty. Though Doolittle fears the workhouse he's not happy with his new class identity, either; Shaw injects humor through Doolittle's surprising (according to traditional class values) distaste for his new status.

# Style

## Plotting with a Purpose

In *Pygmalion's* plot, Higgins, a phonetics expert, makes a friendly bet with his colleague Colonel Pickering that he can transform the speech and manners of Liza, a common flower girl, and present her as a lady to fashionable society. He succeeds, but Liza gains independence m the process, and leaves her former tutor because he is incapable of responding to her needs.

*Pygmalion* has a tightly-constructed plot, rising conflict, and other qualities of the "well-made play," a popular form at the time. Shaw, however, revolutionized the English stage by disposing of other conventions of the well-made play; he discarded its theatrical dependence on prolonging and then resolving conflict in a sometimes contrived manner for a theater of ideas grounded in realism. Shaw was greatly influenced by Henrik Ibsen, who he claimed as a forerunner to his theatre of discussion or ideas. Ibsen's *A Doll House,* Shaw felt, was an example of how to end a play indeterminately, leading the audience to reflect upon character and theme, rather than simply entertaining them with a neatly-resolved conclusion.

## Intellect vs. Entertainment

Shaw broke both with the predominant intellectual principle of his day, that of "art for art's sake," as well as with the popular notion that the purpose of the theatre was strictly to entertain. Refusing to write a single sentence for the sake of either art or entertainment alone, Shaw openly declared that he was for a theater which preached to its audience on social issues. Edward Wagenknecht wrote in A *Guide to Bernard Shaw* that Shaw's plays "are not plays: they are tracts in dramatic form." He further reflected a popular perception of Shaw's plays as intellectual exercises by stating that Shaw "has created one great character—G.B.S. [George Bernard Shaw]—and in play

after play he performs infinite variations upon it." Thus, in his day Shaw was viewed as succeeding *despite* his dramatic technique rather than because of it. Wagenknecht again: "it is amazing that a man whose theory of art is so patently wrong should have achieved such a place as Shaw has won."

Though his plays do tend towards ideological discussion rather than dramatic tension, Shaw succeeded because he nevertheless understood what made a play theatrical, wrote scintillating dialogue, and always created rich, complex characters in the center of a philosophically complex drama. Among his character creations are some of the greatest in the modern theatre, especially the women: Major Barbara, Saint Joan, Liza Doohttle. Also, Shaw's deep belief in the need for social improvement did not prevent him from having a wry sense of humor, an additional component of his dramatic technique which helped his plays, *Pygmalion* most predominantly, bridge a gap between popular and intellectual art.

## Romance

In calling *Pygmalion a romance* (its subtitle is "A Romance in Five Acts"), Shaw was referencing a well-established literary form (not usually employed in theatre), to which *Pygmalion* does not fully conform. (Shaw was aiming to provoke thought by designating his play thusly.) The term romance does not imply, as it was misinterpreted to mean by many of Shaw's contemporaries, a romantic element between Liza and Higgins. Since the middle ages, romances have been distinguished from more realistic forms by their exotic, exaggerated narratives, and their idealized characters and themes. Shaw playfully suggests *Pygmalion* is a romance because of the almost magical transformations which occur in the play and the idealized qualities to which the characters aspire.

# Historical Context

## World War I

Nineteen-fourteen, the year of *Pygmalion's* London premiere, marked tremendous changes in British society. On July 28, the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia, setting off an international conflict due to a complicated set of alliances which had developed in Europe. Within two weeks, this conflict had erupted into a world war (known in Britain at the time as the "Great War"). By the end of World War I (as it came to be known later), 8.5 million people had been killed and 21 million wounded, including significant civilian casualties. The war constituted the most intense physical, economic and psychological assault on European society in its history; Britain was not alone in experiencing devastating effects on its national morale and other aspects of society.

It is ironic, Eldon C. Hill wrote in *George Bernard Shaw*, that *Pygmalion*, "written partly to demonstrate that language (phonetics particularly) could contribute to understanding among men, should be closed because of the outbreak of World War I." The war brought out Shaw's compassion, as well as his disgust with the European societies that would tolerate the destruction of so many lives. When the actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell informed Shaw of the death of her son in battle, he replied that he could not be sympathetic, but only furious: "Killed just because people are blasted fools," Hill quoted the playwright saying. To Shaw, the war only demonstrated more clearly the need for human advancement on an individual and social level, to reach a level of understanding that would prevent such tragic devastation.

## Colonialism and the British Empire

In 1914 Great Britain was very much still a colonial power, but while victory in the First World War actually increased the size of the British Empire, the war itself

simultaneously accelerated the development of nationalism and autonomy in the provinces. Even before the war, British pride in its Empire had reached a climax prior to the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, and the brutalities of the Boer War (1899-1902), fought to assert Britain's authority in South Africa. Still, British society proudly proclaimed that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" and believed in Britain's providential mission in geographies as widely diverse as Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, India, Burma, Egypt, the Sudan, South Africa, Nigeria, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, and numerous other islands throughout the Caribbean, and Canada.

In addition to providing a symbolic unity to the Empire, the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) also gave coherence to British society at home, through a set of values known as Victorianism. Victorian values revolved around social high-mindedness (a Christian sense of charity and service), domesticity (most education and entertainment occurred in the home, but children, who "should be seen and not heard," were reared with a strict hand) and a confidence in the expansion of knowledge and the power of reasoned argument to change society. By the time of Victoria's death, many of the more traditional mid-Victorian values were already being challenged, as was the class structure upon which many of these values depended. Victorianism, however, survived in a modified form through the reign of Victoria's son, Edward. 1914, the year of *Pygmalion* and the onset of the Great War, constituted a much different kind of break, symbolic and social.

## Industrialization

The growth of industrialization throughout the nineteenth century had a tremendous impact on the organization of British society, which had (much more so than the United States) a tradition of a landed aristocracy and a more hierarchical class system—a pyramid of descending ranks and degrees. Allowing for the growth of a merchant middle class, industrialization changed British society into a plutocracy—an aristocracy of money more than land. Social mobility, however, still did not widely

extend into the lower classes, propagating a lack of opportunity reflected in Liza's anxiety over what is to happen to her following Higgins's experiment.

Industrialization brought about a demographic shift throughout the nineteenth century, with more and more agricultural laborers coming to seek work in the cities. Unskilled laborers like the Doolittles competed for limited employment amid the poverty of the inner city and were largely at the mercy of employers. Increased health standards combated urban crises like tuberculosis and cholera, but slum conditions and rampant urban poverty remained a major social problem after the turn of the century. *Pygmalion* suggests the subjectivity of class identity, and the rapid deterioration of many pre-mdustri-al social structures, but strict class distinctions of another kind nevertheless persisted. This fact is suggested by the severely disproportionate distribution of wealth in Britain at the time: during the years 1911-1913, the top 1% of the population controlled 65.5% of the nation's capital. The poorest of the poor, meanwhile, were often forced into workhouses, institutions which had been developed in the 17th century to employ paupers and the indigent at profitable work. Conditions in the workhouses differed little from prisons; they were deliberately harsh and degrading in order to discourage the poor from relying upon them. Conditions in the workhouses improved later in the 19th century but were still unpleasant enough that fear of going to one, for example, causes Doolittle in *Pygmalion* to accept his new position in the middle class even though it is displeasing to him for other reasons.

## The Rise of Women and the Working Classes

During the decade which produced *Pygmalion*, the political power of the working class increased greatly, through massive increases in trade union membership. Bitter class divisions gave rise to waves of strikes and disturbances, including amajor railway strike in 1911, a national miners' strike in 1912, and the' Triple Alliance" of miners, railway, and transport workers in 1914. A new political party, Labour, came into existence in 1893, advancing an eight-hour work day and other workplace reforms. Meanwhile, reforms to laws concerning suffrage, the right to vote, further

brought men (and later, women) of the working class into Britain's ever-more participatory democracy. Suffrage (the right to vote) had in Britain always been based on requirements of property ownership, reflecting the contemporary idea that only landowners were considered reasoned and informed enough to vote but also that they would do so in the best interest of those in the classes below them. These property requirements were gradually relaxed throughout the nineteenth century, gradually increasing the size of the male electorate.

Only after many years of political straggle by organizations of women known as "suffragettes" did women achieve the right to vote: first in 1918 for women over 30 who also met a requirement of property ownership, then extended in 1928 to all women over the age of 21 (as was already the case for men). Increased political participation further prompted a shift in sex roles: British society had already noted the phenomenon of "the new woman," and was to see further changes such as increasing numbers of women in the work force, as well as reforms to divorce laws and other impacts upon domestic life.

# Critical Overview

Building upon the acclaim *Pygmalion* had received from German-language production and publication, the original English production of the play at His Majesty's Theatre was likewise a success, securing Shaw's reputation as a popular playwright. Still, contemporary reviews *of Pygmalion* are mixed, revealing the somewhat prejudicial views English critics continue to hold towards Shaw's work. For example, an unsigned review in the *Westminster Gazette,* reprinted in *Shaw: The Critical Heritage,* criticized many aspects of the production but had qualified praise for the play, "a puzzling work." Aware that Shaw usually "does not use the drama merely as a vehicle for telling stories," the critic expressed a curiosity about what "the foundation idea" of *Pygmalion* might be. "Curiosity, in the present instance," however, "remains unsatisfied. There are plenty of ideas, but none is predominant.

Alex M. Thompson, meanwhile, wrote in a review in the *Clarion* that "Britain's most famous playwright has won his place at last on the stage of Britain's most famous playhouse" but regretted that "while the great play Wright's really significant plays" were wasted through production elsewhere, "the play admitted to our classic shrine is one whose purpose, according to the author himself, is 'to boil the pot.'" H. W. Massingham, in a review for the *Nation,* declared that "there is a fault in the piece as well as in its production," namely that Shaw "observes too coldly": in pursuing the clash of wits, the excitement of argument, he obscures real beauty and affection. Shaw, somewhat like Higgins, "hides his spirituality or his tenderness under a mask of coarseness," to the extent that he "has failed to show his audience precisely what he meant."

The sensation caused by Shaw's use of the mild profanity "bloody" (breaking with tradition at His Majesty's Theatre) went a long way to ensure the publicity for *Pygmalion*, but many critics found the language of the play shocking. T. F. Evans commented in his notes for *Shaw: The Critical Heritage,* that "[it] is almost impossible ... to assess accurately the critical response to the play itself because of the

totally disproportionate amount of space, time and attention that was given to the use by Shaw... of the word 'bloody'.... Some critics who might have been expected to give largely favourable comments on the play seem to have allowed the use of the adjective to affect them." By 1938, however, the year Pygmalion was made into a movie, Shaw's text was still dramatic and challenging but much of the shock had faded. Of the film version, Desmond MacCarthy observed in *Shaw: The Plays* that "'bloody' still gets its laugh, but it no longer releases the roar that greets the crash of a taboo."

In his 1929 study *A Guide to Bernard Shaw,* Edward Wagenknecht demonstrated the delicate balance many critical interpretations of Shaw in that era tried to maintain, explaining how Shaw had succeeded despite breaking many established conventions of dramatic art. Shaw "revolted" against deeply-held ideas that literature is writing which supersedes a specific purpose other than to communicate life experience, and is not didactic. "It is amazing," Wagenknecht wrote, "that a man whose theory of art is so patently wrong should have achieved such a place as Shaw has won."

By the end of Shaw's life, his status as perhaps the greatest single English dramatist since Shakespeare was secure, but nevertheless critical opinion on him appeared mixed and in many cases prejudiced. Eric Bentley wrote in his book *Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950,* that in reviewing the already voluminous writing on Shaw, "I found praise, but most of it naive or invidious. I found blame, but most of it incoherent and scurrilous." Perhaps Shaw's complexity of thought provoked these mixed (and largely unsatisfying) critical assessments, to the extent that to some critics "Shaw, the champion of will and feeling, is an arch-irrationalist," but to others "Shaw, the champion and incarnation of intellect, is the arch-rationalist." In *Pygmalion* Bentley found a play of "singularly elegant structure ... a good play by perfectly orthodox standards" needing "no theory to defend it."

In his summary of the play's merits, Bentley avoided the tendency of earlier critics to distinguish sharply between various aspects of Shaw's work, instead celebrating the intimate connection between them. *Pygmalion*, he wrote, "is Shavian, not in being made up of political or philosophic discussions, but in being based on the standard

conflict of vitality and system, in working out this conflict through an inversion of romance, in bringing matters to a head in a battle of wills and words, in having an inner psychological action in counterpoint to the outer romantic action ... in delighting and surprising us with a constant flow of verbal music and more than verbal wit." Bentley' s modern assessment of the complexity of Shaw's political thought and dramatic method established a precedent for much Shavian criticism of the last fifty years.

Beginning immediately with the first English production of *Pygmalion,* a popular debate developed as to whether there should have been a romantic ending between Higgms and Liza. Shaw insisted that such an ending would have been misery for his characters but producers and audiences nevertheless tended to prefer a romantic ending. MacCarthy expressed the sentiments of many when he wrote about the original production "when the curtain fell on the mutual explanations of this pair [Higgins and Liza] I was in a fever to see it rise on Acts VI and VII; I wanted to see those two living together."

When the play was first published in 1916, Shaw added an afterword which recounted what Liza did after leaving Higgins and was intended to show to audiences that there was to be "no sentimental nonsense" about the possibility of Higgins and Liza being lovers. The English-language film of *Pygmalion* gave Shaw another opportunity to remove "virtually every suggestion of Higgins's possible romantic interest in Liza" He was to discover, however, at a press show two days before the film's premiere, that the director had hired other screenwriters who added a "sugar-sweet ending" in which Higgins and Liza are united as lovers. MacCarthy commented in 1938 that the effect of the changes in the film version "is merely that of a wish fulfillment love story of a poor girl who became a lady and married the man who made her one." He observes that the difference is "due to a peculiarity inherent in the art of cinema itself (a need for closure), and that the changed ending is no doubt what accounts for the film's "immense popularity."

# Criticism

# Critical Essay #1

*Busiel is an English instructor at the University of Texas. His essay considers Shaw's play within the context of his other great works.*

Like all of Shaw's great dramatic creations, *Pygmalion* is a richly complex play. It combines a central story of the transformation of a young woman with elements of myth, fairy tale, and romance, while also combining an interesting plot with an exploration of social identity, the power of science, relations between men and women, and other issues. Change is central to the plot and theme of the play, which of course revolves around Higgins's transformation of Liza from a flower-girl who speaks a coarse Cockney dialect (a manner of speech which he says will "keep her in the gutter to the end of her days") into a lady who passes as a duchess in genteel society. The importance of transformation in *Pygmalion* at first appears to rest upon the power Higgins expresses by achieving his goal. "But you have no idea," he says, drawing attention to his talent, "how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her."

But where does the real transformation occur in Liza? Much more important than her new powers of speech, ultimately, is the independence she gains after the conclusion of Higgins's "experiment." Charles A. Berst noted in his study *Bernard Shaw and the An of Drama* that Shaw omitted from *Pygmalion* the scene of the ball at the Ambassador's mansion where Liza shows herself as the triumph of Higgins's art. The reason Shaw does so is "because the emphasis here is not on the fairy-tale climax of the triumphant 'test' ... but on the social and personal ramifications of the real world to which Eliza must adjust after the test." In short, Liza realizes Higgins's lack of concern at her unsure future, and she turns on her' "creator," leaving him.

Higgins's successful transformation of Liza contradicts the class rigidity of Victorian and Edwardian society, demonstrating Shaw's belief in the highly subjective construction of social identities. A proponent of a school of thought known as

Fabianism, Shaw believed firmly in the power of individuals to transform, to improve themselves. Drawing on a power Shaw called the Life Force, human beings could both evolve to the full extent of their capabilities and collectively turn to the task of transforming society. Eric Bentley wrote in *Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950* that "Fabianism begins and ends as an appeal—emotionally based—for social justice." In the Fabian perspective, social systems are changeable and need to change. Shaw introduced his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* by encouraging the reader to "clear your mind of the fancy with which we all begin as children, that the institutions under which we live, including our legal ways of distributing income and allowing people to own things, are natural, like the weather. They are not.... They are in fact transient makeshifts; and many of them would not be obeyed, even by well-meaning people, if there were not a policeman within call and a prison within reach. They are being changed constantly by Parliament because we are never satisfied with them."

As a Fabian, Shaw believed in human improvement and evolution as the key to social transformation. What Liza learns by breaking free of Higgms's influence is an independence of thought Shaw believed was a crucial component of personal evolution. Berst emphasized the importance of this process by which "a soul awakens to true self-realization." Having shown that there are no hard and fast rules for social identity, Shaw does not allow his leading character to remain limited within a society in which she can only marry for money. Liza identifies such an arrangement as a kind of prostitution, an explicit example of how, as Bentley summarized, in a culture built around "buying and selling the vast mass of the population has nothing to sell but itself." Instead, Shaw has Liza break free—into an uncertain future to be sure but one in which she will work, struggle, and, hopefully, prosper as an independent woman.

Shaw did not believe in the sense of innate inequality which dominated British society around the turn of the century, in the supposedly natural divisions between classes based on built-in qualities of character. Instead, he believed in the power of "nurture" over "nature," and the "conditioning effects of social circumstance," as discussed by Lynda Mugglestone in the *Review of English Studies.* Though Liza appears rough on the edges to the standards of Edwardian society, she has self-respect, pride, ambition,

and a sense of humor—all qualities which help her mature to the independence she achieves by the play's end. That Liza has such great success mastering the speech of a duchess suggests that all people are fundamentally of equal worth, that the social differences between them are merely the result of different levels of opportunity (financial and otherwise). In Shaw's view, meanwhile, a Socialist society would mean "equal rights and opportunities for all," a definition he gave in a Fabian pamphlet published in 1890.

As Mugglestone wrote, Eliza's education in the ways that the English upper classes act and speak provides an opportunity for the playwright to explore "the very foundations of social equality and inequality." What we discover in *Pygmalion* is that phonetics and "correct" pronunciation are systems of markers superficial in themselves but endowed with tremendous social significance. Higgins himself observes that pronunciation is "the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul." Playwright and character differ, however, in that instead of criticizing the existence of this gulf, Higgins accepts it as natural and uses his skills to help those who can afford his services (or are taken in as experiments, like Liza) to bridge it.

Act *III of Pygmalion* highlights the importance of Liza's double transformation, by showing her suspended between the play's beginning and its conclusion. At Mrs. Higgins's "At Home" reception, Liza is fundamentally the same person she was in Act I, although she differs in what we learn to appreciate as "superficialities of social disguise" (according to Mugglestone): details of speech and cleanliness. "In modern society, however, as Shaw illustrates, it is precisely these superficial details which tend to be endowed with most significance." Certainly the Eynsford Hills view such details as significant, as Liza's entrance produces for them what Shaw's stage directions call "an impression of ... remarkable distinction and beauty." Ironically, however, Liza's true transformation is yet to occur. She experiences a much more fundamental change in her consciousness when she realizes that Higgins has more or less abandoned her at the conclusion of his experiment.

At first, Liza experiences a sense of anxiety over not belonging anywhere: she can hardly return to flower peddling, yet she lacks the financial means to make her new, outward identity a social reality. "What am I fit for?" she demands of Higgins. "What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?" Berst wrote that "while Pickering is generous, Eliza is shoved into the wings by Higgins. The dream has been fulfilled, midnight has tolled for Cinderella, and morning reality is at hand." Liza must break away from Higgins when he shows himself incapable of recognizing her needs. This response of Higgins is well within his character as it has been portrayed in the play. Indeed, from his first exposure to Liza, Higgins denied Liza any social or even individual worth. Calling Liza a "squashed cabbage leaf," ^Higgins states that "a woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live." While treated primarily with humor, Higgins is a kind of anti-hero in Shaw's dramatic universe, because he accepts as natural the divisions among the classes. Assuming that Liza has no inherent worth, Higgins believes only he can bestow worth upon her, by helping her pass in society as a lady.

A romantic union between Liza and Higgins is impossible primarily because unlike her, he is incapable of transformation. He remains the confirmed bachelor that he has always been, an unsuitable Prince Charming denying either a fairy-tale ending to *Pygmalion* or a satisfactory marriage to its "Cinderella. " Nowhere is Higgins shown more strongly to be incapable of change than in his response to Liza's challenge to him. Liza has thrown his slippers at him out of frustration with his lack of concern for her. "I'm nothing to you," she observes, "not so much as them slippers." Higgins instantly corrects her with "those slippers," a mechanical response which shows him clinging to the externals of his trade, incapable of recognizing the importance of the change which has come over Liza.

The response of audiences and actors alike was strongly in favor of a romantic liaison between Higgins and Liza, but such a future for the characters would depend upon a transformation m Higgins which he is incapable of making. Indeed, Berst ventured, a "close examination of Higgins's character and comments cannot support a romantic

conclusion. He is by nature celibate and self-centered, slightly perverse in both respects." Shaw altered the play's ending to make his point more explicit, and when the play was first published in 1916, he added an afterword which recounted what Liza did after leaving Higgins. This was intended to show to audiences that there was to be "no sentimental nonsense" about the possibility of Higgins and Liza being lovers.

**Source:** Christopher Busiel, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale, 1997.

# Critical Essay #2

*Solomon addresses the controversy surrounding the ending of Shaw's Pygmalion in this essay. Examining the play's action, he concludes that the playwright's original denouement is the only appropriate one.*

*Solomon is an educator and critic who specializes in film theory,*

*Pygmalion* is one of Shaw's most popular plays as well as one of his most straightforward ones. The form has none of the complexity that we find in *Heartbreak House or Saint Joan*, nor are the ideas in *Pygmalion* nearly as profound as the ideas in any of Shaw's other major works. Yet the ending of *Pygmalion* provokes an interesting controversy among critics. Higgins and Eliza do not marry at the end of the written text, while the play as it is usually produced often does reconcile the two main characters. Obviously many directors and many readers feel that the apparent unromantic ending is an arbitrary bit of sarcasm appended to the play merely for spiteful humor.

It is my contention that the only valid approach to the problem of *Pygmalion's* ending is to analyze the structure of the dramatic movement. In examining the play, I will consider the central situation and the dramatic problem it raises in preparation for the ending, which is the solution to that problem. All other critical approaches applied to the ending have tended to introduce extraneous information and lead to inconclusive suppositions about which of the possible endings is to be preferred. For instance, in evaluating the ending, one would probably be wise to pass over two extremely interesting but contradictory pieces of evidence which, at first, seem to bear directly on the matter. On the one hand we have the postscript which Shaw added to the published version *of Pygmalion.* In it he explains vehemently and reasonably why Eliza will not *marry* Higgins. On the other hand there is the movie version ending which Shaw rewrote so that it becomes clear to the audience that Eliza will marry Higgins. We can speculate about Shaw's real intention, but lacking conclusive external

evidence we should justify or condemn the ending of the stage play only in relation to the text itself.

The controversy over the ending deserves some scrutiny, however, because the criticism represents a good many different approaches to Shaw's work. One approach is the "instinctive" method, a method which is outside the realm of literary criticism but is certainly of value in judging a play, since Shaw or any good dramatist realizes that during a performance the spectators will intuitively "feel" that an action is right or wrong without bothering to analyze their feelings. After considering the structure of *Pygmalion*, Milton Crane, in an often-quoted article, concludes that Shaw was either wrong or not serious in his ending. But Professor Crane gives no objective reason for his point of view, nor does he tie it in with his analysis of structure. A similar view is expressed by St. John Ervine concerning the denouement:

[The ending] convinces nobody who reads it. .the facts of the play cry out against its author The end of the fourth act as well as the end of the fifth act deny .. [the postscript], and assure all sensible people that she married Henry Higgms and bore him many vigorous and intelligent children (*Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work, and Friends,* [New York], 1956)

The trouble with such opinions is that a great many people may instinctively feel that the play ends correctly. We cannot depend too much on a director's view of the text, for if the play in production has been interpreted romantically, the ending of the stage version seems inappropriate; on the other hand, if the play is produced "anti-romantically," the ending of this version is necessary.

Two directly opposing interpretations of the ending can be based on an analysis of character and situation. In one view, Eliza, a representative of Shavian vitality, is in the vitalistic sense superior to Higgins who is "the prisoner of 'system,' particularly of his profession" (Eric Bentley in his *Bernard Shaw,* [Norfolk], 1957). Higgins and Eliza are un-smted for one another since their temperaments are totally dissimilar. Another interpretation places emphasis on the growth of Eliza's character to the point

where she is able, at the end of the play, to rid herself of her fear of the rich (her middle-class morality); thus, no longer the intimidated flower girl, Eliza has no need to bargain for Higgins' affection. On the other hand, Eliza may be considered as less than a match for Higgins, for her desires are the commonplace ones of marriage and security. Higgins, then, is the representative of Shavian vitality, the true superman, and as such he is superior to Eliza. In each interpretation, the Shavian denouement is justified by the critics' belief that a marriage between the two characters would be a misalliance; or, as Eric Bentley has said, "Eliza's leaving Higgins is the outcome of the realities of the situation" (Modem Drama, September, 1958).

The criterion of realism is of questionable value here. Shaw is a realist— if we must classify him at all—but dramatic realism does not always call for a "realistic" (that is, "true-to-life") ending. After all, Shaw often does marry off his heroine and hero *(e.g. Arms and the Man, Man and Superman, The Millionairess, Buoy ant Billions)*, and when he does so, it is not because he is particularly concerned with "true-to-life" probabilities, but because he is doing the correct dramatic thing. Furthermore, even if the criterion of realism were valid, we would face a difficult task in trying to prove that a marriage between Higgins and Eliza is hopelessly unrealistic. The two have existed in the same environment for a long time, they have grown used to one another— even reliant on one another, and they are no longer very far apart in social position. The fact is, as Shaw himself points out and as Professor Bentley notes, such a marriage would be a bad one. But what is more realistic than a bad marriage! It happens so often in real life that one can hardly accuse an author of being a romanticist if he includes it in his play. It is not quite right dramatically, but for critics to attribute Shaw's ending to "the realities of the situation " is to evince a rather unnecessarily limited view of what reality is.

An examination of the structure *of Pygmalion* can leave little doubt that Shaw's ending is the only logical one. The most direct way to approach the structure is to discern what the dramatic problem of the plot is. Some possibilities that might come immediately to mind concern the superficiality of class distinctions, the inability of Higgins to dominate Eliza's spirit, and the satire on middle-class morality. All of the

preceding are aspects of the play, but further thought on the matter of what happens in Pygmalion will eventually lead us to some statement about Higgins' making Eliza into a "lady." Indeed, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is just what the play is about since the action, obviously, is mainly taken up with the development of Eliza from Act I through Act V. Furthermore, the play is concerned not only with the fact of her development but with the peculiar circumstances surrounding it, that is, the manner in which she is transformed.

It is important to decide whether Eliza or Higgins is the main character, for the main plot will be constructed around the actions of this central character. If we try to put the subject of the play' s action into the form of a dramatic question, we would ask, "Will Eliza become a lady?" The action is done either *by* or *to* Eliza, but in either case we may be certain that the passive main character does not occur in Shaw's work. We need not assume that he is the most interesting character in the play or that he is the one who occupies the author's greatest attention. It appears that Shaw was more interested in Eliza than in Higgins because he explains in detail what happens to her after the play is over. Nevertheless, Higgins must be the main character because he manipulates the action. In a comedy it is not necessary for the main character to undergo a change or show character development. Higgins remains the same from first to last; to use Shaw's term he is "incorrigible." Eliza changes, but Higgins makes her change; she is his product. Thus, a more accurate way of stating the dramatic question would be: Will Higgins succeed in re-creating the common flower girl into a truly different person, inwardly as well as outwardly?

Once we see the dramatic problem of the play in this light, we can begin to trace the steps leading to the logical conclusion of *Pygmalion*. The first act is dramatically essential to the play not merely because it introduces the characters or serves as a prologue, but because it begins the action: Higgins makes such an impression on the flower girl that she is filled with a desire for her physical improvement, her external recreation. In Act II, the question is raised as to whether Higgins will succeed in his experiment.

As is usual in a play with a traditional five-act structure, the climax occurs in Act in and virtually resolves the question. Although the question is not definitely answered, certainly some strong indication is given the audience as to the direction which the following action will take. A shift in the direction of the action after the climax would surely confuse the spectators and might result in bringing the play to the level of romance. But *Pygmalion* is not romance, in spite of the subtitle, and thus Shaw makes his denouement consistent with his climax.

After the second act, the audience might expect the reception scene to contain the climax as it does in the movie and in *My Fair Lady,* but Shaw does not dramatize this scene. It is necessary to have a scene precede the ambassador's reception so as to show the developing process of Eliza's education, and Shaw is skillful enough to make the scene of Mrs. Higgins' at-home serve both as an expository scene of characterization and as climax. However, a few critics are determined to make the omitted garden party into the climax. Professor Benfley says:

If again we call Act I the prologue, the play falls into two parts of two Acts apiece Both parts are Pygmalion myths. In the first a duchess is made out of a flower girl. In the second a woman is made out of a duchess. Since these two parts are the main, inner action the omission of the climax of the outer action—the ambassador's reception—will seem particularly discrete, economical, and dramatic

But we need not be deceived by the subtlety and calmness of Shaw's climax. The dramatic question is answered at the home of Mrs. Higgins when Eliza encounters society and passes as acceptable to the Hills, and even to the much cleverer Mrs. Higgins. We now feel certain that, with more practice, Eliza will succeed in her official debut at the ambassador's party, although she probably would not be able to do so at the time of the climax. Nevertheless, what is important is the knowledge which one now has that Higgins is on the verge of succeeding with his experiment. Eliza's success will be Higgins' success. The question, "Will Higgins be able to recreate the flower girl?" is answered affirmatively.

But Higgins' success is not complete in Act IH. In Act I, he had expressed a wish to Pickering to demonstrate what kind of a Pygmalion he could be in regard to Eliza if he had the chance. He wanted to see if he could create a new human being, not merely a duchess, out of flower girl. The climax, then, only indicates his accomplishment but does not actually show it It remains for Act V to reveal to us the full extent of Higgins' achievement. Then we see that Higgins has succeeded so well—he has turned the frightened, easily-dominated Eliza into an independent woman—that he loses the prize possession itself, irony of such a success is evident. Thus, Pygmalion has created a masterpiece, a real person—and to Shaw area! person is one who is not dominated in spirit by the elements of his environment. Pygmalion loses his Galatea, for he has recreated her with the great humanizing qualities of character: independence of spirit and vitality of mind.

It is now possible to see why Shaw's ending is the only satisfying one, and why certain adapters such as Alan Lerner in *My Fair Lady* contradict the meaning of the play. Suppose Eliza's last line were changed from one of disdain (in answer to Higgins' confident order to her as his servant) to an acquiescent reply that indicates she will return to Higgins. If this were the case, then Higgins would not have really succeeded. He would have taken Eliza, the flower girl, the servant of society, and changed her physically but not spiritually. In the end, she will still be a servant girl at heart. Shaw's ending is not an arbitrary imposition of the author's temperament. Without the essential paradox involved in Higgins' accomplishment of recreation, the play becomes sentimental and one-dimensional.

The traditional structure serves Shaw well here. Professor Bentley is right in dividing the inner development of Eliza into two parts. But he does not go far enough, for the inner development is also dramatized; both inner development and plot structure are connected inseparably—that is, theme and action are virtually the same thing. *Pygmalion* is one of Shaw's best-constructed plays, and this is an important reason for its repeated success in production.

**Source:** Stanley J. Solomon, "The Ending of *Pygmalion*- A Structural View" in *Educational Theatre Journal,* Vol 16, no. 1, March, 1964, pp 59-63.

# Critical Essay #3

*In this essay, Matlaw examines Pygmalion's ending and the ways that subsequent adaptations have strayedfrom Shaw's original vision. The critic ultimately affirms the play's original conclusion,*

Alan Jay Lerner, probably the most successful adapter of Shaw's *Pygmalion,* commented: "Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy and—Shaw and Heaven forgive me!—I am not certain he is right." Many critics would agree with this sentiment. A recent analysis of the play goes so far as to dismiss the Epilogue as a bit of Shavian frivolity and to cite the "happy ending" Shaw himself wrote for Pascal's film as the proper denouement of a play which is persuasively categorized by one critic as a play which follows "the classic pattern of satirical comedy" [Milton Crane *mPMLA,* vol.66, 1956].

Such an ending has been popular also with audiences and actors ever since the play first appeared in 1913. Shaw chided both Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Beerbohm Tree for their romantic interpretations in the first productions: "I say, Tree, must you be so treacly?" he asked during the rehearsals. Tree's stage business before the curtain fell left no doubts in the minds of audiences that Higgins's marriage to Eliza was imminent. Justifying it, Tree wrote Shaw: * 'My ending makes money; You ought to be grateful." Shaw replied: "Your ending is damnable: You ought to be shot." And he continued fulminating against romantic portrayals of an ending which caters to what, in the Epilogue written for *Pygmalion* later, he called "imaginations. .. so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-medowns of the ragshop m which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories."

Nonetheless, the recurrent arousing of inappropriate audience expectations and the apparent inability of the play to arouse the appropriate expectations (or those which Shaw considered appropriate) raise a question about Pygmalion's success on the playwnght's terms. Perhaps even more important, they call for a re-examination of

these terms; for I think that the ending is significant and dramatically inevitable, and that it is the ending Shaw himself rewrote for the film (thereby confusing the matter further)—rather than his Epilogue—which is frivolous....

While one of the most penetrating and suggestive of the analyses of Shaw's work accepts the original ending of *Pygmalion*, it seems to do so for the wrong reasons. I cannot agree with the assertion in that analysis that "the 'education of Eliza* in Acts I to III is a caricature of the true process." No educative process is in fact represented in the play (although Shaw inserted "a sample" for film production at a later date—a hint which was deftly developed in *My Fair Lady*). But more important, the conclusion that "Eliza turns the tables on Higgins, for she, finally, is the vital one, and he is the prisoner of 'system,' particularly of his profession," seems to me to miss the point (Eriz Bertley in his *Bernard Shaw,* [New York], 1957).

Rather the reverse is true. The magnificent comic subplot underlines the point, for Doolittle was once, like Higgins, outside of class or "system" ' and had vitality. Both Doolittle and Eliza are brought to join the middle class. What is sharply contrasted, however, is the consequence of the transformation: for Doolittle it is a descent while for Eliza it is an ascent—the transformation makes the previously articulate (vital) father comically impotent while it gives the previously inarticulate ( "crooning like a bilious pigeon") daughter human life. In sum, Higgins, the life-giver, will continue his study of phonetics while Eliza will settle for the life her father describes so picturesquely in the last act when all the cards are put on the table. Higgins, that is, will continue to teach proper, civilized articulation, a superman attempting to transform subhumans into humans; while Eliza will lead an admirable if circumscribed middle-class existence, having been given humanity—life—by Higgins.

Her ability to undergo successfully such a transformation evidences her superior qualities and often makes her appear as the hero of the play. She is only a Shavian hero *manque*, however, and she is not the wife for Higgins. She can not even understand him, their values and interests being so different. Higgins genuinely

admires Eliza, although he is first shocked and then amused by her values: in a most effective and inevitable denouement, the curtain falls as "he roars with laughter" —at the thought of her marrying Freddy. Admirable as she now is—especially when compared with what she was when he met her—she is not, and never can be, his equal. She is now part and parcel of the system of "middle class morality" which the early Doolittle and Higgins find ludicrous. Higgins and Eliza, then, still do not speak the same language, although this is true now only in the figurative sense. This does not, however, preclude the existence of an affinity between them, perhaps one comparable to the one existing between Caesar and Cleopatra. Nevertheless, marrying Eliza would be preposterous for Higgins, a superman with the vitality of a soul and a "Miltonic mind" (as he himself labels it) who lives on an entirely different plane, a plane where sex and marriage, indeed, are unknown.

What causes audiences to wish for it (as Eliza herself, for that matter, was wishing for it) is the Cinderella guise of the plot—which buttresses audiences' perennial desires, as Shaw rightly said in the Epilogue, for the marriage of the hero and the maiden—and the sentimental part of the myth which the title incidentally also calls to mind. The Cinderella guise, however, is accidental and irrelevant; it is purposely negated by the omission of scenes depicting the process of the transformation and by the omission of the grand ball scene, the highpoint of any Cinderella story. The title specifically and intentionally focuses attention away from the heroine and on Higgins, and on Higgins "s life-giving qualities in particular.

It is very appropriate, therefore, that the most recent popular production is called *My Fair Lady,* focusing attention, as the musical itself does, on the Cinderella theme. At the same time, with all the brilliance of this version, even with the dialogue culled from the original play, this one is a very different play throughout. All the noncomic lines... are omitted, for in *My Fair Lady* Higgins is the conventional romantic hero and not what he surely is in *Pygmalion:* the Shavian hero, standing alone, a superman embodying a life force divorced from human social and sensual drives, but representative of the vitality and creative evolution in which, in Shaw's philosophy, lies the ultimate hope of mankind.

**Source:** Myron Matlaw, "The Denouement of *Pygmalion,"* in *Modern Drama*, Vol 1, no. 1, May, 1958, pp. 29, 33-34.

# Media Adaptations

*Pygmalion* was adapted as a film produced by Gabriel Pascal, directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, starring Howard and Wendy Hiller; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1938, The film received Academy Awards for Shaw's screenplay and for the adaptation by Ian Dalrymple, Cecil Lewis, and W, P. Lipscomb.

*Pygmalion* was also filmed for American television, directed by George Schaefer for the Hallmark Hall of Fame series, starring Julie Harris and James Donald, adapted by Robert Hartung; Compass, 1963.

The play has also been produced in audio recordings. In 1972 Peter Wood directed a recording starring Michael Redgrave, Donald Pleasence, and Lynn Redgrave (Caedmon TRS 354). In 1974, the play was recorded in association with the British Council, starring Alec McCowen and Diana Rigg (Argo SAY 28).

**Pygmalion** was also adapted into the musical *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe. An original cast recording was released in 1959, starring Rex Harrison, Julie Andrews, and Stanley Holloway (CK 2015 Columbia).

*My Fair Lady* was made into a film in 1964, produced by Jack L. Warner and directed by George Cukor, starring Audrey Hepburn as Liza with Rex Harrison reprising his stage role of Higgins. The film was nominated for twelve Academy Awards and received eight. It is considered a film classic in the musical genre.

# Topics for Further Study

Research the history of phonetics and speech as a subject of study; does Shaw's depiction of the scientific interests of his character Higgins seem to have been well-grounded in historical precedent?

Compare and contrast the ways in which both Liza and her father are thrust into the middle class (she through learning to speak "properly," he through obtaining money), and why each is not comfortable in it. Through these characters, what does Shaw seem to be saying about class distinctions?

Contrast Colonel Pickering and Henry Higgins in terms of manners and behavior. What are the implications of their very different treatments of Liza?

Research the social position of women in early twentieth-century Britain (economic opportunities, cultural conventions, legal rights), and use this information to explain further why Liza is so concerned about her future following the conclusion of Higgins's "experiment."

# Compare & Contrast

1910s: Women in Britain do not have the right to vote, and their opportunities for education and employment remain limited.

Today: Since 1928, all women over the age of 21 have had the right to vote in Britain. The direct participation of women in government continues to be more limited than that of men, although the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 set an important precedent. Women were admitted to full admission at Oxford in 1920 and to Cambridge University in 1948. Women make up a much larger portion of the work force than they did at the turn of the century, and although their compensation and employment opportunities continue to lag behind those of men, the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and other measures have addressed this issue. It is no longer the case that a women's natural role is widely assumed to be limited to domestic work.

1910s: With industrialization and legislative reform beginning a process of diversification, Britain's society is still rigidly hierarchical, with a tradition of a landed aristocracy and a pyramid of descending ranks and degrees. In 1911, the power of the royally-appointed House of Lords in Parliament to veto the legislation of the democratically-elected House of Commons is reduced to a power to delay legislation.

Today: The political power of royalty and the nobility has been greatly reduced through a process of legislative reform. While tides of nobility remain, Britain's society remains stratified primarily by wealth rather than rank. While the middle class grew considerably throughout the century and there was significant growth in economic indicators such as owner-occupation of homes, sharp divisions between rich and poor persist in Britain. With the growth of the technical institutes, the "polytechnics," the expansion of the university system after World War II greatly increased opportunities for higher education in the country.

1910s: Despite the promotion of a standard "Queen's English," beginning in the Victorian era, the British Isles—even London itself—is marked by a wide diversity of spoken English. The diversity of British population (including its varieties of English) was further shaped by large-scale immigration, by Irish beginning in the 1830s, Germans in the 1840s, Scandinavians in the 1870s, and Eastern Europeans in the 1880s.

Today: The diversity of English culture—especially in London and the major cities—has been further increased, along with the diversity of English dialects, by twentieth-century immigration from Britain's colonies and former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, and the Far East.

1910s: Europe is devastated by the 8.5 million dead and 21 million wounded in "the Great War" (World War I), including unprecedented levels of civilian casualties. Britain was not alone in experiencing the most intense physical, economic, and psychological assault in its history.

Today: The specter of civilian death leads to a realization that modern warfare potentially endangers the future of the enure nation. This feeling has been accentuated since the end of World War n by the threat of nuclear destruction. Much more so than at the beginning of the century, citizens have come to perceive war and the necessity of avoiding it as their business, and they often try to impact their government's policies to this end. Shaw's position against war, still somewhat radical in his day, has become much more common.

# What Do I Read Next?

*Major Barbara,* another of Shaw's plays, first produced in 1905, and considered his first major work. It explores the ideological conflict between "Major" Barbara Undershaft, who strives to lift up the poor through her untiring effort with the Salvation Army, and her father, Sir Andrew Undershaft, a fabulously wealthy arms manufacturer. Both achievers represent Shaw's theory of the Life Force, or human advancement through "creative evolution." The play explores the question of whose actions better serve society, Barbara's or those of her father, who provides a comfortable existence for his employees but can only do so through his profiting by the destruction of human life. Similar to *Pygmalion* (and many of Shaw's other plays), the action revolves around a strong, independent female character and explores issues of class, social identity, and human worth.

*The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism.* A significant example of Shaw's political writing, one which examines many themes central to *Pygmalion*. The text demonstrates Shaw's firm, lifelong belief that only members of a socialist society—with collective ownership of wealth and equal opportunity for all—could look forward to the future with hope. Writing ten years after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Shaw viewed that experiment as a failure (recognizing the developing trend towards totalitarianism in the Soviet state). In general, Shaw looked with hope not to revolution but to a democratic transition to socialism, a truly collective evolution towards an equitable society. That "the intelligent woman" was his audience for the work was a deliberate choice; Shaw was particularly concerned with the exploitation of women, both through their unpaid but crucial domestic labor and their limited and underpaid positions in the work force. "Our whole commercial system," he wrote, "is rooted ... in cheap female labour." Shaw perceived the special need during his era to increase educational and employment opportunities for women. This text is of a significant length but has an encyclopedic structure.

*Plays and Players: Essays on the Theatre,* edited by A. C. Ward (Oxford University Press, 1952); and Shaw on the Theatre, edited by E. J. West (Hill and Wang, 1958). These volumes compile a number of Shaw's extensive writings on the theatre (commenting on both the plays and productions of his own career, as well as on other playwrights such as Shakespeare and Ibsen.)

*Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell: Their Correspondence,* edited by Alan Dent (Knopf, 1962). The compiled correspondence between Shaw and the actress who created the part of Liza in the English premiere. Shaw also wrote Caesar and Cleopatra for her and the actor Johnston Forbes-Robertson, though she never performed in it. Pygmalion is discussed extensively,

*The Story of English* by Robert McCrum, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil (Viking Penguin, 1986; revised, 1992). A companion book to a public-television series (available on video at most libraries) about the history of English: its historical development out of Germanic, Celtic, and Anglo-Saxon roots; its transition from an early, to a middle and then a modern form; and its unprecedented spread throughout the world through British colonialism and emigration (approximately 1 billion people worldwide speak it as a first or second language). Students interested in Shaw's exploration of issues of speech and dialect in Pygmalion will be especially interested in this book, which further examines the seemingly innumerable varieties of spoken English throughout the world. This text examines how standards of "the Queen's English" developed in the Victorian era, and how social identities were constructed based on variations from this standard. The Cockney of Liza Doolittle, among numerous varieties in the British Isles, is given close attention. *The Story of Englisvh* provides the basis of valuable discussion on topics such as: what constitutes "Standard' * English? What is a dialect? An accent? In what ways is dialect still a mark of social position?

# Further Reading

Bentley, *Eric Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950,* amended edition, New Directions, 1957.

Though Bentley's book (originally published in 1947) is not adulatory, Shaw considered it "the best book written about himself as a dramatist." Bentley states that his double intention in the book is "to disentangle a credible man and artist from the mass of myth that surrounds him, and to discover the complex component parts of his 'simplicity'" Pygmalion is discussed in detail, pages 119-126, and elsewhere in the book.

Crane, Milton, "*Pygmalion:* Bernard Shaw's Dramatic Theory and Practice" in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 66, no 6, December, 1951, pp 879-85. Crane begins with the question of whether Shaw was old-fashioned in his approach to drama or innovative. Wrapped up in this issue is the figure of Ibsen, who Shaw declared was revolutionary for giving his plays indeterminate endings and concluding with "discussion," rather than the clear unraveling of a dramatic situation in the "well-made play"—the popular form of the day. Crane demonstrates that Ibsen did not present a new innovation so much as modify earlier forms and claims that something similar holds true for Shaw as well Although Shaw denied his audience a romantic ending in Pygmalion, Crane does not feel it is true of the playwright what many have said, "that he is primarily a thinker, who chose for rhetorical reasons to cast his ideas in dramatic form " Rather than viewing his characters abstractly, as means to a rhetorical end, Shaw was passionately invested in their lives and destinies, which highlights a basic "conventionality" in his technique

Dukore, Bernard F. "The Director As Interpreter- Shaw's *Pygmalion* " mShaw, Vol 3, 1983, pp. 129-47.

A three-part article analyzing, first, "Shaw's concept of the question of directorial interpretation"; then his own directorial interpretation of Pygmalion (in the London

premiere and several subsequent productions); and finally, the revisions he made to Pygmalion as a result of the experience of directing the play. Dukore shows the careful separation Shaw maintained between "Playwright Shaw" and "Director Shaw": rather than explain to his actors the ideas in his play in a literary manner, Shaw was able to help them in very practical terms to develop their performances Often these actors led him to new insights about his own characters "While he recognized that there are a variety of appropriate ways to interpret any well-written role," however, Shaw also "rejected what he considered inappropriate interpretations."

Evans, T P., editor. *Shaw;* The Critical Heritage, Routledge & KeganPaul (London), 1976.

An extremely useful collection of 135 contemporary writings on Shaw's plays: reviews, essays, letters, and other sources. Arranged roughly in chronological order and grouped by play, the items "give a continuing picture of the changing and developing reaction to Shaw's dramatic work." Pygmalion is covered on pages 223-29

Harvey, Robert C. "How Shavian is the *Pygmalion* We Teach?" *m English Journal,* Vol 59,1970, pp. 1234-38.
This article by a former high school English teacher begins with the observation that while Shaw lived, he absolutely refused to let his plays be published in school textbooks: "My plays were not designed as instruments of torture," he wittily commented. Harvey recognizes that despite the wishes of the playwright, there are definite values to students reading his work in a school setting Too often, however, the work is taught to support grammar lessons, with the message that like Liza, students can succeed if they learn to speak "correctly." Harvey affirms that the real value of the piece for students is in trying to grasp its literary complexity. If anything, the play should show students "the social importance of all varieties of language .. the equality of every dialect" rather than being used "to forge the very chains [Shaw] wrote the play to break."

Henderson, Archibald. *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century,* Appleton-Century-Crofts (New York), 1956.

A final, culminating book by Shaw's "official" biographer, incorporating much material from his previous works. Henderson studied Shaw first-hand and wrote on him for over fifty years

Hill,EIdonC George *Bernard Shaw*, Twayne (Boston), 1978.

A biography and critical study intended not for the Shaw specialist but for the general reader "who seeks an understanding of Shaw's life and work " *Pygmalion* is discussed in detail, pages 118-21

Huggett, Richard. *The Truth about* Pygmalion, Heinemann (London), 1969.

Focusing predominantly on Mrs, Patrick Campbell, the actress who created Liza for the London premiere, this study is the result of three years of research into the play and its performances.

Kaufman, R. J., editor. G B. Shaw: *A Collection of Critical Essays,* Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ), 1965

While none of the essays examines *Pygmalion* exclusively, the topics of these compiled studies overlap extensively with issues in that particular play. Notable contributions include a short, provocative piece by Bertolt Brecht, showing Shaw's influence on his work. Brecht states of Shaw's view towards society, "it should be clear by now that Shaw is a terrorist The Shavian terror is an unusual one, and he employs an unusual weapon—that of humor" In his article "Born to Set It Right. The Roots of Shaw's Style," Richard M. Ohmann investigates the development of Shaw's position as a social outsider, "the critic of things as they are." Eric Bentley's "The Making of a Dramatist" examines the formative years 1892-1903 in Shaw's life.

MacCarthy, Desmond Shaw. *The Plays,* Newton Abbott, 1951.

Originally published as a series of essays from 1907 to 1950, this book offers a unique chance to trace the development of a particular perspective on Shaw's long and prolific career. Pygmalion is discussed in detail, pages 108-13.

Miller, Jane M "Some Versions of *Pygmalion" in Ovid Renewed- Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century,* edited by Charles Martindale, Cambridge University Press, 1988

A study of Ovid's version of the *Pygmalion* myth (including possible antecedents for it), and its influence on later works Miller stresses the sexual implications of the Pygmalion-Galatea relationship in Ovid's story (which suggest possible consequences for Shaw's version). Miller states that the various versions of *Pygmalion* tend in general to be of two types: historical, which depict a social transformation and which usually contain "an element of social comment" (she places Shaw's Pygmalion in this category); and mystical, which explore "love as a divine experience " Miller suggests Shakespeare's *The Winter's* Tale as an early example of the "mystical" interpretation but comments that the form abounded in the nineteenth century in particular. Miller concludes that the "histoncist" versions of Pygmalion, Shaw's included, "are interesting products of their time but lack the vitality of the Ovidian original "

Muggleston, Lynda "Shaw, Subjective Inequality, and the Social Meanings of Language in *Pygmalion" in Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language*, Vol 44, no 175, August, 1993, pp. 373-85.

A detailed study of the social importance of *Pygmalion's* exploration of accent and pronunciation as determiners "not only of social status but also of social acceptability," Although difficult only in places for readers not familiar with some linguistic vocabulary, the article's central argument is easily grasped, that Shaw rebelled against the idea that there was something inherently better about people of the upper classes and therefore demonstrated that social judgments of a person's merit

depend on superficial, subjective qualities (like proper speech). Pygmalion is a "paradigm of social mobility," illustrating that social transformation is possible, and "a paean to inherent equality," suggesting that a person's merit is distinct and separate from their level of social acceptability.

Quinn, Martin. "The Informing Presence of Charles Dickens in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*" in the *Dickensian*, Vol. 80, no. 3, Autumn, 1984, pp 144-50.

This article traces a number of connections between *Pygmalion* and various works of Dickens, who Quinn states "entered Shaw's life early and completely and was thereafter always at his fingertips when not on the tip of his tongue." Quinn shows that Dickens was specifically on Shaw's mind when writing Pygmalion in 1912, because he was completing at the same time an introduction to Dickens's novel *Hard Times.* The influence of Dickens was "pervasive" throughout Shaw's career, however. The value of Quinn's article is in documenting the exhaustive reading of "[a]n intellect as comprehensive as Shaw's," and inserting the name of Dickens, a novelist, among the list of dramatic artists considered to be Shaw's major influences: Shakespeare, Mohere, and Ibsen.

*Shaw Bulletin, Shaw Review, Shaw The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, the Shavian.*

Publications of the Shaw Society of America (*The Shaw Bulletin*, 1952-1958; *Shaw Review,* 1951-1980; and the Shaw annual, 1981-present) and the Shaw Society, London (the Shavian, 1953-present). These journals have published extensively on all topics related to Shaw's work; check their title and subject indexes for further information

Small, Barbara J. "Shaw on Standard Stage Speech" in Shaw Review, Vol. 22,1979, pp. 106-13.

A short but enlightening study of Shaw's interest m diction and stage speech. Not entirely about *Pygmalion,* but its references to that play suggest the close relationship

between Higgins and Shaw's own ideals of spoken speech. "Shaw was preoccupied with the dearth of good standard speech on the English stage," Small wrote "Good diction was, for Shaw, associated with fine acting " Shaw did not blame individuals for their poor pronunciation; in his preface to *Pygmalion,* for example, he decries the problems stemming from English not being a language with phonetic spellings of words. These larger issues Shaw addressed through a phonetic system of his own devising, and other means, but regarding individual persons what Shaw hated most was pretension. "An honest slum dialect" was preferable to him "than the attempts of phonetically untaught persons to imitate the plutocracy."

Wagenknecht, Edward. *A Guide to Bernard Shaw,* Russell & Russell (New York), 1929.

A study written while Shaw was alive and at the peak of his career (he had won the Nobel Prize only a few years previously). Wagenknecht wrote that the purpose of his book is expository rather than critical: that is, "to gather together... all the information which, in my judgment, the student or general reader needs to have in mind in order to read Shaw's plays intelligently." As a study, it has largely been superseded by other later works, but it remains an important historical document.

# Sources

Berst, Charles A. *bcrnard Shaw and the Art of Drama,* University of Illinois Press (Urbana), 1973, pp 197-218

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to

information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.

- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as The Narrator and alphabetized as Narrator. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name Jean Louise Finch would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname Scout Finch.
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first

received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures,

and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the Criticism subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on Winesburg, Ohio. Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition, Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. Richard Wright: Wearing the Mask, in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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