

Pygmalion, by george bernard shaw essay



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Pygmalion, by George Bernard Shaw, is a romantic comedy on the use of language by the various social classes of London. Two old men, Colonel Pickering and Henry Higgins, develop the plot through their phonetic observations on the dialects used by the people who are sheltering from rain under the portico of St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden. Higgins bets Pickering that he would be able to pass the cockney speaking flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. Eliza Doolittle appears at his laboratory on Wimpole Street the next day to ask for speech lessons.

Higgins makes fun of her, but takes up the challenge of transforming her speech using his scientific experiment. Pickering agrees to cover the costs of the experiment if Higgins can pass Eliza off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. The challenge taken, Higgins starts by having his housekeeper bathe Eliza and give her new clothes. Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle, who comes to get money from Higgins using his daughter, fails to recognize the now clean, pretty flower girl as his daughter. Higgins trains Eliza to speak properly and subject her to two trials to test his experiment.

The first trial takes place at Higgins' mother's home, where Eliza is introduced to the Eynsford Hills, a trio of mother, daughter, and son. The son Freddy gets attracted to her and thinks it is her affected "small talk" when she slips into cockney. The second trial, which takes place some months later at an ambassador's party, is a resounding success. Higgins wins the bet and gets bored of the experiment. Eliza is hurt as she does not know what to do with her new speech skills. She runs away and threatens to work for

Higgins' rival Nepommuck. The play ends in an open note with Eliza going out without a decisive reply to Higgins' commands.

Though a romantic comedy, *Pygmalion* tries to give insights into the social class, human behavior, and on the dialects used in various parts of London. While the upper class dialect is more formal – “ Oh, sir, is there any sign of its stopping? ” the dialect of the flower girl is more casual – “ Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah. ” Shaw shows distinction in the psychology of the upper and the lower classes through these dialogues. The various attitudes portrayed by the characters throw light on the importance of class and etiquette that were quite looked upon in early London society. She's quite a common girl, sir.

Very common indeed. I should have sent her away, only I thought perhaps you wanted her to talk into your machines. I hope I've not done wrong; but really you see such queer people sometimes” by Mrs. Pearce, the housekeeper of Higgins, clearly brings to light the line between the classes in London society. Shaw describes the appearance of Eliza Doolittle on the day of her meeting with Higgins to reinforce the difference among the classes. “ The flower girl enters in state. She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red.

She has a nearly clean apron, and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little. The pathos of this deplorable figure, with its innocent vanity and consequential air...” paints the image of the London common class. The psychology of men in their relationship with a woman is exhibited by Higgins at the following instance: “ I find that the moment I let a woman make

friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything.

When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another. " The etiquette expected of upper class is learnt through the dialogues of Mrs. Pearce and Higgins on table manners. The play throws light on the expectations of the society on individuals and their style of living. While Shaw has succeeded in creating a visual of the London society, there are difficulties experienced by the reader in understanding the cockney accent of the flower girl who mixes her vowels and consonants.

There has been no clear evidence of the inter-personal relationship between Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins though they throw daggers at each other most of the times. The five acts of Pygmalion depict a phonetic romance of dialects, society and human psychology mixed with comedy. George Bernard Shaw has brought to focus the need of an English man to watch his dialect and speak without making another English man hate or despise him.

(Bernard Shaw: Preface to Pygmalion)