

"henry higgins bullies
eliza doolittle." to
what extent do you
agree or disagree ...



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Pygmalion is a well-known play written by George Bernard Shaw in 1912. In mythology, Pygmalion was a sculptor who fell in love with one of his statues. In the play, Professor Henry Higgins represents the 'sculptor' who falls in love with Eliza Doolittle, his creation. He makes a bet with another linguist that he can pass her off as a proper lady and begins to teach her how to speak proper English. Due to Higgins' impersonal nature, he treats Eliza badly causing her to leave once she wins his bet.

After finding her at his mother's house, he learns that she intends to work for herself and possibly marry an upper class twit she met there previously. He leaves upset, and she comes back to him because she realizes that even though he doesn't show his emotions, he does care for her. Firstly, some of Higgins' behaviours prove that he does bully Eliza. This can be shown by Higgins treating her like dirt and telling her what to do all the time, like he has control over her.

For example, when Eliza is convinced that Higgins is a policeman (when in fact he isn't) in Act 1, she believes that he will charge her for prostitution after she calls a stranger 'Captain.' She panics with 'much distress' and 'struggles with her emotion'. Irritated by her whines and wails, Higgins loses his temper and says "Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly." The use of the word 'woman' suggests that Higgins is impersonal and doesn't even bother to ask what her name is.

Also, by saying 'cease' we can see that he is using imperative language and this emphasises the fact that he tries to control her. In addition, we know that Higgins is very angry because of the stage direction, 'explosively'. Eliza reacts with 'feeble defiance' especially as nobody has spoken to her like

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that before. Furthermore, Higgins says " Don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon. " Again, Higgins uses imperative language in his attempts to control Eliza. He also uses natural imagery to portray Eliza as an unclean, sick animal you can find on any of the streets of London.

Although in the play, Higgins' character is portrayed to be mean and unsociable as we can see when he says to his mother " I know I have no small talk; but people don't mind. " This quotation is evidence that he is quite impersonal, not just to Eliza, but to everyone. For example, when he meets Mrs Eynsford Hill, he says that he's " delighted," sarcastically and bluntly and is uncomfortable, also shown by the stage direction, ' glumly' and ' backs away'. However, Shaw also shows some of Higgins' softer sides. For instance, in Act 4 Eliza is furious with

Higgins because she feels like she's just been treated as an experiment and not like a person. Here she provokes Higgins by shouting and throwing insults at him so he finally tells her " It is you who have hit me. You have wounded me to the heart. " This suggests that Higgins never realised he hurt Eliza or treated her wrongly. However it also shows that he's upset with Eliza for failing to realise that deep down he really does care about her feelings. However, in a sense Higgins is irresponsible for deciding to allow a young vulnerable woman stay in his house without knowing anything about her.

The main reason he takes her in is for the money that he can win in his bet with Pickering. Mrs Pearce has to frequently warn Higgins that if he takes Eliza in as a pupil, she will be his responsibility and also that he must ' look ahead a little. ' This is because Mrs Pearce is concerned that once Eliza has learnt to speak properly, she will be used to the luxuries of Higgins' house

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and won't have any money, clothes or a suitable home to live in once it's time to move out. Higgins however takes no notice of Mrs Pearce and says "When I've done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter. From this we can tell that he is impersonal and doesn't call Eliza by her own name, it also implies that he doesn't care about her at first and just thinks of her as an experiment. Towards the end of the play after the garden party, Higgins says fervently "Thank God it's over!" Eliza reacts by 'flinching violently' but 'they take no notice of her'. From the stage direction 'fervently' we can tell that Higgins is speaking with spirit and confidence which emphasises how little he cares about Eliza's journey to become a lady in a flower shop which hurts her deeply as we can tell from the stage directions.

Another way in which we can prove Higgins doesn't bully Eliza is through the fact that he's very generous and liberal with her. An example of this is when Eliza meets him in his house, the day after their first encounter. Higgins offers Eliza life changing lessons, new clothes and shelter but at first she ungratefully refuses them. Also, Higgins is undoubtedly a busy man with not much time to spare because of his phonetics experiments and studies. Nevertheless, he decides to take Eliza into his own home and sacrifices months and months of his time to assist Eliza in her 'lady-in-a-flower-shop' dream.

In conclusion, Higgins' character is impersonal, unsociable and he definitely has the tendency to cause an argument at times. Higgins calls Eliza some nasty names in *Pygmalion* such as 'baggage' and even 'squashed cabbage leaf' however it isn't meant in a malicious way. This is because Higgins doesn't really know how to act normally around other people and has a lack

of social skills and he even admits it himself. Higgins never physically bullied Eliza, he's big hearted, used to banter, but finds it difficult to express his emotions and occasionally forgets to think before he speaks.