

Pygmalion: social class and liza

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



PYGMALION 1. Significance of Title: The significance of the title, "Pygmalion" is in Greek mythology, The town Cyprus Pygmalion was a king who deeply fell in love with the statue of Aphrodite. Pygmalion had pictured nothing but beauty in his mind. He worked many countless days and nights in search of loveliness beyond his powers of expression. The statue got the life, in his quest for ideal beauty and divine's grace. Over time the two were married and he gave her the name Galatea. In contrast to Shaw's play, " Pygmalion" professor Higgins the scientist of phonetics is a Pygmalion and a convent garden flower girl Eliza is a Galatea the statue, who will be later transformed by Higgins into an upper class lady. Though Higgins creates a new Liza, he doesn't marry her unlike the Greek legend. The title has mythic and suggestive appeal to it. 2. Setting: The setting of Pygmalion is set in England around the late 1800s and early 1900s. Why Shaw chose this setting, it is when and where he lived, but it is important to the story in many ways. He was an active socialist, in many of his novels they were based on social and political issues like capitalism and socialism. In Pygmalion, Shaw lays down his beliefs and teaches us about society in the early 1900s. This was a time when people were just starting to be able to move up in society, if you were poor at birth, you could raise yourself to a higher level by working hard, like Liza. Women were finally starting to be considered more than just the homebuilders; they were starting to be viewed as the heart of the family. Shaw supported the idea that women should get the same opportunities as men, also he believed strongly in equality for all mankind. In this story it tells about a working young lady who gets an opportunity to become upper class lady. Throughout the novel, Shaw keeps the contrast between working class

and the middle class by using strong characters from both sectors. The setting provides events and opinions from both sides of class divided. When the two different worlds are clashed together the results are interesting. England is also a major part of the setting, because it had a more rigid social structure at the time of the story than America did. It was easier to spot the differences that kept Liza stapled to the gutter of society. 3. Theme: There are many themes in this novel. One of themes is Professionalism, the idea of female professions were somewhat new, in this time period. Women were generally housewives before this period and there is some resistance to the idea of that male professions being entered by females. When Liza opening a flower shop and she comes from the lower class, it's almost treating to the males because it's one job that the female took away from them. Gentility and Manners is another theme. The upper class was associated with mostly good manners. The author's position on manners was a bit unclear. Since he's a socialist, a person might think he wouldn't have no time for them because they are a maker of class divisions. Though Pickering's treating everyone like a duchess, while Higgins's pattern is treating everyone like trash. At the end of the novel Liza thanks Pickering for teaching her manners; if it wasn't for him she would have never learned them. Change and Transformation is also another theme. The central theme and plot of the novel is the transformation of Liza. At first it appears to rest in the power Higgins expresses by achieving his transformation. He quotes, " 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. " Liza becomes the central in the play. The learning of independence and the sense of inner self-

worth is the true importance that allows her to leave Higgins. 4. Characters: Liza Doolittle is around eighteen and twenty years of age, a cockney flower girl who is energetic and street-smart. She is intelligent though was not educated by the traditional standards. Innocent vanity and consequential air describe the deplorable figure. Liza is a quick learner, who learns a genteel accent from Higgins's and washed and dressed exquisitely as a duchess. As she is transformed, she is shocked that Higgins has lost interest in her afterwards. Liza notices the difference between a flower girl and a lady and she learns that the social graces and class not the true measure of a person's worth. Henry Higgins is described as, " a robust, vital appetizing sort of man", also an energetic scientific type. He is an expert in the phonetics and the author of, " Higgins's Universal Alphabet. " His manners range from genial bullying. When he transformed Liza, he is shaken by the independence Liza demonstrates and by the end of the play Higgins is able to respect her. Another character is Alfred Doolittle is an elderly but vigorous man. He thinks he deserves as much as others Though never gets anything because the disapproval of middle class morality. Alfred is a moocher that finesses loans from the most miserly of people. 5. Conflicts: There are several conflicts in this play. Higgins and Colonel Pickering have a playful " bet" that Higgins can't make the flower girl speak and act like a duchess. There is the issue of what we actually hear and say as opposed to what we think we hear and say. Higgins transforms the flower girl into an upper class duchess, and this is why Higgins forgets about her as soon as transformed her because he won the bet. Another conflict was that Liza Doolittle wants to better herself in life, than just be a lower class flower girl but is rather stuck

in her position since her income fluctuates and her education is limited. This conflict is solved when Liza decides to open her own flower show, because that is what she knows how to do. Plus she enjoys it.

6. Symbolism and Imagery: One of the symbols in this play is chocolate. Higgins loves chocolate; while he does his studies he displays them on desk. He tried to convince her Liza to be transformed into a duchess, he lures her with chocolate. She takes a bite of half of one. Before she can reply he pops one in his mouth. In the chocolate dish before leaving his house, Liza leaves a sentimental ring given to her by him. Liza taking a bite of chocolate represents trust. Money would be another symbol because it defines the difference between lower, middle, upper class depending how much money you have. The ring is also another symbol. Usually a ring symbolizes love and marriage though Higgins and Liza were never together; she leaves the ring by the chocolate dish. This indicates that she doesn't trust him no more, since she left the ring by the chocolates and that she doesn't have any more feelings for him. Eliza has now moved on.

7. Author's style: Shaw's style in his novel, "Pygmalion" is Intellect vs. Entertainment Shaw not only wants to just entertain his audience, he also wants them to learn about social issues. Usually theatre plays are strictly to just entertain; Shaw adds his own twist to it (to learn as well). Rather than dramatic tension, his plays do tend toward discussion. Shaw understood what made plays theatrical that's why he succeeded in his plays. His belief in the need for social improvement didn't however discourage him for adding humor into his plays. Pygmalion most people would think that his novel would have to do with romance but it doesn't at all. After reading the novel you might interpret that it is a romance

novel, because Eliza and Higgins. Romance has been distinguished as exotic, exaggerated narratives and idealized characters. And Pygmalion is a romance not the typical one but because of the magical transformation throughout the play. 8. Key Quotations: " A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere - no right to live" (Act. 1) By this quote Higgins does accept all the class divisions. He believes that since Liza didn't inherit in being an upper class lady, only he can bestow worth upon her, by helping her become a lady in society's eyes. "You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you-not so much as them slippers" (Act4 pg64) This shows Liza's transformation and how it changed her, they even though she completely changed in appearance deep down she is nothing like Higgins or any upper class person. She has a different way of explaining things and she wants to be her own person, but still use the traits of an upper class lady. " You are certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll"(Act3 pg. 53) Mrs. Higgins doesn't agree with what her husband is doing with Liza, at first she was somewhat okay with the idea, but now she thinks it's wrong because he going to have nothing to do with her afterwards.