

*PYGMALION*  
BY  
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Classroom Notes Part 2  
For MA English, Semester II  
ENGL4007: Modern Drama

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# A note on these notes...

- Do you think this PPT can replace an actual classroom, where you gossip with your friends and peacefully sleep during by my long-winded antics?
- **Of course, not.**
- Do you think this PPT can replace the texts prescribed in your syllabus?
- **Of course, not. Then what are these notes worth?**
- These notes are just to excite your curiosity for the ideas discussed. To reap most benefits of the notes, read the texts first.
- By the time, you must have noticed there are two inks used here. It's an interactive PPT. The black ink is for me and the red is yours. Pause and think when the **red ink** appears. Wow end-rhyme.



# Title: Pygmalion

- We know that title is a paratextual element of a work of art. It is both part of and apart from the text. What does the title **Pygmalion** tell us?
- Pygmalion refers to an ancient myth of a Greek sculptor who fell in love with a beautiful sculpture he created.
- The sculpture, named Galatea, came to life and the sculptor professed his love to her. **In the play *Pygmalion* by Shaw, who is Pygmalion and who is Galatea?**
- Before Shaw, British playwright W. S. Gilbert had written a play titled *Pygmalion and Galatea*.
- Do you know there is something called 'Pygmalion Effect' introduced by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson? **Lemme find out...**



# Major Characters

- Here are some of the important characters of the play:
  - *Eliza Doolittle: a young flower girl who learn lady like behaviour*
  - *Alfred Doolittle: Eliza's father, a dustman, turns a gentleman*
  - *Henry Higgins: a middle aged phonetician, trains Eliza*
  - *Mrs Higgins: Henry's mother, London socialite, shelters Eliza*
  - *Col. Pickering: a chivalrous middle-aged linguist, funds Eliza's tuition*
  - *Freddy: a likable romantic young man, loves Eliza*
  - *Mrs Pearce: a motherly character, works at Henry's*



# Eliza Doolittle

- Eliza says often, “I'm a good girl, I am.” Her sense of self-esteem and self-improvement seems to be the content of the play.
- She desires to learn proper English because, “I want to be a lady in a flower shop instead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road.”
- She is assertive, as is evidenced throughout the play. **Can you find the evidence?**
- After she learns the manners of a duchess, without a dukedom, she feels an existential crisis. “What's to become of me?”
- A strong-willed dignified, lady, she leaves the house of Higgins the very night.
- Almost at the end of the play, she realises, “Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours.”
- **Well, what will happen to her afterwards?**



# Henry Higgins

- Higgins is a phonetician and loves language. Perhaps, he loves language more than any human being.
- His ego is manifest when he says, “Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess”. He takes the challenge to teach Eliza, not for money or pity, but to exercise his linguistic power.
- A conformed bachelor and misogynist, he says, “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.”
- Henry is generous, callous, proficient in his craft, yet devoid of human sympathies. He says, “And I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl.”
- After Eliza’s success, he does not treat Eliza with dignity, nor does he apologise.
- **Do you think Henry’s misogyny is a reflexion of Shaw’s own mother-fixation?**



# Col. Pickering

- Opposed to Henry, Pickering is respectful, gentle, and courteous. Eliza says, “He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess”.
- He has a great impact on Eliza’s success. Eliza says, “Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me.”
- He was an avuncular figure for Eliza as he paid for her tuitions, clothing, and jewellery. He treats her like a human. He says, “Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?”
- He also made sure that Henry’s intentions with Eliza were honourable when they arrange her stay there. He asks, “Are you a man of good character where women are concerned?”
- Then why does Eliza, in some versions, falls in love with Henry, not Pickering?  
Think...



# Alfred Doolittle

- Unlike Eliza, her father does not like to learn the behaviour of the upper class.
- When Pickering asks him if he has any morals. He says bluntly, “Can't afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me.”
- He demands five pounds from Henry in exchange for his daughter, but refuses when he is offered more.
- By an unwanted letter of recommendation by Henry, Doolittle becomes a moral preacher by the very virtue of his lack of morality.
- When he ascends to middle class, he gets married, and has to mend his ways.
- Alfred shows the antithesis of Eliza. If Eliza is a lady without a fortune, Alfred is a gentleman without a character.
- The play ends with his marriage bells.





# Other Characters...

- What do you think of Mrs Henry Higgins as an influence both on Henry and Eliza?
- What is the contribution of Mrs Pearce in the education of Eliza and the housekeeping for Henry? She takes care of Eliza, and ensures that Henry behaves politely with her.
- Is Freddy a reliable life partner for Eliza? He proposes to her and waits at the door of Henry's house for her. Can you imagine an alternative ending where Eliza would chose Freddy as her husband?
- Find other characters in the play that are of interest to you. In the film version of the text, we are introduced to Zoltan Karpathy, a student of Henry, who works as a language expert. An interesting character. Find more about him.



# A Post-Colonial Reading

- Henry's attempt to reform Eliza's speech can be compared to the colonial master's civilizing missions. **Was Henry discharging his white man's burden on another whiter person?**
- While Henry stood for the patriarchal master, Col. Pickering symbolises military as well as economic enterprises. Mrs Pearce, giving her a bath, could be a symbol of the evangelical mission, allied with the colonial one.
- Eliza's process of learning could be compared to the three modes of colonial experience, adopt, adapt, and adept. Her leaving the Henry household symbolises freedom of erstwhile colonies.
- Her retort at Henry symbolises the empire striking back. **Do you think that Eliza is any better for her experience with Henry's company? Why?**



# A Feminist Reading

- Henry and Eliza's relationship falls neatly into the typical patriarchal man-woman relationship, with man as the master, woman as the subordinated being, with or without her volition.
- Eliza's leaving the house reminds us of Nora Helmer leaving the house of Torvald Helmer at the middle of the night in *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.
- Eliza claims respect from Henry which symbolises the call of gender equality.
- At the same time, both characters are bound and limited by their normative gender roles and can't accept to transgress the social codes.
- Is Henry's offer to Eliza to live as a bachelor in his house a call too advanced for its time? What do you think?



# Art and Artist

- If *Pygmalion* be viewed as the troubled relation between an artist and one's art, does it announce "The Death of the Author"?
- After Eliza is well versed in her language and manners, she claims equality, and goes her own way. Does that mean that once produced, the work of art sets itself free from the authority of the author?
- Shaw's own relationship with the play *Pygmalion* follows a similar trajectory. Once staged in Vienna, the play chose its own way and was adapted into different genres in different languages during his lifetime and afterwards as well.
- These versions often contradicted Shaw's own idea regarding production, especially its ending.
- Was Henry overambitious in waiting for Eliza as Shaw was in expecting faithfulness to the original idea?



“I'll talk as I like. You're not my teacher now.”

Eliza says to Henry. Does she sound like Caliban?

