

Paper 4, Module 26: Text

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George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

Pygmalion A Romance in Five Acts

1. Shaw and the Problem Play- The idea of the 'problem play' comes from the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen who is considered the father of modernist drama. It is in fact part of the realist movement that swept the world of art during the late 19th century. Its early beginnings can be seen in the work of the French writers such as Alexandre Dumas and Emile August and Emile Augier. Augier brought a strong dose of didacticism in his works of under the influence of the idea of the "well-made" play proposed by Eugène Scribe. Problem plays dealt with contentious social, psychological or political issues like illegitimacy, prostitution social morality and women's emancipation in the form of debates between characters on the stage or characters that represented conflicting points of view. Ibsen brought this genre to perfection with artistic merit and contemporary relevance. Bernard Shaw started writing his plays under this influence, and came to be known as an Ibsenist in England. He displayed amazing originality coupled with engaging wit and sense of language that enabled him to engage his Victorian audience even when he provoked them. The names of John Galsworthy and Harley Granville-Barker are also remembered along with Shaw's as practitioners of this new form of realism.

Bernard Shaw's work on Ibsen *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) came out a year before his own first play *Widowers' Houses* came out. His knowledge of Ibsen became the basic inspiration behind his stage craft and themes. He also acknowledged his indebtedness to the French satirist Moliere of the 17th century. Shaw's problem plays testify to his moral intensity. A C Ward refers to him as "the Knight of the Burning Pencil, a crusader whose appointed lifework was the endeavour to restore colour and light and joy to England's once green and pleasant land."

Shaw's plays brought fresh life into the British theatre by introducing radical themes leavened with wit and bubbling energy. He was an iconoclast in every sense. He questioned the established institutions, time-honoured beliefs and customs and subverted romantic ideals that prevailed from the time of Shakespeare. While his reformist zeal is unmistakable, he always presented both sides of a case often in the form of lengthy discussions, turning his characters into his own mouthpieces. His first play *Widowers' Houses* "a dramatic essay in 'social realism' dealt with the theme of slum-landlordism, exposing the cruel oppression of the poor slum-tenants by big financier-landlords. This was followed by *Mrs. Warren's Profession* that spoke about the evil of prostitution that time considered a taboo subject faced censorship and public outrage against it. *The Apple Cart* Shaw defended the idea of a benevolent dictatorship as superior to democracy and critiqued modern capitalism. *Arms and the Man* subverts the romantic popular notions about love, chivalry, patriotism and war.

Strongly attracted by the Bergsonian evolutionist philosophy, Shaw wrote a series of plays in which his heroes or heroines represent his pet idea of 'Life Force'. *Man and Superman*, *Heartbreak House*, and *Back to Methuselah*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Saint Joan* are examples of this. To Shaw, Life Force means "a power continually seeking to work in the hearts of men and endeavouring to impel them towards a better and fuller life." Shaw variously described this as "the Holy Ghost denuded of personality" and "the will of God."

2. Pygmalion, the Play - for many reasons, *Pygmalion* is the most widely known and entertaining of Shaw's plays. *Pygmalion* is enjoyed worldwide even among non-English speaking communities thanks to the brilliantly entertaining musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* by Hollywood. Shaw won an academy award for the screenplay that he wrote for it. An element of the autobiographical is also alleged in the making of the play. It was rumoured that he created the character of Eliza Doolittle for

the famous British actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell who at that time was having an affair with the playwright. The failed affair or rather the absence of a true romance in the relationship between Henry Higgins and Eliza is believed to be a reflection of Shaw's own personal experience in this case. Shaw is known to have flirted with many women but never developed them into serious relationships. His lifelong marriage to Charlotte Payne-Townsend was reportedly a celibate one!

3. The title- Henry Higgins, the phonetician is the eponymous (title) character named after the mythical sculptor in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He is a great lover of the female form but has no love for flesh and blood women. He creates his ideal beauty with his chisel and falls in love with his handiwork and names her Galatea. Ovid's story tells us that Pygmalion sought desperate refuge in the temple of Venus to pray for a woman like Galatea. He attains his ideal love by the magical transformation when the goddess Venus, touched by his love brings Galatea to life. The artist returns home and when he kisses the statute he learns that she is alive and the story thus has a happy ending. However Shaw's play is rather ambiguous in terms of the love story. Prof Higgins is a 'sculptor' who moulds the cockney girl Eliza into a lady by his effort, thus making her into an ideal. However he is not romantically interested in her. This is perhaps the reason for Eliza to feel frustrated and angry at him in the end. She had not entertained Freddy's romantic interest in her because she is attached to her mentor. In the end, as she walks out, Higgins seems to expect Eliza to return to him. But we are given no indication whether it will happen. Shaw leaves it at that.

4.Characters

Eliza Doolittle - the heroine of the story. She comes from a low working class background and speaks cockney dialect. In the end the rude, foul-mouthed flower girl gets transformed into a beautiful woman.

Professor Henry Higgins – An intelligent, self-assured and arrogant language expert who bets he can transform Eliza Doolittle into a duchess in six months; and does so.

Colonel Pickering – retired from the Indian colonial service and expert in Indian dialects who challenges Higgins to train Eliza to become a duchess and supports the project. He is sympathetic to Eliza, unlike Higgins.

Alfred Doolittle – The drunken boisterous father of Eliza, widower who never misses an opportunity to extract money from others.

Mrs. Higgins – Henry Higgins's mother, an upper-class Londoner who opposes her son's attempt to change the life of Eliza to satisfy his whim.

Freddy Eynsford Hill – Freddy falls in love with Eliza when he meets her a second time in Mrs. Higgins' home, but Eliza does not reciprocate his love.

Mrs. Pearce – Mrs. Pearce is Higgins' housekeeper. She appears snobbish initially and does not like Eliza in the house. But she turns out to be kindhearted and even is concerned about her future, pleading with Higgins to consider what will happen to the girl once Higgins has finished with his experiment.

5. Plot overview-

Professor Henry Higgins is a scientist who studies English speech. He meets Colonel Pickering, an Indologist who served in the British colonial army and is now back home pursuing his interest in Indian dialects. While they wait for the rain to subside, they are accosted by a cockney flower girl named Eliza Doolittle, whose speech interests Higgins. He bets Pickering that he can train the girl in a few months to speak upper-class English and fool the London aristocracy to think that the Covent Garden flower girl is a duchess.

The interested girl turns up at Higgins' home in Wimpole Street the next morning seeking speech lessons with the hope of improving her business and starting a florist's shop. Higgins is

disdainful and sarcastic with the naïve Eliza but he decides to experiment with her. Pickering offers financial support if Higgins can pass Eliza off as a duchess at an ambassador's banquet. Eliza is forced to get clean and put on new clothes and start training. But her drunkard father Alfred Doolittle visits them in hope of extracting some money from the Professor Higgins finds the loquacious Doolittle interesting and gives him five pounds. But he is unable to recognize his daughter when she comes down to meet him on his way out!

Higgins puts Eliza to the rigour of training in phonetics .she struggles with Higgins's toughness as well as her cockney speech and improves. Her first occasion for testing out occurs when Higgins takes her to meet his mother in her home. Here Eliza meets the Eynsford Hills family - mother, daughter, and son. Eliz's attempt to speak like the upper class brings forth much shock for the group as well as amusement for the audience. Freddy Eynsford Hill is enamored of Eliza mainly on account of her cockneyism. But Mrs. Higgins is worried about the situation that may develop in the future. Higgins and his friend continue to pursue their hobbyhorse.

Some months later they dress up Eliza and take her to an ambassador's party where Higgins makes a success with Eliza. Though Higgins's has won the bet the two men are now tired of Eliza and the project. Eliza is wounded by Higgins's treatment of her like an experimental animal. Enraged, she throws her slippers at him and decides to go back to her old world, not knowing what to do with her life, now that is too sophisticated to be a flower girl any more. Higgins suggests that she marry somebody. When she returns the hired jewelry which she was wearing to the party, Higgins accuses her of ingratitude. She runs away.

Higgins rushes to his mother next morning, anxious because Eliza has run away. He doesn't know that Eliza is with his mother. He is followed by Mr. Doolittle who is now rich by a windfall

because Higgins had once recommended him as England's "most original moralist." To a millionaire who bequeathed his wealth to the old cockney. Doolittle also has found a lady as his next wife.

Higgins' mother scolds her son for his treatment of the poor girl Eliza comes in and she thanks Pickering for always treating her like a lady. But she also warns him that she is going to work with Nepommuck, Higgins' rival phonetician. Though outraged by this, Higgins cannot help admiring the girl's spirit. Higgins is hopeful that she will return to him. So as she is about to leave for her father's wedding, he shouts after her to run some errands for him afterwards. Eliza for her part gives no indication whether she will return to Wimpole street or not. She may join her lover Freddy now that she is an accomplished lady fit to be married into a higher class.

6.Critical Summary

Act I. The play is set in London one stormy evening when under the portico of St Paul's Church in London a group of Londoners are stranded on account of the sudden downpour. The crowd consists of all classes of people in London society. No taxi is available and a family standing there asks the boy Freddy in the group to fetch one. As Freddy rushes off on the errand, he knocks down a cockney flower girl. The girl shouts to him "Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah." The mother is surprised because the flower girl is using the boy's real name. She gives the poor girl some money and wants to know how she got her son's name. The lady soon learns that Freddy is a common form of address to a male used by flower girls. At that point a senior Gentleman enters from the rain. He is Colonel Pickering. The flower girl accosts him to sell flowers. He gives her some small change, while a passerby tells the girl to be watchful because he has noticed another bystander taking notes of her activities in a book, possibly a police informer. The girl is upset and become hysterical, shouting out that she is a poor girl and has done nothing wrong. The attention of the crowd is now focused on her and the note taker turns up before them. The crowd is soon mystified by the man's ability to identify

each one's native place or residence whenever they speak a phrase or sentence. The man seems to have an uncanny ability to identify the speech habits of everyone in the town.

The rain subsides and the crowd thins, leaving the flower girl the Note taking gentleman, Colonel Pickering and a few stragglers around. The colonel accosts the note taker about his special skill and is interested by his explanation that it is "simpl phonetics... the science of speech." He tells the old Colonel that he can identify the dialects of England exactly by listening to each person. In fact he can train someone like the cockney girl who speaks corrupt English and make her speak like a duchess. Colonel Pickering come to know that he is actually speaking to professor Henry Higgins whom he had been looking for. Both are linguistic scholars. Pickering had been in India studying Indian dialects. As they decide to dine together. The flower girl begs money from Higgins and he gives a half a crown some florins, and a half-sovereign, to her great delight. She enjoys a night of luxury taking a taxi home. Freddy comes in a taxi only to find that this mother and sister have left in exasperation waiting too long. Eliza takes that same taxi.

Shaw sets the setting and tone of the play in the very first act and introduces all the major characters in this scene. The occasion of the thunderstorm helps to bring together a slice of London society for the purpose of contrasts in terms of speech as well as status. The image of the theater is also significant in suggesting the idea that the play is going to be a highly theatrical suggested in the subtitle "A Romance in Five Acts," The theme of speech is also highlighted with the arrival of the two linguists together and the cockney girl who is going to the focus of their attention. The anticipation of the future conflict is also there with the challenge introduced by the two men that they can turn the cockney into a duchess by employing the science of phonetics. Shaw's habit of giving detailed and accurate stage directions is also helpful for the theater artists as well as the reader of the

play in making clear sense of what is happening. The boisterousness of Eliza and her rude manners contrasts with the stiffness and snobbishness of the upper class characters.

At the beginning none of the characters are given names. It is through their conversation that the names are identified. Thus Shaw shows the future course of development in the play in which people who are types identified with a rigid class system grow into individuals and their social status becomes less important than their individuality.

The idea of a romance is suggested as ironic considering the way in which characters are presented. There is a deliberate subversion of the idea of romance. Eliza is a "creature with her kerbstone English" who is a "squashed cabbage leaf," "who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds. Higgins seems to have only an abstract interest in the girl on account of her speech mannerisms. Though Freddy is introduced there seems no attraction there too. She picks the cab he brings only by accident and it might have been only an incidental happening unless viewed in terms of the later meetings between Freddy and Eliza.

Act II.

The scene follows the previous night. Higgins and Pickering are engaged in discussion at Higgins' home when Eliza breaks in, much to the confusion of Mrs. Pearce and to the surprise of the two men. Obviously, Eliza had taken seriously the previous night's boast by Higgins' about his ability to train her. She has a clear purpose; she wants to improve her speech so that she can become a salesgirl in a flower shop at the corner of Tottenham Court Road where genteel people are customers. Higgins is amused and disdainful and continues to tease and threaten her with beating with a broomstick. Eliza howls and shouts at him making general confusion. Pickering is kind to her and even addresses her as "Mrs. Doolittle" and offers her a seat too. Pickering is skeptical about helping the girl as Higgins had

claimed and he bets Higgins that if he can pass the girl off as a duchess in high society, then he will pay for the expenses involved in her grooming.

When she gets exasperated by Higgins' insult and mockery, Eliza threatens to leave. But Higgins lures her back stuffing her mouth with chocolate eating half of it to allay her doubt that it is poisoned. Finally they enter upon an agreement according to which Eliza will board with Higgins for six months and get schooled in language and proprieties of behaviour in high society. Mrs. Pearce takes charge of her taking her upstairs for a bath first.

In her absence Pickering questions Higgins about his intentions regarding the cockney girl. He wants him to treat the girl honorably. Higgins tells his friend that he dislikes friendships with women because they are jealous, demanding and stupid. They might "as well be blocks of wood." Apparently, he is a misogynist.

Mrs. Pearce returns to the scene to admonish Higgins about his manners in speech and at table since now they have a young girl of impressionable age living in the house. But Higgins gives no indications about his willingness to change his ways. But out of the blue appears Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father who has got information that she is at Higgins's house. He pretends to come to save his daughter's honour. Higgins offers to hand her over immediately, when the old man is forced to admit that the real purpose of the visit was to ask for five pounds which he will surely spend on drink and other disreputable activities he is used to. Higgins finds the man amusing and gives him five pounds. And when Eliza enters washed clean and wearing fine clothes, everyone is amazed at her appearance; even her father cannot recognize her. Thrilled by her own transformation Eliza wants to run off to her old neighbourhood to show off to her friends. Higgins warns her not to be a snob. Their real task lies ahead and Higgins must get ready for it.

Commentary- Higgins had bragged himself into this situation, something which he would not have wanted. This may be the reason why he insults the girl and tries to send her away. But then Pearce and Pickering are also involved with the education of the cockney girl. On his own, Higgins would never accomplish this, especially since we know that he hates women. We soon learn that Higgins' role is mainly to teach phonetics but it is the other two that help Eliza build her self respect and social confidence. If Eliza's roughness and lack of manners is evident, so is the case with Higgins who is often chastised by his maid for his bad manners and absent mindedness. However he is not malicious though he enjoys poking fun at Eliza and others in general. As the action progresses we may be able to discern some change in Higgins too, running parallel to the change that he and his companions elicit in Eliza. The one who sets out to sculpt a change in his Galatea himself seems to need a change for the better. He appears initially as one who is intensely interested in scientific pursuits and in this case the science of phonetics. He is about to play with the life of a poor girls for the sake of his science. His interest in the girls was merely for the sake of learning her accent. Once it was over he wanted to dismiss her. This attitude is reflected in his treatment of Eliza's father too. He finds the loafer interesting on account of his speech mannerism. The discussion between Pickering and Higgins about his intentions with regard to the girl focuses on the fact that the phonetics professor is anything but a romantic hero. The other characters in the play – Eliza, Pearce and Pickering tell Higgins that he lacks personal feelings.

Alfred Doolittle is a typical Shavian hero- boisterous iconoclast bubbling with wit and humour and hence very engaging. Shaw uses him to poke fun at the popular notions of conventional morality .We are also forced to pay attention to the old man's speech which Higgins comments on. The sequence in which Eliza threatens to leave because e of Higgins' rudeness foreshadows a similar episode in the final scene. Higgins calls her and ingrate and lures her back with chocolate. In the later

scene when she is about to go out he repeats the same accusation but she does not return although he seems to expect her to return to him. he is left alone, and Eliza's future is not known to us.

Act III

The scene is laid in Mrs. Higgins' residence in a flat on Chelsea embankment. Henry visits his mother unexpectedly .she is not happy with the visit because Henry is not well mannered to be in the company she is expecting at the moment. It has been some months since he had begun the phonetic experiment with Eliza Doolittle. And he wants his mother's help to introduce the girl to polite society. Mrs. Higgins does not appreciate her son's idea and is not happy with the prospect of having Eliza there. But it is too late now since Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill have arrived. The Eynsford Hills are already familiar since they made a brief appearance in the first scene. They are joined by Colonel Pickering and Freddy Eynsford Hill.

Higgins is in his element about to embarrass his mother and company with his comments on English society as savage when Eliza is brought in and introduced. Eliza has learned social graces and has acquired the skills of proper accent. She makes an impact by her studied way of talking and is comically impressive with her pedantic display. But the party is in for a shock when Mrs. Eynsford Hill begins to talk about influenza. Eliza launches into the topic, describing the death of one of her aunts of influenza and as she gets more involved with the story her natural accent and gossipy nature takes over and she uses expressions that shock them including her reference to her father's drunkenness. However Freddy is greatly impressed by what he thinks is Eliza's affectation of "the new small talk" and thinks that Eliza is an adept in the use of informal expressions- an excellent conversationalist. He develops a crush for the girl. As Eliza gets up to leave, he offers to escort her in her walk. But she puts him in his place exclaiming "Walk! Not bloody likely. I am going in a taxi." The expression

shocks the company .and Mrs. Eynsford Hill leaves immediately. Clara, her daughter, impressed with Eliza, tries to imitate her speech.

When they are alone Mrs. Higgins scolds her son. She tells him that there is no chance of Eliza ever making it to high society on account of her being in his company since he is habitually swearing. She inquires about the conditions under which the girl is living with the two. She thinks that Pickering and Henry are pair of babies playing with their little doll that is Eliza. But the two friends defend themselves launching into a description of how the girls have made tremendous improvements. She is impatient with their talk and foresees the problem of disposing of Eliza once they are finished with their experiment. But they are sure that they can find an opening for her. As they leave her presence Mrs. Higgins feels exasperated.

Commentary- Eliza's experimental introduction into polite company is indeed a disaster. Indeed she has learned a lot but embarrasses her host and company with the naïve pedantry of the novice. But She does steal the heart of Freddy and also impresses Clara who even imitates her, much to the embarrassment of the elders. Despite the fact that Higgins has trained her well Eliza's social debut is a disaster. Shaw uses the scene to reveal the social snobbery and prudishness of polite society and at the same time implies that however much one may put on an acquired self, , at unguarded moments the real personality comes out. It is also a scene in which Shaw exposes the dullness and hypocrisy of social gathering among the middleclass. They have nothing interesting to say except exchange social platitudes. Eliza's rude interruptions and Higgins' ebullience relieve the situation, though his mother is annoyed by it all.

Mrs. Higgins's confrontation with the two experimenters highlights another aspect of the situation. The two self proclaimed language experts are shown to be a pair of boyish men who are not serious about their science rather as Mrs. Higgins had indicated, playing with a doll. Higgins's

confession that his ideal woman is one like his mother and that “(He) shall never get into the way of seriously liking young women: some habits lie too deep to be changed,” is a crucial observation. It is ironic that Higgins can change someone like Eliza, but he cannot change himself.

Act IV

The scene is at Midnight. The Wimpole Street laboratory Higgins Eliza and Pickering return. IV

Higgins and Pickering talk about the evening considering it a success. Rather bored and tired, Higgins searches for his slippers. Eliza brings him the slippers putting it before him without a word and Higgins not having noticed thinks that they appeared out of nowhere. When he notices them, he thinks that they appeared out of nowhere. Higgins is oblivious to her presence, they discuss their experiment which has now become a success. Now they feel that it is getting tiresome. While the two leave for bed, we notice that Eliza is clearly hurt by their manner of treatment. The absentminded Higgins returns to fetch his slippers when Eliza flings them in his face. She is in a murderous mood having come to the realization that for Higgins she is no more important than a pair of slippers. Higgins is seemingly unperturbed and calls her presumptuous and ungrateful for Eliza the problem is what to do with her life now that they have succeeded with their experiment. Higgins suggests that she may now get married and perhaps open a flower shop. Eliza retorts that she wishes that she were left alone where she once had been instead of getting involved in this experiment. She asks Higgins whether her clothes belong to her. She wants to know what she can take away with her without being accused of stealing anything. Higgins is (uncharacteristically) hurt by this remark Eliza returns the ring that he had bought for her but in his fit of anger he throws it into the fireplace and leaves. Eliza later finds it out and places it on the dessert stand and goes out.

Commentary- It now appears that Higgins having achieved his purpose and proved his point the play has attained its climax. But the personal tensions in the play remain unresolved. This has been

anticipated in the remarks made earlier by Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins. Higgins has made a Cinderella-like transformation in the flower girl. But it is only the beginning of more serious issue: what next for the flower girl who no longer can return to her former social status. Eliza has a mind of her own and will no longer be bullied about by her mentor. When she fetches his slippers for him she indicates that she still has regard for him. But soon she flings them at him repeating in her own words what Mrs. Pearce and Colonel Pickering had put in their own words; that he treats people like objects. In her own words “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.” But she will not be a guinea pig for the phonetician's experiment. She explodes at Higgins when he asks her to get married. She won't sell herself and would find her own way through life. Higgins shows uncharacteristic emotion here. This is his moment of realization. His anti-woman stance is shaken up .women are not inferior beings.The ambassador's party is not shown on the stage possibly on account of the practicalities of the stage. More than that Shaw wants to avoid providing the aura of romance because it would rob him of his attempt to subvert the notions of romance.

Act V

The scene is laid in Mrs. Higgins's drawing-room Higgins and Pickering arrive anxious about Eliza who has run away. The seriousness of the situation is relieved a little bit with the arrival of Alfred Doolittle who is dressed as a bridegroom and announces that he is going to get married.

The irony of the situation is that he has come to quarrel with Higgins over a letter Higgins had written to a millionaire. In the letter the professor had jokingly recommended Doolittle as the most original moralist in England. It seems that the millionaire had taken it seriously and provided a sum of three thousand pounds a year to the old man in his will on condition that he would regularly lecture for the Wannafeller Moral Reform World League. Doolittle is angry because the windfall affluence has

spoiled his happiness since his poor relations have now approached him for help and he now has to behave like a respectable gentleman. As he says he is damned by “middle class morality.” The discussion now turns into a serious quarrel about the ownership of Eliza. Higgins can claim her since he has given the old man five pounds. To resolve the issue, Mrs. Higgins calls in Eliza who has been hiding upstairs. She also orders Doolittle to go to the balcony out of sight so that Eliza won't be shocked by the story of his newfound wealth. Eliza enters. She is quite cool and polite in her talk, Pickering tries to console her saying that she must not think of herself as a mere experiment. She thanks him. She is grateful that even though Higgins treated her as a flower girl to be trained to become a duchess, Pickering always treated her like a duchess. It is from Pickering that she learned self-respect. Higgins is his old self again and in fact even more harsh. The reappearance of Doolittle is yet another shock for Eliza. Doolittle announces that he is on his way to the wedding and invites the others also to join him for the ceremony. He leaves while Eliza and Higgins are left alone. The other leave the scene to get ready for the wedding.

The two quarrel. Higgins is unapologetic about his treatment of Eliza. But he claims that he is fair in that he treats everyone like he treats Eliza. He asks her to return to him. He would adopt her as his daughter or can get married to Pickering. She snaps at him saying that she won't marry him even if she asks. She also indicates to him that Freddy has been writing love letters to her which elicits only scorn from Higgins since he considers Freddy a fool. But Eliza tells him that she will marry Freddy and they would earn their living by supporting the work of Higgins' rival phonetician Neppomuck. Higgins has only contempt for Neppomuck too. But Eliza's defiance impresses him in such a manner that he admires her for it. Mrs. Higgins appears at this moment announcing to Eliza it is time to leave for the wedding. As she is leaving with his mother, Higgins in his casual manner asks Eliza to buy some gloves, ties, ham, and cheese for him when she returns home. Eliza's reply is confusing, leaving

us in doubt whether she will do so or even return to him. His mother tells Higgins that he has spoiled the girl. She offers to buy the things for him. But Higgins is confident that Eliza will do it. He is chuckling to himself in his self-satisfied manner as the curtain falls.

Commentary- The final scene ties together the various themes developed in the previous acts. Eliza has acquired a new self and a social standing. Higgins does not seem to appreciate her for what she is. It is from Eliza that we learn certain truths to which Higgins was not open. Treating people as objects in an experiment deprives them of dignity and self respect. Higgins has failed to understand this. Eliza's appreciation of Pickering and Mrs. Higgins comes from the fact that they treat her as a human being. Eliza makes the observation that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated." This goes against Higgins' theory that good manners and proper language is what makes for class difference. But Eliza's statement is also an indication that it is the language that she has learned that makes her say so. Had she remained the flower girl, she would not be able to make such a statement. She has grown to maturity, to self-respect thanks mainly to Pickering. The appearance of her father highlights another side of the theme. The man has acquired sudden wealth and through that social respectability and the life a bourgeois with its middleclass morality and all. But it has destroyed his spirit. In his own words, it has "ruined me. Destroyed my happiness. Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality." Higgins claims that Eliza has hardly an idea that he hasn't put into her head that she can express. His air of intellectual superiority bars him from being meaningfully related to Eliza. So there is no reason to believe that their relationship would develop any further.

The ending of the play is problematic. Considering Shaw's ant-romanticism, the conclusion is characteristic. The suggestion that Freddy will marry Eliza is there, but this is not certain. Higgins expects Eliza to toe his line though he has no intentions of marrying her. In several versions of the

popular productions on stage as well as movies, producers have added lines that suggest reconciliation between the two. Shaw never intended that. He has kept the ending abrupt and deliberately ambivalent.

In an **epilogue** that he added to one of the later editions of the play Shaw insists on the ending that he wrote. He downplays the popular romantic expectations of the audience. He analyses the situation and argues that Higgins could never marry Eliza. He has too much admiration for his mother that he cannot find Eliza a substitute for her in any sense. Higgins would never marry. and even “had Mrs. Higgins died, there would still have been Milton and the Universal Alphabet.” In Shaw's imagination if Eliza marries anyone at all, it must be Freddy—“And that is just what Eliza did.” But then he says that their life is also not successful .they face failures and has a hard time of it. In other words Shaw is attempting to subvert any notion of the romantic in the story. The title of the play with its suggestions of a fairytale ending thus becomes ironic.

7. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Major Characters

1. Henry Higgins: He is a typical Shavian character. Expert phonetician, eccentric arrogant, self-righteous and willful and cocksure of his skills he treats others with disdain. Higgins is entirely unromantic, in fact a misogynist. If he has any attachment to a woman, it is his mother only. He is character full of contradictions, which makes his actions and true intentions ambiguous to the audience. Shaw keeps Higgins as incorrigible throughout the play except for the moment when Eliza confronts him in a rage. Higgins is a mouthpiece for Shaw to put forward his controversial ideas on the English language and the British class system. He enjoys poking fun at conventional British society and its values and thinks that he can do wonders with his power of speech. He is loquacious

and dominates everybody around him with his power of language and air of superior knowledge. Higgins justifies his bullying of Eliza saying that he treats everybody, even a duchess, as equally badly as one would treat “flower girls by the curbside”. The only change that we may notice is his intention toward teaching Eliza. Initially Higgins only wanted to have fun playing the Pygmalion to Eliza. But in the end, he wants to train Eliza into a true lady. Thus Higgins through Eliza breaks the popular notions about class hierarchies.

He accidentally comes across Eliza whom he is sure he can pass off as a duchess in a few months time by training her in good speech. Eliza joins him as a willing pupil in hope of improving her career and is subjected to his insults. He teaches her well and once he gets bored with the project, Higgins tries to get rid of her. This leads to further complications. Higgins expects her to be bounden to him, but she becomes independent minded. The credit for this also is claimed by Higgins. He considers women a nuisance. Nevertheless, Higgins is kind by nature, and this characteristic of his has prevented the world from turning against him. An emotional moment occurs when Eliza tells him to his face that he has no regard for her as a human being and hurls his slippers at him. Higgins is anxious about the girl when she absconds. He is glad to find her with his mother but he does not seem to change his ways. In spite of it all Higgins comes off as a lovable character.

2. Eliza Doolittle: The poor cockney flower girl Eliza is one of the most memorable of Shaw’s creations. She becomes the linguistic protégé of the arrogant bully Professor Higgins in the hope of improving her speech so that she can work in a respectable flower shop. But she gets more than what she bargained for. She is headstrong but submits to Higgins rigor and even develops an attachment to him. Initially she is out of place at Wimpole Street with her dirty ill-fitting clothes and rude manners. She is introduced into high society as promised and is successful in getting a male admirer too. She develops from the naïve street girl to an accomplished and independent minded woman whom even

the disdainful Higgins develops an admiration for. She is put up as an example of social improvement through training. But there is a deeper moral growth in her. She realizes that she cannot be treated as an inferior 'object' by any one any more and find her own way in life. She is not snobbish though and has no need for the comforts of the professor's home. He tells her that she would be treated more as a human than an experimental object. She admires Colonel Pickering precisely because Pickering treated her with respect. Her refusal to return to Higgins shows that she has acquired moral and social maturity. She does elicit many comic moments in the play especially in her debut performance in high society at Mrs. Higgins' party. Higgins's training did her good. But to become a proper lady she got the moral support of Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins along with that of Pickering.

3. Colonel Pickering: Pickering is introduced as a typical retired British Officer from the Indian Service of the time. He is a wealthy bachelor and expert in Indian dialects. He has come to England from India to meet Higgins, and sets up lodgings with Higgins joining in Eliza's training in English and offers to finance the project if Higgins succeeds. He is initially sceptical of Higgins' claims. But he sympathises with the girls and it is his presence that makes Eliza's life bearable in Higgins' company. Pickering also finances Eliza's flower shop after she has attained what she was supposed to achieve- good manners and social graces

4. Mrs. Higgins: Mrs. Higgins is Prof Higgins' mother. She is his ideal woman. She is a refined, independent woman, who lives alone but is frequently visited by her son. She is irritated by his bad manners and swearing and often chastises him for that. She is worried about her son and his friend playing with the life of a poor girl for the sake of proving a theory. She shelters Eliza in her distress.

5. Alfred Doolittle: Eliza's father, a common dustman drunkard, who tries to cadge money for anyone to get a drink at the pub. He has at least 6 wives but is worried about his daughter taking to

prostitution when she joins Higgins's household. He amuses Higgins with his talk when he comes to bargain over his daughter and succeeds in extracting five pounds from him. His speeches on middleclass morality are aimed at the moralistic pretenses of the British gentry. He is least bothered about his roguish behaviour. Higgins recommends him to an American Philanthropist who bequeaths a pension on the man to deliver lectures on morality his Moral Reform League. It is indeed ironic that he complains about this because now he has gone up in society and is forced to be different from his natural self and behave like the middle class. He is now forced to be a respectable gentleman providing for his poor relatives and family and get married properly .he complains against Higgins for recommending him to the philanthropist. Shaw uses him to poke fun at the British middleclass and highlights the point that it is people like Doolittle who actually enjoy life without any inhibitions. However we cannot be sure whether Shaw really means him as a model citizen.

6. Mrs. Pearce the housekeeper is a lady of firm but gentle nature. Initially we are led to think that she is a snob. But we soon learn that she is a foil to the professor and even admonishes him for his attitude to the young Eliza. She expresses her concern about Higgins swearing when he speaks and also his table manners because they have an impressionable young "lady" in the house .Mrs. Pearce also requests Higgins not to arrive for breakfast in his "dressing-gown", or at least not to substitute it for a napkin at the table. She would rather treat Eliza as a human being and wonders what will be her fate when finally Higgins has succeeded improving his point. She tells Higgins he can't treat humans like objects "as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach." She fails to make him change. Mrs. Pearce also has an important role in the nurturing of the cockney girl, providing a human touch to the situation and being a sort of guardian to her against Higgins.

Minor Characters

1. Clara Eynsford Hill-She is the sister of Freddy, a snobbish shallow girl with aristocratic pretenses. She is impressed by the rude mannerism of speech by Eliza when she first meets her and is ready to believe that it is the new small talk in society. She even tries to imitate it. But she soon learns that she can gain other peoples respect by being sincere and straightforward rather than putting on airs.

2. Freddy: A former member of the upper class he is Mrs. Eynsford Hill's son and Eliza's lover. Freddy is humble and kind and has the manners of a gentleman accustomed to a middle class lifestyle but, like his sister, lacks a middle class education. . He is constantly being bossed around by his sister and mother He falls madly obsessed with Eliza and is reported to have been creeping on Eliza every night under her windows. Eventually he marries her. They try to open a flower shop together, but do poorly until they take some classes in simple mathematics. Freddy is truly incompetent and referred to as a fool by Higgins. He is put up as an example of the problem of class. His behaviour shows how difficult it is for members of a higher class to adjust to lower class lifestyle when their fortunes fall.

3. Mrs. Eynsford Hill: Freddy and Clara's mother. She is a former member of the upper class, who having lost her social prestige tries to keep up a show of her class in impoverished circumstances. She is a friend of Mrs. Higgins. She is a dotting mother to her children but contently worries about not being able to give them some good education and proper breeding.

4. Nepomuuck(Zoltan Karpathy): He is a former Hungarian student of Higgins who claims to be an expert in languages and translation. His impressions of Eliza at the Ambassador's party are an assurance that Higgins has succeeded with Eliza. The man thinks that she is a Hungarian of royal blood, on account of her behaviour. Higgins has only jocular contempt for him.

5. Ezra D. Wannafeller: The stereotypical millionaire American philanthropist. He is probably a parody on John D Rockefeller, the American millionaire and philanthropist of Shaw's time. He is used for satirical purposes. Because Higgins wrote a joking letter to the man indicating that the drunken and irreverent Alfred Doolittle is an original moralist, Wannafeller bequeaths a fat pension on Doolittle so that he would deliver moral lectures for the Wannafeller Moral Reform League. This suddenly changes the life style of Doolittle.

1. Shaw's satire on Class hierarchies- Shaw identifies language and manners as signs that distinguish social class. He implies that social mobility is possible through education. Besides he makes fun of the British middle class for its snobbery and lack of spontaneity. Three classes of British society are represented in the play. The upper class represented by the Eynsford Hills and Mrs. Higgins, the middle class reflected in Mrs. Pearce, and the lower class by Eliza and her father. They are all brought together in the very first scene and contrasted for their living conditions, language and attitudes.

Eliza appears as a poor cockney trying to make a living selling flowers on the kerb The playwright describes her as "...not at all a romantic figure...hair needs washing rather badly...wears a shoddy black coat...boots are much the worse for wear...no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies she is very dirty." Her misery is evident in the description. She encounters the upper class people in the Eynsford Hills, when Clara's snobbery comes out .She treats the girl with contempt. We also notice how delighted she is when she gets money and enjoys a taxi ride home with it. Eliza chooses to undergo the necessary training to improve her status. She goes to Wimpole Street to take lessons from Higgins supported by the Kindly Colonel Pickering. Both Eliza and her father change their class in the end. But Eliza's change is deeper because she attains self respect and

personal integrity whereas her father changes his class through a financial windfall, and does not like it except for the comforts that money would bring. The upper class is also represented in the patronizing American philanthropist whose wealth is used for empty-headed enterprises like moral reform.

2. Feminism- Shaw was indeed an advocate of Women's rights. But he often presents his male characters as patronizing and superior to the females (like Caesar in *Caesar and Cleopatra*). The behavior of women in each social class is highlighted in the play through Eliza, Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Higgins and the Eynsford Hill ladies. The lot of the working class is like Eliza, no opportunity for education or cultivation of good manners. But they have strength of character and spirit.

The upper class women are artificial, snobbish and incapable of fending for themselves. But they speak polished language and get easily scandalized by unconventional behaviour. Language is one particular point of distinction. But through Eliza Shaw proves that class distinctions can be dissolved through training and more than that it is one's attitudes that distinguish the power of a woman. Eliza's questioning and rejection of the misogynistic Higgins is in fact the moral climax of the play. She would not be patronized or bullied by men any more.

3. The Battle of the Sexes- As an extension of this theme we may also refer to the battle of the sexes. Higgins has little sympathy for Eliza or women in general. He considers them a nuisance. Both he and Pickering are bachelors and they amuse themselves through 'scientific' experiments and gloat about their achievements in the field. Their experimental animal is Eliza. But the cockney girl grows out of being bullied and gets back at Higgins and tells him home truths about herself. She would no longer be anyone's plaything. In fact the other two women had anticipated this when they raised questions to Higgins about what they would do after they are finished with their experiment. They

both ask of Eliza's future "after [they're] done with her. When Eliza flings his slippers at him, Higgins is forced to confront the situation which he had refused to look at. Pickering and Higgins are ignorant of the consequences of their actions while the women are perceptive enough to see it .they are possessed with practical wisdom and intuitive knowledge. This is evident in Mrs. Higgins' observation: "...you two infinitely stupid male creatures: the problem of what is to be done with her afterwards." Higgins is comfortable with his mother and is able to idealize her. He may not need a romantic relationship, but he too needs emotional and spiritual comfort which he seeks in his mother.

4. Education and social mobility- Nature versus nurture.

The main plot of Pygmalion revolves around social classes and the bet Higgins makes with Pickering that he can "turn [Eliza] into a duchess." That is to say, he is taking an ordinary, poor girl in the lower class and turning her into an elite member of the upper class. This means that he is changing her natural speech, behavior, and her natural lifestyle and way of life (man vs. nature). Higgins says, "But you have no idea 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..." which implies the theme of man vs. nature. He is also going against the norms of the distinction between classes on the social ladder (man vs. man).

Shaw's style-

Shaw developed a kind of stage craft that was influenced by Ibsenist problem approach, the idea of the "well made play" of Aw Pinero and the comic spirit of Oscar Wilde. Without his gift for laughter and humour Shaw would not have been so successful. Shaw showed that serious problems could be discussed on the stage and still engages the audience when it is leavened with lively language and witticism. A strong touch of the farce adds to it. Shaw could hold his audience without much sensational action on the stage because of this. Trained as a musician, his English is also musical and

full of flourishes of language. He is entertaining and at the same time highly subversive and provocative. He also introduced extensive commentary on his plays and their themes and characters so that the audience would not remain in ignorance of what he wanted to say. Hence his plays are not only to be enjoyed on stage but can also be read in the library. There is little ambiguity in the theses that he projected in his plays. He plays the role of a teacher or a lecturer when it comes to explaining his themes.

8. Self-Check Question-

1. Explain the significance of the first scene.
2. What is Shaw's attitude to language?
3. What makes Higgins undertake the project of training Eliza Doolittle?
4. Identify the speech mannerism (cockneyism) of Eliza citing some examples.
5. Who is Colonel Pickering? How does he differ from Higgins in his attitude to Eliza?
6. What is Mrs. Pearce's reaction to the appearance of Elia?
7. Why does Eliza come to Higgins' house in Wimpole Street?
8. Who is Eliza's lover?
9. Did Higgins succeed in introducing Eliza to society?
10. Why was Mrs. Eynsford Hill shocked by Eliza's behaviour?
11. Who is Neppomuuck?
12. Why does Higgins call Eliza ungrateful?
13. What is Eliza's reaction to it?
14. What are your impressions of Alfred Doolittle?
15. How does he rise in social class
16. What is Doolittle's reaction to his financial windfall?

17. Why is the ending ambiguous?

18. Why does Shaw call the play a romance? How does he subvert the standard conventions of a romance?

19. Explain the title “Pygmalion”?

20. What is Shavianism?

21. Who is a Shavian hero? Does Higgins fit the description?

Essays:

1. Identify the themes in the play.

2. Compare and contrast the characters of Higgins and Eliza.

3. What ideas regarding language and social class does Shaw examine in his play?

