PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS

PYGMALION

by George Bernard Shaw

UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

PYGMALION

George Bernard Shaw

Prestwick House

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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

CONTENTS

Notes

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin in 1856 to a lower middle-class family. In his early twenties, he moved to London, England, where he began his career as a writer, speaker, and critic. Before his death following a fall in 1950, he had also become a famous socialist and vegetarian, a feminist and anti-war activist, and an international celebrity.

Shaw's fierce opposition to World War I turned many of his fellow citizens against him, but the outcry was muted by their love for his plays; and before long, the public embraced Shaw as a national treasure. With his reputation ensured, Shaw traveled the world, always speaking out against what he believed was wrong. He stayed for a while in the Soviet Union at Stalin's invitation, but he visited the United States only briefly.

During his life, Shaw wrote more than sixty plays, including *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Pygmalion* (1912), and *Saint Joan* (1923). In addition to his many other accomplishments, George Bernard Shaw earned the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

The fact that a Shaw play is in production somewhere in the world on any given day reflects the popularity of this playwright, whom some critics consider second only to Shakespeare.

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

As you read through *Pygmalion*, consider the following points:

1. The English language:

    - Does language determine one's status?
    - Should "The Queen's English" be the only proper way of speaking?
    - Are Eliza's syntax and pronunciation actually incorrect, or does Higgins place too much of an emphasis on them?
    - Is Higgins's method of teaching pronunciation compromised by his expectations about Eliza?

2. Gender and class roles in Victorian England were rigidly defined. Audiences were not used to seeing these values questioned. Shaw, though, examined and rejected the idea of each person being trapped in his or her role. Toward the end of the play, Eliza claims that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated."

3. The concept that appearance differs from reality is another of Shaw's targets. Although Eliza is the same person from the beginning of the play until the end, Freddie ignores her when she is a lowly flower seller and yet is completely enraptured by her when he views her as a member of high society.

4. What does Eliza actually learn and accomplish? Readers should be aware that the most important change she undergoes is one of self-realization. She learns that accent, vocabulary, and pronunciation are not the measure of a human being; by the end of the play, Eliza is aware that she can function independently of Higgins.

ACT I

[Covent Garden at 11.15 p.m. Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico of St. Paul's Church, where there are already several people, among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. They are all peering out gloomily at the rain, except one man with his back turned to the rest, who seems wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing busily.

The church clock strikes the first quarter.]

THE DAUGHTER: *[in the space between the central pillars, close to the one on her left]* I'm getting chilled to the bone. What can Freddy be doing all this time? He's been gone twenty minutes.

THE MOTHER: *[on her daughter's right]* Not so long. But he ought to have got us a cab by this.

A BYSTANDER: *[on the lady's right]* He won't get no cab not until half-past eleven, missus, when they come back after dropping their theatre fares.

THE MOTHER: But we must have a cab. We can't stand here until half-past eleven. It's too bad.

THE BYSTANDER: Well, it ain't my fault, missus.

THE DAUGHTER: If Freddy had a bit of gumption, he would have got one at the theatre door.

THE MOTHER: What could he have done, poor boy?
THE DAUGHTER: Other people got cabs. Why couldn't he?

[Freddy rushes in out of the rain from the Southampton Street side, and comes between them closing a dripping umbrella. He is a young man of twenty, in evening dress, very wet around the ankles.]

THE DAUGHTER: Well, haven't you got a cab?
FREDDY: There's not one to be had for love or money.
THE MOTHER: Oh, Freddy, there must be one. You can't have tried.
THE DAUGHTER: It's too tiresome. Do you expect us to go and get one ourselves?
FREDDY: I tell you they're all engaged. The rain was so sudden: nobody was prepared; and everybody had to take a cab. I've been to Charing Cross one way and nearly to Ludgate Circus the other; and they were all engaged.
THE MOTHER: Did you try Trafalgar Square?
FREDDY: There wasn't one at Trafalgar Square.
THE DAUGHTER: Did you try?
FREDDY: I tried as far as Charing Cross Station. Did you expect me to walk to Hammersmith?
THE DAUGHTER: You haven't tried at all.
THE MOTHER: You really are very helpless, Freddy. Go again; and don't come back until you have found a cab.
FREDDY: I shall simply get soaked for nothing.
THE DAUGHTER: And what about us? Are we to stay here all night in this draught, with next to nothing on. You selfish pig—
FREDDY: Oh, very well: I'll go, I'll go. *[He opens his umbrella and dashes off Strandwards, but comes into collision with a flower girl, who is hurrying in for shelter, knocking her basket out of her hands. A blinding flash of lightning, followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder, orchestrates the incident]*
THE FLOWER GIRL: Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah.
FREDDY: Sorry *[he rushes off]*.
THE FLOWER GIRL: *[picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket]* There's menners f' yer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad. *[She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady's right. She is not at all an attractive person. She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly older. She wears a little sailor hat of*

black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly: its mousy color can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to her waist. She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron. Her boots are much the worse for wear. She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than theirs; but their condition leaves something to be desired; and she needs the services of a dentist].

THE MOTHER: How do you know that my son's name is Freddy, pray?

THE FLOWER GIRL: Ow, eez ye-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty baw-mz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them? *[Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London.]*

THE DAUGHTER: Do nothing of the sort, mother. The idea!

THE MOTHER: Please allow me, Clara. Have you any pennies?

THE DAUGHTER: No. I've nothing smaller than sixpence.

THE FLOWER GIRL: *[hopefully]* I can give you change for a tanner, kind lady.

THE MOTHER: *[to Clara]* Give it to me. *[Clara parts reluctantly]*. Now *[to the girl]* this is for your flowers.

THE FLOWER GIRL: Thank you kindly, lady.

THE DAUGHTER: Make her give you the change. These things are only a penny a bunch.

THE MOTHER: Do hold your tongue, Clara. *[To the girl]*. You can keep the change.

THE FLOWER GIRL: Oh, thank you, lady.

THE MOTHER: Now tell me how you know that young gentleman's name.

THE FLOWER GIRL: I didn't.

THE MOTHER: I heard you call him by it. Don't try to deceive me.

THE FLOWER GIRL: *[protesting]* Who's trying to deceive you? I called him Freddy or Charlie same as you might yourself if you was talking to a stranger and wished to be pleasant. *[She sits down beside her basket]*.

THE DAUGHTER: Sixpence thrown away! Really, mamma, you might have spared Freddy that. *[She retreats in disgust behind the pillar]*.

[An elderly gentleman of the amiable military type rushes into shelter, and closes a dripping umbrella. He is in the same plight as Freddy, very wet about the ankles. He is in evening dress, with a light overcoat. He takes the place left vacant by the daughter's retirement.]

GLOSSARY

Preface

Melville Bell – (1819–1905) a Scottish American teacher who wrote about education and the science of speech; he created an alphabet with symbols that represented every sound of the human voice. Bell was the father of Alexander Graham Bell.

Alexander J. Ellis – (1814-1890) an English scholar of linguistics

Henry Sweet – (1845-1912) the founder of modern phonetics; sweet was a British phonetician and scholar of linguistics. He is well known for his *History of English Sounds*.

Ibsen – Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is known as the "father of modern drama." The Norwegian playwright is known for his psychological dramas and commentaries on social issues of the day. His plays are still frequently performed globally.

Samuel Butler – (1835-1902) a British writer; he is best known for *The Way of All Flesh*, a satire on family life in mid-Victorian England.

Imperial Institute – built as the National memorial of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in the United Kingdom (1887-1893); the Institute's objective was to spread knowledge of agriculture, commerce, and industrial progress throughout the Empire.

Joseph Chamberlain – (1836-1914) a British statesman who advocated radical social reform throughout his political career

Oxford – one of the oldest English-language universities in the world; built in the 12th century in England, it was the center of learning throughout the Middle Ages. Oxford University still maintains an outstanding reputation for its academic programs.

Pitman System of Shorthand – a phonetic system of rapid writing developed by Sir Isaac Pitman, first presented in 1837

Sybil – This is a reference to "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves," a poem written by Gerard Manley Hopkins. The poem discusses the consequences that occur when opposites (such as good and evil) are not resolved.

The Times – a daily newspaper in the United Kingdom; it is called the *London Times* by those living outside of Britain.

"…**Thersites railed at Ajax**…" **–** In Greek mythology, Thersites was a soldier in the Greek army during the Trojan War. Thersites also appears in Shakespeare's play *The History of Troilus and Cressida* in which he is Ajax's slave.

VOCABULARY

Preface

amenity – pleasantness, attractiveness
aspirant – someone who seeks a high position or advancement
conciliatory – appeasing, pacifying, reconciling
cryptograms – coded or secret writings
decipher – to interpret, decode
derisive – mocking; sarcastic
didactic – morally instructive
eminence – a position of superiority
exorbitant – excessive
inscrutable – difficult to understand; mysterious
libelous – defamatory; slanderous
repudiation – refusing to honor something previously agreed to
satires – literary works that use humor to ridicule something or someone
syndicate – a business that sells publications to periodicals
vulgarly – crudely, offensively

Act I

bilious – ill-humored
brogue – an accent
crooning – singing, humming softly
detestable – abominable; despicable; loathsome; repugnant
draught – a current of air
genially – graciously
grandeur – nobility of character, magnificence
gumption – boldness; aggressiveness
half-a-crown – a silver coin worth 2.5 shillings
half-sovereign – a gold coin worth 10 shillings
impertinent – improperly forward or bold
mendacity – untruthfulness
pence – the plural form for a penny
plinth – the supporting block or slab of a column
portico – a roofed porch or walkway supported by columns
rebuking – reprimanding; criticizing sharply