

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion" is a social commentary on the British class system of the early 20th century, wrapped in a narrative inspired by the Greek myth of the same name. The play centers around Professor Henry Higgins, an expert in phonetics, who makes a bet with Colonel Pickering that he can transform Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl, into a refined lady through the power of speech training¹. Summary Two old gentlemen meet in the rain one night at Covent Garden. Professor Higgins is a scientist of phonetics, and Colonel Pickering is a linguist of Indian dialects. The first bets the other that he can, with his knowledge of phonetics, convince high London society that, in a matter of months, he will be able to transform the cockney speaking Covent Garden flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a woman as self-confident and well-spoken as a duchess. The next morning, the girl appears at his laboratory on Wimpole Street to ask for speech lessons, offering to pay a shilling, so that she may speak properly enough to work in a flower shop. Higgins makes merciless fun of her, but is seduced by the idea of working his magic on her. Pickering goads him on by agreeing to cover the costs of the experiment if Higgins can pass Eliza off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. The challenge is taken, and Higgins starts by having his housekeeper bathe Eliza and give her new clothes. Then Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle comes to demand the return of his daughter, though his real intention is to hit Higgins up for some money. The professor, amused by Doolittle's unusual rhetoric, gives him five pounds. On his way out, the dustman fails to recognize the now clean, pretty flower girl as his daughter. For a number of months, Higgins trains Eliza to speak properly. Two trials for Eliza follow. The first occurs at Higgins' mother's home, where Eliza is introduced to a trio of classy mother, daughter, and son. The son Freddy is very attracted to her, and further taken with what he thinks is her affected "small talk" when she slips into cockney. Setting: The myth is set in ancient times and involves divine intervention, while the play is set in modern London and focuses on social issues. Differences: Love: In the myth, Pygmalion falls in love with his creation, whereas in Shaw's play, Higgins remains emotionally detached from Eliza, viewing her more as an experiment. He suggests she .marry somebody