Women’s Suffrage Movement And The Difference In Social Classes In Pygmalion

Pygmalion is a play written in 1912 by George Bernard Shaw. Pygmalion depicts many ideals of the early 20th century, including the women’s suffrage movement and the large difference in social classes (“Pygmalion”)e. The play’s main characters are Eliza Doolittle, a strong-willed young woman, and Professor Higgins, a linguistic. Eliza speaks Cockney (a working class language), which means she does not get much respect from others, and Professor Higgins offers to make her speak like a Duchess (meaning she can be more in her life). Eliza wants a job at a flower shop and Higgins, who was challenged by Colonel Pickering, wants to prove he can teach Eliza “proper” English in just six months (“Introduction to Pygmalion”). The two met on a rainy day in Covent Garden, with Higgens taking notes on Eliza’s speech (“Pygmalion by George”). Pickering himself pays for Eliza’s education and Higgins’ trainings are very intense and he is often very rude to Eliza, though Eliza almost always defends herself. Through their training, though neither Eliza nor Higgins admits this, they start to like each other more and more (“The Relation”), Higgins even says, “She is at an age of interest.” (George Bernard). Throughout all this, Eliza’s father, Alfred, requests money from Higgins as his daughter no longer spends time at home. He later admits that money does not make him happier, which is another ploy of Shaw’s to get people to question social classes. In addition, Higgins takes Eliza to his mother for practice, and she greatly disapproves, saying Higgins and Pickering are “...treating her (Eliza) like a doll,” and asks them to think about what will happen when the course is over. She was right, as after Eliza performs well on a test, Higgins and Pickering forget all about her and Eliza becomes very mad. She eventually realizes that she no longer needs Higgins and Pickering and goes to stay with Higgins’ mother (“Pygmalion by George”), she turns down Higgins marriage proposal and states that she will support herself and then marry Freddie, who she met at Mrs.Higgins’ house (George Bernard). This ending shows how pygmalion presents the ideals that women do not need men to survive, and that social class/construct is made up. Eliza did not need language lessons to feel better or like herself, and the language lessons did not change her intelligence, showing that people make assumptions about other people based on social class. Shaw wanted people to think about this during his play, asking people to question the mindset they had.

George Bernard Shaw was the writer of Pygmalion and Nobel Peace Prize in Literature winner in 1925. He was born in 1856 in Ireland to an alcoholic civil servant. When he was 16, his mother left him to move to London (“George Bernard”). Shaw had a hard time in school and he was self taught, causing him to have an interest in Shakespeare and once he finished schooling, he moved to London to become a writer. However, he did not become a playwright until years after he moved. He started as a journalist in 1885. In London, he found that social classes were rigidly constructed and he wanted social reform, which gave him inspiration for many of his plays, including Pygmalion (George Bernard). In fact, Shaw was part of the social liberalism party, seeking fair distribution of wealth and power (“What is Social”). His social and political beliefs were often portrayed in his work and he used his work as a platform for social change. This is seen in Pygmalion with how strong-willed Eliza is and the different in Higgins’ and Eliza’s social class (he spread the message that you did not need to be male or socially superior to be successful.) And, though Shaw never fell in love, he believed women had the exact same rights as men, saying that “Unless woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to

her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself." This ideal is, again, presented in Pygmalion. Shaw's true inspiration for Pygmalion came from his editor, WT Stead, who wrote a series of articles about young women being sold. Stead, through his research, proved that society though "women ought to value (their virginity) more than life." So, Shaw used this in his theatre to promote social change (George Bernard).

Eliza Doolittle, specifically, is a very strong-willed character who is not afraid to say her mind. She also has a little bit of a temper. Her dialect, which starts the story, shows that she is in poverty, from a poor-area of London who never normally find herself in high society. In addition, Eliza cannot afford new clothes or to clean herself very often, so she is portrayed as a dirty, lower class person ("The Character"). She is almost a cliché - poor girl who becomes insanely smart and gorgeous, who is manipulated by a man - the perfect heroine. Though, some of her unique charm makes Eliza special, for example, she growls when she gets mad ("Eliza Doolittle"). Throughout the story, Eliza is transformed into an upper class women, eventually learning how to speak, look, and talk (including conversations to bring up) like one. However, when the play ends and she becomes "like a duchess" she does not feel very duchess like and is not sure which social class she belongs to or whether she belongs in a social class (one of the social points that Shaw is trying to make.) This, along with way Higgins treats Eliza makes her very angry, her "boiling point" being her act four monologue (where my inspiration should come from) when she yells at Higgins (George Bernard). This makes Eliza a lovable, relatable character. In the end, she finds comfort with who she says and returns back to some of her "lower class ways" (yet again, another social point made by Shaw.) In the end Eliza says, " I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me," when Higgins suggest marrying her off. Eliza's strong willed, independent, no one will take advantage of me attitude makes her a very angry character when she is being taken advantage of (Eliza Doolittle).

Act four is the scene where Eliza becomes furious with Higgins and Pickering after finishing her training. Act four is a major power shift as, while Eliza had bursts of anger before, Higgins was always in charge. Eliza finally has the power to say what she wants - and make Higgins angry. Act four gave Eliza credibility (to the audience) and she started taking control of what she wanted and who she was. Eliza's anger starts when Higgins and Pickering ignore her, talking about where Higgins has put his slipper. They all had recently been out, testing Eliza on her manners and speaking by going to dinner, parties, the opera, etc. Eliza had passed with flying colors. No attention is payed to Eliza and she begins to get mad, it was her who put in the work. Eliza finds the slipper and argues with Higgins, making sure to not forget her roots in poverty. Eliza questions whether the clothes (which were bought for her) are really hers and questions her place in society. Higgins even suggests that Eliza, as an attractive lady, can find someone to marry, which Eliza is very opposed to (this is Eliza's monologue scene). The monologue revelas how Eliza feels about marriage, and how degrading it really is (showing how social classes don't always mean good things). This scene reveals the hidden feelings between Higgins and Eliza, though Eliza ends the scene by giving back a ring (hinting at marriage). Though Higgins leaves the room calmly, he tries to regain his dignity back. Act four brings back Eliza's sense of identity as a lower class women, and with that, anger. Eliza refuses to believe that she is a project, that Higgins created her, as it is Eliza who endured months of training. Act four also "balances" Eliza and Higgins' relationship as Eliza is finally able to say her mind and get mad at Higgins. In addition, Eliza implies that working in lower-class is less degrading then becoming an upper class wife. It is here that Shaw's ideas are conveyed ("Pygmalion

Summary”).

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