 Year 12 English Standard

Pygmalion – Acts I and II – the story so far

Task – Fill in the blanks using the words in the bank below.

Word bank:

* Pickering
* Annoyance
* Flower
* Cab
* Rain
* Demands
* Dirty
* Note-taker
* Eliza
* Taxis
* Empty

Act I

Summary

Heavy drenches Mrs Eynsford-Hill and her two adult children, Freddy and Clara, as they wait for a . As Freddie leaves to continue looking, he runs into girl Eliza Doolittle. Dressed in rags, Eliza is not shy about voicing her , and in her loud cockney accent, payment for her ruined flowers. She is overheard by a gentleman , Professor Henry Higgins. Professor Higgins attacks for her “kerbstone” English, and jokingly asserts to Colonel that “in three months (he) could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party.” Eliza it home with Higgins’ and Pickering’s money and arrives at her small and rental room, counts her money, and goes to bed fully dressed.

Analysis

This act is carefully constructed to portray a representative slice of society, in which characters from vastly different strata of society who would normally keep apart are brought together by bad weather. While the transformation of Eliza in the play focuses on speech, each one of her subsequent tests is also highly visual. Under these terms, it should help us to think about the comparison of the artificial makeover of Eliza Doolittle against the genuine increase in self-esteem.

The confusion of the thunderstorm foreshadows the social confusion that will occur when Higgins decides to play god with the raw material that the unschooled flower girl presents to him. In this act, everyone is introduced in very categorised roles. In this scene, Shaw introduces almost all his major characters, but refers to them by profession rather than name. This creates a society whose members have rigid relations to one another.

Key symbols

* Clothes – What the characters wore was representative of their societal status. The exchange of rags for fine dresses is symbolic of Eliza's societal transformation from a poor flower girl to an upper class woman.
* Flowers/ Flower shop – Flowers represent the potential Eliza has hidden within. The flower shop that Eliza wishes to own at the beginning of the play also symbolises all of her hopes and dreams.
* Empty bird cage –

Complete for the above missing key symbol.

Task – Fill in the blanks using the words in the bank below.

Word bank:

* Professional
* Father
* Voice
* Flower
* Cash
* Principles
* Leave
* Rant
* Sobbing
* Scrubs
* Ignorance
* Romantic

Act II

Summary

Mrs Pearce, Higgins’ housekeeper, announces the arrival of a young woman. Eliza arrives and Higgins tells her to , but Eliza insists she is there to pay for lessons so she can be a lady in a shop instead of a street corner flower girl. Mrs Pearce attacks Eliza for her and poor manners, but Higgins begins to consider Eliza’s proposal. Mrs Pearce shows Eliza to a lovely bedroom and bath, and her roughly despite Eliza’s protests. Meanwhile, Higgins assures Pickering he has only a , not a personal, interest in Eliza, as he believes that relationships are too difficult.

Another visitor soon arrives, this time it is Eliza’s alcoholic , Alfred Doolittle. At first pretending to protect Eliza’s honour, Doolittle quickly admits he wishes in exchange for Eliza. Professor Higgins calls Alfred’s bluff, but is then impressed by Doolittle’s against middle class . After a brief encounter with Eliza, whom he does not recognise, Doolittle leaves. The act closes with a sample of the language lessons the Eliza endures for the next several months.

Analysis

We learn in this scene, quite significantly, that while Higgins may be a brilliant phonetician, Mrs Pearce finds fault with his constant swearing, forgetful manners, quarrelsome nature, and other unpleasant habits. The obvious question posed to us is if Pygmalion (Higgins) can be transformed himself?

This act shows Higgins as a persistent scientist. He is not only "violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject," but interested in them only as subjects of scientific study. There is no denying that Higgins makes an absolutely hopeless romantic hero. For him, if women do not inform his science in any way, "they might as well be blocks of wood". Eliza's criticism comes well-deserved – "Oh, you've no feeling heart in you: you don't care for nothing but yourself." Even Mrs Pearce criticises him for treating people like objects – "Well, the matter is, sir, that you can't take a girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach."

Key symbols

* Mirror – Eliza has never seen herself clearly before, and therefore sees herself without flaws. The mirror she sees in Higgins' bathroom is representative of Eliza ‘waking up’ to realise she can improve her life and herself.
* The bath – The bath that Eliza takes once Higgins and Pickering make their bet represents Eliza washing herself of her past life and speech patterns.
* Block of wood –

Complete for the above missing key symbol.

Cloze Passage Answers

Act I

Heavy rain drenches Mrs Eynsford-Hill and her two adult children, Freddy and Clara, as they wait for a cab. As Freddie leaves to continue looking, he runs into flower girl Eliza Doolittle. Dressed in dirty rags, Eliza is not shy about voicing her annoyance, and in her loud cockney accent, demands payment for her ruined flowers. She is overheard by a gentleman note-taker, Professor Henry Higgins. Professor Higgins attacks Eliza for her “kerbstone” English, and jokingly asserts to Colonel Pickering that “in three months (he) could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party.” Eliza taxi it home with Higgins’ and Pickering’s money and arrives at her small and empty rental room, counts her money, and goes to bed fully dressed.

Act II

Mrs Pearce, Higgins’ housekeeper, announces the arrival of a young woman. Eliza arrives and Higgins tells her to leave, but Eliza insists she is there to pay for voice lessons so she can be a lady in a flower shop instead of a street corner flower girl. Mrs Pearce attacks Eliza for her ignorance and poor manners, but Higgins begins to consider Eliza’s proposal. Mrs Pearce shows Eliza to a lovely bedroom and bath, and scrubs her roughly despite Eliza’s protests. Meanwhile, Higgins assures Pickering he has only a professional, not a personal, interest in Eliza, as he believes that romantic relationships are too difficult.

Another visitor soon arrives, this time Eliza’s alcoholic father, Alfred Doolittle. At first pretending to protect Eliza’s honour, Doolittle quickly admits he wishes cash in exchange for Eliza. Professor Higgins calls Alfred’s bluff, but is then impressed by Doolittle’s rant against middle class principles. After a brief encounter with Eliza, whom he does not recognise, Doolittle leaves. The act closes with a sample of the language lessons the sobbing Eliza endures for the next several months.