

Pygmalion Act 1 analysis

The opening scene of the drama captures many of the diverse elements running throughout the play. Brought together by the common necessity of protection from a sudden downpour, such diverse types as the impoverished middle-class Eynsford-Hills, with their genteel pretensions and disdain, a wealthy Anglo-Indian gentleman (Colonel Pickering), who seems quite tolerant, a haughty egotistical professor (Higgins), who seems exceptionally intolerant, an indistinct group of nondescript bystanders, and a pushy, rude flower girl who embodies the essence of vulgarity gather. **These diverse characters would never be found together except by the necessity of something like a sudden rain shower. This serves Shaw dramatically because he needs a variety of accents so that Professor Higgins can demonstrate his brilliance at identifying dialects and places of birth,** according to his science of phonetics. Note also that his performance arouses both antagonism and appreciation in the crowd. The antagonism is based upon the fact that the crowd, at first, believes that he is a spy for the police, and second, even after identifying where they come from, he is intruding upon some private aspect of their lives which they might want to cover up — that is, due to false pride or snobbism, many people want to disguise the place of their birth; thus, Professor Higgins, they think, in identifying the backgrounds of some of the members of the crowd is also revealing something about their pasts. Ironically, Professor Higgins' occupation is teaching wealthy people how to speak properly so that they can conceal their backgrounds

Shaw is also dramatically exhibiting two types of vulgarity here: first, the vulgarity of the lower class, as seen in Eliza, and second, the **"refined" vulgarity of the middle class, as seen in Clara Eynsford-Hill.** Unjustly, Eliza can be falsely accused of prostitution because **she belongs to a class of society where prostitution is an assumed practice,** and she can also be pigeonholed in a class of society which cannot afford a lawyer for protection. Consequently, Eliza can only prove her innocence of such a charge by loudly proclaiming to everyone "I'm a good girl, I am." Ultimately, the most vulgar thing about Eliza is her disgusting and animalistic use of the English language, a habit that elicits the wrath of Professor Higgins and thus sets up the dramatic premise for the rest of the drama.

In contrast to Eliza, Clara Eynsford-Hill would superficially seem to be without a trace of vulgarity. But she represents aspects of the middle class which Shaw and Doolittle reject

After the above speech, **Higgins boastfully announces to the gathered crowd that "in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party."** Consequently, this sentence provides the impetus for the remainder of the play

The **rain forces people from a variety of different social classes,** who normally don't interact with each other, **to come together** under the portico. Freddy is fulfilling the role of the chivalrous gentleman, going out into the rain to find a taxi for his sister and mother.

The interaction between the gentleman and the flower girl makes their positions in the social hierarchy very clear, as she must beg for whatever change he can spare.

Here the gender roles are pushed to comedic effect, where Freddy is forced by his mother and sister to be chivalrous even though doing so is pointless: there are no cabs. Freddy's mother is surprised and confused when the lower-class flower girl apparently knows who her (upper-class) son is.