

PYGMALION

An Abridged Acting Edition

By George Bernard Shaw

Adaptation by Christopher Morse

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DEDICATION

For Marsha, of course

STORY OF THE PLAY

London. On a rainy evening in 1913, linguist Henry Higgins has a fateful encounter with an impertinent Cockney flower seller. When the girl shows up at his laboratory the following day, the haughty and impulsive Higgins makes a bold wager with a colleague: employing his mastery of language he will transform Eliza Doolittle from a rough street urchin into an aristocratic lady in just six months' time. And so begins Eliza's halting metamorphosis ... but what will become of the poor girl once this "experiment" is over?

George Bernard Shaw's classic has been a hit with audiences for more than a hundred years. *Pygmalion* skillfully blends social satire, philosophical wit, a heated battle of the sexes, and what is perhaps the greatest platonic love story every committed to paper. The play's musical incarnation, "My Fair Lady," remains a Broadway staple.

Although it has everything you could want in a play – laughs, drama, iconic characters -- the original is not often performed on modern stages, primarily because of its ponderous length. This seamless abridgement removes about thirty percent of the dialogue, while retaining every important character and plot point. None of the meat of the play goes missing. This absolutely remains Shaw's *Pygmalion*; it's just a lighter, livelier *Pygmalion*, easier on actors and more entertaining for the audience.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

An earlier version of this abridgment was first performed by Stratford Players of Idyllwild, California, in the spring of 2013.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 to 6 w, 2 extras)

HENRY HIGGINS: Bachelor of about 40, a professor of linguistics.

ELIZA DOOLITTLE: A young Cockney flower girl.

ALFRED DOOLITTLE: Eliza's father, a dustman with a philosophical bent.

COLONEL PICKERING: Friend and colleague of Higgins, some years his senior.

MRS. HIGGINS: Henry's mother, a society woman.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Middle years, a friend of Mrs. Higgins.

CLARA EYNSFORD-HILL: Mrs. Eynsford-Hill's daughter, a modern young woman.

FREDDY EYNSFORD-HILL: Mrs. Eynsford-Hill's son.

MRS. PEARCE: Henry's housekeeper.

PARLOR-MAID: Maid of Mrs. Higgins.

BYSTANDERS: (2) either gender and any age. For ease and thrift of production a crowd of Londoners has been eliminated from the opening act. Shaw seems to have had ten or twenty extras in mind; now just two "bystanders" speak their lines. Companies wishing to reinstate the crowd may refer to the original play.

DOUBLING

The bystanders may be played by any two actors who do not appear in ACT I: Alfred Doolittle, Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Higgins, the Parlor-Maid.

A very skilled and hardy actress could take on the roles of Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins, or Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Eynsford-Hill.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING

London, 1913. ACT I takes place outdoors on the portico of St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. ACTS II and IV are set in Prof. Higgins' laboratory. ACTS III and V take place in his mother's drawing room.

These sets need only be suggested. ACT I could be played on the proscenium before the curtains. The Professor's laboratory has a careless, cluttered feel while Mrs. Higgins' drawing room expresses elegant taste, but actual furnishings may be minimal.

COSTUMES AND PROPS

Attractive period costumes will be appreciated by the audience and would be the best use of your budget. Eliza, in particular, benefits from several striking changes of attire. Doolittle requires two outfits, one shabby, one dapper.

ACT I: A notebook and pencil; a basket of flower bunches; a handful of coins.

ACT II: A box of chocolates; a handkerchief; a 5-pound note.

ACT III: Pen and writing paper for Mrs. Higgins.

ACT IV: A pair of men's slippers; a diamond necklace and earrings; a ring.

STAGED READING

A dialogue-rich play without a great deal of action, *Pygmalion* adapts easily as a staged reading. A narrator sets the scene simply by reading the introduction to each act; no further narration is required. Entrances and exits are made as indicated by the script. Costuming is basic black, accessorized with a few pieces such as a kimono for Eliza in Act II or a fine top hat for Doolittle in Act V. You may also wish to employ some of the props listed above.

ACT I

(AT RISE: Covent Garden at 11:15 pm. SFX: Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Under the portico of St. Paul's Church stand MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL and her daughter CLARA in evening dress, as well as a couple of BYSTANDERS in shabbier attire. Nearby a MR. HENRY HIGGINS with his back turned to them seems wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing busily. SFX: The church clock strikes the quarter hour.)

CLARA: I'm getting chilled to the bone. What can Freddy be doing all this time? He's been gone twenty minutes.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: You exaggerate, but still, he ought to have got us a cab by now.

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

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: What could he have done, poor boy?

CLARA: Other people got cabs. Why couldn't he?

(Enter FREDDY EYNSFORD-HILL. He trots "out" of the rain.)

CLARA: *(Cont'd.)* Well, haven't you got a cab?

FREDDY: There's not one to be had for love or money.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Oh, Freddy, there must be one. You can't have tried.

CLARA: 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: everybody had to take a cab.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Did you try Trafalgar Square?

FREDDY: I tried as far as Charing Cross Station.

CLARA: You haven't tried at all.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: You really are helpless, Freddy. Go again; and don't come back until you have found a cab.

FREDDY: I shall simply get soaked for nothing.

CLARA: And what about us? Are we to stay here all night in this draught, with next to nothing on? You selfish pig—

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FREDDY: Oh, very well: I'll go, I'll go.

(HE exits, bumps into ELIZA as she enters carrying a basket of flowers to sell.)

ELIZA: Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah. (Now then, Freddy: look where you're going, dear.)

FREDDY: Sorry. *(Exits in haste.)*

ELIZA: *(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. (There's manners for you! Two bunches of violets trod into the mud.)

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: How do you know that my son's name is Freddy?

ELIZA: Ow, eez ye-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy atbaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them? (Oh, he's your son, is he? Well, if you'd done your duty by him as a mother should, he'd know better than to spoil a poor girl's flowers then run away without paying. Will you pay me for them?)

CLARA: Do nothing of the sort, Mother. The idea!

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Please allow me, Clara. Have you any pennies?

CLARA: I've nothing smaller than sixpence.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: *(To Clara.)* Give it to me. *(CLARA parts reluctantly. To Eliza.)* Now. This is for your flowers.

ELIZA: Thank you kindly, lady.

CLARA: Make her give you the change. These are only a penny a bunch.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Do hold your tongue, Clara. *(To Eliza.)* You can keep the change.

ELIZA: Oh, thank you, lady.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Now tell me how you know that young gentleman's name.

ELIZA: I didn't.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: But, I heard you call him by it. Don't try to deceive me.

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ELIZA: 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.

CLARA: Sixpence thrown away!

(Enter PICKERING. He is seeking shelter from the rain.)

PICKERING: Phew! *(Brushing rain from himself.)*

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Oh, sir, is there any sign of its stopping?

PICKERING: I'm afraid not. It started worse than ever about two minutes ago.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: Oh, dear!

ELIZA: If it's worse, it's a sign it's nearly over. So cheer up, Captain; and buy a flower off a poor girl.

PICKERING: I'm sorry, I haven't any change.

ELIZA: I can give you change, Captain.

PICKERING: For a sovereign? I've nothing less.

ELIZA: Garn! Oh do buy a flower off me, Captain. I can change half-a-crown. Take this for tuppence.

PICKERING: Now don't be troublesome: there's a good girl. *(Trying his pockets.)* I really haven't any change--Stop: here's three hapence, if that's any use to you.

ELIZA: *(Disappointed, but three halfpence is better than nothing.)* Thank you, sir.

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: *(To Eliza.)* You be careful: give him a flower for it. There's a bloke here behind taking down every blessed word you're saying.

(ALL turn to HIGGINS who is taking notes.)

ELIZA: *(Terrified, speaking to Higgins.)* I ain't done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman. I've a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. *(Hysterically.)* I'm a respectable girl: so help me, I never spoke to him except to ask him to buy a flower off me.

HIGGINS: There, there, there, there! Who's hurting you, you silly girl? What do you take me for?

ELIZA: (*To Pickering.*) Oh, sir, don't let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. They'll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. They—

SECOND BYSTANDER: It's all right: *he's* a gentleman: look at his boots. (*To Higgins.*) She thought you was a copper's nark, sir.

HIGGINS: What's a copper's nark?

SECOND BYSTANDER: It's a--well, it's a copper's nark, as you might say. What else would you call it? A sort of informer.

ELIZA: (*Still hysterical.*) I take my Bible oath I never said a word—

HIGGINS: (*Overbearing but good-humored.*) Oh, shut up, shut up. Do I look like a policeman?

ELIZA: (*Far from reassured.*) Then what did you take down my words for? You just show me what you've wrote about me. (*Looks at Higgins' book.*) That ain't proper writing. I can't read that.

HIGGINS: I can. (*Reads, reproducing her pronunciation exactly.*) "Cheer ap, Keptin; n' haw ya flahr orf a pore gel."

ELIZA: (*Much distressed.*) It's because I called him Captain. I meant no harm. (*To Pickering.*) Oh, sir, don't let him lay a charge agen me for a word like that. You—

PICKERING: Charge! I make no charge. (*To Higgins.*) Really, sir, if you are a detective, you need not begin protecting me. Anybody could see that the girl meant no harm.

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: Taking down people's words! He wants promotion, he does.

(*ELIZA struggles with her emotion.*)

SECOND BYSTANDER: He ain't a tec. He's a blooming busybody: that's what he is. I tell you, look at his boots.

HIGGINS: (*Turning on him genially.*) And how are all your people down at Selsey?

SECOND BYSTANDER: (*Suspiciously.*) Who told you my people come from Selsey?

HIGGINS: Never you mind. They did. *(To Eliza.)* How do you come to be up so far east? You were born in Lisson Grove.

ELIZA: Oh, what harm is there in my leaving Lisson Grove? It wasn't fit for a pig to live in. *(In tears.)* Oh, boo--hoo--oo--

HIGGINS: Live where you like; but stop that noise.

PICKERING: *(To Eliza.)* Come, come! He can't touch you: you have a right to live where you please.

ELIZA: *(Very low-spiritedly to herself.)* I'm a good girl, I am.

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: Do you know where *I* come from?

HIGGINS: *(Promptly.)* Hoxton.

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: *(Amazed.)* Well, who said I didn't? Bly me!

ELIZA: *(Still nursing her sense of injury.)* Ain't no call to meddle with me, he ain't.

SECOND BYSTANDER: Of course, he ain't. *(To Higgins.)* What call have you to know about people what never meddled with you? Take us for dirt under your feet, don't you? Catch you taking liberties with a gentleman!

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: *(Indicating Pickering.)* Yes: tell HIM where he come from if you want to go fortune-telling.

HIGGINS: Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge, and India.

PICKERING: Quite right. May I ask, sir, do you do this for your living at a music hall?

HIGGINS: I've thought of that. Perhaps I shall some day. Oh look, the rain has stopped.

ELIZA: He's no gentleman, he ain't, to interfere with a poor girl.

CLARA: What on earth is Freddy doing? I shall get pneumonia if I stay in this draught any longer.

HIGGINS: Earls Court.

CLARA: *(Violently.)* Will you please keep your impertinent remarks to yourself?

HIGGINS: Did I say that out loud? I beg your pardon. Your mother's Epsom, unmistakably.

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: How very curious! I was brought up in Largelady Park, near Epsom.

HIGGINS: *(Uproariously amused.)* Ha ha! What a devil of a name! Excuse me.

ELIZA: (*Still preoccupied with her wounded feelings.*) He's no right to take away my character. My character is the same to me as any lady's.

HIGGINS: I don't know whether you've noticed it; but the rain stopped about two minutes ago.

SECOND BYSTANDER: So it has. Why didn't you say so before? And us wasting our time listening to your silliness. (*Exits.*)

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: I can tell where you come from. You come from Anwell. Go back there.

HIGGINS: (*Helpfully.*) Hanwell.

SARCASTIC BYSTANDER: (*Affecting great distinction of speech.*) Thank you, teacher. Haw haw! So long. (*Touches his hat with mock respect and exits.*)

MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL: It's quite fine now, Clara. We can walk to a motor bus. Come. (*Exits.*)

CLARA: Oh, how tiresome! (*Exits angrily.*)

ELIZA: (*Still pitying herself in murmurs.*) Poor girl! Hard enough for her to live without being worried and chivied.

PICKERING: How do you do it, if I may ask?

HIGGINS: Phonetics. The science of speech. That's my profession; also my hobby. I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets.

ELIZA: Ought to be ashamed of himself, unmanly coward!

PICKERING: But is there a living in that?

HIGGINS: Oh yes. Quite a fat one. Men begin in Kentish Town with 80 pounds a year, and end in Park Lane with a hundred thousand. They want to drop Kentish Town; but they give themselves away every time they open their mouths. Now I can teach them—

ELIZA: Let him mind his own business and leave a poor girl—

HIGGINS: Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly; or else seek the shelter of some other place.

ELIZA: (*With feeble defiance.*) I've a right to be here if I like, same as you.

HIGGINS: A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere -- no right to live.

HIGGINS: (*Cont'd.*) Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.

ELIZA: (*Quite overwhelmed and looking at him in mingled wonder and deprecation.*) Ah--ah--ah--ow--ow--oo!

HIGGINS: (*Whipping out his book.*) Heavens! What a sound! (*Writes; then holds out the book and reads, reproducing her vowels exactly.*) Ah--ah--ah--ow--ow--ow--oo!

ELIZA: (*Tickled by the performance and laughing in spite of herself.*) Garn!

HIGGINS: You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant. That's the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires.

PICKERING: I am myself a student of Indian dialects; and—

HIGGINS: (*Eagerly.*) Are you? Do you know Colonel Pickering, the author of *Spoken Sanscrit*?

PICKERING: I *am* Colonel Pickering. Who are you?

HIGGINS: Henry Higgins, author of *Higgins's Universal Alphabet*.

PICKERING: (*With enthusiasm.*) I came from India to meet you.

HIGGINS: I was going to India to meet you.

PICKERING: Where do you live?

HIGGINS: 27A Wimpole Street. Come and see me tomorrow.

PICKERING: I'm at the Carlton. Come with me now and let's have a jaw over some supper.

HIGGINS: Right you are.

ELIZA: (*To PICKERING, as he passes her.*) Buy a flower, kind gentleman. I'm short for my lodging.

PICKERING: I really haven't any change. I'm sorry. (*Exits.*)

HIGGINS: (*Shocked at the girl's mendacity.*) Liar. You said you could change half-a-crown.

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ELIZA: You ought to be stuffed with nails, you ought. (*Flinging the basket at his feet.*) Take the whole blooming basket for sixpence.

(*HIGGINS raises his hat solemnly; then throws a handful of money into the basket and exits.*)

ELIZA: (*Cont'd. Picking up a half-crown.*) Ah--ow--ooh! (*Picking up a couple of florins.*) Aaah--ow--ooh! (*Picking up several coins.*) Aaaaaah--ow--ooh! (*Picking up a half-sovereign.*) Aasaaaaaaaaah-- ow--ooh!!!

(*FREDDY enters.*)

FREDDY: Got a taxi at last. Hallo! Where are the two ladies that were here?

ELIZA: They walked to the bus.

FREDDY: And left me with a cab on my hands. Damnation!

ELIZA: (*With grandeur.*) Never you mind, young man. I'm going home in a taxi. (*Calls while exiting.*) Angel Court, Drury Lane, round the corner of Micklejohn's oil shop. Let's see how fast you can make her hop it.

FREDDY: Well, I'm dashed!

End of ACT I

End of Freeview

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