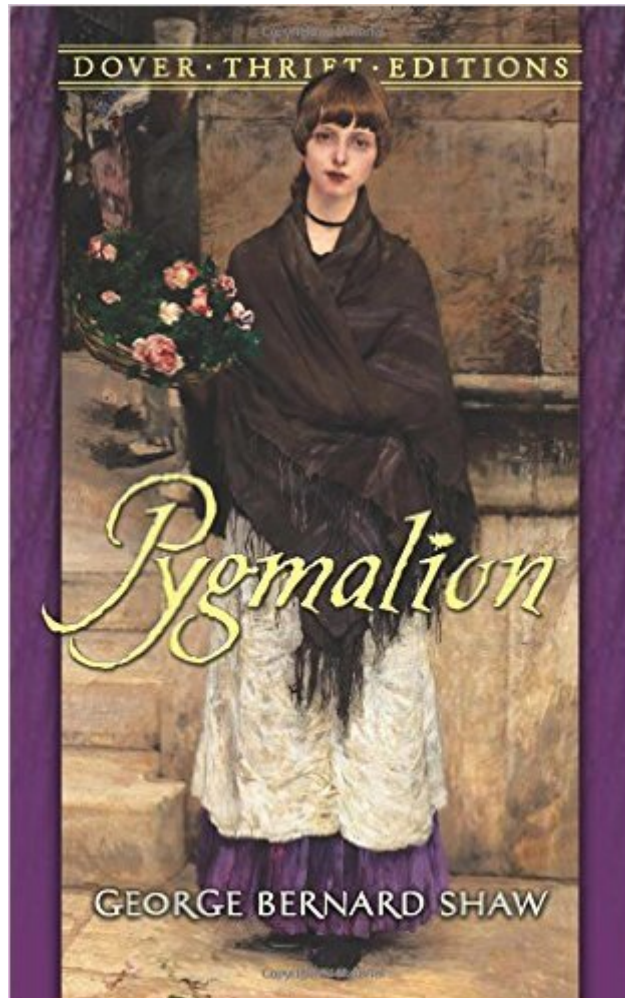


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Pygmalion (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

One of George Bernard Shaw's best-known plays, *Pygmalion* was a rousing success on the London and New York stages, an entertaining motion picture and a great hit with its musical version, *My Fair Lady*. An updated and considerably revised version of the ancient Greek legend of Pygmalion and Galatea, the 20th-century story pokes fun at the antiquated British class system. In Shaw's clever adaptation, Professor Henry Higgins, a linguistic expert, takes on a bet that he can transform an awkward cockney flower seller into a refined young lady simply by polishing her manners and changing the way she speaks. In the process of convincing society that his creation is a mysterious royal figure, the Professor also falls in love with his elegant handiwork. The irresistible theme of the emerging butterfly, together with Shaw's brilliant dialogue and splendid skills as a playwright, have made *Pygmalion* one of the most popular comedies in the English language. A staple of college drama courses, it is still widely performed.

Book Information

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Age Range: 11 and up

Grade Level: 6 and up

Customer Reviews

It is not very likely that George Bernard Shaw knew he was writing the play that would become one of the seminal romantic comedies of the 20th when he penned '*Pygmalion*'. The play is delightful, with borrowed elements from many genres. There is comedy and romance, above all, but there is

also a very clear social critic -- and even a Marxist idea of class struggle. What only enhances the reading of this masterpiece. Professor Henry Higgins is a linguistic expert who is much more interested in how people say the words rather than what they say. He ends up taking a bet that he is able to transform a simple cockney flower seller, Eliza, into a sophisticated and refined young lady, who would be able to fool the Queen herself. To succeed in such a move he claims he will change only the way she speaks. To work on Eliza he puts her up in his house and starts polishing her speech. This is not an easy job, because what the girl speaks is not English, but a language she has developed herself. After some time, the Professor decides to introduce her to a group of friends, without mentioning her backgrounds. At first the meeting is blast. Although Eliza can use a fine language it is clear she has not backgrounds to develop and keep up a conversation. And her behavior ends up being the laughing stock. But one of the guests notices how beautiful the girl is. Higgins feels sort of jealous and this could lead their relationship to another level. Shaw's prose is funny and touching at the same time. He uses devices, like everybody speaking at the same time, which only enhances the fun of the play and brings more truth to the action. His characters are lively and well developed. His social critic is evident.

At the core of Henrik Ibsen's art lay a bottomless talent for investigating the way people hurt one another. But reading his "Four Major Plays" is not painful at all; rather, they are thrilling and even delightful for the different ways the playwright captures and sustains our interest. "A Doll's House" (1879) the first play here, presents the story of Nora Helmer, a seemingly childlike housewife with a weakness for macaroons whose actual level of devotion to her husband and family is kept hidden until the threat of scandal exposes her to a surprisingly judgmental spouse. Shocking in its day for questioning then-traditional domestic roles, "A Doll's House" makes its best points in its handling of Nora's character and an abrupt conclusion that still startles. If there are touches of excessive melodrama, and I think there are, they are more than compensated for by Ibsen's deft touch in drawing out the suffocating hypocrisy of social norms. Even more of an attack on society, "Ghosts" (1881) is that much more melodramatic, too much so for my tastes. Incest, social disease, people living together out of wedlock - it's like Ibsen wanted to cram every shocking thing he could think of into one play, and finish it off with something more shocking still. Convuluted but never boring, "Ghosts" makes its points, dares you to judge, and leaves a mark. What makes this book indispensable for lovers of good drama are the last two plays, each brilliant in a totally different way. "Hedda Gabler" (1890) is the tale of a woman's moral and mental meltdown told in four gripping acts. Title character Hedda is newly married, but full of spite for the settled life, seeking to cause

misery wherever she can."Oh, you know how it is...

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