

Student Essay on Artificial Class Distinctions in "Pygmalion"

Artificial Class Distinctions in "Pygmalion" by George Bernard Shaw

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Essay

Through my reading of Pygmalion, I have learnt that class-distinction is artificial and man-made rather than something innate in the English society. It is created by the English society to classify the people into the first class, the middle class and the third class. Indeed, the position of a man in the class distinction can be determined by other people, through their treatment towards a person.

Eliza is a good example to show that class consciousness is artificial. At first, she was in the third class, the lowest class in the society, earning her living by selling flowers. Her English was awful until Higgins satirized her as "You squashed cabbage leaf. You disgraced to the noble architecture of this columns. You incarnate insult to the English language." However with assist from Mrs. Pearce and Colonel Pickering, Higgins had succeeded in transforming her into a lady by changing her language, appearance, manners and most obscurely her dignity and self-respect. These proved that class distinction was artificial, rather than something innate. Through the help of a phonetics teacher, one can change his/her status in the society.

Apart from that, Alfred Doolittle was another good example. At first, he was only a dustman, living in the third class. However, Higgins jokingly introduced him as the most original moralist in England to Ezra.D.Wannafeller, an American millionaire. By leaving a share of his money to Alfred Doolittle, he had singled-handed lifted him to the middle class. This proved that class distinction is determined by human.

Eliza had said that, "the difference between a flower girl and a duchess is not how she behaves but how she is treated." Again this line suggests that it was other people's treatment towards a person that determined his/her status in the society. One can upgrade his/her position by creating a new appearance, manners and language that give him a new identity. Thus, class distinction is artificial. They can change their position in the society if they have opportunity such as those came to Eliza and Alfred Doolittle.

In the nutshell, I think that class distinction is artificial and not genuine.