

pygmalion by george bernard shaw

****Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw: A Timeless Exploration of Identity and Society****

pygmalion by george bernard shaw stands as one of the most influential plays in modern theatre, blending sharp wit, social commentary, and a compelling narrative about transformation. Written in 1912, this play has captivated audiences for over a century, not only for its engaging plot but also for its profound examination of class, language, and personal identity. Whether you're a student, theatre enthusiast, or just curious about classic literature, diving into Shaw's *Pygmalion* offers a rich experience filled with memorable characters and thought-provoking themes.

The Origins and Context of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright and critic, was known for his sharp critiques of society and his advocacy for social reform. When he penned *Pygmalion*, Shaw was responding to the rigid class distinctions of Edwardian England. The play's title is inspired by the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he created. Shaw reimagined this myth through the story of Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetics expert who transforms Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl, into a refined lady by teaching her how to speak with an upper-class accent.

This transformation serves as a clever metaphor for the arbitrariness of social class and the power of language. Shaw himself insisted that *Pygmalion* was a serious social critique rather than just a romantic comedy, which distinguishes it from many other plays of its time.

Plot Overview: The Journey of Eliza Doolittle

At the heart of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw is the story of Eliza Doolittle, a spirited and outspoken flower girl struggling to make a living on the streets of London. The plot kicks off when she encounters Professor Higgins, who boasts that he can teach anyone to speak "properly" and pass as a member of high society.

Higgins wagers that he can transform Eliza into a duchess simply by teaching her to speak with an upper-class accent. With the help of his friend Colonel Pickering, Higgins begins the rigorous task of teaching Eliza, focusing on pronunciation, grammar, and etiquette.

The transformation is astonishing. Eliza impresses everyone at an ambassador's garden party, fooling the high society guests. Yet, the play takes an intriguing turn as it delves deeper into Eliza's identity crisis. She realizes that despite her new speech and manners, she's caught between two worlds—no longer a flower girl but not fully accepted by the upper class either.

The Role of Language and Speech in Pygmalion

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw is its exploration of language as a tool of social mobility. Shaw was a linguist at heart, and through Higgins, he demonstrated how accents and dialects carry heavy social implications.

Language becomes a symbol of power and class distinction. The play challenges the notion that speech defines a person's worth or capabilities. Eliza's journey reveals how society judges individuals based on superficial traits like accent, highlighting the arbitrary barriers that keep people trapped in their social status.

This theme remains relevant today, as discussions about dialect, accent bias, and social prejudice continue worldwide.

Characters That Bring Pygmalion to Life

One of the reasons *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw remains a beloved classic is its complex and memorable characters. Each figure in the play embodies particular societal attitudes, making the narrative rich and dynamic.

- **Eliza Doolittle:** The protagonist whose transformation drives the story. She's resilient, witty, and embodies the struggles of the lower class striving for dignity and recognition.
- **Professor Henry Higgins:** A brilliant but arrogant phonetics expert. His confidence in controlling language and identity reflects his belief in social engineering.
- **Colonel Pickering:** A gentlemanly and kind-hearted linguist who serves as a contrast to Higgins' brusque demeanor.
- **Alfred Doolittle:** Eliza's father, a dustman with unconventional views on morality and class, adding humor and depth to the narrative.

Each character contributes to the play's exploration of class, identity, and

transformation in unique ways, making the story not just about Eliza's change, but about society as a whole.

The Dynamic Between Higgins and Eliza

The relationship between Higgins and Eliza is arguably the most compelling aspect of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw. Though Higgins plays the role of a creator, he often treats Eliza more like a project than a person. His casual disregard for her feelings contrasts with Eliza's growing self-awareness and independence.

Their interactions highlight themes of power, control, and respect. Eliza's eventual assertion of her own identity challenges Higgins' assumptions and forces both characters to confront their prejudices.

The Impact and Legacy of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

Since its premiere, *Pygmalion* has left a lasting mark on theatre and popular culture. It has been adapted into various formats, most famously as the musical **My Fair Lady**, which brought the story to an even wider audience.

Shaw's insistence on keeping the ending ambiguous—refusing to provide a neat romantic closure—set *Pygmalion* apart from many other plays of its era. This choice invites audiences to think critically about the characters' futures and the societal structures that frame their lives.

Moreover, *Pygmalion*'s themes of social mobility, identity, and the power of language continue to resonate, making it a frequent subject of study in literature, linguistics, and social sciences.

Why *Pygmalion* Still Matters Today

Reading or watching *Pygmalion* today offers more than just entertainment; it provides insight into the persistent issues of class division and societal expectations. The play encourages us to question how much of our identity is shaped by external perceptions and how language influences opportunities and prejudices.

For anyone interested in language, culture, or social justice, *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw serves as a timeless reminder of the complexities behind human interactions and the courage it takes to redefine oneself.

Tips for Engaging with Pygmalion

If you're planning to read or watch *Pygmalion*, here are a few tips to deepen your appreciation:

1. **Pay attention to language nuances:** Notice how accents and speech patterns mark social boundaries.
2. **Consider the historical context:** Understanding Edwardian England's class structure enriches the play's themes.
3. **Reflect on character motivations:** Think about what drives Higgins and Eliza beyond their surface actions.
4. **Explore adaptations:** Watching **My Fair Lady** or other versions can offer different interpretations of the story.
5. **Discuss themes with others:** Talking about class, identity, and transformation can reveal new perspectives.

Engaging with the play actively will help you uncover the layers Shaw masterfully embedded in this social critique.

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw remains a vivid exploration of the power of language and the fluidity of identity, making it a timeless piece that continues to inspire and challenge audiences around the world. Whether you encounter it on stage, in print, or through its many adaptations, the story of Eliza Doolittle's transformation invites us all to reconsider how we perceive ourselves and others in society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of George Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion'?

The central theme of 'Pygmalion' is social class and transformation, exploring how language and manners can influence one's identity and societal perception.

Who are the main characters in 'Pygmalion'?

The main characters are Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetics expert; Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl; Colonel Pickering, Higgins' friend and fellow linguist; and Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father.

How does 'Pygmalion' address social class distinctions?

The play highlights social class distinctions by showing how Eliza's speech and behavior change under Higgins' tutelage, challenging the rigid class system based on accent and manners rather than inherent worth.

What is the significance of the title 'Pygmalion'?

The title refers to the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he carved. Similarly, Higgins 'sculpts' Eliza into a refined lady, raising questions about creation and control.

How does Shaw use language in 'Pygmalion' to develop characters?

Shaw uses dialect and speech patterns to define characters' social backgrounds and personalities, particularly contrasting Eliza's Cockney accent with the refined speech she learns.

What role does Eliza Doolittle play in challenging gender roles?

Eliza challenges gender roles by asserting her independence and making choices about her future, moving beyond the passive female stereotype common in Shaw's time.

How does 'Pygmalion' end, and what is its significance?

The play ends ambiguously, with Eliza asserting her independence from Higgins, emphasizing themes of self-identity and challenging traditional power dynamics.

What influence did 'Pygmalion' have on popular culture?

'Pygmalion' inspired the famous musical 'My Fair Lady,' which further popularized its themes and characters, influencing how social class and language are portrayed in media.

Why did George Bernard Shaw write 'Pygmalion'?

Shaw wrote 'Pygmalion' to critique the British class system and to explore how language shapes social identity, using humor and drama to engage audiences in social commentary.

Additional Resources

****Exploring the Enduring Legacy of Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw****

pygmalion by george bernard shaw remains one of the most influential and thought-provoking plays in modern theatre. Premiering in 1913, this work has transcended its original Edwardian context to become a timeless commentary on social class, identity, and the power of language. Shaw's incisive wit and sharp social critique make *Pygmalion* a text that continues to invite analysis, reinterpretation, and adaptation, including the renowned musical "My Fair Lady."

In-depth Analysis of Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw

At its core, *Pygmalion* is a study in transformation and the fluidity of identity. The play follows Professor Henry Higgins, a linguistics expert who wagers that he can teach Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl, to speak with an upper-class accent and pass as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. This premise serves as a vehicle for Shaw to dissect the rigid British class system and the arbitrary nature of social distinctions.

Higgins represents the intellectual elite, confident in his ability to shape Eliza through speech and manners. Eliza's metamorphosis is more than a superficial makeover; it challenges the entrenched societal norms that judge individuals based on accent and appearance rather than character or intellect. Shaw's portrayal of this social experiment invites audiences to question the authenticity of identity when it is so easily altered.

The play's title itself alludes to the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he has carved, bringing it to life. Shaw's use of this mythological framework adds layers of meaning to the narrative, emphasizing themes of creation, control, and the ethical implications of molding another person.

Language and Class Distinction

One of the most compelling aspects of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw is its exploration of language as a marker of social status. Shaw, himself a critic of class-based prejudices, demonstrates how accents and dialects serve as social barriers. Eliza's initial Cockney accent confines her to the margins of society, while her polished speech grants her access to elite circles.

This linguistic focus underscores the performative nature of class identity. Shaw suggests that social mobility is possible, but it requires conformity to certain linguistic standards imposed by the ruling class. The play exposes

the superficiality of these standards and questions the fairness of a society that values form over substance.

Characters and Their Symbolism

Beyond Higgins and Eliza, the supporting characters enrich the narrative's social critique. Colonel Pickering, Higgins's friend and fellow linguist, provides a contrast to Higgins's brusque demeanor, embodying kindness and respect towards Eliza. Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, offers a satirical perspective on the working class, particularly through his humorous yet insightful commentary on morality and social responsibility.

Eliza herself emerges as a complex figure who grapples with her newfound identity and autonomy. Her journey from subjugation to self-awareness challenges the traditional gender and class roles prevalent in early 20th-century England. Shaw's nuanced characterization avoids simplistic heroism, instead presenting Eliza as a symbol of individual agency within societal constraints.

Pygmalion's Impact on Theatre and Culture

The influence of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw extends far beyond its original stage production. The play has inspired numerous adaptations, most famously the 1956 musical "*My Fair Lady*," which added songs and romanticized some aspects of the story. While the musical brought Shaw's narrative to a broader audience, purists often debate its fidelity to Shaw's critical tone and social commentary.

Shaw's original play remains a staple in academic curricula and theatrical repertoires due to its rich thematic content and sharp dialogue. It continues to be relevant in discussions about class mobility, gender roles, and the power dynamics inherent in education and language.

Relevance in Contemporary Society

In the 21st century, *Pygmalion*'s themes resonate in ongoing conversations about social inequality and identity politics. The idea that one's social worth can be altered through speech and etiquette parallels modern debates about code-switching, cultural assimilation, and systemic barriers to opportunity.

Furthermore, the ethical questions raised by Higgins's experiment—particularly the extent to which one person has the right to "reshape" another—mirror contemporary concerns about autonomy and consent in education and personal development.

Strengths and Criticisms of Pygmalion

- **Strengths:** Pygmalion's enduring appeal lies in its sharp social critique, memorable characters, and clever use of language. Shaw's wit and insight render the play both entertaining and intellectually stimulating.
- **Criticisms:** Some modern readers and critics find Higgins's treatment of Eliza patronizing, and the play's conclusion ambiguous, leaving unresolved questions about gender dynamics and power. Additionally, the focus on accent as a determinant of class has been challenged for oversimplifying complex social realities.

Despite these critiques, Pygmalion's ability to provoke discussion and reinterpretation speaks to its literary and cultural significance.

Conclusion

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw is far more than a story about speech and social mobility; it is a nuanced exploration of identity, power, and societal constructs. Shaw's incisive examination of the ways language influences perception and opportunity continues to engage and challenge audiences worldwide. Whether approached as a historical artifact or a living text, Pygmalion remains a vital work that illuminates the complexities of human interaction and social stratification.

[Pygmalion By George Bernard Shaw](#)

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion (Complete Illustrated Edition)* George Bernard Shaw, 2017-07-31 This carefully crafted ebook: *Pygmalion (Complete Illustrated Edition)* is formatted for your eReader with a functional and detailed table of contents. Excerpt: It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him. (*Pygmalion*, Preface) Named after a Greek mythological character the play was first presented on stage to the public in 1913. In ancient Greek mythology, Pygmalion fell in love with one of his sculptures, which then came to life. Professor of phonetics Henry Higgins makes a bet that he can train a bedraggled Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party by teaching her to assume a veneer of gentility, the most important element of which, he believes, is impeccable speech. The play is a sharp lampoon of the rigid British class system of the day and a commentary on women's independence and has been successfully adapted into a motion picture and a musical comedy. George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950) was an Irish playwright, essayist, novelist and short story writer and wrote more than 60 plays. He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Academy Award (1938). This carefully

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pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion* Bernard Shaw, 2005 This Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Edition? includes a glossary and reader's notes to help the modern reader appreciate Shaw's wit and cynicism. In this delightful romance about the man too self-centered to fall in love and the woman too unsure of herself to want more out of life than the little she already has, George Bernard Shaw shakes the dust off the Cinderella story and tells it as only he can. Eliza Doolittle, the Cockney flower girl who wants to work in a flower shop, and Henry Higgins, the phoneticist who turns her into a princess, are no mythological knight and maiden. Instead, even today, they resound with sharp humor and cutting dialogue. Originally published in 1914, *Pygmalion* invites readers and audience members to examine the roots of social prejudice and the true value of a human being, while also involving them in the improbable lives of Shaw's one-dimensional, yet endearing characters.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw George Shaw, 2017-08-25 *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion* George Bernard Shaw, 2018-05-31 *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw. *Pygmalion* is a play by George Bernard Shaw, named after a Greek mythological figure. It was first presented on stage to the public in 1913. In ancient Greek mythology, Pygmalion fell in love with one of his sculptures, which then came to life. The general idea of that myth was a popular subject for Victorian era English playwrights, including one of Shaw's influences, W. S. Gilbert, who wrote a successful play based on the story called *Pygmalion* and *Galatea* that was first presented in 1871. Shaw would also have been familiar with the burlesque version, *Galatea*, or *Pygmalion Reversed*. Shaw's play has been adapted numerous times, most notably as the musical *My Fair Lady* and its film version. As will be seen later on, *Pygmalion* needs, not a preface, but a sequel, which I have supplied in its due place. The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like. It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him. German and Spanish are accessible to foreigners: English is not

accessible even to Englishmen.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Study Guide to Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw* Intelligent Education, 2020-09-12 A comprehensive study guide offering in-depth explanation, essay, and test prep for George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, a didactic play written with the purpose to teach the audience. As a play of the early-twentieth century, its story and relevance continues to play out in modern movies, musicals, and movie musicals. Moreover, *Pygmalion*'s success can be attributed to its challenging of a universal truth that in the English-speaking world, there seems to be only one "sufficient" way to speak it. This Bright Notes Study Guide explores the context and history of George Bernard Shaw's classic work, helping students to thoroughly explore the reasons it has stood the literary test of time. Each Bright Notes Study Guide contains: - Introductions to the Author and the Work - Character Summaries - Plot Guides - Section and Chapter Overviews - Test Essay and Study Q&As The Bright Notes Study Guide series offers an in-depth tour of more than 275 classic works of literature, exploring characters, critical commentary, historical background, plots, and themes. This set of study guides encourages readers to dig deeper in their understanding by including essay questions and answers as well as topics for further research.

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pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion* Bernard Shaw, 2020-11-20 *Pygmalion* is a play by George Bernard Shaw, named after a Greek mythological figure. It was first presented on stage to the public in 1913.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *A Study Guide for George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion* Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015-09-24

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: Pygmalion George Bernard Shaw, 2019-06-05 The story of Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics who makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can successfully pass off a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, as a refined society lady by teaching her how to speak with an upper class accent and training her in etiquette. In the process, Higgins and Eliza grow close, but she ultimately rejects his domineering ways and declares she will marry Freddy Eynsford-Hill - a young, poor, gentleman.

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pygmalion by george bernard shaw: Pygmalion Bernard Shaw, Richard S. Hartmetz, 2013-06-21 The ancient Greeks had a legend of a sculptor who created a statue so beautiful that he

fell in love with it, which eventually came to life. George Bernard Shaw creates a similar story, the basis for the musical "My Fair Lady," in which Professor Henry Higgins tutors Eliza Doolittle, a young flower girl, making her into a lady, then finds himself falling in love with her. Join us for a witty, acclaimed, comedic play that is brilliantly written; a true Cinderella story.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion by Bernard Shaw Annotated Editon* George Bernard Shaw, 2021-05-03 Pygmalion has become by far Shaw's most famous play, mostly through its film adaptation in 1938. Shaw was intimately involved with the making of the film. He wrote the screenplay and was the first man to win both a Nobel Prize and an Academy Award. Shaw wrote the part of Eliza Doolittle for a beautiful actress named Mrs. Patrick Campbell, with whom it was rumored that he was having an affair. This rumor later turned out not to be true, and some critics read the disappointed love affair between Higgins and Eliza as reflecting Shaw's own romantic frustrations including a long, celibate marriage.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: *Pygmalion, a Play by George Bernard Shaw* George Bernard Shaw, 2019-04-07 Pygmalion is a 5-act play by George Bernard Shaw. It was written in 1912 and first produced in 1913. The plot revolves around Professor Henry Higgins' bet with a colleague over whether he can transform a low-class flower girl, Liza Doolittle, into the equivalent of a Duchess in just 6 months. Pygmalion was a Greek mythological figure who fell in love with a sculpture he had carved and was a popular theme in Victorian drama. Most people would be familiar with the characters Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins from the hit 1956 musical My Fair Lady, which was adapted from Pygmalion, though the plots differ in small but significant ways. In particular Shaw wanted to avoid any sense of a happy ending and, after viewing a performance of the play where an extra scene had been added, he wrote a sequel which definitively states what came after. The sequel was included in the published edition.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: Pygmalion Bernard Shaw, 2020-08-03 This play is based on the Greek myth of Pygmalion. It tells the story of Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics based on phonetician Henry Sweet, who makes a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering that he can successfully pass off a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, as a refined society lady by teaching her how to speak with an upper class accent and training her in etiquette. In the process, Higgins and Doolittle grow close, but she ultimately rejects his domineering ways and declares she will marry Freddy Eynsford Hill a young, poor, gentleman. Adapted for film under the title of 'My Fair Lady'.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: Pygmalion and Three Other Plays George Bernard Shaw, 2004 Pygmalion and Three Other Plays, by George Bernard Shaw, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics : New introductions commissioned from today's top writers and scholars Biographies of the authors Chronologies of contemporary historical, biographical, and cultural events Footnotes and endnotes Selective discussions of imitations, parodies, poems, books, plays, paintings, operas, statuary, and films inspired by the work Comments by other famous authors Study questions to challenge the reader's viewpoints and expectations Bibliographies for further reading Indices & Glossaries, when appropriate All editions are beautifully designed and are printed to superior specifications; some include illustrations of historical interest. Barnes & Noble Classics pulls together a constellation of influences--biographical, historical, and literary--to enrich each reader's understanding of these enduring works. Hailed as "a Tolstoy with jokes by one critic, George Bernard Shaw was the most significant British playwright since the seventeenth century. Pygmalion persists as his best-loved play, one made into both a classic film--which won Shaw an Academy Award for best screenplay--and the perennially popular musical My Fair Lady . Pygmalion follows the adventures of phonetics professor Henry Higgins as he attempts to transform cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle into a refined lady. The scene in which Eliza appears in high society with the correct accent but no notion of polite conversation is considered one of the funniest in English drama. Like most of Shaw's work, Pygmalion wins over audiences with wit, a taut morality, and an innate understanding of human

relationships. This volume also includes *Major Barbara*, which attacks both capitalism and charitable organizations, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, a keen-eyed examination of medical morals and malpractice, and *Heartbreak House*, which exposes the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for the bloodshed of World War I. John A. Bertolini is Ellis Professor of the Liberal Arts at Middlebury College, where he teaches dramatic literature, Shakespeare, and film. He has written *The Playwrighting Self of Bernard Shaw* and articles on Hitchcock, and British and American dramatists. Bertolini also wrote the introduction and notes to the Barnes & Noble Classics edition of Shaw's *Man and Superman* and *Three Other Plays*.

pygmalion by george bernard shaw: Pygmalion (Annotated) George Shaw, 2014-06-05
Pygmalion is a play by George Bernard Shaw, named after a Greek mythological figure. It was first presented on stage to the public in 1913. Pygmalion sees professor of phonetics Henry Higgins making a bet that he can train a bedraggled Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party by teaching her impeccable speech. The play is a sharp lampoon of the rigid British class system of the day and a commentary on women's independence. The play was well received by critics in major cities following its premieres in Vienna, London, and New York. The initial release in Vienna garnered several reviews describing the show as a positive departure from Shaw's usual dry and didactic style.[8] The Broadway premiere in New York was praised in terms of both plot and acting, described as a love story with brusque diffidence and a wealth of humor.[9] Reviews of the production in London were slightly less unequivocally positive, with the Telegraph noting that the play was deeply diverting with interesting mechanical staging, although the critic ultimately found the production somewhat shallow and overly lengthy.[10] The London Times, however, praised both the characters and actors (especially Sir Herbert Tree as Higgins and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Eliza) and the happy if unconventional ending. Pygmalion remains Shaw's most popular play. The play's widest audiences know it as the inspiration for the highly romanticized 1956 musical and 1964 film *My Fair Lady*. Pygmalion has transcended cultural and language barriers since its first production. The British Museum contains images of the Polish production...; a series of shots of a wonderfully Gallicised Higgins and Eliza in the first French production in Paris in 1923; a fascinating set for a Russian production of the 1930s. There was no country which didn't have its own 'take' on the subjects of class division and social mobility, and it's as enjoyable to view these subtle differences in settings and costumes as it is to imagine translators wracking their brains for their own equivalent of 'Not bloody likely'. Joseph Weizenbaum named his artificial intelligence computer program ELIZA after the character Eliza Doolittle

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