

Retracing Pygmalion For Integrated Teaching

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Abstract:

One and the same narrative in music, art, literature, films. The Pygmalion myth is a transgressive one and through it we make a statement of how effective integrated teaching can be: identifying a figural reiteration in different works of art. By retracing the Pygmalion myth in artifacts, students develop their ability to recognize patterns, to exercise their capacity of breaking codes in order to retrieve essential, basic information and practise integrated learning. We also develop in their minds horizons of expectations, that is, background information that is used in the interpretation of new data. It is obvious that in this way we prepare the ground for their future studies in sociology, psychoanalysis, the ethics of science, semiology, genre studies, philosophy of politics, ecology, philosophy, art history, history of ideas, anthropology, gender studies, media studies, a.o.

Key words: integrated teaching, common theme, Pygmalion myth

We took into consideration the motif of generating human out of dead matter, one that goes back to immemorial time and feeds the artifacts in the time, whether in literature, art, films.

From the apparently inoffensive Professor Higgins in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, who is trying to improve a common girl's speech and manners while treating her like an object, without a personality or even feelings of her own, the motif takes on dark aspects in dystopias of totalitarian regimes straitjacketing and brainwashing citizens (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) or programming them genetically (Huxley and his long heritage in literature or in the movies, such as Andrei Tarkovski's 1979 *Stalker* or the equally famous serial entitled *The Matrix* (1990), written and directed by the Wachowski Brothers.

The Pygmalion myth is a transgressive one, as it runs counter one of Jung's archetypes of mankind's collective unconscious, namely the mother complex. Jung mentions its complexity in "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious":

The effects of the mother-complex differ according to whether it appears in a son or a daughter. Typical effects on the son are homosexuality and Don Juanism, and sometimes also impotence. In homosexuality, the son's entire heterosexuality is tied to the mother in an unconscious form; in Don Juanism, he unconsciously seeks his mother in every woman he meets (Jung 1968: 85).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* constructs a misogynist male sculptor, who disappointed with female promiscuity, chooses celibacy and a substitute for love in an artefact which would bar him from consumption of an erotic relationship. As Victor Ieronim Stoichiță argues in the Introduction to *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (2008), Plato distinguishes in *The Sophist* between **copies**, images of things, governed by the poetics of mimesis, and **simulacrum**, which is image invested with an autonomous presence, a copy without original. Pygmalion's Galatea belongs with the latter order of images, as the sculptor has had no real life model. She is a desired image/ idol which assumes a concrete, touchable presence, without being of this world.

In *Frankenstein*, the protagonist dreams of his dead mother the night preceding the animation of the creature. He is in a way killing his mother by being her substitute in a process of giving life to a rational creature. We may say that Galatea and Frankenstein creature respond to their creator's mother complex as they avoid sexuality and natural reproduction because of the desired but tabooed motherly body, while trying to escape into a sort of paternal role: the son and the daughter replacing the lover.

By asking students to trace the Pygmalion motif to such later artefacts, we develop their ability to recognize patterns, to exercise their capacity of breaking codes in order to retrieve essential, basic information. We also develop in their minds horizons of expectations, that is, background information that is used in the interpretation of new data. It is obvious that in this way we prepare the ground for their future studies in sociology, psychoanalysis, the ethics of science, semiology, genre studies, philosophy of politics, ecology, philosophy, art history, history of ideas, anthropology, gender studies, media studies, a.o.

The Pygmalion motif has been chosen in support of our argument, first of all, because it characterises the very agenda of schooling and tutoring students, following the belief that they will perform better if their instructors are motivated by certain expectations. Self-efficacy is the concept defining the theory of the influence of the teachers' expectations over the students' performance. If they feel that they are trusted to succeed rather than expected to fail, the probability is that they will live to their teachers' expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobsen 1968). This is called the Pygmalion Effect.

Although Jie Chang argues that the climate instructors create does not always influence the students' achievement (Chang: web), positive or negative expectations on the part of the teaching staff can only effect what Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) describes as class-based positioning of individuals in relation to culture. They feel that they belong to low life and can only have access to cheap entertainment, high art being destined to the upper classes. They do not dare to think about going to a concert of classical music or to an opera. They need to be encouraged to dare to know, as Immanuel Kant says in his 1784 "What is Enlightenment?".

At the same time, Pygmalion includes the main Jungian archetypes designating crucial moments in our lives: birth, wedding, death.

Let us take a closer look at the integrated method of teaching the Pygmalion motif underwriting a host of works of art (Table 1). The core meaning is given by the original story. As Galatea is an image/ idol descending into the real world, crossing the dividing line between ontological planes, we may say that Ovid's story enacts a sort of incarnation, that it belongs to the mythical epistemic regime (Table 1).

Early modernity is associated with the collapse of authoritarian regimes of power, the time when the burlesque, the mock-heroic, the anti-discourse, the tragicomedy, that is hybrid generic forms were created with a demystifying and deconstructionist effect. For instance, gender superiority (Pygmalion creating Galatea as God created Eve) is reversed: in "Hercules and Omphale", a painting by Rubens, it is Omphale, Queen of Lydia, who entralls Hercules changing him into a mock-object, holding his club, wearing the fur of the Nemean lion killed by the hero, and twisting Pygmalion's ear. This is a burlesque, a reversal of the patriarchal relationship between the sexes. The heroic is being played down, the hero is his lady's plaything.

Jean Leon Gerome is a very complex artistic personality of the nineteenth century. He collapses ontological planes as well as the media, producing a sculpture within a painting with the latter reproduced by a photograph. In *My Portrait*, he impersonates Pygmalion, a self-portrait of the artist in his studio, with the real-life model sitting side by side with the sculpture. The sculpture in the painting is further distanced from a coherent reality by being the image reproduced by a photograph. The origin has been removed from reality and located within the space of representation (painted Gerome and painted model), the work of art (the sculpture) being the mimetic image of the model: Fig. 12.

According to Jean Baudrillard's classification of signs (*Simulacres et Simulation*, 1981), Ovid's Pygmalion belongs to the first order of images, the sign/ textual figure being a "reflection of a profound reality" levelled with "the sacramental order" of the gods who intervene in the mortals' lives, performing miracles. The Rubens painting belongs to the second stage in the "precession of simulacra", as it "masks and denatures" the reality of the patriarchal order, rewriting wrong the heroic tradition. Gerome's painting pretends to be a mimetic copy but the ontological distance between original and copy has vanished, they exist on the same level of reality. Gerome's painting is self-reflexive, the sign referring to itself (the making of the painting, not the representation of a pre-existing reality out there). In *Pygmalion and Galatea* (Fig.13), Gerome introduces the intertextual element which places a representation at the origin of his refurbishing: the sculpture's body is metamorphosing before the onlooker's eyes, the white legs being still of marble, while the torso is fleshly, a woman's body curving to embrace the painter. Finally, Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* is centred upon simulacrum, a copy that refers to no reality whatever. Eliza is a copy of the Professor's imagination, his desired phantasma.

Conclusion

Like all artifacts that enter the flow of culture, the Pygmalion myth has suffered transformations to suit the needs of the society it mirrored. In the artifacts that we have presented to expose the Pygmalion myth it is obvious that we understand them in the light of the distance between the myth and the simulacrum.

By identifying the myth in these artifacts students use critical thinking and make thematic connections which benefits their integrated learning.

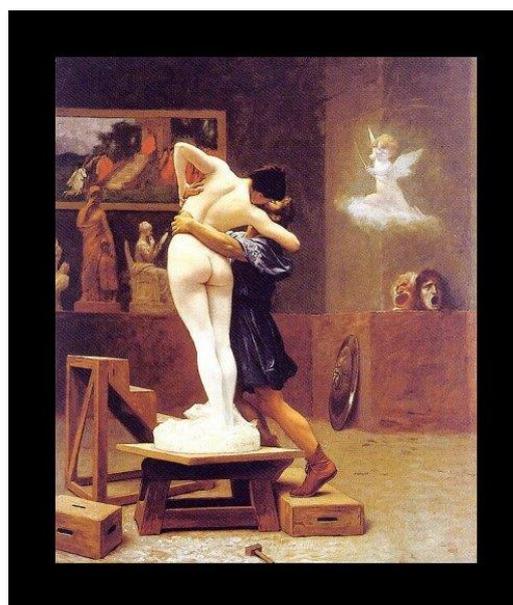


Fig. 12. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *My Portrait*, Fig. 13. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1890).

Here is a correlated picture of the elements shaping several works of art based on the same fable:

TITLE	DOMAIN	TIME	GENDERED IDEOLOGY	EPISTEMIC REGIME
Metamorphoses (Ovid)	Myth (narrative poem)	8 Ch.E.	Pygmalion as originator of art and female body Galatea as man's creature	Mythical
"Hercules and Omphale" (Rubens)	Painting	Cca 1602	Hero Hercules as Queen Omphale's slave, spinning wool. Queen Omphale holding Hercules's club and twisting his ear	Burlesque
"My Portrait" "Pygmalion and Galatea" (Jean Leon Gerome)	Photograph of painting. Self-portrait as sculptor and painting, superimposed	1890	The artist collapses the planes of art, reality, and representation	Simulation
"Pygmalion" (Bernard Shaw)	Play	1914	An academic possessed of power over language undertakes to make a flower-girl with "curbstone English" talk like a ducess.	Simulacrum

TABLE 1. Deconstruction of Myth into Simulacrum

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