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Pygmalionesque in *Pygmalion* and *Educating Rita*

Pygmalion ve *Educating Rita*'da Pygmalionesque

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ABSTRACT
This article introduces the term "pygmalionesque" to describe the patriarchal impulse to reshape women according to male ideals, as depicted in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) and Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980). The article situates pygmalionesque within linguistic neologism, blending Pygmalion with the suffix *-esque* to denote the aesthetic and coercive dimensions of patriarchal reform. Drawing on Ovid's myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the paper argues that both literary works critique the hierarchical dynamics of creator and creation, wherein male figures, Henry Higgins and Frank, respectively, attempt to mold the working-class women Eliza and Rita into refined embodiments of their own aspirations. Through textual analysis, it is demonstrated how these narratives expose the futility of such transformations: Eliza and Rita ultimately reject their Pygmalions' visions, asserting agency over their identities. By interrogating the intersections of gender, class, and education, this study reveals how both plays subvert the myth's traditional resolution, challenging the notion that women's worth is contingent upon male validation. Ultimately, pygmalionesque emerges as a framework for analysing systemic attempts to control female autonomy, while celebrating resistance to such impositions.

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Introduction

Nearly all Greek myths were adapted by the Romans, often with changes to the characters' names and occasionally with minor modifications to the plot. The story of Pygmalion and Galatea, however, stands out as an exception. It is narrated exclusively by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (Hamilton, 2013, p. 111). This brief yet influential tale has served as the basis for numerous literary works and adaptations. Both the myth and its titular characters have been the subject of extensive critique. For instance, William Sherwood Fox compares Pygmalion, a young and talented sculptor from Cyprus, to a misogynist. With a high ideal attributed to women, Pygmalion creates a woman of perfection, whose mere flaw is the lack of spiritual traits (1916, p. 200). Pygmalion has never married, driven by his disdain for women. His misogynistic nature stems from his disdain for the Propoetides, who denied Venus' divinity and thus were punished with immodesty, leading to prostitution (Guirand, 1968, p. 143). In *Metamorphoses*, the story unfolds as follows:

> These women's scandalous way of life was observed by a sculptor,
> Pygmálion. Sick of the vices with which the female sex
> has been so richly endowed, he chose for a number of years
> to remain unmarried, without a partner to share his bed. (Ovid, 2004, p. 299)

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As stated above, Pygmalion refuses to marry, holding the belief that no woman is truly chaste. Instead, he falls in love with his art, creating a woman beyond the imperfections of the real world. Aware of the deficiencies real women possess, he invests considerable effort in sculpting a flawless female figure from ivory. W. D. Reynolds argues that ivory, the chosen material for the statue, symbolizes "a holy woman" who is "chaste, cold, weighty, and honest" (1971, p. 355), which explains Pygmalion's preference. The sculpture becomes so alluring and lifelike that Pygmalion falls deeply in love with his own creation. Over time, the statue begins to feel less like ivory or stone and more like warm, living flesh. Pygmalion grows increasingly desperate; he kisses her lips and touches her skin, but she remains unresponsive. Treating her as though she were alive, he dresses the statue, applies colour to her face, and brings her gifts in an effort to please her. Yet, he is painfully aware that all his efforts are futile. His state of despair does not go unnoticed by Venus (Aphrodite). During a ritual on Venus' feast day, he prays to the goddess, asking for a maiden who embodies the qualities of his statue. Understanding that his true desire is for the sculpture itself to come to life, Venus grants his wish. The goddess of love breathes life into the statue. When Pygmalion returns home, he discovers that his dream has come true: the statue is now flesh and bone, responding to his acts of love. Venus blesses the couple with her presence at their wedding. Beyond this, the story provides little detail, except that Pygmalion names the statue "Galatea" (Hamilton, 2013, pp. 111-13).

The re-narrations of Ovid's myth differ from the original story of Pygmalion, yet the core of all the works remains unchanged. Regardless of the time and the era, these new versions of the myth represent a hierarchy between the dominant and the submissive, the superior and the inferior. In some works, Pygmalion embodies a god-like figure in relation to human beings; in others, he represents the superiority of men over women (Joshua, 2001, p. 8). While the setting may vary, the underlying desire of men to change, modify, and reappropriate women according to their own interests persists. Irrespective of the different time periods they were penned in, George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) and Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980) are examples of such works, where the Pygmalion figure exerts dominance over the woman. Men's willingness to educate, tame, or remake women can be conveyed in the term "pygmalionesque," though the term itself has not been previously coined.

A related concept derived from the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea is the "Pygmalion effect," an educational theory proposed by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968. They argue that the higher a teacher's expectations of a student, the greater the likelihood of the student's success (1968, p. 16). Teachers' expectations, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping students' intellectual development. This theory can be extended more broadly to encompass a broader range of psychological phenomena. It connects to the myth of Pygmalion in that his disbelief in finding a real woman who meets his standards drives him to create an idealized sculpture, embodying his vision of perfection. His devotion to his art and his success stem from the expectations he places on his own abilities and efforts. Pygmalion's constant effort to create a woman who fits his standards, on the other hand, has several instances in both fictional and real worlds. This dynamic can be observed in the relationships between a father and a daughter, a husband and a wife, a teacher and a student, etc. However, a specific term to describe the *desire* to tame, educate, or shape an individual has yet to be established. This study aims to fill this gap by introducing the term "pygmalionesque" with the intention of indicating to what extent and by what means Galateas are crafted by Pygmalions. As such, this concept is explored in literary works *Pygmalion* (1912) by G. B. Shaw and *Educating Rita* (1980) by Willy Russell.

Forming Pygmalionesque

"Pygmalionesque," to put it simply, is the desire to recreate, idealize and reform someone inferior by someone superior. Inspired from the myth of Pygmalion, it requires a male/female, reformer/reformed, and superior/inferior relationship at the same time, and only fulfilled when the "Pygmalion" figure successfully reappropriates the Galeta figure through his own male ideals. Hence, similar to the male gaze, it projects male fantasies onto the female figure. Originated by the film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975, the concept of the male gaze refers to the tendency to objectify

women in cinema by visual creators and to reduce them "to mere spectacles for male enjoyment" (Caffrey, 2024). According to Laura Mulvey, "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (1975/1989, p. 19). She argues that not only the male spectators but also the camera and the male character, hence the male gaze, project their fantasies onto the female body, consequently shaping the way women are presented, framed and styled on the screen (1975/1989, p. 19). Women, therefore, function as figures to appeal to visual and erotic fantasies. The male gaze, then, is an act of objectifying women to serve the male pleasure through a visual representation of women. Women are already formed to appeal to male desire and presented within the limits of male ideals on the screen. Pygmalionesque, on the other hand, is not a mere visual representation. The pygmalionesque aims to *reform* not only the appearance of the female figure but also the character and behaviours. It is a process of recreation, not satisfying visual pleasure, but a need to dominate and reshape. While the male gaze requires a relationship between the spectator and the camera, the pygmalionesque is formed through the relationship between the superior reformer (the male figure) and the inferior reformed one (the female figure).

Additionally, similar to patriarchy, pygmalionesque aims to dominate the female figure. However, while patriarchy is a broad social structure, pygmalionesque is a process of construction and an aesthetic pleasure of artistic shaping. The term "patriarch" first appeared in Max Weber in order to define a political system in which "men ruled societies through their positions as heads of households" (Walby, 1989, p. 213). According to Gerda Lerner, patriarchy is not something natural but rather "a historical creation formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion" (1986, p. 178), and is "an institutionalized system of male dominance" (1986, p. 239). Sylvia Walby also describes it as a social structure which aims to "dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1986, p. 213). Walby notes that patriarchy cannot be reduced to a single system such as capitalism, as it operates across various structures, including organization of production, i.e. household labour, relations in paid work, male violence, sexuality, the state and the cultural institutions as in media, education and religion. These structures cooperate to sustain women's subordination. Hence, patriarchy establishes male dominance over women through its own social mechanisms (1989, p. 214). In this regard, patriarchy is a system that aims to dominate and subordinate women and pygmalionesque is a result of it. Both aim to exploit, to control, and to manipulate for the male interest but while patriarchy is the whole system that defines the superior/male and inferior/female relationship, pygmalionesque is a consequence that arises from this system. It is a concept nourished by patriarchy. Like a child born of this system, it emerged from it, matured within it, and continues to grow through the nourishment the system provides.

Pygmalionesque is a newly-formed word, that is, a neologism. John Algeo states, "Be it as it may with books, those of us who study vocabulary will surely agree that at least of the making of many words there is no end" (1980, p. 264). He emphasizes that words are more fluid compared to phonetic and grammatical structures as they are more readily created, repurposed, and fallen out of usage. Algeo further observes that the modern era provides a fertile ground for the formation of new words owing to mass communication, which allows new terms to spread rapidly (1980, p. 264). Although the formation of new words found itself a space to flourish rapidly in the modern era, Algeo notes that the phenomenon is deeply rooted in ancient times. He explains that "we can be sure that the long interest in the origin of words is at least partial evidence for the perennial efflorescence of the vocabulary" (1980, p. 267). Drawing on Horace's metaphor, he likens words to leaves: "Every year-old ones wither and fall away, and every year new ones sprout and thrive. The English language, like a healthy, growing tree, each year puts more new leaves than it loses old ones, and thus its lexical foliage becomes ever lusher and more luxuriant" (1980, p. 267). Parallel to Algeo, R. M. W. Dixon examines how new English words are formulated. He begins by highlighting the word classes in English, categorizing nouns, verbs, and adjectives as "large open word classes," while describing adverbs as a "smaller one." He also notes the role of affixes in forming new words by modifying existing ones (Dixon, 2014, p. 11). Another method Dixon

discusses is the creation of new words through compounding. It is "simply combining two roots. The roots can be of the same class [...] or they can belong to different word classes" (2014, p. 12). According to Dixon, compounds are unique lexical items with specific meanings and, unlike words formed with derivational affixes such as *-ness*, must be listed in dictionaries. He explains that derivational affixes allow speakers to infer the meanings of new words without consulting a dictionary, whereas compounds require such documentation due to their distinct meanings (2014, p. 12).

Another method of forming new words is through the creation of neologisms. According to Fátima Vieira, "Neologisms correspond to the need to name what is new" (2010, p. 4). She explains the purpose of neologisms as naming new concepts and reflecting societal changes and values and proposes three types of neologisms: lexical neologism, semantic neologism, and derivation neologism. Lexical neologism is the creation of new words to name new concepts or the synthesis of pre-existing words. As Vieira observes, "by revealing the changes that the shared values of a given group undergo, the study of neologisms provides us not only with a dynamic portrait of a particular society over the ages but also with a representation of that society in a given period" (2010, p. 3). Semantic neologisms, on the other hand, involve assigning new meanings to pre-existing words within a new cultural context (Vieira, 2010, p. 3). Finally, derivational neologisms involve variations derived from existing words. In order to explain the derivation neologism, the term "utopia," on which Vieira bases her study, can be referred to. The term "utopia" has frequently been used as the root for forming new words. Examples include "eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia, alotopia, euchronia, heterotopia, ecotopia, and hyperutopia" (Vieira, 2010, p. 3). These are all considered derivational neologisms.

Medvid et al. propose another approach to neologism, defining it as "a new word in the lexicon of one or another language in terms of form or content" (2022, p. 78). They outline four ways to create neologisms: neologism proper, transnomination, semantic innovations, and methods of creation (2022, pp. 78-79). The first of these refers to words in which both form and content are new, meaning the word itself is a novel creation that introduces a concept or meaning previously non-existent in the language (2022, p. 78). The second type, transnomination, "combines the novelty of the word form with the meaning that was previously conveyed by another form" (2022, p. 78). Namely, it refers to a process of using a new word form in order to create a meaning that was previously expressed by a different word or phrase. Semantic innovations involve assigning new meanings to pre-existing words or phrases. Additionally, during this process, the form of the word does not change; however, the meaning of the word evolves or expands to include a new concept or context which was not originally associated with it (2022, p. 78). Finally, Medvid et al. discuss "methods of creation" for neologisms, which include: 1. Phonological neologisms, created from individual sounds, such as "zzz" to indicate sleep; 2. borrowed neologisms, introduced from other languages, such as culinary terms like "restaurant" and "gourmet"; 3. affixation, where new words are formed by adding prefixes or suffixes to existing ones; 4. conversion, changing the word class of an existing word without altering its form; 5. compounding, combining two or more existing words to create a new term; 6. blending, merging parts of two words into one, such as "brunch" (a blend of breakfast and lunch); 7. abbreviations and acronyms, which condense phrases into shorter forms; and 8. separation of meaning, involving the creation of new words by detaching or extending a word's meaning (2022, pp. 78-79).

The term pygmalionesque in this sense can be classified as both a derivation neologism and a neologism proper. It is formed by blending the name "Pygmalion," referring to a creator or a man who shapes or transforms something, with the suffix *-esque*, thereby creating a novel form and content. Moreover, the suffix *-esque* originates from Romance languages and means "having the style of, in a pleasing manner" (Dixon, 2014, p. 52). While its historical usage has been limited, it remains a productive suffix, as seen in recent formations like Pinter-esque, meaning "in the (esteemed) style of playwright Harold Pinter" (2014, p. 52). Additionally, Liu and Shen note that according to the Macmillan English Dictionary, the suffix *-esque* has two primary semantic meanings: it is used with proper names to form adjectives describing something related to the

person, place, or their work, and with certain nouns to create adjectives denoting a specific quality associated with the noun (Liu and Shen, 2012, pp. 769-70). Moreover, they emphasize that the meaning of a word formed with *-esque* is intrinsically linked to the meaning of its base (2012, p. 770). In this context, the neologism pygmalionesque signifies the creation of new form and content through derivation, embodying the desire to transform, reform, modify, or reappropriate. It specifically refers to the domination of women by reconstructing and redefining them in a manner aligned with male ideals.

Before delving into the specific literary works, it is important to establish clear criteria for the "Pygmalionesque dynamic." Essentially, this dynamic is an aesthetic and coercive process of gendered reform functioning upon the asymmetrical relation between authority and novice. The framework encompasses the following elements:

1. A theme (The male reshaping of women): The overarching drive to dominate and reconstruct the female subject.
2. A character trait (The disciplining mindset): An authoritative disposition tied to patriarchy and class mobility, characterizing figures like Higgins or Frank as inherently Pygmalionesque.
3. A process (Techniques of remaking): A specific set of coercive reforming practices targeting language, taste, manners, and evaluation.
4. An effect (The transformation and the "resistant remainder"): The outcome of the reform, which inevitably triggers Galatea's pushback through refusal, exit, or the repurposing of her new identity.

With this conceptual framework established, it becomes clear that the Pygmalionesque is not merely a passive literary trope, but an active, disciplining methodology. By tracking the specific techniques of remaking employed throughout the narratives, the following analyses will put forth how the text simultaneously constructs the Pygmalionesque ideal.

Pygmalionesque in *Pygmalion*

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw serves as a quintessential illustration of pygmalionesque, as the play represents the patriarchal upper middle-class desire to modify, reconstruct, and dominate women through education, ultimately reshaping their identities in the style of men. The title of Shaw's work directly alludes to the original myth of Pygmalion, situating the play as a retelling of the myth. In this context, the play and its characters can be compared to the original story, enriching our understanding of the pygmalionesque concept.

The play opens on a rainy evening in London, introducing a variety of characters from different social classes. As the narrative progresses, it offers brief glimpses of several individuals before focusing on a flower girl attempting to sell her flowers to passers-by and a mysterious man observing from a corner while taking notes in a notebook. It is revealed that the flower girl is Eliza, with her distinct Cockney accent, and the man taking notes is Henry Higgins, a linguist who studies people's accents. Henry and Eliza part ways after their first encounter; however, during their second meeting, Eliza requests Higgins' help to improve her accent so that she can work in a flower shop. This request sets the stage for a turning point in the narrative, leading to a long period of interaction within the confines of Henry's home. When Eliza visits Higgins to ask for his services, Henry and his friend Colonel Pickering wager that Henry cannot only "fix" Eliza's accent but also transform her into a polished, upper-class lady, presenting her at the Ambassador's Party within six months. From this moment, Eliza's education and transformation into an "ideal" upper-middle-class lady begin.

Both Higgins and Pickering are male figures in the play who attempt to reshape Eliza's identity in the style of an upper-middle-class man. In this regard, it can be asserted that both Higgins and Pickering have resemblances to Pygmalion, who sought to create a sculpture of the ideal woman. It can therefore be argued that both Higgins and Pickering embody pygmalionesque traits, though Higgins is portrayed more aggressively, making him the primary example of the concept. Eliza, a flower girl from the lower-middle class, exhibits characteristics such as her profession, accent, appearance, and behaviour that clearly place her within the lower social strata. These traits,

however, serve as obstacles in her life, hindering her upward mobility. Eliza asks for Higgins' services because she wants to be able to work in a flower shop, yet she cannot achieve this unless she "can talk more genteel" (Shaw, 2021, p. 31). Lynda Mugglestone, in her article, refers to Shaw's emphasis on the impossibility of an Englishman speaking without inciting contempt from others, highlighting the social divisions created by language:

> Joseph Priestley in 1762 pronunciation had been merely an "ornament" of correct speech, for William Savage writing in 1833 its role as determiner of social identity is clearly well established. Pronunciation is "the talisman" that will enforce admiration or beget contempt; that will produce esteem or preclude friendship; that will bar the door or make portals fly open. (1993, p. 375)

As demonstrated in the play, language is a powerful social tool that indicates one's social class. Hence, it can be stated that once Eliza starts to speak with her Cockney accent, she makes people from the upper classes despise her and creates prejudices towards her, consequently supporting the idea that her social mobility is only possible if she *fixes* her accent. Consequently, Eliza becomes aware that the first step toward assimilating into upper-class ideals is to change the way she speaks. This idea is introduced by Henry at the beginning of the play:

> THE NOTE TAKER. A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. 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. (Shaw, 2021, p. 22)

For Henry, anyone who cannot speak the ideal language, which is the language of great writers such as Shakespeare and Milton and the language of the Bible, does not even have the right to live. He argues that her "kerbstone English [...] will keep her in the gutter to the end of the days" (2021, p. 22), emphasizing that such an accent has no place in the upper class. Furthermore, in that same scene, Henry suggests that he can fix her accent and present her as a duchess at the ambassador's garden party. This proposition marks the moment that ignites the transformation, setting the stage for the teacher-student, or, more fittingly, the Pygmalion-Galatea relationship between Henry and Eliza.

While Eliza Doolittle merely desires to improve her employment prospects, Henry Higgins' desires are fuelled by his ambition to achieve success, demonstrate prowess, and craft Eliza into his idealized version. He utters, "What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do. Never lose a chance: it doesn't come every day. I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe" (2021, p. 22). Thus, for Henry, Eliza is a challenge to overcome. She is a minor figure in his eyes, diminished by her social class and gender, as evidenced by his description of her as a "draggletailed guttersnipe." Later, Henry's mother suggests that Eliza is no more than a doll to be played with, or, drawing on the original Pygmalion myth, a figure of ivory or clay to be sculpted. Both Henry and Pickering devote themselves to reshaping Eliza, her accent, appearance, and behaviour, striving to make her the ideal woman. Henry tells his mother:

> HIGGINS. I've taught her to speak properly; and she has strict orders as to her behaviour. She's to keep to two subjects: the weather and everybody's health—Fine day and How do you do, you know—and not to let herself go on things in general. (2021, p. 68)

He further adds, "Besides, she's useful. She knows where my things are, and remembers my appointments and so forth" (2021, p. 80). Hence, in this sense, Eliza is not only a student for Henry to project his desires onto, but also, in a more demeaning way, like a puppy that he trains to obey his commands.

Eliza's first social appearance occurs at Henry's mother's home. This scene particularly demonstrates how ambitious Henry and Pickering are to fix Eliza and emphasizes the ideals which they try to project onto her. Therefore, it can be argued that this scene serves as a prime example of the pygmalionesque notion, as it underscores both Henry's and Pickering's desire to recreate her into a more refined version of herself. Their excitement about the success of their experiment

is clearly evident in the scene:

> HIGGINS. It's the most absorbing experiment I ever tackled. She regularly fills our lives up: doesn't she, Pick?
> PICKERING. We're always talking Eliza.
> HIGGINS. Teaching Eliza.
> PICKERING. Dressing Eliza.
> HIGGINS. Inventing new Elizas! (2021, p. 81)

Therefore, it can be argued that their desire is driven by the satisfaction of shaping her to meet their expectations. They take delight in her ability to have "the most extraordinary quickness of ear," and compare her to a parrot, as she repeats everything she has been taught without question, absorbing each new piece of information like a child or a young pupil. Previously, she was a poor woman with "the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income" (2021, p. 81). Now, having been transformed in the image of these men, they assume she is happy because she fits into their class and its ideals, and *the pygmalionesque is fulfilled.*

As the scene juxtaposes Eliza and Henry, a question arises: Why is Henry able to fit into the upper class, despite his language and behaviour not being ideal, while Eliza cannot? In Act III, Mrs Higgins is displeased with her son for visiting her when she was expecting guests, remarking, "You offend all my friends: they stop coming whenever they meet you" (2021, p. 66). Henry frequently uses foul language and behaves inappropriately, yet he is not subject to the same scrutiny. While he criticizes Eliza's language, Mrs. Higgins subtly suggests that his own language is far from proper as well:

> HIGGINS. Do you mean that my language is improper?
> MRS HIGGINS. No, dearest: it would be quite proper—say on a canal barge. (2021, p. 79)

Henry educates her on how to speak, giving her commands on what to say and what not to say, while dictating how she must behave in public to fit an idealized version of upper-class propriety. However, although Henry does not conform to these ideals, his social status and worth are never questioned, and he remains an accepted member of his class. This irony highlights the superficial nature of social expectations and exposes the inconsistency in Henry's standards for what is considered ideal. Moreover, it reveals an inherent contradiction in his character: while he teaches propriety, he frequently behaves rudely and crudely, which challenges his authority as a figure of moral and social guidance. This inconsistency also underscores Henry's disregard for perspectives beyond his own, particularly evident in his narrow view of Eliza's progress and his assumption of her happiness as a result of her transformation.

Regardless of Henry's belief in her satisfaction, it becomes clear by the end of the play that Eliza is not content with her transformation or her sense of self as Henry assumes. In fact, the only person who is truly happy with the results of Eliza's education is Henry, as his desires have been fulfilled, not hers. Eliza's initial goal was to work as a flower girl under better conditions, but Henry sought to reshape her like a piece of ivory. Now, Eliza is neither fit to be a flower girl nor fully integrated into the class she was trained to fit into. The pygmalionesque transformation has been realized, but it results only in an identity crisis for Eliza, while satisfying Henry's ambitions.

> HIGGINS. You won my bet! You! Presumptuous insect! [...]
> ELIZA. Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you? [...] What's to become of me? What's to become of me? (2021, p. 95)

Pygmalion succeeded in his mission because Galatea was initially a lifeless object that he created from scratch. He sculpted the ideal woman, fell in love with her, and when Venus gave her life, she loved him in return, as she was born with his desires and ideals. However, Eliza is a living, independent human being, not a lifeless object. When she sought Henry's services, she already had her own emotions, ideals, and dreams. She obeyed him, as many students do, because she

believed her teacher would guide her to a better life, showing her the correct way to live it. However, Henry led her not to the right path but to one that fulfilled his own desires. Consequently, this journey prompts both Eliza and the audience to question the nature of the ideal and to recognize Henry's selfishness.

This realization brings consequences for Henry. As Eliza begins to awaken from the illusion that Henry, as her teacher, will provide her with the education needed to achieve her goals and earn her value both in society and in his eyes through her changed accent, Henry starts to lose his ability to control and dominate her, thus his power to shape her. When Eliza decides to leave, Henry resorts to manipulation. After the Ambassador's party, Eliza leaves Henry's house and takes refuge in Mrs. Higgins' home. Once again, Mrs. Higgins' house becomes a stage where Henry can play the role of Pygmalion and demonstrate his pygmalionesque desire to mould Eliza to his will. In terms of his manipulative tactics to reshape Eliza, two contemporary terms can be applied: mansplaining and gaslighting. These terms are used as heuristic devices that help analyse Higgins' manipulative tactics and offer explanations yet do not make definitive ontological claims. Mansplaining, as defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, means "to explain something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this context, mansplaining can be applied to Higgins, as he seeks to impose his own ideals on Eliza, disregarding the possibility that she has her own thoughts, desires, and knowledge.

Furthermore, gaslighting is defined as, "psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality [...] leads to confusion, loss of confidence, [...] and a dependency on the perpetrator" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Thus, it can be stated that Henry uses these manipulation techniques to fulfil his pygmalionesque. Henry mansplains Eliza in an attempt to make her question her ability to succeed without him. He says, "Let her find out how she can get on without us. She will relapse into the gutter in three weeks without me at her elbow" (Shaw, 2021, p. 118), implying that she will inevitably fail without his guidance, thus attempting to manipulate her into believing that she cannot exist without him. However, Eliza was not born yesterday, and from the beginning of the play it has been stated that he has always taken care of herself, as emphasized from the beginning of the play. Even though she has lost parts of her old self, she retains the confidence to survive without him. Eliza now realizes that she does not need Henry to validate her worth because she knows her own value. She understands that she deserves someone who loves her, like Freddy, and instead of returning to her former life as a flower girl, she envisions herself as a teacher, passing on the knowledge she gained from Henry. Despite this, Henry attempts to manipulate her thoughts again. Furthermore, he gaslights her by dismissing her feelings and her desire for independence and love. In the following excerpt, Higgins suggests that her feelings of neglect are unreasonable and attempts to make her doubt the validity of her emotional responses. However, Eliza is aware of his manipulative tactics and recognizes that he is trying to turn everything against her.

> HIGGINS. If you're going to be a lady, you'll have to give up feeling neglected if the men you know don't spend half their time snivelling over you and the other half giving you black eyes. (2021, p. 127)

Students trust their teachers because they believe their teachers have their best interests at heart and want the best for them, rooted in the assumption of being respected and loved. However, when students realize that this belief is a delusion, their trust is shattered. This case can be applied to Henry and Eliza's relationship. When Eliza realizes that the value she desires to gain in Henry's eyes is an illusion, she loses her trust in him. By neglecting and undermining Eliza's worth as an individual, Henry loses his authority to reshape her, thus failing to satisfy his desire to mold her in his own image—the pygmalionesque. Nevertheless, through this loss, he inadvertently teaches Eliza an important lesson: what truly matters is not the values and expectations imposed by society, but the ideals she chooses for herself. Written sixty-eight years later, a similar pattern emerges in Willy Russel's *Educating Rita*. While the characters, setting, and plot evolve into a modern context, what persists is the underlying pygmalionesque urge.

Pygmalionesque in *Educating Rita*

Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980) serves as a prominent example of the pygmalionesque effect, focusing on the transformative journeys of its protagonists. The play centres on Rita and Frank, the two characters who dominate the stage, with other figures merely mentioned but never physically appearing. Rita, a twenty-six-year-old working-class hairdresser, has an unquenchable thirst for university education, particularly in literature, marking the beginning of her transformative educational journey. In contrast, Frank, a middle-class university lecturer, is initially reluctant to accept Rita as his Open University pupil. He finds the teaching task challenging due to her lack of formal education, poor manners, and frequent use of slang and colloquial words, which, coupled with her local accent, reflect her limited language skills and serve as a barrier to the world of academia she aspires to enter.

One can observe how seemingly irrelevant and uniquely distinct each character is, as they are portrayed as embodiments of entities originating from entirely disparate worlds. An illustrative instance of this is when Rita's reference to "Flora," a margarine brand, is met with confusion by Frank, suggesting their cultural disconnection. Similarly, Rita's mention of a programme aired on ITV, juxtaposed with her accusation that Frank exclusively follows the BBC, indicates their divergent social classes and upbringings (Russell, 2000, p. 23). These examples demonstrate how profoundly different their backgrounds are. Despite being an uneducated, working-class woman, Rita is driven by a deep-seated desire to fulfil her potential. This is exemplified by her reluctance to conform to traditional roles of mother and wife assigned to her, as seen in her decision to continue birth control, asserting, "See, I don't wanna baby yet. See, I wanna discover meself first" (2000, p. 24). Perhaps what intrigues Frank is Rita's strong-willed nature and her passionate determination to defy societal expectations. Initially, Frank expresses dissatisfaction with Rita's progress in the courses, even advising her to consider finding another tutor. Despite his discouragement, Rita remains undeterred by his attempts to intimidate her. Impressed by her driving ambition, Frank ultimately decides to give Rita a chance, and their relationship begins to develop in the subsequent weeks. It seems Frank has found someone he can shape to fit his ideal, since Rita is the exact opposite of him, with several contradictions between the two. One contrast between them is Rita's local dialect and Frank's formal grammar, with Rita using idioms unfamiliar to Frank, such as "being off one's cake" (2000, p. 31), referring to mental instability. Interestingly, Frank later adopts and utters this phrase when drunk near the play's conclusion (2000, p. 86), marking a reversal of the pygmalionesque as Rita also influences Frank. He is captivated by Rita's spirited nature and independence, especially her outspokenness on various topics. To demonstrate, she boldly criticizes E.M. Forster's work as "crap" (2000, p. 33) due to his indifference towards the poor, among whom Rita is. Frank finds Rita's honesty and authenticity appealing; it is her dynamic and genuine self that he comes to admire and shape with his experience.

During Rita's first visit to Frank, he rejects Rita as a student, consistently disheartening her pursuit of education with statements like, "You want to learn. Well, that, I'm afraid, means a lot of work. You've barely had a basic schooling, you've never passed an examination in your life. Possessing a hungry mind is not, in itself, a guarantee of success" (2000, p. 38). Despite this discouragement, Rita perseveres in her headstrong attitude, a trait that Frank finds endearing. To Frank, Rita's witty comments on English classics by Eliot, Forster, and Maugham reveal her unique perspective. Still, Frank is situated as the superior one in the dual with Rita. As the dominant figure, he harbours a deeper intention to satisfy his desire to change and control Rita's behaviour. Rita, on the other hand, faces additional challenges at home. She writes her essays at work to avoid discouragement by her husband, Denny, who disapproves of her studying at home, as stated in, "He doesn't like me doin' this. I can't be bothered arguin' with him" (2000, p. 45). This sentence illustrates that Frank is not the only one attempting to shape and dominate Rita; her husband also tries to impose his will on her. As Rita resists meeting Denny's expectations, their marriage falls apart. She reflects on Denny's attempts to mould her into his ideal wife, highlighting the pressure as follows:

> It might sound selfish but all I want for the time bein' is what I'm findin' inside me. I certainly don't wanna be rushin' off with some feller, cos the first thing I'll have to do is forget about meself for the sake of him. (2000, pp. 51-52)

Denny's treatment of Rita can be seen as an unsuccessful attempt at pygmalionesque. Rita asserts her self-reliant change, uttering, "I see him lookin' at me sometimes, an' I know what he's thinkin, I do y' know, he's wonderin' where the girl he married has gone to" (2000, p. 52). This implies that Rita perceives Denny's struggle to mould her as a failed endeavour, akin to Shaw's *Pygmalion*, where the flower girl reproaches her new form.

When Frank invites Rita to dinner at his home, she becomes preoccupied with what to wear (2000, p. 63). Unable to decide on her attire and which wine to bring for dinner, she decides not to attend the dinner prepared by Frank's girlfriend, Julia. The main reason behind this is the fact that Rita feels like an outsider among them (2000, p. 66), fearing potential ridicule. She believes she was invited as a mere laughingstock (2000, p. 67), sensing that Frank views her as not fitting into his social circle. It might stem from Frank's remaining dissatisfied with Rita's progress in her essays. However, Rita continues to seek guidance on her academic success, which ensued in their dialogue:

> FRANK. (getting up) But I don't know if I want to tell you, Rita, I don't know that I want to teach you. (He moves towards the desk) What you already have is valuable.
> RITA. Valuable? What's valuable? The only thing I value is here, comin' here once a week.
> FRANK But, don't you see, if you're going to write this sort of thing - (he indicates the pile of essays) - to pass examinations, you're going to have to suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you. (2000, pp. 70-71)

Frank finds himself in a dilemma as he is prompted to shape Rita while also preserving her original spirit. He cherishes Rita's free-spirited nature as she initially appeared in his room. However, after her return from summer school in London, where she adopts a new lifestyle with stylish clothes and a friend circle, Frank cannot overlook her noticeable transformation. Rita recalls a memory from her time at summer school, reflecting on the experience and its profound impact on her:

> Anyway, this tutor come up to me, he looked at the book in me hand an' he said, 'Ah, are you fond of Ferlinghetti?' It was right on the tip of me tongue to say, 'Only when it's served with Parmesan cheese', but, Frank, I didn't. I held it back an' I heard meself sayin', 'Actually, I'm not too familiar with the American poets'. Frank, you woulda been dead proud of me. (2000, pp. 73-74)

Rita highlights her personal development and growth, emphasizing changes in her behaviour. In contrast, Frank appears discontented with Rita's academic progress because she no longer resembles the Rita who first entered his office. We discover that Rita now shares a flat with Trish, whom she admires, noting, "She's great. Y'know she's dead classy. Y'know like, she's got taste, y'know like you, Frank, she's just got it" (2000, p. 75). Frank is dismayed by Rita finding another role model resembling himself, because, as the creator, the shaper, he believes to remain unrivalled.

Likewise, Frank appears both astonished and troubled when Rita draws an analogy between a plant's need for air. In an attempt to assert his intellectual superiority, Frank elaborates on her analogy by incorporating water and fertilizer, stating, "If you're going to make an analogy why don't we take it the whole way?" (2000, p. 77). This exchange reveals his desire to maintain dominance over Rita. Frank is keenly aware of Rita's influence on him, as evidenced by his comment, "Rita, I thought you weren't interested in reforming me" (2000, p. 78). Here, the term "reform" metaphorically signifies the pygmalionesque. In the original myth of Pygmalion, the transformation of the Propoetides into stone symbolizes "a reversal of the Pygmalion situation" (Joshua, 2001, p. 3). A similar reversal is evident in Frank's pygmalionesque influence on Rita. Under Frank's guidance, Rita grows both personally and academically. Their close relationship also leads to Frank being influenced by Rita, illustrating the mutual transformation that occurs between them. Following this interaction, Rita recites from memory the following poem by

William Blake: "O Rose, thou art sick!/The invisible worm/That flies in the night./In the howling storm. […]" (2000, p. 79). This intertextuality is deliberate and meaningful. In Frank's perception, the sick rose symbolizes Rita, who he sees as having withered and grown sick as she moves further away from his ideal woman. Rita's evolving character, especially her newfound confidence in discussing literature, disturbs Frank. Similarly, in Act II, Scene II, Rita undergoes a dramatic change in her voice and accent, which she decided on after the summer school. When Frank questions this change, she explains that she has chosen to speak more formally in order to engage in literary discussions, influenced by Trish. This stimulates Frank to advise Rita to remain true to herself (2000, p. 83). Rita's tendency and possibility to be influenced by people out of Frank's influence disrupts Frank, who becomes further unsettled by Rita's interactions with the literature students sitting on the grass. Upon discovering that one of the students has invited Rita to travel abroad with him, Frank voices his objection:

> FRANK. You can't go.
> RITA. What?
> FRANK. You can't go - you've got your exams.
> RITA. My exams are before Christmas.
> FRANK. Well - you've got your results to wait for… (2000, p. 85)

The roles seem to reverse when Rita interprets the poem "The Blossom" as a reflection on sexuality, whereas Frank views it simply as "an uncomplicated piece about blossom, as if seen from a child's point of view" (2000, p. 88). Rita asserts her independence, affirming, "I can have a mind of my own, can't I? […] don't keep treatin' me as though I'm the same as when I first walked in here" (2000, p. 89). Despite Rita's intention to better herself and the salient progress in her literary analyses, Frank seems deranged.

Frank discovers that Rita has quit her job at the hairdresser's, reflecting, "It struck me that there was a time when you told me everything" (2000, p. 93). Rita explains that she left due to her growing dissatisfaction with mundane conversations with customers. Frank becomes increasingly frustrated with his inability to shape Rita, feeling that his attempt at pygmalionesque of her has thus far failed. Frank also experiences jealousy towards Tyson, the student who has invited Rita to travel abroad. It is noteworthy that towards the end of the play, Rita's pronunciation and vocabulary have become more refined, which can be interpreted as a form of self-pygmalionesque. Frank, however, credits himself for Rita's personal growth, stating, "Oh I've done a fine job on you, haven't I?" (2000, p. 97). Rita responds,

> what you can't bear is that I am educated now. What's up, Frank, don't y' like me now that the little girl's grown up, now that y' can no longer bounce me on daddy's knee an' watch me stare back in wide-eyed wonder at everything he has to say? I'm educated, I've got what you have an' y' don't like it because you'd rather see me as the peasant I once was; you're like the rest of them - you like to keep your natives thick, because that way they still look charming and delightful. I don't need you. […] I've got a room full of books. I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do without you. (2000, p. 98)

Frank becomes unsettled by Rita's newfound self-confidence: "Found a culture have you, Rita? Found a better song to sing have you? No - you've found a different song, that's all - and on your lips it's shrill and hollow and tuneless. Oh, Rita, Rita ..." (2000, p. 98). On the final page of the play, Frank presents Rita with a gift, a dress he purchased long ago. Upon receiving it, they engage in a conversation on giving and receiving. Rita states that she has always taken from Frank while she has given him nothing. Thus, she proposes to him a haircut, a reminder of their first encounter when she was a hairdresser. The play ends with Rita giving a haircut to Frank and making him look ten years younger. The ending highlights Frank's failure at his pygmalionesque of Rita since he himself becomes subject to change, while Rita has followed her own path.

Educating Rita presents another failure at pygmalionesque. Initially, Frank assumes the role of Pygmalion, attempting to educate Rita and mould her into an ideal student. However, he feels

threatened when Rita adopts Trish as a role model, gains independence, and asserts her individuality. Another instance of an unsuccessful Pygmalionesque dynamic is evident in Rita's relationship with Denny, her former husband. The male desire to shape a woman through domination is salient in the play. As in various versions of the Pygmalion and Galatea myth, the process of shaping remains consistent, even as the characters assume new names, such as Higgins and Eliza or Frank and Rita.

Conclusion

In this study, the neologism Pygmalionesque has been established with a distinct set of criteria to serve as a cohesive framework for future literary analysis. Both Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Russell's *Educating Rita* exemplify this coercive correlation, depicting an authoritative male figure's unsuccessful effort to shape a novice woman into his idealized vision. However, as Eliza claims her independence and Rita forges her own path, the inherent flaw in the Pygmalionesque causes the subjects of pygmalionesque, Henry and Frank, to become unsettled. Ultimately, the male practitioners' drive to impose this gendered reform is thwarted as both women evolve in ways that actively subvert the very blueprints designed for them.

Pygmalion explores Higgins' methods of reforming Eliza from a flower girl in the kerbstones with a Cockney accent into a lady of refined speech and suitable manners. Henry's treatment of Eliza is often condescending and dismissive as he only aims to reflect his own ideals on her and views her as a project to work on rather than an individual with her own aspirations. Higgins not only attempts to shape her by using his techniques as a linguist and the education he gained within the upper-middle-class society, but also uses manipulation techniques to convince her that she is incapable of succeeding without him, even though he successfully reformed her into an upper-class lady in appearance. However, the play at the end demonstrates a conflict between Henry's desire to pygmalionesque Eliza and Eliza's desire to find her unique place in the world. Similar to Rita, however, the ending proves that what is important is not one's worth dictated by Pygmalions but by one's own self. In a similar vein, the story of Frank and Rita reveals a complex exploration of change and self-discovery. Initially introduced as a hairdresser thirsty for academic enlightenment, Rita challenges Frank's preconceptions and expectations at every turn. Their relationship evolves through stages of mentorship, resistance, and mutual influence, reflecting themes of personal growth and the clash between societal norms and individual aspirations. Frank's attempts to mould Rita according to his ideals weaken as Rita asserts her independence and evolves into a confident individual. The play's conclusion, marked by Frank's ambivalent emotions and Rita's symbolic acceptance of a long-forgotten gift, indicates their journey of self-discovery and the realization that true transformation stems from embracing one's authentic self despite external pressures.

In conclusion, the concept of pygmalionesque in both *Pygmalion* and *Educating Rita* functions as a criticism of patriarchal desire to reform and reestablish women based on the ideals set within society. Furthermore, the plays demonstrate the futility of such ideals, as they are superficial since the very same ideals are not applied to men. Therefore, pygmalionesque is a concept that feeds the male members of the societal order to fulfil their desires, ignoring women's needs, which are without the influence of patriarchal influence on the way to genuine self-fulfilment and identity formation outside external forces. Consequently, true empowerment comes within, and any attempt to forcibly reshape Galateas by Pygmalions is destined to fail. Ultimately, by defining pygmalionesque, this study aims to provide future researchers with a novel critical lens necessary to unearth and interrogate similar dynamics of coercion across other literary works.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declaration of AI Use

Any AI-assisted tools, if used, were limited to language editing. No AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The author(s) assume sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and final content of the manuscript.

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