

**Éva Antal**

# **Pygmalions' Reading of Reading Pygmalions**

## **Rhetorical Self-Quest in de Man, Rousseau, and Ovid\***

This paper discusses issues of autobiography, or life-writing, that is, the writing of (a) life/self, focusing on two images: the stony statue and the sealing, melting wax that appear in the readings of narcissistic Pygmalions and their prosopopoeia. Although the *apropos* of this reading is provided by the 'blind statue' of Rousseau and Pygmalion, I cannot help writing about Narcissus, who as a wax-figure or, rather, 'as a reverant ghost' keeps reappearing. While the text is concerned with the question of self/life-writing and life work in literary criticism, I also pay attention to the self-reflexive, life-giving and all-demanding irony of postmodern reading theories. Although the analysis centres on Rousseau's works (*Narcissus*, *Pygmalion*), the central classical Ovidian figure is Pygmalion, whose creative 'life-giving' story is often alluded to in Anglophone deconstructive critical writings.

Is the status of a text like the status of a statue?  
(Paul de Man)

I

In his "Autobiography As De-Facement" Paul de Man claims that "autobiography . . . is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts."<sup>1</sup> If every text is autobiographical, then the study of autobiography, being the figure of reading, cannot reveal self-knowledge, but presents "the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions."<sup>2</sup> In my paper I discuss self-quest and life-writing, that is, the writing of (a) life/self,

---

\*The present paper was composed during my three-month stay at Kingston University. I am really grateful to the Hungarian Scholarship Board (Magyar Ösztöndíj Bizottság) as my research in London was funded by a Hungarian State Eötvös Scholarship granted by the Board in Spring 2008.

1. Paul de Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 67–81, p. 70.

2. De Man, p. 71.

focusing on two images: the stony statue and the sealing, melting wax that appear in the readings of narcissistic Pygmalions and in their versions of prosopopoeia. Although the *apropos* of my reading are the blind Rousseau and Pygmalion,<sup>3</sup> I cannot help also writing about Narcissus, who, as a wax-figure, or rather ‘as a reverent ghost’ keeps reappearing in the text.

Why is Rousseau presented as a blind statue in Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life* and in de Man’s “Shelley Disfigured?” We can suspect that it can be explained by the main concern of romanticism with architecture and statuary, as de Man refers to it. But we cannot forget about de Man’s phrase, namely that the romantic poet was deeply concerned with the “encrypted statues of Truth” of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> For Shelley, Rousseau is basically the philosopher of the self-quest, though in *The Triumph of Life* he is shown to fail in his quest for self-knowledge. In the figural language of the poem, as de Man points out, Rousseau’s brain becomes ‘sand,’ his eyes turn to ‘stony orbs,’ that is, Rousseau is disfigured, defaced.<sup>5</sup> In de Man’s text the self-reflexive moment of reading is beautifully displayed with the ‘seeing’ sun-eye, the reflecting well, and Narcissus’ rainbow-like iris. But what if we take into consideration that “the sun ‘sees’ its own light reflected, like Narcissus, in a well that is a mirror and also an eye?”<sup>6</sup> What if in the frozen moment of self-understanding the viewer is stoned and blind, and his iris/the rainbow becomes “a rigid, stony arch”? As we know in (rhetorical) reading/understanding “the text serves as a mirror of our own knowledge and our knowledge mirrors in its turn the text’s signification.”<sup>7</sup> The romantics favoured the idea of “monumentalization;” consequently their texts can be read as their epitaphs and monumental graves. As de Man adds, “they [viz. the romantics] have been made into statues for the benefit of future archaeologists”<sup>8</sup> – all readings are monumentalization.

In “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self” de Man also highlights that contemporary criticism has found relevant the problem of the self and the problem of the ‘speaking voice’ in the romantic works. The main concentration on the emergence of the self in Wordsworth’s, Shelley’s, Keats’s, Hölderlin’s, and Rousseau’s

---

3. Actually, the *apropos* of the text is provided by the re-reading of my own paper, “The Ironic Allegory of Remembrance and Oblivion (In Memory of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida),” *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005) 233–252. For an overview of “à propos of à propos,” see Derrida’s “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2),” in Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), 71–160, pp. 76–77.

4. De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” p. 95.

5. De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” p. 100.

6. De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” p. 109.

7. De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” p. 112.

8. De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” p. 121.

works goes together with their realisation of the problematic relationship between origin and totality, what's more, the temporality of literary language. De Man finds that the problem of "the split, the disjunction between the empirical and what we have called the literary, or poetic self" is still crucial in the understanding of writing and reading.<sup>9</sup> It is obvious that the abyssal or labyrinthine structure of self-writing invites the reader to join the writer's self-quest with the "presence of a double self in the terms of self-knowledge and self-deception."<sup>10</sup> While reading, we fancy/imagine that we identify ourselves with the speaking voice and Rousseau is a test case for de Man, claimed "a philosopher of the self."<sup>11</sup>

In his works Rousseau dramatises the (ironic) duplication of his empirical self and the one appearing in his work; the most remarkable 'duplication' can be noticed in his *Dialogues*, where the two conversing figures are called Rousseau and Jean-Jacques. According to Jean Starobinski, Rousseau succeeds in escaping the dangers of reflection, as "he claims to be entirely separated from his own existence, pushing the reflexive disjunction (*dédoublement*) to the point where the reflected image would become, for the reflecting consciousness, an objective figure, kept at a distance and observable as from the outside. . ."<sup>12</sup> It is true that we can observe some "oscillation between materialistic naturalism and transcendental intuition in Rousseau's works" and that Rousseau tends to call his imaginative works *fiction*, referring to the "fiction-engendering faculty" of the self; but the pragmatic self uses imagination for the benefit of its own pragmatic purposes. De Man thinks that Rousseau's self-transparency is only a trick; the above mentioned "oscillation is . . . a succession of flights from self-knowledge."<sup>13</sup> I would rather think that Rousseau thematises the face-giving and face-taking of memory, writing 'the history of his

---

9. Paul de Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 25–49, pp. 25–26.

10. De Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," pp. 27–28. Thus, it is not by chance that Rousseau's readers had mistaken the author's voice several times for his own; for instance, Mme de Staël adored the passionate voice of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, while Hazlitt disliked his over egotistical self-centredness.

11. Paul de Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," in *The Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979), 160–187, p. 163.

12. Quoted in de Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," p. 35.

13. De Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," pp. 37–38. He also quotes Starobinski's telling passage to show Rousseau's double perspective about the work of remembering in *The Confessions*: "By abandoning myself *simultaneously* to the *memory* of the impression I received and to the present sentiment, I will paint the state of my soul in a *double perspective*, namely at the moment when the event happened to me and at the moment I described it" (p. 38, my italics).

soul.’ It seems that an autobiographical piece cannot work without the (double) irony of *dédoublement* caused by the allegorical-ironical structure of forgetting and recollecting embedded in the ironic context of writing *itself*.

Similarly, de Man says that in prosopopoeia, behind the mask of Rousseau’s conceitedness, “an element of distance, of disinterestedness is introduced from the start, and the confessional statement is admittedly fictionalized, changed by an imaginative act of writing, which prevents it from coinciding entirely with itself.”<sup>14</sup> To understand Rousseau’s confrontation between the artist and his work, dramatised in the questions of selfhood, de Man analyses two of Rousseau’s brief dramatic works: an early piece, *Narcisse* (with its “Preface”) and *Pygmalion*, that was written between the philosophical-literary and the confessional parts of his life-work in 1762. In another writing, de Man says about *Pygmalion* that it focuses on the self’s getting closer to being in artistic creation, where the work is given priority over the self.<sup>15</sup>

## II

Before reading Rousseau’s version of Pygmalion and others’ versions of Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*, it is quite fruitful to re-read the ‘original’ story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Although in Ovid’s narrative most mythical transformations are related to love and passion, human artists and skilful artisans – for instance, the weaver Arachne, the poet Orpheus, and the inventor Daedalus – are punished, as the Olympian gods cannot endure human rivals. The sculptor Pygmalion’s story about his bringing the self-made statue to life is a central and a uniquely positive one in the work. The myth – more exactly, Ovid’s telling of the myth – is placed within the song of Orpheus, who has a verbal power over death, while Pygmalion has a visual and tactile power over dead material; Ovid has all kinds of power displayed in his work, as Philip Hardie puts it.<sup>16</sup> Actually, the Ovidian narrative of the ‘life-giving’ artist’s story is another reading of ‘Pygmalion.’ In an earlier one, in Philostephanus’ version of the Cyprian legend, Pygmalion was a king, not an artist, who was “lustfully infatuated with a statue of the goddess Venus, which he took from the sanctu-

---

14. De Man, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self,” p. 39.

15. Paul de Man, “Madame de Staël and Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” in *Critical Writings, 1953–1978*, ed. Lindsay Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 178: “the fiction, by the intermediary of artistic creation, brings the private self closer to being. The same movement occurs in Rousseau when Pygmalion’s self, engendering Galatea, permits her to become the self’s true centre. The priority of the fiction is achieved in self-renunciation.”

16. Philip Hardie, *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 188.

ary and polluted with his embrace."<sup>17</sup> It is important to emphasise that Ovid changed the source story because in his version he *made* the King of Cyprus (or of Paphos) from "the perverse *agalmatophilic* [viz. statue-lover] of the traditional version to a pious lover."<sup>18</sup> Pygmalion becomes the elegiac lover and the artist who in his creative fantasy fulfils his desire. While in the Greek myth Pygmalion was a tyrant and sinner who offended Venus, in Ovid's version he is made a shy sculptor who turns away from love and women. More exactly, he turns away from women after seeing the lechery of the prostitutes in Cyprus. In Ovid's poetic version of the myth the "loathsome Propoetides" are punished in a highly inventive way – they are turned to stone. To quote from the *Metamorphoses*: "Then, as all sense of shame left them, the blood hardened in their cheeks, and it required only a slight alteration to transform them into stony flints."<sup>19</sup> Readers of the passage find different meanings of the stoniness of women here: while Kenneth Gross takes it as a chiasmic relation, Joseph B. Solodow remarks on the metaphoric 'hardness' of the prostitutes that is made literal by Ovid playing on its figurative and literal meanings.<sup>20</sup> It is not difficult to see Ovid's irony in the prostitutes' turning to stone and, as a refusal, Pygmalion's making of a perfect ivory statue to avoid the 'stony' ladies. As it goes from stone to stone:

When Pygmalion saw these women, living such wicked lives, he was revolted by the many faults which nature had implanted in the female sex, and for a long time lived a bachelor existence, without any wife to share his home. But meanwhile, with marvellous artistry, he skilfully carved a snowy ivory statue. He made it lovelier than any woman born, and fell in love with his own creation.<sup>21</sup>

After its creation Pygmalion starts to court his 'stony' maiden: speaking and giving presents to it, dressing and embracing the statue. In some readings of Ovid's Pygmalion story, the (quite obvious) eroticism of the myth is highlighted by the reminiscence of the original story in which the King of Cyprus wanted to have sex with the

---

17. Elaine Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 59. See also Jane M. Miller, "Some Versions of Pygmalion," in *Ovid Renewed*, ed. Martindale Charles (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 205–214, p. 205.

18. G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses. An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p. 89 (my italics).

19. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (Penguin Books, 1955, repr. 1961), p. 231.

20. Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992), p. 72 and Joseph B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 2.

21. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 252 (10.243–49).

statue of Venus, and, ultimately, he contaminated it. Jane M. Miller thinks that the sexuality of the source tale is balanced with the life-giving power of art in Ovid's version.<sup>22</sup> It is true that Pygmalion's story becomes a metaphor for the creative process, but it is also revealed in one hint that Pygmalion may have had a sexual relationship with the statue, using it as a substitute for a mistress, "calling it his bedfellow." Returning home to his statue from the sanctuary, Pygmalion leans over their bed and kisses it. Then he senses that it, or rather, for the first time, 'she,' seems warm:

he laid his lips on hers again, and touched her breast with his hands – at his touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft: his fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface, just as *wax* of Hymettus melts in the sun and, worked by men's fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes, and made fit for use *by being used*.<sup>23</sup>

Practically, the statue is softened by Pygmalion's life-giving rubbing that naturally produces warmth, melting stoniness; and that rubbing can be read as the act of love-making. The statue melts like wax in the warm hands of the lover/creator; where wax is the "emblem at once of the unity and changeability of all matter."<sup>24</sup> We can say that the co-operation of the seeing/heating sun and creative human hands results in a true, a real metamorphosis. After melting, the wax becomes solid again, taking its final shape in the form of a real woman. I find Leonard Barkan's summary appropriate here: "And, once the wax has softened and changed its form, it does not stay in the shadowy realm but rather becomes real. . . . Pygmalion is potentially narcissistic since he falls in love with his own creation, but metamorphosis through his art and his belief in his art makes of shadow a very real substance."<sup>25</sup>

We should agree with Barkan that Pygmalion's treatment of the statue as a living human recalls, (or *echoes*), Narcissus' "passionate devotion that refuses to know the identity of its object and cannot distinguish between shadow and substance."<sup>26</sup> Pygmalion's blind devotion to his self-made lover resembles Narcissus' obsession (*furor*) and his tragic inability to extend beyond himself. But in the artist's 'imaginative' story – let us imagine – there are two lovers, while Narcissus himself is simultaneously the lover

---

22. Jane M. Miller, "Some Versions of Pygmalion," in *Ovid Renewed*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 205–214, p. 206. Kenneth Gross even claims that Pygmalion's courting of the statue does not lack the impression of fetishism and necrophilia (Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, p. 75).

23. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 253 (10.280–86) (my italics).

24. Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh. Metamorphosis & the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986), p. 77.

25. Barkan, p. 78.

26. Barkan, p. 76.

and the beloved in his life and in his death. Hardie also thinks that Pygmalion's and Narcissus' stories are similar, though in the former there is a progression from death to life via the image, while in the latter it is in the opposite direction; Narcissus' own image and his realisation of it being just an image of himself causes his death.<sup>27</sup> His stupefied gaze (viz. Greek *narke*, numbness) and his motionlessness make the image at which he marvels even more like a statue. In his pool he takes his illusionary reflection as an image of a marble statue: "[s]pellbound by his own self, he remained there motionless, with fixed gaze, like a statue carved from Parian marble."<sup>28</sup> Narcissus, like Pygmalion, is praying for the coming to life of (t)his statue, but his statue is literally his own reflected image in the virgin pool. His statue's coming to 'life,' that is, his realisation of loving his own *image (imago)*, causes his death. Barkan says that Narcissus, like the other figures of the great stories of discovery, 'acts' in the spirit of *nosce te ipsum* (know thyself) and they are all figures of the mirror:

*intus habes quem poscis* 'he whom you seek is within you.' . . . It stands in a credo for human experience in the world of metamorphosis. We contain our own identity, and we find it in the mirror of transformation. We contain our destinies within us, petrifications of ourselves into stone and image. Narcissus-like, we often seek in love what is within us, and it is revealed through transformation.<sup>29</sup>

His death means his entering the realm of images expressed in the imagery of dissolution: like the melting wax he pines away while his tears are flowing in his eyes. The heat of his fiery passion is balanced by the cold surface of the water, his mirror. As Barkan puts it, "the boy has entered completely into the mirror realm," as if through the tear-stain he had gone to the other side of the mirror.<sup>30</sup> While Narcissus is literally reduced to an image of himself, the artist Pygmalion (like the other artists in the *Metamorphoses*) creates an/the image of himself. Actually, the two processes seem to be different but are in chiasmic relation, and, quoting Barkan, "all metamorphoses are in a sense transformations to imago . . . the turn to *imago* is . . . in fact identical to the stony transformation."<sup>31</sup>

In Pygmalion's story "Ovid creates a figure for the viewer rather than the artist, producing a narrative about the 'beholder's share' in creating the impression of real presence in a work of art."<sup>32</sup> The opening 'close' reading gives life to the stone-like

---

27. Hardie, p. 189.

28. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 92 (3.418–19).

29. Barkan, p. 92.

30. Barkan, p. 52.

31. Barkan, p. 90.

32. Hardie, p. 189.

closed text, so that the particular reading should melt it like wax so as to freeze it again into stone, into another reading. In reading, passionate attention and ardent vigour are needed so that the text should produce its meanings in different forms of interpretations. “Each critic becomes a Pygmalion,”<sup>33</sup> when in his/her Narcissistic petrification, he/she gives life to a stony work of art in the chiastic structure of reading. In Narcissus’ gaze we should recognise a general paradigm for the beholder of a work of art and the narcissistic quality of the beholder’s response. Philip Hardie describes the narcissistic features of reading very well in his *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion*:

the viewer reads into the image his own phantasies, and in so doing transgresses the boundary between the world of the viewer and the world of the artwork. . . . The surface of the pool is also the interface between reality and illusion for those outside the text. Narcissus is a figure for the desiring reader, caught between the intellectual understanding that texts are just texts, words with no underlying reality, and the desire to believe in the reality of the textual world. Narcissus turns into a sophisticated reader at the moment he recognises that the reflection is himself.<sup>34</sup>

Narcissus’ situation mirrors that of the engaged reader as he/she knows with his/her rational mind that the reflection has no reality, but cannot stop thinking as if it did. Metaphorically, the reader becomes one with his/her image-reflection, and in a (narcissistic) text, the voice/persona is able to become one with his/her image in the images/figures of rhetoric.

What Hardie says about the narcissistic reader is strikingly *echoed* in what J. Hillis Miller expresses on the Pygmalion-quality of reading in his *Versions of Pygmalion*. Miller puts personification and prosopopoeia in the centre of his analysis, claiming that “the act of personification [is] essential to all storytelling and storyreading.”<sup>35</sup> In his “Proem: Pygmalion’s Prosopopoeia” he discusses the story told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and again emphasises that for him one of the characteristic features of Ovid’s narrative is that each metamorphosis can be seen and defined as “the literalization of a metaphor.” Miller straightforwardly blames the rhetorical figures of language: “[i]n the cruel justice of the gods we see the terrible performative power that figures of speech may have. . . . The *Metamorphoses* shows what aberrant figurative language can do. The power of the gods to intervene in

---

33. Leo C. Curran, “Transformation and Anti-Augustanism in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” in *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 71–91, p. 71.

34. Hardie, pp. 147–148.

35. J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1990), “Preface,” vii. Although de Man’s ‘prosopopeia’ is spelled here as ‘prosopopoeia,’ and there is a footnote referring to de Man’s ideas, his works are not cited in “Proem.”



human history is the allegorization of this linguistic power.”<sup>36</sup> He also calls attention to the interrelatedness of stories in Book 10, emphasising that Venus seems to have overwhelming power in the happenings, bringing the statue to life so as to be overcome by something greater than herself, love or rather passion in the Adonis episode. Pygmalion, whose self-celibacy is caused by his aversion to the ‘stony’ and ‘painted’ prostitutes, is destined to fall in love with a stony and painted statue. This is to say that Miller pays attention to the textual irony of the narrative and concentrates on figurative language, which I have also done in my rhetorical reading.

Miller sees Pygmalion’s error in “taking prosopopoeia literally,” since he regards metamorphosis as the literalising allegory of the face-giving prosopopoeia. The trope gives face, name, and voice to the absent, the inanimate and to the dead, as it is also the trope of mourning. To quote Miller’s summary on the myth:

For Pygmalion, the other is not really other. Pygmalion has himself made Galatea. She is the mirror image of his desire. His relation to her is not love for another, in an attachment always shadowed by the certain death of the other. It is a reciprocity in which the same loves the same. Here Narcissus’ vain desire seems fulfilled . . . For Galatea, to see at all is to see Pygmalion and to be subject to him. It is as if Narcissus’ reflection in the pool had come alive and could return his love.<sup>37</sup>

In Pygmalion’s story an inanimate object comes to life, that is, an anthropomorphism takes place, while in the other stories the transformation goes in the other direction: from human being to animal, plant or object. Thus, the story of Pygmalion is a unique one: in Miller’s phrase, it is “a prosopopoeia of prosopopoeia.”<sup>38</sup>

Miller also refers to the ‘waxing’ erotic passage in the narrative, when the ivory becomes flesh. Here, on the one hand, he emphasises the importance of male productive work on passive (female) material, taking wax as the traditional figure of/trope for man’s shaping power.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, he clearly sees the possible

---

36. Miller, p. 1. In my paper I retain the name Galatea (this spelling is also kept by most of the cited critics, e.g. J. Hillis Miller); de Man names the statue-work Galathea while some critics – Williams Huntington and Shierry M. Weber – keep the French Galathée in their analysis of Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* (cf. notes 41 and 71 below).

37. Miller, pp. 4–5.

38. Miller, p. 6. Pygmalion’s story can be read as a face-giving story of a face-giving, and in this phrase (in the reading of the phrase), even this ‘of’ is to be taken metaphorically. For the metaphorical ‘of,’ see also Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986), pp. 16–17, and J. Hillis Miller, *Theory Now and Then*, pp. 355–356.

39. Miller, p. 7.

“abuse” or “misuse” of Pygmalion’s creative “use” of wax, which is also related to his own self-abuse, taking prosopopoeia literally. Not only does Pygmalion make the mistake of taking a figure of speech literally. According to Miller, in reading we are likely to take the statue as a real person, or to think of “black marks on the page” as stories of real persons. Readers, critics, and teachers personify, that is, give faces to the characters in the narrative of the texts: “stories are all versions of Pygmalion and Galatea, that is, stories in which the act of prosopopoeia essential to any story-telling is overtly thematized, as when someone falls in love with a statue.”<sup>40</sup>

### III

Now, it is time to return to Rousseau and his self-questi(oni)ng narcissistic version of Pygmalion. Williams Huntington, in his thorough study entitled *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography*, analyses the relationship between two important concepts in the oeuvre: *amour* and *amitié*, that is, love and friendship. Huntington differentiates between *amour* and *amitié* on the basis of their relationship to imagination; while in *amitié* it is an “extrinsic catalyst,” in *amour* it is an intrinsic, final cause. On the other hand, “*amitié* implies a symmetrical, reciprocal, and essentially circular relationship, based on identity,” but “*amour* implies an asymmetrical, non-reciprocal, relationship, based on difference.”<sup>41</sup> Rousseau is greatly concerned with the differences between the real and the illusory, and *amour*, intensifying these differences, makes him aware of this discrepancy. For him love is not a dialogue between two persons, but between the actual world and the third party, imagination.

Rousseau made distinctions between self-love (*amour de soi*) and vanity (*amour propre*): the latter is an infectious disease and “the most corrosive of emotions,” while the former means the natural and “the unreflective, loving passion.” He also claimed “in his evolutionary story of the human heart” that self-love was corrupted by the later kind of love.<sup>42</sup> de Man sees that “in contrast to the solitary self-concentration of self-love, *amour propre* is entirely directed towards the approval of others”: while the paraphrase of self-love can be ‘*je m’aime*,’ of

---

40. Miller, p. 14.

41. Williams Huntington, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), pp. 56–57.

42. John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 155–157. He also associates *amour de soi* with the Freudian ‘primary narcissism’ and sees a unique combination of the two kinds of love in self-writing: “Autobiography may be a form of writing directed to the satisfaction of the writer’s *amour-propre*, but he will use it, uniquely, for the expression of his *amour de soi*, or true self-love” (pp. 156–157).

*amour propre* it is 'on m'aime' or 'je suis aimable.'<sup>43</sup> Rousseau's early dramatic piece *Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même* (*Narcissus, or, the Lover of Himself*) is a comic play where Valère (with a telling male-female name) falls in love with his own portrait disguised as a woman. Valère is a classical comic figure, the type of conceited young fop who is mystified by vanity. He is not like Ovid's Narcissus, who recognises that he loves his own image, since Rousseau's Narcisse remains blind *in/to* his self-love and fails to realise his own self-centredness. On his wedding day Valère is tricked and deluded by the 'fake' portrait and only with the help of the other characters can he get back to his senses. He is not an artist and the portrait is painted by his sister, who wants to play on her brother's vanity and is also tricked by the others in the play. *Narcisse* is about delusion and self-delusion in love. Through the interplay between self-love (*amour de soi*), vanity (*amour propre*) and the love of others, Valère's misreading of the portrait mainly presents his vanity. His narcissism is not metaphorical, or tropical, as it only reveals his *amour propre*, making the comedy satirical and didactic. Thus de Man's statement, namely that "the self here never really becomes another, but remains all too much its own interested self," is true in relation to all the characters.<sup>44</sup>

In the rhetoric of *Narcisse*, there are many puns and grammatical plays on the reflexive mode. The most frequently quoted is in Scene XIII when Valère's drunk valet Frontin reveals the secret of the portrait to his master's sister, the trickster: "It is a portrait. . . metamor. . . no, metaphor. . . yes, metaphorized (*métaphorisé*). It is my master, it is a girl. . . you have made a certain mixture."<sup>45</sup> The portrait is associated with a metaphor but we can take it as a slip of tongue as the drunk valet could have wanted to say that the portrait has been 'metamorphosed.' Frontin also says here that Valère has fallen in love not with the portrait, not himself as he failed to recognise himself in it, but with the "resemblance." That is, he is suspended between self-love and the transitive love of the others – between the love for the self and the love for the other. Similarly, the portrait is not entirely fictional since it exists in the mode of simulacrum. De Man thinks that "resemblance is 'loved' because it can be interpreted as identity as well as difference and it is therefore unseizable, forever in flight."<sup>46</sup> Valère, who is Rousseau's Narcisse, (mis)reads his own portrait and the

43. De Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 165.

44. De Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," pp. 41–42.

45. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Narcissus, or, the Lover of Himself*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, Vol. 10, ed. and trans. by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: Univ. Press of New England, 2004), 125–160, p. 150. See also in French: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 959–1018, p. 1006.

46. De Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 168.

misread self-portrait stands for the beloved. According to de Man, “the portrait is a substitution, but it is impossible to say whether it substitutes for the self or for the other; it constantly vacillates between both. . . . [L]ove, like perfectibility, is structured like a figure of speech. The portrait allows for a bizarre substitution of self for other, and of other for self, called love.”<sup>47</sup> The portrait is “beloved” and partakes of *amour de soi*, though in the displaced version of an imagined other; and it becomes a figure: “the metaphor of a metonymy.” In the play we cannot know whether the beloved is “a person or a portrait, a referential meaning or a figure” – here “selfhood is not a substance but a figure.”<sup>48</sup> In *Narcisse* Rousseau “portrayed” the action as a “painter,” and as the author of the text his main concern is the rhetoric of self. As a result of this, he produces a misreading in his self-quest. But it is not only Rousseau who can be taken here as the rhetorician of the self since de Man’s main concern is also the rhetoric of self-quest. Valère’s self-love is a “representation of a rhetorical structure . . . that escapes the control of the self,” which shows that the rhetorical resources of language are incompatible with selfhood. This is the revealing passage about the ironic relation of rhetoric (language) and the self, in full:

Rhetoric all too easily appears as the tool of *the self*, hence its pervading association, in the everyday use of the term, with persuasion, eloquence, the manipulation of the self and of others. Hence also the naïvely pejorative sense in which the term is commonly used, in opposition to a literal use of language that would not allow the subject to conceal its desires. The attitude is by no means confined to the popular use of ‘rhetoric’ but is in fact a recurrent philosophical topos, a philosopheme that may well be constitutive of philosophical language itself. In all these instances, *rhetoric functions as a key to the discovery of the self*; and it functions with such ease that one may well begin to wonder whether the lock indeed shapes the key or whether it is not the other way round, that a lock (and a secret room or box behind it) had to be invented in order to give a function to the key.<sup>49</sup>

In this allegorical passage of highly refined rhetoric, de Man not only questions the relation between the Self/selves shown as locked rooms or boxes, and language with its keys to the locks, but he also suggests that some rooms/boxes should be

---

47. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 169. Taking love as a rhetorical figure recalls Freud’s ideas, for instance, on the narcissistic partner choice. Moreover, de Man refers to Ricoeur’s statement on Freud showing him as “the rhetorical undoer and the hermeneutic recoverer of the self” (de Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 174).

48. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 170.

49. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 173 (my italics).

kept locked. However many boxes (books?) are opened, there will always be other (locked) ones – perhaps in the form of Chinese boxes (*mise en abyme*).

According to Huntington, in his *Narcisse* Rousseau shows the relationship between imagined and real objects of love, as “the literary or linguistic model mediating between the sentiment of the lover and the object of his love insures that they will never fully coincide.”<sup>50</sup> *Amour* relates to its object indirectly, through ‘*autre univers*’ (Rousseau), or world of imagination, and it develops through the confusion of an imagined model of love with an existing person, and on the assumption that they can be one and the same. Moreover, Huntington claims that the rhetorical figures of language – especially in the literary discourse of love – are to be blamed for the linguistic confusions, when the figures are taken for actual referents. In *Narcisse* the man, not recognising his own portrait, actually loves resemblance, while in *Pygmalion*, if

Galathée’s birth is a shared identification among two persons, it is also a ‘réveil,’ the instant of awakening in a reverie, in which the primary identification is not between two persons, but between the illusory and the real. Galathée moves from illusion toward reality, Pygmalion from reality toward illusion. From different starting points, they meet in one ‘Moi,’ at a point somewhere between illusion and reality, or even prior to such a distinction.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly to the other critics, Paul de Man, in two of his writings, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self” and “Self (Pygmalion),” presents Rousseau’s dramatic pieces as the key-texts to understand self-writing and writing of the self. While *Narcisse* (the work that he is supposed to have written at the age of 18, though, according to de Man, he is probably lying) marks the beginning of his creative period, *Pygmalion* rather shows the problem of the fictional versus empirical selves in retrospective meditation. He says, “in the figure of the sculptor Pygmalion contemplating his handiwork, Galathea, we thus have a clear equivalence of Rousseau reflecting on the feelings that develop between the author . . . and the fictional character he has invented in that work.”<sup>52</sup> In his self-quest, the “scène lyrique” *Pygmalion* marks Rousseau’s transition from theoretical and fictional to autobiographical works. Correspondingly, the main theme here is that an author/maker is confronting his own finished work and the relation(ship) between the work of art and the artist is focused on. Leaving behind Narcissus’ lonely stone-like wax-figure, or rather melting him so as to be re-shaped, we move to the stony world of Pygmalion. According to de Man, Rousseau’s Pygmalion, simi-

---

50. Huntington, p. 53.

51. Huntington, p. 62. About the different spellings of the statue-woman’s name see fn. 36.

52. De Man, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self,” p. 40.

larly to his Narcissus, is mystified and does not show a progress from error to truth. To support this contention he refers to the sculptor's last statement to the statue/Galatea: "Yes, dear and charming object: yes, worthy masterpiece of my hands, of my heart, and of the Gods. . . it is you, it is you alone: I have given you all my being; I no longer live except through you."<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, we can see some steps in Pygmalion's progress: at first, he admires the statue, then examines it and finally desires it. The very first step of his 'fetishism' recalls Narcissus' vain contemplation on his counterfeit image, when Pygmalion says "Vanity, human weakness! I cannot grow weary of admiring my work; I intoxicate myself with amour-propre; I adore myself in what I have made. . ."<sup>54</sup> In his admiration of the statue Pygmalion's *amour propre* is clearly presented, which is akin to Valère's 'je m'aime aimant.' There is another similarity between the two works, namely that Pygmalion is also in love with resemblance, saying: "It is not at all this dead marble with which I am infatuated, it is with a living being who *resembles* [*ressemble*] it; it is with the *face* [cf. *shape* for de Man; *figure* in French] that it offers to my eyes."<sup>55</sup> On the level of appearances, he is in love with something that is shaped/made by/in his own mind. On the one hand, it refers to *Narcisse* where Valère was in love with resemblance, on the other hand, it starts "the tropological pattern of substitution that makes *Pygmalion* into an allegory of figuration."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, de Man's statement makes the life-giving artistic Pygmalion's story the allegory of reading, as in reading not the dead leaves of paper but the rhetorical figures of the text will incite desire and give the illusion of life to the eyes/mind.

In his desire Pygmalion is ashamed of himself, but the pattern of Pygmalion's/Rousseau's desire can be read as "truly aesthetic."<sup>57</sup> In desire the conscious-

---

53. In his "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self" de Man himself translated the quoted lines, but here I quote from the 'standard' collection of the English translation of Rousseau's works. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, Vol. 10, ed. and trans. by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: Univ. Press of New England, 2004), 230–236, p. 236. Cf. in French: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Pygmalion, Scène lyrique*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, II (Gallimard, 1961), 1224–1231, p. 1231.

54. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 232. Cf. *Oeuvres II*, p. 1226.

55. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 233 and in *Oeuvres II*, p. 1227 (my italics). Also quoted and translated in de Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 183. De Man translates the French *figure* as 'shape,' while in the English collection the word is translated as 'face,' which is closer to de Man's prosopopeia. I would prefer to keep the original *figure* in the sentence, relying on the Pygmalion-quality of rhetoric offered to my eyes. See also de Man, "Autobiography As De-Facement," p. 76 and "Shelley Disfigured," p. 100.

56. De Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 183.

57. De Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," p. 45. In his other text on *Pygmalion* de Man admits that Pygmalion's desire is not only "truly aesthetic," as the sculp-

ness moves toward something that it has lost, and now wants to possess to be complete again. It shows Pygmalion's desire as a lack, as a shortcoming, as a striving for/after a "beautiful soul." Desire is a temporal experience caused by the loss of the source of being and "the text of *Pygmalion* makes clear that the source is not located in the self of the artist, but that it exists in the work that he has created."<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, as the source is outside the empirical self, the painfully desired union would imply the death of the self:

Alas! it stays immobile and cold, while my heart, set ablaze by its charms, wants to leave my body in order to warm its body. In my delirium I believe that I can hurl myself out of myself; I believe that I can give it my life, and animate it with my soul. Ah! that Pygmalion might die in order to live in Galatea!<sup>59</sup>

In this 'apocalyptic moment' the desired unity would result in an absolute negation/annihilation of the self due to the desired exchange between the self and other. Besides *echoing* Narcissus' struggle with his own reflection, the confused Pygmalion is also speaking about himself in third person, not only in the above quoted wish, but also earlier in his worshipping of the perfection of his creation. Then in his meditation Pygmalion realises that the dead self loses not only its own life but the contact with the other. Here the paradoxical dialectic of selfhood and otherness is revealed: how can one truly experience the other without giving up one's self? The dialectic of self and other in the act of reflection, and the dialectic of self-love and desire, are also shown in the linguistic complexity of Pygmalion's cry: "No, that my Galatea live, and that I not be she. Ah! that I might always be another, in order to wish always to be she, to see her, to love her, to be loved by her."<sup>60</sup>

Actually, Rousseau's Pygmalion does not get (and cannot get) closer to the self in his quest for the experience of the other. I agree with de Man that in this "ironic epiphany"

the [real] progression has taken place, not in Pygmalion, but in the figure of Galathea, who, at the end of the scene, has not only come to life but has

---

tor's sexual aggression is quite literal in the story. We should not forget that, in the Greek narrative, the King of Cyprus wanted to copulate with the statue of Venus. See de Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 181.

58. De Man, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self," p. 46.

59. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 233.

60. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 233. In French: "Non, que ma Galathée vive, et que je ne sois pas elle. Ah! que je sois toujours un autre, pour vouloir toujours être elle, pour la voir, pour l'aimer, pour en être aimé. . ." (*Oeuvres II*, p. 1228).

been able to define the nature of her own selfhood in relation to herself, to Pygmalion, and to the natural world. And a similar progression has taken place in us as readers, who are now able to understand the entire complex relationship that exists between the three entities (the artist, the live sculpture, and the piece of marble); this progression is a correlative of a progression that has taken place in Rousseau himself as the author of the play, who controls the patterns of truth and error, of insight and blindness, that organize the action.<sup>61</sup>

In the end, following an ironic reciprocity, Galatea's coming to life freezes Pygmalion and astonishes him – he is petrified with astonishment. Now Galatea exists as a self, claiming to be (her)self, uttering “Me” [*Moi*],” and, pointing at the marble, she says: “This is me no more [*Ce n'est plus moi*].”<sup>62</sup> She becomes self-conscious and, as a work of art, she is still flawless. Although art can achieve the ultimate triumph of consciousness by an act of imagination, it cannot recapture the fullness of Being. At the end of the play Galatea puts her hand on Pygmalion and says, sighing: “Ah, still me [*encore moi*].”<sup>63</sup> It shows Rousseau's efforts to transcend his actual self into a language, a work that now exists outside himself. But his writings only record his failure to transcend his own selfhood. As de Man concludes: “The work is ‘encore moi,’ the half-resigned, ironic mood of self-reflection that predominates in Rousseau and in the readers who recognise themselves in him. The romantic artist is still Narcissus, though a Narcissus who has come back alive from his trip to the other side of the mirror – perhaps what Rilke will call later, in one of his French poems, *le Narcisse exaucé* – the demystified Narcissus.”<sup>64</sup>

However, there is a great difference between Valère's deluded self-love and Pygmalion's worship of his self-made creation, namely that the sculptor sees a goddess in the statue. As an artist, he used to make statues of gods and goddesses, that is, he was/is capable of giving shape to the divine. Although we can read it as the sign of extreme self-adoration, in his allegorical reading of *Pygmalion*, de Man takes it as Pygmalion's experience of the sublime. He says that in the story the artist “is paralyzed by the feeling of awe that is characteristic, to use Kant's terminology, of the sublime.”<sup>65</sup> In the third *Critique*, Kant's sublime is not an exterior power but it has rather much more to do with imagination *reflecting* on that power. The sublime displays “the dominance/power [*Gewalt*] which reason exercises over imagina-

---

61. De Man, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self,” p. 43.

62. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 235 and in *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1230.

63. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 236 and in *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1231.

64. De Man, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self,” p. 49.

65. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 177.



tion with a view to extending it to the requirements of its own realm (the practical) and letting it look out beyond itself into the infinite, which for it [viz. the imagination] is an abyss."<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, the ambiguity of imagination seems incongruous – it fails by being incapable of comprehending the infinite greatness, and succeeds by functioning as the agent of reason for the law. On the other hand, in a forced way the Kantian imagination functions as the agent of reason and exercises power over itself for the sake of linking the absolute with the human world.

Pygmalion regards his work of art as godlike/divine, and “the goddess metaphor is an aptly monstrous concatenation of self and other.”<sup>67</sup> Without realising it, with these remarks de Man alludes to Ovid's original, or perhaps to the origin of Ovid's narrative, where the confrontation – either spiritual or physical – with the divine is more emphatic. Right from the beginning, in accordance with the dichotomy of human vs. divine, in the dynamism of the text, as readers we are to *face* several antinomies that are engendered by the arch-antimony of the two polarities: the self vs. the other. Besides the most obvious cold vs. hot – expressed in the coldness of the marble statue and the figurative coldness of Pygmalion's ‘virginal’ condition that is opposed by his melting passion and his fire of creation – de Man lists several other antinomies, such as inside/outside, art/nature, life/death, male/female, heart/senses, hiding/revealing, eye/ear, lyric/dramatic etc.

With the introduction of the sublime, de Man seems to move away from the rhetorical reading of the ending and tries to interpret it with reference to the generality implicit in the sublime itself. However, he still shows the ending of Pygmalion as aporetic, but he reaches this conclusion through a different argument. Pygmalion wishes for their union but, “instead of merging into a higher, general Self, two selves remain confronted in a paralyzing inequality,”<sup>68</sup> as Galatea's ‘moi’ is more self-assured than Pygmalion's amorous ‘moi.’ And when Pygmalion starts kissing the woman's hand, she utters “encore moi” with a sigh. She has just previously stated that she is no longer the stone, and now she accepts that she is one with Pygmalion. Their union can hardly be labelled as an ecstatic one as Galatea, leaving her stone-prison, is just about to enter Pygmalion's ‘love-prison.’ De Man thinks (or rather presupposes) that Galatea should be taken here as ‘the Self,’ that is, she has to contain all individual selves including Pygmalion's. Galatea's disappointment can also mean “a persisting, repeated distinction between the general

---

66. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 115, collated with Kant, *Kritik der Ästhetischen Urtheilskraft*, in *Werke in sechs Bänden, Band 4* (Köln: Könenmann, 1995), p. 135.

67. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 177.

68. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 185.

Self and the self as *other*.<sup>69</sup> Thus, de Man reaches the same aporetic conclusion, although via *another* route:

Galathea's coming alive rewards the access to his advanced level of understanding. The point of the text however is that even this mode of discourse fails to achieve a concluding exchange that would resolve the tension of the original dejection. The part of the action that follows Galathea's epiphany disrupts the dialectical progression that leads up to it and merely repeats its aberrant pattern. The discourse by which the figural structure of the self is asserted fails to escape from the categories it claims to deconstruct, and this remains true, of course, of any discourse which pretends to re-inscribe in its turn the figure of this aporia. There can be no escape from the dialectical movement that produces the text.<sup>70</sup>

#### IV

To find a way out of the self in a text about the Self, I will be assisted by Shierry M. Weber's article "The Aesthetics of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*."<sup>71</sup> In the article Weber places Rousseau in the context of 18th and 19th-century aesthetics, questioning and defining the status of the work of art and its relation to reality. But Rousseau – somehow close to Kant's critical ideas – does not give primacy to the artist's consciousness or to the absolute expressed in the work: "he shows how artist and work can both be characterised in terms of selfness and yet be different, and he tries to relate that difference to the physical existence of the work of art, its presence within 'earthly life.'"<sup>72</sup> According to Weber, in the work, the main concern for Rousseau is Pygmalion's desire for Galatea; and in the ending, after Pygmalion has given (his) being to Galatea, Rousseau seems to give priority to the work over the artist. By that I mean that Rousseau/Pygmalion gives priority to his *Pygmalion*/Galatea. Weber's main focus is on Rousseau's notion of the reflective, discontinuous nature of the self that is thematised in the work, culminating in the final utterances of the two characters: "Ah, still me. – Yes, dear and charming object: yes, worthy masterpiece of my hands, of my heart, and of the Gods. . . it is you, it is you alone: I have given you all my being; I no longer live except through you."<sup>73</sup>

---

69. De Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 186.

70. De Man, "Self (Pygmalion)," p. 187.

71. Shierry M. Weber, "The Aesthetics of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*," *Comparative Literature* (December 1968) 900–918.

72. Weber, p. 902.

73. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 236. In *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1231.

Weber also refers to different mis-readings of the work, for instance, to Goethe's attack on *Pygmalion* which accuses Rousseau of degrading the spiritual work of art to a sensuous object, or, to Starobinski's misinterpretation of Pygmalion's desire as narcissistic – longing for a complete union of self and other, and she could also have mentioned de Man's aporetic rhetorical reading. All err since Rousseau's ideas are akin to Kant's, emphasising the negative or paradoxical presence of the absolute in the work of art. Opposed to the previous readings, and recalling de Man's sublime re-reading of the work, Weber sees that in *Pygmalion* "the sensuous artistic representation thus points beyond itself to the infinitude of the supersensuous realm."<sup>74</sup> The aesthetic image for Rousseau leads not *to* but *away* from the natural. From Pygmalion's point of view priority is given to the work of art, as Galatea can be taken as his "externalized better or past self and thus seems free from the negativity of reflective consciousness."<sup>75</sup> Going beyond Rousseau's ideas, we can think that the work, with its non-reflexivity, is given priority over consciousness. Ironically, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* shows the differences between the result of the reflected artistic activity and the un-reflected status of the work, while both can be reflected upon in other artistic or critical pieces.

In Rousseau's work the negation of the self happens earlier (not only in the 'work'), when Pygmalion makes the statue, his masterpiece. He feels that he gives away his genius to give 'life' to the work of art, uttering: "I have lost my genius" [J'ai perdu mon génie].<sup>76</sup> His genius becomes – later? – Galatea's animating spirit, as if it/she had been imprisoned in stone, in a 'stony' slumber.<sup>77</sup> Pygmalion dies in some sense (similarly, love-making is little death) creating Galatea, but he survives to experience the consciousness of the "scène lyrique." Weber calls our attention to a crucial point, namely that Rousseau presents to us not the action, not the creation of the statue, but the artist's reflection on it:

*Pygmalion* is a phenomenon of reflective consciousness . . . . The recapitulation of Galathée's creation is an internal reliving of it, and the scene is Pygmalion's mind. Rousseau shows us the aesthetic subject not as producer but as one now contemplator, having been artist. He shows us not

---

74. Weber, p. 903.

75. Weber, p. 916.

76. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 231. In French in *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1225.

77. I cannot help remembering Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal," where the life-forgetting slumber makes the persona forget about the mortality of the beloved so that he should realise/remember that the girl is 'stony' dead. Pygmalion's story definitely moves backwards from the beloved's motionless stony thing-like 'existence' to her coming to life. But, on the whole, both girls are imprisoned in the lover's text, telling their story.

Pygmalion making a statue but *Pygmalion reflecting on the act of making it*, Pygmalion interpreting creation as animation. . . . In that what reflection examines is not only action but the transition from action to reflection – for the act of making the statue is itself the transition, the transfer of being – it is a movement inward toward the self, as reflective consciousness.<sup>78</sup>

Thus Pygmalion has finished his (act of) creation and now he is reflecting upon the completed action. I can accept this version of *Pygmalion*, but I still wonder what we mean by creation. Weber admits that Rousseau's *Pygmalion* is a reflection on the Greek story, not a nostalgic one but it moves to a further stage in aesthetic thought. In a footnote Weber refers to the third meaning of Rousseau's reflective *Pygmalion*: a *Reflexion in sich*, that is, 'reflection in itself' (borrowing Hegel's term), which reflects on the progress of consciousness in the making of the statue. It is not clear what she means here since Hegel distinguishes the 'reflection in itself' from the 'reflection in something else' (*Reflexion in Anderes*) by their relationship with the essence: the former is associated with the Being/Self that shines in its own (light), while the latter shines in the light of another/others.<sup>79</sup> *Pygmalion* displays a creative self (Pygmalion or Rousseau) reflecting on the (be)coming of another (self) – on the implications of the 'reflection in itself' (viz. *Reflexion in sich*) and the reflection of the self/Self while creating Galatea's self/Self (viz. *Reflexion in Anderes*). Weber does not realise that Rousseau's work (always-already) undoes not only the Hegelian dichotomy of the two kinds of reflection but also the duality of action vs. reflection. Reflecting on an action is another acting that can be reflected on so that the other reflected action should be reflected on again (and again) 'in the progress of consciousness.' Moreover, Rousseau's version of Pygmalion's reflecting on the creation of the self, that is, his *Pygmalion*, is read (reflected on, or acted on) by Weber here; and now I will re-act/reflect upon her reading of Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, that is, her version of *Pygmalion*, in my self-questing text with Pygmalion duplicated in its title.

Pygmalion's desire is ideal, not real; it is aesthetic rather than sensual, simply because if his were a real desire then it would display a subject having desire and an object being desired. But, as Weber points out, in *Pygmalion* "the self encompasses the polarities subject and object, self and other. The ideal moment of desire, as op-

---

78. Weber, p. 905 (my italics). For the different spellings of the statue-woman's name, see footnote 36.

79. See also G. W. F. Hegel, "Die Reflexion," in *Wissenschaft der Logik: Erster Teil, Die objektive Logik* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/8wsl110.txt>>; G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London & New York: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

posed to its real or sensuous moment, is desire for something which is self and other at once."<sup>80</sup> In the end, 'the lovers' turn out to share the same self, and Pygmalion should recognise that his desire is ideal, not real. First, he moves towards the object, longing to be united with it; then, realising the impossibility of love, he has to move back, away from the object, "because the love relationship is possible only when lover and beloved are separate. In order to love Galathée, Pygmalion must be other than she."<sup>81</sup> Weber, though analysing the dynamism of desire well, reads the ending as self-alienation, since Pygmalion seems to have given up his selfhood to the other. I do not approach it so radically. I think that the self goes full circle here, or rather makes his journey along a spiral-line: through the momentary confrontation with the *other* the *self* becomes *another* (self). In fact, when the artist utters at the end that he has given his being/self to Galatea, he is affirming that he has become another. What Weber says about Rousseau's notion of desire, namely that it "does not have the assimilation or destruction of the object as its goal but rather preserves the object in negating, momentarily, the subject," recalls Derrida's impossible claim about "allowing the other to come in its otherness."<sup>82</sup> Weber calls attention to Rousseau's irony, reflecting upon the paradoxical structure of desire since at the end of *Pygmalion* the work and the artist have once again become separate. As she claims: "desire involves the other becoming self and the self becoming other. The 'real,' authentic self is separated from the experiencing self, and the experiencing self seems to be merely the negation of that other, real self."<sup>83</sup>

If we accept that in the ideal the real is negated and annihilated, what could we claim about the status of the work of art? The statue has a physical reality and Pygmalion is struggling to define the source of (its) beauty. Having realised that he has sexual desire for the statue, he speaks about the spiritual beauty of it, referring to the beauty of (its) soul: "How beautiful the soul *made* [l'âme faite] to animate such a body must be!"<sup>84</sup> We must see that in his reflection Pygmalion is speaking about the making of a soul, that is, he is speaking about the beauty of his soul in his 'spiritual' narcissism. He tries to go beyond the polarities of body and soul, giving the

---

80. Weber, p. 907.

81. Weber, p. 908.

82. Cf. "to allow the coming of the entirely other [laisser venir le tout autre]" in Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," trans. by Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 25–65, p. 55 and in Jacques Derrida, "Psyché. Invention de l'autre," in *Psyché* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 11–61, p. 53. Derrida's ideas on 'the (im)possible coming of the other' greatly influenced me in the writing of the paper.

83. Weber, p. 909.

84. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 232 and in French in *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1227 (my emphasis).

source of beauty an aesthetic form. He is still praying to find a model that resembles the statue, as it surpasses all the models in beauty. But he knows that the only model is an imaginary one, or an absent one, as Galatea is a perfect work. Pygmalion says that “such a perfect model be the image of that which is not [qu’un si parfait modele soit l’image de ce qui n’est pas]” – that is, the statue is image in itself, the statue is the image of an image. Pygmalion’s prayer is heard by Venus, and in the culmination of his error, the animation of Galatea, fulfils his false desire. As Weber summarises: “Pygmalion prayed for the original of the statue, and the result was the animation of the statue. The statue thus has no model other than itself; it is its own original. But it remains an image as well as its original; it is not real as a natural object or a living person is real.”<sup>85</sup> Galatea’s first movement is reflective, “the work of art is selfness as it has been constituted by reflective consciousness. The statue derives not from nature but from Pygmalion’s consciousness . . . it is the image of his negativity. . . . Consciousness constitutes itself through its negativity as negativity, as lacking the continuity of the organic.”<sup>86</sup> The animation of the statue means its realisation as an image, but it also has a negative aspect, being the image of a reflective self and the negation of the real. In *Pygmalion*, reflection shows the act of the petrified consciousness.

In the scene when the artist sees Galatea come to life he remarks that “it is too funny for the lover of a stone *to become* a man of visions [il est trop heureux pour l’amant d’une pierre *de devenir* un homme à visions].”<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, this statement can be read as if in his ecstasy (recalling his ecstatic love-making that gives life to the statue in Ovid’s story) the ‘mad’ Pygmalion imagined that the stony beloved was brought to life. On the other hand, in the moment of his insight into the blindness of his passion Pygmalion becomes not only the man of visions but also a man of rhetoric, because for Rousseau, figural language is the playground of love. Huntington shows that Pygmalion also marks the point when in Rousseau’s works “the tension between fiction and reality begins to take the rhetorical forms.” In several *loci*, the figurality of language is discussed together with the passion of *amour*. Huntington explains: “Like *amour*, Rousseau’s linguistic world will be open-ended and valuable because his use of language can never attain a reciprocal, one-to-one correspondence with its referent. Any final referent, if we ourselves must name one, must result from the process of taking an illusory passion for an actual referent.”<sup>88</sup>

---

85. Weber, p. 914.

86. Weber, p. 915.

87. Rousseau, *Pygmalion*, p. 235 and in *Oeuvres, II*, p. 1230 (my emphasis).

88. Huntington, pp. 115–6.

Weber also refers to the second preface written to *Nouvelle Héloïse*, where Rousseau speaks about the relation between love and the aesthetic, claiming that love is an illusion – it is ideal. Moreover, in the language of love the figures of speech used are “ideals constituted by consciousness”<sup>89</sup> – as de Man summarises, “‘love’ is a figure that disfigures.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, a passion – perhaps, the passion of the ‘mad’ Pygmalion – that figures and disfigures works in reading. According to de Man, for readers

the critical insight seems to occur at the moment when the consciousness of the reader and that of the writer merge to become a single Self that transcends the two empirical selves that confront each other. This encounter forces the reader to leave behind his own everyday self, as it exists at this particular moment of his history, to re-establish contact with the forgotten origin of this self, and to gauge the degree of conformity he has maintained with his origin.<sup>91</sup>

This may describe the process of reading an autobiographical text and the process of reading in general. It is highly philosophical, alluding to a universal *Dasein*; and at the same time it leads us to the interrelatedness of *amitié*, *amour* and pity in the forming of human relationships – reading is a bond-creating activity.

Nevertheless, Weber also thinks that Rousseau, like Kant, sees the irony of human existence, showing reflection and desire as the “manifestations of an ironic negativity of the self, a discontinuity within the self.”<sup>92</sup> This negativity simply means that the self is finite and mortal, which makes Pygmalion’s ideal desire for Galatea ironic. Huntington also ends his book on Rousseau with the discussion of irony; to be precise he ends it with the discussion of the lack of irony in Rousseau’s character. However, his conclusion is more concerned with the irony of criticism and the irony of the critical position:

the ironist never claims to understand, and actively refuses to identify with any form of textual world. He remains instead in a virtual position of withdrawal, the better to proclaim fiction as no more than fiction, and to deflate the claim for understanding that anyone so ‘mistaken’ as an auto-

---

89. Weber, p. 917.

90. De Man, “Self (Pygmalion),” p. 198.

91. De Man, “Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self,” p. 32. In “Allegory (Julie)” (in *Allegories of Reading*) de Man clearly connects the self vs. other substitutions of the lovers in *Narcisse* and *Pygmalion* with the relationship not only between the author and the work but also between the author and the reader (p. 213).

92. Weber, p. 911.

biographer might make. . . . [T]he ironist . . . remains . . . sceptical about everything, and most of all about himself [or herself]. This response aptly characterises the critical spirit. Some critics, giving close attention to texts, have come to see irony as the limiting rhetorical category, not just as one among several possible character traits. When this position is taken to its logical conclusion, misunderstanding and the impossibility of reading are the norms for the author and the critic. They become trapped in the *alluring mirror-play of the textual worlds* that they or other writers create.<sup>93</sup>

The mirroring surfaces that make all these reflections possible are in the receptive minds and in the works. The very first mirror, in this case the mirror of mirrors, is Galatea, the work of art. The other mirroring surfaces (sur-faces) are the texts and their readings. In the reflection and in the works of reflections through endless ‘ironic’ mirror-play, the self – of the maker, the writer, the reader, or the critic – in the act of confronting with the Other/other, or each other, can/will become another. The acts of confronting can be associated with the (more or less) passionate ‘wax-melting’ efforts made in reading, writing, interpreting, and understanding. In the ironic narrative of the rhetorical/figural self-quest,<sup>94</sup> my text, reflecting on Pygmalion-reflections, can/will be(come) *another* “petrified” mirror that tells the story of “Pygmalions’ reading of reading Pygmalions.”

---

93. Huntington, p. 223 (my italics).

94. In “The Concept of Irony” de Man reminds us of the instability of irony (have I ever forgotten it?) and he also warns us that “the self is never capable of knowing what it [viz. the narrative] is, can never be identified as such, and the judgments emitted by the self about itself, reflexive judgments, are not stable judgments” (in Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 163–184, p. 176). Although the infinite mirror-play of my ‘passionate’ reading is in accordance with ideas de Man received from Schlegel, ideas about the disruptive function of irony, his analysis of the Fichtean analytical, synthetic and thetic judgments – especially, the flashing of the empty thetic judgment, “I am” – can show Pygmalion’s and Galatea’s self in quite a different light.