Intertextuality Study of the Play Pygmalion and the Assumption of Pygmalion Myth

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Abstract: The paper is aimed at discussing the relationship between the play Pygmalion and Pygmalion myth from the intertextuality point of view. Intertextuality means the inter-relationship among different texts. Special attention will be paid to the similarities and differences between the play Pygmalion and the Pygmalion myth. Both of the two texts are compared and analyzed by focusing on three aspects: characters, plot and context. From the characters' point of view, male and female characters will be compared. In terms of the plot, both of the two texts are given the story lines to analyze. As for the context, ideology in social background and man power will be mentioned as well. By considering three aspects, new insights are raised about the awakening of female roles meanwhile.

Keywords: George Bernard Shaw; Intertextuality; Pygmalion; Pygmalion Myth

1. Introduction of Two Texts

In Oviduct's *Metamorphoses* [1], Pygmalion, the king of Cyprus Island and a sculptor, resolved never to marry anyone during his lifetime due to his disgust of ordinary women. He spent his time day and night in creating a beautiful maiden sculpture out of ivory and fell in love with her. Pygmalion heaped his full affection on this maiden sculpture and named her Galatea, which meant "sleeping love". One day, he prayed for a wife like his ivory maiden sculpture to Goddess Aphrodite, who was greatly impressed by his work and brought the statue to life finally.

There is a play *Pygmalion* [2] created by George Bernard Shaw. In his play, Professor Henry Higgins found a flower girl Eliza Doolittle and would like to transform her into a decent and elegant lady of noble birth by changing her accent, behavior and appearance.

From these two texts, it is easily found some similarities between them. For example, Professor Henry Higgins resembles Pygmalion, who creates his ideal model and brings it to life, while Eliza Doolittle as Galatea, who is changed by her creator to some extent. However, not all the play is the adaptation from Pygmalion myth. There are some differences between the two texts. Therefore, the paper places emphasis on discussing the intertextuality of characters, plot and context between the play *Pygmalion* and Pygmalion myth, as well as finding some new insights of the awakening of female roles and shedding light on the study of plays.

2. Theoretical Review of Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a concept mentioned by a famous French literary critic and feminist Julia Kristeva in her work Word, Dialogue and Novel [3]. As she mentions in the book that "any text is constructed of a Mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", intertextuality is a theoretical term emphasizing the relationship between or among different texts. Within the interrelationship, the text is related to another text on the basis of adaptation, processing and creation, which consists of two essential elements: connection and transformation. Connection means each text is closely related with one another and forms an intertwined network of the past, present and the future. Transformation signifies the similarity or difference of the degree between one text and the previous one. If the relationship between texts is taken as an axis, the abscissa represents the interaction between texts of different historical periods in chronological order, while the ordinate means the influence of previous text on the following text and their relationship correlated with each other [4]. In brief, intertextuality underlines the relationship between different texts, which transforms, absorbs and extends their meanings from the previous texts to a new one to a certain degree.

With continuous development of the definition of intertextuality, it has been endowed with new connotations under the influence of structuralism and post-structuralism. In a narrow sense, intertextuality refers to mutual influences between two or more different texts, emphasizing the non-isolation feature of the texts [5]. According to this point of view, Structuralism is to pursue the precise accuracy of the texts, with representative figure of Gerard Genette. Gerard Genette [6] classifies five types of relationship within the texts: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality. Among them, hypertextuality focuses on the differences from the original texts. Then, broadly speaking, intertextuality regards all the texts as a kind of relationship intertwined with each other, which all aspects are involved, like social practice, interpersonal relationship and the background context. Post-structuralism is related to intertextuality in a broad sense, which underlines the "fuzziness of sign relation and the infinite regression of signification".

By understanding the definition and development of intertextuality, it can be found that the play Pygmalion is related with the Pygmalion myth to some degree. In other words, the content of the play Pygmalion is re-created, and intertextual methods such as adaptation and rewriting are used to describe the characters, plot and context, which realize the transformation and absorption between two texts, and further promote the play.

3. Comparison of the Two Texts from Intertextuality Point of View

3.1 Intertextuality of Characters

As to Alfaro, intertextuality refers to the fact that text "is formed by the repetition and transformation of other text structures [7]." In the play Pygmalion, both of the male and female characters can be regarded as the repetition and transformation of the characters in Pygmalion myth. There is a classification of two types of characters for further analysis: the male characters and the female characters.

For the male characters, both the king Pygmalion and Professor Henry Higgins are in charge of a woman's life [8]: the king Pygmalion creates his ideal sculpture Galatea and brings her into life; while Higgins also reshapes Eliza and makes her a sheer beauty, which totally changes her life. However, there is also a huge contrast between the two male figures.

As to Pygmalion, the process of creating Galatea is a kind of enjoyment and self-spiritual satisfaction. He shaped Galatea with his perfect caving skills and regarded his work as a kind of perfection.

However, in Shaw's play, Higgins is just crazy about phonetics and is absolutely an egoist. He decided to remold Eliza just out of a bet between Colonel Pickering and himself, as well as showing off his skills as the best phonetician. He treated Eliza like dirty rubbish and an experiment, as well as his personal property. He never cared about how Eliza felt and what she would be in the future, not to mention their love relationship. Although Pygmalion and Higgins both created an ideal model respectively for themselves, their attitudes are absolutely different concerning their own artwork, from which the distance between ideal and reality can be seen.

Then, here come the female characters between Pygmalion myth and Shaw's play Pygmalion. According to Li Yuping [9], "the value of intertextuality study is the difference between similar texts". The differences between Galatea and Eliza deserve more attention.

In Pygmalion myth, after the awakening of Galatea, she was kissed by Pygmalion and finally married him. However, in Shaw's play, there is a sentence "Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable". Concerning this, Shaw has reshaped the female character and endowed her with independent consciousness, which challenges the Pygmalion myth in his own way. In fact, at the beginning of his play, Eliza already had her own consciousness when she asked for lessons from Higgins and paid him money. She hoped that there was a kind of equal relationship between Higgins and herself, rather than a relationship full of inequality and inferiority.

Then, during the process of training, Eliza gradually became mature and had independent consciousness. There are two stages of her maturity: the sudden outbreak of Eliza and the departure of Eliza. After her leaving, she pinned her hope on Higgins, but she was absolutely irritated by the indifferent attitude of Higgins. After being ignored by him and receiving no response, she had a big fight with Higgins. At that moment, she didn't know how to control her strong emotions and had no idea about her own life. Therefore, she tried to rethink her own identity and decided to leave Higgins,

pursuing her own independent life. From the moment on, she was endowed with the spirit of independence, clearly realizing what kind of life she really wanted. She said, "If you can preach, I can teach. I'll go and be a teacher", from which represents her emancipation from Higgins and her receiving a full understanding of her existence, choosing to live her own life. Unlike Galatea being restrained with her creator, in Shaw's play, Eliza transforms from an innocent and dependent girl into a girl of self-consciousness and self-control, which proves that women are not necessarily the inferior subject to men who create themselves.

3.2 Intertextuality of Plot

The main plot of Pygmalion myth can be deemed as: "the hatred of women——creation of ideal modal——love feeling generated——happy ending", while the plot in the play Pygmalion shows a little difference with Pygmalion myth: "the contempt for women——cultivation of ideal figure——affection aroused——bad ending".

In the two stories, both of the men were women-haters at first, but they all created their psychological ideal to satisfy their needs. In the process of getting along with each other, they gradually fell in love with the ideal character which was created by their hearts. However, the king Pygmalion realized his dream to be with his goddess, while Professor Higgins broke Eliza's heart and they were apart from each other in the end. The biggest difference between the two plots is the ending part.

In Pygmalion myth, Galatea was alive in the end and married to Pygmalion, which was a sense of completion, as well as a happy ending for all readers. However, in Shaw's play, he breaks up this kind of dreamlike relationship and shifts his topic on the conflicts between individual and society. In his play, he challenges this kind of a romantic relationship between two characters. Eliza finally had a clear eyed view of reality and looked for a new identity for herself. She chose to break up with Higgins and married Freddy, a man who deserved.

Although the ending is lamentable, Shaw achieves his purpose of writing by distorting the expected roman of readers, and shares his own intention——the awakening of self-consciousness for women in that society. At the end of Shaw's play, it is clear that love of Professor Higgins is different from Pygmalion. For Pygmalion, he was deeply attracted by the woman created by himself. However, Higgins is not the same as Pygmalion, for he is obsessed with his skills in phonetics and greatly enjoyed his achievement in changing Eliza into a noble lady. He decided to change Eliza out of his vanity and his competitive spirit. Once he won the competition, he was greatly satisfied with his strong competence and ability in phonetics, regardless of the poor girl's feelings and her awkward situation. According to the purposes of art and different attitudes towards the art creation, the two characters King Pygmalion and Professor Higgins are totally different, one for love, while the other for a bet; one in love, while the other in self-satisfaction.

Besides, here is a trivial detail in the plot difference between the two stories. In Pygmalion myth, Pygmalion created a perfect ideal Galatea according to his own imagination and finally married her. However, this is just like Cinderella fairy tale, which is too dreamy to be realized in the real world. Therefore, in Shaw's play, there are many specific trivial matters of ordinary life [10], such as buying Eliza some new clothes at first, giving Eliza her favorite dessert chocolate and finally looking for Higgins's slippers such things. These things are too worldly to happen in Pygmalion myth; while in Shaw's play, life of Higgins is also full of such small and ordinary descriptions. For Shaw, he twists the original fairy-tale love story and pours into a large amount of daily life details, to reshape the role of female, to realize his purpose of writing.

3.3 Intertextuality of Context

Kristeva shows that intertextuality involves inserting society into the text, and implanting this text into the society [11]. By doing so, the text "responds, reemphasizes and rewrites the past text". In a large part of social context, ideology plays a key role in the two stories. In Pygmalion myth, the king Pygmalion felt lonely and desperate in his life, so with his gifted and excellent sculpting techniques, an ideal figure was created. During the process of creation, he had devoted all his energy, passion and love into the creation of Galatea, which touched the goddess so she vitalized the statue. It is persistence and perseverance that bring Galatea alive, as well as Pygmalion's sincere and pure love. Within Pygmalion's love, no class difference is specified, only Pygmalion's inner love and pursuit of beauty is presented to the reader. However, the female character Galatea resembles a product of no self-awareness and man-reliance. There is a commonly seen happy ending in Pygmalion myth, which

has no descriptions of woman's self-aspiration and self-consciousness.

Nevertheless, in Shaw's play, although Professor Higgins was all on his own, he was not a love-seeker. The reason why he wanted to teach Eliza was that he made a bet with his friend Pickering. As to Professor Higgins, he is self-contained, self-serving and self-proud, which hints the sad ending between Higgins and Eliza as well.

In Shaw's play, he attaches great importance to the equality between two social classes: the upper class and the underclass. As a famous phonetician, Professor Higgins lived in "an urban, civilized environment" [12], while the flower girl Eliza lived in a squalid slum. The great difference within classes signifies the impossibility of their acquaintance, but in Shaw's play, he also challenges this kind of impossibility and achieves the transcendence of classes by creating Eliza into an elegant lady. What Shaw wants to tell us is that social class can't define anyone, and thoughts and ideology are the most important things in shaping a person. This echoes the story of Pygmalion myth mentioned above. However, in Shaw's play, Eliza is an independent woman and relies on her own. At first, Eliza asked to learn pronunciation by herself, then in the process of cultivation, she became more and more inner-directed, not to rely on men. In the end, Eliza emancipated her mind and learned self-reliance, which is what exactly Shaw wants to display at that time: the awakening of self-awareness and ideological emancipation.

Then, in a small part of character context, there are some differences in the power of two male characters. In Pygmalion myth, the king Pygmalion does have the absolute power to create what he wants. "The male artist's efforts at creation are now emphasized, even as the love story and the living statue are de-emphasized as story elements [13]". However, in Shaw's play, he changes this kind of possibility. Although Higgins shaped Eliza according to his own desire——a well-behaved and decent duchess, Eliza gradually shifted from a fictional duchess into a female character of independence, having her own ideas about life, being out of control of Higgins. The transformation of Eliza in Shaw's play challenges the absolute power of male artists and the role of woman character as man's accessory in Pygmalion myth. Besides, Shaw in his play depicted Higgins as a man of hubris and superciliousness, a kind of strong sarcasm to role of a decent man and a male artist, indicating that a strong man is still a man not a God, so he couldn't change anything arbitrarily and ignore the human nature just for the sake of art and beauty.

Last but not least, here is a transformation of supporting role as well. In Pygmalion myth, it is the goddess Aphrodite who vitalizes the statue Galatea. However, Aphrodite didn't empower Galatea the consciousness and mind, and Galatea still resembled an accessory to the man Pygmalion. Aphrodite played the role of a bystander and had no substantial help in shaping the character of female role. Then, in Shaw' play, Professor Higgins's friend Pickering had some similarities with the role of Aphrodite, but differences maintained more. To some extent, Pickering acted like the goddess Aphrodite who animated Eliza and made her changed. However, Pickering was the man who challenged Higgins to transform Eliza, like a main promoter in the play. Then, in the process of transformation, he also helped Eliza and encouraged her whenever she was in trouble or feeling upset. The role of Pickering is more of a friend than an unreachable God. Therefore, at the end of the play, Eliza was supported by Pickering and became an independent woman in some respects.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, based on the Intertextuality theory, it can be found some similarities between Pygmalion myth and Shaw's play Pygmalion. The playwright George Bernard Shaw created the play Pygmalion which is closely related to the myth, but in some degree he adapted and transformed it. From the perspective of male or female characters, plots as well as the context, all of them are endowed with new meanings based on the original myth, which shapes a new "female myth" in the play. Shaw skillfully makes use of the Pygmalion myth to express his own concern about the British society and satirize the attitude of British bourgeoisie to the lower class people. After all, life is not a fairy tale and no one can be Cinderella with such a ruthless and merciless society. Therefore, Shaw uses his own way to show the change and transformation of his own "Galatea" in his play, which is still a wonderful challenge to the original myth and brings enlightenment to people nowadays about female identities. Maybe one of the aim for Bernard Shaw to re-create the play is to "make the reader investigate the theme of self-identity [14]", which sheds light on women emancipation as well.

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