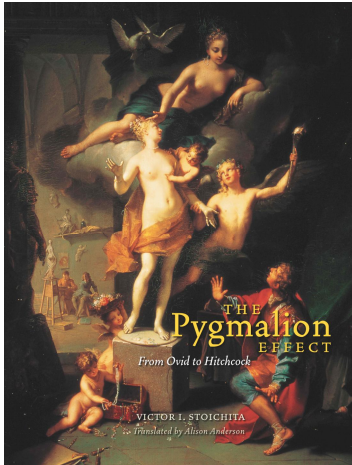


The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock / Victor I. Stoichita.—(The Louise Smith Bross lecture series).—Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, June 2008.—260 p.: ill.—ISBN 0-226-77521-0 (cl., alk. paper): \$45.00.



Author Victor Stoichita is a professor of modern art at the University of Fribourg. In *The Pygmalion Effect*, he identifies specific examples of simulacrum in Western art and cites the myth of Ovid's Pygmalion as its origin.

In Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion is a Cypriot sculptor who creates his perfect woman and falls in love with her. Venus hears his prayer and decides to breathe life into the form. Pygmalion places a kiss upon the face of his statue and is surprised to feel warmth and soft flesh. Stoichita interprets Pygmalion's work as a simulacrum, a woman not meant to imitate anyone, but a representation created by Pygmalion, and fully realized with intervention from Venus. The myth is about transformation, not substitution for reality and it represents the start of a "transgression of representation" in Western art.

Stoichita discusses "Pygmalion-like" images throughout history. He begins with medieval manuscripts, and presents the love narrative, "The Romance of the Rose," as an early example. He cites works from the Renaissance and points to linkages with the myth because,

stylistically, this era was defined by artists who focused on creating "works of exceptional beauty." In the eighteenth century, a period in which new theories and science relating to life were openly discussed, Stoichita sees the rediscovery of the myth reflected in numerous engravings. Moving forward to the latter part of the nineteenth century, Stoichita describes how photography began to change the way artists capture life. His last chapter is primarily dedicated to analyzing *Vertigo*, the 1958 Alfred Hitchcock film starring Kim Novak and James Stewart; Novak plays the role of two women who have affected the life of Stewart's character and Stoichita argues that the "Pygmalion conflict lies at the heart" of the film.

The research that Stoichita has done is extensive and well documented, though not always convincing to me. This is an optional purchase that will appeal largely to academic faculty and graduate students.

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