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## **Metamorphoses of the Pygmalion Myth in French Literature 1771 – 1886**

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METAMORPHOSES OF THE PYGMALION MYTH IN FRENCH LITERATURE  
1771 – 1886

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of French Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

Writers have long explored and attempted to portray the visual artist's challenge of creating the ideal in the real world through art. My thesis asserts that the Pygmalion myth, originally told in written form in Ovid's 8 A.D. *Metamorphoses*, is the quintessential model to explore the changing, and sometimes problematic, relationships between the artist, the creation, and the creative process. The three main characters in the Pygmalion myth – the sculptor, the sculpture, and the divine intervention – each appear, albeit in different manifestations, in its later adaptations. Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in French literature, authors explored this tripartite relationship in their texts. I claim that the retellings in my corpus attest to a renewed interest in Ovid's myth at a time when ideologies and conceptions about the creative process underwent significant changes.

Plato's conception of the ideal in *The Phaedrus* and *The Republic* serves as a grounding for each of my texts. I begin my examination with an exegesis of the Pygmalion poem in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Chapter two explores the creation theme at the heart of Pygmalion's quest in eighteenth-century theater to indicate the point at which French literature saw a marked increase in Pygmalion adaptations. Here, I introduce *L'Amante statue* (1774) and *La Fausse statue* (1771) into the Pygmalion corpus. Looking at the ways in which the creator figure attempts to control the potential of the ideal object through destructive means, I turn to nineteenth-century fantastic short stories in Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837) and Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831/7). A final chapter reveals how innovations in technology and artifice aid the artist in

reconstructing the ideal in two decadent novels: Villiers's *L'Eve future* (1886) and Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884).

This dissertation will contribute to nineteenth-century French literary studies and eighteenth-century theater as well. Adding criticism of two eighteenth-century plays to the already significant body of Pygmalion retellings underlines the myth's renewed popularity at the time. Each chapter examines these adaptations as part of a greater metamorphosis of the Pygmalion story itself. From creation to destruction to reconstruction, the creator figure adapts - with varied results - to a changing artistic, technological, and cultural environment.

## INTRODUCTION

In the ancient myth of the sculptor king, Pygmalion is disgusted with real women; he creates a perfect ivory statue, Galatea, who comes to life after he prays to Venus, the goddess of love. The two then marry, and Venus presides over the ceremony joining the two. Honoré Daumier, the famed caricaturist, published his own take on the myth in an 1842 issue of *Le Charivari*. The sketch features a stupefied sculptor in his studio, surrounded by fragments of statues - a male torso sits on a table behind him while a hand and face hang on the wall next to a rudimentary sketch. Atop the pedestal in front of the Pygmalion character, a jovial, and alive, Galatea reaches down to pinch from the artist's snuffbox. Daumier's inscription in verse under his illustration reads:

O triomphe des arts, quelle fut ta surprise,  
Grand sculpteur, quand tu vis ta marbre s'animer  
Et, d'un air chaste et doux, lentement se baisser  
pour te demander une prise.<sup>1</sup>

Daumier's sketch and short verse mocks the greatness of art and the artist; the verse refers to the sculptor with the informal "tu" subject pronoun. This linguistic marker paired with Daumier's portrayal of the sculptor as dumbfounded identify the latter as far from grandeur. In contrast to the silent, passive wife of the traditional myth, Daumier's Galatea possesses actual agency. Daumier illustrates her in a way that shows her asserting her desires and taking Pygmalion's possession. In Daumier's rendering, Galatea's existence no longer centers on pleasing Pygmalion but also on pleasing herself. While this comedic portrayal of the ancient myth seems lighthearted enough, it opens questions

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<sup>1</sup> Daumier, Honoré. *Pygmalion*, from *Histoire Ancienne*, published in *Le Charivari*, December 28, 1842. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Web. 13 August 2015.



about the representation of the artist and his creation and the changing dynamics within this relationship throughout the centuries.

Interpretations of the Pygmalion myth - at its simplest, the story of an artistic creation that exceeds its creator - have continually emerged as sites of authorial exploration of artistic (pro)creation, imitation, and limitation, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*. Through depictions of art and the artistic, writers throughout the history of the French literary tradition have struggled to adequately portray in words what can be seen visually. Whether the written word represents person or object, it poses a set of complications with which the author must work. Few stories better demonstrate this paradigm than the Pygmalion myth; for when an author attempts to describe a work of art meant to represent the human form, as Pygmalion does by creating his statue, the notions of person and object combine to create a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. During this process, the fictional artist not only imagines his or her image, but s/he physically creates it as well. This act of creation, the difficulties surrounding it, and its possible destruction form the crux of my study. But because the artist's mental image can never be exactly rendered in the physical world, difficulties ensue, highlighting the fictional creator's struggle with his own (pro)creative powers and the relationship to his work of art. That is, the Pygmalion myth becomes the quintessential vehicle for the author's, and artist's, challenge: how can he bring the idea (or ideal) into the real? The methods by which artists are able to transfer their ideas to a physical medium shift as beliefs and abilities transition over time. The evolution of the Pygmalion myth, in turn, reflects these changes, particularly in the late eighteenth and

throughout the nineteenth centuries, when the myth experienced a resurgent popularity in French theater and literature.

In order to arrive at this central point of how the creative process transpires, I will explore seven primary texts through three principal lines of inquiry: gender, technology, and visual arts. My corpus consists of *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.), *La Fausse statue* (1771), *L'Amante statue* (1774), *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1837), *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837), *L'Eve future* (1884), and *Monsieur Vénus* (1886). These works, which enjoyed diverse levels of popularity, reflect and contribute to transformations of gender roles and technology, especially regarding the role of the artist in the late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries. The aforementioned themes can be traced back to Ovid's written version of the ancient Pygmalion myth. Though this is not the first iteration of this creation myth, Ovid is credited with the first written account in his 8 A.D. collection of poems, *Metamorphoses*. As the poet recounts, Pygmalion is a Cypriot king who possesses great skill as a sculptor. He finds himself disappointed and disgusted with the women he has encountered and decides to sculpt a perfect woman with whom to share his life. Pygmalion falls in love with his ivory statue and prays to Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty, to give him a wife in its exact likeness. Upon returning home to his statue, Pygmalion finds that it comes to life under his touch. Venus has answered his prayer, and he marries his ideal woman.<sup>2</sup> And as can be seen from this brief description, gender, technology, and visual arts lie central to the myth since Pygmalion constructs, with man-made instruments, a visual art form meant to resemble (and even replace) the ideal woman.

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<sup>2</sup> I will provide a detailed analysis of Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth in chapter one.

I also argue that Pygmalion myth adaptations uncover the ways in which the creative process can be challenging and even go awry. In their explorations of creative genius, authors turned to Pygmalion and his ability to create life through art, exceeding his own skill only with the help of divine intervention. Although the fictional artists in my corpus utilize different media and methods, their end goal is often the same: to access the ideal and then portray it in the real world. In order to do this, the fictional artists carry out their projects using the accessible technology of the time, and for my purposes I define technology very broadly; it consists of the tools and methods that humans use to manipulate nature. These contemporary forms of technology, furthermore, evolve from the creative powers that man (and one man in particular: Pygmalion) once believed in, such as the divine intervention of the Gods in ancient mythology. The artists modeled on Pygmalion seldom reach the result that the original sculptor did; while I would not deem these fictional artists failures based solely on said result, they do trouble the notion of “success” vis-à-vis Ovid’s version. If success in the creation endeavor is defined as an ideal statue created by man coming to life through divine intervention, then the creators in my corpus challenge this definition at every turn. In addition to the act of creation itself, the narrative portrayal and textual representation of the female figure stands out as an operative theme in adaptations of the Pygmalion myth. The ways in which authors choose to examine the role of woman, both aesthetically and socially, reveal certain truths about their respective cultural knowledge. This point led me to question the roles of the plastic arts (painting and sculpture) and technology when representing woman in works of literature, and to do so using the Pygmalion myth as a central recurring motif.

## Genesis, Gender, and Genre: An Historical Perspective

Several key movements in France's aesthetic and political history will frame the discussion of my corpus of Pygmalion adaptations. As I will elaborate below, moments of ambiguity preside in the works, whether they are plays, short stories, or novels. These fictional portrayals of precariousness and uncertainty reflect similar moments in French history, especially as they relate to gender. While adaptations of numerous ancient myths and mythological figures appear across genres and eras in French literature, the late eighteenth through nineteenth-century representations of the Pygmalion story occur in theatrical comedies (*L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*), romantic fantastic short stories (*Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* and *La Vénus d'Ille*), and realist decadent novels (*L'Eve future* and *Monsieur Vénus*).

The first genre that I explore is the theatrical farce of the late eighteenth century, which relied on different points of view for its comedic value. The audience knew certain details of which the characters were unaware, thereby rendering their actions ridiculous or humorous. This genre works well to adapt the Pygmalion myth because one or more characters could be unaware of a crucial detail that could render a statue coming to life impossible. That is to say, instead of all characters and spectators knowing that a statue did not really come to life (as in *L'Amante statue*), only one character is duped. At the end of the spectacle or text, everyone (including the reader/spectator) learns the true events and the farce is resolved. Thus, it becomes clear that a mythological depiction, in which a truly imaginary and impossible event takes place, of the Pygmalion myth is incompatible with this eighteenth-century fictional setting.

Following the comedic plays of the Enlightenment, I will treat two texts from the Romantic Fantastic movement: Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831/7) and Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837). As Tobin Seibers, in *The Romantic Fantastic* (1984), suggests, "[t]he Romantic conception of superstition radically contradicted the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and one vehicle for this new aesthetic was fantastic literature" (22). In response to the rationalized structure of the Enlightenment, Romanticism sought to represent the emotional aspects of man and nature through literature and art. Through aesthetics rather than reason, this movement aimed to elevate man and to inspire a sense of awe within him. Closely related to the theme of awe were horror, curiosity, and disbelief, each of which was a key characteristic of the Romantic fantastic. Here, artists and writers alike were free to explore realms beyond reality and rational thinking, all the while setting their stories and characters in relatable environments. Authors of fantastic works could in turn evoke mythology or mythological figures, such as Pygmalion and Venus, to insert a sense of otherworldliness into their narratives.

Finally, the last two works in my inquiry, *L'Eve future* (1886) and *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), date from the decadent period in French literature. This period roughly spans the years 1880-1910 (roughly the era between the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War). Whereas Realism (beginning roughly mid-nineteenth-century), and then Naturalism (roughly post-1860), portrayed everyday events of real life, from the highest to the lowest levels of society, Decadence moved beyond this reality to show the degradation and destruction inherent in a modern society in the aftermath of and leading into war. Indeed, the decadent movement embraced "the belief that France was moving

backward, degenerating morally, politically, culturally, and physically, was nearly universal at the end of the century” (Asti Hustvedt *The Decadent Reader* 1998). Spurred by fears of disease, crime, and depravity due to large migrations of the population to urban centers in search of industrial work and opportunities, decadent works often portrayed macabre scenes of struggle, death, and suffering. The decadent aesthetic became an ideal space for adaptations of the Pygmalion myth as it allowed these authors to portray the other side of creation, that of destruction and decay. These same literary works sometimes employed technology and artifice in an attempt to escape what they perceived as society’s inevitable fall into ruin. “Nature, far from being the attentive and responsive witness conceived by the romantics, is an unfeeling and pitiless mechanism,” according to Jean Pierrot’s sketch in *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (1981). While the romantics had embraced portrayals of man in nature, the decadents preferred representations of man in artifice. Attempting to escape what some viewed as the destructive forces of both nature and modern industrial life, eccentric fin-de-siècle characters frequently removed themselves from society and enjoyed physical and psychical-altering substances like hashish and opium.

While an understanding of the aforementioned artistic movements (theatrical comedy, fantastic, and decadence) sheds light on this moment in history, we must also acknowledge the influence of and inspiration by societal factors for authors and artists. These factors, as with the motivations behind the literary movements outlined above, undoubtedly affected each author’s reimagining of the Pygmalion myth. One such factor, or rather, problem that plagued the French public at the end of the nineteenth century was “the decline in the birthrate and the relative stagnation of the French population”

(Silverman 66). “Germany,” notes Deborah Silverman, in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France* (1989), “in particular became a formidable demographic menace in the 1890s, matching its industrial expansion with a momentous growth in population. The birthrate in France declined gradually and continually after 1870, so that by 1891 the German birthrate was about double the French” (66). Germany’s threat to France coupled an economic and technological threat with an important demographic disparity. In addition, France’s military conflicts led to large losses in the working male population, which in turn, contributed to industry’s higher demands on the female population of working age.

Changing conceptions of gender in French society reveal several factors that contributed to this decline in birthrate. During the rapid period of industrial growth from the mid-nineteenth century onward, women increasingly worked outside of the home, entering the public domain in a new way. This “new” female demographic became known as *la femme nouvelle* and, for mainstream society, represented a threat to traditional bourgeois values: many “assumed that any movement of the female away from the private world would violate the natural order and yield an unstable and dangerous state of social inversion. Not only is woman a vital part of the French family, moreover, she is thought to hold a natural place within society as a whole. When this natural and traditional paradigm undergoes an essential (meaning, in its essence) shift, the arts portray it as an unstable and precarious situation. More specifically for this examination, we must remember that the Pygmalion myth tells a tale of creation; this generative act, necessarily, is contingent upon a subject who creates and an object that is created. Although the myth and its later adaptations treat creativity within the arts, it also serves as a metaphor for both human reproduction and technological production, as those “who

commented on the new woman, link[ing] her to new technology” (Silverman 72). This follows my assertion that the versions of the Pygmalion myth in my corpus reflect questions and changes in French society, just as their respective literary movements inspire them. One of the key players in the metaphor for human (re)production in the Pygmalion myth and its adaptations is the goddess Venus.

### Venus and the Role of the Divine Intervention

As one of the three principle characters in Ovid’s Pygmalion myth, Venus presents the role of divine intervention, without which the sculptor would not have been able to transform his statue into a human wife. In addition to this key narrative function, it is impossible to neglect the goddess’s equally powerful symbolic role. Within this otherworldly figure, Venus represents all that is beautiful in creation and dangerous in decay in the realm of romance and sensuality. Indeed, “arousal mingles with worship, passion with veneration. The double nature of Venus, low and high, makes the metaphorical identification of Venus with art especially durable” as Arscott and Scott observe in *Manifestations of Venus* (2000) (6). In the Pygmalion adaptations that make up this study, sometimes Venus appears as a solid and malicious statue,<sup>3</sup> such as in *La Vénus d’Ille*, and other times Venus is personified as an effeminate and submissive man,<sup>4</sup> as in *Monsieur Vénus*. Regardless of her varying forms, Venus remains an integral part of each author’s reimagining of the myth.

Beyond her textual importance, the goddess Venus also holds an historical and mythical significance in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France; during this time,

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter four.



interest in and portrayals of Venus surge. One concrete example of this renewed appreciation of the goddess is the 1820 discovery of a Venus statue on the Greek island of Milo. Upon discovery, France claims the statue, and emissaries bring it back to the Louvre to put on display with much fanfare. M. Quatremère de Quincy presented a comprehensive study of the Venus statue itself and its import to the French in an address to the Academy of Beaux-Arts in 1821.<sup>5</sup> In this nearly 60-page address, the Secretary details the discovery of the statue in what could best be described as a romantic narrative. In addition, all of the major newspapers of the day recounted the finding and described the statue in great detail for their readerships. Not only was the statue lauded as a “chef d’oeuvre” recovered from an ancient past, but also newspapers such as *Le Mercure* and *Le Figaro* commented on it in terms of its importance for France and the French officials who were able to claim it for “La Patrie.” M. Quatremère de Quincy compares this finding with that of England’s repatriation of the Parthenon statues: “la découverte de notre statue, qui réunit dans un haut degré toutes leurs beautés diverses, n’en offrira pas une moins importante [que celle d’Angleterre], et l’admiration raisonnée des hommes les plus habiles l’a déjà placée au premier rang des ouvrages d’un mérite supérieur” (2). This statement testifies to both the aesthetic and political significance of the Vénus de Milo for France and its citizens.

The statue fragments from Milo offered no indication of the date, location, or artist; essentially, the Venus statue was an object with an unknown origin. Two characteristics of the finding will prove essential in my analyses of the Venus figure in the Pygmalion myth texts in the chapters that follow. The first is the physical nature of

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<sup>5</sup> Quatremère de Quincy, Antoine. *Sur la statue antique de Vénus découverte dans l’île de Milo en 1820*. Notice lue à l’Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts le 21 avril 1821.

the statue as it was found: in fragments rather than a whole intact figure. The second is that it was discovered without provenance, adding an element of mystery and anonymity to its origins. “Venus, as potent in pieces as in entirety, functions for Western culture, literally, as the lost object that was not known to be lost until recovered,” as Scott and Arscott put it (16). Several of the fictional works in this study employ one or both of these elements -- fragmentation or unknown origin -- from the Venus of Milo’s discovery. Moreover, the incomplete statue recovered in Greece in the nineteenth century immediately recalls the quintessential sculptor’s ivory statue; the name Venus recalls the goddess of love who answered Pygmalion’s prayer, while the disparate parts evoke the assemblage of ivory pieces used to sculpt his ideal woman.

Artists and authors alike exploited the dual nature of Venus, and since she plays one of the three major roles in the Pygmalion myth, she also appears in subsequent adaptations, albeit under different guises. Venus became the nexus for representing ambiguity, uneasiness, and even fear when present in the Pygmalion texts of my corpus. In Ovid’s poem, Venus is the all-powerful goddess who is the only one who can make Pygmalion’s [implied] wish come true. Venus, in contrast to Galatea, has agency and uses it; this abundance of power, personified in Venus, came to represent a threat to the status quo. The specter of the *femme nouvelle*, coupled with the mythic Venus combined to create a metaphoric representation of the fears and apprehensions that plagued nineteenth-century French society: “the *femme nouvelle* inverted traditional sexual roles and threatened the essential divisions ordering bourgeois life: public from private, work from family, production from reproduction” (Silverman 63). Furthermore, Venus, the goddess of love, vividly and overtly marked this moment in France’s history, as well as

the population's psyche. Combining these two notions of the mythic and transcendent beauty of woman with her troubled place in society will inform our understanding of the statue role in the Pygmalion myth representations.

### Techne: A Confluence of Art and Technology

In Pygmalion stories, the artist is not only a creator of ideal images, but one who possesses technical skill in executing the creations as well. "Techne," an Ancient Greek term encompassing the notions of artistic creativity and technical aptitude, designates the act of the making or doing of art. One who professes knowledge of a certain skill, but fails to produce a finished work does not possess techne. Rather, in addition to saying that he can do something, he must also be able to show through action that he can reach the desired end. Historically, "techne has a useful, a visible product, which is produced through the application of rational and clearly communicable means," David Roochnik observes in *Of Art and Wisdom* (1996) (24). The Pygmalion characters in the adaptations that I study here produce a statue figure (or equivalent), through artistic or technological methods; the means may vary, but the end product is always destined to be a romantic partner. The depiction of the Pygmalion figure either artist, technician, or both recurs prominently in numerous late eighteenth- to nineteenth-century depictions of the Pygmalion myth and thus figures noticeably into my analysis of the texts of my corpus.

The Ancient Greek philosopher Plato delves into the concept of techne and its framing of the artist and the arts. Most notably, *The Republic's* Book X elaborates how the artist must wield both imagination and technical knowledge in order to succeed in

creating what is good and true.<sup>6</sup> Although in use before Plato's time, "however it is translated," states Roochnik, "'techne' signifies clear, reliable, specialized, and authoritative knowledge" (3). Hence, *techne's* manifestations are always aimed at reaching the epitome of knowledge and execution. The artist possessing *techne* (the *technites*) occupies an elite and sometimes enviable position in society; "the *technites* is, quite literally, a professor: he avows publicly that he knows" (Roochnik 15). Even when the artist figure hides his masterpiece (like Frenhofer in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* initially does), he does not hesitate in making his superior skills known to others. In the Pygmalion adaptations of my corpus, *techne* accompanies a quest to represent the ideal in the real. Therefore, conceptions of expertise in craft as well as beauty in art hold equal importance for the new Pygmalion creators of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. "Beauty is a canonical Platonic Form - transcendent, mind-independent, absolute, and hence a proper object of genuine knowledge," according to A.E. Denham in his introduction to *Plato on Art and Beauty* (2012) (xiv). Man, then, cannot access this Beauty;<sup>7</sup> he can only aspire to it by creating works of beauty. In the real world, man creates objects that he hopes embody some aspect of the canonical forms, but it is impossible to depict their true essence.

When we ponder *techne* in relation to the themes of imitation, creation, and limitation in the Pygmalion myth, it is necessary to refer to *mimesis* and the role of the copyist for Plato. Artists or craftsmen could produce mimetic images that mirrored the same real objects that they perceived in the world. At times, the artist's skill could be so

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<sup>6</sup> See, especially, verses 307-311 in Book X of *The Republic* for Plato's presentation of *mimesis* using the example of the bed, bed-maker, and painter.

<sup>7</sup> "Beauty," like "Form," written with a capital letter refers to the ideal notion of the concept. As the Ancient Greeks understood it, these ideals did not manifest in reality or as earthly characteristics; rather, one understood them as lofty truths. I elaborate on this idea further in chapter one as well as chapter four.

great as to trick or deceive the viewer into thinking that the artificial representation was in fact the real object.<sup>8</sup> The danger in mimetic art in the polis, according to Plato, was that men could be deceived into perceiving a real object rather than an artificial model. Thus, they would attempt to relate this artificial or contrived imitation with an imagined ideal. Art's purpose and goal, however, according to Platonic aesthetics, was to attempt to transmit an imagined ideal (from the ideal Forms) among men through tangible means, typically through sculpture or painting. In *The Republic*, Plato describes these Forms as such:

There are many beautiful things and many good. And again there is a true beauty, a true good; and all other things to which the term *many* has been applied, are now brought under a single idea, and, assuming this unity, we speak of it in every case as *that which really is*. The many, as we say, are seen but not known, and the Ideas are known but not seen. (507b)

While the gods know the ideal Forms, men cannot know them. If, by contrast, art directed men to believe that a mimetic depiction of reality (not a real object) was related to an ideal that he had heretofore not perceived or experienced, then he would lose the true path to understanding the ideal Forms.

For today's reader, as well as that of the 1771 - 1886 period, these fears may seem trivial or even primitive. As technology, especially technology in art, progressed during the nineteenth century, the potential dangers and challenges associated with it increased as well. Just as in past generations, some members of society felt that technology was evolving too quickly and that not enough study could be conducted to understand its impact and implications. These fears were not so different from those felt during Plato's

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<sup>8</sup> This example is the story of the famed painter Zeuxis and his painting of grapes that fooled the birds into trying to eat the painted image. In a successful effort to top his mimetic skill, Zeuxis's competitor, Parhassius paints a curtain in front of his scene that. He is so clever as to fool Zeuxis into trying to pull back the painted curtain to reveal the painting underneath.

era, or even today as developments in artificial intelligence bring to light certain ethical questions, to cite just one example. As portrayals of art and the ideal in my study's texts shift from confusing, mysterious statues (as in *L'Amante statue*) to reanimated and reconstructed automata (as in *L'Eve future*), the multi-faceted concept of techne allows the reader to bring these representations together meaningfully.

As adaptations of the Pygmalion myth morphed to depict the challenges and worries that nineteenth-century French society faced, the way in which artists and spectators understood the work of art changed as well. Throughout the Industrialization period in Europe, man's need to dominate technical means of production spilled over into the artistic realm and manifested itself in artistic production. For example, a compelling shift in the epistemological standing of technology occurs with the explosion of industry. In *Le Romancier et la machine* (1982), Jacques Noiray claims that this shift stems from the origins of the means of production and not the products themselves. That is to say,

Alors que les machines de l'époque précédente, faites de bois de toile ou de pierre, mues par des sources d'énergie naturelles, étaient accordées aux rythmes et aux formes d'un univers conçu par Dieu, les machines construites à partir de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, grâce aux progrès rapides de la métallurgie sont exclues désormais de l'ordre du monde. (16)

Unquestionably, pre-industrial machines relied on natural materials and energy sources while industrial machines utilized man-made materials and methods. Hence, Ovid's Pygmalion used chisels, wax, and ivory to sculpt his Galatea. While the prevailing belief up to a certain point held that God created everything in the natural world, all of the new artificial elements resulted from man's intervention. However, the rapid progress manifest in technology was excluded from the "ordre du monde," or natural order, placing it, paradoxically, on a level similar to the divine. While nineteenth-century

engineers grasped the practical uses of new technologies, artists of the same period thought of novel ways to incorporate comparable methods into their explorations of the arts. The artist figures in new Pygmalion myth adaptations subsequently incorporated some of these new tools, methods, and technology into their fictional quests for the ideal. The use of these new tools and methods, I assert, represents to a certain degree the divine intervention found in Ovid's retelling of the myth. Thus, in each of the contemporary manifestations of the myth explored here, the various tools and methods used to create the ideal statue figure occupy an essential space within my analyses.

#### Todorov's Structural Presentation of the Fantastic

The Pygmalion myth takes on many forms in the adaptations following Ovid's version. The Fantastic genre, in particular in literature (under whose classification the two primary texts in chapter three lie), becomes key to understanding a transition in nineteenth-century adaptations of the myth. Tzvetan Todorov, in his 1970 *The Fantastic*, took a structural approach to this genre, focusing not on enumerating or identifying characteristics within specific works but on constructing a theoretical basis that could be applied to differentiate the fantastic from other genres. Within my study of Pygmalion, Todorov's approach will serve as a tool to better understand how and why the myth inspired so many authors during the 1771-1886 period. By identifying those characteristics of the fantastic within texts from differing genres across this century, we can determine the changes in the Pygmalion myth's portrayal.

Todorov locates the fantastic as the midpoint of a linear trajectory between the uncanny and the marvelous. Uncanny events in literature are said to exist when "the laws

of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described” (Todorov 41). In other words, one who witnesses an uncanny event is able, at the end of a story, to understand and explain the occurrence that began as inexplicable. For example, if a mysterious flower were to appear in a character’s home in the middle of the night, he would have a range of possible explanations for the origin of the object. If, at the end of the narrative, it were revealed that the character’s sister entered his home and left the flower without telling him, then he would understand that the laws of nature remained intact and, thus, reached a rational explanation for the phenomenon. Todorov would consider this an uncanny event. At the other extreme, marvelous events indicate that “new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena” (41). Considering the same sequence of events, the character would arrive at a marvelous conclusion if his sister had been dead for years, but he witnessed her apparition placing the flower. In this case, the only solution for the appearance of the mysterious object would be his deceased sister’s supernatural visit; furthermore, this supernatural apparition would indicate that new laws of nature existed, confirming Todorov’s definition of the marvelous.

From these two narrative poles - the uncanny and the marvelous - we reach a middle point of undecidability, or what Todorov terms the fantastic. Elements of the fantastic can occur in various types of literature, but, according to Todorov’s definition, all share a commonality: a hesitation or uncertainty. When we consider the aforementioned example, before the man (and reader) arrives at either an uncanny or marvelous explanation of the flower, he has several possible explanations for the phenomenon. He could question his senses and believe that he was not really seeing the flower or that it had always been present and he had only just taken notice of it.



Alternatively, he could jump to supernatural explanations and believe that the flower appeared from another realm, not his own reality. Thus, the fantastic exists when a character (and possibly the reader as well) can speculate on multiple causes of a strange occurrence.

Todorov names three functions of the fantastic in a literary work, which I will refer to at various points in my textual analyses. The first function provokes “a particular effect on the reader - fear, or horror, or simply curiosity;” Todorov further claims that other genres do not have the capability to produce the same reactions (92). Secondly, and quite simply, the fantastic serves a narrative function in that it conveys suspense; since the reader can speculate, he remains at an ambiguous point. Finally, fantastic literature, as with all fiction, represents a world that only exists in written form. In his detailed exploration of this “tautological function,” Todorov attempts to differentiate the fantastic from other forms of literature (92). He focuses on both the form and the function of the text in a systematic abstraction based upon studies conducted by Genette, Caillois, and others.<sup>9</sup>

Following his development of the definition and functions of the fantastic genre, Todorov presents two thematic categories that often appear: themes of the self and the other. For him, themes of the self encompass various internal psychoses, while those of the other represent societal taboos like incest or necrophilia. Fantastic narratives provide no explanation for the origins or causes of these themes, which leaves the door open for mystery and superstition. With advances in cognitive sciences and applications of technology in a post-Freudian era, the fantastic genre in literature becomes obsolete:

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<sup>9</sup> This third function of the fantastic generates linguistic questions that I will not investigate here. My analyses will focus on the first and second functions: the effect on the reader and the narrative suspense.

to proceed a step further: psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby made useless) the literature of the fantastic. There is no need today to resort to the devil in order to speak of an excessive sexual desire, and none to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses: psychoanalysis, and the literature which is directly or indirectly inspired by it, deal with these matters in undisguised terms. (Todorov 160-1)

For every literary event, the reader can reach some type of conclusion and the point of undecidability that characterizes the fantastic dissolves. Even after the fantastic genre in literature evolves, we still notice elements of the fantastic in other works.

Applying Todorov's explanation of the fantastic to the Pygmalion adaptations reveals that they also reside on a similar trajectory between the uncanny and the marvelous, passing through the fantastic. Thus, the Pygmalion adaptations can be seen as a meta-text corresponding to the thematic elements that Todorov uses to structure fantastic literature. In *La Fausse statue* (1771), for example, one of the characters bears an uncanny resemblance to a Greek statue, fooling his lover. Later, in *L'Eve future* (1886), marvelous scientific elements are manipulated in ways not possible in the real world. The reader can conclude that there is a rational explanation (a real man posed as a statue) and the text belongs in the domain of the uncanny, as in the first example, or that the text operates outside of the natural realm (an inventor employs a fictional machine called a *lampascope*) and the text occupies the marvelous space, as in the example of *L'Eve future*. The core elements of the fantastic not only serve as a useful tool in analyzing the Pygmalion adaptations, but they also reveal the underlying limitations that hinder man's quest for the ideal creation.

## Ovid's *Pygmalion* and Beyond

We arrive at the confluence of themes discussed above -- gender, technology, and visual arts -- in Ovid's myth of Pygmalion, the Cypriot sculptor. For obvious reasons, the criticism treating Ovid's Pygmalion myth, as well as the entire work of *Metamorphoses*, is wide-ranging and prolific. My focus, after Ovid's version of the myth, concerns a brief century (1771-1886) of literature and its related criticism. In *Versions of Pygmalion* (1990), J. Hillis Miller identifies some major themes present in several adaptations of the ancient myth:

Though the birth of Galatea [the statue] takes the help of a goddess, Ovid emphasizes the way it is the result of human work, even of specifically male work. The work is both sexual and at the same time simply one of manufacture, in the literal sense of a making by hand: 'at his touch the ivory lost its hardness.' This story embodies a male fantasy whereby a woman cannot be the object of sexual desire and cannot desire in return unless she has been made so by male effort. The process is likened to the procedure whereby a passive and formless raw material is given shape by man's productive power. (7)

Miller comments on several versions of the Pygmalion story; he names these adaptations "versions" so as "to suggest not only different retellings of the same story, but also deflections, or one might even say 'metamorphoses,' of that story" (7). Just as Miller examines narrative adaptations of the statue myth, I will attempt to present the seven primary texts of my corpus as adaptations that do not necessarily follow the same arrangements as Ovid's story, but evoke similar questions about the creator, gender, (pro)creation, and the ideal inherent in the myth.

In the four chapters that follow, I elucidate how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French authors essentially subject the myth itself to textual metamorphoses in their own texts. These changes reflect authors' concerns about understanding and even mastering the arts and creativity in their own time. In turn, this quest for artistic mastery

within the Pygmalion versions acts as a synecdoche of the attempts to replace Venus's divine power with modern methods and techniques to re-enact the sculptor king's inimitable creation of the ideal female form.

Chapter one, entitled *Ovid's Pygmalion Myth*, sets up a framework for the analyses of adaptations of the Pygmalion myth during the century 1771-1886. In it, I explore the aspects of the myth, as it appeared in Ovid's 8 A.D. collection of poetry, *Metamorphoses*, that later authors will appropriate and mold to their own ends. Chief among the myth's elements under scrutiny are: the characters' roles and traits, the creator's impetus, the materials and methods used, and finally, the results of the creation project. Furthermore, my hermeneutical approach to Ovid's poem will identify key themes and representations that are essential to understanding the story as mythology. As the myth is adapted in different genres, I will apply this structural basis in my inquiry.

In chapter two, *Creating Confusion in the Pygmalion Myth*, I present two eighteenth-century plays, heretofore absent from literary criticism. *La Fausse statue*, by M. Le Chevalier de Laurès, was performed just once in Lyon in 1771. *L'Amante statue*, written by B. Desgagniers, followed the same route in 1774. Both plays were published, however, and it is from these written forms of theatrical *scènes lyriques* that I will discuss the statue's role and relationship with its creator. The farcical plays confuse the Pygmalion myth in different ways; namely, characters presented with statue forms become perplexed as to their meaning or purpose. Additionally, the original Ovidian characters change in *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* so that elements from one character fuse with others, demonstrating a structural metamorphosis of the myth rather than a mythical metamorphosis of characters (that of a statue becoming a real woman

with the aid of divine intervention, as in Ovid's retelling of the original version). Because *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* are both comedic plays, the author presents a clear resolution for each Pygmalionesque endeavor; in other words, none of the characters or the reader is left questioning how the events of the story transpired.

Where the characters in chapter two's texts were confused in their Pygmalionesque situations, those in chapter three rest in a state of indecision and in a space between what is real and what is not. This chapter, entitled *The Fantastic Pygmalion*, explores two fantastic short stories that portray versions of the Pygmalion myth where neither the characters nor the reader (actual or assumed) arrive at a resolution at the end. Within Balzac's well-known tale, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1837), and Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837), I conduct a reading based upon Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. As I outlined above, Todorov argues that texts in this genre illustrate certain themes and structures.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, he insists upon the importance of the narrator's function as arbiter between the characters and the reader. For Todorov, the narrator's perception of the tale's events is central to the reader's acceptance or refusal of their veracity within the story. When the reader is unable to leave a space of uncertainty and reach a decision, the text is considered part of the fantastic genre. As I will make evident in this chapter, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* and *La Vénus d'Ille* demonstrate how creative and destructive forces in these adaptations of the Pygmalion myth hinge on perception and point of view.

Two decadent novels, *L'Eve future* 1886 (Villiers de l'Isle-Adam) and *Monsieur Vénus* 1884 (Rachilde), bring the Pygmalion myth from the fantastic realm of uncertainty

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<sup>10</sup> Todorov groups themes of the Fantastic into internal and external; for a description of these classifications, see the section on Todorov above, as well as an elaboration in chapter three.

to one of decay, artifice, and experimentation in chapter four. The Pygmalionesque characters in these two stories attempt, yet again, to control art and technology in their creation projects. Rather than depict a version of Pygmalion as a sculptor, *L'Eve future* presents a lovesick Lord and an American inventor as two facets of the creator character. *Monsieur Vénus*, by contrast, represents Pygmalion as a depraved and macabre cross-dressing woman. According to the concept of *techne* that I outlined earlier, both creator figures submit their statuesque objects to a process of disassemblage and destruction only to later attempt to reanimate and reconstruct them using modern techniques and materials such as photography and prosthetics. In my analysis, I will demonstrate how Villiers and Rachilde integrate the themes of decay and degeneration in their versions of the creation myth; while the principal characters mirror the desires of the original Pygmalion, their efforts cannot match his results.

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing examination of the fictional artist's challenge in bringing the ideal creation into reality and this quest's reflections of contemporary epistemology. A particularly unique contribution to the Pygmalion myth adaptations corpus is the inclusion of *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*, which have remained absent from scholarly criticism. I assert that these eighteenth-century plays hold significance in setting up the nineteenth-century adaptations that I, and other critics, investigate under the lens of ancient mythology. While scholars such as Pierre Laubriet, Pierre-Georges Castex, Jacques Noiray, Alan Raitt, and Melanie Hawthorne, among others have established a strong foundation of scholarship of my primary corpus, especially of *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, *L'Eve future*, and *Monsieur Vénus*, I attempt to bring these varied texts together under one umbrella - that of the ancient Pygmalion

myth.<sup>11</sup> In the analysis to follow, I anchor each of my seven primary texts in the tripartite structure of that myth: creator (Pygmalion), creation (Galatea statue), and intervention (Venus).

In summary, this project examines the Pygmalion myth over the period of 1771 - 1886 in order to demonstrate that the central themes of the myth, and the individual treatments thereof, reflect larger questions and changes within contemporary French society. Moreover, my project aims to illustrate that because these themes (gender, technology, and visual arts) were germane to philosophical and societal questions of the time, the myth experienced a renewed popularity amongst artists, audiences, authors, and readers alike. Throughout the four chapters that follow, I will identify the changing methods, tools, and technology that the contemporary Pygmalions wield in their attempts to bring the ideal into reality. I will equally explore the various ways that each author coped with the fact that modern artistic or technological methods could not replace the ultimate divine power from which Pygmalion benefitted in the ancient myth. M. Le Chevalier de Laurès (1771), B. Desgagniers (1774), Honoré de Balzac (1831/7), Prosper Mérimée (1837), Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (1886), and Rachilde (1884) all used the Pygmalion myth to exploit man's great abilities all the while grappling with his persistent inabilities in an ever-changing aesthetic landscape. Finally, I will assess each

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<sup>11</sup> On Balzac, see Pierre Laubriet's *L'Intelligence de l'Art Chez Balzac*. Genève, Paris and Gex: Slatkine Reprints, 1980 and Castex's *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant*. Paris: José Corti, 1951. For complete biographical and literary analysis of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's oeuvre, consult Noiray's *Le Romancier et la Machine*. Vol. 2. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1982 and Alan Raitt's *The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981 and *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: Exorciste du Réel*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1987. Melanie Hawthorne conducted a thorough study of Rachilde's body of work in her *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship: From Decadence to Modernism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. In addition, she contributes valuable insight of *Monsieur Vénus* in the introduction to the 2004 MLA edition of the novel.

fictional creator's result with respect to his creation project and investigate how this result affects his relationship to it.



## CHAPTER ONE - OVID'S *PYGMALION* MYTH

I use Ovid's 8 A.D. version of the Pygmalion myth as the first extant written version of this creation myth and the anchoring point for my textual analyses. The story, as told in fewer than one hundred lines, is part of Book X, The Songs of Orpheus, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Although the original poem is in Latin, for consistency and completeness, I analyze two English translations of the original text: Allen Mandelbaum's 1993 version and Charles Martin's 2004 version.<sup>12</sup> I refer to both translations in order to better understand Ovid's intended message and how it applies to the later texts in this project; often, slight differences in the translations illuminate different, but equally thought-provoking, elements of the story. Though not the original iteration,<sup>13</sup> Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth sets up a framework for my arguments within the primary texts of this study. Specifically, I will focus on four areas: the characters, the creator's impetus, the materials and methods, and finally, the results of the creation project. Using these same elements, I will then demonstrate how they are used in modern French retellings of the myth. I examine the artist's relationship to his work of art as well as his connection to, and understanding of, both the natural and supernatural/artificial realms. The creator's relationship with the supernatural realm (the goddess Venus, in Pygmalion's case) shifts and becomes complicated during later periods of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French literature. I will explore how the myth is portrayed in several genres, including the comedic play, fantastic short story, and finally, decadent novel. Ovid's descriptions of the statue preface the way in which the later fictional "artists" or creators describe their own works, how other characters view them,

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<sup>12</sup> Henceforth, I will abbreviate Allen Mandelbaum's translation *AM* and Charles Martin's translation *CM*.

<sup>13</sup> Ovid was the first to document the myth in writing and may have been inspired by earlier Greek mythology about the Cypriot king, Pygmalion.

and how the authors present them in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French texts. Thus, Ovid's 8 A.D. version of the Pygmalion myth sets up a tripartite relationship between a creator, a creation, and an (divine) intervention, which undergoes significant reconfigurations within the six primary texts I will consider dating from 1771-1886. These changes in the Pygmalion stories reflect the epistemological changes surrounding man's abilities and desire to create art and life.

The story begins by setting up Pygmalion's impetus for creating his ivory statue. He is a bachelor by choice, due to the Propoetides'<sup>14</sup> indecent behavior. He is "disgusted by the many sins to which the female mind had been inclined by nature" (*AM*, v. 313-314) / "dismayed by the numerous defects of character Nature had given the feminine spirit" (*CM* v. 313-314). Even though he takes issue with the "female mind" and the "feminine spirit," Pygmalion wants to create a *physically* perfect form. This confusion between the interior feminine spirit and the exterior physical woman appears in many of the later versions of the myth as well. The artist in each retelling often conflates physical beauty with psychical or spiritual wholeness, sometimes believing that one's presence outweighs the other's absence. This confusion affects the outcome of each modern Pygmalion's quest for the ideal woman, as I will show.

In order to quell his desire for a woman, Pygmalion begins to create a statue that is, "a female figure more exquisite than a woman who was born could ever match" (*AM* v. 317) / "a figure better than any living woman could boast of" (*CM* v. 317).

Pygmalion's creation surpasses nature, especially the negative aspects with which nature cursed the Propoetides. However, rather than a living woman, born from the joint

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<sup>14</sup> The poem preceding *Pygmalion* introduces the Propoetides as women of Cyprus who denied that Venus was a goddess and incurred a punishment. Venus made them into prostitutes, and then they were turned to stone (Mandelbaum 350, Martin 335).

reproductive act between a man and a woman, Pygmalion formed his figure from ivory, a non-living organic material, to resemble the ideal woman. In the *Metamorphoses* (and subsequent Pygmalion retellings) the only possible way to produce the ideal version of a figure or an object is through artificial or artistic means with help of supernatural intervention by the gods. In place of *nature*'s creative abilities, we witness instead supernatural, artificial, or technological assistance. "By emphasizing the difference between Pygmalion's sculpture and those creatures of 'woman born,' Ovid not only proclaims the ivory superior to the flesh; he also compares and separates artful male creativity from 'natural' female reproduction," Mary Sheriff explains in *Moved by Love* (142). This proclaimed superiority of ivory to human flesh is a fleeting thought, however. Pygmalion creates his ideal woman out of ivory, but he quickly realizes that his true (unarticulated) wish is for the statue to be alive, or at least to have a real wife in its likeness. In Sheriff's analysis, natural reproduction seems to be attributed only to the female role in the process. However, Venus's supernatural intervention, which ultimately completes Pygmalion's job, is also a feminine power. Thus, even though Ovid separates male creativity and ability from female nature, man cannot create natural (or artificial) life on his own. Without the goddess's aid, Pygmalion would need to content himself with the non-living ivory statue, not a real woman. In addition to the creator and the statue, Venus is the third, and crucial, player in the creation myth. Later adaptations of the myth will attempt to define these qualities, which leads to more trouble when the creators attempt to execute them.

Now that the characters and roles in the Pygmalion myth have been established, we can examine the materials and methods used to complete the ideal woman. The

significance of Pygmalion's choice of primary material, ivory, cannot be understated. In his article, "The Function of Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid," Douglas Bauer elucidates this choice: "Doubtless the most challenging medium, for it exacted a skillful joining of numerous pieces and fragments," ivory would have been, not only more rare, but more difficult to work with than wood or stone as well (16). If we are to assume that Pygmalion created a life-size statue (as most scholars concur), then the material he uses becomes problematic. In order to complete his "ivory maiden," he would have had to join several pieces of ivory together with another material to achieve the size of a real woman: "In the case of ivory, the application of a wax would surely have concealed the myriad joints and minute blemishes of its surface" (Bauer 16). Ovid's text does not indicate that Pygmalion actually used wax in this way. However, the narrator does allude to wax's behavior when manipulated by a sculptor's hand; "His fingers sink into its warm, pliant flesh" (*CM* v. 329) / "the image seems to yield beneath his fingers" (*AM* v. 329). At this moment early in the poem, the statue is still made of hard ivory; it only seems to have a fleshy or soft waxy feeling. Scholars have investigated the role of wax as an artistic material throughout the ages. Wax acts as a liminal, transformative material that hovers meaningfully between the real and the artificial; in *Ephemeral Bodies*, Roberta Panzanelli (et al.), observes: "Ovid's description of the process evokes wax...in order to become flesh, ivory has to behave like wax, the ultimate organic simulacrum" (5). As a simulacrum, wax acts in place of human flesh; even though the statue is neither waxy nor fleshy, the idea of a soft and pliant material enters the sculptor's mind as he envisions the possible metamorphosis that his work could undergo. Thus, even though ivory is a hard,

solid material, Pygmalion imagines it becoming soft and pliable like wax, and eventually, flesh.

For a time, Pygmalion enjoys simply admiring and adorning his statue. Then, after his prayer to Venus on her holiday, Pygmalion witnesses his hard, cold, ivory statue becoming warm and soft under his own touch. In both translations of the text, this moment is described using the image of wax:

Aroused, the ivory softened and, losing its stiffness,  
Yielded, submitting to his caress as wax softens  
When it is warmed by the sun, and handled by fingers,  
Takes on many forms, and by being used, becomes useful. (*CM* v. 357-360)

The ivory had lost  
its hardness; now his fingers probe; grown soft,  
the statue yields beneath the sculptor's touch,  
just as Hymettian wax beneath the sun  
grows soft and, molded by the thumb, takes on  
so many varied shapes – in fact, becomes  
more pliant as one plies it. (*AM* v. 357-360)

Ovid metaphorically compares the moment of softening to how wax behaves when naturally warmed by the sun and technically manipulated by man. Although the vocabulary used is not identical, both translations employ the same type of language to convey that the ivory figure is submissive in relation to the sculptor's touch. In addition, the author hints that two separate, but commensurate, forces simultaneously influence the ivory statue: nature and man. Referring to the triangular relationship among creator, creation, and intervention, we recall that two influences are necessary to bring the ideal woman into existence in this version of the Pygmalion myth. Unsurprisingly, Panzanelli analyzes the passive wax material and active touch in gendered terms: "[Wax] is transformed by the warmth of skin, a hard substance receptive to heat and pressure, its form altered by the magic of touch, which epitomizes creation and organic forces: female

passivity and male resistance” (3). The female statue remains motionless and lifeless, receiving the touches and caresses of the living man.

Pygmalion not only conceives the ideal woman in ivory, but also imagines his own desire embodied in this ideal. In creating a perfect version of woman (unlike the imperfect Propoetides), he simultaneously ignites his desire for this perfect woman, since he previously had none. When the artist falls in love with the statue that he created himself, he is recognizing and appreciating his own artistic skill, not the object itself: “with his art, he’s hidden art” (*AM* v. 322) / “art concealed artfulness” (*CM* v. 322). The beginning of the myth focuses solely on Ovid and his sculpture; he is, so far, the only living being. Thus, it makes sense that all of his emotion is self-directed, since he is the only one to view and appreciate his secret work of art. This sense of interiority is explained in Jan Elsner’s *Roman Eyes*: “Ovid’s Pygmalion actually falls in love not with a work of art (an object in the external world) but with his own creation, his own fantasy” (123). Conversely, I argue that the text does not support Bonnie Roos’s assessment in her 2001 article, “Refining the Artist into Existence: Pygmalion’s Statue, Stephen’s Villanelle and the Venus of Praxiteles,” She takes Pygmalion’s creative power to a problematic degree past the explicit meaning in the text: “Pygmalion, as artist, usurps the power of both (sexual) woman and God in that he creates ‘life itself,’ an artistic child, of sorts. And in fact, he even improves upon both [...]. Important to consider, however, is that Pygmalion is not so much in love with the statue as he is with his own performance and artistry” (Roos 97-98). The artist does not create life, but fools the viewer into seeing life where it does not (yet) exist; Roos, however, mistakes Pygmalion’s artistic abilities for actual life-giving powers. Ovid’s text clearly demonstrates that the ivory statue is not

a real woman and that Pygmalion only wishes it to be real. To be sure, Pygmalion “promptly conceived a passion for his own creation,” but this passion does not ignite life in the work of art (*CM* v. 319). The key to the transformation from art to life remains Venus’s supernatural power since Pygmalion is only a mortal man and does not possess that transformative power.

A transformation, or metamorphosis, appears at the heart of each of Ovid’s stories. At its most basic meaning, a metamorphosis is a “change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The relationships between real, animate beings and artificial or supernatural beings, and the intervening metamorphoses create troublesome spaces wherein the boundaries between the real and the artificial lose their distinctions. Joseph Solodow, in *The World of Ovid’s Metamorphosis*, examines how Ovid uses images (representations and works of art) in his poem. “[Metamorphosis] is – and this constitutes a central paradox of the poem – a change which preserves, an alteration which maintains identity, a change of form by which content becomes represented in form” (174). In the case of the Pygmalion story, the change that the statue undergoes to become a real woman fixes her ideal qualities. Those qualities that Pygmalion deemed lacking in the real women around him manifested first as physical beauty in his statue. As he began to admire that beauty in its physical form, and to continue to alter it with his hands, and to improve it with accessories and embellishments, the very act of transforming the ivory into a statue imbued the ideal qualities of beauty in it. These qualities of beauty Plato describes in *The Phaedrus* as existing on a plane that all souls once knew and can recognize in reality if among the initiated. He refers to these ideal forms as “the colourless, formless, intangible essence,

visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul”, but “that which is found, in varying forms, in one or other of those regions which we men call *real*” as the manifestations of these forms in reality; the forms found in the real lack the essence of those on the heavenly level (*Phaedrus* 247c-e). In the Pygmalion story, the metamorphosis occurs thanks to Venus’s answer to Pygmalion’s prayer. What began as a lifeless ivory shell metamorphoses into a live woman who *contains* those ideal feminine qualities, which are always alluded to, but never defined in the myth.

Another key to understanding Pygmalion’s connection to both the work of art and the real woman is his role as creator. In Ovid’s 8 A.D. story, we know that Pygmalion is the artist who both imagines and executes the Galatea statue. This role becomes less clear and more confused in later retellings of the myth, as I will demonstrate. The fact that no outsiders, save the goddess Venus, ever witness Pygmalion and his statue makes the creator’s role that much more powerful in the triad of characters. His active position can be attributed to both his manipulation of the ivory into his ideal woman as well as his determined prayer that he receive a wife in his statue’s likeness. However, another interpretation of the character’s roles posits that the statue’s passive lifelessness is an active refusal, in essence granting a choice to the inanimate ivory statue: “in refusing sexual activity, his statue implicitly refuses to usurp Pygmalion’s role as creator; her sexual, procreative powers are never a threat to Pygmalion’s artistic creative powers. In other words, Pygmalion’s love for the statue is really narcissism; he loves himself, and in creating art, embraces his own imaginative, artistic powers of creation” (Roos 98). Here, I find that Roos’ analysis reaches beyond the scope of the story, in that all of the textual descriptions of the statue render it passive. Further, the end of the poem submits that:



“Pygmalion’s wife gives birth to Paphos” (*AM* v. 370) / “a daughter was born to them” (*CM* v. 370), proving that the artist and the live woman engaged in sexual activity and procreated. Nevertheless, Roos is correct to point out that Pygmalion lives in a narcissistic vacuum, wherein he is the only one who can appreciate his creation.

There is very little in the text that directly portrays Pygmalion’s collection of tools or materials, his plan for executing his project, or the actual act of creation. I would agree with Elsner’s perception that Pygmalion’s desire is a more significant and troublesome creation than the statue itself: “Ovid in fact gives only two and a half lines to describing Pygmalion’s act of creation. The rest of the story (some fifty lines) dwells in exquisite detail on the viewing, which sees the ivory statue as a real woman, and on Pygmalion’s desire and its fulfillment” (Elsner 115). In addition, contrary to Elsner’s assessment above, Pygmalion’s fulfillment of his wish for the statue to come to life also constitutes a rather small portion of the entire story. In fact, as I show in my analysis of the project’s outcome, the sculptor’s wish remains ambiguous, as he asks for one outcome, but Venus grants another. After his prayer to Venus, his actions toward the statue remain similar to those before his prayer; he dotes on the statue, caressing and kissing it, albeit with a new enthusiasm. Pygmalion adorns the statue with jewelry and fancy materials, but observes that “all this is fair enough, but it’s not less appealing in its nakedness” (*AM* v. 358) / “[s]he does not seem to be any less beautiful naked” (*CM* v. 358). His desire to have “the wife [he] want[s]...one like [his] ivory girl” / “as [his] wife...one like [his] statue” seems to be fulfilled immediately after his prayer (*AM*; *CM* v. 349). However, he only recognizes the metamorphosis after he has returned to his statue and spent some time with it. Then, Pygmalion experiences many emotions in quick succession; he is

“aroused,” “amazed,” then “rejoices, then doubts, then fears he’s mistaken,” as if his senses deceive him (*CM* v. 357, 361). Finally, he accepts that, “it is a body!” / “she is alive!” (*AM*; *CM* v. 363). The use of “it” as the subject in one translation and “she” in the other illustrates the liminal nature of the act of metamorphosis. This seems to portray that fleeting moment when the statue is neither ivory object, nor living woman, but something in between. That final moment in which Pygmalion realizes that his prayer has been fulfilled constitutes just one line of the poem. Prior to this realization, he is doubtful that Venus would answer his prayer.

Not only is the story of Pygmalion’s artistic transformation pivotal in Ovid’s complete work, but Venus’s role figures as a central hinge in the story as well. Douglas Bauer examines the poetic structure and importance of the Pygmalion episode within Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

But [the Pygmalion episode] also has a bipartite design, at the very heart of which stands Venus herself halving it into a before-and-after portrait of the artist. That is, following his introduction in the first verse (243), the contempt of Pygmalion for womankind does not diminish for twenty-seven verses until the goddess of love appears (270); in exactly as many verses the flames of passion melt the frigid indifference of the maiden, and in the final verse Paphos is born (297), child of a perfect love. (12-13)

Bauer stresses the *bipartite* design of the poem, in contrast to my analysis of a tripartite relationship. In his analysis, it is almost as if the statue’s role is unimportant, focusing only on the creator (Pygmalion) and the supernatural force (Venus). Although its presence doesn’t seem important in the poem, I view the statue’s role as equal to its counterparts (the sculptor and the goddess), if only for the simple reason that the creation myth would not exist if the statue didn’t exist. Pygmalion needs to create the statue in order for Venus to grant his prayer for it to come to life. Further, Bauer, like Roos,

attributes the statue's lifelessness to a "frigid indifference," rather than the simple fact that it is not (yet) alive. The poem does not demonstrate any type of refusal or indifference on the (newly) living woman's part. On the contrary, her behavior is portrayed as shy and peaceful:

"And timidly blushing, she opened her eyes to the sunlight,  
And at the same time, first looked on her lover and heaven!" (*CM* v. 367-368)

At her awakening, she sees both of her creators simultaneously – Pygmalion, her lover, and heaven, representing the goddess Venus.

The first word of the poem is "Pygmalion" and the last name mentioned is "Paphos," who is Pygmalion and his wife's offspring. In Ovid's version of the myth, the statue is never named by any of the characters or the narrator. As I have shown, the statue remains a passive figure, rather than an active subject, throughout the story. The fact that it/she remains unnamed even after it comes to life and becomes a real woman underlines her status as object rather than subject in the triad of characters. In this way, Pygmalion forms a narcissistic relationship with his work, as both Roos and Mary Sheriff argue: "in giving the statue no name, Ovid's text reveals that Pygmalion engages not another subject but his own passion reflected back to him through his art" (Sheriff 142). Contrary to Roos's characterization of the statue as a conscious subject refusing sexual activity with Pygmalion, Sheriff remarks that Ovid writes the statue as an object with no name.

### The Project's Outcome

This is not the only complication in Pygmalion's relationship with his statue, as Sheriff observes: "That Pygmalion fathers his work of art obviously complicates the tale of artistic creativity, shadowing it with the color of incest. In creating Galatea, Pygmalion

is her father; in penetrating her, he becomes her husband/lover” (180). Even though Pygmalion and Galatea’s relationship is not truly incestuous, the outcome of Ovid’s version of the myth is not entirely positive or felicitous. Ovid’s next story in the Book of Orpheus, “Myrrha,” hints at the evils that Pygmalion’s grandchildren and great grandchildren endure:

“And Paphos’ son was Cinyras, a man  
who, if he’d not had children, might have found  
some happiness.” (*AM* v. 372-373)

Further down the line, “Pygmalion’s grandchildren have incestuous relations that offend the gods, which points to Ovid’s disapproval of the couple. It also points to the unnamed girl’s [Galatea] diminished capacity to (pro)create, when compared to Pygmalion, creator of living ideals,” observes Roos (99). In Ovid’s version of the Pygmalion myth, the outcome is certain and clear. A dissatisfied sculptor creates his ideal version of woman; the statue comes to life with the aid of Venus; the artist and living woman marry and have a child.

The omniscient narrator uses language to lead the reader to understand Pygmalion’s story in a certain way. The only line uttered by Pygmalion himself is his plea to Venus to bring him a wife like his statue. There is nothing unsure about this request, except for the narrator’s interjection that Pygmalion didn’t dare ask Venus to bring his own statue to life:

“If you in heaven are able to give us whatever  
we ask for, then I would like as my wife-’ and not daring  
to say, ‘-my ivory maiden,’ said, ‘-one like my statue!’” (*CM* v. 357-359)

The narrator makes a judgment about Pygmalion’s wishes and intentions even though the sculptor’s request is quite explicit. After the creator’s plea, the narrator then makes a

judgment about what Venus thought. The narrator adds that Venus “knew what he wanted to ask for,” implying that he did not verbalize his actual wish (*CM* v. 351). This notion of uncertainty, whether actually felt by the creator or implied by a narrator or other character, appears throughout retellings of Ovid’s myth in the nineteenth century. This moment of disbelief is central to the fantastic nature of the creation myth.

Ovid refutes Platonic idealism, that is, the belief that all ideal forms exist on an imaginary plane, but not in the physical world, according to Solodow. In *The Phaedrus*, Plato encourages us to believe that all of the ideal forms exist, whether or not we can perceive them. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Solodow argues that, “the conclusion which emerges is that art/metamorphosis is necessary for perception” (203). In short, for the ideal forms to become physically perceptible, there must be a metamorphosis, which transforms them to real, tangible objects or beings. Ovid’s stories of both subtle and drastic metamorphoses aim to illuminate the necessary changes from the imperceptible forms of the ideal world to their perceptible representations in the real flawed world. The ideal Platonic forms have no reference point in the real world. The artist acts as an intermediary to bring the forms into view. Solodow elaborates: “Plucking something from the random flux of the universe, fixing it, establishing it as a clear point of reference for the rest of us, metamorphosis acts like the eye and hand of an artist” (207). In this definition, metamorphosis is a change that results in a fixed and static object, entity, or being. Thus, what happens when statues begin to move? The questions that arise when works of art do not conform to the traditional boundaries set up by artists and spectators alike are the reasons for this particular study.

## CHAPTER TWO - CREATING CONFUSION IN THE PYGMALION MYTH

They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:  
They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:  
They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak  
they through their throat.  
They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.  
[Psalm 115:5-8]

Psalm 115 evokes religious idols, but the observations apply equally when contemplating the common statue. Created by humans to resemble us, but also to represent a certain artistic ideal (that changes as aesthetic values shift over time), statues populate the same space that real people do. Because humans and statues cohabit, we are compelled to interact with these works of art: to speak to them, to gaze upon them, perhaps even to love them. The Psalm enumerates the human qualities in sculpture that the living recognize as familiar, yet distinctly different from their own selves. I begin this chapter with the Psalm in order to illustrate society's long-held curiosity about sculpture. More importantly, I will explore how man's relationship to the statue reflects questions and concerns about creation during the eighteenth century in France. Our focus, therefore, is sculpture and, as Alex Potts observes: "The sculptural object – the work of art as literal thing rather than two-dimensional representation – has been both a recurrent obsession and, at the same time, an awkward problem ever since the emergence of modern formalist aesthetics in the eighteenth century" ("Male Phantasy and Modern Sculpture" 38). This project aims to explore the problematic obsession, as Potts calls it, that artists had with the work of art and how this preoccupation harkens back to Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth, albeit with distinct variations. These variations, as I will show, reveal the very nature of the problematic relationship between a creator and his creation and, particularly, how this took shape in the eighteenth century. The fluid barrier

between these two entities, as well as the questionable nature imposed by a supernatural entity, allows for an environment in which both creator and creation cease to exist as two distinct entities. Each exhibits traits and performs roles that become intermingled in these eighteenth-century works and announce the beginning of a series of Pygmalion myth adaptations in which the previously clear distinctions between living creator and non-living creation become less and less defined. These modern retellings will reveal how the creator's position in the real world changes in relation to his imagined or ideal world.

Potts begins his analysis in the quotation above by identifying the sculpture as object; I will continue this thread, but take it further to the moment of metamorphosis when the object supposedly or seemingly comes to life, thereby becoming a subject in the real world.<sup>15</sup> The “modern formalist aesthetic” to which Potts refers stems from Winckelmann's and Lessing's art criticism in the eighteenth century, to cite just two critics among many. Lessing's approach to understanding the arts, put forth in his *Laocoön* (1766), an essay on the statue of the same name, is anchored in Plato's philosophy of Beauty and the Forms, as discussed in both *The Republic* and *The Phaedrus*. These ancient conceptions of the real world and the ideal world will be central to understanding the primary texts in this chapter as well as those in subsequent chapters. Although I have outlined Plato's philosophies in my introduction, I will refer to them in my textual analyses here.

This chapter's title, “Creating Confusion in the Pygmalion Myth,” encompasses two meanings: first, the texts portray the primary figurative meaning of the verb “to confuse,” that is, to befuddle the mind or to be unable to distinguish between two things;

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<sup>15</sup> This chapter focuses on the differentiation between sculptural object and living human subject, but I will examine a painted (that is, two-dimensional) representation in chapter three.

second, the origin of the word combines the prefix *con-*, from the Latin *contra* meaning against, and *fuse*, meaning to combine or to integrate. Derived from the Latin *confundere*, meaning to pour or to mingle together, the word in the literal sense meant to mix or mingle things so as to render the elements indistinguishable from each other. I assert that the two comedic eighteenth-century plays in this chapter represent adaptations of Ovid's myth that confuse the story and the three primary characters, in both senses of the word. In so doing, the texts broach the difficulty in distinguishing between the subject and the object.

The original Pygmalion myth that I analyzed in chapter one becomes something other in the texts that I explore below. In my analysis, when referring to the first figurative meaning of confusion, I will use the term "confusion." I will also point to moments of "fusion" wherein traits from one character are combined with those of another character. Finally, "literal (or physical) confusion" will denote the second literal meaning of the term, locating those moments in the written text's structure or content where the reader or spectator witnesses a physical or spatial change in form or shape. The analysis that follows illuminates the key departures from Ovid's 8 C.E. myth in each theatrical text. On the character level, the *scènes lyriques* from the eighteenth century take elements from those original Ovidian characters - Pygmalion, Venus, and the (as yet, unnamed) statue<sup>16</sup> - and reassign them, combining traits in a new way. Rather than three clearly delineated characters with specific roles in the story, the plays' characters incorporate divergent aspects from the original fused together in a new way, thereby

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<sup>16</sup> While it may not seem apparent reading modern criticism of Ovid's myth as well as earlier adaptations of the Pygmalion myth, the original statue was, in fact, unnamed in the poem. Scholarship often overlooks this point, so much so that we have widely accepted that the statue was always called Galatea and normally it is referred to as such when discussing various iterations of the classic myth.



creating a parallel between each playwright's creation of the text (and performance) and the fictional sculptor's statue. Further, the players in each text fool one other in order to reach their goals, evoking confusion's first, figurative definition.

Chapter two aims to do three things. First, I will establish some of the reasons why the Pygmalion myth resurged in eighteenth-century French aesthetics and briefly examine Rousseau's play, *Pygmalion* (1770), as a point of departure. Second, I explore two comedic plays, also from the late 1700s, to show how they adapt Ovid's original myth so that it creates not new life *through* metamorphosis, but confusion *in* metamorphosis. The primary texts that I investigate here are *L'Amante statue, ou le nouveau Pygmalion* (1774), written by B. Desgagniers, and *La Fausse statue* (1771), by le Chevalier Antoine de Laurès. Finally, I hope to demonstrate that these works deserve a place in the discussion of the Pygmalion myth in French literature, not because they are "successful" or exact retellings of Ovid's original myth, but because they demonstrate how a new episteme alters the myth's structure, and consequently, its result. The characters in the texts that I analyze perform these two meanings of confusion. I uncover how these adaptations take apart, change, and reconfigure the original relationships (established in chapter one) among the three main players: the creator, the work of art, and the divine/supernatural power. Some characters in each play work actively to befuddle and fool others, while others simply miscommunicate with each other. Ultimately, we will see that unlike Ovid's version, these stories fail to create a new living woman. There is, in fact, no creation of new life, only confusion created in the quest for ideal beauty in the characters' reality. Moreover, these plays do not and cannot repeat the

central transformative act in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, most importantly because they question and reject the very existence of a powerful supernatural figure.

Additionally, this chapter does not present a catalogue of the Pygmalion adaptations in eighteenth-century French literature; the simplest reason would be that this would entail a much larger project in scope. Although the leap from 8 C.E. to 1770 may be extreme,<sup>17</sup> I have chosen to examine works from this latter period because they demonstrate a distinct change in adaptations of the myth. On one level, artistic creation's focus rested on a border between the magical and the scientific. Contrary to medieval or Renaissance religious statues or idols that allegedly bled or shed tears through miraculous phenomena, "the belief was this: that it might be perfectly possible- scientifically, not magically or miraculously- to make a statue out of dead matter and cause it to come to life as a human being," observes George Hersey in *Falling in Love With Statues* 2009 (99). Where the magical phenomena emanated from a higher power during the previous movements, the new "miracles" in the eighteenth century had questionable origins. The shift that both eighteenth-century plays bring to light reflects the extremely tenuous border between these two modes of thought: the magical and the scientific.

Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth-century, France witnessed a resurgence in interest in Greco-Roman Antiquity, partly due to the rediscovery of the ruins of Pompeii (1748) and partly due to a refusal of the Baroque and Rococo aesthetics, which valued excessive ornament and detail over simplicity. The new artistic tradition manifested, most notably for this investigation, in sculpture where artists privileged Greco-Roman Antiquity's smooth, white, marble figures over the preceding artistic

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<sup>17</sup> Other adaptations of Ovid's myth appeared during this long span of time. In France's early literary tradition, Guillaume de Lorris' thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose* (later extended by Jean de Meun) remains one of the most important adaptations of the Pygmalion myth.

movements' highly ornate and colorful sculptures. The two plays I examine here aptly demonstrate this preference for the old over the new, through their set notes that evoke this tradition and the statue characters who supposedly possess the smooth, white features of their Ancient counterparts. Despite this apparent preference for Greco-Roman style, however, the myth takes new shape through the statue's increasingly prominent and subjective role.

Various adaptations of the Pygmalion myth have not been altogether absent from modern criticism: "Artists often chose the Pygmalion story to represent their profession in eighteenth-century France, taking as an imaginary ancestor not a rational creator but a desiring lover," observes Mary Sheriff in *Moved by Love* (143). Sheriff's characterization of the eighteenth-century sculptor protagonist as "desiring lover" rather than "rational creator" seems to align with Ovid's original myth. As shown in chapter one, Ovid's Pygmalion wished to create a beautiful counterpoint to the evil Propoetides, which in turn ignited a new desire for the female sex; it was not, ultimately, to form a new life. In fact, before creating his ideal statue, he only felt disgust and repugnance toward the real women that he had previously encountered. Consequently, his plea to Venus to "have the wife [he] want[s]" only came after he fell in love with his own statue (*AM* v. 348). Sheriff notes that eighteenth-century artists of various media looked to Pygmalion, a fictional sculptor, for inspiration in their craft.

Still, Sheriff offers proof that enlightened thinkers valued the mysterious aspects of art as much as its practical and rational purposes. She refers to the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*, when she states: "[T]he fine arts - collectively grouped under the name Poetry - depend on imagination. Unlike historical fact and philosophical theory,

knowledge in the fine arts is an imitation of nature created through the workings of imagination” (16). Thus, the fine arts bridged a gap between imagination and mimesis. For the eighteenth-century artist (and Ovid as well), the ability to use the imagination to access higher truths (much like Plato espoused) held an important position in his craft. For this reason, the Pygmalion myth stands out in the eighteenth century as representing the creative act’s mythical and mysterious nature, even at a time when art’s practical qualities were highly valued. “Equally problematic,” notes Sheriff:

was that Pygmalion did not produce works for public edification or for the nation’s glory but to arouse and satisfy sexual appetites. Although it might have been a common fantasy, creating an ideal love object was not advanced as a justification for art in an era when both official institutions and critical commentary more and more demanded that the arts have an ethical purpose. (185)

Clearly, when Ovid’s sculptor king created his ideal statue, he did so with selfish intent. Nowhere in his task did “public edification” or instruction play a part. The problem that Sheriff notes above is that the Pygmalion myth’s heightened popularity, which I examine in detail in the next section, comes during a period which insists upon two main ideals in artistic creation for the public: to please and to instruct the viewer.<sup>18</sup> However, these goals conflict with Pygmalion’s search for beauty and love in both the original and eighteenth-century adaptations. In these later works, some artists tended to view artistic creation as an act stemming from imagination rather than reason, as quenching a personal desire rather than enhancing a public glory.

In turn, eighteenth-century writers and artists using this particular myth that places so much belief in the artist’s ability to create as well as a supernatural entity’s power to intervene in the real world denotes a sort of paradox. Through their creative

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<sup>18</sup> These artistic ideals, both challenged and lauded across many centuries, originated in Horace’s *Ars Poetica*.

explorations, artists attempted to comprehend a philosophical and aesthetic struggle. This creation lies at the very heart of philosophy, as defined by eighteenth-century thinkers. In their *Encyclopédie*, Diderot and d'Alembert define "Philosophie" as comprising three main principles: "Dieu, l'ame et la matiere" (*Encyclopédie*). These three main objects, according to the entry, represent an ensemble of possibilities under each. That is to say, creative possibilities exist in the spiritual, intellectual, and physical realms. Their explanation of the tripartite science of Philosophy highlights its importance as a way of understanding the world through intense observation and study, rather than taking facts or beliefs as common knowledge:

Ils [les objets de la Philosophie] se réduisent à trois principaux, Dieu, l'âme, et la matière. A ces trois objets répondent trois parties principales de la Philosophie. La première, c'est la Théologie naturelle, ou la science des possibles à l'égard de Dieu. Les possibles à l'égard de Dieu, c'est ce qu'on peut concevoir en lui et par lui. Il en est de même des définitions des possibles à l'égard de l'âme et du corps. La seconde, c'est la Psychologie qui concerne les possibles à l'égard de l'âme. La troisième, est la Physique qui concerne les possibles à l'égard des corps. (Diderot et d'Alembert 2013)

If we replaced "Dieu" with "God(dess)," "l'ame" with imagination/ideal, and "le corps" with physical presence, then we can easily recognize the significance of the tripartite Pygmalion myth in relation to the struggle to define Philosophy during Rousseau's, Laurès's, and Desgagniers's time.

In the Pygmalion myth, as retold by many eighteenth-century authors, the fictional artist's activity in relation to the other figures represents a way for those authors to make sense of the different possibilities within the very notion of philosophy. The Pygmalion creation myth, which encompasses man's power (and conversely, his impotence), connects him to the spiritual, natural, and artificial realms through artistic

creation outlined in the *Encyclopédie*'s explanation above.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the sculptor's role in the story, it is necessary to investigate the heightened significance of the titular statue's role in both plays. The statues that I examine in this chapter share certain traits that are not necessarily inherent to all statues. To begin, only *L'Amante statue* actually features a real statue in the character triad; *La Fausse statue* portrays exactly that – a false statue – or a person posing as a statue. Potts outlines some commonly accepted statue traits: "It is one of the clichés of our culture that the cold marble forms of the pure classical nude, supposedly embodying an ideal beyond the measure of time and mortal alteration, is redolent of a deathly coldness" (1). Each statue in this chapter, whether real or imagined, defies these common perceptions that a statue is immobile, cold, and unable to behave as a human or to have human characteristics. Though we can draw comparisons, I contend that the statues in this chapter, whether they are real or false, are fundamentally different from Ovid's statue, and that, furthermore, that difference reveals essential truths about the society in which they appear. While Ovid's statue remains a passive object, even after its metamorphosis into a real woman, the "statues" in Desgagniers's and Laurès's plays each demonstrate active agency. This modern transformation, I contend, lies at the heart of understanding the myth's use as a barometer of eighteenth-century social thought.

Ovid never gives a name to Pygmalion's statue in his version of the myth, even though most readers believe that he coined the name Galatea. Many years and adaptations later, *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* (as well as Rousseau's *Pygmalion*) each have named statues. This is not to say that scholars have not attempted to uncover the origin of

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<sup>19</sup> Each of the three areas within an understanding of *Philosophie* corresponds to Pygmalion's relation to each character's role in the myth. As such, the myth illustrates one way in which to understand man's relationship to each function in philosophical thought.

the statue's name. In her 1932 article on the name of Pygmalion's statue, Helen Law found that an English adaptation used the name Galatea to refer to Pygmalion's statue in William S. Gilbert's 1871 play, *Pygmalion and Galatea* (340). This is obviously much later than our focus here on the eighteenth century in France, where, in French literature, Rousseau's *scène lyrique*, *Pygmalion* (1770) appears as the first mention of Galathée (340). Law's findings seem to prove that the name for the statue had not appeared before 1770. Although she concedes, "I realize, too, that any conclusions based on negative evidence are dangerous, since there may be references to Galatea which I have overlooked," Law's conclusions do play a part in painting the picture of why the naming of the statue represents a pivotal moment in the series of adaptations, which I will attempt to show below (341). Her study does not point to any of these reasons and merely concludes, rather off-handedly, that "the name was chosen simply because it was familiar and euphonious" (342). Galatea appears as a different character in other classical myths, as well as "in poetry from the sixteenth century on as the name both of a shepherdess and of a sea-nymph" (342). Nevertheless, none of those Galateas is Pygmalion's wife, the Galatea with whom we are presently concerned.

In his 1971 article, "The Naming of Pygmalion's Animated Statue," Meyer Reinhold enters into conversation with Law's study in an attempt to expound upon her findings. He uncovers that Jean-Antoine Romagnesi gave the statue the name Agalméris in his 1741 play: "This obvious formation from the Greek *agalma* (statue) is a unique occurrence" (317). Therefore, a named statue precedes Rousseau's 1770 play, but we're not yet to Galatea. He found that the name still in use today first appeared "about the same time [as Romagnesi's play]" in a *roman* by Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe de

Cordonnier (317). Reinhold's last finding (though not French) proves to be most exciting in the frame of my investigation; in 1747, "the famed German-Swiss author and educator, Johan Jakob Bodmer, wrote a poem *Pygmalion und Elise*, which was influenced by Saint-Hyacinthe's retelling of the myth but introduced a new name--Elise" (317).

Desgagniers gave this new name to the female protagonist in *L'Amante statue*, the first eighteenth-century play in my study. In conclusion, Reinhold's findings point to three additional (pre-Rousseau) possible origins for the naming of Pygmalion's statue in eighteenth-century French and German literature: Romagnesi's 1741 play, Cordonnier's contemporaneous novel, or Bodmer's 1747 poem. Only one, Rousseau's 1770 version, names the statue Galatea, the name that most retellings of the myth employ from that point forward.

I believe Rousseau's *Pygmalion* to be the most likely source for the statue's name in French literature based upon Law's and Reinhold's findings. It certainly would have been the myth's most well known adaptation at the time, and this could be one reason why the name has persisted until the present. How, then, does this act of naming an inanimate statue become significant in the eighteenth century in particular? In these adaptations, why did the statue begin to be named in a myth where previously only the sculptor and the God(s) had been named? Ovid does not name Pygmalion's statue, and the sculptor refers to it only as "the girl" or "ivory girl" in Mandelbaum's translation, and as "a body," his "ivory maiden," or his "sweetheart" in Martin's translation (v. 323, 349, 353). Although Pygmalion uses only endearing terms, he never names (or learns the name of) his statue. He, the goddess Venus, and eventually, Pygmalion and his wife's progeny, Paphos, all have names. Ovid's poem never broaches the question of whether or



not the statue has a name or should be named. The ivory statue, both before and after its metamorphosis, retains the same status as object in relation to the other character subjects in the poem. That is to say, everyone in Ovid's version represents an active player, except for the passive creation. This fact becomes essential to my own reading, and to eighteenth-century representations in particular, as the statue's subjectivity will occupy a central theme in the various iterations.

The transformation from passive statue to active person in the eighteenth-century adaptations of the myth occurs at the same point when the myth increases in popularity in the arts. Therefore, I posit these texts as a starting point for my focus on retellings of Ovid's creation myth. When an object acquires a name, it undergoes a change, much like the physical metamorphosis in Ovid's tale. During this change, a passive, lifeless object obtains life, agency, and becomes an active player in the story. In *Versions of Pygmalion*, J. Hillis Miller defines this transformation as prosopopoeia, or "the ascription to entities that are not really alive first of a name, then of a face, and finally, in a return to language, of a voice" (5). Ovid's ivory maiden never received a name. In fact, the original text offers no evidence that she obtained a voice either. The only actions that she performs after the metamorphosis are to open her eyes, look at her lover, and then produce a daughter nine months later: "blushing, she lifts up her timid eyes; she seeks the light; and even as she sees the sky, she sees her lover [...]. And when the moon shows not as crescent but orb for the ninth time, Pygmalion's wife gives birth to Paphos" (*AM* v. 367-371). The artistic creations in the Pygmalion adaptations are not really alive, but in giving them a name, the creator attempts to initiate the metamorphosis using his own creative power. Where Ovid's Pygmalion enlisted the help of Venus to change his "ivory maiden"

into a real wife, the creators in the modern versions try to make use of their own artistic or technological skills, either eschewing or not believing in the Gods' power, to enact the same change. This prosopopoeia occurs in each retelling of the myth, demonstrating that the trend to name the statue began with and continued forward from Rousseau's popular 1770 version.

### The Enlightenment, Gender, and Aesthetics

Prosopopoeia in the eighteenth-century *Pygmalion* adaptations highlights one vital element of the statue's new active presence. However, we cannot overlook the social currents making their way throughout Western Europe at the same time and their influence on the story's variations. While, in this chapter, I explore eighteenth-century versions of the Pygmalion myth, I do so as a prelude to the nineteenth century. Therefore, I will briefly outline only those definitions and elements within the Enlightenment that lend understanding of the two plays' historical grounding with respect to gender and the myth. In my readings, the shift in understanding creation, as well as the role of gender with respect to active versus passive behaviors, can be explained, at least in part, through the historical changes in man's understanding of his relationship to the world. In fact, the eighteenth-century man's understanding of the world hinged closely, at times, on how he viewed woman as different or other than himself.

One of the central questions of the Enlightenment was to define the human experience on a universal level. This created a challenge when pondering woman's role as different from man's in this new system of thought:

Without a universal, non-gendered standard of morals and rationality, it would not be possible to sustain the Enlightenment project of emancipation through

universal value systems based on reason and virtue, if one half of the human race were held to lack a capacity for either quality. In other words, the way the Enlightenment thought about gender contradicted, undermined, and challenged its claims to legitimacy as a universally applicable project. (Outram 86-87)

The contradictory nature of the movement itself projected confusion into aesthetic thought and creation. Although *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* do not overtly treat the question of gender differences, it is nonetheless possible, and almost necessary, to explore them today. While rife with complex interactions and problems,<sup>20</sup> woman's paradoxical position within eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought centers on a question of difference and attempting to define this difference logically. Of course, people had observed and prescribed differences between men and women well before the eighteenth-century, but the attempt to define and document them was one of the Enlightenment's unique ambitions.

This impossibility for both figures to exist reflects larger questions about female subjectivity and objectification, as well as the relationship between a creator (and the very existence of a Creator) and his work that were germane to eighteenth-century thought. I briefly refer here to Carole Pateman's analysis of woman's place in eighteenth-century society through the marriage contract to illustrate woman's subjectivity and objectification. She observes, as other critics have as well, that: "Men create patriarchal civil society and the new social order is structured into two spheres. The private sphere is separated from civil public life; the private sphere both is and is not part of civil society - and women both are and are not part of the civil order" (Pateman 181). Women were

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<sup>20</sup> Dorinda Outram describes each of the problems that occurred when one tried to justify Enlightenment values as universal, all while separating men and women into distinct categories. In her chapter, "Enlightenment thinking about gender," she takes up many scholars' attempts at explaining these difficult ruptures (*The Enlightenment* 2013).

relegated (mostly) to the private sphere, while men exerted their power in the public sphere. Pateman acknowledges this separation between the public and private social spheres, which translates more broadly to the active and passive roles in society. This means that: “Women are not incorporated as ‘individuals’ but as women, which, in the story of the original contract, means as natural subordinates (slaves are property). The original contract can be upheld, and men can receive acknowledgment of their patriarchal right, only if women’s subjection is secured in civil society” (Pateman 181). More broadly, “Increasingly, medical writings seemed to imply that women were virtually a separate species within the human race, characterized by their reproductive functions, and by a sexuality which was often denied or repressed. Paradoxically, however, women were often ascribed the role of custodians of morality and religion within the domestic setting” (Outram 85). Once again, we uncover a central paradox of Enlightenment thought, that of defining “man” and “woman” under a “universal” umbrella.

### Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of Ovid’s *Pygmalion*

Although the Pygmalion myth held a significant position in the eighteenth-century arts overall, two theatrical adaptations, *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*, remain overlooked in criticism. Scholars have attempted to catalogue the various artistic manifestations of Ovid’s myth, but none of these studies criticizes or even mentions *L’Amante statue* or *La Fausse statue*, to my knowledge. Beginning with Law’s 1932 article, “The Name Galatea in the Pygmalion Myth,” and including Reinhold’s 1971 study, those critics examining modern adaptations of the Pygmalion myth have omitted *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*, demonstrating, at the very least, their relative

obscurity within literary studies. Through my analysis of these two plays, I hope to accord them a place in the eighteenth-century Pygmalion myth corpus and to demonstrate their roles in the artist's exploration of his relationship to his work and the creation process.

My study will situate these plays as the starting point in a series of Pygmalion adaptations throughout the nineteenth century. As both Law and Reinhold show, the Pygmalion myth experienced particular prominence in the eighteenth century when compared to its near absence from French texts during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. I hope to show why an ancient myth would gain popularity in French literature at this particular time. Even though we can find examples of many other myths in the arts, this particular creation myth would be significant to artists of the eighteenth century and beyond.

As the plays appeared on stage during the latter half of the eighteenth century, the question of supernatural and rational explanations for mysterious phenomena was especially relevant. The arts reflected society's confusion during a time when philosophers and those who would later be considered scientists debated scientific thought against belief in a higher power. As Outram states, "the popular Enlightenment idea that it was not only possible but proper to deduce the existence and nature of the creator from that of creation," pervades these eighteenth-century works (102). Pygmalion's impetus for and realization of his artistic task sets him apart from other creators in that, as we recall, he conjures the ideal in his imagination in opposition to a negative influence (the Propoetides), rather than in emulation of a positive inspiration.

A look at the extant criticism provides further justification for this study. Law's article examines "fifteen classical dictionaries and handbooks on mythology written in various languages and published from 1581 to 1850 [...], a group of handbooks in English published from 1893 to 1928," as well as an unspecified survey of French literature (338). The study focuses on retellings of Ovid's poem in English and French literature, but does not provide much detail or analysis. Nearly forty years later, Reinhold observes: "A new impulse was given the myth in the first half of the eighteenth century, when it acquired an extraordinary vogue in France and Germany" (316). This upsurge in interest in the Ovidian myth, coupled with the fact that we are dealing with sculpture, the original myth's artistic medium, makes these eighteenth-century plays a natural starting point for this project's explorations. Reinhold goes on to name some of the most famous versions of Ovid's poem in opera, theater, and literature in France. For example, Jean-Philippe Rameau wrote a one-act operetta based on the myth that was performed at the Opéra de Paris in 1748.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this *opéra-ballet*, 1741 saw a comedy by Jean-Antoine Romagnesi (*Pygmalion*) as well as a *conte philosophique* by Boureau-Deslandes (*Pigmalion, ou la statue animée*). Referring to Boureau-Deslandes' 1741 story, J.L. Carr observes: "The bare bones of the tale are as in Ovid; but the eighteenth-century French author has adapted it to suit his own times. It is, in fact, a tale with a modern message, with an ideological and doctrinal basis – in other words, a *conte philosophique*" (239). Adapting the ancient myth to correspond to the current episteme was, thus, not uncommon. Even though both *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* contain a touch of this philosophical tone that Carr found in Boureau-Deslandes' work, I am not making a

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<sup>21</sup> J.L. Carr notes that Ballot de Sovot plagiarized an earlier opera-ballet written in 1700 by de la Motte for the libretto in Rameau's 1748 opera (241).

case for these comedic plays as *contes philosophiques*. Nonetheless, I propose adding them to the larger discussion already in progress to highlight this renewed interest in Ovid's ancient myth in eighteenth-century France.

Perhaps the most well known among the eighteenth-century adaptations of Ovid's myth is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *scène lyrique* aptly titled *Pygmalion* (1770); the play's first performance took place in Lyon, and reprised in Paris five years later.<sup>22</sup> Rousseau's work, contemporaneous with both texts in my study, was met with ardent praise, both for its musical compositions and story, and remained popular for many years after its initial appearance; it was later translated into several other European languages, attesting to the universal appeal of the story.<sup>23</sup> Despite its popularity and appeal, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* does not fit into my own work's focus. In this adaptation, the Pygmalion character sees not an "other" in his statue, but a reflection of himself and his own creative skill. However, because of its wide popularity and its clear use of the myth's characters and title, I will briefly examine it as a counterpoint to the two plays that I investigate to support my own claims. Rousseau uses the guise of the Pygmalion myth to recount a different story. His is a study, not in the life-creating Pygmalion effect, but rather in narcissism and life-transference. Therefore, rather than viewing the statue as external object, he absorbs its image and beautiful qualities into his own subjectivity.

The one-act melodrama has just two characters: Pygmalion and his statue, here given the name Galathée. Venus and the Gods appear only through apostrophe, just as they do in *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*. The dissimilarity rests in the way in

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<sup>22</sup> First published in 1771 in Geneva, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* went on stage over 150 times before the end of the eighteenth century alone, beginning with an initial undated performance in Paris (the next listed performance is June 1770).

<sup>23</sup> Reinhold, of course, takes notice of Rousseau's theatrical version of the myth in his article as well (317).

which Rousseau's artist makes his pleas. He invokes the Gods so that he can admonish them, not to seek their aid; he questions their powers rather than lauding them. Just as fervently, he gives homage to his statue, proclaiming, "O Galathée! recevez mon hommage. [...] Vénus même est moins belle que vous" (Rousseau 300). Pygmalion, therefore, recognizes the Goddess of beauty, but insists that, through his own skill, he has created something to surpass that otherworldly ideal. The artist believes himself able to transmit life through his own chisel and imbue it in his masterpiece. This detail becomes essential later because it stands in stark contrast to the two plays that I will examine in this chapter; Rousseau provides his artist with the ultimate power of creation (as opposed to giving it to a supernatural power), while the artists in Desgagniers's and Laurès's plays never assume this same gift, confusing the power's origin instead.

In Rousseau's play, Pygmalion remains extremely self-reflective about his own skill as an artist and what it means to recognize such talent and beauty. In his impotent torment, the sculptor attempts to make sense of his inner desire to give his statue life. He speaks out loud to himself in order to comprehend his beautiful statue, but he invokes the Gods as well; in his frustration, he pleads: "Dieux puissant, dieux bienfaisants, dieux du peuple, qui connûtes les passions des hommes, ah ! vous avez tant fait de prodiges pour de moindres causes ! voyez cet objet, voyez mon cœur, soyez justes, et méritez vos autels" (303). Pygmalion can feel his own heart on fire and see his cold, stone statue in opposition; he asks the Gods to recognize this error and to free him from his "tourments, vœux, désirs, rage, impuissance, amour terrible, amour funeste..." (303). Then, further, he questions Venus's power to rid him of this unfair situation in which his Galathée remains inanimate: "ah ! où est ton équilibre ? où est ta force expansive ? où est la loi de



la nature dans le sentiment que j'éprouve ? où est ta chaleur vivifiante dans l'inanité de mes vains désirs ?" (304). Further solidifying his disdain for the supernatural, the artist addresses Venus, and even his mythological namesake, using the informal "tu" form, while he reserves the formal "vous" form for the statue, Galathée. Thus, according to this Pygmalion, his statue creation, not the mythic powers, possesses the greatest importance and reverence.

As in Ovid's version, Rousseau's Pygmalion experiences an instance of self-doubt and fear as he witnesses his statue both before and after the life-giving transfer. Although he invokes the Gods, their power does not animate the statue. Pygmalion admits, and even brags, that he is the beautiful Galathée's creator: "je ne puis me lasser d'admirer mon ouvrage; je m'enivre d'amour-propre; je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait... Non, jamais rien de si beau ne parut dans la nature; j'ai passé l'ouvrage des dieux..." (300). He feels love, indeed, but not toward Galathée; his love points inward, focused entirely on himself. This he clearly demonstrates through his use of the subject "je" and direct object "me" in the preceding quotation. Potts explains: "What so compels him about the idea of the sculpture coming alive is not, as is usually supposed, that he will be faced by some adored other, but that he will discover in it an emanation of his own self" (38). This usual supposition lingers, of course, due to Ovid's version of the myth. Because Rousseau's Pygmalion was able to achieve such a magnificent creation that surpasses nature, he falls in love with himself (amour-propre) in this adaptation, quite clearly evoking the Narcissus myth.

Contrary to Ovid's Pygmalion character, Rousseau's protagonist has already completed his sculpture when the play begins. Therefore, he focuses not on creating the

ideal statue, or bringing it to life so that he may have a wife, but on admiring his own handiwork and grappling with how he might improve upon it or better praise it/himself. However illogically, the artist convinces himself that he is not crazy for loving the statue as much as he does and concludes: “Oui, ma seule folie est de discerner la beauté, mon seul crime est d’y être sensible. Il n’y a rien là dont je doive rougir” (302). The artist justifies his self-proclaimed “insanity” by explaining that being sensitive to beauty is no reason to be ashamed. To Venus, he insists: “donne-lui la moitié de la mienne [ma vie], donne-lui tout, s’il le faut, il me suffira de vivre en elle” (304). The creator would willingly give up his life if it meant bringing life and a soul to his perfect creation. Thus, the divine intervenes in this tale only as a mediator (and an underappreciated one, at that) to make the transfer of life and to form a bond between the creator and his alter ego-statue come to life.

After this point, Pygmalion’s speech changes and he now speaks of “nous” in reference to his fusion with Galathée. Contrary to the character fusion that I will show in *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*, this connection between the two characters rests explicit and simple. Once given life, this statue also has a voice, unlike Ovid’s statue, which never speaks. She recognizes herself as “Moi,” while the block of marble “ce n’est plus moi,” and finally the sculptor himself as “encore moi” (306-307). So, the perfect sculpture that surpassed even the goddess of love’s beauty imposes her subjectivity in relation to the objectified cold stone as well as to her living creator; Pygmalion finally acquiesces: “c’est toi, c’est toi seule: je t’ai donné tout mon être: je ne vivrai plus que par toi” (307). From beginning to end, Rousseau’s theatrical adaptation of Ovid’s creation myth is in fact, “nothing if not narcissistic” (Potts 38). The statue comes to life only

because another life, Pygmalion's, ceases to exist in the same way. The talented sculptor fell victim to his narcissism and found that he could not retain his immense skill AND appreciate it in a living embodiment.

I hope to add *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* to the discussion of the Pygmalion myth in French literature and, in so doing, to explore a new path in the ancient myth's representation and adaptation. In what follows, I turn to the two plays that form my study's focus. Briefly beginning with a short summary of each play, I will then trace the relationships among the characters in reference to their ancient counterparts (elaborated in chapter one). My analysis takes into account the inherent differences in a play performed before an audience and a written text. While the play's performative nature informs my arguments, I rely on the plays as published written texts for two principle reasons. First and most obvious, it is not possible today to witness a performance of the play as no living record exists. However, general knowledge in the theatrical arts allows us to make certain assumptions with regard to the audiences. In proximity to the stage, they would be able to see the differences between artificial statue props and real actors. This fact reveals that they were "in on" the farce of each story, because they could see that present statues were not statues at all, but mere representations of statues by actors portraying them. Where some characters in the plays question the real versus fictive nature of the statues before them, the audience experiences the certainty that they are false. Thus, the audience witnessing each performance understands the plays as farcical comedies rather than confusing metamorphoses. Secondly, each play was published several years subsequent to its only performance, a fact that likely suggests that a readership existed at the time, and points to

a recognition of the text as its own entity, separate from the earlier performance.<sup>24</sup> Where the audiences witnessed movement, tone, intonation, and facial expressions in the *presence* of the actors, the reader experiences the actions in his or her imagination in the mind, in their *absence*. Thus we must address the treatments of the statues and the characters as they are portrayed textually, rather than performed and experienced aurally and visually.

### *L'Amante Statue, ou le Nouveau Pigmalion*

B. Desgagniers wrote *L'Amante statue, ou le nouveau Pigmalion*, a comedy interspersed with ariettas; according to the text and historical records, actors performed the play only once in 1774 at the Théâtre de Lyon. In this adaptation, the ultimate ruse ensues when Elise, the female protagonist, steps in to replace a statue, fooling the male protagonist, Eraste, into believing that she is the marble figure. The pastoral love story takes place at the Eraste's country house where he decides to spend most of his time pining away after his love interest, the lovely Elise. Crispin, Eraste's valet, confirms his reclusive behavior: "Toujours renfermé dans son cabinet; y passant les jours et les nuits...à s'entretenir...avec des Sylphes sans doute...je ne sais quels charmes il peut trouver..." (10). He spends his days and nights all alone in a closed room talking to Sylphides, according to Crispin. The supernatural creatures traditionally represent beauty and, etymologically, a quest for *le génie*. The scene implies, then, that Eraste engages in some kind of solitary creative project that he keeps secret from even those closest to him.

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<sup>24</sup> *L'Amante statue*, published on an unknown date in 1774, was only performed in Lyon on August 9, 1774. *La Fausse statue*'s only performance in 1753 predates the published date of 1771. I consulted both published plays at the Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris in June 2009.

Further, his work could attempt to reach a genius, or ideal, level of understanding. From the start, the reader recognizes aspects of Ovid's Pygmalion myth.

Although the title and textual references to Ovid's story clearly point to its influence, *L'Amante statue* further solidifies this link through the inclusion of the creator's counterpart – his artistic creation. In this play, we have Elise, a young widow who directs her attention toward another man, Floricourt. Although she esteems Eraste and considers him a friend, Elise regrets the impossibility of a romantic relationship since her marriage to Floricourt has been pre-determined. In order to assuage Eraste, his friends try to interest him in another woman (Arténice), while encouraging Elise to leave him alone: “Laissons un peu notre Philosophe avec Arténice” (15). Arténice, for her part, believes that Eraste directs his musings on love and sentiment toward her and that he just needs some coaxing to admit his feelings. She takes him aside and first says to herself, “Voilà ce qui s'appelle un homme réservé!...Il faut aider les gens timides...” then, pressing him quite explicitly, “Ah ça! Entendons-nous: comment voulez-vous m'aimer? Comment voulez-vous que je vous aime?” (17). Her direct questioning takes Eraste by surprise because he had never thought of Arténice in a romantic way and was not expecting this confrontation. Arténice, on the other hand, feels affronted, thinking that Eraste was leading her on with all of his sentimental proclamations. After she departs angrily, Eraste admits to himself, “La folle!...oui, j'aime...mais, c'est Elise” (18). He thinks her crazy for believing that his feelings were directed toward her rather than Elise, but Eraste himself failed to be explicit. This exchange depicts confusion's first meaning introduced in this chapter, that of misunderstanding or misreading. Eraste also adds to the confusion among the characters by not voicing his true feelings to anyone. He never tells

Arténice or Elise that he loves Elise, allowing both of them believe an untruth. This comedic confusion prefigures the more significant confusion, that of the artist and his creation.

Desgagniers' adaptation marks a departure from Ovid's *Pygmalion* in that, again, no actual metamorphosis from statue to living woman transpires. In this play, the main characters become confused as to who loves whom. Further, the original three characters (creator, creation, mythical figure) in Ovid's version become (con)fused, as I will now show. Multiple (more than three) characters in *L'Amante statue* play the roles that Pygmalion (creator), Venus (intervention), and the statue (creation) played in the original myth. The statue creation in Ovid's version acts as the creator's desired object and receives the breath of life from a divine intervention (Venus) to animate; both the goddess and the artist act upon the statue. When, in *L'Amante statue*, Elise stands in for her statue likeness, she breaks the connection stemming from the divine intervention meant to give the statue life. Likewise, the link between creator and creation splits when another figure - here, Elise - enters the original tripartite relationship. The confusion inherent in this disjunction denotes a power transfer, attributing agency to the statue character while withdrawing it from a supernatural entity. When the mythical character loses a bit of power, that power transfers to another, rather than disappear. These power shifts underline the tenuous relationships that man had with the aesthetic and real world during the eighteenth-century.

When the artist or creator views his real desired woman, he simultaneously imagines the ideal figure that she could become. Thus, when he stands before the real model (that is, when Elise takes the statue's place without Eraste's knowledge of the

switch), the perfect or ideal form, the now-missing statue, fuses with it in his imagination. Conversely, in private, when the creator viewed his ideal statue figure, the real woman was physically elsewhere as well as absent from the viewer's mind. Expanding this idea further, in the artistic work's (an artificial copy of the ideal fused with the real woman's features) presence, reality necessarily assumes absence. The work for the artist, therefore, stands in as an object to represent the ideal-real woman fusion. Drawing upon the artist's initial confusion, I will show how Desgagniers' play portrays a departure from Ovid's myth.

Desgagniers explicitly employs the Ovidian myth through his title choice and statue theme; however, he clearly marks his deviation from the original through several means. Most notably, the title's second part, "*nouveau Pygmalion*" points to his simultaneous reliance on and divergence from his source. He presents not just another Pygmalion, but a NEW one, claiming that he has a novel take on the ancient myth; Desgagniers has found something in the story that heretofore remained hidden in past adaptations. Offering a portent of his artistic discovery, the playwright chooses to include the statue in the title and goes even further to emphasize its significance by placing it first in order: *L'Amante statue, ou le nouveau Pygmalion*. Whereas Ovid's (and, we will recall, Rousseau's) title focuses uniquely on the artist or creator (*Pygmalion*), Desgagniers' decision to highlight the statue as a titular character serves as a primary step in granting agency to the sculpted artwork. Furthermore, the title acts as a catalyst for further confusion and interweaving, as the conjunction *ou* suggests a parallel between the statue and the artist. While the title could lead the reader to focus on the loving statue, or that the play introduces a new and different Pygmalion, it could also suggest that the statue *is*

the new Pygmalion--a reading that combines themes present throughout the play: fusion and confusion between creator and creation. Use of the conjunction *and* instead would clearly distinguish two characters - the loving statue and the new Pygmalion - and the confusion would disappear. In other versions of the creation myth, only the artist wields any power to enact and interact with the creation. Here, the statue and the creator seem to rest on equal footing, denoting a compelling revisioning of the formerly passive statue figure.

During the play, the curious servants attempt to uncover the truth about Eraste's feelings toward Elise. In Scene XI, Finette tells Elise that "son valet m'a dit qu'il passoit les nuits entières dans son cabinet; qu'il sembloit vous adresser la parole...n'y auroit-il point quelque chose là-dessous?" (24). This statement reaffirms Crispin's from Scene I, when he shares with Finette the news that his master spends his time alone, "renfermé dans son cabinet" (10). Finette changes the phrasing, however, and implies that Eraste speaks, not to himself or the Sylphides, but to Elise. Since Elise is obviously not in the room with Eraste at these times, the characters know that Eraste keeps a secret that they wish to uncover; they question whether there isn't something "underneath."

Indeed, something does lie hidden underneath Crispin's observations, relayed by Finette, but the curious Elise and Finette must sneak into Eraste's *cabinet* with Crispin's help in order to find out what the former withholds. Elise and the others' initiative entering Eraste's *cabinet* introduces issues of secrecy and gender into the play. Socially and historically, not only does Eraste's *cabinet* denote a private place reserved for him alone, but it represents a gendered space as well, since the room was traditionally reserved for men only. Therein, he keeps his personal affairs, including those that he



would like to keep secret. Linguistically, the author brings the gender issue to the fore in this scene. First, Finette decides to use her romantic influence over Crispin to their advantage in concocting a plan: “Tenez,” she says to Elise, “Crispin m’aime; il pourra nous instruire. le voici qui me cherche: interrogeons-le un peu” (24). Her reasoning here suggests that his love for Finette must, in turn, dictate a favorable response to her requests; they assume that, as a man, he should be able to inform them about all things masculine. Next, after Finette and, with encouragement, Elise (her statement to Finette, “tu es folle,” indicates that she doesn’t have much confidence in the plan’s success) have decided to go to Crispin for help in executing their plan, the former addresses the male servant: “ne pourroit [sic]-tu nous introduire dans le cabinet de ton maître?” (25). The two women hope that he will be able to “introduce” them into the secret room, suggesting a desire to initiate them to man’s secret knowledge. This desire, however, does not only take a cerebral form; romantic and sexual desire, a trait that the myth previously attributed only to the male creator (in both Ovid’s and Desgagniers’ versions), perturbs the original three roles through its fusion to the additional female figures (Elise and Finette) in the present adaptation. For Elise, romantic curiosity enhances her personality, while sexual power fuels Finette’s.

The curious female characters, imbued with new power, concoct the plan and Finette insists on its importance: “Il n’y rien de si dangereux aux filles que de ne pas satisfaire leur curiosité.... moi, j’en créverois d’abord....” (25).<sup>25</sup> Finally, the male character, literally and figuratively, holds the key to solving Eraste’s mystery: “je connois une porte condamnée....en deux coups, la porte est en dedans” (25). The author insists on

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<sup>25</sup> Finette and Elise’s dangerous curiosity refers to Pandora’s myth, in which this woman opens up a container that releases all of the world’s evils.

the difference between male and female power and access in this scene to further underline the overarching significance of agency in *L'Amante statue*. This interaction demonstrates both a moment of fusion and of transfer, when the female characters obtain the powerful traits to uncover a secret. In this scene, Crispin remains the individual who can execute the plan, but he would presumably have stayed in the dark about his master's private matters if Finette had not approached him.

Furthermore, it announces the greater questions about the very idea of curiosity during the Enlightenment. In earlier eras, “curiosity had a bad name, both as a form of lust and as the impulse which had resulted in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise,” yet “Even by 1762, Rousseau was still having to argue [...] that curiosity was a virtue which could bring benefits by enhancing knowledge” (Outram 103). Therefore, curiosity and unveiling the secret are the ultimate dangers in this Pygmalion adaptation, even though they symbolize the greater quest for knowledge. When women wield this dangerous curiosity, it emblemizes “the much larger problem of the relation between women and the public sphere in the eighteenth century” as Lynn Hunt observes in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* 1992 (90). The threat to the male population is characterized by female curiosity, which signifies a thirst for knowledge (found in the masculine realm).

When Elise and her servants, Finette and Crispin, secretly enter Eraste's *cabinet* they betray his trust, and they also expose his secret work of art. This topos of hiding the ideal work from others, recalling the original sculptor king's behavior, will reappear throughout each of the works in this study. Until this point in the play (Scene XII), each character (excluding Eraste), the spectator, and the reader have been ignorant as to the

meaning of the play's title, since the author hasn't mentioned a statue yet. In this way, the author builds suspense, even though the spectator and the reader have a certain expectation based on their general familiarity with the Pygmalion myth. This narrative juncture, built upon confusion, marks the major departure from Ovid's myth in *L'Amante statue*, which supports my earlier assertion that the statue, rather than the creator, comes to the fore and asserts agency. Before the first glimpse of the secret statue, everything remains an unanswered question; the characters are confused as to who loves whom. What was once private becomes public and Eraste's secret is revealed. After the statue appears in the narrative, the knot begins to unravel.

As the three characters continue their intrusion, the stage notes indicate that they all leave the stage: "ils sortent" leaving behind, as we recall from the opening notes, the initial set design depicting Eraste's country home (26). At this moment, the plot and dialogue structure gives way to a change of scenery: "La toile de fond se lève: le théâtre change, et représente le cabinet d'Eraste. Dans le fond on voit une alcove, fermée par un rideau de soie: à droite est un secrétaire couvert de papier et de livres" (26). Although the scenery drastically changes and all characters exit the stage, the play's dialogue continues in the same scene, Scene XII. Bringing both the audience and the reader along during the pivotal moment when the statue enters the story, the playwright doesn't hide anything behind the scenes, but leaves the metamorphosis completely visible. The scene's continuation after the set changes holds the reader's attention, as he perceives no visual break in the written text. The dialogue resumes when Crispin announces, "Nous y voilà." where "we" represents the three characters on stage who, in turn, function as a microcosm of the greater audience and readership (26). Everyone, both fictional

characters and real readers/viewers, learns the secret at the same moment. This key moment alludes to cultural and intellectual discovery in eighteenth-century France: “Exploration in order to gain new knowledge was a characteristic of the Enlightenment,” confirms Outram (54). Thus, when Crispin, Finette, and Elise gain knowledge in the play, we equate this revelation to the broader Enlightenment episteme.

Upon entering the room through a hidden door, the three see only books and papers lying about. Bringing attention to Eraste’s library would again seem to indicate a certain intelligence level as well as at a least cursory interest in seeking knowledge in addition to his other pursuits. However, when read in a comedic context, these objects take on an ironic meaning. While the scene presents Eraste as a knowledgeable man, the ensuing events reveal his propensity for delusion. When Finette suggests to Crispin on the side that they pull back a curtain “pour savoir ce qu’il cache,” they discover a statue of a woman resembling Elise standing on a pedestal (26). At this moment, two supplemental characters in this iteration (to the original three in Ovid’s myth) - Finette and Crispin - enter the myth as a barrier or an intermediary between the real woman and the statue in her image. The stage notes read as follows: “Finette & Crispin ouvrent le rideau, qui laisse voir un temple d’architecture corinthienne. Au milieu est un piédestal, sur lequel est une statue ressemblante à Elise, & habillée comme elle” (26). We note the references to ancient Greece in this description that strengthen the play’s link to Venus, the goddess of love, and ancient mythology in general. The Corinthian temple housing a beautiful statue on a pedestal recalls the ancient architectural structure that housed statues for worship. Therefore, the parallel between ancient Greek worship and Eraste’s solitary visits to his *cabinet* strengthens the connection to the Pygmalion image.

The stage notes halfway through this scene insist upon the discovery theme, so prevalent during the period in question, in several ways. Finette, Crispin, and Elise enter the *cabinet* through “une porte condamnée,” and discover unknown items, as explorers might enter an ancient site filled with curious artifacts (25). The references to a Corinthian temple in the scene only underline this impression, which, again, causes the reader to recall the ancient Pygmalion myth as well as eighteenth-century explorations in Greece. Further, the three literally *discover*, or uncover, (they “ouvrent le rideau”) the statue hidden behind a curtain (26). Without the physical barrier between them, the statue ceases to be a secret. The characters and spectators now perceive its physical form, even though its meaning for Eraste remains a mystery. Perhaps most significantly, the spectators watching the performance, as well as the reader, participate in the same exposure at the same time as the play’s characters do. However, this new information only leads to more queries, since the characters (as well as the greater “we”) are not sure about the statue’s role vis-à-vis the original Pygmalion myth.

*L’Amante statue* reorganizes character traits in reference to the Ovidian myth; the admirer here has a statue that physically represents his ideal, but a near-ideal living version also exists. Just like Ovid’s sculptor king, Eraste has adorned his statue with clothing befitting the real woman: “le même habillement” (27). In a mythical context, we could interpret the clothing as a type of offering (similar to a type given in worship). In conjunction with my discovery reading, it also acts as an additional layer of artifice meant to hide the female form underneath it. (The statue does not represent a nude woman.) All three experience shock to see that the statue exactly doubles Elise. The reader assumes that Eraste keeps his Elise sculpture in his private space so that only he

can enjoy viewing it. Until this point in the play, the reader can intuit that the only people who have seen the statue are Eraste and the (unknown) sculptor.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, its purpose seems to be to worship the figure in secret, much like the ancient Greeks revered idols housed in stone temples. On yet another level, the secrecy that surrounds Eraste and his statue could indicate that he is able to enjoy a sexual relationship with it.<sup>27</sup>

Viewing the heretofore hidden statue, Finette and Crispin begin speaking to the real Elise quickly and in unison, “Sur ce piédestal, /En propre original, /C’est vous, c’est vous-même” (26). Then, the two speak alternately, uttering short phrases describing the statue’s physical features:

FINETTE: Voilà vos yeux.  
CRISPIN: Votre bouche charmante.  
FINETTE: Le port majestueux.  
CRISPIN: Et la taille élégante.  
FINETTE: Le même habillement.  
CRISPIN: Et la même coëffure. (27)

When Finette and Crispin pronounce these staccato verses alternately to describe the work, they present the statue’s body as a fragmented composite to the reader; they observe each distinct part as mirroring Elise’s form. We recall the same fragmented depiction in Ovid’s portrayal of Pygmalion’s statue as separate ivory pieces joined together. Here, the author provides a portrait of the statue pre-metamorphosis, before the disjointed parts become a full, living subject. Lessing elaborates this dilemma stemming from the written text attempting to holistically represent the physical statue:

It is an intrusion of the poet [writer] into the domain of the painter [or sculptor] and a squandering of much imagination to no purpose when, in order to give the

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<sup>26</sup> The text never reveals sculptor’s existence or identity. We can only speculate that Eraste created it, even though this information is not explicit.

<sup>27</sup> Sheriff notes this possibility in other sculptural works of the period: “Also widespread was the association of enthusiasm with sexual performance, which has a particular bearing on the Pygmalion story when the sculptor is conceived as ‘fathering’ his statue” (176).

reader an idea of the whole, the poet enumerates one by one several parts of things which I must necessarily survey at one glance in nature if they are to give the effect of a whole. (91)

Not only do Crispin and Finette view the statue form as a composite of smaller pieces of one whole woman, but the reader experiences the same disjunction in their stilted speech. Moreover, Elise is almost effaced in favor of the replication in this part of the scene in an action mirroring the titular (con)fusion of lover (*L'Amante*) and statue (*statue*). This scene adds to the examples in which the statue obtains an active, albeit fragmented, role in the story. I present this as one more element of proof in my argument that the eighteenth-century represents a fundamental shift in Pygmalion myth adaptations.

Desgagniers develops this assemblage of physical traits in the discovery scene, again pointing to it as a pivotal moment in the play. The servants use the possessive adjective “*vos*” (your) when their gaze falls upon the statue’s features. Rather than observing and admiring “*sa*” (its or her) mouth, eyes, etc., they see Elise’s features supplanted on the statue figure and refer to it with the second person possessive adjective instead. Elise, now in the background, can only react with shock at this likeness: “O ciel! Ma surprise est extrême,” then further, “Quelle étrange aventure! Je ne peux revenir de mon étonnement” (27). She seems touched, yet also surprised and bewildered, by what she perceives as Eraste’s admiring (if not idolizing) gesture, but she maintains that the statue simply resembles her and does not actually replace her, asking: “Comment aura-t-il pu avoir cette ressemblance?” (27). Plato’s conception of ideal beauty versus natural or real beauty, as presented in *The Republic*, illuminates the distinction between a mimetic resemblance and an ideal replacement. As mentioned in my introduction, he states:

There are many beautiful things and many good. And again there is a true beauty, a true good; and all other things to which the term *many* has been applied, are

now brought under a single idea, and, assuming this unity, we speak of it in every case as *that which really is*. (507b)

Through the creative process, the sculptor finds inspiration from the idea of absolute beauty (the ideal) in his imagination. Echoing Plato's description, he has not witnessed this idea in reality, rendering the task extremely difficult. He attempts to recreate it from his imagination, but the effect falls short, instead producing a mere resemblance of the ideal form fused with his knowledge of Elise's real beauty. Mimetic sculpture, on the other hand, seeks to copy what is real and already present in nature, not what exists only in the ideal realm of the Platonic Forms. A successful replacement of a natural figure by an artificial figure could merely represent the earthly form of beauty (a natural, not ideal, quality). In short, a *resemblance* in a work of art would most closely correspond to an artist's attempt to re-create the ideal Beauty, whereas a *replica* sculpture would correspond to a sculptor's accurate rendering of a real, observable beauty. The former stems from the artist's imagination, hidden from anyone else, while the latter exists in the real world for anyone to view. Eraste attempted to have in his statue what only he knew of his ideal Elise; that is, his secret sculpture fused his idea of the perfect Elise (how he wished her to be) and the real Elise (how she acted in reality, i.e. not romantically interested).

Elise simply thinks that the statue strongly resembles her physical features, while the two servants claim that no difference exists between the two. Even if comical and untrue, these observers do not make a distinction between the real woman and the factitious rendering, essentially conflating the two figures by reassigning physical traits. Though the statue and the real Elise stand side-by-side, Finette and Crispin refer to the two entities as if they were one; they view Elise, the woman, and her image as if reflected



back at her in a mirror (*vos yeux, votre bouche*, etc.). The primarily affected person in this situation, Elise, is reluctant to make this same observation, and at this point, recognizes herself as an autonomous subject and the statue as a separate non-living object. This phenomenon, of course, has no equivalent in the Ovidian myth, since the sculpture and the real woman exist sequentially, rather than simultaneously.

As the three characters stand in awe before the statue, they become worried that Eraste will find them in his study and they begin to concoct a plan to escape detection. Finette suggests that Elise take the statue's place on its pedestal, "Si ma maîtresse prenoit la place de la statue?" while she and Crispin hide (28). They propose to fool the owner/creator by replacing his artifice with the real woman, a plan that seems utterly nonsensical since they do not address the issue of what to do with the statue that remains. When Elise ascends the pedestal, she demonstrates what Roberta Panzanelli describes as the sculpture's ultimate power over the admirer: "By 'enlivening' the object as well as the viewer...sculptures *draw us to them*, make themselves accessible to our imaginations and *participate* in the fantasies we form about them" (134). In this pivotal scene, Elise acts out this "enlivening" and inserts herself in Eraste's fantasy of her. Paradoxically, as she assumes this "powerful" position, she simultaneously relinquishes her autonomy. As Hunt notes, "the 'ignorance of women' had an infinite advantage [...] because it contributed to subordination, to keeping women at home. Instructing them would overturn the sexual order" (90). In this transformation scene in Eraste's cabinet, Desgagniers quickly extinguishes any danger related to feminine agency by placing Elise back in a non-threatening position as object.

This plan recalls the artistic competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius in ancient Greece. Where Zeuxis fooled the birds with his hyper-realistic representation of grapes on his canvas and Parrhasius in turn fooled Zeuxis into attempting to pull back a curtain painted on his own canvas, the actors in *L'Amante statue* reverse the mimetic exercise. Rather than fooling the artist with an artistic representation, they convince Eraste of the opposite, that the real woman is the statue copy. This ruse represents an essential moment in Desgagniers' departure from Ovid in that it initiates the transference of agency from Elise to the statue, thereby fusing the two.

Two main issues are at stake: who, in Eraste's eyes, is the object?; and does he believe he is looking at the ideal woman, thereby solidifying his work as transcendent art, or a copy of the real Elise, placing the sculpture firmly on the side of mimetic skill? When Eraste enters the room, he approaches the would-be sculpted image of the woman that he secretly loves. He refers to the Elise on the pedestal as an "objet enchanteur" and an "image" in his love-imbued soliloquy (30). Eraste appears to have fallen in love with his own enchanting creation, perhaps with the help of a supernatural force. He directs all of his emotions to what he believes to be an object, just as he did alone in his *cabinet* as we learned in Scene I. Something different occurs when Eraste, the de facto creator, unknowingly perceives his real love instead of his statue. In so doing, he now objectifies Elise, referring to her as simply an image, rather than a living woman, or as an ideal artwork.

Eraste visualizes the real/desired woman as being different or other from the statue copy, as expressed during his earlier conversation with Arténice: he imagines, "Ce qui ne se trouve point, et ce qu'on ne trouvera peut-être jamais," or in other words, the

ideal (17). Throughout the entire play he desires Elise, whereas the characters, spectator, and reader remain, for much of this time, ignorant that he also possesses a statue copy in her image. When they believe that he speaks to himself in his *cabinet*, he actually longs for the statue copy to animate and become real. Even so, when Elise takes the statue's place he conflates the two figures as he unknowingly regards the real woman. The Pygmalionesque creator perceives differently from the outside spectator, or simply a non-creative admirer. He visualizes the un-real, what exists in his imagination yearning to be in reality, and therefore cannot successfully perceive the real woman before him. In turn, he fixates upon the statue; Sheriff describes this fixation in these terms: "As the motivating force for making art and the passion aroused in its beholding, enthusiasm held an intermediary position in eighteenth-century theory, linking together the creative process and the aesthetic experience" (159). In both Pygmalion's and Eraste's cases, the statue copy becomes more important than the idea of the real woman. Art represents the unachievable, unreachable ideal for which he strives in his imagination, (for which all men strive, according to Plato) and therefore imposes itself on the real Elise.

An earlier episode in the play reveals the near impossibility for Eraste to accept the ideal statue and the real woman's simultaneous existence. In an exchange with Elise, Eraste admits his disappointment with their imperfect relationship and the fact that Elise sees him as just a friend. Eraste becomes agitated and exclaims: "Ah! Madame, c'en est trop; dans la réalité vous êtes ce que bon vous semble; permettez du moins qu'en idée vous soyez telle qu'il me plaît" (20). Eraste reveals that how he sees the real Elise and how he sees her in his mind's eye – ideally – distinctly oppose one another. In his mind, she possesses the ability to please him, but in real life she pleases only herself. Eraste has

the Elise that he wants in his thoughts and dreams, not the real woman who, by his assertions, acts how she wishes. In response, Elise concedes, “nous devrions cesser de nous voir...l’absence...” (20). She thinks that perhaps they need to stop seeing each other since she already has a potential husband in Floricourt. Thus, both parties remain, if not complicit in, then at the very least, aware that Elise’s form has been doubled. Only Eraste, however, goes so far as to create an artificial copy of his ideal love interest. The man in the story takes the initiative to create a copy of the woman; he asserts his own power in creating an object to represent his desired woman. Paradoxically, Elise’s reaction to the sculpted likeness, when she attempts to take its place, reduces the real woman to a sort of dummy character. “Unlike paintings, statues occupy the space of bodies, compete with bodies for that space, share the same light and atmosphere...” as Kenneth Gross asserts in *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (1992) (17). This scene in *L’Amante statue* brings a reversed spatial competition to light. Elise, as real human, competes with her statue likeness for the same attention that Eraste grants the statue, in both real and imagined states. Ultimately, however, she nullifies any agency that she could have possessed in her relationship with Eraste through this confusing replacement act. In essence, Elise confuses her role in the story by granting agency to the ideal statue, rather than to herself.

When Eraste faces the live version of Elise, since there are two versions of Elise that are so visibly similar, he remains uncertain as to which one he sees. This uncertainty reflects a societal preoccupation: “Eighteenth-century representations typically shaped two fantasies: one of making a work so lifelike, so apparently ‘sensible’ that it would be confused with the real, and one of possessing the ideal sexual object, a modest and

faithful Venus who mirrored her creator's possession" (Sheriff 185). For the artist, the statue became too much like the animate, real woman. He believes that his own wish somehow brought his creation to life, but he is the only dupe in the event.

This time viewing his statue (which is now the real Elise standing on the pedestal), however, he feels a new fiery emotion and pleads to "Divin amour," or divine love. In his prayer, he does not ask, but rather demands: "rends-moi l'original; ou bien, en ce moment, anime la copie" (30). This request revives Pygmalion's prayer to Venus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "O gods, if you indeed can grant all things, then let me have the wife I want," but the narrator further explains, "and here he did not dare to say 'my ivory girl' but said instead, 'one like my ivory girl'" (*AM* v. 347-349). Conversely, Eraste makes a more explicit and direct wish. Strikingly, he does not pray, exactly, to any god(s), but addresses the emotion of love; the text states "amour," or love, and not "Amour," or Cupid. Paradoxically, Eraste also uses the familiar "tu" form in his commands, placing this *supernatural* entity on a lower level than Ovid's Pygmalion did. Whereas Pygmalion simply wishes for a wife who resembles his ideal statue, Eraste wishes for either the original woman *or* an animated copy of the version that he created. He does not view one female entity as different from the other; to him, they appear, in fact, as sign and object represented; the signifier and the signified become interchangeable, denoting the conflation of creation and copy. Eraste experiences an amazing, and seemingly impossible, success through his own mimetic exercise; here, the artist was able to fool *himself* into believing that his mimetic representation of Elise was so perfect that it showed no difference from the real living woman. If he would be satisfied with either the statue or the real woman, then one must become obsolete after he

has made his choice. In this case, Eraste believes that he is viewing his statue representing the ideal Elise, and seems to find everything he needs therein. He conflates the two images, one real and the other artificial, thereby negating the uniqueness and personhood of the real Elise and infusing a new subjectivity with the statue, all the while, in reality, forgetting the statue entirely.

Although a real person can coexist alongside an artistic representation, whether a portrait, sculpture or, later, a photograph, in *L'Amante statue*, the line between what is real and artificial dissolves in the artist's psyche. Even though the other characters, as well as the spectators or readers, clearly comprehend the ruse, Eraste essentially fools himself, confusing his own desires, which leads to Elise's objectification. To Eraste's surprise, he witnesses his "statue" coming to life as Elise begins to move on the pedestal. As he watches, Eraste describes Elise's animation in a fragmented manner, echoing Finette and Crispin's description of the statue earlier in the same scene. Even though, as Lessing reminds us, the visual object can only be represented as a series of consecutive words in writing, Eraste's word choices in his description hint that a change has occurred. The fragmented structure appears through the use of ellipses in his descriptions, visually and aurally marking breaks between each observation. However, each single observation that Eraste makes differs from Finette and Crispin's in that he uses verbal actions, rather than nominal phrases. Eraste exclaims : "O ciel ! son sein palpite....son visage se colore....ses yeux s'animent....sa bouche semble prête à parler...." (30). Here, the lover observes each part of Elise's body performing an action: palpitating, coloring, animating, and getting ready to speak.

I assert that Desgagniers' linguistic choice to juxtapose the two observations through nominal and verbal emphasis also serves to (con)fuse the character and statue: in both situations, spectators reduce the character and statue to fragmented series. The nominal phrases highlight the statue's inert nature whereas the movement conveyed by the verbs solidifies the fusion between Elise and her likeness by reducing her to a compilation of fragmented parts that are extraordinary simply because they move. His observations of Elise's physical features seemingly coming to life are punctuated by ellipses, indicating a pause in his thoughts or even in his way of looking at the statue, further underlining the fragmented manner in which the female form is represented in the Pygmalion texts, beginning, as I showed in chapter one, with Ovid. Just like the servants' description upon entering the *cabinet*, he mentally conflates the real woman with the statue replica and describes both in the same terms, albeit in the opposite direction. We presume that the servants have hidden the statue so that only Elise remains visible when Eraste enters. While Eraste is able to convince himself that his statue came to life, he does so only in the statue's absence and in the real woman's presence. In other words, it does not seem plausible that he would interpret the situation the same way if Elise and the statue were standing side-by-side.

In *L'Amante statue*, Eraste represents the liminal questioning, yet believing figure in eighteenth-century society. He wishes that his statue could animate, then he actually believes that it does. He embodies the Enlightenment struggle between "science" and the supernatural, which I developed above. Contrary to Ovid's Pygmalion, Eraste does not pray to a supernatural power; as we recall, his familiar use of "tu" in addressing an outside power reveals that this particular belief has left his rational mind. However, he

does still accept that this incredible transformation took place, even though he cannot determine the cause. The comedy, of course, lies here; while Eraste believes in a supernatural event, the spectators, and later readers, know without a doubt that nothing out of the ordinary realm occurs.

In the play, Eraste splits and doubles Elise without her knowledge, yet with her implicit permission. She exists as a real person; yet she cannot control how Eraste or the others perceive her. Elise does not even protest when Finette suggests that she step on the pedestal and replace her statue copy. Rather than affirming her individuality by insisting that Eraste accept the reality of their situation, Elise willingly objectifies and then metamorphoses herself (albeit temporarily) into a statue and relinquishes her personhood to artifice. She quite literally takes the place of her own copy, at once justifying and nullifying its presence. Eraste's creation makes his desire for Elise visible and tangible; it represents an embodiment of his ideal and his passion. At the same time, however, his creative work begets a negative form, by privileging the artificial version when the real woman remains physically present; "The statue represents not just a way of making visible what is invisible, making present what is absent; it is as much a laboriously achieved negation," observes Gross (21-22). What Eraste could not put into words, either to himself or to the real Elise, he sculpted into a physical representation of his intangible emotions. In a way, Eraste hides his feelings within the statue of Elise and he can visit those feelings even when she is absent. When the artist first created the work, his love and admiration, then only imagined, were affirmed, if only in secret; a second recognition occurred when Elise ascended the pedestal. "The statue coming to life, whether in the hands of the sculptor or in the eyes of the beholder, signifies the release of the imprisoned



idea,” argues Leonard Barkan, in *Living Sculptures: Ovid, Michelangelo, and The Winter's Tale* (651). In Eraste's mind, his statue version of Elise contained his real feelings for her that he was unable to persuade her to accept. At the moment when Eraste believes that the statue transforms and comes to life, he and Elise discover their true feelings; this moment, as Barkan describes it, signifies their release from their emotional imprisonment into a reality where they could freely express and accept each other.

On the other hand, beholding Elise on the statue's pedestal, Eraste wishes that she would come to life and respond to his adoration. The irony in this scene consists in that she already is alive, but Eraste preferred her artificial incarnation to her veritable being. Perhaps because he was too frightened or nervous to admit his true feelings to Elise in person, Eraste grew accustomed to viewing the statue in private. This ironic scene demonstrates a moment in the play when neither reader nor spectator learns the answer about Eraste's actual feelings. Therefore, the reader is left to pose two questions: Could it be that the real Elise, now present in his private space, sparks a new desire for the real woman, instead of for the statue? Or does her willingness to be objectified and to occupy his idealized form elicit this change? The new emotions that Eraste experiences befit the change from artificial to real woman.

When he finally does realize that she has replaced the statue on the pedestal, as she pronounces “J'aime...” at his request, Eraste is overjoyed (31). He announces the end of his previous unhappiness and even rewards Finette and Crispin for having played a role in the ruse to fool him. This joyful proclamation stands in stark contrast to the earlier scene where, we will remember, Eraste admonishes Elise for not being the way he imagines her. Read in this context, the later scene and Eraste's emotional reaction

indicate a change--a metamorphosis--in Elise's character. She does not simply take the statue's place, she replaces it by abandoning herself for the idealized form that Eraste has created for her. In allowing herself to be objectified as a statue form, she shifts her agency to the statue and subsequently to the artist/creator. Not surprisingly, every action that Elise takes results in a loss of agency, either fulfilling one of Eraste's desires, or imbuing the statue with a new power.

In the end, both couples, Eraste and Elise, Finette and Crispin, rejoice in their love with the rest of the townsfolk. Desgagniers never reveals what happens to the actual statue – where it is kept after the marriage or if it still exists. By omitting any further mention of the statue after its removal from the pedestal, the text makes it clear that Eraste chooses the real woman permanently, thereby rendering the statue obsolete. The ideal creation, then, falls out of the original assemblage of characters, indicating a permanent fusion with the real woman. At the end, the reader experiences not total confusion, but resolution, much like Ovid's example.

*L'Amante statue* retells the Pygmalion myth in a way that privileges the artificial creation over the real woman, all the while confusing the two. The artist experiences an event wherein he cannot distinguish between the statue that he (presumably) created and the real woman after which it was modeled, thereby producing an image of the artist/creator who privileges his own powers of imagination and creation over reality. So perfect is the artificial copy that it becomes more important to the creator than the actual woman with whom he is secretly in love. Only when Elise finally pronounces "j'aime" at Eraste's request does he realize that she is real and that she does, finally, return his

affections. In the end, only one entity survives - the real woman - who has transformed in a way that incorporates the statue's traits.

### *La Fausse Statue*

The second play in this chapter, *La Fausse statue* (1771) by Antoine de Laurès, also remains a lesser-known comedy with only a single performance largely overlooked by scholars. In this iteration of the myth, no artist exists and the titular statue is not a statue at all. Aligning itself with the original Pygmalion myth, the story takes place in Greece, situating it in that distinctly “ideal” time and place: “La scène est en Grèce, dans un Bosquet des Jardins d’Idamas, où est une Statue de l’Amour” (Laurès viii). In addition to the geographical setting, statues populate the stage, offering a visual counterexample to the title’s “false statue.” It becomes difficult to assign nomenclature representing each character’s role in *La Fausse statue*, which I will show in the following analysis. Aglaé’s tutor, Idamas, has already chosen Phais as Aglaé’s husband, but both Idamas and Phais worry that Aglaé will not accept this choice. In an attempt to win over Aglaé, Timon’s young daughter, Phais decides to pretend to be a statue in the garden that his love interest likes to visit. Phais’s sister, Zélie, proposes to trick Aglaé into falling in love with Phais in order to ensure a successful romantic match. Presumably lacking actual artistic skill or communication with the gods, as Pygmalion had, the characters in this play instead turn to farce. Zélie muses, “nous verrons si elle [Aglaé] ne changera pas de langage et si elle échappera à l’artifice que j’ai préparé” (4). This statement about language and artifice posits two ideas that make this play integral to my study of the Pygmalion myth in the eighteenth century. First, I examine how this play confuses at the figurative level: I will

explore the characters' puzzlement in the story, as some prepare a ruse to trick the other, and we will witness how language in the play leads the reader to view the characters with uncertainty. Next, this adaptation forms a new, more complicated (con)fusion of the Pygmalion myth's triad of characters. Contrary to the Ovidian myth, in which "the active role of desiring subject is predictably given to the male creator, who is also endowed with the power to bring forth a living being," Laurès version omits the artist altogether, leaving the desiring and power traits attainable in the reorganization (Sheriff "Passionate Spectators" 51). Nevertheless, the playwright still highlights the power of artistic creation through the very ruse he sets up for his characters: in his theatrical world the characters presume that interaction with a piece of artwork could more easily evoke feelings of love than the living presence itself.

The first layer of artifice in the story is purely superficial and physical; a man poses as a statue in order to win a woman's affections. The second layer of artifice concerns written language, and most importantly, Aglaé's language in the play. Just as in *L'Amante statue*, the characters in *La Fausse statue* deceive and trick others in order to secure a pre-determined romantic bond between two characters. First, they use language in order to dissimulate, deceive, and hide information from each other. The characters' language choices in the play affect the audience's and reader's perception, just as much as their actions do. Secondly, Zélie's declaration referring to Aglaé's change in language or possible escape from the "artifice" that she has prepared offers a double reading of the event. "Artifice," like "confusion," inserts its two meanings in the story. First, the artifice denotes a clever trick. This "artifice" could simply refer to the ruse that Zélie has set up with her brother posing as a statue for Aglaé to admire in the garden and with which

eventually to fall in love. If we examine the word's origins, a second signification appears to enrich the plot. The word originated in old French from the Latin *artificium*, meaning art or craftsmanship; this Latin term combines forms of *ars* (art) with *facere* (to make or to do). In one way, therefore, we can view Zélie, the artifice's initiator, as a maker of art, or artist. Further, in the context of this play, "artifice" also signifies a new hybrid character, that of a real man fused with a statue. This hybrid figure echoes some of the problems found in *L'Amante statue* with Elise's double existence. Notably, in both plays, the other characters treat, look at, and speak to the statue figures and humans in ways that demonstrate their confusion with the entities' new identities.

By analyzing the vocabulary choices and language use when describing the male "statue," we can see a marked difference from the ways that female statues appear in Ovid's and Desgagniers' texts. Not only does *La Fausse statue* portray a gender reversal from the original myth and the *L'Amante statue* retelling, but the very content and structure reverse as well, producing a new amalgam of characters and general confusion in the story. To begin, the play's title announces the primary artifice: the fake statue. To call a statue, already a work of imitation or artifice, "fake" opens new avenues in adapting the Ovidian myth. What the title doesn't offer (namely, how a fake statue is different from a real statue) creates the same mysterious air that *L'Amante statue* communicated. The ensuing ruse reveals that a fake statue is actually a real man, reversing, on another level, the original Pygmalionesque metamorphosis from non-living ivory or marble figure to real woman. In the following analysis, I will show how *La Fausse statue* adapts Ovid's myth through a new set of characters.

Posing as a statue of Endymion, Phais monitors Aglaé as she admires all of the statues in the garden, especially this “new” one that he portrays. With the introduction of a new mythical character, Endymion, in the story, we must pause to investigate its significance. Alexandra Wettlaufer describes how this myth unfolds, in her chapter on Girodet’s *Endymion*, in *Pen vs. Paintbrush*:

Traditionally, the myth of Endymion recounted the passion of Diana, goddess of the moon, for the beautiful youth Endymion, a shepherd she happened upon as he slept alongside his flock on Mount Latmus. The goddess was so infatuated with the slumbering mortal that she asked Jupiter to let him sleep forever, in some versions so that he might remain eternally young and desirable, in others, so that he would be ever available for her amorous nocturnal visits. (43)

Hence, the choice to portray the male character as Endymion is telling, as in the myth the desire is to render the *real* man immobile, as a statue, in order to preserve his unique beauty for only one admirer. The myth puts the male character in a passive position, contrary to Ovid’s active Pygmalion, while the female character, Diana, now plays an active, desiring role. Whereas Eraste described Elise as a fragmented composite of movements as she posed on the pedestal in *L’Amante statue*, Aglaé regards the beautiful new figure and notices not fragmented physical parts, but metaphoric impressions: “Quel feu dans les traits de celle-ci, quel sentiment! Quelle variété! C’est l’incarnat, c’est la fraîcheur, c’est le souffle de la Nature...Quelle flamme brille dans ses yeux” (7)! In this male statue, the female admirer finds life and fire rather than death and stone, as one would expect in a statue. Just before this scene in which the statue possesses natural human features, Zélie demonstrates this contrasting image, referring to another statue as “froide” (5), offering a stark contrast between the real garden statues and the man merely posing as one. Aglaé notices that this statue makes a different impression on her than the others do, but she experiences confusion as to how this could happen. She states that this

work (supposedly) in stone is, in fact, imbued with the breath of Nature, indicating that it should be a living being, rather than an inanimate object.<sup>28</sup>

Paradoxically, Aglaé describes the Endymion statue as full of life and brilliant flame. Endymion, whom artists normally portray as a beautiful young man in a permanent slumber like his figure in mythology, appears here in a completely different way. One could read the myth of Endymion and Diana as a reversal of the Pygmalion and statue myth based upon the admirer appearing as a woman, and the admired as a living man, rather than a female statue. In the latter, the admirer asks Venus to bring his perfect statue to life. In the former, Diana, the female admirer, prays to Jupiter (a male god) for her lover to remain asleep and inanimate so that she can continue to visit him in this passive state. However, *La Fausse statue* provides an altogether different representation of the Endymion myth, adding an additional aspect of role reversals in adapting the Pygmalion myth.

This play shows the perfect male form as alive and full of fire, rather than immobile and asleep. Because we as readers have only the written version of the play from which to form mental images, the characters' words and language describing visual aspects of the plot become especially critical. The few spectators who had the privilege of attending this play's single performance had an advantage in that they could actually see the man and reconcile what they saw with how Aglaé described him. In addition, Endymion's introduction to the performance would also conjure certain images for an eighteenth-century audience familiar with the myth. As opposed to viewing an actual

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<sup>28</sup> In the next chapter, we will see a very similar description of the artwork containing a flame or breath of nature in Balzac's *Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*.

statue or a theatrical performance, the reader must glean the imagery through ekphrasis, or the written description of the visual.

As I have highlighted, *La Fausse statue* certainly brings questions of gender and language to the fore, and not only because the author wrote in French (a language in which nouns are gendered). Throughout the play, as Zélie and Aglaé refer to the false statue (*la statue*), they often use the subject pronoun “elle,” rather than the proper name of the man, Phais, the figure that he represents, Endymion, or the feminine noun that denotes his artificial form, statue (*la statue*). Even though we know from the beginning that the statue is in fact a man representing a male mythical figure, the reader cannot help but become confused when he is described later using the female pronoun and adjectival forms. Just before the statue “reanimates,” Aglaé speaks about it for an entire page’s length, using only the feminine linguistic signifiers, even though the statue represents a man. The scene commences when Aglaé speaks while admiring Phais as the false statue. She muses, “je *la* revois...je ne *la* perdrai pas de vue...Dans quel étonnement *elle* me jette! A chaque instant *elle* paroît s’embellir; on diroit qu’*elle* m’entend, qu’*elle* veut me répondre; il semble que la joie éclate sur son visage, que ses regards s’enflamment, s’attendrissent...” (*my emphasis* 13). Presumably, this humorous scene derived its comedic value in part from this feminized identification, which in turn highlights the social inversion that occurs when a male figure occupies the objectified space. The gender confusion would not be as pronounced if the monologue began with a mention of “la statue” or “Endymion,” and subsequently referred to it with simply the subject pronoun “elle” to denote “la statue” or “il” to denote “Endymion.” To begin with the feminine direct object pronoun without a nominal antecedent leads the reader to interpret



the text as describing a female figure, rather than a male. Thus, the reader attributes a gender based on the language used thereby fusing the imagined Endymion image with that of Phais. This new, hybridized, character stands opposite the female admirer who refers to it with feminine signifiers.

In other terms, the signified image (the male Endymion statue) does not correspond to the textual signifier (the feminine “elle” or “la”) that stands alone with no antecedent mentioned, resulting in two possible directions leading to different referents. In *La Fausse statue*, the first possible referent remains the real, living male character, Phais. He exists as an actual physical presence that his admirer, Aglaé, can see, albeit blinded to the truth. The second possible referent emerges from the feminine articles used in the text to denote the false statue that Aglaé believes stands before her. Therefore, the motif in Ovid’s *Pygmalion*, as well as *L’Amante statue*, of placing an imagined ideal figure and a real, living person in apposition to an admirer/creator figure remains central to the creation myth. Here, however, language confuses the question of gender with respect to statue and admirer, further complicating this retelling. The roles and representations traditionally associated with the gendered active gaze and passive object become mobile and fluid. Thus, not only is there a physical layer of artifice between the real man and his love interest (the pedestal on which he poses as a statue), just as we saw in *L’Amante statue*, but this play adds an additional layer of linguistic artifice as well. In *La Fausse statue*, this manifests when the feminine gender signifiers are assigned to a male signified subject.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This change in the statue’s gender (as well as the creator’s or beholder’s gender) becomes more complex in my study of Rachilde’s *Monsieur Vénus* (chapter four).

Aglaré makes a plea to Cupid (*Amour*), similar to Pygmalion's prayer to Venus (and Diana's prayer to Jupiter in the Endymion myth), to bring this statue to life so that she can be with the real man: "que ne puis-je aussi lui donner la vie!" (13). Again, reversing the Ovidian myth's prayer to a female goddess, and mirroring Diana's prayer to a male god maintains the character confusion and fusion. In fact, she asks for the power of the gods to give the statue life. She compares her situation with Pygmalion's and protests: "O Pigmalion, j'éprouve tes feux: tu te venges Amour, mais serois-tu inexorable!" (13). Aglaré dreams of being able to love the animated statue, this "man" coming to life. Does she fall in love with Endymion (the depiction of an ideal passive man), Phais, the real man, or the ideal represented in the physical statue? The Phais/Endymion-statue hybrid character poses a more complex problem than that of the Elise/Elise-statue character. The Elise statue is an exact physical likeness of the real woman; there is no ideal intermediary representative figure or mediating character, as we find here. In *La Fausse statue*, however, the supplemental image of the mythical Endymion character enters the equation, forming an additional barrier preventing Aglaré and Phais's union. This added difficulty hindering the protagonist's love connection obviously adds to the play's comedic value as well. If Aglaré contents herself with admiring the Endymion statue, then we can conceive that she falls in love with the idea of a man. Phais is not a copy of the ideal Endymion; first, the statue does not exist in reality, but only in Aglaré's imagination. Again, Phais/Endymion can be understood as a hybrid character, where two ideas - the real and the ideal - coexist. In *La Fausse statue*, the heretofore-separate real and ideal Platonic forms come together in order to confuse the admirer.

## The False Statue Realigns the Ovidian Structure

Endymion, an ideal male figure, enters *La Fausse statue* and alters Ovid's version of the myth. In Ovid's myth, Pygmalion sculpts the perfect woman, but he uses no mythological model on which to base his creation. The Platonic form of "ideal woman" in his imagination informs his ivory creation, but a real woman does not inspire him (We remember that Pygmalion's disgust for real women inspires him to create his statue). Ovid's myth comprises a creator, creation, and god(dess). In *La Fausse statue*, these roles become blended or mixed; we now have a creator (idea originator – Zélie), a "creation" (false statue of Endymion), beholder (Aglaé), and a god (present only in Aglaé's imagination and therefore does not play an active role in bringing the Endymion statue to life, simply because it was never a statue at all, but always Phais, the man). Laurès separates, then fuses and recombines the previously distinct roles in the Ovid and Desgagniers versions in order to create new roles that no longer resemble homogenous characters. Rather, the roles begin to resemble Pygmalion's ivory figure: a statue comprised of many ivory pieces seamlessly fitted together to form a complete woman, a fragmented form meant to resemble a whole. Therefore, we could view the new character structure in Laurès' play as a diegetic representation of Pygmalion's creation.

*La Fausse statue*, then, uses the appropriation of traits central to its retelling to reaffirm the Ovidian myth's fragmentation. We must note that the creator/admirer character in Laurès' play fuses two female characters - Aglaé and Zélie - who share only some of Pygmalion's (the original creator/admirer) traits. While Zélie gains agency as a creator figure, Aglaé begins the story with no choice and ends it with only a specter of a choice. She thinks that she chooses to love the Endymion statue because of its ideal

qualities, but the choice was pre-determined and she played the oblivious lover role. In “Passionate Spectators,” Sheriff adduces this flux between subject and object roles: “By attributing these qualities perceived as irrational and ‘feminine’ to the male creator, the [Pygmalion] story compromised attempts to locate the artist’s enthusiasm (and hence his particular creativity) in the realm of reason, and hence to gender it as masculine” (52). A similar flux appears in Laurès’ play, but he upends the original gender attributions through his use of a male statue and female creator. Once again, this points to my earlier assertion that subject and object roles have become more difficult to define in modern *Pygmalion* adaptations.

The original triangular relationship in Ovid’s *Pygmalion* splits at multiple junctures when depicting the relationships in *La Fausse statue*. The main difference in the relationship remains that no actual statue exists (and thus, no artist) in *La Fausse statue*. The triangular relationship among Ovid and Desgagniers’ characters shifts in Laurès’s play. To begin, Aglaé and Zélie take the creator’s place where the former acts as an admirer rather than as an artist. Zélie, the ruse’s “creator,” enters as an additional character - a woman (rather than a supernatural being) - who intervenes on behalf of the lovers even though the union has already been determined. In the place of Venus, Amour (or Cupid) is called upon to bring the false statue (real Phais) to life. At the third point of the original triangle exists a hybrid character in that a real man, Phais, takes on an Endymion statue form. Like Elise’s character in the previous text, Phais disguised as Endymion tricks the admirer in the play. To Aglaé, he appears to be a beautiful rendition of the ideal man in statue form, which mysteriously materializes in the garden among the real statues. All of the other characters rightly know that Phais lives and merely poses to

deceive Aglaé. Although Aglaé entreats a supernatural force to help enliven the statue she admires (not knowing, of course, that Zélie, a real woman, intervened to make the plan happen), there can be no transformation (as in *Metamorphoses*) or switch made (as in *L'Amante statue*) due to the simple fact that a statue never actually existed in the text; it was always false.

If the “statue” comes to life in this case, then a fantasy of the ideal man, of love itself, would seemingly be destroyed. Just as Pygmalion simultaneously creates the ideal woman and his desire in the statue figure, Phais and the Endymion statue coexist in reality and in concept. They simply coexist as a confused entity, as described above, with a feminine linguistic signifier and masculine signified image. Gross elaborates this paradox: “The emergence of the ‘statue’ thus both preserves and destroys something – god, person, idea, fantasy, or body” (19). In these two plays, the idea or fantasy of an ideal exists as a statue, which in turn, metamorphoses into a real body that annihilates the original imagined ideal. If we follow Ovidian structure, then the only option for the outcome of *La Fausse statue* is for the Endymion “statue” to transform into a real man, thereby taking its place. When Aglaé perceives only the statue, its presence indicates simultaneously the absence of the real man that she seeks. Even though the relationship between the real woman admirer and the Endymion statue of *La Fausse statue* is, in fact, illusory, it still evokes the same experience as the previous versions of the Pygmalion myth. The false statue embodies, at once, a presence and an absence, both of a real man and a perceived ideal. Although only one character portrays the real man and the ideal in this case, the issue remains the same: the two entities, whether real or imagined, do occupy the same space at the same time.

The play resolves this issue with a seemingly sudden change when the Endymion statue begins to move and allegedly comes to life before the eyes of his admirer. “Ah! Quel prodige! L’Amour m’auroit-il entendue ! *Elle* s’anime ; le plaisir éclate dans ses yeux ; *elle* me tend les bras ; *elle* marche ; *elle* vient à moi,” Aglaé exclaims (*my emphasis* 22). Again, the text presents the Endymion statue with the female subject pronoun “elle,” continuing the gender confusion from earlier in the play. Aglaé believes that Cupid heard her plea to animate the statue and describes its actions in reference to herself. She claims that his eyes explode with pleasure (conceivably for her), that he (*elle*) extends his arms to her and that he (*elle*) walks toward her. Phais, the subject, the real man, remains an object of desire in Aglaé’s eyes. He still retains his statue/object status, even after he becomes “animated” in his admirer’s mind. The statue figure stood in the garden as a symbol of the ideal man; it stood in place of the lover that Aglaé wished could be real. After the imagined transformation, the real man still exists only as an ideal in relation to his admirer. Her perception of his actions and his emotions all stem from the fact that she, a real person, admired him and wished him to be real, thus conjuring him to life.

Notwithstanding the new roles, the problem of gender remains; in *L’Amante statue*, the object (statue) is feminine, while the subject (admirer) is masculine. In *La Fausse statue*, the statue object is masculine, while the admirer subject is feminine. The gender roles are reversed and, therefore, so are individual characters’ behaviors. Phais’s animation differs from Elise’s in that Aglaé perceives the whole male figure moving toward her. Phais animates, becomes real and moves toward his admirer in a seemingly fluid motion, whereas we recall that the portrayal of Elise’s animation is piecemeal and

more focused on individual body parts animating. The author represents, and the characters perceive the male figure as a whole, complete form, while the female figure remains an amalgam of disparate parts fused together. Thus, even when the subject and object figures take on different genders, the descriptive ascriptions to each gender remain unchanged. As statue object, the male stays complete, whole, and active; the female statue object, however, remains piecemeal and passive. Thus, even in their novel takes on a well-known myth, both plays implicitly adhere to the near universally accepted eighteenth-century gender roles, as outlined above. Both “statues,” when they become “real,” in essence annihilate the ideal entity such as the admirer conceived it, destroying the illusion that the ideal could even exist.

#### The Plays’ Metamorphoses: Discovering the Truth

The transformations in *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* do not involve overt metamorphic acts, as in the Ovidian myth. They symbolize at once the destruction and eradication of a (real or artificial) statue idol and the perceived existence of a new breath, a new life, and a beginning of new love. Yet the two transformations mark ontological ruptures in that each being becomes something else during the course of the play. These deceptions and attribute appropriations cause the present versions of the myth to stand out among the significant eighteenth-century pool. In these two Pygmalion adaptations, the statues’ intentions were never evil; they were simply dishonest in order to reach a certain end. The first transformation occurs when Elise (*L’Amante statue*) and Phais (*La Fausse statue*) decide to “stand in” as statues, thus objectifying themselves in the eyes of

their admirers. They play the part of the statue, effectively duping the other characters into believing that they are not real people (even for a short time).

The second transformation occurs when the illusion of the statue dissipates because, at the core, the “creations” were always pretending. Although the characters in *L’Amante statue* realize at the end that Elise on the pedestal represented not a statue, but a living woman instead, a moment still remains when Eraste believes differently. Similarly, when Phais steps forward to meet Aglaé, she believes for a moment that she has witnessed an unreal object becoming real thanks to her prayer. At this pivotal moment, the false ideal statues, created in imaginations by man or through ruse, are destroyed and the real people after whom they are modeled take their places. The metamorphosis in each of these examples represents an act of uncovering the object, which first leads to confusion and a transfer of agency, and finally reveals the truth. Eraste and Aglaé can no longer believe in the artificial ideal that they had each conjured in their imaginations. These two eighteenth-century retellings of the Pygmalion myth uncover the impossibility for the ideal to exist in reality by removing the statue (the artifice) from the admirer’s consciousness. Once the actual person replaces the artificial creation, the idea that the ideal person could exist in reality dissolves. In essence, the creator/admirer accepts the new hybrid character, which embodies his ideal in a tangible way. He understands that a real person could not possess all of the qualities that his imagined ideal does; thus, he contents himself with imagining that those characteristics exist in an imperfect, yet real, being.

The writers of the plays, short stories, and novels to follow sought to capture the sculptor’s challenge in words (in sequential time). Thus, the writer’s goal was not to



convey a Platonic ideal Beauty in the reader's imagination, but to attempt to fit Pygmalion's quest for that ideal into his own system of knowledge in order to get closer to understanding man's place in the creative process. In the preceding analyses, I have shown that *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* should occupy a place in the greater Pygmalion corpus. More importantly, reading these plays as emblematic of a fundamental shift in portrayals of the Pygmalion myth beginning in the eighteenth century highlights those confusions plaguing artists of the time. I have introduced, through these two plays, the notion that the representation and relationship between creator and creation (or subject and object) contains issues of gender at its core. The eighteenth-century plays that I have examined here demonstrate that these relationships do not always remain static, and that the writer (and reader) easily (con)fuses them, combining and altering perceptions on various levels.

The relationship between humans and statues "suggests that a gap can be bridged, that words can give life to the dead, give to the object a subjectivity that is not merely our own, that our words can reconstitute the mournful silence of unloving things, or at least master our own silence before such things" (Gross 150). The statues, either real or perceived, in the two plays in this chapter demonstrate the attempt to bridge this gap. In granting the statue a name, it gains subjectivity in reference to its creator and admirers. Through this naming, that occurs in eighteenth-century versions of *Pygmalion*, the writer initiates a new metamorphosis that confuses the previously clearly defined roles. In so doing, he reflects social issues that sought to understand changing gender roles and power structures. In the following chapter, I will continue to examine the changing adaptations

of the Pygmalion myth through nineteenth-century texts from two additional genres:  
short story and novel.

### CHAPTER THREE – DESTRUCTIVE PYGMALION

“I nearly reached the point of believing.” Tzvetan Todorov

The end of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy informed the first two Pygmalion adaptations in this project. Examining the myth through two farcical comedies reveals just one facet of the multivalent Pygmalion corpus that spans centuries of French literature. *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue* presented a reconfiguration of the original myth's characters along with their uncertainty and confusion. I now move forward to two works that explore how Ovid's Pygmalion myth is adapted and interpreted in literary texts within the Fantastic genre. I will examine two adaptations of the Pygmalion myth in two French authors' nineteenth century works: Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837) and Honoré de Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831/1837). What I will argue through my readings is that man, in his effort to reconcile the differing, and sometimes competing, perceptions of the ideal woman, seeks new control over those representations. In the context of the fantastic text, I contend that the Pygmalion myth takes on a destructive nature rather than a creative one as we have previously seen.

Eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy, and a new faith in rationalism, results in a new movement: French Romanticism in the visual and literary arts. Following this movement, I will demonstrate that Pygmalion's adaptation to nineteenth century Fantastic short story presents a new structure and allows Mérimée and Balzac to ask a new set of questions in the evolution of Pygmalion myth adaptations. For example, what happens to the role of divine intervention within the Fantastic, where uncertainty reigns? When man attempts to create the ideal on his own, without the divine power of Venus, what is the outcome?

This chapter explores the Pygmalion myth in the fantastic short story, which saw its apotheosis during the first part of the nineteenth century in Romanticism. A literary genre popular throughout Europe and the United States during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, it allowed authors such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Poe, and Prosper Mérimée to investigate the mysterious space within the mind and how it relates to reality. The literary genre takes its name from the Middle French *fantastique*, defined as existing only in imagination, which in turn stemmed from the late Latin *phantasticus*, or imaginary. The imaginary context of the Pygmalion myth's representation in *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*, presented in the previous chapter, forms a strong link between the adaptations examined thus far. The late Latin meaning, imaginary, comes from the earlier Greek, *phantastikos*, or "able to imagine," giving an active signification to the term. *Phantazein*, a Greek word translatable as "make visible," was a related generative term. Thus, man becomes involved in the Fantastic through a process of making something visible, either to his eyes or in his imagination.

This questionable space between the physically and the psychically perceptible constitutes the ambiguous realm of the fantastic. In what follows, Tzvetan Todorov's theories of the fantastic as a distinct literary genre inform my readings of Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837) and Honoré de Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831/1837) as nineteenth-century adaptations of Ovid's *Pygmalion* myth. Todorov's *The Fantastic* proves crucial to my analysis because he provides clear definitions for a genre based on obscurity. For Todorov, the fantastic exists as a fleeting moment situated between two possible conclusive states: the real or the imaginary. He states: "The Fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the

other, we leave the Fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous” (25). Every reader makes this choice at the end of a fantastic story, even though an explanation is not given in the text. In order to land in the uncanny, the reader “decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described” (Todorov 41). On the other hand, the reader enters the marvelous if “he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena” (Todorov 41). This chapter explores the Pygmalion myth adapted in two fantastic short stories, which reveal the possibility of different means as well as different ends in the quest for the ideal woman.

The fantastic text hovers between the supernatural and the scientific because the Romantic reader has not integrated rational or scientific explanations into his literary interpretation. As Tobin Siebers argues in *The Romantic Fantastic* (1984), “The Romantic conception of superstition radically contradicted the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and one vehicle for this new aesthetic was Fantastic literature” (22). While it seemed that the Enlightenment would encourage new exploration into rational or scientific possibilities in literature, the fantastic grappled with integrating that system. As opposed to mythology, where the characters clearly accept all events as impossible in the real world, the fantastic enables them to imagine events in two different ways. He or she can believe that a supernatural event occurred or that a natural explanation exists to understand strange occurrences:

The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, or a product of the imagination - and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality - but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (Todorov 25)

In the end, the characters are obligated to reach a decision, but each option leaves him in an unknown realm. Either his own senses have failed him, or the very laws on which he based his understanding of reality failed him.

In the Ovidian myth, Pygmalion sought to bring his ideal imagined woman to life through his own artistic skill, but he could not be successful on his own. The sculptor needed to call upon Venus's divine power, and she granted life to his statue. The Pygmalionesque characters in *La Vénus d'Ille* and *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* seek to control how others perceive the ideal work of art. These figures, either admirers or artists, cannot explain, understand, or accept the troublesome "masterpieces." Through desperation, they decide that their only option is to destroy the ideal Galateas; this they do through physical destruction of the work. I will examine the different modes of destruction that the "creator" figures of Balzac's and Mérimée's short stories employ to control their versions of the central myth. My analyses will also elicit the new arrangement and evolution of the Pygmalion, Venus, and Galatea characters.

#### A Vengeful Venus: Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille*

Prosper Mérimée's oeuvre figures prominently in literary criticism of the fantastic tale in France. Along with Nodier, Guy de Maupassant, Théophile Gautier, and others, Mérimée was one of a group of romantic writers who embraced the short story to explore the related fantastic literary movement. A period from 1837-1847, referred to as the "Golden Decade" by Mérimée scholars, is marked by *La Vénus d'Ille* as its starting point. Pierre-Georges Castex, in his study on Mérimée in *Le Conte fantastique en France* (1962), informs us that Mérimée's inspiration for his 1837 short story comes from the

Medieval Latin legend written by Hermann Corner in the eleventh century (264).

Throughout the following centuries, numerous authors took up the legend and Mérimée supposedly found it in the works of Pontanus. Castex notes that this fact is questionable and presents an alternative: “En réalité, Mérimée, selon toute vraisemblance, connut le récit d’Hermann Corner par l’intermédiaire de Villemain, qui le découvrit dans le *Corpus Historiarum* publié par Eckardt à Leipzig en 1723” (265). Still other evidence points in a different direction, to the possibility that Mérimée invented the entire story from fiction, even while inspired by the Medieval legend. Catherine Velay-Vallantin, in support of this version, cites a letter that Mérimée wrote dated November 11, 1847, a decade after *La Vénus d’Ille*’s publication: “La Vénus d’Ille n’a jamais existé [...] L’idée de ce conte m’est venue en lisant une légende du Moyen Age rapportée par Freher” (293). No matter his influence, Mérimée adapts the Venus d’Ille myth in his own way, opening it up to a reading as an adaptation of Ovid’s Pygmalion myth as well.

Contextualizing *La Vénus d’Ille*, Frank Paul Bowman, in his 1962 study finds that “despite Mérimée’s often avowed skepticism, his fiction is haunted by the presence of the mysterious, the occult, and various forms of superstition” (30). Although he accorded no legitimacy to his characters’ superstitious beliefs and actions, their inclusion in *La Vénus d’Ille*, among other tales, “had literary uses: it provided local color, created suspense, or defined character,” as Bowman observes (35). This is indeed accurate, but Bowman does not go as far as other scholars to name this use of superstition and mystery the fantastic as others have done. It is necessary for the reader to experience this suspense and so that this can happen, often the narrator or other characters in the story must experience the same feeling; “the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the

hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the world - in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character,” explains Todorov (33). This relationship between the reader and narrator or character is especially apparent in Mérimée’s short story where the narrator is sometimes conflated with the author himself.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, this association with the fictional characters anchors it strongly in the fantastic realm; if the reader can place herself in the narrative, then she is more likely to experience the same moment of undecidability as the characters.

While Mérimée scholars have conducted numerous studies on the fantastic nature of either the narrator or Venus figure in his story, my research has not uncovered any studies that contextualize the characters in a Pygmalion myth framework.<sup>31</sup> I intend to re-examine Mérimée’s fantastic story in order to place it within the evolution of Pygmalion myth adaptations in my corpus. As a version that portrays the theme of destruction, I place this adaption alongside Balzac’s *Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu* in order to point to a moment of undecidability in the metamorphosis at the core of the myth. In this stage of uncertainty, the Pygmalion character resorts to violent destruction. This moment is key in the myth’s evolution, as I will show in chapter four; two late nineteenth-century versions will proceed beyond destruction to attempt to animate and construct new Galateas.

In Mérimée’s version of the Pygmalion myth, the artist who imagined and created the bronze Venus statue is long dead. Instead of a creation, this retelling begins

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<sup>30</sup> As “inspecteur general des Monuments historiques,” Mérimée “parcourt ainsi la region où il situera l’action de la Vénus d’Ille” (79 Patruier, in the introduction to the 1967 edition of Mérimée’s works). It is interesting to note, in light of this biographical information, that the first word of the text is “Je.”

<sup>31</sup> Among these studies, some have examined the representations of the marriage trope as it relates to nineteenth-century French societal mores. Catherine Velay-Vallantin, Corey Cropper, and Theodore Ziolkowski, among others, read Mérimée’s story as a metaphor for the status of the Catholic Church in post-Revolutionary France.



with a discovery in the southern French village of Ille.<sup>32</sup> Upon unearthing “l’idole,” as it is first referred to, admirers/observers take possession of the physical statue and call upon an “archéologue illustre” from Paris to examine it (Mérimée 88, 90). The villagers see it as a marvelous representation of the ideal woman, but something about it also instills fear. Thus, the roles of Galatea, Pygmalion’s ideal ivory statue and the goddess Venus are subsumed in the Vénus d’Ille statue. In *La Vénus d’Ille*, I assert that the new Galatea’s admirers (including the narrator) take on Pygmalion’s role, originally a creative one, and instead appropriate his role for destructive ends. The end of the tale results in the bronze Venus statue being melted down into a church bell, thereby transforming it from an art object to a utilitarian religious object. This destructive act indirectly results in a lingering evil sentiment felt in the village. Contrary to the previous versions of the myth, neither creator, admirer, nor statue survives at the end of Mérimée’s story. Thus all characters who, in one form or another, represent the tri-partite group in the original Pygmalion myth – Venus, Pygmalion, Galatea – cease to exist in real or ideal form.

As outlined above, *La Vénus d’Ille* tells a startlingly different tale of a statue coming to life from Ovid’s version or those explored in chapter two. In this fantastic nineteenth-century short story, a real statue is suspected of coming to life, and then perceived to act violently as well. This is in contrast to the happy, romantic endings of the eighteenth-century plays: *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*. Instead, *La Vénus d’Ille* presents the trope of the violent, evil statue actually coming to life in order to exact revenge on humans. In this text, Venus, as statue and supernatural power in one, is

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<sup>32</sup> In this fictional discovery, we are reminded of the Venus de Milo and its influence on the French aesthetic sphere in the mid-nineteenth century. Ziolkowski, for example, observes that Mérimée was “inspired at least in part by one of the major archaeological events of the period: the discovery of the Venus de Milo, which was brought to Paris with great éclat in 1820” (44).

granted a new type of agency; unlike the goddess in Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth, she is vengeful rather than helpful. Parallel to *L'Amante statue* and later retellings of the myth, the narrator of Mérimée's tale describes the female statue in fragmented pieces, rather than a complete whole emanating overall impressions (as, for example, Aglaé described Phais in *La Fausse statue*). In addition, the statue is compared to a real, living woman character, Mademoiselle de Puységur, again confusing the boundaries between the real and the ideal. As such, this text aligns the statue with previous iterations of the Pygmalion myth (i.e. Ovid, Desgagniers).

Le Parisien seems to have the only objective perspective on the strange events that occur following his arrival in the small village. In order for the story to fit within the genre of the fantastic, as defined by Todorov, the character (and reader) needs to pause at a point between believability and unbelievability: "Either total fact or total incredulity would lead us beyond the Fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life" (31). In *La Vénus d'Ille*, the narrator fills this need, as Bowman elaborates:

The narrator of the *Vénus* serves the traditional purpose of procuring a greater 'suspension of disbelief'; he is a man like ourselves, whose relation to the events is similar to that of the reader. He witnesses everything and guarantees the veracity of what happens. He is cleverly depicted as hesitant, unwilling to believe, and finally overwhelmed by the force of the evidence; and the reader's reactions go along with this. (478-479)

Le Parisien consistently attempts to keep a level head and remain rational about what he witnesses and what he hears from other inhabitants. Owing to his scientific sensibilities, he often comments with phrases like "sans doute," "il était évident," "je le regardais de plus près" (Mérimée 89, 96, 110). These expressions of certitude throughout the beginning of the story contrast with the narrator's perceptions after the "supernatural" event takes place. As the reader's most trustworthy source of the story's events, the

Parisian gradually shows anything but certainty. The difference between the narrator's and the reader's reactions at the end of a fantastic tale is negligible; if the story is truly in the realm of the fantastic, then a decision on the side of the uncanny or the marvelous (as defined by Todorov), cannot be reached.

Therefore, Mérimée seems to present a reluctant Pygmalion in the narrator figure, a creator turned discoverer who is uncertain about whether this ideal beauty could or *should* come to life. Ovid's Pygmalion also showed disbelief when he regarded his ivory statue; he couldn't convince himself that it was not a real woman. In contrast to the Parisian, however, Pygmalion did wish to have a wife like his statue. The Parisian makes many concerted attempts to figure out just what the Venus is. His first view of the statue is from afar; since his guide couldn't take him to examine it when he arrived, the narrator takes a short glance through his window when he arrives at the Peyrehorade house that night: "A la distance où j'étais, il m'était difficile de distinguer l'attitude de la statue; je ne pouvais juger que de sa hauteur..." (Mérimée 95). At this point in his observation, two villagers walking by the statue interrupt him. After the Venus's initial unearthing, when it fell on Jean Coll and broke his leg, this is the next questionable event with the statue as the alleged perpetrator of violence. The story that the narrator tells differs from that of the passersby, illustrating at once the formers neutral position in relation to the latter's provincial superstitions. One of the men picks up a rock, throws it at the "coquine" statue, and is then hit by it when it rebounds off of the bronze (Mérimée 95). To the Parisian, "il était evident que la pierre avait rebondi sur le métal," while the young man claims that, "elle me l'a rejetée!" (Mérimée 96, 95). After this first view of the statue from his window, the narrator remains amused by the villagers' perception of the "evil" Venus.

The next day, M. de Peyrehorade takes the archaeologist to the site so that he can show off “his Venus.” Upon first sight, the Parisian confirms, with his expertise, that “c’était bien une Vénus, et d’une merveilleuse beauté” (Mérimée 96). He closely observes the statue and lists each of its physical features, commenting on their artistic value and historical relevance. In this passage, the narrator continues to exude his serious, unromantic manner. When he arrives at his description of the Venus’s face, however, the expert experiences a “sentiment pénible” (Mérimée 97). While he contemplates the Venus statue up close (he climbs up on the pedestal), he remembers that the guide initially told him that it had a strange look. The narrator thinks to himself: “Cela était presque vrai, et je ne pus me défendre d’un mouvement de colère contre moi-même en me sentant un peu mal à mon aise devant cette figure de bronze” (Mérimée 98). Porter offers a similar reading of the narrator that highlights this change from level-headed observer to curious bystander:

The narrator is by far the most interesting character in that story because only he evolves. At the same time as he directly relates a putatively supernatural event, he unwittingly betrays his inner conflicts through his inferences from what he sees. Although he considers himself a dispassionate spectator, he is steadily drawn into the vortex of fantasy at the core of the story. (25)

If the narrator becomes involved in the fantastic aspects of the events, then the reader no longer has a neutral source of information. This fact adds another layer of uncertainty.

In Mérimée’s short story, the supernatural powers of the goddess Venus fuse with the inanimate, newly discovered statue, which inherited the former’s name. Thus, two of the roles in the tripartite Pygmalion myth - the supernatural intervention, Venus, and the statue, Galatea - combine to create an entity with questionable origins and intent. This infused statue character, La Vénus d’Ille, represented within the fantastic genre, gains an

agency not witnessed in the previous texts. Furthermore, no one in the story wishes or asks for the statue to come to life. In fact, most onlookers' first reaction to the statue is fear or uneasiness. The supernatural statue is now, not only, able to act with and upon its human admirers, but to do so in a new, malicious way.

Even before its first appearance in the text, M. de Peyrehorade expresses his own hesitations and misgivings about the discovery. When he first meets Le Parisien, M. de Peyrehorade does not wish to speak about the statue: "Ah! il [le guide] vous a parlé de l'idole, car c'est ainsi qu'ils appellent ma belle Vénus Tur... mais je ne veux rien vous dire" (Mérimée 92). He refuses to pronounce the name that others in the village have given the statue. By not naming the statue here, M. de Peyrehorade maintains the statue's status as object, rather than an agent who could act upon the other human characters. However, through his speech, M. de Peyrehorade recognizes the Venus's presence, both in the story as a character and in the village as a newly discovered statue. In a sense, M. de Peyrehorade conjures the statue into being simply through his speech act. His utterance does two things simultaneously: it announces the presence of a statue, an inanimate object that has unknown origins; it also announces its absence up to this point in the narrative. Both of these utterances (not finishing its name, and then ordering that they not speak another word of it today) underscore the symbolic nature of the statue that signifies at once a physical reality and an imaginary ideal, bringing about ambiguous reactions from those in contact with it. In addition to announcing the simultaneous presence and absence of the statue, M. de Peyrehorade's utterance is contradictory; "Pas un mot sur la Vénus aujourd'hui!". Although it is a negative statement beginning with "pas," he immediately pronounces its name, effectively negating his initial negation.

Thus, the statue acts upon M. de Peyrehorade from two different poles: paradoxically, it compels him to speak of it and forbids him from speaking of it with this new subjecthood.

The Illois' provincial superstitions stand in stark contrast to the Parisian's intellectual observations and background. This dichotomy represents one of the key changes that Ziolkowski argues separates Mérimée's version of the *Vénus d'Ille* myth from previous (German) stories: "The conflict here," he states, "[...] takes place between primitive passion and the sterility of modern civilization" (53). On one side, the villagers' isolation from both the metropole and contemporary thought preserves what others perceived as their pagan and primitive beliefs. Rather than directly contradict them or dispute their veracity, the Parisian, representing the cosmopolitan bourgeois consciousness, simply witnesses and narrates them, leaving the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. Castex also notes that Mérimée, inspired by his actual trip as Inspector of Historical Monuments to Ille in November 1834, based the provincial characters in his story on the Catalans that he met: "Il le fit non sans malice; son héros est bavard, pédant, et se livre à des conjectures plaisamment hasardeuses" (266). The ways in which the narrator describes the villagers as well as their interactions with the learned archaeologist provide the context for a spatial and cultural divide between the two groups.

The fictional divide that Mérimée creates between the rational thinkers and irrational believers reflects the changing cultural landscape of mid-nineteenth-century France. Castex further explains that Mérimée's initial description of the *Vénus* statue as a worrisome and fear-inducing figure could only be believed by someone possessing "toute la naïveté superstitieuse d'un paysan catalan" (268). The author's juxtaposition of a

cultured outsider with naive characters still clinging to pagan beliefs and rituals reflects the post-Revolutionary societal changes in early nineteenth-century France. In reference to the fantastic during this period, Amy Ransom states: "The climate of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France completely suited, then, the development of the Fantastic, as reason and progress, the battle-cries for the dominant bourgeois class, could not quite completely eradicate peasant popular beliefs" (18). Through further analysis, Corry Cropper identifies *La Vénus d'Ille* as one example that Mérimée uses to "parody and undermine this new dominant morality by fictionally allegorizing the tensions between Parisian bohemia and the new middle class" (183). This intellectual dichotomy parallels the literary function of the fantastic as a genre in which either a natural or a supernatural force can be related to each event. Where the Parisian narrator is apt to take a scientific and objective approach, the provincial simpletons are quick to jump to unreasonable conclusions. They create a fictional tension that contemporary readers would relate to.

What seems to be uncontested by all of the characters in the story, save Le Parisien, is that the Vénus d'Ille *can* be a violent statue. This is a departure from the Galatea portrayals that I presented in the two preceeding chapters; each statue was seen as an object to love and admire. From the start, when it is discovered buried next to a dead olive tree, the statue already has a negative reputation. When Le Parisien meets his guide upon arrival at Ille, he hears how the statue was unearthed and fell on Jean Coll [an Illois] and broke his leg. All of the men present at this event took this as a bad omen and henceforth believed that the statue was deliberately malicious and evil toward men. When describing the statue, he recalls the myth of Medusa, who turned her admirers to stone:

“Elle vous fixe avec ses grands yeux blancs... On dirait qu’elle vous dévisage. On baisse les yeux, oui, en la regardant” (Mérimée 89). Medusa, of course, is the anti-Pygmalion; she turns her lovers to stone, while Pygmalion (with Venus’s help) turns his lover to flesh.

Through its initial supposed violent act (the fall on Jean Coll that broke his leg), the Venus statue wields immediate power over the villagers who come into contact with it. As M. de Peyrehorade recounts the story of the statue’s discovery, his wife becomes agitated at his description of the statue as a ‘masterpiece’ and exclaims: “Chef-d’œuvre! Chef-d’œuvre! un beau chef-d’œuvre qu’elle a fait! casser la jambe d’un homme !” (Mérimée 93). M. de Peyrehorade, as one who appreciates a true artistic masterpiece, is naturally excited about the new find in his small village, especially one that brings an outside expert who can share his enthusiasm<sup>33</sup>. Madame de Peyrehorade, on the other hand, does not share her husband’s characterization and instead ironically regards the statue’s perceived act of violence as the “masterpiece.” The repetition in her exclamation emphasizes the quality of the work, whether ironic or not. In an attempt to combat his wife’s negative opinion of the Venus, M. de Peyrehorade quips: “Qui n’a été blessé par Vénus?” suggesting that everyone who has experienced Venus’s gift - love - has also been hurt by it (Mérimée 93). Venus can cause emotional pain, even while bestowing pleasure; *La Vénus d’Ille* takes the idea further and portrays the statue likeness inflicting physical pain on several characters. Indeed, the entire story of *La Vénus d’Ille* revolves around the notion that the statue can be beautiful, while at the same time very dangerous.

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<sup>33</sup> This enthusiasm echoes that of the eighteenth-century artists portrayed in *L’Amante statue* and other Pygmalion adaptations. Although M. de Peyrehorade is not the sculptor, he possesses the same sense of inspiration and admiration for the work.



Just as Ovid's Pygmalion sought to create the image of the ideal woman in ivory statue form, the bronze Venus's admirers (who play the part of Pygmalion in Mérimée's version) see the ideal woman in her form. Although an unknown artist created the statue many centuries before, the mystery of her origins and possible model remain. The spectators in this short story attempt to reconcile the forms of the *Vénus d'Ille* with the ideal woman's forms. One particularly revealing encounter with the statue illustrates the connection between the real model and the ideal statue creation: "Ce qui me frappait surtout, c'était l'exquise vérité des formes, en sorte qu'on aurait pu les croire moulées sur nature, si la nature produisait d'aussi parfaits modèles" (Mérimée 97). The exquisite realness of the statue's forms recalls Pygmalion's ivory statue. However, the fact remains in this story and the others in this project that nature is incapable of producing the ideal forms; neither is the artist, without some help. As Scott Sprenger reads this passage: "the implication here is that nature does not produce such perfection; it comes from the hands of a divine creator" (31). An artist's hand and skill, combined with divine intervention, can create the perfect female representation in life, at least according to Ovid's version of Pygmalion. In the nineteenth-century texts, neither the artist, nor nature is capable of creating an ideal form. As true as these forms may seem, it is impossible to reach the Platonic truths in the real, imperfect world.

All the same, those who observe the Venus statue in Mérimée's story emphasize its striking similarity to a real woman and to the real bride, Mademoiselle de Puygarrig. As the two experts study the statue, the Parisien explores the connection between its extant state after the unearthing and a possible model that the artist could have used in its creation. The Parisien, normally very rational, becomes superstitious for a moment and

seems fearful of the possibility of a real woman who could have been the model for such a frightfully beautiful statue: “Si le modèle a jamais existé, dis-je à M. de Peyrehorade, et je doute que le ciel ait jamais produit une telle femme, que je plains ses amants! Elle a dû se complaire à les faire mourir de désespoir. Il y a dans son expression quelque chose de féroce, et pourtant je n’ai jamais vu rien de si beau” (Mérimée 97). He is not confident that a model for the statue ever did exist, yet he expresses his extreme regret for any of her possible lovers. This spectator ascribes, albeit through doubt, the creation of “such a woman” to the heavens, to an unnamed higher being, as if it would be impossible to create a woman possessing both great beauty and potential malice under natural, biological conditions. Her existence could only be possible (or impossible) thanks to an intervention from the gods. The Parisian speaks of the statue’s model as an entity just as unnatural, “ferocious,” and beautiful as the statue itself. Thus, the possible model and the statue become one dual entity,<sup>34</sup> comparable to Elise and her statue likeness in *L’Amante statue*.

This is not the only doubling that occurs in Mérimée’s tale; the Parisian also equates the statue’s beauty with that of the young bride, Mlle de Puygarrig. At the wedding dinner, M. de Peyrehorade sings a couple of lines in Catalan that Le Parisien attempts to translate as: “Qu’est-ce donc, mes amis? Le vin que j’ai bu me fait-il voir double? Il y a deux Vénus ici...” (Mérimée 110). He of course refers to the statue and to the young bride. The first time that Le Parisien sees the bride, he is struck by her beauty as well: “J’admirais le naturel parfait de toutes ses réponses; et son air de bonté, qui pourtant n’était pas exempt d’une légère teinte de malice, me rappela, malgré moi, la

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<sup>34</sup> The concept of an entity containing two separate elements at once is reminiscent of Christian thought that posits a soul and a body for every man. In chapter four, I explore this duality in *L’Eve future*, wherein a creator attempts to fashion an artificial soul to insert into an artificial body.

Vénus de mon hôte” (Mérimée 104). The combination of intense, nearly perfect or ideal beauty with a dangerous or malicious air characterizes this and other female characters in this study. This, after all, is the cult of Venus in nineteenth-century France when she “came to stand for an eroticized beauty that was bound up with violence. She offered pleasure that was provisional” (Scott and Arscott 3). It is not enough for the authors of these texts to describe the ideal woman as beautiful and perfect; she also possesses a negative or mysterious quality, mirroring the multi-faceted and ambiguous conception of the real woman.

In parallel to Pygmalion’s Galatea and Eraste’s Elise, M. de Peyrehorade’s portrayal of Venus is also fragmented throughout the short story. Although the latter statue possesses some sort of ominous quality, discernible just by viewing it, the way in which the author describes it is similar to the other two female statues in the previous texts. When *Le Parisien* describes the statue, he begins at the top and elaborates on each one of her physical features:

La chevelure, relevée sur le front, paraissait avoir été dorée autrefois. La tête, petite comme celle de presque toutes les statues grecques, était légèrement inclinée en avant. Quant à la figure, jamais je ne parviendrai à exprimer son caractère étrange, et dont le type ne se rapprochait de celui d’aucune statue antique dont il me souviene. Ce n’était point cette beauté calme et sévère des sculpteurs grecs, qui, par système, donnaient à tous les traits une majestueuse immobilité. Ici, au contraire, j’observais avec surprise l’intention marquée de l’artiste de rendre la malice arrivant jusqu’à la méchanceté. Tous les traits étaient contractés légèrement : les yeux un peu obliques, la bouche relevée des coins, les narines quelque peu gonflées. Dédain, ironie, cruauté, se lisaient sur ce visage d’une incroyable beauté cependant. En vérité, plus on regardait cette admirable statue, et plus on éprouvait le sentiment pénible qu’une si merveilleuse beauté pût s’allier à l’absence de toute sensibilité. (Mérimée 738)

Mérimée’s narrator describes the statue much more explicitly and at greater length than either Laurès’ or Desgagniers’ plays. Could it be that the *Vénus d’Ille*’s

malicious nature, which is barely discernible underneath an intense beauty, makes her more difficult to describe? Perhaps the “good” statues in the plays are easier to describe and to accept than this last one.

The statue’s ultimate act of violence occurs on the new couple’s wedding night after everyone has gone to sleep. Le Parisien recounts the events from his point of view, and then the reader learns the bride’s testimony from the narrator’s conversation with the officer at the scene. The supernatural reading suggests that the Venus statue crushed the new husband to death in the middle of the night. An officer claims that “[la mariée] dit qu’elle a reconnu...devinez-vous? La Vénus de bronze, la statue de M. de Peyrehorade...” lifting her husband up by the side of the bed (Mérimée 755). The supposed reason for the man’s death stems from the romantic triangle portrayed in this text: the Venus statue, the groom, and the bride. Before the marriage ceremony, Alphonse took part in a game of *jeu de paume* with some passing Spaniards and took off the large wedding ring destined for his bride and laid it in the Venus statue’s hand for safe-keeping. After the game, Alphonse forgets to retrieve the ring and when he returns to the statue later that day, he finds that the Venus’s hand is closed around the ring. Alphonse reluctantly admits, “C’est ma femme, apparemment, puisque je lui ai donné mon anneau... Elle ne veut plus le rendre” (Mérimée 751). Other scholars have noted this love triangle among the man, woman, and statue; in her article on parallels between *La Vénus d’Ille* and Zola’s *L’Œuvre*, Nathalie Mauriac Dyer observes:

il est aisé de voir que les deux textes s’organisent autour du schéma, identique et banal, du triangle amoureux: un homme est pris entre deux femmes ; et, ce qui est moins banal, la femme qui s’introduit en tiers et finit par détruire le couple est dans les deux cas une représentation, femme de bronze ou femme peinte, statue ou peinture. (62)

Bowman explains the demise of the new couple similarly: “the eternal triangle is resolved by the death of one or two lovers at the hands of the remaining parties” (481). Both critics observe the romantic triangle between the real woman, real man, and statue woman. This triangle also alludes to the notion that one can be fooled by mimetic art if one is not looking carefully enough. The man becomes confused and can no longer distinguish the real woman from the artificially rendered one.

The Vénus d’Ille stands on public display overlooking a garden, so the entire population of the village can view and interact with it. However, Alphonse is the only man who offers a “gift” - his wedding ring - to the Venus. In a conflation of images, Le Parisien finds similarities between Mlle de Puygarrig and the statue. During this confusion of identities, Alphonse accidentally “weds” the bronze Venus. One reading indicates that he cannot retrieve the ring because the statue’s hand has formed a firm grasp of it; however, the visitor dismisses this event as a drunken misunderstanding. The Goddess Venus’s role in the story is left unclear, but it is possible to deduce that the act of giving the ring (a symbol of love, unity, and marriage) to the statue symbolizes the goddess’s role in bringing two lovers together, as Roman mythology indicates. The ideal bronze Venus, unearthed from unknown origins, takes on a power much greater than the other “statues” that we have presented heretofore: those represented in the plays *L’Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*.

After her husband’s death, the former Mlle de Puygarrig reportedly goes crazy. In order to quell the fears in town that the statue may again animate and become violent, the town leaders decide to melt it down and form a bell for the church, which, incidentally, Mme Peyrehorade had suggested upon the statue’s discovery at the beginning of the

story. Even in its melted transformed state, the statue seems to cast its negative influence in later years by affecting the weather and ruining the grape harvest. While it is only superstition that leads the townsfolk to believe that the transformed statue is responsible for negative events, no other explanation is given. They believe that since she was unable to complete her union with Alphonse, the Vénus d'Ille continues to seek her revenge upon the village even after she has broken up his marriage to Mlle de Puygarrig.

In summary, the final schema to represent the Pygmalionesque relationships in *La Vénus d'Ille* is a fragmented triangle of creation, discovery, and destruction, and therefore defies a clean visual representation (contrary to above). Where Ovid's myth involved a creator/artist and a divine intervention to produce the ideal woman, Mérimée's version includes more players, each with altered roles. Initially, no one knows who actually created the bronze Venus, but Jean Coll discovered it in the earth, M. de Peyrehorade now claims it, and Le Parisien attempted to decipher its ambiguous meaning. Jean Coll suffers physical harm when attempting to unearth the statue, Alphonse dies on his wedding night, and M. de Peyrehorade dies a few years later; the new widowed Mme Alphonse reportedly goes crazy. In the next fantastic short story, the Pygmalion character also dies, but seemingly by his own hand after his own attempt at representing his ideal beauty in art.

#### Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre Inconnu*

Balzac's 1831/7 short story is not a fantastic work in the style of Hoffman, but the ambiguous plot elements and structure present in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* lead the reader to possible differing interpretations of the events. Though Balzac subtitled his

short story “Fantastique” for its first publication in the journal *L’Artiste* (1831) and later exacted substantive revisions to include it in his “philosophical” works, *Etudes philosophiques* (1837), there are distinct moments during which the reader must suspend his or her disbelief. In a pre-psychoanalytical world (that of Balzac), people searched for explanations to events that seemed to defy reality. This work by Balzac is part of a genre representing a shift from thinking of these inexplicable events in religious or supernatural terms to psychic or medical terms (that would later develop in the work of psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud). In his work on the fantastic, Todorov argues:

To proceed a step further: psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby has made useless) the literature of the Fantastic. There is no need today to resort to the devil in order to speak of an excessive sexual desire, and none to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses: psychoanalysis, and the literature which is directly or indirectly inspired by it, deal with these matters in undisguised terms. The themes of Fantastic literature have become, literally, the very themes of the psychological investigations of the last fifty years. (160-161)

His position suggests that the themes authors used in fantastic literature of the nineteenth century are no longer understood or felt in the same way in the twentieth century. In the post-fantastic literary world, other solutions and explanations from the psychological realm supplant those from the supernatural world, which was often relied upon in the past. For example, many texts from the nineteenth century portray other-worldly entities like the werewolf, vampire, or monster as embodiments of unknown or taboo subjects.

In contrast to his collection of realist novels that make up the *Comédie Humaine*, *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu* is part of a group of short stories. During the early nineteenth-century, as we have seen, the fantastic and philosophic genres of literature often overlapped as contemporaries of Romanticism. In Pierre Laubriet’s *Un Catéchisme esthétique* (1961), an exhaustive study of *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, he observes how

Balzac was influenced by E.T.A. Hoffmann, and how he conceives his *conte fantastique* according to the following: “l’expression de phénomènes dont l’intelligence humaine n’a pas encore rendu compte, qui de fantastiques deviendront bientôt scientifiques, et qui se rattachent tous à l’exercice de la pensée” (32). This is not a tale of monsters, the supernatural, or similar phenomena. Using new knowledge, man attempts to grapple with events that he does not yet understand. This is exactly what Todorov explains regarding literary themes above. Read under this lens, Balzac’s fantastic short story explores questions of the mind and thought in order to awaken “chez le lecteur la curiosité, l’inquiétude, la sensation de la présence de l’extraordinaire dans le quotidien, de le faire réfléchir sur l’importance des questions soulevées” (Laubriet 32). In order to coax the reader to ponder deeper philosophical questions on aesthetics, Balzac places a man of certain genius, but questionable sanity, in a familiar environment, speaking on the qualities of art with other artists. Furthermore, Balzac puts the very notions of mimetic art and artistic creation into question.<sup>35</sup> Rather than representing reality as a Realist novel would, Balzac thus chooses the fantastic genre to posit the character of the troubled artist and the notion of artistic creation in his time.

*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, in fact, depicts three artists set in seventeenth-century France (the first two based on real seventeenth-century artists and the last completely fictional): François Porbus, Nicolas Poussin, and Frenhofer. I investigate this text as an evolution of Ovid’s Pygmalion myth that involves, like Mérimée’s *La Vénus d’Ille*, a

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<sup>35</sup> Balzac’s knowledge in the arts has remained a topic of speculation and research for critics since the story’s second publication. Some suggest that Balzac was inspired by contemporary artists Delacroix and Théophile Gautier (See Arthur Evans, Jr. for a summary of scholarship up to the mid-twentieth century.). I focus on the artistic works within the written text as representations of fictional works of art and the artists as fictional characters, not based on reality. I do not wish to draw parallels, as many scholars have done, between the author, the characters, and real, living personalities of nineteenth-century France who may have influenced various aspects of the tale.



mysterious work of art and its ultimate destruction. Whether fantastic or philosophical, like the previous texts I've examined, Balzac's story demonstrates some of the major issues associated with the creator, his creation, and the perception surrounding them both. The ultimate 1837 version of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* is divided into two parts entitled "Gillette" and "Catherine Lescault," the names of Poussin's girlfriend and Frenhofer's painting, also known as "La Belle Noiseuse" (translated as either The Beautiful Noisemaker or Troublemaker), respectively (66).<sup>36</sup> Gillette is the only female character that appears as a real woman in the story, whereas all other allusions to women are through historical accounts or artistic representations.

This iteration of the Pygmalion myth features the artistic creation's eventual destruction at the hands of the "mad" artist, Frenhofer. Relying on Plato's conception of the artist and true beauty, as presented in *The Phaedrus* and *The Republic*, I contend that both *La Belle Noiseuse* and Frenhofer epitomize these definitions of art and artist, reaching beyond the tangible real to an imagined ideal. According to Plato, the difference between the imitator and the artist is that of form; while the imitator copies an object that he observes in reality, the artist creates from knowledge of the true forms (*Republic* 599).<sup>37</sup> True art, on the other hand, relates to the divine, which Plato defines as "beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like" (246e). While other characters (and indeed, critics) view the painter as a madman producing an incomprehensible painting, I read these portrayals

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<sup>36</sup> In the initial 1831 version, *L'Artiste*, the first part was entitled "Maître Frenhofer." The focus of the chapter, curiously, shifts to the real woman, even though she is hardly mentioned.

<sup>37</sup> The example in the dialogue explains how god is the creator of "the real object denoted by the word bed," the craftsman makes one bed in this image, and finally the imitator, with no knowledge of the real (only god possesses this true knowledge) or of craftsmanship, paints the bed as it appears, not as it is (*Republic* 597).

as misleading in light of the original Pygmalion myth.<sup>38</sup> To begin, the way in which the artistic work appears in Balzac's text shifts from the fragmentation shown in the eighteenth-century's portrayals of the ideal form (as discussed in chapter two). In this text, the painter keeps part or all of the ultimate masterpiece hidden from other characters, joining the previous Pygmalion figures (Pygmalion in *The Metamorphoses* or Eraste in *L'Amante statue*). As Frenhofer, the painter protagonist, toiled in secret for ten years on his masterpiece, layering brushstrokes, relying on philosophy and imagination, he represents a new Pygmalion, obsessed with representing his own ideal in reality. In *Fictional Genders*, Dorothy Kelly sets up Frenhofer's quest: "He understands that art involves something more than copying and translating [...] A mission to express nature rather than to copy it: what could this be? For Frenhofer it is Pygmalion's dream of creating life itself, of creating reality, rather than imitating it..." (170). I suggest, in line with Kelly's assertion, and, by extension, Plato's conception, that Balzac's painter pursues a different conception of creating art than Porbus or Poussin do; he is not concerned, as they are, with the mimetic representation of reality, but in the creation of an imagined ideal in the Platonic sense.

In order to demonstrate how Balzac's protagonist painter represents a Platonic artist, reaching beyond the real to create the ideal, as Pygmalion attempted, I will place his masterpiece in relation to Porbus's painting. The latter is a mimetic representation, albeit technically and skillfully produced: "La Marie Egyptienne." In both of the paintings, we find references to the sculptural beauty and skill found in Ovid's Pygmalion

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<sup>38</sup> Arthur R. Evans concludes that "his masterpiece does not breathe and radiate life; it does not even achieve significant form and coherence as a painting. Frustrated as creator, he fails likewise as artist" (192).

myth. As in the original myth, we are concerned with the artist's *techné* as well as his inspiration. Frenhofer criticizes Porbus and Poussin for the way in which they see "good" art: "vous croyez avoir copié la nature, vous vous imaginez être des peintres et avoir dérobé le secret de Dieu! Prrrr!" (Balzac 46). As in Plato, only God possesses this secret to real and true art; according to Frenhofer, Porbus "ne [descend] pas assez dans l'intimité de la forme, [il] ne la poursuit pas avec assez d'amour et de persévérance dans ses détours et dans ses fuites" (Balzac 48-49). The old painter is frenzied in his speech on true art and how Porbus does not attain it with his painting.

Conversely, the recollection of real beauty, "the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul" (exemplified in the goddess Venus) is Frenhofer's inspiration (*Phaedrus* 247c). His painting is the new Galatea, in which he intends to portray beauty on Earth that is a manifestation of the Platonic Beauty. The text indicates that Frenhofer's (the new Pygmalion) painting results from both divine inspiration (Venus as the Platonic form of Beauty) and superior technical skill to produce an ideal figure (Galatea). Deborah Harter characterizes Balzac's story as "a dream of mimesis taken to its furthest extreme" (127). In fact, Frenhofer's wish in life is to find the perfect ideal woman in the flesh, if only to use her as a point of comparison to his own masterpiece: "Oh! pour voir un moment, une seule fois, la nature divine, complète, l'idéal enfin, je donnerais toute ma fortune..." (Balzac 57). Put in ancient philosophical terms, "many artists[,] believe[s] in Platonist fashion that any vision becomes flawed by taking on a form" (Nebel 12). Porbus and Poussin represent these "many artists," while Frenhofer is convinced that his vision is realized on canvas. "For these representational artists who always look for the same, Frenhofer and his painting are intolerable, for

nonrepresentational art in this text signifies Frenhofer's madness and brings him to death" (Kelly 171). What Porbus and Poussin observe as the former's painting's "rien," is everything to the true artist. In short, the artist's madness is generative; from their perception of a lack of control springs genius and great art. Frenhofer claims not that he works to create a depiction of natural beauty, but that he combats nature in order to reach an ideal beauty like that of Pygmalion's sculpture. He concedes that we don't even know how long it took Pygmalion to finish his masterpiece, but he fails to attribute credit to Venus, who actually brought the statue to life. The elderly artist even cites the ancient Cypriot sculptor, at the center of our study, as he describes his long struggle to finish his masterpiece: "Voilà dix ans, jeune homme, que je travaille; mais que sont dix petites années quand il s'agit de lutter avec la nature? Nous ignorons le temps qu'employa le seigneur Pygmalion pour faire la seule statue qui ait marché" (56). In this way, Frenhofer represents Pygmalion and also exemplifies the Platonic artist in that he attempts to go beyond nature; "But, as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine, the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired." (*Phaedrus* 249d). Porbus and Poussin admire and wish to emulate Frenhofer, so much so that they search in vain for the mimetic masterpiece that does not exist in "Catherine Lescault." They cannot help but conclude, however, that he has gone mad; Poussin cries: "tôt ou tard, il s'apercevra qu'il n'y a rien sur sa toile," indicating that he hopes that the old painter will eventually recognize his folly.

The way in which the artists in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* perceive the fictional works of art is one of the keys in understanding the painting's role as manifestation of an imagined ideal. Todorov explains perception in the context of the fantastic: "In other

words: concerned as we are here with the perception of an object, we may insist as much upon the perception as upon the object. But if the insistence on the perception is too strong, we no longer perceive the object itself” (103). Viewed under the lens of Ovid’s Pygmalion myth, this act of outside perception disturbs the artist’s original intent and his original imagined vision. Pygmalion never presented his statue for others to view, so he was the only one concerned with perceiving it in relation to his imagined ideal. With Frenhofer, however, he has to reconcile not only his imagined ideal with his painted representation, but also with the ways in which Porbus and Poussin perceive and describe the painting.

Often, rather than seeing the painting as a work in progress or a creation in progress, outsiders only see what they deem a failure to represent reality. In the case of *Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu*, “Frenhofer sees a perfect living woman where Poussin and Porbus see nothing, and the double reading of this portrait illustrates the subjective nature of perception and the way in which the observer’s desire constructs what it creates and perceives” (Wettlaufer 247). Poussin and Porbus desire a mimetic representation of a woman when they look at “La Belle Noiseuse,” whereas Frenhofer desires a representation of his act of creation. The work of art’s ability to convey mimetic representation dissolves with the painter’s desire to create true art through impressions. The “chef-d’oeuvre” (masterpiece) becomes a “travail d’art” (work of art), which can be examined as following the methods of poetry rather than painting.<sup>39</sup> In order for the artist

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<sup>39</sup> Kevin Bongiorno conducts a reading of *Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu* that privileges this association with poetry and the poetic in Balzac, Frenhofer, *Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu: Ut Poesis Pictura* (2000). He insists on the fact that the unknown masterpiece can never exist, quite simply because it is a literary construction from Balzac’s imagination. To Frenhofer, he ascribes the following conception of the artist: “The true artist [...] is a poet for whom the relation between the act of representing- painting and the painting itself- and what is represented- the physical object in the world- is not one of simple visual correspondence and resemblance” (91). This, too, reflects Plato’s definition of the true artist and true, not imitative, art: “Then

to survive, he must create art; this is an infinite process that never accomplishes a “finished” product.

To Frenhofer, his paintings represent far more than oil on canvas; his works are an integral part of his very being, something so private and profound that they cannot be shared for fear of losing their essence. The power of the secret is central in this and other adaptations of the myth, as well as in Ovid’s original version, and affects each of the characters that come in contact with the painted (or sculpted) masterpieces. “C’est le secret donc qui permet au mythe de l’Artiste de se construire et de fonctionner” (Massol-Bédoin 47). The triangle of representation linking the artist, imagined model, and the work in *Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu* differs from Ovid’s Pygmalion in that the illusion of privacy/secrecy dissolves. Pygmalion was able to succeed in his task of creating the ideal woman because only he could see her (and, of course, because he received Venus’s aid). Frenhofer, on the other hand, when he shares his masterpiece with others he becomes suspicious of their intentions; he thinks that they are trying to convince him that he has failed so that they can steal his work. Into the triangle of work-artist-ideal, Balzac’s story adds a new element – the outside observers. As I showed in *L’Amante statue*, the third party observers put into question the intentions of the artist, even while they attempt to influence the possible model. When Finette and Crispin view and describe the Elise statue, the real Elise cannot help but be influenced by their speculations. Likewise, Frenhofer’s painting, in the end, is no longer secret and the outside viewers’ perceptions become one of the most important and problematic aspects surrounding the work. His

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the imitator is a long way off the truth, and can reproduce all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image.” (*Republic* 598b) Again, Bongiorni confirms this association in Balzac’s story: “The task of the painter [...] is to conceive the visible form or object not as complete in itself, but as the physical or material effect and expression of an invisible cause” (91). These impressions and expressions are at the core of a poetic, rather than mimetic, conception of art.

creation is perfect in his mind, but to the outside viewer, it is incomprehensible, or worse, meaningless. Finally, however, he cannot reconcile Porbus and Poussin's reality with what he has produced on canvas.

While Porbus is anxious to view the skill in Frenhofer's masterpiece, for the latter it is not simply an artistic rendering of the ideal woman; for the artist qua lover, it is "[sa] créature, [son] épouse" (Balzac 64). We can relate this lover to the original, Pygmalion, who was moved by the disgraceful Propoetides to find love in an ideal that did not exist in the real world; thus, he sculpted his ideal woman in ivory and kept her to himself - so too did Frenhofer. Like the sculptor king, the painter refers to his artwork as his spouse, yet wishes that he could see the complete, divine, ideal form in nature. When his friend and the neophyte, who have been waiting outside the closed door, enter the studio to view the finished painting, they report seeing only "des couleurs confusément amassées et continues par une multitude de lignes bizarres qui forment une muraille de peinture" (Balzac 69). Unable to convince the two artists of the existence of a perfectly rendered female form on his canvas (they see only a perfect fragment of a foot, while the rest is covered in a mixture of lines and colors), Frenhofer is found the next day dead in his burned studio.

The central focus of Frenhofer's life is the drive to create art. His instincts as an artist are not to mimetically represent reality as so many past and contemporary artists aimed to do. On the other hand, he is an artist in the larger Platonic sense, not merely a painter or copyist of reality; he is a creator, on a Godlike level. For Frenhofer to survive, he must constantly be occupied by the act of creation. This can be any stage of creation, from imagination to completion, but the painter cannot exist in a prolonged state of

latency or impotence. He engages in creation until the moment just before his death and the spectacular destruction of his masterpiece.

Frenhofer, in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, experiences the drive to create from his imagination, rather than from reality, just as Ovid's Pygmalion did. In the 1981 introduction to the short story, Marc Eigeldinger observes:

L'artiste n'imite pas le modèle extérieur qu'il observe, il le recrée et le transforme en se référant au modèle qu'il porte en lui; l'objet est reconstruit selon la vision imaginative, car les apparences du monde ne signifient pas d'elles-mêmes, mais revêtent la valeur de signes renvoyant à une forme spirituelle. (21-22)

In his analysis of the artist's work, Eigeldinger invokes, as I have done, Plato's idea of the Forms as inspiration for creation. The seventeenth-century painter, as presented in a nineteenth-century context, eschews the tenets of mimesis in favor of an inclusive philosophy of art as constant creation and representation, not of reality, but of the ideal Forms stemming from his own genius. In so doing, Balzac adapts the Pygmalion myth to philosophical ends, as his subtitle indicates. He lifts the role of the artist up to meet a Platonic definition: "and the soul which has seen the most of truth shall be placed in the seed from which a philosopher, or artist, or some musical and loving nature will spring" (248d).

### Unknowing the Masterpiece

The artist, through his own desire to create turned madness, destroys his work. The creation exercise becomes one of destruction, self-destruction. Whether we see the artist as a success or a failure, his end is the same. He may not be successful at producing mimetic or ideal representations of woman, but he is successful (at least for a time) at creating art. Throughout his artistic process, the artist and his work pass through different



levels of dissolution and destruction. Unfortunately, Frenhofer disproves Cecile Nebel's conclusion on destructive artists: "It is also worth noting that artists who destroy their work do not commit suicide and that those who do, do not destroy their works" (138). Both admirers (M. de Peyrehorade and his Alphonse) and artist (Frenhofer) are dead at the end of each tale.

Balzac makes a clear link between creation and destruction through Frenhofer's character. If the artist cannot create the ideal masterpiece, then both he and his art must perish. McLaughlin reads beyond the end of *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*: "Frenhofer's death is from this perspective double. It is earthly as well as artistic: he dies to the world and also to memory, he becomes 'unknown.' In the end, Frenhofer is condemned to oblivion by his resistance to the earthly measure of exchange" (60). In *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, elements of the fantastic enter the works to confuse the boundaries between the real and the supernatural. The ways in which Balzac uses the fantastic differs from the episodes in the texts in chapter two. Frenhofer ends up consumed by his desire to engage in the creation of something novel. From an outside perspective, his masterpiece is a confusing mess of incomprehensible forms. The artist, however, exclaims: "Mon oeuvre est parfaite, et maintenant je puis la montrer avec orgueil" (Balzac 68). The imitators, Porbus and Poussin, cannot see the perfection in his work, simply because they are not true artists.

As I have shown, the fantastic interpretations of artistic creation through the Pygmalion myth represent a shift from supernatural explanation to scientific inquisitiveness, and ultimately, indecision and destruction. When characters perceive strange occurrences in the stories, they must relate them either with an outmoded

superstition or with an as-yet not established scientific theory: psychoanalysis. In order to attempt to make sense of these inexplicable experiences, the characters' natural inclination was to control the situation through any means.

In Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille*, the townsfolk, unable to solve the mysterious death of M. de Peyrehorade, shifted the blame to the beautifully frightful Venus statue. To gain a sense of control in an otherwise suspicious setting, they decide to melt the statue down, physically altering its form in the hope that its perceived evil powers would be destroyed in the process. Although they take action to destroy the Venus, they cannot escape future negative occurrences, like crop freezes. Again, even though all of the questionable events in the story could have rational explanations, they remain mysterious to the characters, and to the reader through the use of the fantastic genre.

In Balzac's tale, the Pygmalionesque creator is unable to convince the other characters of his genius masterpiece. After spending years attempting to achieve the ideal representation of woman on canvas, his creation is met with confusion and derision. What he cannot explain about the true nature of art, according to a Platonic framework, Frenhofer tries to control through means of destruction. Once more, the text leaves the ending's meaning ambiguous; Porbus discovers that Frenhofer has burned his studio and died during the night. All the same, the fact remains that each creator or admirer of the ideal is incapable of reconciling its possible malevolence with its superior beauty. This inability to accept a dual meaning or dual explanation for mysterious events brings the characters to a desire to destroy what he cannot comprehend. Finally, without the aid of a divine intervention, relying solely on their own skill and power, none of the characters in

the fantastic texts is able to create a sustained ideal in the real world, as Pygmalion did in Ovid's myth.

## CHAPTER FOUR – A NEW GALATEA (RE)ANIMATED AND (RE)CONSTRUCTED

Throughout a century of French literature, we have explored examples of the ancient Pygmalion myth that alter the main structure and themes therein. As we recall, the original myth achieves the creation of the ideal with, of course, the aid of Venus's divine intervention. In chapter two, I focused on eighteenth-century texts, wherein theatrical farce highlighted the confusion that could occur within the Pygmalion plot, all while the characters assumed new traits traditionally associated with other players. In the nineteenth-century fantastic short stories in chapter three, the creator or discoverer figure in *La Vénus d'Ille* and *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* attempts to take control over his own creation or discovery. Although this new Pygmalion tries to alter others' perceptions of the ideal creation, his attempts ultimately prove unsuccessful and he resorts to destroying the artistic product. In this final chapter, we arrive at two decadent nineteenth-century novels in my corpus of Pygmalion myth adaptations that evoke the stages beyond destruction. From the destructive Pygmalion characters in chapter three, we will turn to two new creator figures who also perform their own destructive processes before engaging in complicated reconstructions and animations of the Galatea characters.

In Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel, *L'Eve future*, and in Rachilde's 1884 *Monsieur Vénus*, the authors adopt the Pygmalion story using protagonist figures with futuristic and avant-garde ideologies. The methods that these characters use in their quest for the ideal include the application of late nineteenth-century technology and artifice - both in rapid growth and improvement - during the end of that period. The new Pygmalion figures, the inventor Thomas Edison (in *L'Eve future*) and aesthete Raoule de Vénérande (in *Monsieur Vénus*) commence by physically and philosophically breaking

down what they view as Nature's failed attempts to produce the ideal person. These 'failures' are represented in the characters of Miss Alicia Clary (in *L'Eve future*) and Jacques Silvert (in *Monsieur Vénus*). During this disassembling process, they take inventory of the necessary qualities needed for the ideal Galatea,<sup>40</sup> such as physical, and also spiritual beauty. They then (re)construct, (re)assemble, and (re)animate entities that bear only some ontological resemblance to the real originals. Unlike Ovid's Galatea, these new creations are at times grotesque or troublesome for the reader or characters in the stories, but the two new Pygmalionesque creators insist upon their genius.

Contextualizing these new creation attempts within the period of European industrialization, Annie Petit proposes, in her 1990 article "La Science en procès: Edison et *L'Eve future*": "A la fin du siècle les choses changent. [...] les applications de la science s'exposent avec fierté; les recherches techniques et industrielles séduisent. On s'est aperçu du 'génie' de l'ingénieur" (65). As Petit shows, during the end of the nineteenth-century, attitudes begin to change so that not only artists can possess genius, as in the past, but engineers as well. Through science and technology, the engineer can bring new ideas to light; he can imagine what only the artist could imagine and create before and furthermore, his unique skills are appreciated by society. Thus, the cult of technology and industrialization, personified in the figure of the proud engineer, begins to compete with the cult of art that reigned for so many centuries. In sum, this societal shift towards science and technology provides a space in which both Villiers and Rachilde can fully integrate such attitudes into their (re)imaginings of the Pygmalion myth.

As stated earlier, in both adaptations, modern creators attempt to take control where Nature had failed in order to produce the ideal. We have seen that it is an inherent

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<sup>40</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of Galatea as the name given to Pygmalion's statue.

impossibility for the ideal to exist in reality, yet it remains a task that creators continue to pursue. Contrary to the previous Pygmalion figures we examined, however, Villiers's and Rachilde's protagonists wield new tools as well as new ideologies. In *L'Eve future*, Edison, the protagonist, is convinced of his success in bringing the ideal Android to life, but ultimately, nature destroys her in an unforeseen accident. In *Monsieur Vénus*, Raoule crafts her ideal figure from Jacques's corpse, thus creating a permanent, passive automaton. The new methods (which I will develop in the sections that follow) that they use attempt to supplant Venus's divine role in the original myth but, in the end, are unsuccessful at bringing and sustaining life through technological or artificial means. Do their talents and commensurate hubris actually pay off? Despite all of the pronounced societal advancements in technology at this time, it nevertheless appears in the end as though the divine is still necessary in achieving the creation of the ideal.

The eccentric decadent hero, representing Pygmalion, through his (or her) use of contemporary technology and artifice in these texts, reflects a nineteenth-century obsession with control over the means of production. Rather than using strictly artistic methods like sculpture (Pygmalion) or painting (Frenhofer), Edison and Raoule integrate mechanisms like metallic cylinders and anatomical waxworks to bring their creations "to life." I contend that while the new creator figures rely on modern technologies, they are ultimately unable to adequately replace Venus's divine force with them. In my analysis to follow, I argue that these results of the myth's adaptations (i.e. their ultimate inability to achieve the sustained creation of the ideal) reflect society's preoccupations with industrialization and technology during late nineteenth-century France. This preoccupation, in turn, influenced the decadent movement in literature.

Before this analysis, however, a brief overview of some of the elements that pervaded decadence in the arts at the fin-de-siècle will assist in framing our understanding of the two primary texts dating from 1884 and 1886. Asti Hustvedt sums up the troubles associated with defining the decadent movement in literature:

Decadence has been viewed as a development of romanticism or as a transitional movement between naturalism and symbolism, owing its preoccupation with degeneration to the naturalists and its imaginary qualities to the symbolists. Decadence has existed either in a theoretical vacuum or as literary parasite of its richer relatives. (13)

Its place in literary history indicates a shift from romantic notions of man's relationship with nature to the naturalist conceptions of nature as a primary and potentially destructive force upon man. Decadence, thus, indicates ambivalence about man's relationship with nature; man is at once subject to nature's destructive forces all the while attempting to control it using new technological and scientific knowledge. Moreover, the above description indicates that literary scholars have not really come to a consensus on a concise definition or an appreciation of the movement's values within the French literary tradition. "In contrast to [the naturalists]," Hustvedt goes on, "whose purported aim was an objective, 'scientific' documentation of the world, the decadents aestheticized decay and took pleasure in perversity" (14). Villiers's and Rachilde's artistic portrayals of natural degradation and artificial reconstruction serve as two prime examples of decadent literature. In what follows, a decadent framework will contextualize the Pygmalionesque creators' endeavors at accessing an ideal in a reality plagued by decay and artificiality, beginning with Villiers's 1886 *L'Eve future*.

## Villiers De l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve Future*

In Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 decadent novel, *L'Eve future*, the Pygmalion myth appears as a tale of technological and artificial creation. While some<sup>41</sup> have noted the peculiar novel's clear similarities to the Biblical myth of Genesis (the most obvious reference being the titular character "Eve"), I will align my analysis with scholars who elucidate the artistic and creative aspects that harken back to the Pygmalion myth.<sup>42</sup> Although its eclectic nature makes it difficult to classify, *L'Eve future* has appeared in recent critical works treating science fiction, gender studies, as well as the decadent genre.<sup>43</sup> In it, Villiers presents a complicated adaptation, rich in esoteric detail, of Ovid's myth of creating the perfect woman as a statue and bringing it to life. Nineteenth-century conceptions of religion, technology, mythology, and science all play significant roles in the exploration of who this ideal woman is and the characteristics that she should possess according to the male characters. This is in stark contrast to the texts from my corpus analyzed in chapters two and three, in which such conceptions (i.e. technology) affect the creation of this ideal woman to a lesser degree, and are sometimes not even present at all.

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<sup>41</sup> In her 2005 article "The Difficult Guest: French Queer Theory Makes Room for Rachilde," Katherine Gantz mentions Villiers's text as a contemporary of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*. Of *L'Eve future*, she writes: "Villiers clearly delights in twisting that most renowned of female personages, the Bible's Eve; by invoking a literary figure almost universally recognized by the mainstream, the decadent author may corrupt a part of the cultural canon already embraced by a more conventional readership" (Gantz 117). Laurent Mattiussi, in the edited volume *Le Mal dans l'imaginaire littéraire français 1850-1950* (1998), conducts an extensive study of the Edison character as a type embodying God, demon, redeemer, and poet, among others. He observes that Villiers's novel "suggère un retour à l'origine, une reprise corrigeant ce qui s'est joué au commencement de l'humanité" (207).

<sup>42</sup> I will elaborate on some of these analyses of *L'Eve future* as a retelling of the Garden of Eden story from The Bible in a later section of this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Recently (1996), the edited volume *Jeering Dreamers: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Eve future at our fin de siècle: A collection of essays* regrouped studies from these various approaches. This volume, edited by John Anzalone, testifies to a renewed interest around Villiers's "disturbing, prescient novel" (13). Deborah Harter includes it in her 1996 book, *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment*, where she groups it with other fantastic stories from the nineteenth century. In *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (1981), Jean Pierrot groups Villiers among other writers of the period who he names "decadent," such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, Jean Lorrain, Guy de Maupassant, and others. Dorothy Kelly calls *L'Eve future* a "science-fiction tale" in her 2007 book, *Reconstructing Woman*.



The Pygmalion myth further undergoes yet another evolution in *L'Eve future*. Where I argued in chapter three that both Frenhofer (*Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*) and Alphonse de Peyrehorade (*La Vénus d'Ille*) suffered death and destruction at the ends of their attempts to control their ideal works, I will now show how *L'Eve future* moves beyond this point of destruction. In nature, after death comes decomposition and a return to the earth; following earth's interiorization of the organic elements, it then germinates and re-creates life. Analogous to this natural process of death to decay to rebirth, the new Pygmalion metamorphoses from a destructive force to a reconstructive force in this nineteenth-century iteration of the myth. He is no longer portrayed as an artist, however; this transition from artist to inventor is made clear at the beginning of Villiers's novel, which opens with a description of our inventor hero. Edison is first compared to the artist Gustave Doré and bears a striking resemblance to the latter: "C'était presque le visage de l'artiste *traduit* en un visage de savant" (Villiers 100). Here we see the image of the artist literally "translated" or more accurately, transfigured into the face of a thinker. An inventor (Edison), rather than a sculptor, endeavors to create a decadent Galatea using all of the new methods at his disposal. The cult of genius has now evolved from sculptor and painter to inventor and scientist in the nineteenth century. The mythical American character conducts his project in his Menlo Park laboratory, which is secluded from curious reporters and onlookers. We will remember that previous creators kept their works in secret as well (i.e. Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses*, Eraste in *L'Amante statue*, Frenhofer in *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*). The entire story is set in a strange, foreign place removing it from French society even while the threat of technology and industry threatens from across the Atlantic. Edison attempts to both construct the perfect female

anatomical form and to animate within her the most appreciated and desired sensibilities. In order to save man from ever falling prey to a dangerous, or even mediocre, woman in the future, he begins his task. In like fashion to Pygmalion's Galatea, the Future Eve in Villiers's text is conceived of in opposition to a real negative example of the undesirable woman rather than as inspiration from a perfect idea. Her creation in the story only takes place because of man's desire, need, and ability to escape from a natural woman, the version of woman over which he has no control.

In my analysis of *L'Eve future*, I will uncover the ways in which this new Pygmalion figure usurps natural creation, not unlike Ovid's sculptor. However, the artist/inventor character goes much further than the original myth to control the means of (re)construction and (re)animation. Likewise, various *techne* reveal how Venus's role as divine power in the original Pygmalion myth becomes overshadowed by the new "miracles" of modern technology. Finally, I attempt to map and decipher, in reference to the original Galatea, the various female figures that ultimately compose the ideal representation of woman as an Android. Hadaly, the Android who lives in Edison's laboratory, is presented in the text as a mysterious, unreal female shell. Alicia Clary, the beautiful actress and singer, is the subject of Thomas Alva Edison's and Lord Ewald's joint creative project around which the story hinges. These two male characters, Edison and Ewald, are concerned with creating the ideal female form, personified (or statuefied) as the mythic Venus or Biblical Eve. They use a combination of artificial materials (i.e. metal cylinders, make-up), new technologies (i.e. phonography, photosculpture) and spiritual techniques (i.e. telepathy, somnambulism) in their project. Villiers's novel not only incorporates artifice and technology in the creation of the ideal Galatea, but also

calls into question the very possibility of this creation existing in a nineteenth-century context by destroying it in the end. Such questioning thus uses the myth to highlight the overall societal complications surrounding fin-de-siècle advancements in science and technology.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas Alva Edison, the idealistic inventor and his friend, Lord Ewald, who is visiting America from Scotland, are the only two male characters in the novel. Edison, who despite having a wife and two children (Dot and Dash), spends most of his time secluded in his laboratory surrounded by his inventions. Ewald, who has virtually no scientific sensibilities, concerns himself with his sentimental and cultural success in life, specifically with finding his perfect female companion. The majority of the story takes place in Edison's Menlo Park laboratory as a sustained philosophical conversation and interaction between the two men. Only one other male character, Edward Anderson, briefly enters the narrative through a reminiscence by Edison. He recounts the sad story of his friend who fell for a dancer named Evelyn Habal and subsequently ruined his family. This particular episode will prove significant later in the section on artifice and the female form. Additionally, the small number of distinct male characters contrasts with the many female characters that exist not so much as separate wholes, but as individual fragments that will ultimately form a complete entity.

*L'Eve future's* narrator first introduces Lord Ewald with the following description of his desirable physical qualities: "un jeune homme de vingt-sept à vingt-huit ans, de haute taille et d'une rare beauté virile...Ses traits, bien que d'une régularité grecque,

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<sup>44</sup> In addition, Jacques Noiray, in *Le Romancier et la machine*, has thoroughly demonstrated Villiers's own mistrust and dislike of technology in his time, notably, "cet anti-positivisme, cet anti-progressisme, qui ont toujours été considérés comme essentiels à sa pensée" (v. 2; 266). Hereafter, I will abbreviate *Le Romancier et la machine* as *RM*.

attestaient par la qualité de leur finesse une énergie de décision souveraine” (131). This physical description paints Ewald as a worthy suitor; he is even compared to a Greek conception of beauty, owing to his supreme good looks. This physical description then paves the way for the narrator to associate the Lord’s traits with his inner sentiment:

Il semblait tellement beau qu’il avait naturellement l’air d’accorder une grâce à qui lui parlait. Tout d’abord on eût dit un don Juan d’une froideur insoucieuse. Mais, à l’examiner un instant, on s’apercevait qu’il portait, dans l’expression de ses yeux, cette mélancolie grave et hautaine dont l’ombre atteste toujours un désespoir. (Villiers 131-132)

This is a complicated description, because the narrator paints Ewald as both a nonchalant Don Juan and as a handsome, gracious fellow. The manner in which Ewald is described leaves the reader to question the narrator’s accuracy; through the use of words like “semblait” or “avait l’air” we understand that the narrator attempts to make a connection between the Lord’s outward appearance and his interior personality. In some ways, Ewald’s content does not correspond to his form either; he is also incongruent, although to a lesser degree than Alicia is. He portrays the hopeless melancholy of his social class, which seeps out from just below the surface of his countenance. This is made apparent in the description of his eyes, which show darkness or a shadow beneath the surface. Moreover, we must not ignore the parallels to the narrator’s presentation of Alicia Clary, the “bourgeois Goddess,” who also displays a certain mediocre air typically of a woman from the “petit monde” of the stage who attempts to better her station through association with the upper classes. It seems that although Ewald is no great figure, he demands the ideal for his partner. This is the man for whom Edison decides to design the ideal female Android.

This strange collection of female characters is much more complicated to describe than the male characters. To start, only one of the female characters is a living human being (Alicia Clary); the remaining four (Any Anderson, Sowana, Evelyn Habal, and Hadaly) are either non-living humans or living non-humans. Briefly, each female character serves to portray one particular aspect of the ideal woman figure according to Edison and Ewald. The story and, thus, my description begin with a real woman, Miss Alicia Clary, who is the object of Lord Ewald's affections as well as his frustrations. According to Ewald, Alicia is perfect in every way except for one – she is completely devoid of an adequate, let alone transcendent, spiritual presence, or soul. Ewald is in love, but cannot be with Alicia if she is not the ideal woman, both inside and out, so he vows to commit suicide unless his friend Edison can help him. In essence, Alicia is the perfect shell of a woman who possesses all the ideal physical traits; her form does not correspond to her content. What she lacks in spirit, however, is what makes her a frustrating creature in Ewald's eyes.

When Ewald approaches Edison with his problem, the inventor welcomes the challenge because he happens to be on the verge of creating an Android in the form of the ideal woman (he already has a prototype among his inventions). He responds nearly as openly and as positively as Venus did when Pygmalion visited her alter in Ovid's poem. In order to ensure that no one encounter Ewald's dilemma, he proposes to use Alicia's perfect physical features as the model for the exterior of the Android. The mechanical Android<sup>45</sup> has been personified and given a name – Hadaly –, which Villiers claims

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<sup>45</sup> See page 161, where I elaborate Villiers's use of the term "Andréïde" in *L'Eve future*.

means “Ideal” in “lettres iraniennes” (209).<sup>46</sup> Hadaly is the second female character, in the group who will ultimately be composed of two entities – a physical exterior modeled on Alicia Clary and an interior “soul” based on the spirit entity Sowana. Sowana, the third female character, lives in Edison’s laboratory and can best be described as a spiritual entity, almost like a somnambulist who drifts in and out of consciousness and reality. Nevertheless, Sowana does inhabit a human body, which is what has become of Mr. Anderson’s (Edison’s friend named above) wife, Any Anderson (the fourth of the group), after he left her for the exotic dancer, Evelyn Habal. This fifth, and last, female character exists only as a recorded projection and a collection of cosmetics and costumes.

In total, these four female supporting characters – Alicia Clary, Sowana, Any Anderson, and Evelyn Habal – each appear at separate points in the story (and in Edison’s discourse) to illustrate the multifarious troublesome representations of woman in the decadent text. As Deborah Harter puts it, in her work on the fragment in fantastic texts *Bodies in Pieces* (1996): “The women in the novel [*L’Eve future*] become so many Galateas, each one more or less ‘complete,’ each one more or less deficient, each one an object of unsettling display” (44). In one form or another, each of these four aid Edison in creating the ideal Android, Hadaly. I contend, furthermore, that we can view these disparate figures as analogous to the ivory pieces that Pygmalion joined together to create his ideal Galatea; as Harter suggests, they are complete fragments that make up the troublesome whole. The last character, Hadaly, is most important in retelling Ovid’s Pygmalion story, as she comes to represent the complete ideal Galatea figure, the one who Edison and Ewald will clothe in beautiful fabrics and don with rare jewels just as the

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<sup>46</sup> In fact, according to a note in the 1992 edition (that I reference throughout my analysis), this is not a direct translation or transcription of “ideal” at all. Rather, “‘had-é-âli’ (en iranien: *limite supérieure*) peut être pris métaphoriquement au sens d’‘être suprême’” (Satiat, 209, note 128).

Cypriot king did. Contrary to Ovid's statue that comes to life at the end of the poem, Hadaly only survives until the end of the novel when the boat transporting her (below decks in a coffin) and Ewald back to Scotland capsizes.

Now that we have a general portrait of each character in Villiers's novel, we must begin to understand each entity as it relates to the original tripartite collection of characters in Ovid's Pygmalion myth. I interpret *L'Eve future* as an adaptation of this myth wherein the statue, the sculptor, and the Venus characters are represented by a curious group of entities in various forms. Fundamentally, as Ovid's Pygmalion used ivory pieces to fabricate a beautiful statue, the act of creating the Android using fragments of different women demonstrates the nineteenth-century inventor's attempt to animate and possess the ideal woman through new techne. That is to say, the strange amalgam, Hadaly, comprises elements (both physical and psychical) of the other female characters named above; together, Edison's Android invention represents the statue figure from Ovid's Pygmalion story. Moreover, the invention project in Villiers's text parallels that of the artistic one in Ovid's text (as well as others in my corpus). With all of her complex parts and implications, Hadaly stands in as the ideal, created here by man and for man. The male creator is not an artist as such, but a scientist and inventor who represents a new idea of genius; Edison creates new objects, tools, and techniques out of pre-existing materials. He does so in novel and ingenious ways, likening him to the ancient Pygmalion who used ivory and wax to sculpt and construct his statue.

Additionally, Lord Ewald has a significant role in the Android's creation that we cannot ignore. Ovid's Pygmalion sought to create his ideal wife following his utter disgust with the real women he had encountered ("[he] observed how these women lived

lives of sordid indecency” (v. 312)). Here, Ewald seeks Edison’s help because the woman who he has met in real life, Alicia Clary, simply does not live up to his ideal standards. In Alicia, Ewald sees an inherent incongruence between her supreme physical beauty and her disappointing psyche: “Le seul malheur dont soit frappée Miss Alicia, c’est la pensée! – Si elle était privée de toute pensée, je pourrais la comprendre. La *Vénus* de marbre, en effet, *n’a que faire de la Pensée*. La déesse est voilée de minéral et de silence” (Villiers 155-156).<sup>47</sup> Both figures, Pygmalion’s statue and Edison’s Android, result from a negative interaction with reality rather than a positive genius inspiration. Pygmalion, in Ovid’s version of the myth, had a literal “disgust” for the women of Cyprus, causing him to close himself off from marriage and to live alone for years (v. 315). Their impetus, therefore, stems from the same lack that they perceive in reality. What they cannot find in the real world, they decide to sculpt or to fabricate artificially.

As I presented in chapter one, Venus acts as a divine and powerful force who grants Pygmalion’s wish to enliven his statue; since he cannot create life where none exists on his own as a mortal man with no wife, he must rely on the goddess in whose powers he unequivocally believes. The next eighteenth-century versions of the myth that I explored in chapter two showed how the creator figures questioned the power of the divine and were, in fact, confused as to how the statues in their midst could come alive without external intervention. These texts from the eighteenth century reflected the complicated and wavering belief systems in society between new ideas of science and

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<sup>47</sup> A few lines later, Ewald contemplates Alicia “si elle se taisait et fermait les paupières,” which clearly alludes to her being dead and further points to his necrophilic desires. In *Persons and Things*, Barbara Johnson explains Ewald’s statement: “Living is truly what Alicia does wrong: a live person can never be an *object* as well as a dead person – or a stone person. Behaving like a *subject* is often a beautiful woman’s mistake” (128). While this is a most interesting theme to follow, I will restrict my reading of Villiers’s novel to the enlivening aspects that compare to the Pygmalion myth.



reason and the old ideas based on superstitions and long-held traditions. Villiers, on the other hand, complicates the Venus role in a new way in his nineteenth-century retelling of Ovid's myth. The inventor/inciter pair, personified as Edison and Ewald, certainly has no belief in a mythical divine power like Pygmalion did, nor do they accept any of the pagan superstitions or religious traditions of previous generations like Eraste (*L'Amante statue*) or the Illois (*La Vénus d'Ille*) may have. Thus, no divine intervention is requested or expected, yet there is an element of spiritualism or mysticism that enters the story. These superstitious notions, which combined new science with occult entertainment, in vogue throughout the European continent at the time, stand in as a vestige of belief in a divine power.

The scientist, as mentioned, stands in for the artist (sculptor in Ovid, painter in Balzac, etc.) figure that we encountered in the three previous chapters. Again, Villiers makes this transition explicit in the first book (entitled "M. Edison"), chapter one ("Menlo Park") of his novel in the declaration cited above: "C'était presque le visage de l'artiste *traduit* en un visage de savant" (100). Thus, the task of achieving the ideal in reality has now been conferred to the scientist, leaving the work of the artist in the past. Along these lines, I assert that the male creator (both the inciter, Ewald, and the executor, Edison) will supplant the divine intervention's role in his own Pygmalionesque quest with technology and artifice (both existing and fictitious techniques).

As we saw in Ovid's text, as well as subsequent adaptations of the Pygmalion myth, it is strictly the artist figure who is seen as able to surpass the skills of the average man and come closest to surpassing nature as well: no longer called upon is the divine character of Venus or one of her many iterations in past retellings. Even though Ewald

professes that “la science ne saurait aller jusque-là,” Edison will make use of many tools and techniques that are uniquely at his disposal due to his profession, his station, as well as his particular moment in time (Villiers 136). In order to create the ideal woman in a mechanical and artificial form, the scientist uses new nineteenth-century technologies as well as the latest techniques in make-up artistry to replace Venus’s divine role. As we know, Ewald is looking for the ideal woman on the inside as well as the outside, so Edison must go beyond artifice and technology in his creative process. At this point, both men will philosophize about what the perfect characteristics are, and then Edison will go about re-creating them in an automaton using his scientific knowledge.

To summarize, *L’Eve future* depicts the story of a lovesick man, Lord Ewald, who goes to his inventor friend, Thomas Alva Edison, for some help and advice. Lord Ewald has fallen for a beautiful woman, Miss Alicia Clary, who is cursed with a mediocre soul: “Médiocre avant tout, elle n’est même pas méchante: elle est bonasse, comme elle est avaricieuse plutôt qu’avare: toujours sottement, jamais bêtement” (Villiers 158). With pointed nuance, Ewald describes Alicia as a foolish sort of woman who acts without forethought, but never idiotically or maliciously. The problem with Alicia, according to the polite Ewald, is that there is an inherent disconnect between her exterior physical qualities and interior psychic sentiments; simply put, she is a physically beautiful woman who doesn’t have a comparable soul. On a nineteenth-century medico-sociological level, as Hustvedt notes, “[t]he female body was viewed as the site of a disturbing and incomprehensible split between inside and out. The dramatic symptoms of the outer body had no inner reference, no location. They did not reveal the workings of the unconscious. They were only themselves, baffling, alarming, but revelatory of nothing” (500). While

Hustvedt's assessment of the decadent view of the female body refers to negative or mysterious outer symptoms on hysteric female patients that have no explanation, the inverse observation also holds true, as in Villiers's description of Alicia's beautiful physical nature that does not indicate a similar interior nature. She is like so many inanimate objects that, "apparaissent comme des signes sans contenu, des signifiants sans signifié," observes Sylvain Matton in his article, "Le jeu de la technique et de l'imaginaire dans 'L'Eve future' de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam" (55). In Ewald's words, again: "À l'extérieur – et du front aux pieds – une sorte de Vénus Anadyomène: au-dedans, une personnalité tout à fait ÉTRANGÈRE à ce corps. Imaginez ce semblant de conception réalisé: une Déesse bourgeoise" (Villiers 148). Ewald essentially describes Alicia as a freak of nature; both he and Edison believe that a beautiful exterior must indicate a beautiful interior, that the signifier should evoke the signified. However, Alicia's personality is somehow completely "FOREIGN" to her body; she seems to be an inconceivable woman. This depiction confirms Hustvedt's aforementioned assertion that the paradoxical, and even pathological, female body is the decadent motif *par excellence*. Additionally, Ewald implores Edison to imagine a bourgeois Goddess, an oxymoron, conflating the images of the mythic (Venus Anadyomène) with the pedestrian (bourgeoise). As a member of the bourgeoisie, Alicia is human, but the comparison to a Goddess elevates her to superhuman.

Following Ewald's desperate description of his situation, Edison claims that he can create the ideal woman in the exact physical likeness of Alicia Clary, without her empty personality, and vows to do so within twenty-one days in order to save his friend from a suicidal fate. Key in Edison's assertion is that he alone, as scientist, can complete

this project. Whereas Ovid's Pygmalion invoked Venus's aid and other creators looked in vain for help in various forms, Edison, as all-powerful engineer, is completely convinced of his own talents and powers to execute the task. Jennifer Forrest describes Edison's hubris in her 1996 article "The Lord of Hadaly's Rings: Regulating the Female Body in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 'L'Eve future':" "Edison, with the authority of the Wizard of Menlo Park, speciously concludes that supplanting a cosmetic and prosthetic illusion with a machine will incur neither remorse for the radical nature of the deed, nor grief for the loss of the real woman, nor nostalgia for her company" (31). In Villiers's adaptation of our central myth, the scientist's talents are presented as innate: "Il n'invente, dit-il, que comme le blé pousse;" his talents are as natural as wheat growing - effortlessly (102). In light of the Pygmalion story, I assert that the inventor character, imbued with superior talent and equipped with new *techne*, replaces both Pygmalion's and Venus's roles. The inventor's plan is one of animation: he alone intends to bring the perfect soul into being through technology and to match it with the perfect exterior that Alicia already possesses. With his skill, he will construct the form, as Ovid's Pygmalion did when "he created an ivory statue, a work of most marvelous art" (v. 316-317). Then, with his power of invention, he will bring it into being as Venus was "able to give us whatever we ask for" (v. 348). In *L'Eve future*, the different parts necessary to do this consist of elements from each of the female characters detailed above along with the technologies and tools of Edison's time. Lord Ewald, obviously stunned at this proposition, but so deep in his misery that he prefers this plan to suicide (self-destruction), accepts Edison's offer and they begin work conceptualizing this ideal woman in Edison's Menlo Park laboratory. Ewald has lost all hope in reality and, as a decadent hero, places his trust and belief in

known science rather than unknown superstitions. From a point of near destruction, the Pygmalion myth adapts to bring forth a (re)creation of an already living semi-ideal woman.

Edison attempts to create a perfect, or even more perfect, copy of Alicia Clary, who will in essence be the representation of the Ideal woman. As Edison puts it to Ewald, “cette sotte éblouissante sera non plus une femme, mais un ange: non plus une maîtresse, mais une amante; non plus la Réalité, mais l’IDÉAL” (Villiers 172). She will no longer be a simple woman, mistress, or product of reality; she will surpass all of those earthly, base qualities to become the ideal lover. Moreover, “Edison’s masterpiece is interactive since the various possibilities appear only if Ewald so desires, and, as the scientist reassures him, they can always be erased,” notes Hustvedt. The Android is not only passive, but interactive as well meaning it will respond to its operators commands and wishes (507); in other words, it will not possess free-will as a real woman would.

On the inside, the Android is constructed of various metals, fluids, and magnets connected to exterior rings that Ewald can use to regulate her day-to-day activities and responses. On the outside, artificial substances form her hair, flesh, and overall look to mimic those of Alicia. On the narrative level, Villiers parallels Edison’s process as he pieces together the Android in textual form with separate chapters, each focused on one aspect: “la démarche,” “l’éternel féminin,” “l’équilibre,” “la carnation,” “la bouche de rose et les dents de perle,” etc. (Villiers 294, 300, 303, 312, 316). In the story Edison and Ewald, either practically or conceptually, work on each part of the Android one by one. The narrative structure, with its short individual chapters that name one aspect of the Android, reflects the events of the text, revealing Edison’s scientific process, step by step,

as in a dissection. In Allison de Fren's 2009 article, "The Anatomical Gaze in Tomorrow's Eve," she reads this episode as a proto-science fiction display of dissection that announces the same theme in later cinematic works. Citing other feminist and film scholars, de Fren argues that the literary dissection in *L'Eve future*, which appears on both a narratological and plot level, parallels cinematic representations of "the female through close-ups, medium- and long-shots" (236). In a later section on Evelyn Habal, we will witness one such dissection that is only metaphorically alluded to in this narrative structure.

The creator never envisions the future Eve as an actual real human being in this story. As we recall, although he wishes for a real woman, Pygmalion does not believe that his sculpture is living; "the image [merely] seems, in truth, to be a girl" (v. 320). Furthermore, Pygmalion's prayer to Venus is not to bring his ivory statue to life so that he can marry it, but that she "let [him] have the wife [he wants]"; this is not what the goddess does – she, in fact, transforms his statue into a real woman going beyond his prayer. In a reversal of Pygmalion's wish, Ewald expects that his real lover will become a predictable, passive automaton and Edison produces the form of a hybrid soul/mechanical entity. This dual nature of the Android is not unlike the nineteenth-century conception of humans being made up of a soul<sup>48</sup> and body; in this new Pygmalion story, the artist figure replaces the natural soul with a contrived one and creates a mechanical structure to house it. Thus, the creators put the future Eve's ontology in question from the moment of her

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<sup>48</sup> In *The Decadent Imagination*, Jean Pierrot describes what this term signified in a nineteenth-century context: "What the word 'soul' was to denote increasingly for those who employed it during this period, however, was principally a mysterious and 'deep' self, as opposed to the immediate certainties provided by the consciousness as it processed the interplay of phenomena, perceptions, and sensations. 'Soul' in this sense was the individual, permanent, and perhaps eternal essence, as opposed to a view of human life interpreted by physiologists in terms of simple physiochemical reactions" (84).

inception. If the creators cannot and do not classify their project as human or non-human, then how will society eventually be able to accept and understand the Android, as Edison expects it will need to do when mass production can theoretically begin? Edison reflects upon his creation as an industrial producer, rather than as an artist, when he says, “La première Andréïde seule était difficile. Ayant écrit la formule générale, ce n’est plus désormais, laissez-moi vous le redire, qu’une question d’ouvrier: nul doute qu’il ne se fabrique bientôt des milliers de substrats comme celui-ci--et que le premier industriel venu n’ouvre une manufacture d’idéals!” (Villiers 307). The inventor completed the difficult work of developing and creating the ideal Android. He doesn’t hesitate to suggest that an entrepreneurial figure could come along at any time and open up an “ideal factory” to produce thousands of models based on his original design.

As discussed in my introduction, the ancient Greek concept of *techne* will aid in understanding the concept of creation for Edison and Ewald in light of the Pygmalion story. We established that the Ancient Greeks first used the term to encompass several ideas (“skill, art, craft, expertise, profession, science, knowledge, technical knowledge”) regarding conception, knowledge, and production (Roochnik xi). In the ensuing millennia, myriad philosophers and scholars have taken up the idea of *techne* following Plato’s writings.<sup>49</sup> Since it is a term that encompasses so many meanings and applications, it has been used in various fields outside of aesthetics and technology studies to different ends. In my close reading of Villiers’s *L’Eve future*, *techne* serves as a way of situating the inventor/artist’s (Edison) role and his creative task within both an artistic and technological area of expertise at a particular moment in time. Such an

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<sup>49</sup> In his comprehensive study of the philological and philosophical roots of *techne*, Roochnik begins by making clear that “by the fourth century [when Plato wrote his dialogues], the ‘*techne* question’ had already been pursued in earnest by a wide variety of writers” (17).

approach allows us to better comprehend Edison's multi-faceted role in this re-telling of the Pygmalion myth. My examination of *L'Eve future* is, therefore, largely predicated on the above translations of *techne*, specifically those of skill in science and technical knowledge as it relates to the arts. To ignore the multiple meanings associated with this complex idea would be to misunderstand Edison's role in the current Pygmalion myth's adaptation. We cannot view him as *only* an inventor or *only* an artist; he portrays both professions simultaneously, continuing a long tradition of literary Pygmalions.

In *L'Eve future*, we finally see a Pygmalion figure that attempts to control the production and representation of ideal beauty using modern tools and techniques not seen before this point. In Ovid's myth, the author refers to ivory, wax, or a simple chisel as aiding the artist to execute his ideal statue. The later eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts that I've analyzed in previous chapters introduce the use of marble, paint, and canvases as materials in the creative process. In Villiers's adaptation of the myth, however, these traditional materials and hand tools are but a small fraction of the modern resources and techniques at Edison's disposal in industrial America. In true decadent fashion, "in this novel he changed the goals of science, bent its technologies to his idealist uses, and imagined science as an art that might work toward a reengineering or rewriting of that society, a refabrication of 'nature' that would improve on it," asserts Dorothy Kelly in *Reconstructing Woman* 2007 (126). Thus, through the inventor character, Thomas Edison, Villiers appropriates new technology as the art of the future, or that which can showcase true creative genius.

Although Edison's seemingly benign task is to re-create the beautiful exterior of Alicia Clary, it becomes problematic when a real soul and artificial materials are



combined to create the ideal woman in the form of a hybrid android (as shown above, Hadaly is one part “soul” and one part “physical shell”). “Thus, although [Edison] might reject the utilitarian nature to which the science of his time was being put, in this novel he changed the goals of science, bent its technologies to his idealist uses, and imagined science as an art that might work toward a reengineering or rewriting of that society, a refabrication of ‘nature’ that would improve on it” (Kelly 126). Perhaps, at the beginning of his project, Edison does not realize the inherent metaphysical troubles that the Android could cause. The reader, as Kelly notes, can simply attribute this oversight to his hubris as all-powerful inventor as he adapts science to his own lofty ends.

The author of *L’Eve future* was most likely influenced and inspired by the World Exposition of 1878 in Paris, where, as Noiray and others note,<sup>50</sup> he would have been able to see the real Thomas Edison’s phonograph, artificial flowers, and other inventions. He would conceive of the idea for his novel as a “figure féminine, représentant à la fois le point d’aboutissement de la science la plus avancée, et le triomphe de l’art sur la nature” (Noiray 288). Villiers’s choice to name his hero Thomas Edison is made explicit in an “avis au lecteur” in which the author clarifies that his character is purely fictional. He describes the real inventor using those “fantastiques surnoms” given him by Americans and Europeans alike: “le MAGICIEN DU SIECLE, LE SORCIER DE MENLO PARK, LE PAPA DU PHONOGRAPHE, etc., etc.” (95). Villiers argues that the real Edison could be considered a character of “la littérature humaine” due to his legendary status among men (95). The novel opens, therefore, with a coded prescription of the fictional

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<sup>50</sup> Dobay Rifelj, for example, directs the reader to the Pléiade edition of *L’Eve future*, which documents Villiers’s use of “articles and pamphlets and what he had seen of other inventions at the Exposition universelle for his depiction of Edison and for the scientific and pseudo-scientific passages in the novel” (431).

protagonist as a legendary hero, one who is capable of feats beyond the average man. Instead of extolling the Romantic aesthetic philosophy of “l’art pour l’art,” in which art exists just for its aesthetic value and appreciation, Villiers hopes to represent the ability of man (exclusively) to produce an entity that is above and beyond nature’s capacities. Edison’s Android will represent both an aesthetic ideal and a bourgeois necessity: the physically and psychically perfect woman, who is eternally accessible to the nineteenth-century man.

The “Magician of the Century” commences his ultimate creative endeavor with the real woman. Under the pretext of creating a statue of Alicia Clary in order to increase her fame as a singer, Edison convinces her to stay with him for a short time so that he can accurately and completely record all of her beautiful physical features: “vous comprenez que la chose est devenue maintenant tout à fait reçue! [...] Lorsqu’une artiste est douée d’une grande beauté, elle se doit sa statue... [...] Je rougis de le dire, mais – je ne me rappelle pas votre statue” (Villiers 346). Edison plays to her vanity as an actress and convinces her that mere portraits are out of fashion. Here, the electrician plays the role of the mimetic artist, faithfully copying features from the real woman onto an artificial replica. He uses many new artistic techniques of the late nineteenth century, such as photosculpture, photography, and the phonograph. I argue that this demonstrates an evolution in the Pygmalion myth from earlier adaptations. In *L’Eve future*, the shift from the statuary (ivory or marble) representation of the ideal female figure in past adaptations to the mechanical being created from nineteenth-century techniques in a scientific laboratory is broached repeatedly in the dialogue between Ewald and Edison. In the narrative structure, however, Edison refers to creating an actual traditional statue of

Alicia in just a small part of Book VI; nearly the complete novel is dedicated to the description of the methods for fabricating the new machine-woman, or the new Galatea figure. Despite this change in place and time (from Ancient Greece to nineteenth-century America), the trope of man seeking (and attempting to create) ideal woman persists. In this futuristic staging, we have an inventor rather than an artist as protagonist and an android rather than a statue as object, highlighting the decadent movement's inspiration from and ambivalence to the influx of new technologies.

#### Hadaly, the Ideal, Created from Alicia, a Copy

Edison attempts to create, in the real world, a representation worthy of the moniker "ideal woman." In portraying a Galatea figure that is both a copy of a real woman and an imagined ideal at the same time, Villiers further complicates the Pygmalion story in his adaptation. "The greatest paradox of *L'Eve future* is perhaps just this: from a copy, an original is produced. And this is indeed the newly discovered reproductive power of technology" (Lathers, in ed. Anzalone 61). Whereas the original Pygmalion was able to sculpt his ivory statue using just the image in his mind, the new creator character in *L'Eve future* relies on many representational techniques to get the image exactly right.<sup>51</sup> Although Hadaly is the first mimetic entity to be constructed, she is a double copy. First, she is a physical copy of Alicia Clary, the real woman. Later, we will examine the tools and methods that the inventor uses to reproduce the singer's

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<sup>51</sup> Is this merely Villiers's way of incorporating as many scientific and pseudo-scientific methods in his novel? If so, as critics have suggested, this may be one reason why his penultimate work was not as well-received by his contemporary readership. Furthermore, it may be a reason why scholarly interest in *L'Eve future* has only recently (within the last few decades) increased; Villiers sometimes privileged exhaustive cataloguing to the detriment of plot development.

physical features (these are the *techne* that replace Venus's power). We initially encountered this motif of the artist creating a work of art that copied a real person in Desgagniers's *L'Amante statue*; Eraste's statue looked exactly like Elise, the woman he secretly loved. This structure deviates from the original Pygmalion story in that Galatea was not modeled after a real woman, but a conception of the ideal woman in contrast to the Propoetides of Cyprus. In other versions of the myth explored in my corpus, such as Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, the artistic creation is based purely on the painter's imagined idea.

Second, Hadaly is a representation of the ideal entity that exists only in the minds of Edison and Ewald. In order for the creators to bring it into being, they must first access the idea in their imaginations. The brief history that I provided on the discovery of the Venus de Milo statue in 1820 becomes relevant in *L'Eve future* as well. Dobay Rifelj refers to the discovery and Villiers's allusion to the Venus de Milo to contextualize this copying: "The Venus de Milo is already the creation of a man and a symbol of perfect womanly beauty. Hadaly will be an ideal copy of a copy of the ideal woman" (435). In her interpretation, Hadaly is an artificial copy of an artwork meant to portray the idea of the perfect woman; thus, a copy twice removed from the ideal. In yet another formulation, Marie-Hélène Huet states that, "the artist makes art from life modeled after art itself," referring here to Ewald's observation that Alicia resembled the Venus Victrix (often conflated with the image of the Venus de Milo in the collective imagination) in the Louvre (225). To relate these observations that other scholars have made on Hadaly's existence as a copy, I once again find Plato's expression to be the most inclusive and appropriate for my reading of Villiers's text as a Pygmalion myth adaptation. Plato names

this recognition process a “theory of Recollection” in the *Phaedrus*: it is “the recollection of those things which our soul once saw while following God- when regardless of that which we now call being she raised her head towards the true being” (249c). Those things “we now call being,” or truths, are merely simulacra of the higher truths, which cannot be seen.

Lord Ewald and Mr. Edison have never perceived the ideal woman during their lives, but in Platonic terms, her image, and all that it represents, remains in their subconscious (to use an anachronism) as a vestige of their souls’ experiences at some point with the true forms. Hadaly, along these lines, represents the physical copy of the imagined ideal; in turn, this imagined ideal stems from Alicia, the real woman, who resembles Venus, woman epitomized. Moreover, we have textual evidence of the Platonic philosophy in *L’Eve future*; Edison, in Socratic fashion, expresses the essence of Plato’s discussion of the Forms to Ewald: “La ligne de l’Equateur terrestre n’existe pas: elle *est*! Toujours idéale, imaginaire, - et cependant aussi *réelle* que si elle était tangible, n’est-il pas vrai” (Villiers 304)? He insists that for something to be *real*, it does not need to *exist* as a tangible object; it can be real even if it is only a construction in the mind or the imagination. Edison’s great task, as inventor, is to usurp Plato’s conception of the ideal by bringing it into reality. This is something that only Ovid’s Pygmalion succeeded at before, simply because he had the help of the all-powerful Venus. Edison, however, only has his tools and technology from which to create an extant version of the ideal woman; in Villiers’s re-imagining of the Pygmalion myth, Edison plays the parts of both sculptor and divine intervention.

In the novel, the physical part of the Android first appears as a metallic form that Edison brings forth from a dark corner of his laboratory. Through an act of prosopopoeia,<sup>52</sup> “la main de l’électricien s’appuya sur un objet que Lord Ewald ne distingua pas bien... ‘Hadaly!’ appela-t-il enfin à haute voix” (Villiers 177). First Edison touches the object, and then he calls out a name, which essentially brings the figure into being. The next chapter in the novel, entitled “Apparition,” describes how both Lord Ewald and the reader perceive this unknown entity. She leaves the room as mysteriously as she appeared and we learn that she is “une sorte d’Etre,” but Edison insists, “Ce n’est pas un être vivant” (178, 180). For Lord Ewald, Hadaly is not a woman, but “un Etre de limbes, une possibilité” (181). Hadaly is no longer referred to as an object after this point. For now, she exists in a liminal space between the real and imaginary realms. She can, and will, be exactly what and who Ewald desires after Edison completes his task. In this description, Hadaly is not a being, but a coming-into-being;<sup>53</sup> she is midway through a process that may or may not come to completion. This liminal non-human entity recalls the gradual metamorphosis by which Pygmalion’s ivory statue came to life under his touch: “the ivory softened and, losing its stiffness, yielded, submitting to his caress as wax softens when it is warmed by the sun, and handled by fingers, takes on many forms, and by being used, becomes useful” (v. 357-360). Indeed, in order for Hadaly to be of use

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<sup>52</sup> Prosopopoeia, as I explained in my introduction, is the process by which an entity obtains a voice and becomes animate when given a name. In chapter one, the example of Rousseau’s Pygmalion character naming his statue Galatea is a prime example of this figure of speech.

<sup>53</sup> For my purposes, this quality of liminality speaks to the metamorphosis that the Android, and by extension, the Pygmalion myth undergoes in the text. On another axis, Rodolphe Gasché reflects on the philosophical consequences of Hadaly in his 1983 article, “The Stelliferous Fold: On Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future*.” “According to the Republic,” he writes, “that which floats between Being and Nothingness, simultaneously participating in the two orders, is unworthy of philosophical consideration. Characterized by equivocity and essentially unstable, these things which one cannot firmly conceive to be or not to be, or to be both or neither, are the objects of opinion (doxa), the intermediary faculty betwixt and between knowing and ignorance” (309).

to Ewald, he must press upon her various rings and pearl necklace that she wears that control her movements. When he metaphorically handles her through conversation, she responds accordingly.

Only after Edison conjures Hadaly through calling her by name and introduces her to Ewald, do we see the term “Andréide” used for the first time in the text to describe her form (Villiers 183). It is a name that Ewald, naturally, does not understand and asks Edison to clarify what exactly an Android is. The inventor defines the term as “une Imitation-Humaine,” which must not, he warns, surpass the real model. His warning stems from man’s past attempts at creating human-like automata, but ending up with what the electrician describes as “des monstres dérisoires” (Villiers 183, 184). Edison calls attention to what he deems past failures in the arts to imitate reality. They have exactly the opposite effect on man from what Edison believes he is capable of achieving: “Ces ouvrages, sycophantes informes, au lieu de donner à l’Homme le sentiment de sa puissance, ne peuvent que l’induire à baisser la tête devant le dieu Chaos” (Villiers 184). In stark contrast to man lifting his head up to the ideal forms (as Plato’s theory of recollection encourages), Edison claims that the failed creations incite man to lower his head in front of the god “Chaos.” “The scientist, however, in combining technical and historical knowledge with aesthetic sensitivity, emerges to assume control of shaping the society of tomorrow,” argues Forrest (32). Edison, with his great capacity as electrician and mechanic, asserts that his creation will transcend all of the previous attempts.<sup>54</sup> And

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<sup>54</sup> Marie-Hélène Huet proposes one reason that Edison’s Android invention ultimately fails in *Monstrous Imagination* (1993); it is, simply, its construction as a monster. She defines monsters in a Romantic context as “the offspring of an imagination that literally imprinted on progeny a deformed, misshapen resemblance to an object that had not participated in their creation. They were the products of art rather than nature, as it were” (5).

in his case, Edison has science and technology on his side that he can combine with all the knowledge and skill that came before him.

Physical and natural reproduction by a woman has become problematic in the fin-de-siècle episteme. “Advocates of women’s rights, women and men alike, understood the central role of the population question in the success of their cause,” notes Karen Offen (652). She associates this increased interest in woman’s role in post-1850 French society to a real decline in population: while other industrialized nations experienced a drop, France “was the first to experience the decline, and in absolute numbers its population was swiftly being overtaken by those of the surrounding monarchies [namely Great Britain and Germany]” (651). The population problem relates to reproduction at the end of the nineteenth century. On a metaphorical level, it is akin to what Marie-Hélène Huet observes as “the scientist in his laboratory, the modern womb. The scientist now takes the place of the mother” (111). Dorothy Kelly echoes this sentiment when she writes, “this need to keep science objective and masculine does not seek simply to separate man and science from woman and subjectivity; it seeks also to dominate both woman and nature” (232 in *Spectacles of Realism*). What is needed in Villiers’s time is a guaranteed, infinitely multipliable alternative to procreation: in his imagination - that of mechanical reproducibility. Before the metaphorical (re)production and animation can be completed, however, the female figure must undergo a destructive phase, or death, in order to form a new beginning.

However, Edison does submit that he is finished with production when he claims that Hadaly is the last version that he will create, “mais... je ne fabriquerai plus d'andréides” (Villiers 408). In addition to the idea that Edison will remove himself from



the industrialization aspect of any future creations, the reader also notices a textual difference in this statement. There is a significant linguistic shift, only perceptible in the written text, but masked in Edison's speech, in the above quotation. Until this point, which is approximately three pages before the end of the novel, "android" is always written with a capital "A" when referring to Hadaly created in Alicia's likeness. In this statement, however, "android" is written in the lower case - signifying, I claim, a shift from uniqueness to commonness, from original to reproduction. Edison is implying that there could only have ever been one such Android and that all others would be impossible replicas ("C'est par suite d'un choix métaphysique, non d'une impossibilité technique," alerts Noiray (300).) of the original ideal creation. This marks a distinction between a special work of art and a simple reproducible copy.

This is not the only use of the "a" orthography and it links *L'Eve future* to other creation myths. I find it telling that all four female characters in the novel have the "a" vowel sound in their names more than once: Alicia Clary, Evelyn Habal, Sowana, and Hadaly. This "A" could be conceived as the beginning, an origin, as it is the first letter of the Roman alphabet. One also recalls the "A" of Adam (the name means "humankind" in Hebrew), the first man in the Biblical creation myth. Adam was the human form created by God to resemble God on Earth. Furthermore, from Adam the first woman was created: Eve. Eve, the original and supposedly perfect, yet tainted and dangerous, woman is also obviously the inspiration for the title of Villiers's novel. In *L'Eve future*, Villiers recounts a quest to create a new version of the ideal woman, one who will not possess any of the previous defects that time and society bestowed upon her.

From the “A” orthography of Android and the phonetic vowel sounds contained in Adam, Anderson, Hadaly, (Evelyn) Habal, and Sowana we move to the “E”s of the (future) *Eve*, *Evelyn* (Habal), *Edison*, and *Ewald*. The new father of humanity – technology – personified in the inventor Edison has supplanted the original mother of all humanity, God’s Eve from the Garden of Eden (or as I contend in a Pygmalion context – Venus). Gantz notes, in reference to Villiers’s chosen titular character and the genre in which he wrote:

French decadence reveled in the game of rewriting the stories and legends that comprised the cultural canon, indulging in the two-pronged pleasures of exclusion and infiltration. [...] Villiers clearly delights in twisting that most renowned of female personages, the Bible’s Eve; by invoking a literary figure almost universally recognized by the mainstream, the decadent author may corrupt a part of the cultural canon already embraced by a more conventional readership. (116-117)

Through his use of a widely accepted and traditional story in France’s “cultural canon,” Villiers is able to comment on those more subversive issues at stake when contemplating technology, the real and ideal woman, creation and destruction.

Gantz’s observation points us to the many critics who have identified the characters in *L’Eve future* with God, Adam, and Eve, or with the Biblical story in which they appear in general. Many, of course, begin with an association of Alicia Clary with the Biblical Eve based on her characterizations of beauty, temptation, and the fall of mankind. Edison, by the same token, recalls God’s role in the Garden of Eden for many readers. Mattiussi, Bellour, Dobay Rifelj, and Hustvedt, for example,<sup>55</sup> all compare the skilled inventor to the Christian deity. Bellour, however, takes this comparison a step further to equate, not only Edison, but man, Ewald, and woman, with God: “When

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<sup>55</sup> Hustvedt sees this new Biblical story set, “in a garden of science, Menlo Park,” rather than the Garden of Eden (511).

woman becomes the ideal machine invented by man, she takes the place of God. At the same time and by the same token, man transforms himself into God. Man and woman thus become God through each other, with all that this entails for their respective identities and the fantasies that it fuels” (113). He continues by naming Edison’s creation “the Woman-Masterwork [...] she is verbalized by Edison, embodied in Lord Ewald, produced as a virtual fact by the two men and, between them, by Hadaly, who is her incarnation” (128). This makes the final Android the culmination of efforts by the three characters: Edison, Ewald, and Hadaly, each curiously representing the God figure for Bellour. Honing in on just one character, while finding a range of his “duplicity,” Mattiussi finds several figures embodied in Edison in his study: “Dieu et demon, démiurge et Titan, *trickster* bénéfique et maléfique,” “médecin,” “porteur de lumière artificielle [...] de la race de Lucifer ou de Prométhée,” etc. (207, 211, 213). For Mattiussi, “il semble que l’activité esthétique suppose, aux yeux de Villiers, des gestes de transgression. Sans doute les sentait-il peu compatibles avec l’orthodoxie catholique à laquelle il tenait, d’où cette multiplication de types mythiques,” which unsurprisingly supports Gantz’s views above on the use of the Eden myth in the novel (220). Noiray’s reading, however, would appear to disagree with that of Mattiussi: “[I]e modèle auquel nous renvoie le personnage d’Edison est moins celui de Satan que celui de Prométhée” (*Le Laboratoire de l’Idéal*<sup>56</sup> 68). In a similar, albeit reversed, construction to Mattiussi’s of Edison, Harter presents each of the female characters in the novel as a partial representation of Galatea.<sup>57</sup> In keeping with the tripartite structure of the Eden story, but taking it to a metaphysical level within Catholicism, Petit views, “une sorte de nouvelle

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<sup>56</sup> From this point on, I will abbreviate Noiray’s *Le Laboratoire de l’Idéal* as *LI*.

<sup>57</sup> I referred to this observation above in my presentation of the four female characters whose elements make up Hadaly: Alicia Clary, Evelyn Habal, Any Anderson, and Sowana.

trinité - Edison le Père, Ewald le Fils, et Sowana l'Esprit" (74). In this interpretation, all three characters are placed at the divine level, rising above man's abilities and faults. In summary, Noiray brings together Hadaly, Edison, Ewald, and Sowana as key parts in an equation that results in the final mechanical Android:

Dans *L'Eve future*, la machine, c'est, véritablement, l'automate, plus Edison, plus lord Ewald, plus Sowana. C'est l'action conjuguée, sur une créature mécanique, d'une technique, d'un rêve et d'un esprit: extraordinaire construction, la plus complexe, la plus profonde sans doute que l'imagination littéraire ait jamais produite. (RM 2; 311).

After naming them, he then expands these characters to their metaphorical purposes: the mechanics, the technique, a dream, and a spirit (or soul). Each of these interpretations attests to the complicated, multifaceted nature of the characters in Villiers's work; the existing criticism, of which I have highlighted just a few examples, on *L'Eve future* illuminates many aspects of the text, and my reading of these characters as re-visions of the Pygmalion myth adds but one piece to this intricate puzzle.

In essence, as we have seen, Edison's goal is to create a more perfect version of Alicia, using his skills and various *techne*. As mentioned above, the inventor uses nineteenth-century techniques in his process of creating the Android; one such technique, developed in the early 1800s and improved throughout the century, is photography.<sup>58</sup> The photograph serves as a memory tool, or a tool of recollection, in that it can stand in for the subject that it represents when that subject is absent. In photographing and meticulously recording all of Alicia's visual and audio characteristics, Edison is creating partial copies that come together to signify the whole of this woman when transposed onto the form of Hadaly. He demonstrates his *techne*, or knowledge of a certain skill,

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<sup>58</sup> See *A New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot for a history of photography in nineteenth-century France.

when he conducts this process. In a photograph of her face, for example, he creates a visual copy that he then uses as the basis for construction of her artificial copy, the android Hadaly. Noiray focuses on Villiers's reasons for insisting so strongly on the methods of production in *L'Eve future*: "le soin que met Villiers à détailler les procédés de reproduction souligne l'importance attribuée, dans *L'Eve future*, à l'exactitude de la copie," that does not reach, however, "l'excès de perfection dans la ressemblance" (*RM* 315-316). Creating an artificial copy of a human certainly goes against nature, but perfecting this copy beyond nature, to excess, would go beyond the realm of philosophical understanding placing Edison in a Godlike position.

These new techniques of the nineteenth century allowed scientists, artists, doctors, and the public to view the world in a different way. Through these visual and audio recordings, they are able to metaphorically return to the past, and possibly to a past ideal. Villiers was writing at a time, "when critics and artists either disputed or upheld photography's membership in the fine arts. Discussions of the aesthetic categories of the real and ideal invariably included references to photography, whose supposed affinity to a real was viewed as either monstrous or liberating," writes Lathers (85). Villiers's use of this new technique in the creation of a future Eve, who is at once an artistic and technological marvel, reflects some of the issues surrounding the use of this burgeoning technology. As such, Villiers's *L'Eve future* incorporates the scientific as well as the fantastic conceptions of photography and other new technologies; "le talent de cet auteur consiste d'ailleurs en cela: mettre en lumière et récapituler, sous le couvert de l'ironie, les principales obsessions du siècle," notes Philippe Ortel in his comprehensive study of literature during the early development of photography, which focuses on how writers of

the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries incorporated photographic techniques in their writing and thinking (297). Villiers attempts to illustrate how these “obsessions of the century” are important on ontological and artistic levels through his retelling of the Pygmalion myth using said techniques. Edison also uses the photosculpture technique, which consists of taking many simultaneous photographs of different angles of a subject, on Alicia in order to recreate her exterior physique exactly. The photographs are developed and then enlarged so that a copyist can trace them while his pen is linked to a special machine that carves the sculpture material at the same time.<sup>59</sup> Thus, a new techne, the camera, enters into the artistic process as an intermediary between the subject and artist. Where, in the past, the artist relied on his eyes<sup>60</sup> as the only device to perceive a subject and mimetically reproduce it on canvas or in stone, Edison, the artist-technician, brings in a new method to enhance his own vision. The former techniques utilized by previous Pygmalion characters must be surpassed when Edison takes control of the creative process. Lathers’s research reveals that “the process requires the participation of five workers, both artists and technicians: a sculptor, a photographer, a draughtsman, a machinist (who may also be a sculptor), and an assistant machinist” (51). The photosculpture, as techne, encompasses the work of both technicians and artists, combining the skill of two different, yet complimentary, professions. Edison, the artist and technician, then uses various artificial substances and cosmetics to imitate real traits in an ideal fashion.

The inclusion of this new and obscure technique (to both contemporary and later readers) highlights the cult of technology at the heart of *L’Eve future*. On a philosophical

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<sup>59</sup> Lathers provides a detailed description of this technique in chapter two of *The Aesthetics of Artifice: Villiers’s L’Eve Future*.

<sup>60</sup> Or perhaps a primitive camera obscura.

level, “c’est que la technique est bien un effort de prise sur le réel, d’emprisonnement du monde, mais par lequel l’homme s’emprisonne lui-même,” declares Sylvain Matton.

Through his combined use of both known and unknown technologies, Villiers is able to appeal to the contemporary reader with ideas that he or she could actually envision. As man attempted to control the world around him, he inadvertently become subject (or imprisoned by) to the power of his new inventions. The late nineteenth-century hope instilled in industry and mechanization sits uncomfortably beside a profound fear of them.

This paradoxical feeling toward new technologies appears very clearly in the technique of photography. When a subject poses for a photograph, he or she submits to a process that will create a tangible simulacrum parallel to his or her real being. In addition to this spatial doubling, a temporal fixation takes place in one moment that creates an historical version of the self that exists long after the actual subject has perished. The photograph in *L’Eve future*, taken at a specific moment in time, creates an other Alicia. They (the photograph and the woman) are both copies and originals simultaneously; each version of Alicia puts the other’s subjectivity into question. As we observed above, Alicia Clary is already a dual entity according to Lord Ewald. She is composed of her perfect exterior and mediocre interior; both parts could not be more incongruent, yet they coexist.

Villiers treats death and the photographic image in the *Danse Macabre*, or dance of the dead, chapter, which marks an interruption in the main narrative. Situated mid-way through Book IV, entitled “Le Secret,” “Danse Macabre” begins with an epigraph by Charles Baudelaire that reads: “et c’est un dur métier que d’être belle femme!” (Villiers

265). This direct reference to Baudelaire at the beginning of a crucial chapter in the novel reminds the reader of the poem, *Danse macabre*, from *Les Fleurs du mal* (added to the second edition 1861), dedicated to Ernest Christophe. Following the artistic thread back even further, we learn that Christophe was a nineteenth-century French sculptor and that Baudelaire's poem was an ekphrastic work based on Christophe's statuette called, of course, *Danse macabre* (1859). So, before we even read this chapter in *L'Eve future*, we are sent to two artistic works in different media (poetry and sculpture) that treat the themes of beauty, artifice, death, and artistic creation. This scene in the novel, in turn, functions as an ekphrastic description of a "lampascope" projection of a young woman dancing a fandango (the dance of the dead). It is, in essence, a *mise-en-abyme* of the poem itself. Villiers's description of Edison's technical work echoes Baudelaire's poem dedicated to Christophe and, in turn, inspired by his work.

In the "Danse macabre" chapter, the narrator describes the "lampascope" as:

une longue lame d'étoffe gommée, incrustée d'une multitude de verres exigus, aux transparences teintées, se tendit latéralement entre deux tiges d'acier devant le foyer lumineux de la lampe astrale. Cette lame d'étoffe, tirée à l'un des bouts par un mouvement d'horloge, commença de glisser, très vivement, entre la lentille et le timbre d'un puissant réflecteur. Celui-ci, tout à coup, - sur la grande toile blanche, tendue en face de lui, dans le cadre d'ébène surmonté de la rose d'or - réfracta l'apparition en sa taille humaine d'une très jolie et assez jeune femme rousse. (265)

In this scene, Villiers gives the reader a preview of cinematographic technologies that would soon thereafter be developed in France. A short, moving image of a beautiful exotic dancer is projected onto a white screen so that Edison can demonstrate the visual miracles of artifice. Edison and Ewald watch and comment on the dancer's beauty as she moves and sings along to the music. The reader enjoys great detail as Edison enumerates each of the dancer's perfect physical features. Once again, this adaptation adopts the



narratological devices of past Pygmalion myth versions with the fragmented description of a beautiful woman. This theme of seeing the female body in parts seems to pervade each iteration, as I have shown, regardless of genre or time. Lord Ewald looks on in mute surprise and agrees wholeheartedly with Edison's descriptions and claims that it is clear why Edison's friend, Anderson, could fall for such a beauty. Then, all of a sudden, Edison stops the projection and a second filmstrip passes in front of the first to project a new "apparition." Edison starts the new film and projects the image of what Ewald perceives as a "witch." Edison responds to Ewald's surprised horror: "c'est la même: seulement *c'est la vraie*. C'est celle qu'il y avait sous la semblance de l'autre" (Villiers 267). He then goes on to extol the virtues of modern cosmetics, which were present in the first projection and removed in the second. Therefore, both images are of the same woman, but only one represents her true, frightening appearance (to Ewald). The "divine" intervention between the two images is, once again *techne*, represented here as proto-cinematic tools.

Edison recounts the story of his former close friend, Edward Anderson, to Ewald as an accompaniment to the projected image. He is portrayed as an honest husband who succumbed to passion in a moment of weakness. The object of his infatuation was an exotic dancer, none other than the *danse macabre*'s performer, Evelyn Habal. After suffering financial ruin, Anderson later leaves his wife and family. This trope is by no means unique in decadent literature, as it reflects larger social worries with regard to the place of woman. As George Ross Ridge observes: "When the family decays the society it represents will surely disintegrate, for the family crumbles when the wife, mother, earth-woman, upon which it rests, is supplanted by the vampire, succubus, modern woman –

the femme fatale” (359). The Ovidian femme fatale, who inspired Pygmalion’s creation, were the Propoetides, who

dared to deny [Venus’s] divinity; in anger, Venus  
made them the first, it is said, to sell their own bodies,  
and as their shame ceased, and they lost the power of blushing,  
they turned into stones – a very small difference, really. (v. 308-311)

In the novel, Anderson eventually met his death after being emotionally ruined by this “femme fatale.” Edison concedes that Anderson’s case is in no way unique, that it is spreading throughout Europe and America, like a sickness: “Adieu famille, enfants et femme, dignité, devoir, fortune, honneur, pays et Dieu!” he cries. “Cette contagion passionnelle ayant pour effet d’attaquer lentement le sens quelconque de ces vocables dans les cerveaux inoculés, la vie se restreint, en peu de temps, à un spasme pour nos galants déserteurs” (Villiers 251). Not only does the male victim lose his own sanity, but his family, children, wife, fortune, honor, country, and God are not even safe from the evil woman either.

Having never met Evelyn Habal in person, Edison had resolved to solve the case of Anderson’s suicide using the scientific method. He sets up the experiment for Ewald as follows: “Miss Evelyn me représentait l’x d’une équation des plus élémentaires, après tout, puisque j’en connaissais deux termes: Anderson et sa mort” (Villiers 252). To proceed, Edison uses statements from Anderson’s friends who all affirmed that “cette créature était bien la plus jolie et la plus amoureuse enfant qu’ils eussent jamais convoitée en secret sous le ciel” (Villiers 252). The inventor turned investigator does not believe these eyewitnesses and instead creates his own theory about the type of woman Evelyn Habal must have been. These women, the *femmes fatales* as Edison describes them, are:

jouets sans conséquence pour le passant, mais redoutables pour ces seuls hommes, parce qu’une fois aveuglés, souillés, ensorcelés par la lente hystérie qui se dégage d’elles, ces ‘évanouies’ – accomplissant leur fonction ténébreuse, en laquelle elles ne sauraient éviter elles-mêmes de se réaliser – les conduisent, forcément, en épaississant, d’heure en heure, la folie de ces amants, soit jusqu’à l’anémie cérébrale et le honteux affaissement dans la ruine. (Villiers 257)

Otherwise harmless to the casual passerby, these women blind and bewitch men like Edward Anderson who are susceptible to their outward charms. They find that they cannot resist the *femme fatale*’s slowly emanating hysterical vapors. In this fictional description, the men who fall prey to women like Evelyn Habal literally go crazy and end up in ruin. Edison’s solution, as Hustvedt reads it in medical terms would proceed as follows: “By eradicating her naturalness – which was constructed as pathological – the artificial state produced a calm and harmonious femininity, an empty shell that could be occupied by man’s ideal. Artifice, not nature, opens a path to the ideal” (514). When Evelyn, in particular, and the decadent woman, in general, is stripped of her natural (dangerous) qualities and “corrected” using artifice, man can read and control her without feeling threatened.

These layers of artifice are further explored in the chapter following *Danse Macabre*, entitled *Exhumation*. One by one, Edison pulls various items out of a dark drawer: hairpieces, half-used cosmetics, fake teeth, complicated corsets, and perfumes designed to “combattre les regrettables émanations de la nature” (Villiers 272). He keeps them hidden away in a drawer in his laboratory as evidential proof. Edison needs to be able to prove that the projected photographic images are not just an optical trick, and that the difference between the two Evelyns was and is real and tangible. The artificial materials that she used to alter her appearance have been kept for an unknown amount of time; additionally, the time between the recordings of the two images is not known. We

know that Evelyn is now dead and that hers was a macabre dance in reality, not just in spirit. In the end, artifice was unable to preserve her sordid, decadent life. The reader is still left with questions after reading this chapter, but Villiers's motivation for including this demonstration in the novel seems to illustrate two points. First, through this particular experiment, Edison succeeds in convincing Ewald that his methods and skills in artifice attain his claims. Second, Villiers paints a truly decadent picture when he recounts Anderson's affair with Evelyn Habal. In so doing, he highlights the societal malaise around the "femme fatale," which in turn, supports Edison's solution of the Android, an artificial woman, as a replacement for natural woman. Both of these conclusions further link *L'Eve future* to Ovid's Pygmalion myth; we can associate Edison's skills with those of the sculptor king and their motivations for creating the artificial woman come into clearer focus.

Once we establish that Hadaly alone is a mere physical shell we can begin to understand Sowana's role in the many-faceted Android figure. Despite all of the intricate mechanisms that will make the final Android function, she still lacks the perfect soul – the initial impetus for Edison's project. Therefore, the reader encounters no difficulty when imagining the hollow form of Hadaly as a receptacle that needs to be filled with another entity in order to be complete. The Android figure is composed of two separate, but necessary parts, insists Deborah Conyngham in *Le Silence éloquent*: "l'Au-delà," which is personified by Sowana, and "l'En dedans," which manifests in Hadaly, the physical shell (137). Sowana is a sort of muse or somnambulist figure, who was formerly Any Anderson, Edward Anderson's wife. As we recall from the "Danse macabre" chapter, Anderson was the seemingly moral man who fell for Evelyn Habal and left his

wife and family. Edison took Any Anderson into his care and she mysteriously lost her normal identity and came to be known only as Sowana, a soul who could reach beyond normal human capacities.

Conyngham further describes this relation in terms of a duality: “Cette correspondance exacte entre Hadaly et Sowana est le résultat du fait que l’âme libérée du corps, et le corps sans âme se trouvent tous deux dans cet ‘état supérieur’ de la virtualité et peuvent donc s’adapter l’un à l’autre. Unies, Sowana et Hadaly forment ‘UNE dualité’” (145). Thus, they form a singular entity that is composed of two very different parts. Carol de Dobay Rifelj notes that this ontological duality also raises philosophical questions:

The problem of personal identity arises within the framework of metaphysical dualism: since the body and soul are separate, they can be conceived as separable. In which, then, does personal identity reside? And how can two elements so distinct be so intimately interrelated? What are the mechanisms of this exchange? (438)

Because of this inherent duality of the physical body and psychic soul, Edison’s task as creator is twofold; he must perfect both the outside physical appearance and the interior spiritual contents. In addition, he must ensure the means of joining and linking these two parts in order for them to function as a whole. This task harkens back to Plato’s philosophy of Beauty’s role in reference to man. Murdoch paraphrases one particular passage from Plato’s *Republic* on this topic: “The initiate is not to rest content with beauty in one embodiment, but to be drawn onward from physical to moral beauty ... Carnal love teaches that what we want is always ‘*beyond*,’ and it gives us an energy which can be transformed into creative virtue” (*my emphasis* 16). The same was true of Pygmalion, who fashions “a female *figure* more exquisite than a woman who was born

could ever match,” following his disgust of “the many sins to which the female *mind* had been inclined by nature” (*my emphasis* 335). For the original sculptor-king, as with both Ewald and Edison, both the mind and body stir his desire and love for the ideal woman. Here, the physical shell, Hadaly, can be likened to the feminine figure that incites carnal desire. In turn, the “moral beauty” emanates from what the shell encloses: Sowana’s perfect soul.

### The Dangers of Playing God

Ewald, through his wish, and Edison, through his capacity as inventor have brought Hadaly into being. She exists only because they have willed her into existence in the world and because Edison is able to harness the power of new techne, the nineteenth century’s answer to Venus’s divine intervention in the original Pygmalion myth. “The existence of Hadaly depends on the will of Lord Ewald,” confirms Conyngham, and also on the skill of Edison (148). When Edison first presents the idea of creating an ideal android to Lord Ewald, he is stunned and cannot understand how this feat would be possible. He “considéra l’inventeur avec un étonnement inquiet” (Villiers 173). All of his conceptions of reality are based on what he can see and understand; as such, he personifies the philosophy of positivism<sup>61</sup> in the nineteenth century. Thus, the notion of an ideal, artificial copy of a human being is completely outside of his realm of comprehension. At the beginning of his discussion with Edison about the plan, Ewald is

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<sup>61</sup> Holmes cites Auguste Comte as the foremost thinker on positivism, which was “the hegemonic ideology of this period of industrial expansion: [...] the belief, in the words of Auguste Comte, that: “the study of nature is destined to provide a truly rational basis for man’s ability to intervene in nature, since only the knowledge of and hence the ability to predict natural phenomena can enable us to modify them” (7). See Noiray’s *Le Romancier et la machine*, for a history and development of Villiers’s relationship and disavowal of positivism. (See my Note 36).

incredulous and asks, “Vous pouvez reproduire l’IDENTITÉ d’une femme? Vous, né d’une femme?” (Villiers 191). He goes on to add, “Mais, entreprendre la création d’un tel être, murmura Lord Ewald, pensif, il me semble que ce serait tenter...*Dieu*” (Villiers 191). Ewald observes that it is, and should be, impossible for a man, born of a woman, to create another human independently. Furthermore, he sees this as attempting to do the work of God.

Edison’s goal is to create the ideal in the form of an artificial woman who is in the exact image of a real, albeit psychically imperfect woman. In *L’Eve future*, Hadaly exemplifies the artistic and real rendering of the ideal form, in Plato’s terms. She is the first copy of the ideal, an ideal that, in essence and in fact, has never before existed in the world. Edison was able to imagine her because, as Plato would argue, he encountered the form previously as “our soul once saw while following God” (*Phaedrus* 249c). As an expert in various *techne* (in this case, artistic as well as technological skills), he is able to bring his imagined image to the real world through tangible, scientific means. In fact, Edison does not hesitate to deem Hadaly a work of art, in addition to a marvel of technology. When presenting Ewald with his finished companion, he concludes: “Un être d’outre-Humanité s’est suggéré en cette nouvelle oeuvre d’art où se centralise, irrévocable, un mystère inimaginé jusqu’à nous” (Villiers 406). This entity, created outside of the realm of humanity (that controlled by Nature or God), can only be described as a previously unimagined work of art. Paradoxically, the only way that the Android could exist in reality is if she were previously imagined.

Villiers, thus, demonstrates common themes of French fin-de-siècle literature and shows how the task of creating the ideal female entity is wrought with complications and

paradoxes. New technologies play an unprecedented role in the decadent retelling of the Pygmalion myth. These methods are different from both natural and human elements, yet Edison uses them in various ways to recreate human life in his, and Lord Ewald's, own vision. The new *techne*, as I have argued, are a way for the inventor/scientist/artist figure to do the work of each of these professions AND harness the power of the divine intervention, who is no longer present. These roles appeared as separate in the original Pygmalion myth and underwent various reorganizations and renamings in the subsequent adaptations. As Ewald warns, they are, in essence, playing the role of God(dess) in creating a future Eve. This future Eve is created, not from an existing male form, as in the Genesis myth, but from pieces of different female forms combined with artificial and mechanical parts. In other words, "this need to keep science objective and masculine does not seek simply to separate man and science from woman and subjectivity; it seeks also to dominate both woman and nature" (Cohen and Prendergast 232). Villiers's novel, however, fails in dominating woman and nature; *L'Eve future* demonstrates that it is ultimately impossible to create an actual copy of a real woman, initially based on an imagined ideal. Therefore, Hadaly, the ideal, artificial woman created by and for man, does not have a chance to survive in the real world. The Ideal Android, is therefore destroyed in the shipwreck of *The Wonderful* at the end of *L'Eve future*.

Complicating Ovid's Pygmalion myth yet again, *L'Eve future* splits each of the roles in the original tripartite formation. Not only has the creation taken on a multifaceted image in this adaptation, but the creator figure has as well. *Techne*, a term with multiple meanings, replaces Venus and intervenes in the creative process through different, yet complimentary, manners. At a time in French history when real threats to



the population (disease, war, labor needs) were at the forefront of society's concerns, perhaps Villiers felt a conscious (or subconscious) need to proffer an alternate fictional ending that would aid in preserving the French population on an ideological level. Furthermore, could Villiers be telling a tale of the risks of automation, artifice, and ultimately, industrialization? In order to carry on the human race, Ewald would need to procreate with a real human woman, not one who had been altered by technology and artifice.

### Rachilde's Pygmalion(ne): *Monsieur Vénus*

Rachilde (née Marguerite Eymery Vallette) was not just another enigmatic writer from the end of the nineteenth century in France; as an indication of her reputation, she was known under the epithet "Mademoiselle Baudelaire" following Maurice Barrès's preface to the French edition of *Monsieur Vénus* in 1889.<sup>62</sup> M. Jean Anderson writes in a 2000 article that, "it is perhaps not surprising that Rachilde and her works have become a focus for critics interested in fin-de-siècle France and the relatively recently-elaborated gender criticism" (5). As she goes on to argue in "Writing the Non-Conforming Body: Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) and *Madame Adonis* (1888), Rachilde's work contains a number of gender questions that must be approached on both a narrative and behavioral level. In the fifteen years since Anderson's article, criticism on Rachilde, and especially *Monsieur Vénus* has surged; scholars have produced two full-length projects on the author's life and complete oeuvre as well as a new annotated edition and English

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<sup>62</sup> *Monsieur Vénus* was originally published in Belgium in 1884, where it was immediately banned and Rachilde sentenced to serve time in prison and pay a fine, but as Melanie Hawthorne notes in her groundbreaking biography of the author, "[she] avoided most of the inconveniences caused by the Belgian reaction by not setting foot in Belgium, a small price to pay for the notoriety that she achieved in France" (90).

translation of *Monsieur Vénus*.<sup>63</sup> Prior to this 2004 edition, the most recent Flammarion edition from 1977 was the only one widely available to the reading public. Certainly, we can associate much of this recent scholarship with the increased interest in women's and gender studies that brings to light new questions in this nineteenth-century woman writer's body of work. While my research touches on some of the same areas of investigation into gender roles, I will explicate them according to their significance and uniqueness in the evolution of Pygmalion myth adaptations.

Due to the ease of accessibility and readability of Rachilde's 1884 novel, much of the work conducted until very recently centers around it to the exclusion of her other short stories and novels. Most criticism from the past two decades, as can be expected, takes up various questions related to sexuality and gender. For example, Dorothy Kelly conducts a Freudian reading of *Monsieur Vénus* in her 1989 book, *Fictional Genders*, which sums up the almost humorous nature of the multiple role reversals that the characters undergo. In her chapter exploring Rachilde's novel, which she contends is "the story of a woman's desire," (143) she attempts to summarize the many twists that the reader encounters:

so many reversals take place, so many roles are exchanged, that after a while, one can no longer tell what is being reversed, which gender is which, whether one should be scandalized or not, whether the subject of this text is a woman's love for a man, a man's love for a woman, a woman's love for herself or for another woman, or a man's love for himself or another man. (Kelly 151)

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<sup>63</sup> Until the publication of the 2004 edition, scholars relied on a 1997 Flammarion edition, which reproduced the 1889 French publication. In 2004, Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable edited the original 1884 version of the text, which includes a full chapter (among other revisions) that was later excluded from the 1889 French version. They comment on their reasons for restoring the original version of the text in their introduction; in addition, they published a companion English translation of *Monsieur Vénus*, the first in several decades. Melanie Hawthorne also wrote *Rachilde and French Women's Authorship* and Diane Holmes published *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender, and the Woman Writer*, both in 2001. In addition, both projects include full bibliographies of Rachilde's works and the resulting criticism.

The subsequent criticism flows naturally from this complex play on gender role reversals; scholars continue to attempt to map and make sense of Rachilde's unique representations of sexuality and gender as well as the interplay between the main characters.

In an especially prescient examination of the "entre-genre" in *Monsieur Vénus*, Barbara Havercroft writes in 1992 that, "le féminin se déplace dans le lieu du masculin, où le masculin suit un parcours stéréotypiquement féminin, sans que ce double mouvement aboutisse à un simple échange stable de contraires binaires. De cette façon, la place d'un(e) devient également celle de l'autre ; la notion du lieu comme propriété d'un genre spécifique est ainsi mise en question" (49). My reading of *Monsieur Vénus* as a version of the Pygmalion myth will rely heavily upon Havercroft's observation of an "in-between" space, rather than a clear dichotomy between the main characters' genders or behaviors. As I will show in the last section of this chapter, "Rachilde's Third Path," this novel creates a new understanding of the Pygmalion myth's operation in the nineteenth century founded on what Havercroft terms the "entre-genre."

Owing to its popularity and inclusion in the fin-de-siècle literary canon *Monsieur Vénus* is included in excerpt form in *The Decadent Reader* (2000), just as Villiers's *L'Eve future* was. Some of the decadent themes that appear in the former are a privileging of artifice and a portrayal of female sexuality as dangerous, to name just two. Janet Beizer, in her introduction to this excerpt, conducts a reading of Maurice Barrès's preface in conversation with Rachilde's novel.<sup>64</sup> In the same vein as Havercroft's argument, which states that a clear distinction between genders cannot be made, Beizer proposes, "that *Monsieur Vénus* embodies much less a reversal than a *dispersal* of convention – a

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<sup>64</sup> An earlier version of this text appears in Beizer's 1994 book *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*.

more radical placing in question than can be accommodated by the inversion figure” (240). To identify the ways in which Rachilde presents this “dispersal,” Beizer poses her self-described “sticky questions” according to several categories: “gender/power roles, gender reversal, clinical hysteria, heredity, and the semiotic body” (246). She notes that these areas frequently overlap in the narrative, and like the plot, cannot be extricated from each other. Indeed, my own reading will treat several areas and not attempt to form any type of dichotomy out of the interwoven themes.

Rachel Mesch comments on hysteria, one of the medical and cultural paradigms that Beizer names above, as it relates not only to Raoule, the protagonist, but to Rachilde, the author, as well in *The Hysteric’s Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (2006). Clearly, the decadent novel opens the door to many different critical approaches. Subsequently, M. Jean Anderson takes up the question of gender “and the writing of gender codes” in her 2000 article, “Writing the Non-Conforming Body: Rachilde’s *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) and *Madame Adonis* (1888)” (5). She attempts to bring another of the author’s novels into the critical fold as a companion (or possible inversion of) to *Monsieur Vénus*. One of the more unique contributions of Anderson’s work is her reading of the ending of the novel, which is something that I will expand upon in my analysis; she proposes that other critics have ignored a “female winner takes all” perspective (16). I share this perspective, especially when reading Rachilde’s text as a revision of the Pygmalion myth.

Masha Belenky writes concisely in a 2003 edited volume, *Visions/Revisions: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture* that, “*Monsieur Vénus* overtly undermines the conventional polarity of masculine and feminine through its main characters...”

(283). Specifically, she focuses on the “jealousy plot” and how she views Rachilde’s novel as a revision of “Balzac’s presuppositions” in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* (1835) (Belenky 275, 276). Also writing on the gender issues in her 2003 book, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, Lisa Downing finds that, “[i]t is difficult to establish the status of these [linguistic] devices; although gender is loosened from biological sex, the logic of the novel continues to degrade and oppress the feminine and to associate victimhood with femininity” (162). The association of the female gender with desire continues to pervade these recent projects. Desire is, of course, one of the principle elements at the heart of the Pygmalion myth: the sculptor desires the ideal woman. *Monsieur Vénus*, as I will show, turns this traditional desire around, and in more ways than just one.

Much more recently, Katherine Gantz conducts a reading of the 1889 version through the lens of queer theory in her 2005 article, “The Difficult Guest: French Queer Theory Makes Room for Rachilde,” utilizing terminology like “butch-femme,” “transgenderism,” “stone butch,” and “proto-pre-op” (120, 126, 129). Although it is cumbersome to apply these anachronistic labels to late nineteenth-century fictional characters, Gantz nevertheless highlights the difficulty that these protagonists pose through their non-traditional presentations. In addition, she takes the position that “[i]t is a misnomer to label *Monsieur Vénus* with the now-familiar catch-all term of transgenderism, because despite the many daring transgressions in this novel, *there is no gender line being crossed*” (126). This may seem like a strong argument to make, and there is no doubt that it goes against (or past) those made by other Rachildian scholars; however, Gantz clearly shows that the “lines” that others attempt to find in the text are

simply too fluid and ambiguous to define as such. In my attempt to tease out the ways in which Rachilde challenges the traditional Pygmalion, Galatea, and Venus roles, I will target the characters' behaviors and focus less on assigning appellations to them.

In addition to the numerous studies on gender in *Monsieur Vénus*, scholars have investigated other areas of this rich text. For example, in *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (1992), Rae Beth Gordon takes a unique approach to studying the body as object in Rachilde's work. She highlights, unlike other commentators, the ways in which decorative objects like furniture or flowers resound in the Rachilde's language use as well; for example, "'furniture with twisted legs' is mirrored by the frequent appearance of the words *tordre and tordu* to describe Raoule and Jacques" (231). In this way, the reader experiences the objects in her mind's eye through their ekphrastic description, but also through their metaphorical association to the human characters as well. Catherine Nesci and Kathryn Adair's 2010 reading of *Monsieur Vénus* as a re-telling of the Prometheus myth of creation places it within a mythological framework. Here, I submit my own analysis of the story as an adaptation of the Pygmalion myth, in part, as a response to the closing line of their article: "Il resterait à mieux saisir [sa] réinterprétation du mythe de Pygmalion dans la création genrée des sujets amoureux..." (85). The creation of an ideal lover and all of the metamorphoses inherent in the process are to be found in a distinctly *other* form in this, the last text of my Pygmalion myth corpus.

Rachilde's 1884 novel, *Monsieur Vénus*,<sup>65</sup> presents a provocative pseudo-reversal of the traditional Pygmalion roles. Contrary to previous texts in my corpus, I explore

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<sup>65</sup> My citations refer to the 2004 MLA edition of *Monsieur Vénus*, which reproduces the original 1884 (Belgian) edition of the novel. Some of my secondary sources reference the 1977 edition (which

quite a different problematic in this fin-de-siècle text, wherein a woman manipulating a male model troubles the Pygmalion paradigm even further than before. In it, we will encounter topoi from Ovid's myth as well as other authors' reinterpretations throughout the century leading up to Rachilde's work. The scandalous novel begins when Raoule de Vénérande, the aristocratic protagonist, seeks out a renowned artist and florist to create an embellishment for a ball gown. When she approaches the workshop door, which reads "Marie Silvert, fleuriste, dessinateur," she enters with the hope of commissioning this named female artist (Rachilde 7). Upon entering the workshop, however, Raoule encounters Jacques Silvert, Marie's brother. After reading the sign on the door, which announced "Marie Silvert," Raoule obviously expects to find a woman inside, but the figure that she does encounter is initially nameless and even faceless. His back faces the door, so Raoule focuses on the back of his body and his stance before she can wonder about who he is. Hustvedt signals the significance of the setting of the first scene: "The space best suited to decadent art is urban and interior: the artist's studio, the theater, the masked ball, the boudoir, the laboratory, the dreamscape" (21). Much of the action to follow will take place in this studio, Jacques's new apartment, Raoule's boudoir, or the drug-induced dreamscape all too familiar in this literary genre.

Jacques eventually responds to Raoule's confusion: "C'est bien ici, Madame, et pour le moment, Marie Silvert, c'est moi" (Rachilde 9). He informs her that his sister is sick and since "elle ne peut rien fournir de bon," he has stepped in to take over her work; he also adds, "moi, je sais peindre," indicating that he, too, is an artist (Rachilde 9).

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reproduced the 1889 French edition), and I will indicate when any substantive differences affect the readings. In their introduction to the 2004 edition, Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable indicate that, "[the 1889] text was, however, censored; key passages from the original 1884 Brussels edition were omitted" (xxvi).

Jacques, the painter, physically replaces his sister and takes over the role of creating nature through artifice (the artificial flower), echoing the male creators in previous works who held this position initially. Marie, Jacques's sister, is also metaphorically stripped of her power to produce art, which represents (wo)man's ability to recreate aspects of nature artificially because she is ill and unable to fulfill her duties at the time. Though her illness is never revealed, the reader learns later in the novel that she has previously worked as a prostitute (and continues to do so after Jacques's marriage), so the reader can infer that she has a venereal disease. The aristocrat remains dubious, stating that Marie's name was given to her "comme une véritable artiste" (Rachilde 10). This qualification of Marie as a "true" artist seems to contrast with Jacques's assertion that he can produce good art as well; he has no one to vouch for his techne. Jacques's talent as a painter is rudimentary at best, but Raoule decides that, where the artificial flowers are concerned, he has "du talent, beaucoup de talent!" (Rachilde 11). As the text will reveal, however, she clearly has other interests in the handsome young man beyond the promotion of his artistic career.

As other scholars have rightfully noted, it is difficult to identify and follow a straight path in *Monsieur Vénus*. From the very beginning, the main characters seem to portray ambiguous, and even contradictory, physical and behavioral traits. As the title suggests, we are dealing with a masculine (Monsieur) Venus here; nevertheless, this could mean at least two things. Either Raoule represents Venus and takes on a masculine identity with the title or Jacques is a man who embodies Venus's qualities representing love and sensuality. As Havercroft observes, "le nom propre 'Monsieur Vénus', qui évoque déjà une entité double (féminine/masculine), flotte sans cesse entre Raoule et



Jacques” (52). In my reading, I will explore both of these options, looking at Jacques as artist and Venus figure, and then focusing on Raoule as Pygmalion creator of an artificial Venus. On yet another level, we see that the Galatea role of the work of art has taken on the name Venus, borrowing from the divine goddess. The image of the goddess in statue form flows between the real (artistic) and ideal (mythic) realms, similar to what we witnessed in *L'Eve future* with the references to the Venus de Milo and the Venus Victrix (both real statues portraying the divine goddess).

Raoule undertakes her quest as new Pygmalion in similar fashion to the Ovidian and Villiersian structures; she too, is disgusted with the male suitors that have been proposed to her. She feels, as Silverman claims, “[d]égoûtée par le choix offert à la femme d’un type d’homme (un choix, elle insiste, entre l’impuissance et la brutalité), révoltée par le rôle féminin de victime, ...” (51). In her soliloquy before Raittolbe (her primary suitor), Raoule professes that she represents all women and that she will educate man on what he must do to please her: “j’arrive à votre tribunal, députée par mes soeurs, pour vous déclarer que toutes nous désirons l’impossible, tant vous nous aimez mal” (Rachilde 72). As porte-parole of the female sex, Raoule insists that she (and her sisters) seeks the impossible in love. Raoule approaches Raittolbe in his “court” as Pygmalion approaches Venus in her temple – powerless and exhausted from searching for the ideal where it cannot exist.

The creator figure in *Monsieur Vénus*, Raoule de Vénérande, undergoes a double reversal from the representations in previous works in this study. This double reversal begins with the biological sex of the creator figure. Where we have traditionally (and almost exclusively) seen Pygmalion portrayed as a man in adaptations of the myth,

Rachilde writes a (non-traditional) woman in this role. The second reversal occurs when the reader learns that Raoule's behaviors (and outward appearance, at times) align with those of the male gender (as constructed and understood in nineteenth-century French society). The young female protagonist plays the part of Pygmalion as she attempts to dominate and to influence a man to become her ideal lover since she is unsatisfied with real men. Jacques Silvert, a young artisan of the working class, becomes her Galatea, first figuratively, then literally. Although the sexes of creator and creation/creature are reversed in *Monsieur Vénus* -the former is a woman and the latter is a man- the nineteenth-century gender roles of masculine artist and feminine œuvre are maintained. Raoule is simply a feminized version of the common male name, Raoul, and her character is portrayed as powerful and dominating (two characteristics stereotypically associated with the male gender) from the beginning of the text. We learn that her Aunt Ermengarde<sup>66</sup> often calls her *son neveu* while her active niece engages in fencing or painting lessons (Rachilde 28). Through her masculine traits, behaviors, and language, Raoule performs a gender role that does not correspond to her female sex. Although this type of gender performance<sup>67</sup> is not novel in literature, by any means, the way in which Rachilde presents it textually strikes the reader in a couple of notable ways. Anderson adds to Kelly's categorization of gender reversals, what the former calls "reversed nomenclature," two other levels of reversals: "an inverted *narrative model*, and an

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<sup>66</sup> Hawthorne and Constable note that this name was changed to Elisabeth in the 1889 edition; some criticism uses this name (21).

<sup>67</sup> I borrow the term "performance" from Judith Butler's foundational work in gender studies: *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Karen Offen, in her article, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France," situates the first common usage of the term "feminism" in the early 1890s in France. Before this time, issues of gender differences and equality of the sexes was referred to as "the woman question" (654). This is posterior to the works in my corpus, so I will be using the anachronisms that are commonly accepted now in gender studies when referring to man/woman (biological sex) vs. male/female (gendered behaviors and representations).

inversion of *behaviours*” (7). She reads the narrative model as a reversal of the traditional eighteenth-century trope of a wealthy male aristocrat educating a woman of a lower class on all things love and sex. Upon first reading the novel, this is a clear association; as one reads more closely, as Anderson and many have done, it is obvious that Rachilde works to elicit something more complex from her “exotic” characters. This is where we will uncover how the second type of inversion acts upon the Pygmalion myth structure in this text.

The inverted behaviors to which Anderson refers are what I, and others, have observed as the man and woman in *Monsieur Vénus* acting in ways traditionally associated with the opposite gender. As we will recall, a similar gender reversal occurred in another earlier adaptation of the Pygmalion myth: *La Fausse statue* (1771). In chapter two, I analyzed how this play troubled the original creation myth by placing a real man in the role of an inanimate statue in order to fool a real woman into falling in love with him through her appreciation of it. Even though the roles of Pygmalion (Aglaré, the woman) and Galatea (Phais, the man) are switched, the language used to describe the false male statue retains the masculine attributes. Aglaré, as I showed, sees general impressions and overall sentiment in the male statue rather than fragmented physical parts denoting beauty, as men viewing female statues (or other works of art) portrayed in other texts have. Thus, in Rachilde’s novel of a century later, the reversals go beyond what appeared in the earlier play, complicating the Pygmalion myth even further.

Early in the novel, after Raoule has become Jacques patron, Jacques attempts to justify the former’s abnormal behavior to his sister Marie: “Mademoiselle de Vénérande est une artiste, voilà tout! Elle a pitié des artistes; elle est bonne, elle est juste...”

(Rachilde 31). This rationalization of Raoule's seemingly malevolent character as "artistic" is revelatory of the difficulty in classifying the artist. Is she simply artistically eccentric or determined to create an entity that is outside of the bounds of nature? Nesci and Adair, for example, attempt to answer this question: "Dans quelle mesure et sous quelles formes [*Monsieur Vénus* représente-t-il] la création de l'humain, l'origine de la vie et la différence des sexes" (63)? They contend that one could read different creation myths in Rachilde's text including those of Genesis, Faust, Narcissus, and Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from Zeus in order to create life.<sup>68</sup> This should also bring to mind Frenhofer in Balzac's *Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* and Edison in Villiers's *L'Eve future*, as both of these creator figures reference Prometheus in their quests to bring their creations to life.<sup>69</sup> *Monsieur Vénus* presents a creator that is both eccentric and idealistic – Raoule's creation will surpass the real in a non-traditional way.

Jacques, in his role as Galatea, takes on stereotypically feminine traits such as submissiveness and weakness. Linguistically, other characters in the text (including himself) refer to Jacques using the female subject pronoun "elle" as well as many female-gendered nouns and adjectives such as "mienne," "jolie," etc. (98, 105). In many instances throughout the novel, the narrator describes Jacques in statuesque terms as well. Just as I have shown in the other Pygmalion retellings in this study, the object of the artist's dream and goal is often portrayed as sculpture, either explicitly or figuratively, to mirror the original myth. The first time that the author presents Jacques (in the scene

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<sup>68</sup> They also compare Rachilde's work to her English and German predecessors Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) and E.T.A. Hoffmann (*The Sandman*).

<sup>69</sup> In *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, Frenhofer critiques Porbus's *Marie égyptienne* by claiming: "Le flambeau de Prométhée s'est éteint plus d'une fois dans tes mains, et beaucoup d'endroits de ton tableau n'ont pas été touchés par la flamme céleste" (Balzac 47). For Noiray's analysis of Edison as Prometheus, see his chapter three in *L'Eve future ou le laboratoire de l'Idéal* (1999).

when Raoule first meets him in the workshop that he shares with Marie), his body is wrapped in a garland of artificial roses while he is intensely absorbed in his work:

“Autour de son torse, sur sa blouse flottante, courait en spirale une guirlande de roses; des roses fort larges de satin chair velouté de grenat, qui lui passaient entre les jambes, filaient jusqu’aux épaules et venaient s’enrouler au col” (Rachilde 8). Scholars have noted that he is positioned to resemble the mythical figure Daphne, “a nymph who was pursued by Apollo and changed into a bay or laurel tree in order to escape him” (Hawthorne and Constable, in Rachilde 8). I take this image a bit further to include Pygmalion’s statue, Galatea; we recall that Ovid’s Pygmalion “offers gifts that girls find pleasing: [...] many-colored flowers” (v. 333). The artificial flowers in the scene paired with Jacques’s response to Raoule’s search for Marie, a female artist, add to the perplexing intermingling of the Pygmalion and Galatea representations; Jacques is at once artist and work of art in this description. In this instant, Raoule’s reaction announces to the reader that something is amiss: “faite d’une voix aux sonorités mâles, cette réponse avait quelque chose de grotesque, que ne corrigeait pas la pose embarrassée du garçon, tenant ses roses à la main” (Rachilde 9). On multiple sensorial levels – sound, sight, touch – the scene comprises the different ways in which Jacques’s character goes against gender norms. Moreover, the protagonist’s use of the adjective “grotesque” to describe her first impressions of Jacques prefigure what she will turn him into by the end of their relationship: “half mechanized model and half organic corpse, a triumph of the modern imagination” (Downing 162). Raoule is still an artist, possessing the all-important imagination that spurs creation; in this respect, she does not differ from Pygmalion and his impetus.

On another occasion, while Raoule secretly watches Jacques bathe and dress behind a screen in the new apartment that she provided and furnished for him and Marie, the male artist is compared to the “Vénus Callipyge,” a representation that refers specifically to a part of the statue’s anatomy: her “beautiful buttocks” (Rachilde 40). In this description that spans two pages of text, Raoule moves her gaze from Jacques’s feet slowly up to his head, focusing on each of his features. The individual parts are then compared to a statue or work of art, or, even more problematic, to a woman. Her scopophilic dissection recalls that of Edison and Ewald when they visually take apart Evelyn Habal’s projected image or when Crispin and Finette see Elise’s statue for the first time in Eraste’s cabinet. When Raoule reaches Jacques’s mid-section, she describes his solid thighs as “un peu moins fortes que des cuisses de femme, [qui] possédaient pourtant une rondeur solide qui effaçait leur sexe” (Rachilde 40). This, and nearly every subsequent physical description of Jacques, hides the male genitalia from view, textually for the reader, and visually for the fictional observer. Leading us into increasingly ambiguous territory, Rachilde prevents the reader from obtaining a firm grasp on the main characters’ sexualities. Further still, *Monsieur Vénus* confuses the Pygmalion roles of creator and creation, so that one is never fully certain of who plays what role.

In a parallel to the elaborate descriptions of woman in *L’Eve future*, Raoule appears to have an epiphany as she observes, behind the screen, what she considers to be the perfect male form: “L’homme! Voilà l’homme! [...] Il est beau, j’ai peur. Il est indifférent, je frissonne. Il est méprisable, je l’admire!” (Rachilde 41). Yet again, her reactions to him seem to contrast with his impressions; why would the young woman feel afraid when faced with his beauty? Why would she shudder if he is indifferent? The

answers to these questions, I propose, is simply Rachilde's replacement of the *femme fatale* figure, which we encountered in *L'Eve future*, with a male version. Even though Rachilde writes a man as the object of affection in her novel, he retains the same oxymoronic qualities that the *femme fatale* inspires in the men she seduces. She compares this real man, Jacques, with mythical images of the perfect woman (Venus and Daphne) and concludes that she has finally encountered the ideal male form.

Raoule seems wildly, even uncontrollably, attracted to Jacques, as if an outside force, even stronger than her own impulses, were directing her toward him: "une torpeur singulière s'emparait d'elle, engourdissant jusqu'à ses paroles" (Rachilde 12). The numerous references to Jacques's open shirt and soft chest hairs in the text provoke Raoule's frenzied glances toward "ce nu" (Rachilde 17). She cannot escape her carnal attraction to Jacques when "elle passa la main sur la poitrine de l'ouvrier, comme elle l'eût passée sur une bête blonde, un monstre dont la réalité ne lui semblait pas prouvée" (Rachilde 17). Raoule engages in a reverse prosopopoeia, inverting the enlivening structure of the Pygmalion myth; rather than ascribe a voice, a name, and a face to an inanimate object, she strips these human qualities from a real man.

The terms used to represent Jacques in this passage are telling of the multiple ways in which his character is defamed, defaced, and deformed. This process, in turn, points to the destruction that Jacques undergoes before Raoule can begin her (re)creation project. Raoule refers to him as a laborer instead of an artist, demoting him professionally. Then, she does not even focus on his face, touching his chest instead. Nowhere in this intimate and sensual description is he depicted as a man or an artist, underlining, I contend, the way in which Rachilde's text upsets the notions of gender and

class (on the level of “narrative inversion,” as Anderson puts it). He is first a worker of the lower class, marking the distinction between his status and Raoule’s noble status in Parisian society. Next, the patron touches him as she would a “blonde beast,” ascribing animal characteristics to him.<sup>70</sup> Finally, Jacques is a monster, “as frightening for [its/his] deformities as for [its/his] perfection” (Huet 9). As we saw in *L’Eve future*, the monster figure encompasses the paradox of the ideal. While the artist strives to create an absolutely perfect entity, she cannot help but focus on those inhuman, or monstrous, aspects stemming from her imagination. Rachilde prefigures what Raoule will eventually turn Jacques into in this early passage of the novel.

Additionally, this passage sets up a process of dehumanization and emasculation that continues throughout the novel, ultimately resulting in an altered, macabre version of Jacques Silvert. Raoule’s intentions vis-à-vis the innocent, almost childlike, Jacques are also revealed early: “qu’importait la naissance de cet homme pour ce qu’elle en voulait faire, l’enveloppe, l’épiderme, l’être palpable, le mâle suffisait à son rêve” (Rachilde 19). She is not concerned with his mind or soul; the only important thing for her is his outside shell, his “envelope,” that which makes him physically resemble a man. In this novel, we seem worlds apart from even the proto-science fiction realm found in Villiers’s story. Raoule does not seek a romantic, cerebral relationship with Jacques, as Ewald wished for with Alicia Clary/Hadaly. In *Monsieur Vénus*, Raoule simply seeks to possess the empty shell of a physically perfect man rather than a complete emotional and spiritual package.

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<sup>70</sup> This appears to be the one instance in which Jacques is presented in animalistic terms. Others have noted that Raoule “is routinely compared to a variety of animals – thoroughbreds, cats, and unnamed beasts – and occasionally to mythological beings as well” (Gantz 120). In a sexual scene, “Raoule se métamorphose d’abord en chasserresse humaine, ensuite en chasserresse animale” as well (Havercroft 50).



Paradoxically, Jacques performs the female gender role most of the time. One wonders if Raoule could have achieved her “dream” with any physically beautiful person, man or woman, or if, due to his submissive personality, Jacques is the only figure who would suffice.

Later, Raoule refers to Jacques as “une bonne œuvre” when speaking of him to her aunt (Rachilde 21). In her attempts to convince Ermengarde of her “project” to fund Jacques’s and his sister’s business, Raoule emphasizes his status as a miserable artist, in need of her support in order to be successful. Adding to this amalgam of Jacques’s representations, we again have the figure of a work of art, rather than a maker of art. Even though she is proud of the artificial flower that he created for the ball, Raoule refuses to share Jacques’s name with anyone who inquires, keeping his identity and location secret: “bien que Raoule n’eût pas d’amies intimes, elle s’en découvrit quelques-unes, ce soir-là, qui la supplièrent de leur indiquer la demeure de son habile fleuriste. Raoule s’y refusa” (Rachilde 29). This action echoes that of some of the other creators in this project. Convinced that they must hide the ideal creation from the rest of the world Eraste (*L’Amante statue*), Frenhofer (*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*), and Thomas Edison (*L’Eve future*), just like Raoule de Vénérande, all seek sole control over and access to their ideal creations and muses.<sup>71</sup> For these artists, the greatest value exists only when the masterpiece is hidden from the public. Furthermore, these creators attest to their mistrust of other observers, unconvinced that they could comprehend their works’ ideal nature.

Jacques does initially submit willingly to Raoule’s romantic advances and demands. He even admits how far he would go to thank her for her generosity: “je crois que je me saignerais les quatre veines pour cette femme-là” (Rachilde 33). Little does he

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<sup>71</sup> See chapters one, two, and three for these analyses.

know at the time, but he won't really have the choice of giving his life for her; she will indirectly take it from him. Later, however, Jacques becomes confused about her sexuality as well as his own. Here, the reader witnesses the continued emasculation that will eventually lead to Jacques's death. Raoule even refers to herself as a man in conversations with Jacques: "Mais souvenez-vous donc que je suis un garçon, moi, disait-elle, un artiste que ma tante appelle son neveu..." (Rachilde 38). Raoule molds him, just like Pygmalion would a Hymettian wax figure ("the statue yields beneath the sculptor's touch, just as Hymettian wax beneath the sun grows soft and, molded by the thumb, takes on so many varied shapes - in fact, becomes more pliant as one plies it"), into the submissive lover that she desires (v. 358-360). Initially, this strong infatuation that both Raoule and Jacques feel for each other seems to be the product of a sensual romantic tryst; by the end of the story, however, the relationship will prove deadly for Jacques, and grotesque for Raoule.

Moreover, as Harter notes, "looking in [this] text becomes not just a vehicle of appropriation but a terrifying form of aggression, both inward and outward, and the literary text a violent imagining of other interwoven, violent imaginings" (66). When Raoule later returns to the apartment after receiving Marie and her letter (supposedly written by Jacques to convince Raoule to return), she says to Jacques: "Tais-toi. Je ne viens pas ici pour t'entendre" suggesting that she wishes only to look at him, as one would view a statue in a museum or an idol in a shrine (Rachilde 59). Raoule's persistent abuse (both verbal and physical) and emasculating behavior has the desired effect on Jacques, and he gradually becomes utterly submissive and complacent to her will.

We must consider what exactly Raoule's "masterpiece" entails and how it relates to the Pygmalion project. Ovid's Pygmalion crafted his Galatea out of separate pieces of ivory joined together. Raoule, our decadent *Pygmalionne*, begins her chef-d'œuvre with her lover's corpse and subsequently alters it with wax additions, mechanical pieces, and other artifice. As Beizer states of wax anatomical figures, "the vision of unity, the illusion of ideal wholeness, is constructed by supplementing the wax image with myriad fragments of the body it represents" (259). However, Raoule's grotesque creation, similar in at least one fundamental way to the other masterpieces in this study, is fragmented. Her creation strives to be the ideal Galatea, that Platonic form present in each creator's imagination when first embarking upon the project. But in another reversal of the traditional paradigm, Rachilde writes a male creation that is imbued with the feminine statuesque traits. Silverman reiterates what this difference was during Rachilde's time: "Throughout the nineteenth century the pictorial goals of male and female portraiture had been rigorously separated in academic doctrine. Depictions of women were tests of technical expertise and the elaborate crafting of surfaces, whereas portraits of men were occasions for exploring character and expressing inner life" (Silverman 69). Hence, where we saw many of the Galatea iterations portrayed as individual fragmented parts, the descriptions of Jacques follow suit. Although he is a man, his representations are not aligned with those of male depictions that would express "inner life" or overall impressions, like the male character in *La Fausse statue*, for example. Just as Beizer puts it, this creation is merely an "illusion of ideal wholeness" and cannot portray the true Platonic form in reality.

Let us expand this idea of an “illusion of ideal wholeness” to a broader level in order to explore how nineteenth-century French thought is reflected in the text. We have observed how many of the authors in this study privilege the fetishized part or fragment, all the while reaching for an impossible goal of creating the complete ideal chef-d’œuvre. Indeed, France in 1884 was vastly different from the country a century prior when our study originated. Not only had interior migration to large cities following industrialization changed the demographic landscape, but exterior influences shaped a new worldview as well.<sup>72</sup> In an effort to make sense of the changing social environment, writers like Rachilde explored some of the influences spurring the change. Raoule is depicted not only as an artist figure, crafting her new male Galatea, but as a discoverer as well. In Mérimée’s *La Vénus d’Ille*, we encountered a Pygmalion figure that did not create the bronze statue, but unearthed it and put it on display.<sup>73</sup> In this novel, the female protagonist represents, in Raittolbe’s words, “le Christophe Colomb de l’amour moderne” after she presents her rant on why women cannot love the men of their time (Rachilde 73).<sup>74</sup>

Bringing this point of discovery back to the novel’s origin, Rachilde begins with the following dedication: “Nous dédions ce livre à la beauté physique” (5). Contrary to *L’Eve future*, in which the artist/inventor creates a copy of physical beauty, while adding a beautiful soul, *Monsieur Vénus* is concerned with preserving physical beauty using artificial materials. After Jacques has died in the duel with Raittolbe, Rachilde sets out to complete her macabre task. In the scene following Jacques’s death, Madame Silvert (the

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<sup>72</sup> See my introduction for a summary of these changes.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter three for this analysis.

<sup>74</sup> I would like to recognize Barbara Havercroft’s work when she enumerates the various masculine appellations attributed to Raoule throughout the novel for bringing this quotation to my attention (53).

most traditional moniker used by Raoule after her marriage) is poised over the sumptuous bed in their bedroom as temple. To aid in her work, she uses “d’une pince en vermeil, d’un marteau recouvert de velours et d’un ciseau en argent massif,” and periodically wipes her hands with “un mouchoir de dentelle” (Rachilde 208-9). These elaborately decorated tools seem fit only for the most delicate work, like the meticulous and caring work done to an idol for worship. Even the tools that Raoule uses to reconstruct the ideal body are feminized, just as Jacques came to be. They are not described or valued for their usefulness or strength, but for their elegance and beauty. The finished product is displayed as the Vénus Anadyomène (the image of the birth of Venus emerging from the sea), “sur la couche en forme de conque,” guarded by Eros (209). It is made of natural and artificial materials melded together into a “chef-d’œuvre d’anatomie” (Rachilde 211). The reader is privy to only a short physical description of the model: “un mannequin de cire revêtu d’un épiderme en caoutchouc transparent. Les cheveux roux, les cils blonds, le duvet d’or de la poitrine sont naturels; les dents qui ornent la bouche, les ongles des mains et des pieds ont été arrachés à un cadavre. Les yeux en émail ont un adorable regard” (Rachilde 209). In traditional representations, Roberta Panzanelli informs us that, “the wax model stands in place of the corpse: a refined, ordered, idealized representation of the exposed materiality of the body” (55). However, in this work, the corpse and wax elements are combined to create a hybrid, monstrous figure.

This copy can be likened to the copy of Alicia Clary, in *L’Eve future*, in that, “like the photograph, the cast and ultimately the waxwork record one precise moment. Each freezes its image in that instant, which will already have passed before the first viewer sees it” (Panzanelli 76). Edison uses the photograph to record Alicia’s physical

appearance, while Raoule uses wax and other materials to fix the image of her lover at a particular moment in order to preserve it forever. The main difference between the two creations, of course, would be Hadaly, the Android's, active presence and Jacques, the male cadaver's, passive stiffness. In both texts, "[t]he identification with a beautiful form is an identification of life itself as imperfect," something that Edison, Ewald, and Raoule could all agree upon (Johnson 58). However, where the future Eve ends up useless at the bottom of the ocean, the secret Jacques figure remains accessible and useful to its creator. Thus, as Johnson further argues, "only the inanimate has the fixity, the lack of feelings, the lack of need that corresponds to the unchanging ideal" (58). The Future Eve failed to meet her creator's expectations because she was too close to human. Although she could only interact with Ewald and Edison on a superficial level, it was enough to convince them both that she was too successful as a copy of a real woman.

Ultimately, the mythic male Venus survives artificially, enclosed within the walls of the creator's home. Although the living creature that Mademoiselle de Vénérande formed and submitted to her whims perishes in the story, the monstrous incarnation remains as a permanent vestige of her destructive and creative efforts. In the other Pygmalion-esque myths, the creation (whether living or artificially rendered) does not meet a similar fate. It is possible to read this ending as a new power attributed to the female, as she is manifested in the woman protagonist, but also in the female object of creation. In this story, the ultimate creator is a woman, but still possesses traditionally masculine attributes of power and control. She succeeds in preserving her desired form that she has worked to mold in life in death. The hybrid creation/creature of Jacques

Silvert is feminized; however, this feminine masterpiece is preserved and enhanced after its death and remains something tangible for the creator.

### Rachilde's Third Path

Rachilde, the sole woman writer in this project, appears to be the only one willing (or able) to represent a successful, albeit vastly re-interpreted, retelling of the Pygmalion myth. In so doing, her work stands in opposition to the others, defiantly subverting the accepted notions of artist/inventor/creator and statue/painting/creation. This is extremely apparent in *Monsieur Vénus*, wherein “Rachilde displays and parodies the power inequalities at work in orthodox heterosexuality, and undermines the model of a neat binary divide with a portrayal of gender as fluid, interchangeable, and constructed,” claims Diana Holmes in *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer* (2001) (142). In this text, there is not a clear binary relationship between man and woman, male and female, creator and creation. Rather, there is a third path or even a bridge spanning perceived gender differences. Rachilde shows us through fiction that, just as in life, traditional gender roles and relations are mere social constructions and can be molded into something different. How fitting, then, that the final scene of the novel contains each of the sex/gender combinations presented earlier in the text:

La nuit, une femme vêtue de deuil, quelquefois un jeune homme en habit noir, ouvrent cette porte. Ils viennent s'agenouiller près du lit, et, lorsqu'ils ont longtemps contemplé les formes merveilleuses de la statue de cire, ils l'enlacent, la baisent aux lèvres. [...] Ce mannequin, chef-d'œuvre d'anatomie, a été fabriqué par un Allemand. (Rachilde 210-11)

During the night, either a woman in mourning or a young man in black comes to kneel before the wax figure. These two people are, of course, Raoule in her different personae.

Holmes even goes so far as to argue that, “once the sex/gender connection is broken, the rationale for women’s inferior status is demolished” (165). Indeed, Rachilde’s text is an exercise in exploring the new power of women, in literature as well as in society, in the nineteenth century.

Rachilde, forming her own identity in fin-de-siècle literature, creates a new kind of female protagonist with Raoule de Vénérande. This decadent creator does not act alone, however. In addition to this duality, the narrator informs us that a German man created the “anatomical masterpiece.” This German remains unknown to the reader, but can be interpreted as a metaphor for Germany’s industrial prowess. Here, we have yet another reference to perceived threats to male-dominated creation in France, that of other nations and nationals. Janet Beizer explores this connection in *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*: “The cooperation of Raoule and the German presents us with a phantasmatic fin-de-siècle alliance of superwoman and superpower: a sex and a nation each grown too knowledgeable, too strong, too competitive, too threatening” (258). In this passage, Rachilde seems to embrace the power inherent in frightening threats to French society that so many other (male) authors fought against. It is as if she is saying to fin-de-siècle France, “Look what we can do together; let us proceed into the future.” Instead of pointing out the threats that powerful, independent women, industry, technology and artifice posed to the patriarchal nationalistic discourse, *Monsieur Vénus* brings their abilities, positive characteristics, and possible collaborations to light. Rachilde’s text brings these subversive thoughts to the fore, forcing the reader to consider both sides of the coin as well as the third path, a hybrid hidden interior.



Villiers and Rachilde portray the Pygmalion myth in order to present difficult questions surrounding man in society in late nineteenth-century France. Villiers, through his use of an inventor character versed in modern technologies and methods, explores the possibility of reanimating an Android as the ideal. In place of the divine Venus, *L'Eve future* utilizes nineteenth century tools and techniques complete the triangular set of Pygmalion characters, as presented in Ovid's story. Employing natural and artificial artistic materials, a Decadent Pygmalionne, in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*, reconstructs her version of the ideal man. In this retelling, artist becomes work of art; active male becomes passive female; and active female becomes creator. On several complicated levels, each text uncovers ambiguities and paradoxes associated with the creative process during a period of fin-de-siècle malaise in France.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear, from the above analyses, that it is difficult, even impossible, to paint a reductive picture of Pygmalion myth adaptations throughout the century 1771 – 1886. Through the Pygmalion myth, I have shown how various authors, in theater, short story, and novel, present characters that shed light on epistemological questions of their time. A creation myth allows writers to explore their own creative endeavor in producing a text. On a macro level, writers can exploit the myth to comment on sociological changes.

I have examined seven primary texts, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.), *L'Amante statue* (1774), *La Fausse statue* (1771), *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837), *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1837), *L'Eve future* (1886), and *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), within the triangular structure of the Pygmalion paradigm: Pygmalion, Galatea, and Venus. In these texts, each character metaphorically stands in for a particular role or perspective. Venus, in her role as powerful divine intervention, represents the changing constructions of belief in French society. From Roman goddess, who is both revered for her beauty and feared for her control over love, Venus takes on an ambivalent role of superstition in the eighteenth-century plays, *L'Amante statue* and *La Fausse statue*. In this position, Venus illustrates how Enlightenment thinkers searched for reason and knowledge in their experiences. In nineteenth-century fantastic tales, Venus takes on a double role to enact violence and inspire awe in her admirers. *La Vénus d'Ille* portrays a bronze statue of questionable origins who some believe comes to life in order to kill a bridegroom on his wedding night. *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* reveals the otherworldly nature of Venus's beauty and power as a representation of art in reference to the Platonic forms. In fin-de-siècle decadence, the reader understands Venus's powerful role as it is instilled in the new

technologies and artificial materials and methods at the artist's disposal. Edison, in *L'Eve future*, exploits technological wonders, both real and imagined, in order to appropriate the divine goddess's power. In *Monsieur Vénus*, the goddess is once again doubled and split so that the author leads us down a third previously uncharted path of discovery and creation.

Galatea, who began as Pygmalion's passive, perfect, ivory statue in Ovid's myth, undergoes her own transformations in the corpus. As a living subject represented as statue, Galatea acts in order to fool and confuse observers in eighteenth-century theatrical farce. In *La Vénus d'Ille*, Galatea's role manifests itself in both the bronze statue and the real bride, who exhibits eerily similar traits. *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* posits several artistic renderings of the female form, but it is ultimately Frenhofer's painting, *La Belle Noiseuse* who depicts the attempted ideal. Neither Galatea in the fantastic tales survives the creation project; its discoverer or creator destroys each one. In *L'Eve future* and *Monsieur Vénus*, the new creator attempts to revive Galatea from her previous demise. The inventor in *L'Eve future*, who attempts to harness Venus's power in the form of techne, constructs and animates the ideal woman in the form of a futuristic Android. Raoule, the protagonist of *Monsieur Vénus*, who possesses both masculine and feminine sensibilities, forms a passive young man into her ideal submissive lover, and then ensures his eternal presence through his death and reconstruction as a macabre effigy.

Pygmalion, who is the titular character of only one primary text in this corpus – Ovid's poem in the *Metamorphoses* – is the figure that aspires to be the most powerful of the three. Normally portrayed by man, Pygmalion demonstrates his persistent efforts to control and adapt the world around him. Although the creator may use different

materials, summon new and diverse powers, and end up with radically transformed Galateas, he is always the inciter of the creation project. This figure may embody one or more characters in each adaptation, but this only serves to highlight the way in which he aspires to artistic greatness as well as reaching his conception of the ideal. Plato describes Pygmalion's quest for love in *The Phaedrus*: "at first a shudder runs through him, and again the old awe steals over him." The ideal appears in Pygmalion's imagination, either as a note of positive genius or in reaction to inadequate reality. "Then looking upon the face of his beloved as of a god he reverences him." The creator actually creates a work and marvels at his skill. He may even worship his creation in secret, fearful of others' gazes upon it. Seeing that it has a face, he may ascribe a name to it, thus bringing it to life, at least in his mind. Finally, "if he were not afraid of being thought a downright madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a god..." (251a). This fear appears in many of the Pygmalion versions, and in all but a few, results in destruction.

As I hope to have shown through my analyses of the seven versions of the Pygmalion myth spanning the late-eighteenth through nineteenth centuries, this possible destruction evolves from the initial belief that man *can* reach the ideal. The belief is flawed, however, because the creation of the ideal in reality was possible only through divine intervention in the original myth. Over the century that I have examined here, authors' portrayals of the Pygmalion myth depict man's persistent quest to replace the power of the divine Venus. Whether through simple play-acting or vast knowledge in various *techne*, the Pygmalion characters cannot find an adequate tool to bring their Galateas to life. As real men, they are forever subject to real forces in the real world;

these are borne out in the adaptations of the creation myth as they relate to their contemporary struggles and issues.

This selection of Pygmalion adaptations is by no means exhaustive during the period in question. I have argued that the versions explored here illustrate the ways in which the myth changes in order to reflect broader societal changes in art, technology, and gender. Furthermore, the texts in my study have shown the difficulties inherent in creating great art as well as conceiving an ideal in the real world. I hope to have brought lesser-known texts into the already well-established Pygmalion corpus in French literature. In addition, I aimed to shed new light on more familiar works by focusing on the Pygmalion structure as represented at a particular moment in time. From this point (fin-de-siècle France) forward, the retellings of the creation myth continue to occupy a significant place in the arts. Pygmalion and his statue, Galatea, continue to be a source of inspiration for writers, artists, and filmmakers alike. As these authors pose new questions about man's relation to the ideal and his possible sources of power, Venus, Galatea, and Pygmalion persist in their eternal metamorphoses.

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## VITA

Carrie O'Connor was born in Attleboro, Massachusetts and lived in several states before her family settled in Williamsburg, Virginia. She began studying the French language in school and participated in an exchange with a family in Marseille, France during high school. During college at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, Carrie's interest in French language, culture, and literature flourished. She spent a summer in Paris, France in 2001 and then the fall semester of 2002 at the Institut National des Télécommunications in Evry, France where she studied business.

Immediately after earning a B.A. in French and a B.S. in Accounting and Information Systems, with a minor in Global Business from Virginia Tech, Carrie enrolled in a master's program at Middlebury College in Vermont. She spent the summer of 2004 in the French immersion program and the following year studying and writing a thesis in Paris. In 2005, Carrie moved to the Washington, DC area where she worked as an Admissions Counselor for the non-profit organization Youth For Understanding. In 2007, she began a doctorate at Louisiana State University, where she taught undergraduate French language courses. During her time at LSU, Carrie taught students on the LSU in Paris summer study abroad program, combining her love of teaching and travel.

In January 2014, Carrie moved to Boston, Massachusetts to accept a Lecturer in French position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During the fall of that year, she began a Lecturer in French position at Tufts University. Upon completion of her PhD in French Studies with a minor in Comparative Literature from LSU, she will continue to teach at both universities and enjoy taking advantage of all that Boston has to offer.