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# VIRTUAL METAMORPHOSES: COSMETIC AND CYBERNETIC REVISIONS OF PYGMALION'S "LIVING DOLL"

JANE O'SULLIVAN

"Got myself a cryin,' talkin,' sleepin,' walkin' livin' doll." When pop idol Cliff Richards sang these lyrics from his huge 1959 hit single, "Living Doll," he was in many respects articulating the kind of exultation experienced by Ovid's Pygmalion when his "skilfully carved . . . snowy ivory statue" (Innes 1955.231) warmed to his touch and became his living and loving bride. When the 1950s song lyrics urge the listener to test the authenticity of the doll, "Take a look at her hair, it's real / If you don't believe what I say just feel," the male lover's proprietorial rights are also being asserted. In his later declaration that he is going to "lock her up in a trunk, so no big hunk / Can steal her away from" him, the violence experienced by such an object of desire is foreshadowed. On the other hand, the potency and pleasures of such property ownership are exposed as having a soft underbelly: vulnerability to loss and pain. Whether figuratively blessed with the "living doll" in the song or more literally blessed by the gods in the story of Pygmalion, there is, it would seem, no such thing as a favour with no strings attached. Or expressed in terms more appropriate to the pattern of events established throughout Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, each transformative action has its consequences. A debt is incurred and must be paid—sooner or later.

In essence, these are two quite disparate texts, one a pop song, the other a classical literary rendering of Greek myth and Roman folktale, yet they display a common preoccupation with one very negative aspect of heterosexual power relations: fetishism. Each text presents its own version of the idealised markers of femininity and the processes of objectification



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and anxiety that underpin the male lover's fetishistic efforts to obtain and subsequently contain the ideal woman. Here fetishism is taken to be a process by which a concurrently feared and desired object—in this case, a woman—is refashioned to conform to idealised notions of femininity in a bid to render her a compliant and familiar substitute for that unruly object and, in so doing, to tame her. In Pygmalion's case, obtaining such a woman entails replicating these ideals by making her to measure. In the film texts to be examined in this paper, it is, of course, visual criteria that are invoked by the various Pygmalion-like "makers" in their evaluation, replication, and subsequent objectification of their respective "Galateas." Like the "blind" misprisions of visual information in various renderings of the Greek myth of Oedipus explored by Geoff Bakewell and Martin Winkler in this issue, in this discussion of the workings of Ovid's Roman-centred story of Pygmalion, the inability to separate vision from interpretation and the dire consequences of an arrogant fetishizing of the ocular are also revealed.

The above juxtaposition of the Pygmalions who inhabit "Living Doll" and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is not intended to emphasise the existence of a "high-low" divide between them as cultural texts. Rather, it seeks to signal the scope, or breadth, of inter-textual quotation existing in the various "remakes" of the power relations depicted in the tale of Pygmalion. Indeed, such a remake is not necessarily an attempt at faithful replication. Rather, a remake offers a re-vision, or another view, "motivated by cultural and historical differences between it and the original text, while not denying the basic integrity of the original source" (Grindstaff 2001.141). In that "original source," Pygmalion uses his artistry to carve a perfect woman out of ivory. In the films selected for discussion here, it is through the combined efforts of the male protagonist's eye and ear for fashionable femininity along with the artistry of the filmmakers that an ostensibly perfect woman is captured and preserved on celluloid.

Cinematic representation is an ideal site for the further exploration of Ovid's tale of a man's illicit obsession with the surface beauty of an image of femininity, as, in cinema, "the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium . . . and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation" (Mulvey 1992a.749). This creates a kind of "safe distance" and allows for the pleasures of scopophilia, a Freudian concept characterised by Laura Mulvey as associated with "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (1992a.748). The fetishistic trajectory of this process of refashioning is most overtly depicted in *Vertigo*

(Hitchcock 1958) and, in a surprisingly interesting manner, in the romantic comedy box-office success *Pretty Woman* (Marshall 1990).

In addition, and in quite a different way reflective of different technologies, the notion of a purpose-made woman is also embodied in the female protagonists in a number of fantasy and science-fiction films, including Pris, one of the extremely dangerous "basic pleasure models" available among the replicants that inhabit the cybernetic cityscape of *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982). Like such cybernetic fetishes found in *Metropolis* (Lang 1927), *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale 1935), *The Stepford Wives* (Forbes 1975), and more recently, the remake, also entitled *The Stepford Wives* (Oz 2004), in *Blade Runner,* the would-be creator's day of reckoning entails some form of Frankenstein-like monstrosity and disobedience. Whilst there is clearly a wide range of severity on the Richter scale of reckonings, it will be argued that, to some extent, all these films have a darker side, in that each particular invocation of Pygmalion serves well as a vehicle for the explication and critique of masculine fetishistic responses to hysterical, and often frustrated, heterosexual desire. Popular cinema continues to draw heavily on classical narratives; here I explore the narrative trajectory of Ovid's tale of Pygmalion in its many comic or far darker generic forms and, through a feminist and psychoanalytic mode of analysis, consider the form and function of the tale in late twentieth-century cinema.

## PRETTY WOMEN

### *Pygmalion*, *My Fair Lady*, *Educating Rita*

In Book 10 of *Metamorphoses,* Ovid prefaces his account of Pygmalion and Galatea with a brief sketch of the "loathsome Propoetides," women in the "district of Amathus" (Innes 1955.230) who failed to properly acknowledge the divinity of Venus. As a result of Venus's revenge, they were to become "the first women to lose their good names by prostituting themselves in public. Then as all sense of shame left them, the blood hardened in their cheeks, and it required only a slight alteration to transform them into stony flints" (Innes 1955.231). This has been described as an instance of "the stilling of transgressive female sexuality" and as framing the tale of Pygmalion in which "the fetishising of 'femininity' into a still and silent form . . . [is] achieved through the manipulative efforts" of a sculptor (O'Sullivan 1996.234). Eventually becoming dissatisfied with the unresponsive essence of a woman carved from ivory, the sculptor dares

to pray that he be able to have his creation as his wife. In a gesture of goodwill, Venus allows the statue to come to life, seemingly in response to Pygmalion's touch. And sure enough, when Pygmalion returned to his sculpture (Innes 1955.232):

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

And so we have in the tale of Pygmalion a prototypical instance of a man creating an ideal substitute for a real woman.

A number of cinematic adaptations, including *Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion* (Asquith and Howard 1938), *My Fair Lady* (Cukor 1964), and *Educating Rita* (Gilbert 1983), have offered romantic and comic revisions of the tale of Pygmalion in their treatment of narratives in which the male protagonist fashions an ideal woman who is obedient and satisfies all his desires. Before turning to a close analysis of *Vertigo* and *Pretty Woman,* it is useful to take a brief look at some of their precursory cinematic texts.

In the film *Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion*, Professor Henry Higgins (Leslie Howard) strictly disciplines the linguistic sensibilities and appearance of the "simple flower seller," Eliza Doolittle (Wendy Hiller), refashioning her into "a lady." Like his legendary predecessor Pygmalion, who "was revolted by the many faults which nature had implanted in the female sex" (Innes 1955.231), Henry Higgins is a self-proclaimed woman hater. Like Pygmalion, Higgins has "long lived a bachelor existence, without any wife to share his home" (Innes 1955.231). In *My Fair Lady*, the Hollywood musical version of Shaw's play, the linguistic or lyrical transformation of Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn) remains a large part of the project taken on by Professor Higgins (Rex Harrison). In this film, however, there is also a much greater emphasis placed upon the technicoloured spectacle of Eliza as she is transformed by hairstyles, makeup, and a range of fashionable garments from the capacious wardrobes of Twentieth Century Fox. In both of these films, the project of figuratively sculpting the feminine involves the professor taking an unschooled and uneducated woman as his raw material and then reworking her into a refined lady.

More recently, the film version of Willy Russel's play and subsequent film script *Educating Rita* relocated this Pygmalion-like transformation to the formal educational setting of an introductory or bridging course to university. Under the tutelage of the rather world-weary and often inebriated academic Dr. Frank Bryant (Michael Caine), Rita (Julia Waters) rapidly loses her "Cockney" accent and is directed through the conventional prescriptions and proscriptions of university study. Initially striving to emulate her tutor's opinions and modes of expression, Rita moves from a relatively uneducated and unconfident hairdresser to an articulate and aspiring student of literature. In this and the two previously mentioned films, it would seem that while striving to satisfy the demands and expectations of their makers, the women themselves are depicted as enriched by the transformation, in that they gain the approval of their creators and of those in the society to which they aspire. Certainly, the process is depicted as a painful one, as we see the female protagonists stumble over syllables and run up against raised eyebrows of disapproval and unyielding surfaces of social acceptability. Indeed, it is a variously frustrating, fulfilling, and threatening process for the male protagonists also. In these films, each man's arrogant assumption of the god-like prerogative of creation and control earns him his particular day of reckoning, usually in the form of his losing the woman or, at the very least, losing much of the previously uncontested power he held over her in their relationship. Professor Higgins is disabused of some of his assumptions of his own superiority, and when Eliza returns to the streets after his experiment is completed, he has lost her forever.

*Educating Rita* is set in a time when second-wave feminism was having an impact on the lives and aspirations of first-world women. There was a marked increase in the numbers of mature women entering tertiary education, perhaps in search of new ideas, increased employment opportunities, and, more broadly, in the hope of finding a new space in which to realise their full potential—goals that may have been obstructed by the men in their lives. Ironically, as depicted in *Educating Rita*, the process of their re-education was also to be overseen by men. It is this context of feminist struggle that informs the transformation of the Pygmalion tale itself as it is rendered in *Educating Rita* and that goes some way towards explaining why Frank has less of a hand in Rita's physical transformation as he chooses to focus on her intellectual development. It may also account for the film's resistance to reproducing the conventional closure of romantic coupling. Unlike Pygmalion's Galatea, neither Rita's body nor her mind is rendered a completely "yielding surface": rather than becoming, and remaining, her

maker's ideal woman, Rita is only selectively responsive to his intellectual touch. When his transformational tutelage is completed, Rita chooses not to stay with him, despite his having attempted to change himself into a man more worthy of the new woman she appears to have become. Of course, appearance is not everything, and it is apparent that Rita's progress has been less a transformation than a revelation—a kind of burgeoning, if you will. Once again, this is in keeping with the feminist politics of the time, as Rita's progress is one in which the potential previously impeded by patriarchal privilege is realized. This is distinct from the making of Galatea, which can be "likened to the procedure whereby a passive and formless raw material is given shape by man's productive power" (Miller 1990.7). Whilst Frank Bryant presents a lonely figure as he watches Rita set forth on her life's journey, he is able to manage a teary smile of satisfaction. This cannot be said of the Pygmalion-like protagonist in *Vertigo*.

## PRETTY CONVINCING WOMEN

### *Vertigo*

The darkly disturbing thriller *Vertigo* constitutes a reworking of the tale of Pygmalion in which the psychological implications of the male protagonist's fashioning of a more manageable version of the real are quite explicitly enacted—and with far more dire consequences. This film certainly incorporates many of the conventions of heterosexual romance in its depiction of Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart), his wooing of Madeline (Kim Novak), and her apparent love for him. However, the complexities of assumed and substituted identities that make *Vertigo* better classified within the thriller (or even noir) genre also allow for its unflinching exploration of fetishism and male hysteria. In essence, Freud links the substitution process involved in fetishism with the notion of men's experience of the castration complex. In effect, Freud sees the fetish object as "a substitute for the penis" (1927.153), in the sense that it stands for a level of potency that the fetishist himself may lack. In the case of Pygmalion, this could be said to underpin the anxiety triggered by the "loathsome Propoetides," women caused by Venus to lose "all sense of shame" (Innes 1955.231), anxiety that leads to his carving his substitute maiden. Yet however abstracted a fetish object may be from that for which it is a substitute, it has been selected in a bid to disavow the nagging fear of emasculation or castration. When that fetish is in the form of a woman, as is the case for the male protagonists under discussion in

this paper, the heat is really turned up, as a woman's "lack" of a penis can be taken as testimony to the possibility of castration. Unfortunately for the fetishist, the woman he has created simultaneously reassures and disconcerts him as "the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute" (Freud 1927.154). Even in Pygmalion's case, which has only a pleasurable outcome (at least in his lifetime), the making and desiring of a fetishized model of femininity causes him some consternation, as he "timidly" prays that he may have as his wife "one like the ivory maiden," as "he did not dare" to ask that the maid of his own making be brought to life (Innes 1955.232). Clearly, this business of fetishism is a fraught one, as is far more evident in the love-hate relationship Scottie has with the much abused female protagonist in *Vertigo*.

In an early sequence of the film, we are introduced to Scottie as a man whose feigned ignorance of the technologies of femininity anticipates both his vulnerability to the surface beauty of an "ideal woman" and his self-conscious disavowal of the more "real," complex, and potentially desiring woman that lies beneath. He has, therefore, as later becomes apparent, all the makings of a fetishist. Despite the mocking disbelief expressed by his ex-girlfriend, Madge, Scottie denies all knowledge of female corsetry and marvels at the engineering of the brassiere that Madge is currently designing. In relation to the comic connections made between the structure of a brassiere and the cantilever bridge, Tania Modleski observes that "it is as if at this early moment in *Vertigo*, the film is humorously suggesting that femininity in our culture is largely a male construct, a male 'design,' and that femininity is in fact a matter of external trappings, of roles and masquerade, without essence" (1988.91). The decidedly clinical manner in which Scottie inspects the brassiere—turning and testing it with the tip of a pencil—resembles a kind of forensic detachment that is in keeping with his experience as a police detective. He is not, of course, able to maintain this level of detachment when confronted with the blonde and beautiful Madeline, a woman designed as bait by her employer, Gavin Elster, in a bid to enmesh Scottie in a murder.

Scottie has recently been retired from the police force as a result of the onset of vertigo that almost caused him to plummet to his death while pursuing a criminal across the rooftops of San Francisco. As a result, he is available as a private investigator and employed by Elster, ostensibly to follow and protect Madeline, who Elster pretends is his potentially suicidal wife. According to Mulvey, in this new employment: "Scottie's voyeurism is blatant: he falls in love with a woman he follows and spies on without speaking to . . . a perfect image of female beauty and mystery" (1992a.755).

As it turns out, in a number of respects, Scottie is to be the fall guy as he falls for the masquerade, falls for Madeline, and falls again into a vertiginous malaise. This is all part of Elster's plan to kill his real wife, and as Scottie's vertigo stops him from mounting the stairs of a bell tower with sufficient speed to prevent Madeline from leaping to her death, Elster has time to push his real wife from the tower. With Elster and Madeline hidden in the recesses of the bell tower, Scottie arrives on the scene in time to witness what he takes to be Madeline's suicide. The first part of *Vertigo* ends with Ester inheriting his wife's fortune, Madeline being paid off and disappearing into the relative anonymity of her own brunette persona, and Scottie incapacitated by grief, remorse, and an intensified fear of falling.

And fall he does—again—this time for a woman of his own making, a perfect replica of Madeline and substitute for the man-made woman he had loved and seemingly failed to hold on to. After a period of time in an asylum recuperating from an hysterical onset of very intense vertigo, Scottie hesitantly ventures into the world again, only to find himself stalking Judy (Kim Novak), a "brunette dressed in a cheap, green, tight-fitting dress and wearing gaudy makeup" (Modleski 1988.96) who, despite her relatively unsophisticated appearance and mannerisms, bears a striking resemblance to Madeline. This is because Judy is, in fact, the woman previously employed and transformed by Elster in order to pass as his wife. After her counterfeiting task is completed and full payment is made, Judy leaves, surreptitiously taking with her one of the props central to her paid performance: a diamond necklace. Modleski notes that Judy is not wearing a brassiere and sees this as signifying the relative authenticity of this "original" version of her self as a woman (1988.96).

Scottie is attracted to Judy, yet uneasy with explicit womanliness, possibly construed as wantonness tantamount to that of the "wicked" Propoetides that so disconcerted Pygmalion. Consequently, Scottie sets about transforming Judy into his impossible ideal, that is, "into the fully fetishized and idealized 'constructed' object of male desire and male 'design'" (Modleski 1988.96). Like Pygmalion before him, Scottie takes up his raw material and makes it into a statue "lovelier than any woman born, and [falls] in love with his own creation" (Innes 1955.231). By these actions, Scottie is doubly eradicating any female essence by appropriating the whole process of procreation and producing a woman whose femaleness has been erased and reinscribed with a patriarchally approved surface of femininity.

In *Vertigo,* the painful process of Judy's reluctant metamorphosis into Madeline is depicted in terrible detail: she is given a facial, change of

hair colour and style, and, under Scottie's watchful eye and heavy intervention, she shops for clothes identical to those formerly worn by Madeline. This process leads Mulvey to observe that Judy's "exhibitionism, her masochism, make her an ideal passive counterpart to Scottie's active sadistic voyeurism" (1992a.755). However, in light of Gaylyn Studlar's notion of replacing Mulvey's emphasis on "the similarity between the structures of sadism and visual pleasure, with an emphasis on masochism's relationship to visual pleasure" (1992.775), it is interesting to consider Scottie and Judy as enacting a sadomasochistic, indeed, doubly-sadomasochistic process. On the one hand, Scottie sadistically enforces Judy's transformation, and she masochistically complies, knowing that she, as herself, will never be desired. On the other hand, Judy sadistically misleads and manipulates Scottie into once again desiring the unattainable, and he masochistically subjects himself to the inherently frustrating process of desiring an object that, because of its status as fetish, can only ever be an inferior substitute.

Perhaps it is no wonder that the narrative of *Vertigo*, like that of the morally instructive tale recounted in *Metamorphoses*, demands a time of retribution. In *Vertigo*, Judy's duplicity is punished by Scottie with an intensity that escalates to her death, as he, once again vertiginously slow in his ascent of the same bell tower, must witness Judy's deadly fall. In the closing shots, Scottie reels in horror at the edge of the precipice as he looks down upon the now lifeless form of the woman he has made: broken-down, broken-in, and now irrevocably broken. Scottie's vertigo, along with his narcissistic identification with his object of desire, suggests that, like hers, his fate will be to fall apart.

There would seem to be something inherently narcissistic about the manner in which Pygmalion "fell in love with his own creation" (Innes 1955.231), and in what must, to some extent, reflect his own perception that "raising her eyes, she saw her lover and the light of day together" (Innes 1955.232). In turn, and in the form of a settling of accounts for Pygmalion's pleasures, a far darker narcissistic love between creator and creation must be enacted by Pygmalion's grandson, Cinyras, as he unknowingly "welcomed" his daughter, "his own flesh and blood," into his bed (Innes 1955.237).

Narcissism takes its name from that of another character from *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus, the young man fated to fall in love "with an unsubstantial hope" (Innes 1955.85)—his own reflection. Despite its etymology, and the many instances of male narcissism, the term has most commonly been understood to denote a largely feminine overvaluing, and consequent fixation upon, one's own image (Bruzzi 1997.xv). However, it

would seem that narcissism can apply to men and women, and also to the process whereby someone is strongly attracted to another person because of the extent to which they see in that other a resemblance to themselves, be it in terms of surface appearance or circumstances. In her discussion of the use of doubles in characterizations and narratives—doppelgängers—in selected popular films, Yvonne Tasker draws upon the links made by Freud between doubles, narcissistic identification, and the notion of the "uncanny" (1993.158). *Vertigo*'s unsuspecting Scottie thinks that Judy bears an uncanny resemblance to Madeline, and this doubling of women is troubling. Sarah Kofman observes that "men's fascination with [the] eternal feminine is nothing but a fascination with their own double, and the feeling of uncanniness" they experience resembles that felt "in the face of the abrupt reappearance of what one thought had been overcome or lost forever" (1985.56). For Modleski (1988.92), these words "capture the spirit of *Vertigo*, the way in which Woman keeps uncannily returning, keeps reminding him of what he in turn keeps trying to overcome, to master": his fear of falling towards his own elements of femininity. As observed by Dennis Bingham (1994.81–82), Scottie "embodies a desperate tension between power—the power of patriarchy over femininity and that in men which is feminine—and freedom, the unconscious desire to be free of ideologically constructed gender identity and the terror that blocks this desire from consciousness."

Analysing a sequence in which, when spying on Madeline, Scottie's view of her is suddenly occluded by a mirror that forces him to see himself in her place, Modleski argues that Madeline does indeed remind Scottie of himself, and that in so doing, like the uncanny experience of confronting a double, she is a reminder of the phobias associated with the vertigo he is trying to overcome (1988.92). Scottie sees his own "lack" (of phallic power) reflected in Madeline and Judy, not only in terms of the vertiginous castration anxiety they arouse in him, but also quite literally, in that they have—as has he—been manipulated and later discarded by Gavin Elster, the triumphant patriarch in the film. Scottie's unsuccessful efforts to blot out his own exploitation by Elster do not, however, slow his drive to force the women to confront their ghosts, and fuelled by his need for the resolution of his own fears, in his zeal to "cure" them of their repressed past, he pushes them towards death. In essence, this is the violent consequence of the fetishist being confronted with the unconvincing status of his chosen substitute and its infuriating capacity to remind him of the more real and threatening object of origin. For Bingham, "the mingled terror and fascination of *Vertigo* stems from the exposure of the voyeur's objects as repre-

sentations whose revealed artifice shows [patriarchal] power and freedom to be illusory" (1994.81–82).

## *PRETTY WOMAN*

In what may seem quite a leap from psychological thriller to romantic comedy, I wish to turn from the Pygmalion-like experiences of Scottie Ferguson to those of Edward Lewis (Richard Gere), the male protagonist in *Pretty Woman* whose own fear of heights also betrays an anxiety about the extent to which his considerable patriarchal power and associated prerogatives are illusory. Set in 1990s Los Angeles, *Pretty Woman* traces the relationship that develops between the literally and figuratively "lost" business mogul, Edward Lewis, and the distinctly low-budget "hooker," Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts), who helps him to "find his way."

In the opening sequence of the film, Edward makes a quick and last minute call to his current girlfriend—he needs someone to accompany him to a quasi-business function—but asserting that she is no longer willing to be at his "beck and call," she ends the conversation, and the relationship. Clearly, his self-confidence is shaken by this rejection, as he immediately approaches a previous girlfriend in order to gain reassurance that he was sufficiently communicative in their relationship. She makes it abundantly clear that he was not. Throughout this sequence, Edward's actions are intercut with images of an awakening Vivian, whose "Julia Roberts' face" and tousled locks are not revealed until the camera has lingeringly panned along the quite considerable length of her legs, and over her hips, abdomen, and upper body. In light of the previous discussion of doubling, it is interesting to note that, in *Pretty Woman*, in order to construct Vivian as a *perfect* replica (indeed, fetish) of idealized femininity, the producers give us the facial spectacle and star persona of Roberts and the "spectacular" body of the effaced body-double, Shelley Michelle.[1] It is evening, and Vivian is off to work. The cinematically intercut lives of the two leading characters are set to be narratively interwoven.

In the next sequence, Edward is seen leaving the party alone and inexpertly negotiating a borrowed sports car, along with its unfamiliar manual gearshift, through the equally bewildering streets of downtown Los Angeles.

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1 Chisholm 2000 offers a detailed discussion of the use and effects of the body-double in *Pretty Woman* and other Hollywood films.

As he pulls to the curb to ask for directions, Vivian sees only dollar signs and what she takes to be just another line from a prospective client. Just a few fast moves, and Vivian has installed herself in the passenger seat, then behind the wheel, and within minutes, she is being guided through the lobby of a grand five-star hotel and up to the penthouse. Ever the businessman, Edward asks for a quote on her price for the whole night, and she, seeing a business opportunity, raises her usual fee. Cynically, Edward observes: "One hundred dollars an hour, and a safety-pin holding your boot up?" and then accepts the offer, knowing a bargain when he sees one. Later Edward observes that "very few people surprise me" and, pleasantly surprised by Vivian's childlike naivety combined with a deal of sexual sophistication, he announces that he has "a business proposition" for her. Edward doesn't need "any romantic hassles this week" and, beating her down from four to three thousand dollars, he books her to stay with him for that period of time. It would seem that he is able to have his "beck and call-girl" after all.

In order to effect a "Pygmalion-like transformation of [this] lower class female character" (Chisholm 2000.145) into one fit to pass as the kind of sophisticated and stylish woman he might conceivably been seen with, Edward demands and oversees the makeover of Vivian's etiquette, demeanour, and mode of dress. This process is clearly reminiscent of the metamorphoses in such films as *My Fair Lady* and *Vertigo*; however, the fact that the refashioning of Vivian into a fully fetishized version of femininity entails the transformation of a Propoetides-like prostitute makes the Pygmalion-like aspects of the *Pretty Woman* narrative more explicit. Interestingly, despite his incontrovertible knowledge of her status as a hooker, during the course of the film, Edward seems to be increasingly caught up in this masquerade of his own making and, as a consequence, falls for Vivian. Such is the nature of fetishism, which, according to Freud, entails "a duplicitous blindness that allows the fetishist to hesitate between acknowledging that a body is 'inadequate' and denying, disavowing or negating this 'inadequacy' in order to experience pleasure" (Bronfen 1992.96).

This kind of self-deception is not unlike the suspension of disbelief that may be required of viewers if the otherwise unlikely romantic resolution of the film is to be in any way convincing. It is also the means by which the narrative of the film is able to foreground the pleasure experienced by both Edward and Vivian, and, at the same time, whilst moving towards a happy ending, nevertheless subject both parties to a good deal of emotional anguish and soul searching expressed as shame, anxiety, and regret. This is not at odds with the undercurrent of moral or ethical tension

in *Metamorphoses*, or with the sense that "Ovid's stories show that you always get some form of what you want, but you get it in ways that reveal what is illicit or grotesque in what you want" (Miller 1990.1). There is much that is illicit and grotesque interwoven with the comic and romantic elements of this fairy-tale film that otherwise fits the genre "like a glass slipper" (James 1990.36).

In *Pretty Woman*, the notion of commitment-free sex for money, however you dress it up, keeps reasserting itself as the illicit and shameful subtext of Edward and Vivian's relationship. Well after the portrayal of negotiations surrounding her fee for service early in the film, Vivian's status as "hooker" is mentioned quite often: the hotel manager refers to the likelihood that she has many rich "uncles" like Edward Lewis; she unthinkingly says to Edward: "When I'm with a guy, I'm like a robot. I just do it"—quickly adding—"I mean, except for you." After Edward's right-hand man learns she's a hooker and attempts to rape her, Edward apologises for having revealed her real identity, and then reminds her that she is, however, his "employee," after which he places the agreed three thousand dollars on the bed. Unlike Pygmalion, who sees his "ivory maiden" as an alternative to, and distinct from, the women "prostituting themselves in public" (Innes 1955.232), Edward must face the fact that his arrangement *is* predicated on her prostitution. Indeed, this tension in his dealings with Vivian is underlined in the lyrics of the song, "Wild Women Do," that accompany Vivian's fully accessorized transformation in the boutiques on Rodeo Drive. Here the promise of Natalie Cole's assertion that "What you only dream about / Wild women do," is immediately undercut by the follow-on lines: "You tell me you want a woman who is simple as a flower / Well if you want me to be like that you've got to pay me by the hour." This reminder of the financial basis of the relationship is in keeping with J. Hillis Miller's observation in his discussion of *Metamorphoses* that those transformed within the tales are neither live nor dead, as "the one who has been transformed remains as a memorial example still present within the human community—in the form of a tree, a fountain, a bullock, a flower" (1990.2).

This commemorative effect is also evident in the manner in which Vivian's presence at the high-society polo match raises the spectre of female prostitution. In a very effective satirical exchange, members of a group of socialite women are variously shocked and amused when Vivian comments that, unlike them, she is not trying to "land" the immensely eligible Edward and proclaims that she is "just using him for sex." When the initial laughter dissipates, the import of this statement, which the viewer knows

is being delivered by a hooker, serves as a reminder to socialites and viewers alike that sex in exchange for a financially lucrative marriage also is a form of prostitution.

It is also useful to examine the notion of excessive wealth in *Pretty Woman* and the conspicuous consumption that so often accompanies it. In one of the ostensibly glamorous and "feel-good" moments in the film, armed with his "gold card" and with Vivian in tow, Edward sets out to refurbish her with the best of everything a major spending spree on Rodeo Drive can provide. There is something quite grotesque about both Edward's announcement to the sales manager that they intend to spend an "obscene" amount of money and the manner in which Edward smilingly, yet knowingly, demands and receives a cynical excess of sycophantic "sucking up" from the manager in anticipation of this reward. While certainly far more joyful than Scottie's makeover of Judy in *Vertigo*, this is nevertheless a high point in the process whereby Vivian, like Judy before her, is rendered "like a living doll whom the hero strips and changes and makes over according to his ideal image" (Modleski 1988.90 on *Vertigo*). Modleski is describing a process that is far more violent than Pygmalion's "wooing" of Galatea, as he "dressed the limbs of his statue in woman's robes, and put rings on its fingers, long necklaces round its neck" (Innes 1955.232). Even so, the addendum, "[all] this finery became the image well, but it was no less lovely unadorned" (Innes 1955.232), suggests that while Pygmalion's actions are not violent, they potentially entail violation.

Similarly, although Vivian's shopping spree is not such a terrible experience for her, there is, nevertheless, something uncanny about the extent to which Edward's tinkering with his creation resembles the actions of Scottie Ferguson towards the end of *Vertigo*. When Vivian, dressed in a scarlet gown, presents her self for approval, Edward adds the finishing touch: a fabulous diamond necklace, on loan for the occasion. This echoes the sequence in *Vertigo* in which Scottie assists Judy with the clasp of her diamond necklace—the finishing touch to her transformation into a Madeline look-alike. Given that this necklace is the clue that betrays Judy's role in the murder of Madeline and leads directly to Scottie's extreme anger and Judy's death, some of this darker side of the transformational process bleeds into the lighter moment in *Pretty Woman*. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that, in *Pretty Woman* as in *Vertigo* before it, both the male and the female protagonists must face the consequences of their role in what can surely be described as a deception—of themselves and others. Whilst Ovid does not give us any evidence of post-transformational regret experienced

by Pygmalion or Galatea, sufficient angst is evident in Edward and Vivian to justify speaking of them as victims of some very inflexible social prescriptions concerning idealizations of masculinity and femininity.

Reflecting a somewhat similar notion of transformation as wilful and transgressive, J. Hillis Miller observes that "the halfway state of the victim of metamorphosis is a sign that his or her fault has not been completely punished or expiated. The changed state may be read this way or that, as life-giving or death-dealing, depending on how you look at it" (1990.2). This "life-giving or death-dealing" duality of the transformational act is evident in *Pretty Woman* and adds a level of social and psychological complexity to what might otherwise remain an extremely banal tale of "rags to riches" (or as Vivian's friend and fellow hooker puts it: "Cinder-fuckin'-rella"). With these life-giving and death-dealing dimensions in mind, it is useful to examine the experiences of Vivian and Edward.

Like the yet-to-be-enlivened synthetic shopwindow model in the film *Mannequin* (Gottleib 1987), there is something of the lifeless mannequin about Vivian when she is most convincingly presenting a masquerade of femininity. Of course, as she is situated within a romantic comedy, the mask often slips, revealing a level of animated pleasure entirely absent from the painfully inhibiting masquerade enacted by Judy in *Vertigo*. As Vivian and Judy squeeze themselves into little black cocktail dresses and appropriate manners and mannerisms for their respective roles as the "perfect dinner date" for the men who have fashioned them, each can be seen as fitting into a mould of femininity the outer limits of which function as a kind of restraint that only allows for a lesser version of herself. In Vivian's case, this impoverished version of herself is the one demanded by her current performance of respectability, one for which she must sacrifice her liveli*ness* for her liveli*hood*. It does, in this respect, entail a death-dealing loss of some notionally life-giving spontaneity. Indeed, Edward and Vivian are alike in this performance of an exterior sang-froid that is at odds with their interior state, and this likeness may suggest a degree of narcissism in the mutual attraction they experience. In fact, when each of them reveals a policy of "no kissing on the mouth," Edward observes: "You and I are such similar creatures, Vivian. We both screw people for money."

In Edward, despite an absence of "life-giving" zeal, elements of narcissism, vertigo, and the need to make a woman who is perfect, and perfectly compliant, betray a large dose of masculine hysteria. Edward Lewis is a man driven to make a lot of money, and to do this, he has developed an air of emotional detachment that renders him numb to the suffering caused

by his destructive business practices. Edward buys up financially vulnerable companies at a fraction of their value and then dispassionately rationalizes or cuts "them down to size" before selling them. In essence, he identifies unequal opponents and brings them to their knees. Arguably, this process resonates with the manner in which Edward negotiates, and expects to terminate, his "business arrangement" with Vivian.

What is it that accounts for Edward's destructive actions and his desire to be—and have—the best, even to the extent of occupying the penthouse, despite his fear of heights? In a moment of uncharacteristic self-revelation, Edward tells Vivian about his father's wealth and associated acts of betrayal. It seems that his father walked out on Edward and his mother, after which she died, and Edward grew up without any paternal love or guidance. Since then, his father has also died, and Edward, experiencing bouts of vertigo and extreme anger, has spent thousands of dollars in therapy. In reference to Scottie Ferguson, vertigo has been described as a "fear of . . . falling down from an exaggerated height of 'masculinity'" (Bingham 1994.81). Whilst this reflects the extent of Scottie's fall from the hegemonic status of police detective into the emasculating shadow of the film's alpha patriarch, Gavin Elster, it is also applicable to *Pretty Woman*'s high-flying millionaire.

In the closing sequences of the film, Vivian is packed to leave L.A., and Edward realises that she loved him for himself, not his wealth, and that he does not want to lose her. The fairy-tale "happy ending" is then enacted in a manner that seems to reclaim *Pretty Woman* for the comic romance genre. Confronting his fear of heights and emotional commitment, Edward inches his way up the fire escape to rescue, and, in turn, be rescued by, Vivian. This can be said to resemble the manner in which a rather tremulous Pygmalion "stood, amazed, afraid of being mistaken, his joy tempered with doubt" (Innes 1955.232), before accepting, and acting upon, his love for Galatea. "Ovid's 'Pygmalion' is said to differ from most of the stories in the *Metamorphoses* . . . [in that it] is a tale in which something inanimate comes alive, rather than the other way around" (Miller 1990.3), and in *Pretty Woman*, the two protagonists do seem to have restored one another to a state of animated emotional expression.

However, as has already been discussed, Vivian's past as a hooker makes her a memorial to the ongoing presence of prostitution in its various forms. In addition, there is a sense that her previous performance of sexual availability is being replaced by one of respectable femininity. Given the dually inflected "life-giving and death-dealing" nature of Vivian's transfor-

mation, the film can also be read as reworking the tale of Pygmalion to such an extent that it telescopes the temporal and tonal gap that exists between the depiction of short-term rewards in the tale of Pygmalion and the depiction of their darker consequences for his descendants. This suggests that the darker side of transformation as experienced by Vivian—and far more explicitly by Judy—gives expression to the "always otherwise silenced" protestations of Pygmalion's Galatea, and a string of other muted or otherwise "locked-up" "living dolls."

## PRETTY AWFUL WOMEN

### *Metropolis*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Stepford Wives*, and *Blade Runner*

When an analysis of films that offer new versions, or revisions, of Ovid's tale of Pygmalion turns its attention to the genre of science fiction, the figure of the android looms large. Androids, in their various cinematic manifestations, including robots, automatons, and cyborgs, are the man-made offspring of an asexual, technological mode of reproduction. When that offspring is notionally female, the process resembles that enacted by Pygmalion who, with the relatively simple tools of a sculptor, transformed ivory into a female form. The level of technological sophistication embodied by these latter-day cinematic Galateas varies greatly and in a manner that is consistent with the scientific realities and imaginations of their production contexts. In the silent films *Pygmalion and Galatea* (Power 1911) and *The Modern Pygmalion and Galatea* (Booth and Frenkel 1911), as in Fritz Lang's 1927 film, *Metropolis*, the product of masculine reproductive endeavour is a rather technologically crude robot, the False Maria. *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale 1935) depicts a kind of male-only experiment in creation, drawing upon electricity, whereas in *The Stepford Wives* (1975 and 2004), the process involves the expertise of Silicon Valley. In *Blade Runner*, the replicants are the product of a whole history of scientific experimentation: prosthetics, cybernetics, computer generated memory implants, and cloning.

Amongst those films depicting female androids, or "gynoids" (Stratton 1996.208), there are, as is to be expected, some that largely operate at the level of comedy, like the teen movie, *Weird Science* (Hughes 1985), in which two testosterone-driven adolescent males use their computer skills to design, and animate, their ideal woman. However, even in such films, there

is still the darker presence of an inevitable day of reckoning that serves to qualify the laughter they may evoke. This uneasy mix of mirth and monstrosity in cinematic depictions of dangerous man-made women can be seen in *Dr Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (Taurog 1965) and *Dr Goldfoot and the Girlbomb* (Bava 1966). In the first of these films, "Dr. Goldfoot sets out to conquer the world using gynoids made of plastic. Dressed mostly in gold bikinis, these girls are presented as highly seductive" (Stratton 1996.229). In the second, the gynoid will "explode when . . . [she] kisses her target" (Stratton 1996.230). In general, however, science fiction films largely depict their male scientists' life-giving and life-transforming processes of metamorphosis as driven by an unchecked combination of scientific irresponsibility and masculine arrogance. In a sense, they function as cautionary tales, as women are seen as readily replaceable, and the punishment meted out to these men of science by the seemingly malleable or "yielding surface" of their creations is often severe.

In her wide-ranging discussion of the sorts of deception facilitated by the bedevilling disparity that often exists between the surface and interior in representations of femininity, Laura Mulvey describes the mythological character Pandora as "inaugurating a long line of female androids" (1992.60). It would seem that Galatea, in her function as a female fetish able to be "worked by men's fingers . . . [and] fashioned into many different shapes, and made fit for use by being used" (Innes 1955.232) is most deserving of acknowledgement as a complementary or alternative precedent for such a the line of androids.

A prime example from this lineage can be found in *The Stepford Wives* (1975), a film that Jon Stratton also discusses in relation to its links to Pygmalion and male practises of fetishism. In this film, the computer wizards of Silicone Valley who murder their wives and replace them with androids do so in order to provide themselves with virtual women who are "passive, submissive, domesticated, and more sexually desirable than their wives" (Stratton 1996.224). Essentially, the fate of the virtual women in *The Stepford Wives*, whose femininity is fashioned with an eye to satisfying their male makers, is indicative of a late 1970s feminist conception of femininity itself as a pleasingly seductive, and apparently compliant, surface that belies a large portion of muted anger and resistance. While the female protagonist's struggle to resist the fate of the other Stepford wives is a courageous one, her eventual defeat and virtual metamorphosis is quite shocking. Interestingly, in the 2004 remake of this narrative, the husband of the main female protagonist thinks better of his plan to reprogram his

wife, choosing instead to assist her in liberating her Stepford "sisters." These women, in turn, are able to find retribution in what will undoubtedly be a firm-but-fair "re-education" of their own husbands.

However, when the sophistication of the technologies employed reaches the level depicted in the grim futuristic dystopia of the late 1980s science fiction film, *Blade Runner*, it is a different story. Because of the enhanced powers these "women" accrue through the considerable resources of their manufacturer, the Tyrell Corporation, when they finally give vent to their feelings, they are almost unstoppable. In this instance, the previously discussed "death-dealing" dimensions of "victim[s] of metamorphosis" (Miller 1990.2) are manifest.

In *Blade Runner*, the three female androids or "replicants" are given life in the laboratories of the Tyrell Corporation, but they are also given a limited lifespan. Each replicant is "born" as a fully grown adult and will die within a shorter period of time than would constitute a "natural" childhood. Zhora, Pris, and Rachel have many of the features associated both with the beautiful but deceptive femme fatales of the 1940s film noir and the "post human" beauties of science fiction. Post human bodies are those whose history and biology pose "challenges to the coherence of the 'human body' as a figure through which culture is processed and orientated" (Halberstam and Livingston 1995b.vii). In essence, they are cyborgs, "creature[s] of interdependent cybernetic and organic elements" (Mason 1995.225). Despite their superhuman capacities, however, their makers have limited their potential in a bid to render them dependent and controllable. Indeed, such products of human invention have "left intact the notion that social relations depend—necessarily and properly—on a service being, even on a service class of being" (Chasin 1995.84–85). Clearly, this observation is applicable to the replicants in *Blade Runner*, who have been specifically designed to labour for the Tyrell Corporation and, in the case of the female replicants, to service the erotic fantasies and sexual proclivities of their male makers and counterparts. Yet reminiscent of the danger born of the dissatisfaction displayed by the newly made women in *Metropolis* (Lang 1927) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale 1935), the replicants in *Blade Runner* seek to disobey and elude the prescriptions of their makers. Such acts of disobedience testify to an "antiprogrammatic streak . . . [that serves to] expose the limitations of the entity of the creator, whether a human authority figure or an institution of science or corporate culture" (Battaglia 2001.497).

As these renegade replicants roam the city passing as humans, they are hunted down by the "blade runner," Deckard (Harrison Ford), employed

to locate and eliminate, or "retire," runaway replicants. Deckard is a latter-day version of *Vertigo*'s jaded detective, Scottie Ferguson, and like Scottie before him, he must follow his target female through the labyrinthine streets of the city. His first encounter is with Zhora, a replicant styled as an "exotic dancer," her skin coated with a sprinkling of glittering scales. She is last seen scantily clad in a see-through plastic raincoat, its transparency allowing a clear view of her body, and blood, as she is gunned down by Deckard and smashes though a plate glass window. Next is Pris, described in the film as the "basic pleasure model," who meets a similar fate at the hands of the blade runner: she lies like a crumpled doll with a bleeding wound.

Whilst the death of these "women" seems excessively violent, even to the man who has terminated them, it must be acknowledged that prior to this, they had been depicted as extremely dangerous in that their surface beauty, and apparent sexual availability, served as decoys for their deadly intent. In this respect, they resemble the female protagonists in what have been called "deadly doll films": "Much like the long-suffering heroines of classic melodrama, today's deadly dolls are often bruised, both in the sense of being physically injured and in the sense of being morally flawed. But now they also cruise like the vicious, violent vamps of film noir, and they even actively bruise" (Holmlund 2002.73–74). They also form part of that earlier mentioned "long line of androids" stemming from the story of Pandora (Mulvey 1992.60).

It is in Deckard's encounter with the third replicant, Rachel, that he once again resembles *Vertigo*'s Scottie Ferguson. Wanting desperately to believe that Rachel is a "natural" woman, Deckard is unwilling, or unable, to read the signs to the contrary and remains uncertain as to whether she is "the real thing" or not. In essence, Rachel, with a cool enigmatic beauty reminiscent of the femme fatale combined with a tantalizing element of vulnerability, constitutes Tyrell's most subtle and sophisticated product. Just as Gavin Elster's "Madeline" is a model of perfection designed to entrap Scottie Ferguson, so, too, Rachel serves as the Tyrell Corporation's way of asserting its supremacy over the more sentimental Deckard and the pastiche of early twentieth-century clothing and architecture that reinforce his personal *habitus*. Of course, it falls to Deckard to determine the authenticity, or ontological status, of this "woman," and later, the authenticity of her feelings for him.

Towards the end of *Blade Runner*, Deckard pursues a recalcitrant male replicant across the rooftops of the city's crumbling skyscrapers. When Deckard slips and clings desperately to a dislodged piece of guttering, the absolute fear in his eyes cannot fail to conjure up an earlier moment in *Ver-*

*tigo*. Fortunately for Deckard, that replicant is strong enough to hold him, to save him from falling. Shortly after this, in the final sequence of the film, Deckard stands on the verge of making a commitment to Rachel, teetering between dismissing her as a replicant—a mere man-made doll—and embracing her as near enough to his perfect woman.

In the initial process of her making, Rachel's Pygmalions are the various Tyrell employees whose "marvellous artistry" (Innes 1955.231) gives her form and substance. Indeed, the Pygmalion-like aspects of these acts of creation are further underlined by the desire expressed for Pris by J. F. Sebastian, the timid prosthetic sculptor responsible for the towering proportions of her statuesque femininity. Yet it is arguably Deckard who provides the finishing touches to Rachel as he rouses her from the sleep of innocence. On one level, he does this by dismantling her dreams of a happy childhood with her "natural" mother. On another level, having broken down her own sense of herself, he rebuilds her to suit himself. Employing an armoury of alcohol, sympathy, and physical force, Deckard engineers Rachel's sexual awakening. In contrast to the Tyrell Corporation's literal programming of Rachel, this transformation from "robot" to "living doll" is framed as a seduction. Indeed, moments in this sequence are most reminiscent of Pygmalion's awakening of Galatea, when "at long last, he pressed his lips upon living lips, and the girl felt the kisses he gave her, and blushed. Timidly raising her eyes, she saw her lover and the light of day together" (Innes 1955.232). In a sense, this "kiss of life" is a procreative act and is reminiscent of the timid but enlivening kiss on the lips exchanged by Edward and Vivian in *Pretty Woman*. Unlike Scottie, who swoons when his lips meet Madeline's, for Pygmalion, Edward, and Deckard, the kiss seals a relationship that is built on a willing suspension of disbelief.

Rachel, like her fellow replicants, will never lose her youthful beauty, as she has been programmed to expire before that could happen. This was done by her maker Eldon Tyrell to ensure that replicants can never truly challenge his authority—the law of the father, so to speak. Despite this "design fault," Deckard decides to help Rachel escape her malevolent "father" and to stay with her for the rest of her life. Mind you, there is a certain irony here, given that "Deckard [himself] is an extended citation from film noir and, hence, himself a copy . . . Tyrell is also a replicant of sorts; he reprises a whole history of imaginary scientists who give rise to unconventional life forms, from Frankenstein to *Metropolis*'s Dr. Rotwang" (Silverman 1991.124, cited in Grindstaff 2001.151).

Whilst despairing of Rachel's uncertain longevity, Deckard is also

in a state of quiet desperation about the nature of his own life and status as a "real" man. Like Scottie in *Vertigo*, when confronted with the "made over" and over-determined essence of a woman he desires, he finds himself identifying with her and realising that a more powerful man has not only rendered her powerless, but has made him feel impotent too. Despite growing evidence that both he and Rachel are replicants, and like Edward's selective blindness regarding the underlying prostitution in his relationship with Vivian, Deckard continues to hang on to the belief in her authenticity and, in so doing, seeks to reconfirm his own.

Overwhelmingly, in their representations of cosmetic and cybernetic metamorphoses, *Vertigo*, *Pretty Woman*, *Blade Runner*, and the other films analysed here present an image of Pygmalion-like enterprises as ethically and psychologically flawed. The project of replicating some notional ideal of femininity seems to demand that its male and female participants tread a precarious path between fantasy and full-blown fetishism. Yet authenticity as an ideal, or as of inherent value, is also questioned when we view the celluloid remakes, revisions, and reversions of this process inaugurated by Pygmalion. As has been argued in relation to the production history of the television show *La Femme Nikita* (Grindstaff 2001.133), these films not only constitute adaptations of the tale of Pygmalion, they also stand as "synecdoche[s] for the relation between the original . . . and its copies—the latter being remakes about a remaking" (Grindstaff 2001.161). Ovid's tale of transformation remains intact despite its cinematic metamorphoses, and Pygmalion has not suffered the harsh censure doled out to his literal and metaphorical progeny. Nevertheless, recognition of the fetishistic dimensions of his artistry solicits feminist-informed psychoanalytic readings that do not allow Ovid's "modest" sculptor to emerge from this discussion completely unscathed.

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