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Artificial Generation:
The Hybridization of Female and Form in Gautier, Villiers, Wilde, Hitchcock

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An abstract of
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ABSTRACT

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By Christina M. Parker

Nineteenth-century French modernity rediscovers Ovid's myth of Pygmalion – a story that originated as a veritable founding myth for artistic production as well as the concept of the artificial woman – at a specific point in time when traditional modes of artistic representation were being threatened by their own replication as *something else*, as new modes of perception and representation emerged through technological evolution. Accordingly, the time period's economy of literary representation becomes equally an economy of simulation wherein literature imitates, or copies, the effects of these emerging forms of representation, specifically photography and its prefiguration of the cinema.

As French literature shed the traditional values Romanticism placed on nature, it began to reform itself according to increasingly visual and artificial edicts. In turn, literature reached great heights of heterogeneity, as the amalgamation of modes of representation permeated literature at the level of composition. Yet this hybridization of literary form also accentuated the need to recondition artistic subjectivity. To do this, the nineteenth-century author returned habitually to the long-established Ovidian paradigm of reproducing woman in art as a means to assert their particularly modernized and artificialized conception of literary reproduction.

In close readings of texts by Théophile Gautier, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Oscar Wilde, I focus on the re-emergence of the figure of the artificial woman less as a theme and more as a generative idea foundational to textual composition. I trace this trajectory of what I call "artificial generation" – both a process of artificially reproducing woman in literature and a particular lineage of nineteenth-century authors – into twentieth-century cinematic representation, where I argue that Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* belongs to the same literary genealogy. Ultimately, I trace the genesis of artistic subjectivity through "artificial generation" as a meta-level concern and a method for the de-formation of traditional forms of representation.

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INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century French modernity rediscovers the myth of Pygmalion – a story that originated as a veritable founding myth for artistic production as well as the concept of the artificial woman – at a specific point in time when traditional modes of artistic representation were being threatened by their own replication as *something else*, as new modes of perception and representation emerged through technological evolution. Accordingly, the time period's economy of literary representation becomes equally an economy of simulation wherein literature imitates, or copies, the effects of these emerging forms of representation, specifically photography and its prefiguration of the cinema. As French literature shed the traditional values Romanticism placed on nature, it began to reform itself according to increasingly visual and artificial edicts. In turn, literature reached great heights of heterogeneity, as the amalgamation of modes of representation permeated literature at the level of composition. Yet the decade's hybridization of literary form also accentuated the need to recondition artistic subjectivity. To do this, the nineteenth-century French author returned habitually to the long-established Pygmalionesque paradigm as a means to assert their particularly modernized and artificialized conception of literary reproduction.

On the most simplistic level, Pygmalion's story seems to be a happy one: he sculpts a statue of a woman, which comes to life and becomes his beloved. But if we look at the original story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we may locate the complexity of this tale of artificial generation. Pygmalion embarks on his artistic endeavor of sculpting a female figure as a form of repudiation, in response to the preceding story of a sexual perversion.

After denying the divinity of the goddess Venus, the Propoetides, daughters of Propoetus of Cyprus, are transfigured into "the first / Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms" (10.236-237). Their life-giving, sexual function has been perverted here and, accordingly, they turn into cold, lifeless stone: "As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard, / They turned with little change to stones of flint" (10.238). Finding himself "horrified / At all the countless vices nature gives / To womankind," Pygmalion rejects natural women and remains celibate until he carves a sculpture "more beautiful / Than ever woman born" (10.241-243, 10.247-248). He falls in love with his sterile statue, this daughter of artifice, remarking upon the incongruous and deceptive lifelikeness of his masterwork. At first, we might be persuaded to read Pygmalion's myth as a story of animation of the inanimate, especially is we consider that, in the panoply of metamorphoses that comprise Ovid's text, it is the only transformation of a thing into a person rather than a person into a thing. However, at the feast of Venus he does not request the direct animation of the statue. Instead, he prays for his bride to be "The living likeness of my ivory girl," a likeness of his artificial reproduction of woman – *a copy of a copy* (10.274).

Ovid elucidates his own aesthetic, creation fantasy through the tale of Pygmalion; as Douglas F. Bauer asserts, "the happy resolve of the Pygmalion episode is unique," perhaps because this story justifies the durability and dexterity of artistic reproduction. When the sculptor debates the lifelikeness of his statue upon its creation, Ovid describes the effect through the epigrammatic "ars adeo latet arte sua" – art *(ars)* lies hidden by its own artifice. What is at stake, then, is the idea of an art that hides itself from itself, *an art that pretends to be something else*. Indeed, the phrase's chiastic structure emblematizes the condition *sine qua non* of this dissertation. It indicates a level of artistic reproduction

that reaches such great heights that one cannot distinguish the difference between real and illusion, between form and the simulation of form, thus transmitting an inversion wherein the signifier powers over the signified. In other words, the copy supersedes the original, most specifically regarding the question of woman. There *is* a clear difference between real women (the Propoetides) and artificial woman (the statue come to life), and clearly Pygmalion prefers the woman who was not "born" but made, "the body he had formed." Even more surprisingly, Ovid allows this aesthetic deception to end with a magically positive transformation of the statue into a "real" woman Pygmalion can love. In fact, Ovid permits Pygmalion's aesthetic progeny to somehow bear his biological offspring as "she" begets Paphos nine months afterward.

I would like to suggest further that Pygmalion's tale of artistic reproduction is already a re-presentation of an earlier metamorphosis in Ovid's text, the tale of Narcissus. In similar fashion, Narcissus had fallen prey to the inability to negotiate the difference between original and copy, misrecognizing his own image reflected on the water's surface. He leans down to serve his bodily need to drink from the river and a need of another kind suddenly presents itself – love. Ovid writes, "as he drank he saw before his eyes / A form, a face, and loved with leaping heart / A hope unreal and thought the shape was real" (3.415-417). His misinterpretation of his reflection, this "phantom of a mirrored shape," invites a mediation of Narcissus as a preemptory figure for the artist. In his fifteenth-century treatise on painting *Della Pittura*, Leon Battista Alberti argues for an evaluation of Narcissus as an artist figure and attributes the origins of painting to this tragic figure who falls in love with his own creation. "What is painting," Alberti asks his

reader, "but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?"[1] Pygmalion's desire for a statue produced with his own hands repeats the same gesture as Narcissus' forbidden desire for his own image. As Paul Barolsky notes on the doubling of the tales of Pygmalion and Narcissus in the *Metamorphoses*, "A clue to the fact that Ovid's thinking about Pygmalion is related to his contemplation of Narcissus resides in the detail of Narcissus so charmed by his own image that he is still as a 'marble statue.' If he resembles a statue, then so does his creation, which, like Pygmalion's, is also a sculpture."[2] Remarkably, both tales invoke not only the identical theme of self-same love but they use the same literal material in their respective destruction and reconstruction of faith in this concept of artificial generation. Ovid remedies the tragic end of Narcissus, who "as wax melts before a gentle fire … So by love wasted, slowly [he] dissolves / By hidden fire consumed," by transubstantiating the melted wax of Narcissus' body into the wax that forms the body of Pygmalion's female likeness (3.488-490). After returning from the feast of Venus, Pygmalion touches his statue and soon finds that the body's material "yielded to his hands, as in the sun / Wax … softens and is shaped" (10.274, 10-284-285). Seemingly, Ovid repairs the breach caused by Narcissus' unrequited love for his own fleeting image by granting Pygmalion the power to resurrect his own self-reflection as a sturdy, ivory statue.

In *Versions of Pygmalion*, J. Hillis Miller writes that for the statue "Galatea, to see at all is to see Pygmalion, and to be subject to him," quite "as if Narcissus' reflection in the pool had come alive and could return his love" (5). The tale of Pygmalion takes this trajectory one step further, however, because rather than just deal with the

[1] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 61.
[2] Paul Barolsky, "A Very Brief History of Art from Narcissus to Picasso," *The Classical Journal* 90.3 (1995) 256.

complicated relationship between a person and his reflection, the Pygmalion story adds a layer of complexity by illustrating the relationship between a person and the likeness of his already life-like work of art. I suggest the importance of this because it prefigures the mechanized sense of artificial reproduction that will become increasingly relevant in the nineteenth-century texts that re-produce Pygmalionesque scenarios.

But both tales illustrate the complicated issue of artistic representation by defining love as an artificial determination and signaling the frightening, ever-reversible shift between persons and things, bodies and images, subjectivity and objectivity. Narcissus misrecognizes his self-reflection as someone *other* than himself, and despite the description of his effigy's statuesque resemblance it proves far more fleeting than a statue. His beloved image is fashioned out of an absence: "What you see is nowhere," Narcissus is scolded, for the image he loves is "Nothing itself" (10.434, 437). He designates his own otherness by addressing his reflection as "you," and his misrepresentation of self as other triggers the inevitable death of his human form, and his subsequent metamorphosis into a flower. Pygmalion treads no more cautiously in his own moment of Narcissistic recognition: after his heart begins to desire "the body he had formed," he touches it and "believes / The firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields" (10.258). What for Narcissus seemed to be the misrecognition of self as other is for Pygmalion more a matter of fantastical delusion. He treats "it" like a woman, bringing the statue gifts "That girls delight in" when suddenly "it" becomes a "she." Ovid writes, though "Lovely she looked" in her nakedness, Pygmalion decides to adorn "her" with jewelry and "laid her on a couch of purple silk," "cushioning her head, / As if she relished it" (10.268, 270, 271-272).

The hybridized aesthetic that emerges in nineteenth-century French literature manufactures correspondingly *the appearance* of life in literature, striving to emulate the "ars adeo latet arte sua" used by Ovid's Pygmalion to describe his feminine masterwork. The artist of the nineteenth century finds himself convincingly bestowing life through a composite art form – no one art form able to reproduce the multiple sensations necessary for the illusion of life. He chooses to engender as symbol of this movement, in line with the Ovidian tradition, an artificial replacement of she who gave him life, woman. But as the tale of Narcissus teaches us, and as we will examine in the course of this dissertation, this creation fantasy points inevitably to an absence that it seeks to cover over, a void that it hopes to fill.

What is at stake in this type of narrative is not only the theme of artificial women, but also the question of artificial generation itself. For the purposes of this project, the phrase "artificial generation" has a double meaning, indicating not only the artificial generation of female figure(s) within the text, but also the generation of artists who retreated into the artificial ideals of *l'art pour l'art*, Symbolism and Aestheticism, movements that characterized the reverberations of this myth at this specific point in literary history. This project inquires into the manifestations of this Pygmalion effect in nineteenth-century literature less as a theme and more as a generative idea foundational to the texts I have chosen to examine. Indeed, the texts to be surveyed use artificial generation as a meta-level concern and a method for the de-formation of traditional literary forms. However, the task will prove to be even more complex ultimately because I have chosen texts that I would define as the most idiosyncratic for each of the authors to be studied. The word "idiosyncratic" suggests a few things here. First, it means that I

consider these texts as exemplary of each author's artistic subjectivity and the individual disposition of their aesthetics. On another level, though, I use "idiosyncratic" because the word's etymology derives from *συγκρατικός*, which in ancient Greek means "closely united" and in Hellenistic Greek means "mixed together."[3] As we will see in the chapters proceeding, each text will represent its own unique hybridity on a structural level and/or at the level of composition, and in consequence the often polarized relationships of persons and things, male and female, living and dead will become closely united and yet all mixed up.

In this dissertation, I will trace a distinct trajectory of this concept of artificial generation as a form of differential mimesis through French literature from the 1830s to the 1890s, and then into twentieth-century cinema. Mimesis, from the Ancient Greek μμεῖσθαι "to imitate," ranges widely in critical meanings, which include measures of representation, mimicry, and even self-expression. Pygmalion's creation of a statue as an imitation of a real woman serves as a traditional example of the mimetic representation of the real, or nature, in art. But what does it mean that Pygmalion's "ivory girl," the imitation, is *better than the real thing*. So much better, in fact, that she magically becomes real at the story's end, thus replacing the real. How is Pygmalion's copy both the same mimetically and yet different from the original? "Indeed," as Elisabeth Bronfen writes in *Over Her Dead Body*, "the Greek verb *mimesthai* is fraught with ambiguity, given that it refers both to the creation of a new object and the copy, or imitation of a pre-existing one."[4]

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[3] Cf. "idiosyncratic, *a*." *OED online*. Oxford University Press. November 2010.
[4] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 6-7.

If we look at the cycle of love and loss in the parables of Pygmalion and Narcissus as characteristic of artistic reproduction, we find it striking that although they both fall in love with self-same and self-made images, *difference*, as well as the attempt to erase it, defines these scenarios. Narcissus falls in love with his self-same reflection in the water but his inability to recognize this sameness, his misrecognition of the image not as a reflection of his body but as *other* from his self, leads to the fatality of his human form. In effect, Pygmalion abolishes sexual difference, which the figures of the Propoetides illustrate as abominable, by re-producing woman as a body made of stone. But that which Pygmalion's artistic triumph shut out, namely human nature, returns heartily in the ensuing tale of Myrrha. She does not misrecognize her image reflected through her own father, Cinyras, the grandson of Pygmalion. Myrrha is plagued by the same passion as Narcissus and Pygmalion: desiring her own image in the generational reverse, she is fated to be in love with her own father. She concedes that, "were I not / Great Cinyras's daughter, I could lie / With Cinyras. But now because he's mine, / He isn't mine!" (10.334-337). While we may have accepted that Pygmalion's story ended happily, we come to understand that the sculptor's inherently incestuous love for a self-made object of results in the harsh plight of Myrrha, who seals her own offense by sleeping with her father. J. Hillis Miller argues the "narrative of Myrrha's incestuous love for her father is a retrospective reading of the story of Pygmalion" and that she pays for the sins of her great-grandfather Pygmalion, who tried unwisely to erase sexual difference, by being turned into a perpetually weeping myrrh tree (11).

Yet despite the artificial generation of feminine supplements like Pygmalion's statue, this rejection of female nature only yields degenerative results. And the generation

of artificial women spawned by Pygmalion's Galatea across the aesthetic tradition will prove deviant as well, fitting reflections of the ultimate deviancy of the male artist's usurpation of female reproduction. It is safe to accept that the texts we will examine, which reconfigure the concepts of female and form according to these Ovidian paradigms, will prove somewhat monstrous in their amalgamations of both gender and genre.

Each chapter will re-produce its own particular story of artificial generation based on the idiosyncrasies of the text(s) being read. In the first chapter, I will focus on how this Pygmalionesque imperative is characterized within Théophile Gautier's fantastical tale *La Morte amoureuse* as an aesthetic of resurrection, a reanimation of the dead or inanimate. The second and third chapters will present the notion of woman artificialized by phonographic and photographic technologies in Villiers's *L'Ève future*, a book that tells the tale of Thomas A. Edison's reproduction of an *andréïde*, a female robot, as a re-production of Eve. By focusing on a reading of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, we will explore in the fourth and fifth chapters how Wilde's play mediates Pygmalionism through the figure of the actress and the very otherness built into the notion of theatrical performance as imitation, the re-production of prewritten roles and scenarios for the audience. And in the final chapter, I will show how in *Vertigo* Alfred Hitchcock retells the same type of Pygmalionesque story through the very mode of representation all the earlier stories were pushing toward – the cinema.

The project will raise a number of questions. How, for instance, do these texts re-produce these visual paradigms from Ovid's Pygmalion and Narcissus in ways specific to cultural evolution in the nineteenth-century? What is at stake in a masculine, artistic

subjectivity marked by this demand to bear artificial women as their literary progeny? How is male subjectivity both threatened and yet fortified by these feminized, aesthetic reflections? And what parables about literature's relationship with cultural evolution might these stories offer? But this project's journey will prove most demanding on the level of difference. As we will see, despite partaking in a tradition of love for the self-made image and its meta-level commentary on the activity of artistic creation, each text will be forced to face the ambiguity of its own otherness.

Chapter One

Love in the Literary Afterlife: Gautier's Aesthetic of Resurrection in *La Morte amoureuse*

> Gautier est un écrivain d'un mérite à la fois *nouveau* et unique. De celui-ci, on peut dire qu'il est, jusqu'à présent, sans *doublure*.
> –Charles Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier"

I. *Le monde visible existe*: Gautier and Nineteenth-century France's Hybrid Forms

In 1830, Théophile Gautier published his first book of poetry entitled *Poésies*, a collection of 46 poems written at the young age of eighteen; however, it was not a very auspicious start to his literary career. It was a year of radical change in France, historical as well as literary. In 1830, the July Revolution (*la monarchie de Juillet*) caused political unrest and social turbulence, which would persist throughout the decade. Because Gautier's *Poésies* was published during the July Revolution, it attracted no attention whatsoever, at least not until his long poem "Albertus" was re-released in 1832. But Gautier made himself part of the literary unrest that paralleled France's political upheaval. In February of 1830, Victor Hugo's revolutionary, Romantic drama *Hernani* was set to open at the Théâtre-Français and in order to demonstrate his opposition to dramatic classicists, who would be filling the boxes at the theater that night, Hugo organized a non-violent insurgence of his own. He gathered his loyal disciples as a "Romantic Army" dressed in eccentric costumes to vex the classicists, and to announce them as a new artistic force to be reckoned with. Wearing his long hair over the shoulders

of a waistcoat in crimson (the color of defiance), Gautier led these "troops" that shocked the conservative audience, thus creating an indelible image in French literary history.[1]

In *Optiques: The Science of the Eye and the Birth of Modern French Fiction*, Andrea Goulet posits that 1830 is a particularly important year in the evolution of French literary models, calling it "a marker for the advent of modern visual culture."[2] Certainly, Goulet is not alone in arguing that this specific period in time marked an evolution in visual culture. In "Modernizing Vision," Jonathan Crary asserts that by the 1820s "we effectively have a model of autonomous vision" as the "privileging of the body as a visual producer" collapses the previous perspectival models of vision just as it "began to collapse the distinction between inner and outer upon which the camera obscura depended." (35). But Goulet understands this visual epistemology as "a sort of protophenomenology" that maps itself onto the development of modern fiction. And her literary analyses focus largely on the realist literature of Honoré de Balzac, whose multi-volume collection depicting French society through the first half of the nineteenth-century, *La Comédie humaine*, saw its first volume published in 1830 as well. Indeed, nineteenth-century French writers such as Charles Baudelaire were cognizant of Balzac's gift for visual, material observation and its translation into his literature. Baudelaire asserts that Balzac's admirable contribution to the French novel is his ability to turn it into "chose admirable" by being a subjective observer. Baudelaire writes, "la grande

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[1] Cf. William G. Allen, "Gautier's *Albertus:* The Fantastic and the Fashionable" in *Correspondences: studies in literature, history, and the arts in nineteenth-century France* (New York: Rodopi, 1992) 9. The red waistcoat deserves mention also because Oscar Wilde, a disciple of Gautier's *l'art pour l'art* movement and the focus on chapters four and five, dressed himself quite specifically in the manner of Gautier. As English painter William Rothenstein recollects in *Men and Memories: A Recollection of the Arts 1872-1922*, Wilde sat "for his portrait, in a red waistcoat, which he wore, doubtless, in imitation of Théophile Gautier" (New York: Kessington: 2005) 90.

[2] Andrea Goulet, *Optiques: The Science of the Eye and the Birth of Modern French Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) 4.

gloire de Balzac fût passer pour un observateur; il m'avait toujours semblé que son principal mérite était d'être visionnaire, et visionnaire passionné. Tous ses personnages sont doués de l'ardeur vitale dont il était animé lui-même."[3] But Baudelaire is only making these considerations of Balzac's literary trademarks in order to illustrate how they differ from those of Théophile Gautier, to whom Baudelaire's essay is devoted. Though Balzac's literature finds itself inspired by the muse of modern society, as Baudelaire illustrates, "La muse de Théophile Gautier habite un monde plus éthéré."[4]

Gautier not only permitted but also invited the influence of the panoply of visual arts on his own sense of literary reproduction. Though most famous for his seemingly self-same, literary project of *l'art pour l'art*, Théophile Gautier led an intellectual life characterized by the heterogeneous inter-textuality between various modes of artistic production: journalism, painting, letters, story-telling, travel writing, art criticism. As Baudelaire famously claimed of his *maître* and the dedicatee of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), "Partout où il y a un produit artistique à décrire et à expliquer, Gautier est présent et toujours prêt."[5] For Gautier, like other French writers at the decline of Romanticism who supported the concept of *fraternité des arts*, artistic genres were no longer forms to be locked into without flexibility. By the 1830s there were new forces – emerging genres and visual paradigms – at play in the hybridization of France's literary model of modernity and as an artist Gautier served as an emblem of the transformative literary scene. Before his career in letters, Gautier trained as a painter under Louis Rioult; his dismissal from the studio in 1829 provided him an opportunity to apply his flailing talents

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[3] Charles Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier," *Curiosités esthétiques, l'Art Romantique et autres œuvres critiques* (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1962) 679.
[4] *Ibid*., 679.
[5] *Ibid*., 682. Baudelaire's dedication of *Les Fleurs du mal* to Gautier reads, "Au poète impeccable, au parfait magicien ès lettres françaises," (Paris: Larousse, 2001) 38.

in the studio arts to writing, both fiction and non-fiction. He began by writing Romantic poetry; he also famously penned the somewhat scandalous novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). From the 1830s through the 1860s he wrote a good number of *contes fantastiques* while he also wrote journalistically. In non-fiction, he became an influential art critic, writing reviews of ballets as well as commentaries on culturally evolving technologies, such as photosculpture and the daguerreotype. After being hired by newspaper magnate Émile de Girardin, he spent over thirty years writing a weekly *feuilleton* in *La Presse*, and later in *Le Moniteur universel*. Accordingly, Gautier's literary and critical endeavors were influenced by his artistic talents of transposition, supplementing a restricted prosaic depiction with multi-faceted sensibilities akin to the sculptor, the painter, and the daguerreotypist.

Then the question of generic form in reference to Gautier already becomes distracted by this perpetual hybridity. As Baudelaire writes, "L'esprit de Théophile Gautier, poétique, pittoresque, méditatif, devait aimer cette forme, la caresser, et l'habiller des différents costumes qui sont le plus à sa guise."[6] Quoted by Edmond and Jules de Goncourts, Gautier remarked famously that, "Toute ma valeur … c'est que je suis un homme pour qui *le monde visible existe*" (emphasis mine), suggesting that, "beautiful and enduring forms, with no practical utility, are our only consolation in an impermanent world."[7] Baudelaire believed that Gautier was a literary "magicien" and believed that the author's strengths and originality lay in what Baudelaire called Gautier's "*nouvelle* poétique." But Gautier's most magical turns in fiction may be experienced, as

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[6] *Ibid*., 678.

[7] Christopher John Murray, *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850, Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 401. Of course, this was the premise of Gautier's *l'art pour l'art* manifesto in the Préface of his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835).

one might expect, in his *contes fantastiques*. Young writers disillusioned by France's politics, like Gautier and his friend and contemporary Gerard de Nerval, looked toward "the dark forms of the Gothic, the bizarre tales of the German Hoffmann for inspiration."[8] In the early nineteenth-century, German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann pioneered tales of fantasy as generic forms that allow for the illumination of the darker side of Romanticism while also providing a literary space for the exploration of the fantastical and the unnatural. It was the perfect medium for Gautier's Muse, who, according to Baudelaire, enabled the author to create "une second réalité" in his literature: "La muse de Gautier … aime à ressusciter les villes défuntes, et à faire redire aux morts rajeunis leurs passions interrompues. … assez *visible et tangible* … L'imagination du lecteur se sent transportée dans le vrai ; elle respire le vrai ; elle s'enivre d'une second réalité créée par la sorcellerie de la Muse."[9]

The literary powers Gautier wielded in the service of a muse "plus éthéré" were so magical indeed that the female figures he would reproduce repeatedly over the century were equal parts earthly and extraterrestrial, for his ethereal muse often generated women made of stone. Gautier and many of his contemporary writers were particularly fascinated with "stone women," which appeared in vast numbers in the nineteenth-century "as antique examples of the ideal feminine."[10] In an autobiographical essay, Gautier admits his own Pygmalionesque propensities:

> En ce temps-là, je n'avais aucune idée de me faire littérateur, mon goût me portait plutôt vers la peinture … le premier modèle de femme ne me parut pas beau, et me désappointa singulièrement, tant l'art ajoute à la nature la plus parfaite.

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[8] Amy J. Ransom, *The Feminine as Fantastic in the Conte Fantastique: Visions of the Other* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 90.
[9] Baudelaire 680.
[10] Cf. Marie Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice: Villiers's L'Eve Future* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1996) 58.

> C'était cependant une très jolie fille, dont j'appréciai plus tard, par comparaison, les lignes élégantes et pures; mais d'après cette impression, j'ai toujours préféré la statue à la femme et le marbre à la chair.[11]

Gautier's artistic sensibilities ensured early on that he be disappointed by the vulgarity of natural women, just as Ovid's Pygmalion finds himself disgusted by the Propoetides who prostitute their own earthly flesh. And like Pygmalion, Gautier predisposes himself to the strength and solidity of marble to reconstruct a literary, feminine Symbol, reminiscent of ancient statues. Indeed, his writings obsessively returned to the Pygmalionesque milieu. But at his death, Gautier left unfinished the most fitting of them all, a fantastic ballet named *La Statue amoureuse*, "a scenario in which a statue of the goddess Venus comes to life before the sculptor who has professed his love for her."[12]

Though Gautier's statuary predilection inflected the desire for the time-honored solidity of stone, it also assimilated itself to more modern forms of aesthetic representation. As an artist, Gautier matured contemporaneously with the invention and evolution of photography. Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invented the image-making medium, originally referred to as daguerreotypy; it was patented in 1839. Daguerre saw the daguerreotype as "not merely an instrument which serves to draw nature" but one that "gives her the power to *reproduce herself*" (emphasis mine). In August 2010, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) opened a new exhibition, "The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to today," showcasing photographs of sculptures. In her introductory essay, curator Roxana Marcoci writes that, "The advent of photography in 1839, when aesthetic experience was firmly rooted in Romanticist tenets of originality, brought into focus the critical role that the copy plays in the

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[11] Théophile Gautier, *Portrait de Théophile Gautier par lui-même* (Montpellier: L'anabase, 1994) 14.
[12] Albert B. Smith, *Théophile Gautier and the Fantastic* (University, MS: Romance Monographs, 1977) 55.

perception of art."[13] The fact that a photo produced an automatic copy of the art object caused many Romantic artists anxiety over the loss of art's singularity, causing some, like Baudelaire, to criticize the medium's encroachment on the world of imagination. But others, like American author Edgar Allan Poe, "took pleasure in the fact that the daguerreotype could capture …ciphers of his own imaginative sensibility."[14] And the earliest photographs presented in this exhibition at the MOMA are artifacts that attest to this encounter of the ancient statue and the modern, automatic image.

Although Daguerre claimed that the medium would give life by allowing nature *to reproduce herself*, one of the exhibition's earliest daguerreotypes (1839), attributed to Daguerre's assistant Alphonse Eugène Hubert, is presented under the title *Nature morte, bas-reliefs et sculptures dont la Vénus de Milo*.[15] The image shows a sculpture in the left foreground, ancient bas-reliefs in the background, and the Venus de Milo on the right side. But Geoffrey Batchen makes the point that the Venus in this daguerreotype is not the original statue but is already a copy, which further complicates the issue of technological reproduction. He writes that around 1836 "Achille Collas had introduced a sculptural reducing and copying machine and … demonstrated its capabilities by producing a two-fifths-size version of the same canonical statue."[16] One of the exhibitions' other early daguerreotypes, *Nature morte* by Francois-Alphonse Fortier,

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[13] Roxana Marcoci, "The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today," *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010) 12.
[14] Sabine T. Kriebel, "Theories of Photography: A Short History," *Photography Theory,* ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007) 7.
[15] Cf. *The Original Copy* 51.
[16] Geoffrey Batchen, "An Almost Unlimited Variety: Photography and Sculpture in the Nineteenth Century," *The Original Copy* 20.

shows an even larger assortment of Roman-style busts, bas-reliefs, paintings, and decorated shields.[17]

If we were to fast-forward a few decades we would discover that Gautier became an unlikely advocate for an art form that combined the statue and the photograph in a very different way. Invented in 1861 by M. Villème, photosculpture became a cutting-edge technology "whose function it was to mass-produce statues and statuettes."[18] A complicated process that requires the participation of five artists and technicians reproduces a model, plastic *or living*, as a statuary in relief. In an article in the *Moniteur universel* (1864), Gautier argues against popular opinion and asserts that this new method will allow the artist to unveil the ideal more readily than traditional methods. He writes an invitation to his reader, "quittons la lumineuse rotonde et entrons dans le cabinet noir où le mystère s'achève."[19] Using language reminiscent of Narcissus' story in Ovid, Gautier grants photosculpture the privilege of grasping the aesthetic Ideal: "Que ce rêve antique de fixer sur la glace l'image fugitive se fût réalisé, c'était déjà bien assez merveilleux."[20] Gautier revels in the ever-reversible association of subject and object, person and statue, offered by photosculpture. By means of an "art qui semble magique," one could now produce "une statue dont *l'originale n'existe pas*" (emphasis mine).[21] Rather than reproducing a statue unearthed from the remains of an ancient civilization as subject of a photograph, photosculpture allowed the statue to become equally a construct of the modern and the living.

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[17] Cf. *The Original Copy* 50.
[18] Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice* 51.
[19] Gautier, *Photosculpture* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1864) 5.
[20] *Ibid*., 4.
[21] *Ibid*., 9.

Photography and archeology were mediums developing in the nineteenth-century as vehicles for the preservation of artifacts both real and virtual, thus revolutionizing the culture's grasp of temporality and radically changing the image culture of the period.[22] As Eric Downing writes, "the truth value of a photograph seemed a fleeting one indeed, without much staying power, and it tended to produce a correspondingly ephemeral sense of history and, more pointedly, self-image. The subject also was no longer thought of as a single, sustained, or constantly true identity; it became a series of possibly disconnected and always changing images or truths."[23] Downing's "subject" in the age of photographic reproduction transforms into an "it" in the above citation, a clear indication that artistic subjectivity upon the advent of photography becomes equally a question of visual objectivity, another signal of the decade's repetitious encounter with the Pygmalionesque rendering of woman into an art object. While on the one hand, archaeology and photography might be considered modes of representation of the real, on the other, as Downing suggests, they also provided the century newfound access to an "extra-aesthetic 'real'" by participating "in the proliferation of a new culture of virtuality, or inauthentic images and simulacra."[24] For photography, taking an approach like that of Walter Benjamin, this meant the endless, mechanical reproducibility intrinsic to the image. And although archaeology allowed us to uncover snapshots of past civilizations through their unearthed ruins, its function as a portal to myriad societies *past* served equally as a reminder of the sense of modernity's transient sense of time.

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[22] Eric Downing, *After Images: Photography, Archaeology, and Psychoanalysis and the Tradition of Bildung* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006) 3.
[23] *Ibid*., 7.
[24] *Ibid*., 11.

As discursive possibilities, both photography and archaeology allowed Gautier to produce culturally relevant, optical aspects of meaning in his fiction, further permitting the male artist's mastery of the female subject precisely as object. This chapter will explore what I call Gautier's *aesthetic of resurrection* through a close reading of one of his earliest fantastic tales, *La Morte amoureuse* (1836). Gautier's *La Morte* deals with the ever-reversible association between the dead and the living, past and present, consequently emblematizing that during a time period associated with the rise of technology, modernity's new optically oriented mode of literary representation seeks refuge somewhat unexpectedly in the relics of an ancient past. And Gautier's hybridization in the literary realm becomes an indicator of all sorts of other intentional ambiguities that this story perpetuates, including the vacillation of gender, a temporally fluctuating conception of modernity as a transposition of the ancient, and the ever-reversible association of life and death. Accordingly, we will determine through our reading that Gautier's fictional, feminine supplements act both as *fascinante*, one who fascinates, and *revenante*, one who hauntingly returns.[25]

Romuald recounts the bizarre events that compose his story of love in an equally bizarre way, represented not so much within a linear narrative but through a visual, palpable one. In fact, Gautier's narrative is derived solely from the compilation of static portraits, snapshot likenesses of the woman, creating a literary form the substance of which, both thematically and methodically, reproduces the female figure as a work of art. Accordingly, I will focus on four portraits/likenesses in particular in the course of this analysis: (1) in the church, Clarimonde as work of art; (2) on her deathbed, woman as *la*

[25] This usage relies on the meaning of the French verb *fasciner*, which means "paralyser par le regard" *(Le Grande Robert de la langue française* (version électronique, deuxième édition dirigée par Alain Rey)).

morte; (3) Romuald's auto-portrait, a doubled feminine likeness; (4) the tomb raid, the disintegration of the feminine ideal.

II. Figment of His Fascination: *La Fascinante* and the Uncanny

Originally published in two parts for the *Chronique de Paris* under the direction and mentorship of Balzac, *La Morte amoureuse* tells "une histoire singulière et terrible" – but the story begins, literally, at the end. It opens with its narrator answering an anonymous demand of his fellow *frère*, to know whether or not he has been in love. Indeed he has, but his love affair already lost, the male speaker must resurrect his dead love, *la morte amoureuse*, like his memory from the ashes:

> Vous me demandez, frère, si j'ai aimé; oui. C'est une histoire singulière et terrible, et, quoique j'aie soixante-six ans, j'ose à peine remuer la cendre de ce souvenir. Je ne veux rien vous refuser, mais je ne ferais pas à une âme moins éprouvée un pareil récit. Ce sont des événements si étranges, que je ne puis croire qu'ils me soient arrivés. J'ai été pendant plus de trois ans le jouet d'une illusion singulière et diabolique. (77)

Because the narrator must stir the ashes – *remuer la cendre de ce souvenir* – to tell his story, the reader gets the feeling automatically that this will be a tale of black magic. Many literary critics, such as Jean Bellemin-Noël and Sabine Jarrot, have interpreted the narrative traditionally as a somewhat one-dimensional tale of a female vampire that preys on a priest. On occasion, the story's title has been translated into English, somewhat unsuitably, as *The Beautiful Vampire*. But in the course of our reading we will determine the tale's more ambivalent multi-dimensionality, and how the story's ever-reversibility of signification points toward that which is fixedly irreversible – death.

Romuald laments the aftereffects of a diabolic romance at the very beginning of his tale: "Moi, pauvre prêtre de campagne, j'ai mené en rêve toutes les nuits … une vie

de damné, une vie de mondain et de Sardanapale" (77). The poor priest is thus equated to the subject of a painting – Eugène Delacroix's "La Mort de Sardanapale" (1827) – from the onset.[26] Delacroix's painting depicts Sardanapalus, the last King of Assyria, as he peers apathetically upon his subjects, mainly nude women presumably from his harem. They are about to be set ablaze and murdered in a decree set forth by the King himself, who will also die by his own hand now that he faces military defeat. The scene of the painting is both maniacal and orgiastic, leading Delacroix's generation to reflect on Sardanapalus as a libidinous lunatic. But in his Préface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), published at about the time he was writing *La Morte amoureuse*, Gautier tells his reader to be wary of such judgments on virtue:

> Au lieu de faire un prix Montyon pour la récompense de la vertu, j'aimerais mieux donner, comme Sardanapale, ce grande philosophe que l'on a si mal compris, une forte prime à celui qui inventerait un nouveau plaisir ; car la jouissance me paraît le but de la vie, et la seule chose utile au monde. Dieu l'a voulu ainsi, lui qui a fait les femmes, les parfums, la lumière, les belles fleurs, les bons vins, les chevaux fringants, les levrettes et les chats angoras ; lui qui n'a pas dit à ses anges : Ayez de la vertu, mais : Ayez de l'amour, et qui nous a donné une bouche plus sensible que le reste de la peau pour embrasser les femmes, des yeux levés en haut pour voir la lumière, un odorat subtil pour respirer l'âme des fleurs… (46)

La Morte deals with the story of this old man's past, when he was young and meets an ambiguously demonic woman on the eve of his priestly ordination. The narrator, Romuald, will become a carbon copy of Sardanapalus, a man who partakes in the sensual delights: woman, wine, and other licentious activities. And though this structure interpreted traditionally would lead us to assume that the woman represents the profane, it seems that wickedness may be closer to Godliness than one might expect – at least in the realm of Gautier's fantastic.

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[26] This painting, and Delacroix himself, also had the privilege of being the object of dedication for Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (1835), written at the same time period as *La Morte*.

Chimera, as a concept, emblematizes the visionary quality of Gautier's hybrid and uncanny literary style. Born from the name for the Greek mythological creature with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail, the word soon connotes a variety of grotesque monsters across centuries of literature and painting. In a figurative sense, a chimera can be any number of things with an incongruous composition. But by 17th century England, the word adopted a wholly different character meaning "imaginary," "fanciful," "visionary" and "ideal." Gautier's fantastic was a genre excellent for perpetuating the chimera as an ever-reversible myth of differential mimesis; in French, the word *fantastique*, from the Greek *phantasticus,* means "to make visible" or "to have visions."[27] And so the *conte fantastiques* was a literary form that, because of its hybridization with a particularly modern, visual aesthetic characterized by illusion, allowed for the equivalent de-formation of genre. Gautier famously strove for an illusory, aesthetic ideal that he aptly coined *la chimère* and the contradictory meanings of the word chimera match the uncanny quality of Gautier's fantastic fiction.

The literary uncanny is characterized by ambivalence equivalent to the seemingly contradictory poles of monstrous and ideal conjured up by the word chimera. Although here we will need to use the term "uncanny" in a pre-Freudian way, because Freud would not lay claim to the term by way of his explorations within the "fertile province" of aesthetics and literature until 1919, when he illustrates its function through his reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's Pygmalionesque story *Der Sandmann* (1817).[28] According to Freud, what the uncanny presents, foundationally, is the meeting with something that is both familiar/*heimlich* and unknown/*unheimlich* – an encounter which produces an acute form

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[27] Cf. *OED online*.
[28] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin, 2003) 226.

of anxiety because the uncanny takes the *shape* of something that has undergone repression and since reemerged from it.

In his study of *Sandmann* Freud stresses two themes of the tale: the first, its reliance upon sight and the subsequent fear of losing one's eyes as substitutive of the castration complex. This loss of vision conveys the loss of power, a lack within the subject. In Hoffmann's story, young Nathaniel had believed in his mother's invocation of the feared Sandman who threw sand in children's eyes. As a grown-up, he falls in love with a wooden automaton named Olympia created by Professor Spalanzani and the optician Coppola, who have "purloined" Olympia's eyes from Nathaniel himself. After spying on her for the first time he remarks that Olympia's "eyes alone seemed to him strangely transfixed and dead, yet as the image in the glass grew sharper and sharper it seemed as though beams of moonlight began to rise within them; it was as if they were at that moment acquiring the power of sight, and their glance grew ever warmer and more lively."[29] This idea leads into Freud's second noted thematic, the uncertainty over the animacy of an (inanimate) object. This citation posits that Nathaniel's gaze, his newly acquired ability to visually objectify the female, has the power to give life. In other words, his subjectivity demands her objectivity. And Olympia's eyes are purloined from him in the sense then that the deadened eyes of the wooden doll mirror his subjective desires. Nathaniel claims that through her eyes, "my whole being is reflected!"[30]
But anxiety manifests in Nathaniel, whose eyes have been *stolen* and used for Olympia. A doll that has been fashioned by an optician, master of the lens, Olympia foundationally represents the anxiety imported within the very faculty of sight at the dawning of the age

[29] *Ibid*., 110.
[30] *Ibid*., 114.

of mechanic, or photographic, reproduction. But although Olympia represents a technologically reproduced thing, paradoxically she gives Nathaniel a far greater desire to live than the real woman in the story. Olympia's ability to dis-illusion Nathaniel seems to be produced also by his disillusionment with the real, momentarily allowing him to transcend the morbid reality of his betrothal to conscientious fiancée Clara, who he decrees to be the real "lifeless accursed automaton."[31]

i. Automatic Woman: Seeing is Believing

On the threshold of his ordination, Romuald describes the sudden emergence of *cette femme imaginaire*:

> Oh ! comme elle était belle ! Les plus grands peintres, lorsque, poursuivant dans le ciel la beauté idéale, ils ont rapporté sur la terre le divin portrait de la Madone, n'approchent même pas de cette fabuleuse réalité. Ni les vers du poète ni la palette du peintre n'en peuvent donner une idée […] Quels yeux! Avec un éclair ils décidaient de la destinée d'un homme; ils avaient […] une humidité brillante que je n'ai jamais vues à un œil humain […] Cette femme était un ange ou un démon, et peut-être tous les deux; elle ne sortait certainement pas du flanc d'Eve, la mère commune. (80)

Romuald discovers the object of his affection when, during his ordination ceremony at Easter, he lifts his head "par hasard" and finds "si près que j'aurais pu la toucher," even though "en réalité elle fut à une assez grande distance," a female figure preemptively likened to a painting from the very beginning (80). On a day when a Christian subject should be the mirror through which the Divine is reflected, Romuald instead succumbs to the brilliant, exotic eyes of a competing female presence. Gautier's mysterious *femme* turns out to be either angel or demon; here, the juxtaposition serves to prove the woman

[31] *Ibid*., 106.

is certainly not human and therefore, not subject to the ravages of time.[32] And if she embodies an artistic Ideal, it is far more potent than that which is accessible in a simple poem or a painting, too powerful to be restricted by *genre*. These eyes, which reveal "la destinée d'un homme," become a perverse substitute for the vows Romuald is meant to take in the same instant. Here, instead of raising his eyes to God, he lifts his gaze and catches sight of another figure of immortality in the form of Woman. Clarimonde, as her name suggests, epitomizes the *light of the world*, usurping the position of the Divine in his own house.[33] In "Le Fétichisme dans l'amour," Alfred Binet suggests a transposition of the fetish from religion; from the word *fetisso*, the fetish can be viewed as the enchanted object that held sway over individual destiny, *fatum*. And, as Baudelaire declares in his essay on Gautier, "le goût du Beau est pour lui un *fatum*."[34] At the threshold of relinquishing his autonomy in favor of worshipping the Divine, Romuald confronts an exotically fetishized female figure. His life changes the moment he locks eyes with Clarimonde:

> À mesure que je la regardais, je sentais s'ouvrir dans moi des portes qui jusqu'alors avaient été fermées … la vie m'apparaissait sous un aspect tout autre; je venais de maître à un nouvel ordre d'idées. Une angoisse effroyable me tenaillait le cœur; chaque minute qui s'écoulait me semblait une seconde et un siècle. (80)

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[32] In "Hymne de la beauté," Baudelaire expresses the ability of the enigmatic figure, *Beauté*, to not only open up unknown spaces without measure but, also, to lighten the burden imposed by time. He frames the repeated question of good and evil, "De Satan ou de Dieu," with the repetition of an uninterested "qu'importe." In Baudelaire, according to Elissa Marder in *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert)* "'good' and 'evil' are terms that only acquire significance to the extent that they determine temporal possibilities or failures" (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 20. This idea can be transferred and applied in the same sense to the figure of Clarimonde, especially in relation to her first appearance in the church and the depiction of time going haywire in response.

[33] From the French words *claire*, meaning "clear," and *monde*, meaning "world," *Le Grande Robert de la langue française*.

[34] Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier" 675.

The female figure opens the portals to "une second réalité" within his imagination. But this new world opened up by the woman's eyes frightens Romuald, who, like time itself, becomes "le jouet d'une illusion magique" (99). This *angoisse*, the anxiety that Romuald experiences, signals an eminent danger and a break in the narrative. The fear directly overturns the order of time; now, one minute not only resembles a second, but an eternity as well.

Though we recognize that Clarimonde, not born of our communal mother Eve, is an artificial woman, we have to wonder what sort of Galatea she represents here? Even though the male artist constructs his feminine supplement in order to reify his subjectivity through the command of vision, does she not endanger that very male subjectivity quite clearly by turning the man into *un jouet*, a toy? The uncanny mirror of Clarimonde's inhuman eyes are not human, then, in the sense that they envisage the woman's monstrous form as the necessary condition for presenting Romuald's subjectivity, which is equally chimerical. Her eyes project words, make music, and disintegrate time the way it threatens to disintegrate in its own way – through death**.** Accordingly, Clarimonde gets characterized as a figure not sprung from the flanks of Eve but as a sort of primordial mother herself. Her bodily figure appears inasmuch as "it is not a desire that emerges from a body, but that a body emerges *from* a desire."[35] Clarimonde seduces Romuald with the invitation to sleep on her bosom in a bed of gold, an invitation to enter into an existence that flows "comme un rêve" and is nothing but "un baiser éternal," which has the effect of a lullaby (83). As Romuald admits, "Il me semblait entendre ces paroles sur une rythme d'une douceur infinie, car son regard avait presque de la sonorité, et les

[35] Judith Butler, "Desire," *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 372.

phrases que ses yeux m'envoyaient retentissaient au fond de mon cœur comme si une *bouche invisible* les eut soufflés dans mon âme" (83, emphasis mine).

Clarimonde's lullaby, the intoxicating hymn of a seemingly maternal sort of love, flows out of her eyes and an *invisible mouth*. Somehow, her invisible mouth not only plunges Romuald into a state of horrid delirium, it makes his words invisible as well: "J'étais, tout éveillé, dans un état pareil à celui de cauchemar, où l'on veut crier un mot dont votre vie dépend, sans en pouvoir venir à bout" (82). The sudden presence of Woman, as idealized object, has stripped Romuald of the ability to be his own speaking subject; despite being ready to renounce God, he cannot utter the words to deny his holy pledge. Instead of committing himself in good faith to the "engagement irrévocable" with God, he instead gets initiated into a world marked by the "révélation angélique" of a woman visible and palpable yet untouchable (78). Gautier overturns the ritualistic necessities of the Christian faith and replaces God here with the equally captivating yet distanced cult of *beauté*.

Not only does Romuald represent the object of a painting, he also admits to knowing woman not as a subject but as a thing (*quelque chose*). He can only comprehend woman as a representation: "Je savais vaguement qu'il y avait quelque chose que l'on appelait femme" (78). And upon the eve of his priestly ordination, Romuald instead gets initiated into, in the words of Walter Benjamin, "the principles of the art of seeing," entering into "un pacte avec ses yeux" with the mysterious Clarimonde, an invocation of the Book of Job, 31:1 (79). Romuald metaphorically acquires the faculty of sight not in the service of spiritual enlightenment but as an internal figuration of the artist. Hereafter, Romuald gains the power (*puissance*) of artistic vision. Every detail of the feminine

figure emerges instantly, and not inconsequently, at the very moment he mentally foregoes the possibility of permanently sacrificing his self to the worship of an invisible God. Instead, Romuald lifts his eyes for the first time, shocked into the ability to create the visible world all his own. Romuald raises his head "jusque-là tenue inclinée" and admits, at the moment that he is shocked into seeing: "J'éprouvai la sensation d'un aveugle qui recouvrerait subitement la vue" (79). We might suggest that for Romuald this woman is *automatic*, an automaton in the sense that she is "self-acting," "performed by unconscious, subconscious, or occult action"[36] – and the self her automatism refers to is, indeed, Romuald's.

In the ordination scene, we can trace the invocation of the Pygmalion myth, but in reverse – the uncanny reversal of animation in the female figure. Let us consider the full trajectory of her visual development here:

> Les plus grands peintres, lorsque, poursuivant dans le ciel la beauté idéale, ils ont rapporté sur la terre le divin portrait de la Madone, n'approchent même pas de cette fabuleuse réalité … son front, d'une blancheur bleuâtre et transparente, s'étendait large et serein sur les arcs de deux cils presque bruns, singularité qui ajoutait encore à l'effet de prunelles vert de mer d'une vivacité et d'un éclat insoutenables. … Quels yeux! … ils avaient une vie, une limpidité, une ardeur […] Tous ces détails me sont encore aussi présents … rien ne m'échappait: la plus légère nuance, le petit point noir au coin du menton, l'imperceptible duvet aux commissures des lèvres, le velouté du front, l'ombre tremblante des cils sur les joues, je saisissais tout avec une lucidité étonnante. … Le regard de la belle inconnue changeait d'expression selon le progrès de la cérémonie … Jamais physionomie humaine ne peignit une angoisse aussi poignante … la mère auprès du berceau vide de son enfant, Ève assise sur le seuil de la porte du paradis … le poète qui a laissé rouler dans le feu le manuscrit unique de son plus bel ouvrage, n'ont point un air plus atterré et plus inconsolable. Le sang abandonna complètement sa charmante figure, et elle devint d'une blancheur de marbre; ses beaux bras tombèrent le long de son corps, comme si les muscles en avaient été dénoués, et elle s'appuya contre un pilier, car ses jambes fléchissaient et se dérobaient sous elle. (80, 80, 80, 81, 82, 83-84)

[36] Cf. "automatic, *a*." *OED online*.

Literally, woman has been killed into art, or turned into stone in some strange reversal of the Medusa effect. Gautier amplifies the fact that the male literary subject is literally vivified though this self-manufactured woman by illustrating an immediate, entropic exchange that occurs between the two. As the blood drains from Clarimonde's face, rendering it "d'une blancheur de marbre" like a statue, Romuald experiences a new surge of life as a value of exchange: "je sentais la vie monter en moi comme un lac intérieur qui s'enfle et qui déborde; mon sang battait avec force dans mes artères" (86). This scene not only emphasizes the power of the gaze but also illustrates vision as a question of entropy.

The very title of this story, *La Morte amoureuse*, depicts Clarimonde as a figure who has already passed away and must be reproduced in art. By animating an artificialized woman, or bringing *La Morte* to life, Romauld in turn augments his own subjectivity and gives himself "life" as well. But, inasmuch as she fascinates Romuald, *La Morte* comes alive only to retain an existence painted into the inertia (of art) by Romuald's own paralyzing gaze, jumpstarting a crisis in perception for a man who was not meant to rely on his human faculties – only on his spiritual ones.[37]

ii. On Her Deathbed: Woman as *la morte*

> For Gautier, intoxication is perhaps less that which is produced by wine and drugs than that which is produced by the vision of the ideal realized in art.
> –Harry Cockerman, "Gautier: From Hallucination to Supernatural Vision"

At first, Romuald resists these desires awakened within him visually by the figure of the *fascinante*, and follows through with becoming a priest. On a nightmarish evening

[37] Cf. *Le Grande Robert de la langue française*. Entry for "fasciner" reads: "1. Ensorceler (un sujet, une personne) par un charme 2. Maîtriser, immobiliser par la seule puissance du regard 3. Éblouir, captiver par la beauté, l'ascendant, le prestige. è attirer, charmer, émerveiller, hypnotiser, séduire, troubler."

while asleep at his new presbytery, Romuald is awakened by a monstrous messenger, who delivers the newly appointed priest to the confines of Clarimonde's deathbed. In an attempt to avert the arousal of temptation, Romuald refuses to look at the dying body of his beloved, seemingly in fear that her death might be transferred: "Je m'agenouillai sans oser jeter les yeux sur le lit … remerciant Dieu qu'il eut mis la tombe entre l'idée de cette femme et moi" (95). His desire is not to see, but to be blind and, instead, fix the *(idea* of) woman in memory.[38] But as soon as he believes he has escaped his seduction, when he thinks that averting his eyes has saved him, something literally starts to stink: "peu à peu cet élan se ralentit, et je tombai en rêverie. Cette chambre n'avait rien d'une chambre de mort. Au lieu de l'air fétide … une langoureuse fumée d'essences orientales, je ne sais quelle amoureuse odeur de femme, nageait doucement dans l'air attiédi" (95). This smell, the intrusive sign of the fantastic, is the opposite of putrid. In fact, it is an intoxicating fragrance of the Orient that, rather than invoke fear and anxiety regarding death, suggests *other* worlds and other seductions.

The nineteenth-century was known as an age of intoxication; the controversy over the Opium trade at that period led to the increased awareness of the usage of intoxicants in Europe, especially in the form of opium (morphine), and also including hashish and cocaine. Gautier was certainly not a stranger to this drug economy, making it well known by recording his personal experience with hashish and opium in *Le Club des Hachichins* (1846). Gautier further testified to his familiarity through his fantastic tales, like *La Pipe d'opium* (1838), in which the effect of opium creates a communal relationship between two lovers made impossible without the aid of the drug. Many

[38] Elissa Marder, *Dead Time* 44. Marder invokes this image in her discussion of Baudelaire's "La Chevelure," where she writes, "Bersani implies that the reason the poet desires the woman's absence is so that she can become an object of 'memory.'

authors alike found themselves resorting to artificial stimulants as recourse to the active imagination. French physician Jacques Joseph Moreau credits himself with introducing Gautier to cannabis, and through him, an introduction to other literary greats like Hugo and Baudelaire was made.[39] Opium use, in particular, has a long and transnational history. Egyptian civilization promoted the use of opium as a sleep aid and the ancient Greeks had numerous gods that were portrayed wreathed with or carrying poppies, including: Nyx (the goddess of night), Thanatos (the god of death), and Hymnus (the god of rest and oblivion). Egyptian pharaohs were even buried with opium artifacts. Introduced into England by the Romans, opium extract was later made into morphine, named after Morpheus, god of sleep – the term finds its origin in the Latin *somniferum* which means, "to sleep."[40] In *La Morte*, sleep performs the same task as an intoxicant, as evidenced in Gautier's repetitive image of Romuald getting drunk after "gorgées du sommeil," who can, consequently, "fis une rêve" of which Clarimonde is the main attraction (101). Not only is the intoxicant essential in the transcendence of reality and the evocation of the ideal, it proves to be a fundamental component to literature itself. In other words, Gautier uses literature as an opiate replacement in the way it is meant to open up the space for the reader to exist apart from the material world and insert themselves into the fantastic, or what Baudelaire calls Gautier's "second réalité."

Let us consider briefly the details of another tale by Gautier, *Le Pied de momie* (1840). In this story, a man visits a bric-a-brac shop where he purchases the mummified foot of an Egyptian princess for a paperweight and after bringing it home, he becomes aware of "une vague bouffée de parfum oriental … c'était un parfum doux quoique

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[39] John Frederick Logan, "The Age of Intoxication," *Yale French Studies* 50 (1974) 19.
[40] http://www.sfheart.com/poppy.html

pénétrant, un parfum que quatre mille ans n'avaient pu faire évaporer."[41] We may read the *parfum oriental* that emanates from the mummified foot here, clearly the scent of the embalming herbs used to bathe the corpse of the princess, to be like the exotic scent pervading Clarimonde's death chamber. It is the smell of death itself, or rather, the smell of that which *preserves the life-likeness of the dead,* embalming fluid. Clarimonde, like the scent emanating from her chamber, proves stronger than the edicts of religion as well as the edicts of time, and proves that this final farewell, as Benjamin notes regarding the poetry of Baudelaire, "coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment."[42] Scent, as Benjamin affirms, "is more privileged to provide consolation than any other recollection … because it deeply drugs the sense of time. A scent may drown years in the odor it recalls."[43] As much as she promises an eternity of love to Romuald in the church, the vision of her in "la plus parfaite immobilité" seduces him into a world of eternal life as never-ending death, a death that cannot be escaped because of its eternal presence – a stench that never goes away (97).

This scent not only allows the narrator to ascend consciousness in the real, rendering him separate from the mortal world, but also causes him to split from himself. Consider the continuation of the deathbed scene, as Romuald narrates: "Je songeais au singulier hasard qui m'avait fait retrouver Clarimonde au moment où je la perdais pour toujours, et un soupir de regret s'échappa de ma poitrine. Il me sembla qu'on avait soupiré aussi derrière moi, et je me retournai involontairement. C'était l'écho" (95). At the moment that Romuald is about to lose his beloved other to the hands of death, his

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[41] Gautier, "La Pied de la momie," *La Morte Amoureuse, Avatar et autre récits fantastiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991): 139.
[42] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 169.
[43] *Ibid.,* 184.

voice echoes, thus doubling the sigh into itself and a repetition of the same. However, like Ovid's Narcissus, Romuald does not even recognize that the sigh of regret that echoes is his own: he claims that it seems to come from a mysterious "on," or other. The reader of Gautier, like the reader of Ovid, finds himself/herself confronted "with the rather puzzling image of a speaker who does not hear himself speak" when his sigh is echoed back in its sameness.[44] That is to say, the act of echoing, here, suggests that the "echo could not become a speech attached to a consciousness […] cannot be reduced to the status of a simple repetition."[45] Instead, it suggests a splitting of consciousness, suggesting that something previously repressed *comes back to life*. Critic Hilda Nelson discusses regarding Gautier's penchant in his fantastic narratives to explore *l'anéantissement* – the sensation of getting rid of the subject's *moi* in order to allow the subject's otherness to surface. In this sense and in this scene, Gautier plays with the contradictory situation of being and not-being. Indeed, the echo does not need to come out of the embodied Clarimonde, as Ovid has Narcissus' words Echo-ed from his female counterpart. In other words, Gautier wants Romuald to realize that his own voice has echoed even though he believes mistakenly that it is the echo of *someone else*.

The doubling of Romuald's sigh acts as the signal of a splitting of subjectivity: the echo of the sigh represents not consciousness but what would be designated as the unconscious, or desire in general. Desire and speaking consciousness have had a problematic relationship, it seems, from the first encounter of the lovers in the church. The fascinating conundrum is that Romuald has a mouth that cannot utter words because Clarimonde controls them, yet she does not have a mouth to physically utter them. When

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[44] Claire Nouvet, "An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus" (*Yale French Studies* 79 (1991)) 108.
[45] *Ibid.,* 105, 106.

Romuald presses his lips against hers, a kiss we fear (and he hopes) has come too late, Clarimonde opens her eyes and sighs in equivalent measure to his earlier one. As if resurrected and brought back to life, she envelops him in her arms "comme pour me retenir" – as if she's a mother unwilling to let go (98). Her previous invitation to sleep on her breast brings itself to fruition through the power of the stench, inebriating Romuald to the point where, fully intoxicated, he faints "sur le sein de la belle morte" (98). After an episode that lasts "trois jours [qui] ne comptent pas," Romuald lies in his bed in the presbytery, unable to speak and without memory of the time lapse (99).

According to Jean Bellemin-Noël, Gautier introduces France to her first "vampire femelle," an instrument of eroticization that has turned a priest, in the span of three mysterious nights, into a libertine.[46] Romuald's church mentor, father Sérapion, "d'une voix claire … comme les trompettes du jugement dernier," warns Romuald:

> La grande courtisane Clarimonde est morte dernièrement, à la suite d'une orgie qui a duré huit jours et huit nuits. C'a été quelque chose d'infernalement splendide. On a renouvelé là les abominations des festins de Balthazar et de Cléopâtre. Dans quel siècle vivons-nous, bon Dieu! … Il a couru de tout temps sur cette Clarimonde de bien étranges histoires … On a dit que c'était une goule, un vampire femelle. (100)

Not only vampire, but a festive, orientalized *grande courtisane*, Clarimonde is a prostitute that never dies. One may say that the vampire, the *un-dead*, is an organizing metaphor for the disorganization of narrative space and time, the ghostly return of that which refuses to die. As Sabine Jarrot suggests, "l'essence du vampirisme n'est pas autre chose que la quête de l'immoralité … 'l'idée de vaincre la mort est séduisante et en même temps on croit de moins en moins à l'immoralité de l'âme promise par l'église."[47] Accordingly, the vampire offers itself as "une représentation allégorique de la féminité

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[46] Jean Bellemin-Noël, *Plaisirs de vampire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001) 43, 47.
[47] Sabine Jarrot, *Le Vampire dans la Littérature du XIXe et XXe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 149.

perverse."[48] Despite Serapion's warning, one night soon afterward Romuald submits himself to the luxurious intoxication of sleep (101). "[À] peine bu les premières gorgées du sommeil," Romuald is revisited by Clarimonde in a space that intimates a dream and, for the proceeding three years, Romuald lives a double life – as priest of a country presbytery and as a "jeune seigneur," residing in Venice as Clarimonde's lover. Their amorous, vampiric relationship takes on a symbiotic quality akin to that of mother and child. She whispers to her supposedly unconscious lover before pricking/penetration, "dors, mon dieu, mon enfant; je ne te ferai pas de mal, je ne prendrai de ta vie que ce qu'il faudra" (112). Rather than being characterized by aberration, this relationship illuminates an essential reciprocity. She tells him, "Ma vie est dans la tienne, et tout ce qui est moi vient de toi." Jean Bellemin-Noël claims that this method of vampirism – a seductive form of possession, the give and take of desire, love and blood – proves that Clarimonde functions as the phallic mother. He claims: "Elle nous remet en mémoire ce que nous pensions avoir oublié: que toutes premières relations nouées avec le corps maternel ont une structure secrète qui les place sous le signe de la réciprocité … de la compénétration."[49] Clarimonde not only epitomizes not only the forgotten primal mother but also combats man's ever-present fear of inevitable death.

It remains difficult, however, to accommodate the fullness of the mythological vampire, considering the delicate nature of Clarimonde's blood acquisition. With the aid of a mirror reflection, Romuald realizes that his lover taints his wine with some sort of intoxicating powder in order to induce a deeper sleep so she may drink his blood. Pretending to have drunk from his cup, Romuald remains conscious, permitting the

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[48] *Ibid*., 129.
[49] Bellemin-Noël 51.

witnessing of his (supposed) victimization. He realizes, "elle n'use pas de la méthode primitive," but instead, "l'aide d'un objet pointu … proprement phallique comme toute pénétration" – a delicate, golden pin she pulls from her hair. The reader finds this form of bloodletting shocking precisely because it is so gentle; rather than invoking violence, Clarimonde truly makes her blood conquest a loving, tender endeavor. She performs the procedure with gentle kindness, accompanied by her own tears when in fear of causing him harm.

We must, then, ask ourselves the very rhetorical question that father Sérapion poses to Romuald: "Dans quel siècle vivons-nous, bon Dieu! ?" We are fully aware that the power of this woman hails not only from her evocation of the past as a visual present, but also from her disconnection with the temporal firmament. But we may suggest that what appears to be a vampire story is something much more than that. The origins of the vampire myth lie in the cults of oriental civilizations; more specifically, there exists a specific link between vampires and their source, Egyptian mythology. Accordingly, the vampire trope is already a copy, simply another disguise that hides from view what Clarimonde really represents: mommy, but more importantly, mummy. Although Nicholas Daly suggests that Gautier's *Le Pied de la momie* was one of the first stories to explore the fictional possibilities of the mummy, *La Morte amoureuse* opens up the same space of Egyptian eroticism four years earlier.[50]

III. Love Among the Ruins: Woman as *Revenante* and the Archeological Metaphor

[50] *La Morte Amoureuse* was published in 1836, four years prior to the publication of *La Pied de la momie*, in 1840. In the course of my research I failed to uncover any sources that discussed *La Morte* as mummy fiction and/or Clarimonde as a mummy, even though it would seem likely that this reading be performed considering Gautier's repetitious, fictional encounters with the mummy and ancient Egypt in his writings of the 1850s.

> L'Egypte est puissamment investie par l'inconscient de Gautier. Elle exerce une fascination morbide sur lui dans la mesure où l'âpreté de son climat, le symbolisme de son architecture et sa particulière relation à la mort le renvoie aux grandes terreurs de l'introversion narcissique: l'horreur de l'anéantissement, l'angoisse de la durée vécue comme un arrêt du temps, la cruauté de la pétrification sans cesse.
> –M. C. Shapira, *Le Regard de Narcisse*

By accommodating the "importance of interpreting signs by presenting archaeology as a matter of reading" we may discover that *La Morte amoureuse*, though written before ancient Egypt became his powerful muse of choice, provides strong precedent for Gautier's later preoccupation with the mummy as trope and the creation of a literary, and almost literal, model akin to what art historian Aby Warburg called "the afterlife of antiquity."[51] Avid believers in the afterlife, Egyptians regarded death simply as a change of (bodily) matter: the human body would metamorphosis into its spiritual double, which dwelt with the mummy in the tomb after the body perished. Gautier, Pygmalion of modernity, accomplishes a secondary literary metamorphosis by aesthetically re-animating the dead woman, *La Morte,* in order to resurrect her as modern muse. In fact, almost the entirety of his literary project may be devoted to this reversible rendering of the woman as *objet d'art* in the same spirit that Pygmalion carves his "ivory girl": "tout est mis pour déréaliser la femme … de la décrire l'immobilise, comme dans un tableau … à rendre la femme décrite comparable à un objet inanimé."[52]

If we revisit the portrait of Clarimonde on her deathbed, we might unearth further significance of the mysterious architectural space. As mentioned earlier, the oriental perfumes that pervade the room might suggest the scent of embalming fluids, like the

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[51] Melanie C. Hawthorne, "Dis-Covering the Female: Gautier's Roman de la Momie" (*The French Review* 66.5 (1993)) 723.
[52] Natalie David-Weill, *Rêve de Pierre: La quête de la femme chez Théophile* Gautier (Genève: Droz, 1989) 41-42.

scent that emanates from the mummified foot in Gautier's *Le Pied de la momie*. In *La Morte amoureuse*, the scent signals the supernatural and causes an immediate intoxication that borders on delirium. Not only does it advocate Romuald's change of mental state but the smell, as we have seen, also signals fear and disorder. This is the scent of revitalization, and conversely, the stench through which the story literally begins to go to hell:

> Je ne pouvais plus y tenir ; cet air d'alcôve m'enivrait, cette fébrile senteur de rose à demi fanée me montait au cerveau … Je me penchai vers elle et je pris le coin du drap; je le soulevai lentement en retenant mon souffle de peur de l'éveiller. Mes artères palpitaient avec une telle force, que je les sentais siffler dans mes tempes, et mon front ruisselait de sueur comme si j'eusse remué une dalle de marbre. C'était en effet la Clarimonde telle que je l'avais vue à l'église … la mort chez elle semblait une coquetterie de plus. La pâleur de ses joues, le rose moins vif de ses lèvres, ses longs cils baissés et découpant leur frange brune sur cette blancheur … ses belles mains, plus pures, plus diaphanes que des hosties, étaient croisées dans une attitude de pieux repos et de tacite prière. (96-97)

The previous interpretation of Romuald's echoing sigh over the body of Clarimonde as evidence of a splitting self still remains valid, but not sufficient. The scenic details – the scent "d'essences orientales," the woman's body "couverte d'un voile de lin d'une blancheur éblouissante," her hands "croisées dans une attitude de pieux repos et de tacite prière…séduisante même dans la mort" – suggest something other than the deathbed of a mortal or a coffin for a vampire's repose. Romuald's voice echoes through the hollowness of this architectural void as chamber of death. God has not put the tomb between the two lovers after all, as Romuald hopes. Instead, his arduous journey into this room has clearly been resuscitated, here, as an archeological voyage: "mon front ruisselait de sueur comme si j'eusse remué une dalle de marbre." Romuald finds himself face to face with Mummy in the tomb. If the figure of Clarimonde originates from

someone other that Eve it is because she belongs to Mother Egypt, or, she represents "the Goddess from whom all becoming arose" – Isis, with a causal link to Cleopatra, Isis' most infamous priestess.[53] The cult of Isis became enormously popular under the Roman Empire, which used her, through scriptures and hymns, as the archetypal model for the Virgin Mary. Accordingly, this invocation of an eroticized encounter with the mummified body of a figure linked to Isis puts Romuald in contact with the highest Mother, an Ideal exalted by its pre-historical character. Essential to the Egyptian death-rebirth cycle, Isis can guarantee immortality – she is time incarnate.

After Romuald spends three undetectable days in an unconscious swoon, he escapes the deathbed scene with a life now split in two. He spends the next three years in limbo between two selves –priest and lover – although perpetually unable to discern "où commençait la réalité et où finissait l'illusion" (107). His entire existence now bears an illusory, or hallucinatory, quality. At first, Clarimonde may have captured Romuald's gaze as the figure of the *fascinante*, but returning to the scene, we realize that she has also left on him a different mark:

> Comme j'allais franchir le seuil, une main s'empara brusquement de la mienne; une main de femme! Je n'en avais jamais touché. Elle était froide comme la peau d'un serpent, et l'empreinte m'en resta brûlante comme la marque d'un fer rouge. C'était elle … Je faisais la plus étrange contenance du monde; je palissais, je rougissais, j'avais des éblouissements. Un de mes camarades eut pitié de moi, il me prit et m'emmena; j'aurais été incapable de retrouver tout seul le chemin du séminaire. (84)

Here we see the power of the corporeal response, the strength of Clarimonde's touch, which leaves a searing on Romuald's skin that he will not soon forget. This touch produces "éblouissements" as they represent "trouble de la vue provoqué par une cause

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[53] According to Barbara Walker, in Arabic, the words for snake and life are related to the name of Eve: *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. (Edison: Castle Books, 1988): 207.

interne…et généralement accompagné de *vertige*."[54] We may suggest that the trouble with his vision is exactly that he is *seeing things*, most notably seeing *woman as a thing*. Just before the fated touch Gautier describes Clarimonde as follows: "Le sang abandonna complètement sa charmante figure, et elle devint d'une blancheur de marbre," again paralyzing the female figure into stone (84). Her touch leaves "la marque d'un fer rouge," causing his cheeks to burn with blush as well, suggesting that somehow their contact incites a rush, or exchange of blood, from her to him. Her face drains of the blood that is immediately transferred to his reddened cheeks. As we saw how the words from her invisible mouth castrated his speech, here she touches him and leaves an impression that abandons him in a state of co-dependence. As Pierre-Georges Castex writes, "Gautier apprend bien vite à se dédoubler, à se réserver, et l'abandon aux chimères de l'imagination lui apparaît comme *un vertige dangereux*" (emphasis mine).[55]

On the site prepared for meeting God, instead, Romuald finds himself contacted by woman allegorized as snake. Clarimonde represents the hybrid femme fatale, part seductress and part serpent, in a perverse return to the most archaic of female demons. One of the oldest symbols of female power and divinity, as well as the sacred animal of Isis, serpents were considered immortal because they were believed to renew themselves by shedding old skins. The quality of immortality promised by the un-dead vampire transfers to the serpent, Egyptian symbol of immortality as regeneration and infinite resurrection. Clarimonde may, above all, reproduce *herself*: she is automatic then in every way.

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[54] Entry for "éblouissement, *n*." in *Le Grande Robert de la langue française*.
[55] Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastiques en France: de Nodier à Maupassant,* (Paris: J. Corti, 1951) 219.

Conversely, this quest for immortality turns into its horrifying opposite; regarding the history of Cleopatra, the serpent turns into a harbinger of death. After *La Morte amoureuse*, Gautier went on to write a short story entitled *Une Nuit de Cléopatre* (1838), in which he describes the Priestess' eyes very much in the same way he describes the power of Clarimonde's in the church: "chaque regard de ses yeux était un poème supérieur à ceux d'Homère" (31). Clarimonde is quite primitive in her seduction and her blood letting – she pricks with a hairpin the same way a snake would insert its fangs. And Cleopatra accepts the lethal sting of an asp as her preferred means of suicide, clasping the reptile to her breast in a scene made famous and morbidly erotic in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*. The bite of an asp causes an intense burn at the site of the wound. The burning is quickly forgotten, but in its place the victim experiences a state of giddiness that borders of delirium, poisoned by the serpent's bite. At the exact moment Romuald prepares to cross the threshold, instead of meeting with the Divine, he is branded by what Christian doctrine has demonized as a symbol of evil. However, the serpent's sting offers Romuald what a commitment to God will not – the promise of immortality in fantasy.

The figure of the serpent-woman harkens back to the myth of the lamia, a myth that also serves as foundation to the modern vampire. In Christian tradition, lamias were spoken of as snakelike she-devils, witches able to transform themselves into snakes. We discover that the original lamia, however, may turn up within the Egyptian tradition. A precursory figure to Isis, Neith, or at least that's the closest modern approximation of her name, has become synonymous with all sorts of beginnings, proven through one of her metaphoric monikers, Self-Made. Associated with primeval water and the invention of

mummification, the figure of Neith preemptively evoking her own birth. That is to say, she invented birth, and so her own creation remains unrevealed and unknowable. Neith imparts symbolically the same ideal that sparked most of Gautier's literary endeavors– to create a singular artistic engagement with beauty through literature: "Il a de l'art une vision de l'immaculée conception: création sans enfantement, sans brouillon, tel Pygmalion dont la statue devient vivante par enchantement. La Beauté pour Gautier est de l'ordre du désir."[56] We may then sterilize the messiness of birth as equivalent of the disarray of the modern world – the bending of desire under the weight of common drudgery – by invoking a beginning as pure and ancient as that of the goddess Neith.

As the importance of matrilineal descent declined in ancient Egypt, so too was Neith worship suppressed and, eventually, driven out of the land – perhaps a symbolic parallel to the abjection of the archaic mother. In psychoanalytic terms, the suppression of female equates to the substitutability of the fetish object for the mother's missing phallus. In fact, the mummy, and her relation to the Egyptian deities, has everything to do with the parameters of fetishism, according to Freud. As he admits in *Moses and Monotheism*, the mother deities were probably developed in order to compensate for the limitations placed on the matriarchy; here, that depicts the female's limits not just in the sense of political power but in sexual power as well.

i. The Fetish as Historical Object

There is only the mention of one "woman" in the story before Clarimonde – Romuald's mother. In the church, when he admits to knowing only vaguely that there was such a thing called "woman," Romuald continues by explaining that he was "d'une

[56] David-Weill 3.

innocence parfaite. Je ne voyais ma mère vieille est infirme que deux fois l'an. C'étaient là toutes mes relations avec le dehors" (78). His experience with his mother wears not only a sterile quality but a buried one as well. This mother, one would believe, has become detached from Romuald's life proper. Now that he prepares to enter the brotherhood in the name of Christ, his earthly connections with mother must be suppressed. In the realm of psychoanalysis, the mother figure evokes an equivalent problematic for the boy child who must escape the castration complex and enter into the state of normative heterosexuality. As Freud claims in his essay "Fetishism" (1927), "Probably no male human being is spared the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals."[57] One perverse possibility for the male child to reject this threat of his own castration, as mirrored to him through the sight of the mother's already castrated genitals, is to endow a substitute object – a fetish – with the value of the penis, which he cannot do without.[58] *The Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* invokes the foot as the most popular fetish object, as "substitutive symbol for the once revered and since then missed member of the woman."[59]

Gautier resuscitates his own foot fetish in *Le pied de momie* wherein, the foot takes on meaning only inasmuch as it remains already fractured from the woman's body. The narrator purchases "le pied de la divine princesse Hermonthis" in order to use it as a paperweight and "l'avantage ineffable de posséder un morceau de la princesse" evokes an

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[57] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963) 216

[58] In his "Fetishism" essay, Freud also writes: "One would expect that the organs or objects selected as substitutes for the penis whose presence is missed in the woman would be such as act as symbols for the penis in other respects. This may happen occasionally but is certainly not the determining factor. It seems rather that when the fetish comes to life, so to speak, some process has been suddenly interrupted – it reminds one of the abrupt halt made by memory in traumatic amnesias" (207).

[59] Entry for "Fetish, Shoe and Foot as" in *The Dictionary of Psychoanalysis,* but originally found in Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, (New York: Norton, 1964)

effect satisfyingly "charmant, bizarre et romantique" (138). However, permanently extricated from her body, the relic takes on a personality all its own, forced to define itself in terms of market value. After the apparition of Hermonthis appears with only one foot, she requests the other in order to "me conserver intacte" – but her severed limb informs her that such an exchange will prove impossible, telling his princess: "Vous savez bien que je ne m'appartiens plus, j'ai été acheté et payé" (144). Of course, the time-traveling young lady does not have the five louis to purchase the foot and rectify her fractured corporeal state; she cannot barter by modern terms, but she does find other means. So instead, she literally takes the narrator by the hand and, together, they return in time to visit her father, the Pharoah. As the narrator recounts the beginning of the journey, "La princesse Hermonthis me tenait toujours par la main et saluait gracieusement les momies de sa connaissance" (145). Here, too, the female character makes time-travel possible, overturning reality in favor of the possibility of a fantastic voyage, made in order to unearth this *objet d'art*. The princess' predicament of not owning her foot is representative of mastery over desire: the narrator promises the Pharoah that he will give back her foot if, in exchange, he can have her hand (in marriage), a part that becomes highly invested with value and subsequently, erotically charged.

Written at approximately the same time in history as *La Morte*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* "is full of the cultivation of the superficial, of logical relationships that move horizontally, not vertically, from art to art, or among variations of a theme, or with tantalizing instability between two poles: male and female, living and dead, flesh and

fabric."[60] Originally intended to be an historical novel about the real life cross-dressing French opera starlet, the novel gets later characterized as a literary treatise of a heroine whose transvestitism makes possible the transgression of heterosexual imperatives. Male protagonist d'Albert's perfunctory musings on his desire to possess this elusive feminine "beauté" reveals the very necessity to artistically produce a physical, feminine supplement:

> Ô beauté ! nous ne sommes créés que pour t'aimer et t'adorer à genoux si nous t'avons trouvée, pour te chercher éternellement à travers le monde si ce bonheur ne nous a pas été donné ; mais te posséder, mais être nous-mêmes toi, cela n'est possible qu'aux anges et aux femmes. Amants, poètes, peintres et sculpteurs, nous cherchons tous à t'élever un autel, l'amant dans sa maîtresse, le poète dans son chant, le peintre dans sa toile, le sculpteur dans son marbre ; mais l'éternel désespoir, c'est de ne pouvoir faire palpable la beauté que l'on sent et d'être enveloppé d'un corps qui ne réalise point l'idée du corps que vous comprenez être le votre. (199)

The figure of Mlle Madelaine de Maupin acts as narrative strategy, an exploration of the literary possibility of a "troisième sexe" as she calls herself, who has "le corps et l'âme d'une femme, l'esprit et la force d'un homme" (356). In fact, Gautier frequently employs the word *chimère* in the novel not only to represent d'Albert's dream of beholding elusive beauty, but also to describe this third sex, directly linking the desire to produce an aesthetic ideal as the excavation of the female relic into the impossible dream of gender fluidity. As d'Albert plainly admits, "Ma chimère serait d'avoir tour à tour les deux sexes pour satisfaire à cette double nature" (357). Naomi Segal contends that the novel is exceptional for a number of reasons, most notably because "it sets forth with unusual frankness the man's desire to be a woman."[61]

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[60] Naomi Segal, *Narcissus and Echo: Women in the French récit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 85.
[61] *Ibid*., 94.

While there seems to be no shortage of fetish objects in Gautier (alongside the commodity fetish-foot that dances on desktops in *Le Pied de momie*, the author also fetishizes eyes, mouths and especially hair) the hand emerges as the most prevalent of the dubious sexual symbols emerging in his work. Consider the mediation in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* executed by d'Albert in reference to his beloved, Théodore/Mlle de Maupin:

> Ce que j'adore le plus entre toutes les choses du monde, – c'est une belle main – Si tu voyais la sienne! Quelle perfection! Comme elle est d'une blancheur vivace! … Et puis quelle grâce, quel art dans les moindres mouvements de cette main! … La pensée de cette main me rend fou et fait frémir et brûler mes lèvres. – Je ferme les yeux pour ne plus la voir; mais du bout de ses doigts délicats elle me prend les cils et m'ouvre les paupières, fait passer devant moi mille visions d'ivoire et de neige […] Cette main… Je m'en vais partir en Italie voir les tableaux des grands maîtres, étudier, comparer, dessiner, devenir un peintre enfin. (192)

The erotic charge of the hand – like the figure of Madelaine de Maupin – seems to be based less in its evocation of a particular sex then it is granted the power to make its suitor tremble and his lips burn by its archetypal reminiscence of the ideal of beauty. The perfection of its delicate digits stimulates the narrator's desire to create beauty like this himself, to go to Italy (interestingly enough, Clarimonde and Romuald supposedly live as lovers in the libidinally charged and luxurious Venice) and become a painter. Man here not only desires to look at beauty but to touch it, to make it and to become it.

Gautier uses the Other, the Orient – and the main fetishistic symbol of his mistresses – in much the same way he describes the hand here, as a fetish that allows one to escape the ugliness and utility of quotidian life. In order to overcome the missing beauty from life quotidian, Romuald must fetishize an object through which he can be led away from real life and into the enchanted world of the fetish. An enchanted body part that, after forcing the anxious male to open his eyes (as they are forced open in the previous citation

by delicate fingers) then, reveals beauty rather than ugliness. The hand may also suggest a unique engagement that Gautier tried never to have personally: with progress. The hand of the Princess Hermonthis, the splendid vampire-cum-Egyptian deity, or even of the bourgeois Mlle de Maupin has one other special trait – it never gets used for hard labor. Gautier used the novel's Préface as a manifesto of *l'art pour l'art*, a space of rebellion against the concept of art as useful or moral and a push toward art solely for art's sake:

> À quoi bon la musique? À quoi bon la peinture? Qui aurait la folie de préférer Mozart à M. Carrel, et Michel-Ange à l'inventeur de la moutarde blanche? Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid, car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature. – L'endroit le plus utile d'une maison, ce sont les latrines. (45)

It is not the hand that works but the one that never has to that perpetuates Gautier's ideal of beauty and proves to be his most coveted literary prize. The fetishization of beauty through the immortalized mummy, then, also gestures toward such adventures for which the male protagonist must be led by the hand: "Le fétiche, ici, c'est l'aventure étrange sur laquelle s'édifie notre récit … l'extrême pouvoir de la littérature."[62] The female figure in Gautier gets fetishized inasmuch as she opens up the possibility of literature as the site of fullness and ideality.

Mummy fiction not only opens up a space for the sexualization of the object but confines, "the unruly commodity to the realm of fantasy."[63] By peeking behind the curtain of her deathbed, Romuald enters Clarimonde's tomb; rather than be confronted with the reality of the female genitals, in essence his penetration into her world opens up a void in which the mummy functions as fetishized object. In *Creativity and Perversion*,

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[62] Bellemin-Noël 56.
[63] Nicholas Daly, "The Obscure Object of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy" *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol 28, No 1 (Autumn 1994) 47.

Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel remarks on how the "practice of embalming, by the Egyptians in particular, exactly produces a fetish. Make-up is applied to the putrefying body, which is then decorated with jewels, dressed up with a golden mask, and made into a god" (87-88)."[64] The mummy rises above nature and into the realm of Art by masking her natural (dead/unnatural) qualities and going under the cover of make-up. Baudelaire claims that woman, whom he calls "cet être terrible et incommunicable comme Dieu,"[65] must maintain a near obligation to society by wearing make-up, to make herself, at least on the surface, artificial. Man's (poetic) interest in her, it seems, would remain paltry at best without these lovely accoutrements. Such artifice, according to Baudelaire, present us (or the poet at least) with the most dependable method of overcoming the cruel hideousness that Nature has to offer:

> La mode doit donc être considérée comme un symptôme du goût de l'idéale surnageant dans le cerveau humain au-dessus de tout ce que la vie naturelle y accumule de grossier, de terrestre et d'immonde, comme une déformation sublime de la nature, ou plutôt comme un essai permanent et successif de réformation de la nature. … La femme est bien dans son droit, et même elle accomplit une espèce de devoir en s'appliquant à paraître magique et surnaturelle ; il faut quelle étonne, qu'elle charme ; idole, elle doit se dorer pour être adorée.[66]

The use of make-up, or that which Gautier calls "la toilette éternité" in *Le Roman de la momie*, further disguises the fact that female figures in Gautier's work are not only from the past, but dead as well. Romuald's immortal love – that opens "la porte / D'un infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?" – is for a woman whose real nature is covered up and already expelled, a woman who is a *nature morte*.[67]

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[64] Charles Bernheimer, "Fetishism and Decadence" in *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) 69

[65] Charles Baudelaire, "Éloge du maquillage" in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* 487.

[66] Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* 492.

[67] Baudelaire, "Hymne à la Beauté" in *Les fleurs du mal*.

Mummy fiction opens up a space in which fantasy, part image and part object, is "allowed to enjoy momentary ascendancy over the subject, only to be expelled from the narrative," but within this space the fetishized mummy, a threshold figure for the living dead, offers a narrative strategy for exploring the oscillation of gender as well.[68] As Freud believed, "the infantile assumption of the maternal penis is … the common source of origin for the androgynous formation of the maternal deities like the Egyptian goddess Mut."[69] In returning to our earlier characterization of Clarimonde through the deities, we may recognize that the goddess Neith was notoriously depicted in androgynous form as well. However, it is also death, which does not discern on the basis of gender, that the mummy as fetishized object is meant to combat. The immobility of the woman painted into a frame, mummified or chiseled in marble, grants aesthetic preservation from the feared decomposition of the body. As Elisabeth Bronfen asserts in *Over Her Dead Body*, "the body of the dying woman becomes "a cipher for the mutually constitutive relation between decomposition … and representational composition (as re-composition of the ultimately absent, decomposed body."[70] In his literary development of the cult of the visual, Gautier conceives his aesthetic of resurrection, perversely resurrecting the dead as emblematic of the Ideal, in an ironic reversal of art's vampiric effect.

ii. The Riddle of Romuald: Feminized Reflection

[68] Daly 46.
[69] From Freud's *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Philip Rieff, ed, under the entry for "deities – Maternal"; the original citation is taken from chapter 3 of *Leonardo de Vinci*.
[70] Bronfen 33.

But the new life that Clarimonde lets Romuald live is "in reality an afterlife, like the survival of an embalmed corpse. It is the enchanted life of the fetish."[71] If the male protagonist of Gautier's supernatural tales wants to know the ancient world, then "la femme prend l'aspect d'un guide des enfers, c'est elle qui l'amène dans le 'Royaume des Mères,' dans le lieu où le temps est immobilisé."[72] In *La Morte amoureuse* the pair of lovers embark on a journey, one night unspecified in time, which greatly resembles the one undertaken by Princess Hermonthis and her 27-year young French suitor in *Le Pied*. Clarimonde fetches Romuald from a deep sleep (or, perhaps, in the dream procured in a deep sleep) in order to embark on a journey to a far-away land, to begin their life together – as libertine lovers in Venice. Interestingly enough, before they can depart, before he can enter a world dominated by love and leisure, Romuald must change into clothes presented to him by Clarimonde. Once dressed, she holds up a Venetian mirror and asks him, "'Comment te trouves-tu?'" (106). He reflects,

> Je n'étais plus le même, et je ne me reconnus pas. Je ne me ressemblais pas plus qu'une statue achevée ne ressemble à un bloc de pierre. Mon ancienne figure avait l'air de n'être que l'ébauche grossière de celle que réfléchissait le miroir. J'étais beau, et ma vanité fut sensiblement chatouillée de cette métamorphose. Ces élégants habits, cette riche veste brodée, faisaient de moi un tout autre personnage, et j'admirais la puissance de quelques aunes d'étoffe taillées d'une certaine manière. L'esprit de mon costume me pénétrait la peau, et au bout de dix minutes j'étais passablement fat.
>
> Je fis quelques tours par la chambre pour me donner de l'aisance. Clarimonde me regardait d'un air de complaisance maternelle et paraissait très contente de *son œuvre*. (115, emphasis mine)

[71] Charles Bernheimer, "Fetishism and Decadence" 68.
[72] David-Weill 75.

This Venetian mirror essentially reflects back to Romuald the image of his newly formed self.[73] Just as the real woman disappears behind the disguise of make-up, here the clothes literally make the man. With supernatural flourish and magical effect, the clothes that Romuald puts on force the previously devout subject to disappear entirely and puts in his place a man vanished because he has been conceived through woman, in a perversely reproductive way – he is *son oeuvre*.

In *The Uncanny,* Freud illuminates the connection between the theme of the double and the Egyptian mummy. The double, which has an inevitable connection with mirror-reflections, functions originally as "an insurance against the destruction of the ego." "This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction," Freud acknowledges, links the "same desire [which] led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials."[74] This desire produced the very idea, then, of mummification in the spirit of self-love and self-preservation. But this resurrection of the Egyptian body implies a grander liaison, between the sexes. The ba, the physical manifestation of the deceased, was often depicted as a bird with the head and facial features of the deceased party, with no implication as to the sex of the person. Freud made similar claims in his study of Leonardo da Vinci when he observes the young boy's childhood fantasy of vultures. Freud observes the androgynous characters of Egyptian goddesses, distinguishing that this "combination of male and female sex characters, was an attribute not only of Mut but also of other deities like Isis and Hathor … like Neith of Sais – for whom the Greek Athene was later derived … that all these

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[73] It seems that Gautier chose Venice for particular reasons, for its own presumption of art's value. As Baudelaire writes in his essay "L'Art philosophique" (*Curiosités Esthétiques*), "Venise a pratiqué l'amour de l'art pour l'art."

[74] Freud, *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin, 2003) 210.

hermaphrodite divinities are expressions of the idea that only a combination of male and female elements can give a worthy representation of divine perfection."[75] The resultant totality, like the fetish, also guards against the inevitable awakening to sexual difference by the young boy (like da Vinci in Freud's study) who recognizes that "the penis could be missing," a revelation that "strikes him as an uncanny and intolerable idea."[76]

However, in his auto-portrait in the Venetian mirror, the original Romuald is no longer recognizable, not only because he has been refashioned by a woman but, also, because he looks like one. The metamorphosis of Romuald that begins with this first transgression in the church develops throughout the story as the fantastical journey of a priest who lives a double life as libertine fop. And indeed, fantastic literature proves particularly suitable for the task considering the etymology of the word *fantastic*, which has also been used historically to describe someone foppish in attire.[77] The artificial reproduction of the woman functions, then, as the catalyst for a more important alteration of gender: the exposure of the femininity of man. Literary female supplements, like Gautier's *fascinante* Clarimonde, assume the role of figment of the artist's fascination insomuch as he may map this bewitching femininity onto his own body within the safe space of literature. By the end of the tale, Romuald can no longer recognize himself, not only because he has been refashioned by the female figure (literally dressed in her clothes) but, also, because he looks like one. He admits to being both feminized and materialized in the same instant: "L'esprit de mon costume me pénétrait la peau, et au bout de dix minutes j'étais passablement fat" (106). Romuald "ne vise pas à l'amour

[75] Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci* 44.
[76] *Ibid*., 44.
[77] Cf. *OED online*.

comme but spécial," cultivating as consequence "de culte de soi-même" (483).[78] And over the course of his literary career Gautier would frequently conjoin archaeological objects and metaphors and the dandified/artificialized male subject. Gautier depicts Lord Evandale, the protagonist in *Le Roman de la momie* (1857), as conforming to the rules of the highest dandyism oddly enough at the very moment he crosses the threshold into the mummy's tomb; the perversions of fetishism and narcissism intertwine. The figure of Clarimonde advocates a reading of fetishism, again, not simply as man's denial of the maternal genitalia but instead:

> we can recall that psychoanalysis understands fetishism as a complicated and particular form of defense against reality: disavowal or *Verleugnung*. Disavowal manifests itself as a perceptual denial of the difference between presence and absence […] it is often extended to a denial of differences of all sorts, including those between organic and inorganic material and between living and dead people.[79]

Clarimonde represents a buried ideal of art and a desexualized (doubly sexed) figure for the archetype of origins (mother Eve). Here, Romuald's perceptual desire to see and reproduce her extends into the creation of his own self-image, or his birth of self – his mirror stage, as it were. The female figure – or Other – functions as the screen through which man validates his own narcissistic importance inasmuch as her femininity functions *as a fantasy of man* – what gets threatened is the singularity of the subject's sex. In her discussion of Balzac's short story *La fille aux yeux d'or* in her essay on the "Riddle of Bisexuality," Shoshana Felman allows that, "Masculinity … is not a substance of which femininity would be the *opposite*" but instead, that what is uncanny is femininity "that is not the opposite of masculinity but *that which subverts the very*

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[78] In *Le Peintre*, Baudelaire describes dandyism in the same way: "C'est une espèce de culte de soi-même, qui peut survivre à la recherché du Bonheur à trouver dans autrui, dans la femme, par exemple; qui peut survivre même à tout ce qu'on appelle les illusions."
[79] Marder, *Dead Time* 45.

opposition of masculinity and femininity."[80] As Felman asks in relation to the Balzac text, "if indeed clothes make the *man* – or the woman – are not sex roles as such, inherently, but travesties?" In essence, while Romuald dresses up in clothes that refashion him as his feminine other, then, one of the resemblances sought after by modernity's artificial generation is man's very resemblance to woman.[81]

iii. Tomb Raider: Dis-membering the Feminine Ideal

Gautier's archeological/literary exploration of the Egyptian landscape resurrects antiquity as both temporal firmament and safehaven through which the male subject may seek solace from his anxiety-ridden modern existence: "La marque de fabrique de Gautier et ce combat entre le bien et le mal se double, à travers d'insensibles allusions, d'un autre combat qui est le recollection d'un moi originairement divisé."[82] Ironically, we find that most repeated word in *La Morte amoureuse – singulière* – immolates itself in lieu of the fact that no facet of this "unique" story remains sacred: Gautier uses the same duplicitous formula for most of his fantastic tales, implying that these dreams of stone might be more universal than exclusive. Although not set in Egypt, Gautier's *Arria Marcella* similarly, and perhaps more blatantly, exposes the intersection of literature as (both public and private) archeology and psychoanalysis by the agency of yet another "homme vêtu à l'antique" (185). Again in this story, Gautier uses the resurrection of the ancient world

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[80] Shoshana Felman, "Textuality and the Riddle of Bisexuality (Balzac, "The Girl with the Golden Eyes")" in *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 65. Felman defines Paquita as a "screen woman" in Balzac's story accordingly: "her symbolic screening function was not just to screen the other woman but to be a screen between Henri and his own femininity, to travesty, disguise, or hide from Henri's eyes his own split otherness, his own division as a subject."

[81] The clothes literally make the man within this auto-portrait. As Romuald acknowledges, "L'esprit de mon costume me pénétrait le peau" (106).

[82] M. C. Schapira, *Le Regard de Narcisse: romans et nouvelles de Théophile Gautier* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1984) 20.

into the preferred means of dissolving the burden of modernity, overcoming "la roué de temps": when finding oneself "face à face avec sa chimère … rétrospective. Sa vie se remplissait d'un seul coup" (195). Arria Marcella, the female figure in the story, resembles Clarimonde quite literally at the level of Gautier's repetitious language. Like Clarimonde, Arria Marcella is described as "froid comme la peau d'un serpent ou le marbre d'une tombe." And Octavian, like Romuald, finds the uncharted disorder bewitching: "Je ne sais si tu es un rêve ou une réalité, un fantôme ou une femme … si je suis le jouet d'un vil prestige de sorcellerie, mais ce que je sais bien, c'est que tu seras mon premier et mon dernier amour" (199-200). We might call the literary connection between the search for the aesthetic ideal and the birth of the modern subjectivity herein more blatant, at least retrospectively, because the ideal woman who haunts the imagination of Octavian rises from the ashes of Pompeii. Reviving the ruined civilization of Pompeii symbolizes what would become by the end of the century, in terms of psychoanalysis, the attempts at reifying the already psychically fragmented subject.

In the early twentieth-century Freud chose a narrative that repeated this very same formula, German author Wilhem Jensen's *Gradiva* (1903), as the privileged text to illustrate the revival of desire. Freud's essay "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" illustrates the effects of taking classic archeology through the intermediary of literature as a model for the formation of psychic identity, a probing into the realm of the unconscious. Young archeologist Norbert Hanold – previously sheltered by his "science" from the living female sex, and instead only interested in her women made of stone – retains the belief in the reality of a dream wherein he encounters a light-footed, female sculpture come alive on the very site (and at the very moment) of the destruction of

Pompeii. Indeed, Jensen subtitled his text "Pompeiian phantasy."[83] This "being in love" with something "past and lifeless" reanimated symbolizes, after an analysis akin to the work done in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the equation of historical past and personal one, "an echo of his forgotten childhood memories." It turns out that, according to Freud's analysis, this means the love he had once felt for a young girl before he had turned away from a healthy, normative course of sexual development. In fact, Freud notes that Hanold's perverse dream of love among the ruins included a "repudiation of eroticism which dominated him" and was expressed in fantasy through the "disgust at the honeymooners … the proximity of a German loving couple, 'Edwin and Angelina,' whose evening conversation he could not help hearing through the thin partition-wall."[84] In *La Morte amoureuse* Romuald expresses a similar disdain for the sexually normative relationship when he witnesses, during his "waking" life as priest, a similar family romance:

> Une jeune mère, sur le pas de la porte, jouait avec son enfant; elle baisait sa petite bouche rose, encore emperlée de gouttes de lait … Le père, qui se tenait debout à quelque distance, souriait doucement à ce charmant groupe, et ses bras croisés pressaient sa joie sur son cœur. Je ne pus supporter ce spectacle; je fermai la fenêtre, et je me jetai sur mon lit avec une haine et une jalousie effroyables dans le cœur. (87)

The demarcation between normative and perverse sexuality – between male protagonist and the scene outside his window (or on the other side of the wall, as in the case of Octavian) – suggests the impossible maturation into healthy sexual subject, both heterosexual and procreative, and an inevitable regression into perversion – the

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[83] Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*," *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 6. Gautier went a step further in linking these literary fantasies and the excavation of identity formation by calling his *Arria Marcella* "Souvenir de Pompeii," suggesting that the protagonist's fantasy of Pompeii is actually *real* in some sense, a memory trace.
[84] *Ibid.,* 60.

insurmountable obstacle of giving up the ghost. Gautier did not have access to psychoanalytic vocabulary but his narratives often journeyed into the dark recesses of the Orient as a representation of what Freud would later name the unconscious. And for Freud, "archeology and psychoanalysis announce the same fundamental paradox: each is a way of engaging and articulating what remains alive – in effect immortal – and continues to determine our humanness, yet seems dead and buried and lost forever, permanently forgotten."[85]

If we were to read *La Morte* as if it were a (pre-)Freudian case history, it terminates with the inevitable return of the sense of loss and mourning that characterized the story's opening. This might be the most telling aspect of the story's predisposition to what would later be known as the unconscious. As Jacques Lacan would conjecture through his seminars and writings, the process of psychoanalysis is much like Orpheus's quest into the underworld. He represents psychoanalysis "less as the discovery of the lost secrets of the unconscious" as Freud does with the archeological metaphor, and more as "the endless re-discovery of the unconscious *as lost*," a past which "dis-members."[86] In the end of Gautier's tale, abbé Sérapion mutates into a diabolic, almost inhuman figure, set upon combating Clarimonde in order to restore Romuald to *the living*.[87] When the two

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[85] Donald Kuspit, "A Mighty Metaphor: The Analogy of Archeology and Psychoanalysis" in *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection of Antiquities*, Lynn Gamwell and Richard Wells, eds. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989) 134.

[86] Kenneth Reinhard, "The Freudian Things: Construction and the Archeological Metaphor" in *Excavations and Their Objects: Freud's Collection of Antiquity*, Stephen Barker ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 74.

[87] On the level of literary allusion, the name Sérapion directly suggests the work of E. T. A. Hoffmann – *The Serapion Brotherhood*. Later taken as the name for a group of Soviet literati[87] who hoped to maintain artistic independence under the new regime after WWI, Hoffmann's *Brotherhood* institutes secret societies and magical orders in the world of a hermit, wherein natural and supernatural powers are equal. *Serapionism*, named for St. Serapion and founded on his feast day, is dedicated to presenting paranormal phenomena convincingly. Gautier intentionally alludes to Hoffmann's literary edicts as recourse to the idea of a secret society – the illuminati – within the literary world. Hoffmann led a famously double life – as Prussian civil servant by day, writer of fantastic tales by night (Dennison 13). *Serapionism*, then, takes on

men venture to unearth Clarimonde's unholy grave, in quite the reversal of expectations, the monstrous refracts itself upon the male figure of authority: "Le zèle de Sérapion avait quelque chose de dur et de sauvage qui le faisait ressembler à un démon plutôt qu'à un apôtre … l'action du sévère Sérapion comme un abominable sacrilège" (114). As he catches sight of the "courtisane impudique, buveuse de sang et d'or, " Sérapion throws holy water on her, causing her previously statuesque body to not only dis-member but actually disintegrate: "La pauvre Clarimonde n'eut pas été plus tôt touchée par la sainte rosée que son beau corps tomba en poussière; ce ne fut plus qu'un mélange affreusement informe de cendres et d'os à demi calcinés" (115). In a perversion of the holy sacrament, this female drinker of blood and gold gets expelled from the narrative by the strength of the holy water.

We realize that the transformation of her body into dust carries with it a much more powerful connotation, in terms of medical discourse and Egyptian mummification. In fact, the final scene of the story suggests an entirely new economy and a metaphor of incorporation markedly divergent from the trope of vampirism. If Sérapion can be considered as a medical figure, as the analyst, we must also regard him as a doctor administering another type of cure – mummy as remedy. As early as the sixteenth-century, fraudulent cadavers, or contraband mummies, were plucked from their graves on Egyptian soil and brought to Venice (the site of Romuald and Clarimonde's liaisons) in order to be sold to Europe on the black market, so that European people could cure their myriad ailments with the superior properties a dead body would offer a living one.[88] The

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the character of an "inner world" that must be fed by the privileged relation between writers of the literary illuminati and their illuminations exalted through the text.

[88] Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Egyptian Mumia: The Sixteenth Century Experience," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol 16, No 2 (Summer 1985) 167.

broken fragments of mummies were often made into powder and administered as a cure for diseases as varied as epilepsy and cataracts. It seems that the mummy became misappropriated as medicine, the powder of dead bodies being used to cure living ones, due to various lapses and misunderstandings in translation. In fact, the translation of the work of the familiarly named Arab physician Sérapion the Younger (1070), who wrote at length on the use of *mumia* (a word that later became the English term for Egyptian "mummification") as medicinal cure-all, became one of the main reasons for this misunderstanding that resulted in medical treatments all the way through the nineteenth-century.[89]

When the bones of Clarimonde's body crumble into dust, we not only confront the image of a once well-preserved, now immemorialized death, but also must read the desiccation of her bones as his cure – the necessity of her *ruin* to modern artistic representation. Rather than offer the host of God the father in order to be saved, Father Sérapion must disintegrate the bones of woman in order to "cure" man of his perversion as it doubles for the Promethean desire to strive toward an aesthetic ideal. This also elucidates the fact that, within Gautier's fabricated formulas, desire never has lieu, necessitating the death of the feminine double/aesthetic ideal as precursory to what psychoanalysis would deem the re-repression of the unconscious drives. As Romuald makes absolute, "j'étais décidé à tuer au profit de l'un ou de l'autre un des deux hommes qui étaient en moi ou à les tuer tous deux, car une pareille vie ne pouvait durer" (113). The eater – Clarimonde as the metaphoric drinker of blood and gold – becomes the eaten in this perverse parody of a cure. For instead, the narrative leaves Romuald as the mourning, material double of this dematerialized woman, interiorizing her, as if her dust

[89] Dannenfeldt 165.

has impregnated him with his own ruin. At the moment she vanishes into the air, Romuald admits, "une grande ruine venait de se faire au dedans de moi" (115). And he leaves his *frère* with this final piece of advice: "Ne regardez jamais une femme" (116).

Chapter Two

Book of Genesis:
Literary Genealogy & Technological Reproducibility in Villiers's *L'Ève future*

I. The Purloined Epigraph: Confronting the mythology of "une similitude éblouissante"

Le jardin était taillé comme une belle femme
Étendue et sommeillant voluptueusement
Et fermant les paupières aux cieux ouverts:
Les champs de l'azur du ciel étaient rassemblés correctement
Dans un cercle orné des fleurs de la lumière;
Les iris et les rondes étincelles de rosée,
Qui pendaient à leurs feuilles azurées, apparaissaient
Comme des étoiles clignotantes qui pétillent dans le bleu du [soir.
GILES FLETCHER.

In his 1886 novel *L'Ève future*, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam begins the first chapter ("Menlo Park") with the above epigraph, a stanza from Giles Fletcher's poem "Christ's Victory on Earth" (1610). Conventionally, an epigraph might function as an inscription, written at the beginning of the text in order to direct and authorize a reading. In *Deviant Modernism*, Colleen Ramos writes, "Like the inscriptions on monuments and coins, epigraphs declare the text's lineage, for the epigraph's power to frame or orient the interpretation of the text is the result of its claim to reinscribe the intentions of the [poem's] 'first' author."[1] Though epigraphs were commonly used in nineteenth-century literature, one becomes aware instantly that *L'Ève future*'s first epigraph is *too* common and, indeed, that Villiers's exploitation of the literary device merits closer attention. Nadine Satiat, editor of the 1992 Flammarion edition of *L'Ève future*, informs us that as readers we may be experiencing a case of *déjà-vu*, and not just the customary recognition

[1] Colleen Ramos, *Deviant Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 97.

of an epigraph's original source text. Rather, it seems plausible that Villiers consciously committed *un vol d'épigraphe*; he inscribes not from the original poem's stanza inasmuch as he re-presents a selection of Fletcher's poem that had *already* been made into an epigraph by American author Edgar Allan Poe. Satiat footnotes, "Villiers emprunte la citation à Edgar Poe, qui l'avait mise en épigraphe au *Domaine d'Arnheim* – texte que Villiers avait pu lire dans la traduction faite par Baudelaire du recueil *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses*."[2] Though by definition an epigraph is already a replication of a selection of text, Villiers re-repeats the very gesture of inscription by appropriating an epigraph that has already been made famous by Poe *as an epigraph*. Villiers's above inscription is not extracted directly from the original text but from Baudelaire's translation of Poe's inscription of Fletcher's stanza. It is a copy (of a copy of a copy) of the original.

Yet another reproductive dilemma unveils itself upon the realization that, in defiance of expectations, Villiers's novel does not rely upon this sole epigraph to frame the text as a whole. Instead, each chapter has its own inscription. Written in seventy-four chapters comprising six books, the novel presents an assemblage of seventy-six epigraphs from a veritable array of sources: literary texts, proverbs, and philosophical and religious treatises.[3] The epigraphs range widely in intent as well as source. Some are quite specific and poignant, extracted from the primary text (for instance, Livre IV, chapitre IV's *Et c'est un dur métier que d'être belle femme*! –Charles Baudelaire). Others are oddly vague, oftentimes employing ellipses to indicate the idea's sweeping, open-ended nature

[2] *L'Ève future; Édition établie par Nadine Satiat* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1992) 99.
[3] One for each chapter – except Chapitre XIV, which curiously has two epigraphs – plus the epigraph on the title page, for a total of 76. For more information on the specific epigraphs Villiers uses, see Gwenhaël Ponnau's "Sur les épigraphes de *L'Eve future*" in *Société des études romantiques: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1838-1889)* (Paris: Sedes, 1990).

(for instance, Livre I, chapitre XIII's *Un rien…* -Locution humaine). Some epigraphs even present difficulties, according to Villiers biographer A. W. Raitt, regarding their credibility (for instance, Livre I, chapitre XIV's *Tu as des amis dévoués: pourtant ... si tu partais?...* -Goethe).[4] Even more striking, then, is that Villiers's novel challenges the very potential of a "'first' author" through its reliance on a monstrous multitude of literary authorities. Christened by Gwenhaël Ponnau as a "œuvre-labyrinthe," *L'Ève future* announces itself as a riddle on the structural level from the onset, radically calling into question the very idea of a textual origin by epigraphically re-inscribing the authority of so many 'first' authors.[5]

This heterogeneity of epigraphical citation is countered and paradoxically complemented by what Villiers proudly called the "homogeneity in the composition" of the novel. Despite the novel's multitude of textual precursors, Villiers intended to make its theme rather circumscribed and unique. To discuss *L'Ève future* as homogeneous in any way may seem anomalous, even this early in the discussion. To address this seeming contradiction – and to better understand what he means exactly by "homogeneity" – we can survey a letter written by Villiers to Jean Marras in 1879, in which Villiers boasts of the novel's development in its early stages:

> It's a work whose publication will, I believe, create something of a sensation, since, for the first time in my life, I am in earnest (...) Here, listen: it is an avenging and brilliant book, which will chill the blood and storm the citadels of dreams! Never, never would I have believed myself capable of so much perseverance in the analyses! – of so much *homogeneity in the composition*, of so much astounding imagination, things, the new and magnificent evocation of which no one before me, do you hear, has dared to attempt (emphasis mine).[6]

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[4] A. W. Raitt footnotes this epigraph in his edition of *L'Ève future* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) accordingly: "nous n'avons pas trouvé l'origine de cette citation" 405.
[5] Ponnau, "Sur les épigraphes" 149.
[6] A. W. Raitt, *The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 189.

Despite its grandiloquent tone this letter reveals that, instead of being a consequence of composition, the unique "sensation" produced by the novel is rather its precondition. Villiers seems most exhilarated and perhaps fulfilled by the fact that he, as author, was able to reproduce such "an avenging and brilliant book." The prolific reproduction of epigraphs snatched from such an assortment of men's texts acts as a barely concealed expression of Villiers's submerged anxiety of reproduction. The use of a borrowed epigraph, as well as the profusion of epigraphs in general, emblematizes the notion of perverse, literary reproduction – the enigmatic question at the very heart of *L'Ève future*. The significance of Villiers's notion of "homogeneity," as well as the questions of structure and form, deepen with reflection upon the story's main premise, the artificial reproduction of woman by male authorship.

After years of struggling for literary validation in Paris, Villiers "at last made the breakthrough for which he had been hoping for years," with his story of Thomas A. Edison and his Eve-of-the-future.[7] Villiers invested great energy into this project, the idea for which originated in a short story entitled *Miss Hadaly Habal*, published at an unknown date before he began to compose the novel. In the winter of 1878-1879, Villiers worked incessantly and under some of the most extreme hardships on the now book-length project, under its striking, original title, *L'Andréïde paradoxale d'Edison*. Villiers manages to "create something of a sensation" in the original title, or at least the "magnificent evocation" of an entirely new word. Although the French word *androïde* existed over centuries to signify a creature made in the likeness of man, Villiers biographer A. W. Raitt contends that Villiers pioneers the neologism *andréïde* to connote

[7] Raitt 198.

a specifically female, technological being made in man's likeness. The word *paradoxale* used to modify the noun undoubtedly proves superfluous, for the etymology of the word *andréïde* uncovers the most rebellious and inescapable paradox of the novel. From the prefix andro-, meaning 'male,' and -oid,' meaning 'like' or 'having the nature of,' this word signifies a being that resembles a man, *but is not*. The modifier paradoxal(e), a feminized adjective to modify a feminine noun, indicates this being is a woman. The mode, man's overtaking woman's reproductive function on a literary level, simultaneously addresses the very goal of the project. The etymological turn of the word *andréïde* reveals that Villiers's literary creation acts as a modern substitute for the autochthonous woman who resembled man.

The novel rests upon many philosophical paradoxes but the greatest is the faulty premise of similitude, or homogeneity, between male and female (desire), mythologized through God's first human creations, Adam and Eve. *L'Ève future* lays claim to mankind's near-universal reference point – the myth of Adam and Eve – as its own referent of origin, thereafter subversively re-inscribing itself into the same genealogy of literary history and mythology it challenges. Rather than resign itself to the authority of its literary patronage, *L'Ève future* uses epigraphical intertexts to prepare for its ultimate disobedience to the traditional concept of paternity as symbolized by mankind's 'first' author, God. By the time Villiers's text was serialized in *La Vie moderne* in 1884 he had given the story an entirely different and more evocative name, *L'Ève future*, to indicate that his anomalous literary creation springs forth from Eve, Western religion and mythology's prototype of woman. As the book of *Genesis* dictates, God creates man in his likeness, "formed ... of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath

of life; and man became a living soul."[8] In effect, this makes man the first-order reproduction of God's image. However, soon thereafter, God realizes that "It is not good that the man should be alone" and decides to create "an help meet for him."[9] God puts Adam to sleep in order to take his rib and "made he a woman and brought her unto the man."[10] God subsequently determines that Eve "shall be called woman because she was taken out of Man."[11]

We may suggest that the borrowed epigraph at the onset of the novel acts as a figuration of Eve in the Garden of Eden, as a distorted replica. Daring to make an autonomous decision to eat of the Tree Knowledge causes Eve to fail at resembling man on the level of desire, as it seemed was God's intent. And so, Eve comes to signify a failed attempt at man's perfect similitude. As a second copy of God and a distorted duplicate of man, she becomes a symbol for Sin in Christian theology and Western mythology. Villiers's novel directly confronts the myth of likeness between man and woman by acknowledging that man's companion, although brought forth from his own body, inversely becomes an entirely *other* species. Woman, like Villiers's first epigraph, symbolically represents a copy with no compulsory reference to its original. In the novel's "Préface," A. W. Raitt contends that "Villiers ne craint pas, bien au contraire, d'aller au-devant de la comparaison avec les grands mythes où l'homme s'insurge contre Dieu."[12] All the allusions to diabolical pacts that Villiers makes in epigraphs and within the primary text, as Raitt suggests, push the reader toward comprehending the framework

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[8] *Genesis* 2:7 in *The Old Testament: The Authorized or King James Version of 1611* (London: Everyman's Library, 1996).
[9] *Ibid*., 2:18.
[10] *Ibid*., 2:22.
[11] *Ibid*., 2:23.
[12] Raitt edition of *L'Ève future* 26.

for the narrative, that "l'entreprise d'Edison et Ewald est une mise en jeu de toute la condition humaine."[13] Rather than invoking distance, the theoretical complexity of Villiers's relationship to literary history and mythology – the novel's lineage of artifice – actually serves to heighten the humanity behind what seems to be a most inhuman story, focusing on the creation of an artificial woman.

When the story begins, inventor Thomas Edison receives an unexpected visit from British friend Lord Ewald. Ewald is on the verge of suicide because he has fallen hopelessly in love with singer Miss Alicia Clary, who is, as Ewald tells Edison, a freak, "pilori de cette curiosité" (161). Attracted to her because of her resemblance to "le marbre divin" of the *Venus victrix* statue, Ewald soon comes to discover that her apparent mystique conceals nothing but her loathsome materiality. Ewald confides to Edison, "j'ai reconnu *trop tard* qu'en effet ce sphinx n'avait pas d'énigme: je suis un rêveur puni" (152, emphasis mine). Edison offers his latest scientific project, his latest invention, as a cure for Ewald's dilemma. In his underground laboratory, Edison has created an *andréïde,* a New Eve, and he proposes to give her the outward appearance of Ewald's beloved Alicia. He urges Ewald to postpone suicide for three weeks in order to wait for the completion of this Ideal woman. Edison details the scientific principles behind the creation of the *andréïde* Hadaly in depth over the course of the first half of the novel. Through the use of technologies at his disposal, Edison reproduces Alicia's likeness and transfers it to his invention: the principles of photosculpture allow Hadaly to take on Alicia's external likeness, while two gold phonographs reproduce Alicia's voice, in recitation of a catalogue of words composed by the history of male artists. Edison

[13] *Ibid*., 25.

acknowledges that Hadaly's creation can be easily and rationally explained, that "Miss Hadaly n'est encore, *extérieurement*, qu'une entité magnéto-électrique [..]" but that ultimately, she will become magical in her value – "une possibilité," a renewed hope for mankind (181).

Edison admonishes Ewald for not being aware that his love for Miss Alicia Clary is nothing but an illusion, that "Sa *vraie* personnalité n'est donc autre ... que l'Illusion, éveillée en tout votre être, par l'éclair de sa beauté" (196). If love is nothing but illusion, Edison suggests to Ewald, then why not trade "Illusion pour illusion," expelling Alicia's troublesome otherness in favor of Hadaly's obedient artificiality? Edison establishes the stakes behind Ewald's Faustian challenge:

> l'Être de cette présence mixte que l'on appelle Hadaly dépend de la volonté libre de celui qui OSERA le concevoir. SUGGÉREZ-LUI DE VOTRE ÊTRE! Affirmez-le, d'un peu de votre foi vive, comme vous affirmez l'être, après tout si relatif, de toutes les illusions qui vous entourent. Soufflez sur ce front idéal! Et vous verrez jusqu'où l'Alicia de votre volonté se réalisera, s'unifiera, s'animera dans cette Ombre. Essayez, enfin! si quelque dernier espoir vous en dit! Et vous pèserez ensuite, au profond de votre conscience, si l'auxiliatrice Créature-fantôme qui vous ramènera vers le désir de la Vie n'est pas plus vraiment digne de porter le nom d'HUMAINE que le Vivant-spectre dont la soi-disant et chétive 'réalité' ne sut jamais vous inspirer que la soif de la Mort. (196-197)

Seduced by Alicia's charms a second time at the end of the novel, Ewald comes to discover in horror that this ever-more convincing Miss Alicia Clary is none other than Hadaly, a more sublime representation of the original. But as one might expect, happiness does not ensue. Instead, the novel ends on a final note that makes definitive its thematic resurgence against a higher paternal power, ergo emphasizing the inevitable futility of such attempts at amending nature and the Divine. Aboard the steamer the *Wonderful,* Ewald and Hadaly leave America in order to begin their life together in Scotland. Tragically, the ship catches fire and Hadaly perishes. Alicia Clary, also a passenger on

board, dies when the lifeboat meant to bring her to safety capsizes. Edison learns of the story from the newspaper. His disenchantment is cemented when he receives a telegram from Lord Ewald. In it, Ewald tells Edison that he cannot withstand the loss of his ideal Hadaly and bids him a final and definitive "Adieu."[14] According to A. W. Raitt, the novel's final gesture reveals to Edison that "Dieu n'a pas voulu que réussisse sa tentative sacrilège de remplacer la création divine par ne création humaine, et le livre s'achève sur une immense interrogation silencieuse."[15]

The novel's litany of epigraphs signals its intention to recuperate literary and philosophical mythology as the precondition to overcoming the solitary, dehumanizing effects of modernity. The epigraph offers Villiers a strategy by which revolutionary, literary reproduction is staged.[16] Although the novel needs to be borne of a lineage of male-authored literature, conversely, Villiers's text also becomes its own origin, a cornerstone text in the representation of *artificial generation*. This chapter argues, therefore, that Villiers's *L'Ève future* can be read as modernity's book of genesis, a re-generation of the Eve brought forth from the biblical *Book of Genesis* under the auspices of modern technology. Behind both narratives is an almost identical premise – to create a righteous companion for man. And while Eve's body is generated from Adam's own rib, the body of Villiers's future Eve will be equivocally man-made. Edison uses modern technologies he invents, notably phonographic and photographic recording devices, as a somewhat satirical means of creating a more agreeable companion to address male,

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[14] Of course, the use of this word, "Adieu" as the title of the last chapter further proves Villiers's somewhat playful use of language. While it means good-bye, if you parsed the word into two words – *À Dieu* – it would refer to everything being up to God in the end.
[15] Raitt edition of *L'Éve future* 9-10.
[16] Villiers dedicates the novel "Aux rêveurs, Aux railleurs," indicating that he plays into the paradoxical relationship between dreams and derision. Thus, the concept of artificial reproduction, as we shall examine throughout this chapter, will be equally a dream scenario and a contemptuous endeavor.

psychic needs. The male artist, through these ever-constant creation fantasies, may psychically reverse the adverse effects precipitated by original sin. These fantasies act as literary refuge from the ever-fragile state of being human, borne of woman. Deviating from the traditional embodiment of woman as daughter of Eve, Villiers's novel presents the reader with the incongruous composition of a pre-historical figure (Eve) and a modern, futurized 'woman' (Eve of the future).[17] The book not only develops a new and improved copy of a woman who resembles man and who is *reproduced* rather than reproducing, but it simultaneously establishes a modern, female Symbol derived from an archetypically mythic and primitive woman. Thinking accordingly, this chapter engages with the most striking paradox upon which the novel is predicated, the incredible transformation of both sexual and temporal difference into "une similitude éblouissante," a stunning likeness (84).

II. (P)reproduction: The Manufacture of History

The very first line of the novel reveals what, besides literary language, grants the internal authority to reconfigure the myth of Adam and Eve in the realm of future possibility – electricity: "A vingt-cinq lieues de New York, au centre d'un réseau de *fils électriques*, apparaît une habitation qu'entourent de profonds jardins solitaires" (99, emphasis mine). Rather than endow Divine light as the creator and source of the novel, Villiers forges a new history for humanity by thwarting God in favor of Electricity, the most omnipotent power of the Industrial Age. Villiers's use of the phrase "fils électriques" appears to be a camouflaged yet still compelling demonstration that the

[17] Ultimately, the trope of the *andréïde* in *L'Ève future* refers retrospectively to the literary history of Eve and a variety of her simulacrums, and prophetically to the literary love object in modernity.

power of redemption belongs to the new generation, these modern, *electric* sons taking over the role of God.[18] The word *fil* objectively indicates a wire used as an electric conductor, but in the plural the word *fils* means son: according to *Le Grande Robert*, "Être humain du sexe masculin (opposé à *fille*), considéré par rapport à son père et à sa mère."[19] By the same token, the above citation inaugurates the characterization of Edison's home in Menlo Park, New Jersey, "une habitation qu'entourent de profonds jardins solitaires," as the site of modernity's new and improved Eden. Villiers conducts the reader outside the hubbub of New York along these very *fils électriques* to the source of their electrical power, Edison's laboratory in Menlo Park, pausing before the plot commences in order to assess the inventor and his surroundings. Once inside the gates of his veritable compound, we find Edison solitary and pensive, almost God-like in Villiers's depiction of him. But as Villiers warns the reader in "Avis au lecteur," "j'ai conçu l'idée, qu'en un mot le héros de ce livre est, avant tout, le 'sorcier de Menlo Park', etc. – et non M. l'ingénieur Edison, notre contemporain" (96). Although readers have frequently been perplexed by the novel's seemingly overt, misogynistic premise of creating a simulacrum of a woman more advantageous than the real thing, Villiers does not confine himself to turning *only* women into technological symbols. From the onset the author advises the reader that a literary exaggeration of Edison's mythical persona was of greater use to him than the real man himself, and that the Edison in his novel is "au moins passablement distinct[s] de la réalité" (96). Villiers artificially recasts Thomas Edison, the man of industry, as a literary symbol.

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[18] The reader recognizes that this reading is further emphasized by the surnames of the male characters in the story: Edison, which comes from an English surname meaning "son of Edward," and Anderson, from "son of Andrew."

[19] Entry for "fils" (n.m.), *Le Grande Robert de la langue française* (version électronique, deuxième édition dirigée par Alain Rey).

On the narrative level, Edison operates as a symbolic surrogate for the historian, especially at the novel's starting point, when he mourns the impossibility of bearing phonographic witness to landmark events in history.[20] In *L'Ève future*'s third chapter fittingly titled "Les Lamentations d'Edison," Edison regrets, "Comme j'arrive *tard* dans l'Humanité! ... Que ne suis-je l'un des premiers-nés de notre espèce!" (103, emphasis mine). Although Edison hesitates to make any direct gestures of usurpation toward God, affirming the "cliché galvanoplastique du *Fiat lux*," he complains of his powerlessness over capturing and validating history, moments that have since "tombés à jamais dans le néant" (104). In the course of the first book of the novel, Edison intermittently dreams of historical phenomenon that his phonograph could have recorded and thus preserved, "par exemple du *Son des trompettes de Jéricho* ?... du *Cri du taureau de Phalaris,"* or even "de la Chute de l'Empire romain" (105, 106). But Edison concentrates in particular on one historical event. Of all the historic milestones to phonographically record, he deems the moment immediately *preceding* the creation of Eve quintessential: "de saisir et d'empreindre, dissimulé derrière quelque fourré de l'Éden, tout d'abord le sublime soliloque: *Il n'est pas bon que l'Homme soit seul!"* (104). In effect, Edison's performative repetition of God's words allows for the reopening of the question concerning man solitary existence upon his creation in order to respond with a revolutionarily different answer. Returning to the precise moment Eve can be reconfigured, the novel prepares its own enigmatic relationship with the notion of "recording," which will prove to be as paradoxical as the novel's conception of a "real"

[20] In the words of Eduardo Cadava, "photography does not belong to history; it offers history. It delivers history to its destiny. It tells us that the truth of history is to this day nothing but photography." For further discussion, see *Words of Light: Theses on the photography of history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

woman. Although Edison bemoans his inability to use the phonograph to record and thus authenticate man's past, he also authorizes a re-recording of Eve unfaithful to the original.

Edison acknowledges the impossibility of aural proof to act as reliable, historical testimony. Talking to himself – in essence, representing the lonely man in the Garden of Eden preceding the creation of Eve – Edison says: "Ainsi, j'eusse blâmé, par exemple, le Phonographe de son impuissance à reproduire, en tant que *bruits*, le bruit ... de la Chute de l'Empire romain ... les bruits qui courent ... les silences *éloquents* ... et, en fait de *voix*, de ce qu'il ne peut clicher ni la voix de la conscience?" (106). The phonograph alone cannot faithfully reproduce the experience of life, full of secrets and the aural void of consciousness as much as audible sound. It lacks the faculty to locate man's extra-linguistic experience. In order to appease his fellow man, Edison knows well, "qu'il faut que j'invente un instrument qui répète avant même qu'on ait parlé" (106). His presupposition, that a conglomeration of technologies would be necessary to produce the truest replica of life, appropriately foreshadows his *chef d' œuvre* of inventions, the andréïde Hadaly. Edison's will to simulate history mirrors his scientific project of using "ce surprenant agent vital que nous appelons l'Électricité" to reproduce "toute l'*illusion* de la Vie" in "Une Imitation-Humaine" (183). Peculiarly, Edison's fulminations over being unable to authenticate history technologically prompt him to become the architect of man's pre-history. Through the proposition of an instrument *qui répète avant même qu'on ait parlé,* Villiers advances a solution to nineteenth-century France's anxieties concerning the curious relationship between history and Industrial progress, by hybridizing a being manufactured by technology. Subsequently, Villiers manufactures

history Symbolically by envisioning a being that quizzically repeats, or copies in the future, what has already been said in the past. One can never be too late – *trop tard* – for what will endlessly be repeated. And so, Hadaly represents the reliable capture of man's mythological history, functioning as the New Eve of Edison's puzzling, pre-historic future.

i. Re-production: A Virtual Impression

In one of *L'Ève future*'s most religiously charged scenes Edison delivers a *serment* about his ability to resurrect Eve as a profoundly new indexical sign suitable to modernity – in effect, vowing that he can offer a better solution to man's solitary existence than God did. Edison conjures "woman" neither from the earth's clay, nor from man's body: instead he discloses the power of "Science Humaine" as the most Divine creator:

> 'Et, le fixant presque immortellement, entendez-vous? Dans la seule et véritable forme où vous l'avez entrevue, *je tirerai la vivante à un second exemplaire, et transfigurée selon vos voeux!* Je doterai cette Ombre de tous les chants de *l'Antonia* du conteur Hoffmann, de toutes les mysticités passionnées des *Ligéias* d'Edgar Poe, de toutes les séductions ardentes de la *Venus* du puissant musicien Wagner! Enfin, pour vous racheter l'être, je prétends pouvoir — et vous prouver d'avance, encore une fois, que positivement je le puis — faire sortir du limon de l'actuelle Science Humaine un *Être fait à notre image,* et qui nous sera, par conséquent, CE QUE NOUS SOMMES A DIEU.'
>
> Et l'électricien, faisant serment, leva la main. (189-190)

Creating a "woman" for man through technological rather than Divine intervention indicates a shift in material, from the lime of the earth from which Adam's body was formed to the man-made "limon de l'actuelle Science Humaine." The desired intention of this genesis coincides with that of all time, to create a companion in man's perfect semblance – "un *Être fait à notre image*." Hence, to bring to life a companion based on

his own suitably hand-made processes indicates that man can act as God in this chain of signification, or as may interest us more precisely, as author. *L'Ève future*'s foremost investment lies in the role played by Eve throughout literary tradition and art history, superseding any reliance on religious mythology. The Antonias, the Ligéias, the Venuses and the Hadalys alike operate as the symbolic daughters of Eve.[21]

Though the novel's mindful intertextuality causes us to recognize its place within and perverse challenge of literary genealogy, the concept of perverse reproduction in *L'Ève future* is more than just literary, encompassing nineteenth-century cultural and technological discourses of reproduction as well. Edison functions allegorically as a vehicle for the set of modern technologies representative of the notion of "artificial generation," or artificial life. Within the first pages of the novel, Villiers represents Edison as a subject defined by the very attributes of his most famous invention, the phonograph – as a technological historian, a 'recorder.'[22] On the novel's first page, Villiers describes Edison not by telling us who he is as much as by showing us whom, or what, he resembles:

> Edison est un homme de quarante-deux ans. Sa physionomie rappelait, il y a quelques années, d'une manière frappante, celle d'un illustre Français, Gustave Doré. C'était presque le visage de l'artiste *traduit* en un visage de savant. Aptitudes congénères, applications différentes. Mystérieux jumeaux. … Leurs deux photographies d'alors, fondues au stéréoscope, éveillent cette impression intellectuelle que certaines effigies de races supérieures ne se réalisent pleinement que sous une monnaie de figures, éparses dans l'Humanité.
>
> Quant au visage d'Edison, il offre, confronté avec d'anciennes estampes, une vivante reproduction de la médaille syracusaine d'Archimède. (100)

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[21] There is an inherent and purposeful paradox here, because these daughters of Eve, who as a figure is emblematic of human life born of woman, are all made by male artists and are, indeed, women deadened in art. Ligeia is a story Poe tells of the death of the narrator's wife Ligeia. The narrator remarries Lady Rowena, who dies as well and then comes back from the dead as Ligeia. This story clearly has stronger thematic ties to *L'Ève future* on the whole.

[22] For the discussion of the disavowal of originality in favor of reproducibility, or the decline of the 'aura' of the work of art, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968) 217-252.

Villiers's offering of French artist Gustave Doré and Edison as "Mystérieux jumeaux" implies that, despite the cross-cultural context, the two men could be of the same familial lineage. In consideration of their likeness, Villiers suggests that one could have been copied, *traduit*, from the other. The author also purports that this visual likeness extends to their occupations. One an American engineer and the other a French artist, their aptitudes being "congénères" (meaning "equivalent," or "of the same species") indicates that these seemingly disparate men evolved from the same gene pool, which here is analogous to being from the same cultural meme pool.[23] Note that perhaps Villiers chooses Gustave Doré as Edison's mysterious twin because of their twin preoccupations with the representation of man's point of origin, the story of Adam and Eve. A French engraver, illustrator and sculptor, Doré rose to artistic prominence after he was commissioned to illustrate a new English Bible (1866); his later works included illustrations for an oversized edition of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Villiers may have found the artist additionally provocative here because in the 1870s, *Art Journal* accused Doré of "inventing rather than copying."[24]

Returning to the above citation and submitting it to the logic of *Genesis,* we truly arrive in a new Eden. Villiers replaces the first couple, Adam and Eve, with a second copy of the couple in his new Edenic myth – Edison and Doré, or scientist and artist. In *Genesis,* reproduction between the first man and woman is the direct result of (their expulsion from) the Garden of Eden. Here, Villiers reverses the order: reproduction can only take place *inside* Edison's "Eden." I would suggest that at the moment "Leurs deux

[23] I am using the concept 'meme, *n.*' as the *OED online* defines it, as a "cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means, is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene."
[24] *The Art Journal*, 1870.

photographies" are placed side-by-side in the stereoscope, producing an "impression intellectuelle" like the imprint of faces on money, *reproduction occurs*. After cultivating an interest in the new art of photography, physician and Harvard professor Oliver Wendell Holmes marveled "at the invention of a process of visual representation that he thought separated the form of objects from the physical objects themselves," which he believed to be "the most significant human achievement of all time." In his article "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1859, Holmes coins the term "stereograph" to connote the three-dimensional, illusionistic photographs that had become fashionable during that decade. The stereoscope is composed of two pictures mounted next to each other and viewed through a set of lenses.[25] The intellectual imprint produced from the blending of the men's faces in the extended citation above supersedes the type of imprint made on a coin because the stereoscope specifically produces a three-dimensional image. When observing the pictures through the viewer, the pair of images merges into one because the left and right eyes see a slightly different version of the same scene. Consequently, this creates the illusion of depth necessary to imbue the image with its three-dimensionality. This photographic mating of the two men's faces produces not a person but a virtual impression, *une vivante reproduction*.

The stereoscopic image contains, in miniature, some of the questions most central to the novel.[26] First, this image displaces the value and usurps the function of an epigraph, acting as the internal authority for the story. To reiterate the words of Colleen Ramos from *Deviant Modernism*, "Like the inscriptions on monuments and coins, epigraphs

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[25] Holmes invented the "stereoscope" viewer but did not patent the idea, instead just giving it away.
[26] Holmes writes in "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," "Many persons suppose that they are looking on miniatures of the objects represented, when they see them in the stereoscope." Here, to use the stereoscopic image as a miniature of the larger thematic questions at work in the novel is to again invoke the sense of mise-en-abyme that pervades *L'Ève future*.

declare the text's lineage." Indeed, something "like the inscriptions on ... coins" dictates the lineage of this text, but instead of being a literary inscription of selected, borrowed text, here it is more specifically an internal, technological reproduction that bears resemblance to the facial inscriptions "sous une monnaie." In other words, the concept of a technologically produced likeness of life – "une vivante reproduction" – embodies the main theoretical thrust of the novel. Second, this stereoscopic image encapsulates the concept of a genealogy begotten solely by men, signaling the primary reproduction between men, that of Eve, "daughter of God and Man."[27] While myths have traditionally been generated from various classes of organic life, *L'Ève future* acts in the reverse.[28] The organic life of man aids in the creation of a new and improved generative tool – technology – that takes the helm of generating a new class of life. In this way, the concept of technology offers a site at which this symbolic staging of 'generation' occurs. The term is doubled over to comprise the process as well as the product – the generating of a new generation. This conjures up the striking image evoked by the real-life Thomas A. Edison, who told a *New York Graphic* reporter interviewing him in Menlo Park in 1878, at the time he invented the phonograph: "I've made a good many machines, but this is my baby, and I expect it to grow up to be a big feller, and support me in my old age."[29]

III. Les Fil(le)s de Milton: Daughters of Invention

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[27] Milton frequently refers to Eve in this way throughout *Paradise Lost*.
[28] Similar to Ovid's Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses*, which is the only tale in the collection that tells the story of a thing becoming a person, rather than a person who becomes an animal or a thing.
[29] Gaby Wood, *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) 55.

> We are looking into stereoscopes as pretty toys, and wondering over the photograph as a charming novelty; but before another generation has passed away, it will be recognized that a new epoch in the history of human progress dates from the time when He who
> 'never but in uncreated light
> Dwelt from eternity'
> took a pencil of fire from the 'angel standing in the sun,' and placed it in the hands of a mortal.
>
> –Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph"

In the above excerpt from the very end of "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," Oliver Wendell Holmes conveys his interest in technologies of representation inasmuch as they function in a far greater capacity than mere "toys" or a "charming novelty," arguing that within these very technologies a "new epoch" will emerge of "human progress," and one which continues to mimic the desires of "He who" acts as first father of these life-giving, Promethean sentiments. Holmes's citation of poetry – 'never but in uncreated light / Dwelt from eternity' – is excerpted from the beginning of Book III of John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667).[30] Incidentally, Villiers's recasting of Eden as Edison's workshop in *L'Ève future* becomes consciously intertwined with Milton reference as well, specifically in the novel's third book, "L'Éden sous terre."[31] Of this book's five chapters, two of them – "Chant des oiseaux" and "Électricité" – commence with epigraphs from *Paradise Lost*. The epigraph that prefaces "Èlectricité" – *Hail, holy light! Heaven daughter! first born!* – originates from the beginning of Book III of

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[30] For reference, the first twelve lines of *Paradise Lost*, Book III read: "Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heav'n, first-born, / Or of th'eternal or coeternal beam,/May I express thee unblamed? since God is Light,/And never but in unapproached light/ Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,/Bright effluence of bright essence increate./Or hear'st thou rather, pure ethereal stream,/Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the Sun,/Before the Heav'ns thou wert, and at the voice/Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest/The rising world of waters dark and deep,/Won from the void and formless infinite" (3:1-12).

[31] It can be noted, here, that Villiers sections his novel into "Books," making it structurally similar to *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem.

Milton's poem as well.[32] The first fifty-five lines of Book III comprise what is commonly called Milton's "The Prologue of Light." The setting of this part of the poem, the transition from the darkness of Hell to the light of the Heavens, occasions Milton to "speak[s] of his blindness," directly to his readership. In reality, John Milton suffered from problems with his eyesight and by 1652 he was rendered blind presumably by glaucoma.[33] The loss of sight fully tortured Milton, but never so much as in relation to his writing of *Paradise Lost*. Luckily however, his blindness did not thwart the composition of the epic poem. Instead, he believed that his success was due to his inner light, which reconnected him with God. Accordingly, in "The Prologue of Light" Milton's narrator asks the heavenly light to "shine inward," a request that prepares for the main event of Book III: when the Father reveals his plan for history and the Son offers himself sacrificially, to rescue mankind. The light of spiritual inspiration occasions the illumination and creation of innovative, literary progeny.

Romantic artists revered Milton as a literary authority not least for his thematization of artistic creation and as offering a figural representation of wisdom even at moments of (literal) blindness. Numerous Romantic poets, including William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, approached Milton and his poetry as a strategy for contextualizing their own poetic endeavors. Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) considers the liberation of Prometheus from the tyrannical control of Jupiter, using Prometheus and Jupiter as symbolic stand-ins for God and Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Biographical elements of Milton's life, especially his blindness, also

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[32] The line verbatim from the Norton Critical Edition of *Paradise Lost* reads "Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heav'n, first-born" (3:1). As both A. W. Raitt and Nadine Satiat point out in their respective editions of *L'Ève future*, Villiers misquotes Milton as Hail, holy light! Heaven daughter! first born! See footnote 36.
[33] Cf. Eleanor Gertrude Brown, *Milton's Blindness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934).

served as functional allusions for Romantic artistic undertakings. Notably, French painters Eugène Delacroix and Jules Laure painted scenes of a blind Milton reciting his epic poem to his daughters, who acted as his personal scribes: "Milton dictant à ses filles le Paradis perdu" (1824) and "Milton aveugle dictant son poème du Paradis-perdu à ses filles" (1849), respectively.

Having equally regarded Milton as an erudite literary genius, Villiers directly appropriated this recurrent Romantic theme in a now Symbolist vein in a short story entitled *Les Filles de Milton*, which was left unfinished and published posthumously. About a year after the publication of *L'Ève future*, Villiers embarked upon researching and documenting Milton's life explicitly at the Bibliothèque Nationale in order to compose the story.[34] The tale, in which Villiers artistically capitalizes on Milton's blindness in a similar fashion, has a powerful and perplexing moral import for our reading of *L'Ève future*. The story commences with conversation between Milton's wife and one of his daughters, who denounces her father's vain and solitary preoccupation with literature. Milton's daughter bewails: "O vanité! Dire qu'il s'imagine que ce 'Paradis perdu' dominera les mémoires dans la Postérité! Dérision! Le libraire n'en donnera pas ce qu'a coûté le papier, – qu'il préfère même à notre pain. Bientôt nous serons en haillons, mais il est aveugle et c'est de ses rimes, non de ses filles, qu'il est fier!"[35] In rebellion over her father's disinclination to pay attention to practical matters, like bread for the family to eat or his own daughters' futures, she determines, "je n'obéirai plus!" Subsequently, Milton enters the scene, "tâtait les murs du bout de sa

[34] Remy de Gourmont, who was then on staff at Bibliothèque Nationale, assisted Villiers in his research and became his close friend and admirer as well.
[35] Villiers "Les Filles de Milton," *Nouveau Contes Cruels et propos d'au dela* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1893) 224.

canne," and demands that his family scribes "ne changez pas les mots qui me sont venus, – et n'interrompez pas, si je ne m'arrête."[36] Milton continues speaking, about such things as the importance of poetic word choice and how the Divine provides him with his inspiration, while his daughters are clearly being neglectful toward him. Instead of being faithful 'recorders,' his daughters are busy at their "toilettes de nuit." When they finally commit to the task of transcription, they solicit Milton to "recommencer." However, the story ends with Milton's decree "Ah! il est *trop tard*, j'ai oublié" (emphasis mine).[37] Villiers fictionalizes this recurring scenario to explicitly portray the anxiety over loss, specifically the potential loss of man's literary masterpieces, which are destined to fall into *le néant*. Villiers's fear mirrors Edison's early lamentations in *L'Ève future* previously discussed, echoing one of man's greatest fears – being *too late,* a serviceable metaphor for death. Edison deplores, "Comme j'arrive tard dans l'Humanité! ... Même parmi les *bruits* du passé, combien des sons mystérieux ont été perçus par nos prédécesseurs et qui, faute d'un appareil convenable pour les retenir, sont tombés à jamais dans le néant?" (103-104). In place of a woman who may *reproduire*, Villiers's *L'Ève future* posits one that will *retenir* instead – just like a machine.

In the entirety of *Les Filles de Milton*, Villiers's fictionalized John Milton speaks aloud only one direct line from the actual text of *Paradise Lost*, and it is the same line Villiers uses as the epigraph for the *L'Ève future* chapter entitled "Èlectricité" – "Salut, lumière sacrée, fille du ciel née la première..." (232). Both uses of the citation are, however, misquoted.[38] In the context of *Les Filles de Milton* we discover that Villiers's

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[36] *Ibid*., 228.
[37] *Ibid*., 234.
[38] The footnote for Livre III, chapitre v "Électricité" in the Nadine Satiat edition reads: "C'est un souvenir passablement inexact du premier vers du chant III du Paradis perdu : "Hail holy Light! offspring of heaven

main distortion of the Milton citation – describing the *lumière sacrée* as a daughter (*fille*) rather than a gender-neutral offspring in Milton's original usage – discloses his philosophical intentions.[39] An evident breach occurs in Villiers's story between Milton's real *Filles* and the *fille du ciel* that licenses his poetic product. Milton's human daughter in the story complains that Milton's pride lies in his descendent poems rather than his flesh-and-blood female children. The poet's preference for self-generated verse over his biological heirs proves that the most exalted flesh is that made of words. Accordingly, the connotation of the word *fille* shifts entirely, from the biological *Filles de Milton* to the symbolic daughters of Milton's poetic genius, particularly Eve from *Paradise Lost*. Villiers's imagined failure of Milton's biological daughters to conscientiously record his masterpiece, to preserve the male author, can be symbolically repaired through the crafting of artificial women.

Villiers takes up a cause similar to Milton's, passed down through generations of literature and art, of defining male identity by addressing how this identity was first and continuously thereafter imperiled by its complicated identification with woman. The second epigraph Villiers uses in *L'Ève future*, for the chapter "Chants des oiseaux," comes directly from Eve's speech of personal subjection in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*. Although Milton envisages Eve in this speech calling Adam her "author and disposer," it is she who ultimately writes Adam's all too human future.[40] This is the precise dilemma for which *L'Ève future* extends a hypothetical resolution. In a Judeo-Christian reading of

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first born! " Villiers cite probablement d'après Les Débuts littéraires de Thingum Bob, conte de Poe traduit par W. L. Hughes ... (Villiers citera ce même vers, en français, dans les Filles de Milton, un de ses derniers contes : "Salut, lumière sacrée, fille du ciel née la première"); see pg. 419.

[39] Certainly, it would be impossible for Villiers to chose a word that is gender neutral in the French, but this does not diminish the value he places here on the word *fille*.

[40] *Paradise Lost* (4.635); See T. Ross Leasure, "Yesterday's Eve and Her Electric Avatar: Villiers's Debt to Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *Latch: A Journal for the Study of the Literary Artifact in Theory, Culture or History* Vol. 1 (2008) 134, for further discussion.

the biblical text, man's female companion directly causes his Fall from Divine perfection by eating first from the Tree of Knowledge, the only act forbidden in the Garden of Eden. Milton's Adam laments his abject state as perhaps a fault of Nature, which in the creation of Eve "from [my] side subducting took perhaps / More than enough." In turn, she exhibits "Too much of ornament, in outward show / Elaborate, of inward less exact" (*PL,* 8.536-539). Adam admits that he falls victim to Eve's artifice, blinded by the seductive "ornament" worn by woman in her prototypal state. In Milton's version of the myth, woman ensnares male narcissism on the level of being his "Best image" (*PL,* 5.95). Adam's misrecognition of the copy (Eve) for the original (himself) creates the impetus for Milton's literary recreation of man's regression to his most fragile state, being human. Now bifurcated into two different sexes, male identity is called into question. Duped by nature, Adam senses "the link of nature drew me, flesh of flesh" (*PL,* 9.913-914). Forced to make woman's intentions his own causes Adam to eat the fruit, committing the same sin as his self-same image. He tells Eve, "what thou art is mine. / My own in thee" (*PL,* 9.957-958). The moment of narcissism occurs transitively when Adam first gazes at Eve, compelling him to fall in love with his duplicated image, "in delight / Both of her beauty and submissive charms" (*PL,* 4.497-498). Adam consequently falls prey to the same fatal reflection that composed Narcissus's sin: "I now see / Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self / Before me: *Woman* is her name, of Man / Extracted" (*PL,* 8:494-497). However, while Narcissus commits the fault of taking his own image for someone other, Adam misapprehends inversely someone else as his own image.

It may be that Adam not only misrecognizes Eve as his "Best image," but further commits his own sin in Milton's poem: falling in love.[41] In Book VIII of *Paradise Lost* Adam seems willing to believe in Eve's naïveté, remaining steadfast in his dedication to her, despite not having what he calls "proof enough" of her character. He finds himself "only weak / Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance" (*PL,* 8:532-533). In fact, it seems that the copy here overpowers its original. Adam acknowledges what will prove to be his faulty urge to submit himself completely to Eve's intentions as "best" when in fact he is guided only by her perfected appearance: "Yet when I approach / Her loveliness so absolute she seems / And in herself complete so well to know / Her own that what she wills to do or say / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best" (*PL,* 8:546-550). Illogically, Milton's Adam equates beauty with goodness, or "Best image" with most virtuous intention. His falling in love with Eve, a riddle as perplexing as Narcissus falling in love with his own imago, endangers his sense of self:

> O fairest of Creation, last and best
> Of all God's works, creature in whom excelled
> Whatever can to sight or thought be formed,
> Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet! […]
> How can I live without thee, how forego
> Thy sweet convérse and love so dearly joined
> To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
> Should God create *another Eve* and I
> Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart. (*PL,* 9:896-899, 908-913, emphasis mine)

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[41] This problematic within Milton's canon is not unique to his treatment of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. His *Samson Agonistes* also explores the concept of masculinity threatened by a notorious, biblical *femme fatale*. In *The Wilde Century*, Alan Sinfield writes about problems of effeminacy for male artists (in relation to the Wilde trials), and notes that, "In *Samson Agonistes* Samson's explanation of his subjection to Dalilah is: 'foul effeminacy held me yoked / Her bondslave.' … It is love for a woman that produces the problem for masculinity." Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994) 27.

Within Milton's poetic recreation, Adam yields to Eve not on the level of logic but on the level of love. However, he persists in mistakenly considering Eve a mere copy of himself by indicating the future possibility of "another Eve," another copy. In her act of delinquency, Eve makes herself a most troublesome original.

After taking "their fill of love" by sealing their mutual guilt with the act of sex in Book Nine, Adam alters his view of Eve considerably as a result of their newfound sexual difference, for as they "Soon found their eyes how opened and their minds / How darkened" (*PL,* 9:1053-1054). Accordingly, they reach for tree leaves in order to cover up their loins, the evocative symbol of their shameful act (eating the fruit/sex) as well as the symbol for the guilt inherent in their newfound acknowledgement of sexual difference. In the end, Adam admits to Eve that his only offense was "overmuch admiring / What seem'd in thee so perfect […] which is become my crime / And thou th'accuser" (*PL,* 9:1178-1179, 1181-1182). It is possible to read Eve's ostensible perfection as one and the same with her ostensible likeness to Adam. "[O]vermuch admiring" what then seemed to Adam so perfectly congruous with his own Divine creation leads to the fallacy that ends in their discord. In Milton's depiction, Eve becomes the eternal literary referent for man's fallen state.

Future male literary depictions of Eve and her daughters are subject to the fearful foundation provided by Adam's final sentiment in Book Nine — "Thus it shall befall / Him who to worth in women overtrusting / Lets her will rule!" (*PL,* 9:1182-1184). The discourse of female monstrosity borne of the parable of Adam and Eve represents the flip side of divinity as well as that which divinity encapsulates, immortality. Ushering in human mortality is the most significant trespass of woman against man. Adam bewails to

Eve in Book Nine that he "might have lived and joyed immortal bliss" if he had not "chose rather death with thee" by partaking in her sin. God condemns Adam to return to his original state, from dust to dust. Eve's two-fold punishment corresponds to her crime as well. Woman becomes indebted to bear the biological fruit of mankind and to subdue her own desire in order to reflect only the desires of her husband, or as *Genesis* reads, "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."[42] Authorial control over the re-production of woman signifies an attempt to regain man's command over his own identity, which both in the nineteenth-century as in ancient times is threatened by the very idea that the being made in his image is always already irretrievably different. The immortality of artistic production counterbalances metaphorically the mortality man faces since his expulsion from Eden. Villiers can simultaneously and paradoxically use Eve as the signifier of sin as well as, by re-producing her in the future, the medium to psychically erase it.

The dual punishments of the Fall, death and procreation, attest to the cyclic, mortal existence forced upon humankind. Accordingly, Villiers's literary projection of the male author's *filles,* specifically their failure to record and preserve, acts as a thinly veiled substitute for his anxiety regarding his own subjective point of origin – his mother. As A. W. Raitt recounts, *Revue illustré* editor René Baschet received an unexpected visit from Villiers in 1887:

> One day, he arrived in my office, pale and dramatic. 'My dear director,' he said to me, 'they've just exhumed the remains of my poor mother ... Alas! I haven't enough money to have her buried again ... Her coffin is in the open air ... I need 800 francs ... Can you advance them for a story of which I'll tell you the subject: Milton, blind, is dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughters ... [...] The daughters leave the work they are doing, and go to the window to see the handsome soldiers

[42] *Genesis* 3:16.

> marching past. And while they are there, the poet continues dictating magnificent lines ... which will be lost for ever.[43]

This excerpt makes evident that Villiers, threatened with the exhumation of his mother's remains, associates the inability to safeguard her memorialization with powerlessness in the capture and preservation of history, which, like the composition of *Paradise Lost* in the story *Les Filles de Milton*, would be lost forever without a faithful "recorder." As Modris Eksteins writes, "As the Faustian notion of 'becoming' rather than 'being' became the central logic of the century, the historian became the indispensable explicator of this logic."[44] This mirrors the function of Edison in *L'Ève future* - a historian made all the more infallible with technology by his side. Mother acts as an allegorical symbol for man's recuperative history and for reproduction. But by usurping her function, by giving birth to his own mother Eve as a blasphemous Eve-of-the-future, Villiers ensures the mother's betrayal on a literary level.

i. Purloined Prometheus: Mary Shelley and Science fiction's "hideous progeny"

Villiers perpetuates what, in the wake of *Paradise Lost*, becomes an enduring fantasy of literary parthenogenesis: he embarks upon a project of substituting aesthetic productivity in place of biological reproduction. *L'Ève future*, a perplexing book about the technological re-production of a New Eve, functions as a treatise on perverse reproduction, on one hand by its protestation over a literary 'first' author, and on the other hand through its rejection of a biological origin, woman as mother 'Nature.' Of course, Eve functions appropriately as the archetypal figurehead for biological maternity.

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[43] Raitt 326. This visit comes a year after L'Ève was already published, but Villiers's mother died in 1882, while he was still composing the novel, which he began writing in 1878.
[44] Modris Eksteins, "History and Degeneration: Of Birds and Cages" in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 3.

'Woman' in Villiers's novel is transformed into "la créature nouvelle, électro-humaine, – de cette ÈVE FUTURE, enfin, qui, aidée de la GÉNÉRATION ARTIFICIELLE (déjà tout à fait en vogue depuis ces derniers temps), me paraît devoir combler les voeux secrets de notre espèce" (240).[45] The novel disarticulates mankind's reliance on biological reproduction in order to instead promote artificial generation as the means to reproduce literary daughters and, through them, to unravel the "secrets de notre espèce." The achievement of such a creation fantasy predicates itself upon literature, but a particularly hybridized form of science-meets-fiction wherein words and machines unite as forces of representation and creation.

We cannot claim, however, that the amalgam of science and literature proffered in the service of reproduction, nor the association established between Milton's poem and the metaphor of the Divine spark of electricity, belong to Villiers alone. Even though Villiers's novel never explicitly engages with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) inter-textually, both *L'Ève future* and *Frankenstein* pay homage to *Paradise Lost* as their fundamental father.[46] We can extend the theoretical value of the *fille,* then, to she who many would contend to be Milton's most important extra-literary daughter, Mary Shelley. Like Villiers, Shelley joins the force of electricity to the aim of creating life,

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[45] In fact, Villiers had inside information regarding the production and uses of these new technologies. A regular attendee at Nina de Villard's Parisian salons in the 1860s-1870s, much in vogue with the more bohemian men of letters, Villiers met and became close friends with Nina's lover and fellow literati, Charles Cros, who is credited with "having had the idea of a phonograph before Edison and with having perfected a system of colour photography." In actuality, Cros may have given Villiers more than the inside track on these technological developments, and the way they work, for Villiers to bring to life the mechanical body of Hadaly in the story. Cros also wrote a little farce called *La Machine à changer le caractère des femmes*, and when the play was acted Villiers found himself fittingly playing the leading role. See A. W. Raitt's *The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, 82, 160.

[46] Though Villiers invokes a myriad of literary references both in epigraph form and within the narrative, there are no epigraphs or direct evidence that Villiers had the intention of directly engaging with *Frankenstein*. Nonetheless, it would be hard to ignore all the ways that *L'Ève future* either mimics or extends the *Frankenstein* narrative. The works that do discuss various connections, mostly on the level of monstrosity, include Marie Lathers's *The Aesthetics of Artifice* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1996).

choosing Milton's reproduction of the original act of Divine creation – Adam and Eve – as the model subject of a literary birth myth. Shelley was a key Romantic reader and interpreter of *Paradise Lost,* and *Frankenstein* is often considered the nineteenth-century's foundational text of perverse reproduction. Shelley begins her novel with an extremely important epigraph, a selection from Book X of Milton's epic poem – the complaint Adam levels toward God immediately after the Fall: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?" (X. 743-45). In fact, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar proffer in "Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve," although she may have begun the novel "as a secret, barely conscious attempt to subvert Milton, Shelley ended up telling, too, the central story of *Paradise Lost*, the tale of 'what misery th'inabstinence of Eve / Shall bring on men'" (225-226). In this fashion, both act as revisionist narratives on the mythology of Eve, and as Marie Lathers suggests, the trajectory from *Frankenstein* to *L'Ève future* "can be read as a history that slowly integrates technology into the aesthetics of the reproductive imperative."[47]

Interestingly, Villiers's literary aspirations, to have his novel "chill the blood" and create "something of a sensation," appear to be strikingly similar to the driving force of invention behind Shelley's *Frankenstein*. During a trip to Geneva in 1816, Lord Byron challenged their intimately gathered group of writers, which included Percy Shelley and his wife Mary, to write individual tales of horror, inspired by their recent recitation of some famous German ghost stories.[48] Mary Shelley quickly determined that she wanted

[47] Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice*, 28.
[48] We might point out here that the German ghost stories incited Mary Shelley to write a story in English, but which takes place in Switzerland, so therefore the characters would be presumed to be speaking French.

to write a tale that would "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature."[49] However, as Shelley admits in her "Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Third Edition (1831)," she suffered from anxiety over her ability to artistically reproduce:

> I busied myself *to think of a story,* – a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name. I thought and pondered – vainly. I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative.[50]

In order to overcome her anxiety of artistic reproduction, Shelley engenders an amalgam of her "developing sense of herself as a literary creature and/or creator" in order to fashion a tale that is both borne of her literary inheritance as well as product of the contemporary, scientific imagination. Therefore, Shelley "cast her birth myth – her myth of origins – in precisely those cosmogenic terms to which her parents, her husband, and indeed her whole literary culture continually alluded: the terms of *Paradise Lost*, which (as she indicates even on the title page of her novel), she saw preceding, paralleling, and commenting upon the Greek cosmogony of the Prometheus play."[51]

Shelley's unique contribution to this literary mythology is to conjoin this tradition to the somewhat unconventional scientific experiments of her day. She discovers the key

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In reverse, Villiers writes a story of the American Edison and the British Ewald, who we would presume speak in English, while Villiers's novel was written in the French language.

[49] Mary Shelley, "Introduction to Frankenstein, Third Edition (1831)" in *Frankenstein: Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 171.

[50] *Ibid*., 171. Shelley's citation, of relevance in comparison to Villiers' project of artificial reproduction, continues: "Every thing must have a beginning to speak in Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. [...] Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself."

[51] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve," reprinted in *Frankenstein* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 228.

to her enigmatic tale after overhearing discussion, between Lord Byron and husband Percy Shelley, concerning galvanism and Erasmus Darwin's then current experiments in animation, preserving "a piece of vermicelli in a glass case till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion."[52] The "nature of the principle of life" encapsulated in this experiment drives Shelley to employ these details in granting commensurate life to her literature – both figuratively, in terms of affording her the inspiration, and objectively, in terms of her telling the story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein bringing a "new species" to life. The narrative she creates, then, represents the very process of literary creation.[53] Darwin's experiments and his theories of generation, which were later to inform grandson Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (*On the Origin of the Species,* 1859),[54] permitted Shelley the capacity to create a menacingly lifelike story wherein young scientist Frankenstein "could bestow animation upon lifeless matter ... renew[ing] life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption."[55] As indicated by the novel's subtitle, Dr. Frankenstein uses the means of electricity to become literature's *original* "modern Prometheus," stealing life-giving power from the heavens and bringing it to earth. Of course, when Frankenstein confers the electric "spark of being" upon "dead matter" he ends up producing a monster that he calls, upon its birth, "the wretch ... the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life."[56] Instead of

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[52] Shelley, "Introduction." Of course, like Villiers does in his treatment of Edison as the mythologized "Wizard of Menlo Park", Shelley admits, "I speak not of what the doctor really did or said that he did, but, as more to my purpose, of what was then spoken of as having been done by him."

[53] In discussion of three crucial questions, "the question of mothering, the question of the woman writer, and the question of autobiography," Barbara Johnson writes in "My Monster/ My Self" that "Frankenstein, in other words can be read as the story of the experience of writing Frankenstein." For more information, see Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 144-154.

[54] The hypothesis is that all living organisms are descendent from a common ancestor, derivative of the same gene pool.

[55] Shelley, *Frankenstein* 32

[56] *Ibid*., 34-35

transmitting new life he only succeeds in unleashing *a dead thing*. By pursuing "nature to her hiding places … to animate the lifeless clay" in his Promethean venture, Victor overturns the fecundity of Mother Nature as well as the divinity of God's omnipotence in favor of his ill-conceived "new species," which he hoped would bless him as creator and source.[57] Instead, he only ushers in death, which he had every intention of eschewing by virtue of his act of reproduction.

L'Ève future echoes and imitates what Gilbert and Gubar claim to be the nexus of *Frankenstein*'s narrative structure, which "prepares us to confront Milton's patriarchal epic, both as a sort of research problem and as the framework for a complex system of allusions."[58] Like Victor Frankenstein, Villiers's Edison represents the creator and source of a "new species" of symbols. In 1878, an article in technical magazine *Engineering* noted that, when confronted by Edison's new invention, the phonograph, "it is impossible altogether to resist a feeling of wonderment, recalling to one's mind perhaps the feelings of Pygmalion or the hero of *Frankenstein*."[59] This modern scientific invention compelled even the general public at the time to identify its capabilities with its mythical, and literary, predecessors. The phonograph displaces, at least metaphorically, the aberrant reproduction of a *dead thing* as with the rudimentary experiments that inspired *Frankenstein*. Rather, the phonograph confirms its technological aptitude for cheating death, or sensory handicap, by simulating the living. Edison's phonograph, like the galvanization experiments that inspire Shelley to conceive of (literary) reproduction as corporal animation by electrical means, serves as an example of a technical means of

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[57] *Ibid*., 32
[58] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve," 229.
[59] "The Phonograph," in *Engineering*, March 8, 1878, from "The Sound of the Voice," http://members.lycos.co.uk/mikepenney/engmar.htm

representation, supplementation and reproduction of life, specifically of the living voice. At a basic level, literature and the light of Divine inspiration compensated for Milton's blindness, just as the phonograph aids Villiers in his literary quest to "affirmer l'irréductible mystère caché au fond des choses."[60] Villiers embarked upon writing *L'Ève future* in the exact year (1878) that Edison exhibited the phonograph at the Paris Exposition. As the writers at *Engineering* claimed at that time, "Of all the startling powers of the phonograph, there is none perhaps so extraordinary as its capability of reproducing, years after, the voices of those who are no longer on the earth." Indeed, one of Edison's earliest hopes for the phonograph focused on recording books for blind people, and similarly to preserve such things as historically important lectures for future generations.[61]

However, we must acknowledge the primary deviation between these novels, the gender of their respective symbols: Dr. Victor Frankenstein's creation is male and Thomas A. Edison's is female. Indeed, when Frankenstein's creature requests a feminine companion be made for him, a scene that mimics God's creation of Eve as companion in order to mitigate Adam's loneliness, Frankenstein refuses to follow through with the task, leaving his creature solitary and miserable. Employing the extensive feminist literature on *Frankenstein*, Marie Lathers asserts that, "Despite its failed fabrication of the feminine, *Frankenstein* is the foremost ancestor of a series of texts that modify the creation of woman theme so as to accommodate scientific and technological discourse."[62] Lathers claims that *L'Ève future* "set a precedence for similar versions of the creation myth by

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[60] Raitt, "Préface" 10.
[61] Martin Melosi, *Thomas A. Edison and the Modernization of America,* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990) 55. The real Edison was hard of hearing, so the incapacity of being all hearing, abated by phonographic technology, was his own.
[62] Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice* 30.

French male authors of the nineteenth-century" and that "One might even propose that Villiers's *L'Eve future* is a fin-de-siècle sequel to or rewriting of *Frankenstein*, with Hadaly as the female whom Dr. Frankenstein and Mary Shelley were unable to complete."[63] Though I would agree that *Frankenstein* certainly acts as a monstrous mother for the hybrid science-fiction form emulated and imitated by *L'Ève future*, I might also suggest Lathers's claim that the novel functions as a "sequel ...or rewriting" is far too limiting. Both novels participate in the discourse of monstrosity under the rubric of creating artificial life. But if anything, Villiers's text seems to indirectly comment on the monstrosity of female authorial creativity by stripping it away, by recasting woman as a technological object.

Remarkably, Mary Shelley admitted she felt only part-owner of the story she had created, writing in her 1831 Introduction, "At first I thought but of a few pages – of a short tale; but Shelley urged me to develope the idea at greater length ... yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken *the form* in which it was represented to the world" (emphasis mine).[64] She invokes a certain hybridity of the text, already apparent in its science-fictionality, but here more explicitly a mixed authorship of male and female, Mary and Percy – a hybridization of form. Of course, we would not want to suggest that the story does not belong to Mary Shelley as an author. But we may draw upon her anxiety, this *not* feeling a distinct authenticity of authorship. Perhaps this crossbreeding of male and female creativity, her sense of anxiety over this literary genesis, is what brought forth a fittingly monstrous *form*. However, Villiers, believes his novel to be exceedingly original – "the new and magnificent evocation of which no one before ... has

[63] *Ibid.,* 31.
[64] Shelley, "Introduction" 172.

dared to attempt" – borne of a literary genealogy only to disobey it. Despite Villiers's preoccupation with authorial originality, we shall see how his own Promethean endeavor, built upon a framework of epigraphs sewn together, will end up reflecting back the cobbled together limbs of Frankenstein's *dead thing*, and what it comes to symbolize – the monstrous maternity of artificial generation.

ii. Michelet and "les vrais fils de Prométhée"

The word *fille* in French has ancillary connotations. Most commonly, the word is used to designate a female infant or child, as opposed to the word *fils,* which means son. *Fille* can also be used for a young woman, *une jeune fille*. But in the nineteenth-century the word became a popular term used for a prostitute of varying degrees. In the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Parisian officials set forth methods of registration and classification for working girls to try and contain and control the enterprise of sex for sale, which was not about to dissipate under current demand – the social anomaly exerted a profound, irresistible stimulus for bourgeois men. For instance, many women joined a *maison de tolérance* and would become either a *fille à numero* by putting her name in the brothel keeper's book, or a *fille en carte*, given a personal registration card to present to the authorities. As Alain Corbin points out in *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France After 1850*, "Registration indicated not the adoption of a profession, for prostitution could not be regarded as such, but of the state of *being*" (emphasis mine).[65] In *L'Ève future*, Miss Alicia Clary's prostituted bourgeois sensibilities and her willingness

[65] Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France After 1850* (Boston: Harvard, 1990) 30.

to do anything to increase her *prix* as a singer and performer suggest she metaphorically acts as a woman of ill repute. A. W. Raitt writes in the novel's "Préface":

> Avec L'Ève future, si l'attitude de Villiers envers la science est un mélange un peu ambivalent de méfiance et d'émerveillement, il n'y a rien d'ambigu dans sa condamnation de la mentalité bourgeoise, incarnée dans la personne d'Alicia Clary. Douée d'une voix magnifique, elle ne comprend rien à l'art véritable; fermée à ce qui ne peut être calculé en termes d'argent, elle est indifférente à la beauté; elle méprise ce qui est 'poétique'; elle est choquée par tout ce qui passe les bornes étroites de son entendement, Dieu, la mort, l'amour; elle n'a d'autre loi que celle du plus plat bon sens.[66]

Alicia's self-prostituting performative awareness serves as the evocative emblem of monstrosity in the novel. As Marie Lathers contends, Edison lays claim to the ability to nullify feminine deviance by creating a simulacrum of the flawed woman conveniently void of all of the nuisances that real women offer: their own consciousness and agency, *du plus plat bon sens*. This is where Edison's reproductive project differs markedly from Victor Frankenstein's. It is not that Edison's experiment defies nature and humanity as much as it seeks to rectify what is monstrous within female 'nature.'

By the mid-nineteenth-century France experienced a growing social concern over the decline of marriage and the decline of women, most notably in association with widespread prostitution. These concerns were often bound to larger forces at work, like the social shift toward Industrialism and the post-revolutionary apprehension over the concept of history. In the later 1850s, historian Jules Michelet interrupted work on his massive, historical tome *Histoire de France* to write two books on women, *L'Amour* (1858) and *La Femme* (1859). In sum, Michelet presents a manifesto on marriage, love and society, summoning mankind to reproduce woman by reinforcing man's duty of heritage, his responsibility to live up to and hence embody his mythological forebears. He

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[66] Raitt, "Préface" to *L'Ève future* 11.

calls to his fellow brethren, "Nous sommes des ouvriers, créateurs, et fabricateurs, et les vrais fils de Prométhée. Nous ne voulons pas une Pandore toute faite, mais une à faire."[67] In this way, Michelet surmises that in order to achieve social salvation and marital bliss, man must most literally create his other half – relying on the "irrésistible génie d'invention" – and thus creating a Pandora for the new age rather than relying on the figure of the past.[68] A glance at an extended excerpt of *La Femme* will encourage our understanding:

> La femme qu'il faut épouser, c'est celle que j'ai donnée dans le livre de *l'Amour*, celle qui, simple et aimante, n'ayant pas encore reçu *une empreinte définitive,* repoussera le moins la pensée moderne, celle qui n'arrive pas d'avance ennemie de la science et de la vérité. Je l'aime mieux pauvre, isolée, peu entourée de famille. La condition, l'éducation, est chose fort secondaire. Toute Française naît reine ou près de le devenir.
>
> Comme épouse, la *femme simple* que l'on peut élever un peu. Et, comme fille, la *femme croyante*, qu'un père élèvera tout à fait. Ainsi se trouvera rompu ce misérable cercle où nous tournons, où la femme empêche de créer la femme.
>
> Avec cette bonne épouse, associée, de cœur au moins, à la foi de son mari, celui-ci, suivant la voie fort aisée de la nature, exercera sur son enfant un incroyable ascendant d'autorité et de tendresse. La fille est si croyante au père! A lui d'en faire tout ce que'il veut. La force de ce second amour, si haut, si pur, doit faire en elle *la Femme*, l'adorable idéal de grâce dans la sagesse, par lequel seul la famille et la société elle-même être recommencées.[69]

In order to concoct the perfect wife, man must use his daughter as the prototype in this allegory of the *fille* turned into *La Femme*. It is man's *second amour*, love for his own feminine progeny, which can provide him with the next generation of female companions. Michelet's citation suggests, as well, that this perverse reordering of the family romance is absolutely necessary to the reestablishment of social order and the

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[67] Jules Michelet, *L'Amour* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1923) 85-86.
[68] In mythology, Pandora figures as the first mortal woman, therefore she may be compared to Eve as an archetype for woman. She was created out of clay by the Gods (Hephaestus at the behest of Zeus), in retaliation for the stealing of fire by Prometheus. After being delivered to Prometheus' brother Epimetheus, Pandora opens the jar Zeus had given her, thus unleashing the evil spirits contained within. She was named Pandora, meaning "all-gifted" or "the gift."
[69] Michelet, *La Femme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981) 86.

family structure. In order to recommence life and love in the social realm – we can only assume that both have been psychically suspended in time here – man must reproduce his own 'adorable idéal.' With a daughter 'si croyante au père,' the father has full disposition, thus ensuring the reinstitution of his currently waning male authority by producing a girl, 'A lui d'en faire tout ce qu'il veut.' The *fille* acts as the seed of Michelet's Platonic form of *la Femme*.

Framing the ability to love (and the possibility of social restitution) as a question of *making* rather than finding – "l'amour, dans nos temps modernes, n'aime pas *ce qu'il trouve*, mais bien *ce qu'il fait*" – Michelet equates man's wish of regulating the obedience of a wife with the necessity of producing a (better) copy of her, a daughter. Man must avoid women who have already received *une empreinte définitive*; instead, he must marry a woman he impresses himself, his own *printed woman*. "La fille" is better, of course, because she is a woman who directly resembles the man. She is an obedient daughter but also his impress, his own reflection – his proof of life. In a way, Villiers depicts Michelet's "vrai[s] fils de Prométhée" through the character of Thomas Edison in *L'Ève future*. As Anne Geisler-Szmulewicz asserts, Edison functions as "un avatar de Prométhée" in his aspirations to surpass Divine creation by becoming "père des hommes par son rêve de créer une nouvelle race d'Eves, qui remplacera l'ancienne, obsolète et imparfaite."[70] If each successive scientific invention endeavors to replace the obsolete

[70] Anne Geisler-Szmulewicz, *Le Mythe de Pygmalion au XIXe siècle : Pour une approche de la coalescence des mythes* (Paris: Editions Champions, 1999) 361. Of further interest, Geisler-Szmulewicz likens Ewald to an avatar of Pygmalion, the primary myth with which her book-length study is concerned. In this way, Hadaly would somehow be read as a product of the Pygmalion-Prometheus legends combined, although certainly the mythological allusions in Villiers are not wholly limited by these two (the legend of Faust is also of extreme importance in the novel, though it is not an immediate concern for the present analysis). It is interesting to note that by considering Edison and Ewald as avatars of these mythical legends, Geisler-Szmulewicz implicitly suggests that Villiers proffers his male protagonists as human incarnations (or copies) of the mythical. Ironically perhaps, the word avatar has come to currently signify a

invention of old, why not apply the same formula to anything passé and inadequate, as Villiers has done by employing Edison as the main character of his novel, even if that antiquated invention is a woman? As we will survey in chapter three, Edison is simply the propagandist for man's collective desire in the nineteenth-century to reclaim an Eve-of-their-own, one who reflects their proper desires at this particular cultural moment. As Edison professes, both he and Ewald are part of a multiplicity of modern Prometheus figures. He divulges to Ewald that, perhaps unconsciously, "tout homme a nom Prométhée sans le savoir," but that inevitably, "nul n'échappe au bec du vautour" (195).

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graphical representation of a person, usually in a computer-generated environment (*OED online*). An avatar connotes the technological replicant of the real thing.

Chapter Three

Womanproof:
The Villi-fication of Woman in *L'Ève future*

> Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.
> What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?
> *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.
> . . .
> The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun.
> Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.
> –*Ecclesiastes* 1:2-1:4 &1:9-1:10[1]

The previous chapter has reflected on Villiers's use of epigraphs, in conjunction with his revision of the figure of Eve, in order to trace a circumscribed mythology of perverse reproduction before, and within, *L'Éve future*. In this chapter, I would like to begin with another brief reflection on Villiers's metatextuality, to grant ourselves an entry point into an extended reading of the figure of the artificial woman and the question of authenticity. As previously discussed, in his early lamentations in the novel Edison reopens the question of man's solitary existence by parroting the words of God upon his creation of Eve: *Il n'est pas bon que l'Homme soit seul!* (104). I suggest that both his performative reiteration of these biblical words, and the narrative return to the precise moment Eve can be reconfigured, a return that allows the novel to prepare its own enigmatic relationship with the notion of "recording" as well as re-re-production. In the course of his monologic discourse Edison usurps the authority of another important

[1] Given that much emphasis has been placed on Villiers's strategic and subversive use of epigraphs, one might note here that Jean Baudrillard uses a 'citation' from *Ecclesiastes* for the epigraph to *Simulacra and Simulation* that seems to be completely fictionalized. It reads, "The simulacra is never what hides the truth–it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 1.

biblical pronouncement in Livre I, chapitre IX, "Photographies de l'histoire du monde." Edison bewails the loss of "visions disparues," proclaiming "Oui, oui, tout s'efface! … même les reflets sur le collodion, même les pointillés sur les feuilles d'étain. *Vanité des vanités ! tout est, bien décidément, vanité*" (129). We recognize that Edison recites the first line of *Ecclesiastes* from *The Old Testament*, excerpted in the epigraph above. Believed to be written by Qohelet, son of King David, the book of *Ecclesiastes* muses on the futility inherent in the worldly endeavors of man; a great portion of the book reflects indirectly on the inevitably of death. Instead of reiterating the words and denoting their original author, Edison reproduces these sentiments from *Ecclesiastes* as his own, thus severing them from their original context. Villiers reflects upon this notion of vanity in numerous and distinct ways within *L'Éve future* as well as other texts, including a short story entitled *L'annonciateur,* which he inscribes with the epigraph "Habal habalim, vêk'hol habal!" – a transliteration of the original Hebrew version of the first line of *Ecclesiastes*. From the Hebrew word *habal*, meaning vanity, Villiers names Evelyn Habal, a direct prototype of Miss Alicia Clary in *L'Éve future*. Her name, encapsulating both the figure of Eve as well as the notion of *habal*/vanity, establishes her as the paradigmatic figure for artificial re-generation.

More conspicuously, Villiers names Livre V, chapitre II "Rien de nouveau sous le soleil," a direct citation from the French translation of *Ecclesiastes*, and further inscribes the chapter with the following epigraph: "*Et j'ai reconnu que* cela même *était une vanité"* (286). In the chapter, Edison preaches to Ewald, "que dans l'Amour-passion, tout n'était que vanité sur mensonge, illusion sur inconscience, maladie sur mirage," insisting that he can answer Ewald's need to "aimer zéro" with his "l'Andréide ... n'est que les

premières heures de l'Amour immobilisées" (289). In order to convince Ewald that *l'andréïde* Hadaly will be more true to the enterprise of loving a 'real' woman, Edison expounds on the inextricable connection between the human condition and endless reproducibility. We can hear the echo of Villiers's own authorial strategy, and perhaps the theory behind his use of epigraphs, here:

> vous croyez donc que l'on improvise quoi que ce soit? qu'on ne *récite* pas toujours? – Mais, enfin, lorsque vous priez Dieu, est-ce que tout cela n'est pas réglé, jour par jour, dans ces livres d'oraisons qu'enfant vous avez appris par cœur? En un mot ne lisez-vous pas, ou ne récitez-vous pas, toujours, les *mêmes* prières du matin et du soir, lesquelles ont été composées, *une fois pour toutes et pour le mieux*, par ceux qui ont eu qualité pour cela? ... En vérité, toute parole n'est et ne peut être qu'une redite: – et il n'est pas besoin de Hadaly pour se trouver, toujours, en tête-à-tête avec un fantôme.
>
> Chaque métier humain a son ensemble de phrases, – où chaque homme tourne et se vire jusqu'à la mort; et son vocabulaire, qui lui semble si étendu, se réduit à une centaine, au plus, de phrases types, constamment récitées. (292)

Edison divulges to Ewald that all words are recitations, that all men are nothing but parrots and that *everything is a reproduction, a copy* – affirming Qohelet's proclamation that, despite the vain enterprises of men, *there is no new thing under the sun*. Hadaly will represent an artificial copy of Edison's view of humankind, a being that represents a catalogue of masculine citation and the embodiment of male history; thus, a tool for man's self-preservation. But although Hadaly represents the apotheosis of artificiality, she is not as *new* as one might think. In fact, Hadaly is *une redite*, a rewriting of two antique, female figures: the God-made companion Eve as well as the man-made archetype of beauty and ideality that had asserted its prominence in nineteenth-century France, the *Venus de Milo* (see Fig. I).

I. Venus Transference

In "The Decadent Goddess: *L'Eve future* and the *Venus de Milo*," Marie Lathers argues that the novel may be "as much a revision on the history of the *Venus de Milo* as it is a reconstruction of the myth of Eve."[2] As with the figure of Eve, the history of this specific art object in nineteenth-century France reflects the cultural moment's obsession with "the incorporation of the antique ideal into modernity's technological constructions of woman and, furthermore, the confrontation between traditional ("classical") views of art and the bourgeois will to copy most notably evident in the rise of photography."[3] As Lathers makes note, Villiers had numerous possibilities of archetypal Venuses, but had settled on the *Venus victrix*, or the *Venus de Milo*, which had been discovered on the island of Milos in 1820 and subsequently replaced the *Medici Venus* as "the French archetype of ideal feminine beauty" after being installed in the Louvre by Louis XVIII.[4] The revival of interest in the Venus figure, brought about through the archeological excavation of the statue as artifact, analogizes the very reverberations of the antique feminine ideal as modern icon in literature and art. The Paris Salon of 1863 marked a climatic moment in this cultural obsession over Venus representations; so many Venus paintings were exhibited there that Théophile Gautier christened it "The Salon of

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[2] Marie Lathers, "The Decadent Goddess: L'Eve future and the Venus de Milo" in *Jeering Dreamers: Villiers de l'Isle Adam's L'Eve future at our fin de siècle*, John Anzalone, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 50.

[3] *Ibid*., 50.

[4] Art historians Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott extend the symbolic significance of the Venus de Milo's installment in the Louvre, which "secured for her, in her dual capacity of ancient object and modern icon, a place which worked simultaneously for the elevation of beauty and the erasure of the sexual. As Ian Jenkins has made clear, nineteenth-century arrangements of antique sculpture tended initially to follow the conventions of an earlier era, conventions he characterises by a phrase taken from political discourse, 'the chain of being.' Accordingly, antiquities were grouped by estate not chronology. Photographs of the salles des antiquitiés at the Louvre dating from as late as the 1870s indeed confirm that the Venus de Milo presided over a section of long gallery lined with other divinities – Venuses, in the main – rather than a place populated by a heterogeneous assembly of fourth-century Greek works, the era from which she was thought to hail" (7). For more information of the original installment of Venus in the Louvre see Arscott and Scott's "Introducing Venus" in *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Venuses."[5] As Jennifer Shaw establishes in "The figure of Venus: rhetoric of the ideal and the Salon of 1863," because Venus was the perfect vehicle for "the expression of 'the ideal' in art, her representation also brought with it anxieties about the power of masculine creativity."[6] Accordingly, Shaw suggests that the Salon of 1863's veritable fixation on Venus representations was "symptomatic of a need to assert the primacy of masculine creativity and control, both of which were perceived – consciously or not – as under threat."[7] Man's appropriation of a generative image – like the fertile Venus or Eve the primordial mother – acts paradoxically as the means for the articulation of his own generative power.

The fact that Miss Alicia has "la splendeur de la *Venus victrix* humanisée" is both the cause of her attractiveness and the nexus of Lord Ewald's downfall (138). Though her resemblance to the famous Venus statue is to be envied and adored, Villiers presents the humanization of such a divine image as utterly disturbing, monstrous. Understanding love from the standpoint of reproduction induces a shift in perspective that shows Alicia as a "pilori de cette curiosité" – a freak of the nature that formed her. Ewald acknowledges the disharmony: "entre le corps et l'âme de Miss Alicia, ce n'était pas une disproportion qui déconcertait et inquiétait mon entendement: c'était un *disparate*" (140). Ewald finds this mismatch between Alicia's body (Divine) and her soul (too human) so distressing that, on his own, he can find no other alternative to consider except suicide. Edison categorizes Miss Alicia's resemblance to a work of art as a sign of degeneracy

[5] Jennifer Shaw, "The figure of Venus: rhetoric of the ideal and the Salon of 1863," in *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 90.
[6] *Ibid*., 91.
[7] *Ibid*., 92.

and he conjectures that falling in love with this de-generated image has caused Ewald to contract a disease:

> Ce charmant seigneur, qui n'aperçoit pas … que cette ressemblance avec la statue dont on reconnaît l'empreinte en la chair de cette femme, oui! que cette ressemblance — n'est que *maladive*, que ce doit être le résultat de quelque *envie*, en sa bizarre lignée ; [...] c'est un phénomène aussi anormal qu'une géante! Ressembler à la *Venus victrix,* n'est chez elle, qu'une sorte d'éléphantiasis dont elle mourra. Difformité pathologique, dont sa pauvre nature est affligée. — N'importe, il est mystérieux que cette monstruosité sublime soit arrivée juste au monde pour légitimer absolument ma première andréïde! (354-355)

In a book that symbolizes technological reproduction as the highest power, this 'natural' projection of an ideal artistic image upon a mortal woman – *l'empreinte en la chair de cette femme* – proves to be *maladive*, the basest instance of monstrosity. Although Alicia resembles the *Venus victrix*, the problem arises that *she* is not *it* but only a biological bastardization of the ideal work of art. Additionally, her own self-love and self worth directly conflict with the desires of Ewald. "[S]i elle était privée de toute pensée," Ewald declares, he then might be able to understand her. After all, "La *Vénus* de marbre, en effet, *n'a que faire de la Pensée*. La déesse est voilée de minéral et de silence" (156). In spite of the fact that the man-made lines of the Venus statue faithfully reflect the caliber of his love, his desire is thwarted on account of his beloved Venus being born of woman. Ewald's conundrum is doubled over to reflect man's foremost misfortune – being the human descendant of mother Eve. He inquisitively demands, "Mais comment comprendre une Vénus victorieuse [qui,] ayant retrouvé ses bras au fond de la nuit des âges et apparaissant au milieu de la race humaine [...]?" (156). How does one negotiate a creature so heterogeneous, the Divine (man-made) trapped in the earthly (woman-made)?

Miss Alicia Clary, functioning as a symptom of a "bizarre lignée" of female degeneracy, becomes the necessary warrant for Edison's project of artificial generation.

The novel's original title illuminates a gendered paradox, inherent in the concept of the *andréïde*, suggesting that herein artificial reproduction is monstrous. In essence, however, the novel shows that the mechanical body of the *andréïde* replaces the true aberration. In a curious reversal of the trajectory of the narrative of *Frankenstein*, Villiers's fictional Thomas Edison is compelled to replace God's version of woman (Eve) with his own (future Eve) not as part of an ill-conceived scheme to usurp nature but in order to correct "quelle inadvertance d'un Créateur!" (161). Alicia Clary, a hybrid of base sentimentality and external beauty, turns out to be the novel's most veritable monster. The monstrosity in *L'Ève future* – Alicia Clary, whom Ewald deems *L'Irrémédiable* – is not the product of artificial reproduction but its very cause.[8]

Taking into consideration that Venus came to symbolize art itself at this point in France's cultural history, Ewald's inability to reconcile the disparity between the Venus statue and Alicia Clary symbolizes Villiers's meta-literary occupation with the irreconcilable differences between real women and their artistic depictions.[9] But the gulf between Ewald and Alicia only becomes impossibly widened when Ewald attempts to amend the incongruity of Alicia and her doppelgänger statue by bringing them face-to-face in the Louvre. Ewald recounts to Edison the inevitably horrific (and entirely laughable, for the reader) "scène de reconnaissance":

> « Une fois, à Paris, il s'est passé ce fait extraordinaire. Doutant de mes yeux, doutant de ma raison, l'idée sacrilège! – folle, je l'avoue! – me prit d'une

[8] Ewald's early description of his predicament with Alicia ("Mais cette femme! . . . Ah ! c'est l'Irrémédiable") alludes to the Baudelaire poem "L'Irrémédiable," in Les fleurs du mal (1857). Of course, the term also encapsulates the idea of evil by including the word *diable*, the devil, within it. Miss Alicia is likened to be the irrefutable devil of the novel, evil, the monstrous representation of female nature and female vanity that must be conquered.

[9] Arscott and Scott contend that, "The passage from Venus as a figure for artistic creativity to Venus as a sign for art itself is easily made. Since Venus is pre-eminent in beauty, as well as in sexual love, her presence in art triggers a meditation on the domain of the aesthetic": "Introducing Venus," 5.

> confrontation de cette morne vivante avec la grande pierre, qui est, vous dis-je, son image, avec la VENUS VICTRIX. […]
> « Miss Alicia releva son voile, cette fois. Elle regarda la statue avec un certain étonnement ; puis, stupéfaite, elle s'écria naïvement :
> « Tiens, MOI ! »
> « L'instant d'après, elle ajouta :
> « Oui, mais moi, j'ai mes bras, et j'ai l'air plus distinguée. […]
> « Mais, si l'on fait tant de frais pour cette statue, alors, – j'aurai du SUCCÈS?
> « Je l'avoue, cette parole me donna le vertige. (163-164)

Alicia's child-like misrecognition of her own image reflected by the *Venus* statue emblematizes a mirror-stage moment, through which Alicia magically occupies the position of the whole subject on the other side of the mirror rather than the one looking for necessary support. Alicia perceives her completeness as a human body – she possesses the arms the *Venus* lacks – as an extension into her value as a subject. She presumes that if a statue without arms costs as much as it does, then inevitably she, a *Venus* with all her parts, should fetch a fair amount of success as a performer on the stage. This far too facile, subjective identification on the part of Alicia yields Ewald's permanent unease as a subject. Subsequently, he succumbs to a state of vertigo brought forth from the abyss betwixt his own lofty ideals and Alicia's all too bourgeois self-identity.[10]

Ewald's imaginary call – "QUI M'ÔTERA CETTE ÂME DE CE CORPS?" – gets answered with a real response, Edison's already established scientific equation for creating the ideal woman. Edison effectively takes the inverse of this problem as its very solution. This also presents something like the inverse of the tale of Pygmalion, or at least the paradox of Pygmalion. While the ultimate result of these technological revisions of Alicia will be Hadaly, the ultimate theorem of the animation of the inanimate, here the

[10] Villiers adopts the disequilibrium problem he discerns in Alicia, between body and soul, as his own disordered physiological condition – vertigo. This physiological condition and its relationship to the disparity between 'real' and the Ideal will be discussed in the fourth chapter, on Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

first step is the actually rendering of Alicia back into the statue from which she was modeled. Edison will reproduce the external image of Miss Alicia Clary onto a mechanical body in order to reproduce her in the form of the *andréïde*. Alicia, who already resembles the *Venus*, will be made back into a statue; her image will be transferred by means of the techniques of photosculpture onto the body of the *andréïde*.[11] But Edison must dupe Alicia to 'pose' for a statue in her likeness by appealing to her bourgeois vanity and by taking advantage of her ignorance of the art world. In order to gain full access to Alicia's image, Edison convinces her that having oneself made in marble is "à la mode," and that stage performers are indeed replacing their portraits with statues. The ease by which Edison can manufacture Alicia's image is orchestrated upon her desire to be a distinguished actress: "Par une sorte de mise en abyme (qui constitue aussi un clin d'œil au lecteur), la statue 'en Eve' pour laquelle Alicia Clary prend la pose n'est qu'un alibi pour permettre la vraie sculpture de son corps, c'est-à-dire le *vol de son image*, par le nouveau procédé qu'est la photosculpture" (emphasis mine).[12]

Villiers (via Edison) further fictionalizes Eve by metamorphosing her from being to pose, thereby destabilizing any value of the primordial human mother except as an artificial "rôle" for Alicia to play. Edison convinces Alicia that her own likeness in a statue is necessary: "Indispensable! – Voyez-vous, une magnifiquement belle statue de cantatrice, cela prédispose les dilettanti, désoriente la multitude et enlève les directeurs. Posez donc en Ève : c'est la pose la plus distinguée. Nulle autre artiste, je le gagnerais,

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[11] Photosculpture is a "process in which photographs taken of a subject from a number of different points of view are used to trace successive outlines on a block of modeling clay" (*OED online*). Photosculpture, as discussed in the first chapter, was invented in 1861 and coincided with the development of stereoscopic photography. In an article for the *Moniteur de le photographie* in May 1861, the inventor Villème gave a description of the production: "de la sculpture exactement semblable au modèle."
[12] Geisler-Szmulewicz 365.

n'osera jouer ni chanter après vous l'*Ève future*" (348).[13] Villiers's concept of *an Eve of the future* markedly suggests a complete transformation of Eve's value as a figure, from human "being" in the biblical Book of Genesis to the referential and entirely artificial likeness of woman – a Symbol of femininity. Alicia relinquishes her agency as an actress to the directorial control of Edison/Ewald. From this perspective, Edison repairs the breach that transpires in the scene where Ewald fails to achieve the superposition of the *Venus victrix* and Miss Alicia by putting them side-by-side at the Louvre.

Although the novel aims at the vision of a female made supplementary to the male subject, one of Villiers's most powerful contributions to this shifting mythology will be the novel's illustration that a stable sense of identity, like Alicia's faulty self-recognition in the *Venus victrix*, is mythical. *L'Ève future* suggests that, in order to supplement the vicarious male identity, literature requires the establishment of woman not as *identité* but as solely *identique* (to man). When Ewald tries to overcome his amazement regarding Edison's Herculean claims, to "faire sortir du limon de l'actuelle Science Humaine un *Être fait à notre image*," he inquires about what the reproduction of woman's *identité* entails. Edison's response, both emphatic and comical, suggests a total dissolution of the term, replacing any viability of woman's identity in favor of her identicality:

> -- Vous pouvez reproduire l'IDENTITÉ d'une femme? Vous, né d'une femme?
>
> -- Mille fois plus identique à elle-même … qu'elle-même! Oui, certes! Puisque pas un jour ne s'envole sans modifier quelques lignes du corps humain, et que la science physiologique nous démontre qu'il renouvelle *entièrement* ses atomes tous les sept ans, environ. Est-ce que le corps existe à ce point! Est-ce qu'on se ressemble jamais à soi-même? Alors que cette femme, vous, et moi-même, nous avions d'âge une heure vingt, étions-nous ce que nous sommes ce soir? Se ressembler! Quel est ce préjugé des temps lacustres, ou troglodytes! (191)

[13] There is a similarity, here, between the male and female characters' desires, notably the desire to be *timeless*, a true chef-d'oeuvre: in Alicia's fictional case, as the ultimate performer/singer/actress.

In Edison's iterations, identity is the most mythical and elusive of concepts. In revolt, Edison's project of artificial generation operates as a most transparent metaphor for Villiers's own extra-fictional project, unified in the desire to reify the always already fractured status of a quite universal male subjectivity. Edison divulges that man's plight is unchanged from ancient to modern: "Il sent que lui seul, dans l'univers, n'est pas fini. […] Par un mouvement naturel — et sublime! — Il se demande *où il est*; il s'efforce de se rappeler *où* il commence" (256). Nineteenth-century French literature exploits the notion of the woman as an unknown masterpiece, signified by the mysterious *Venus victrix*, in order to refashion the man, the incomplete masterpiece, into a more fully realized subject – an artist.

II. Womanproof

Villiers's novel strikes an ambivalent tone toward science, its necessary collaborator in the artificial reproduction of woman. Cited in A. W. Raitt's "Préface" to the novel, Pierre Citron takes note that "au jugement de bien des connaisseurs un des plus étranges et des plus beaux romans qui aient jamais été conçus, et un chef-d'œuvre annonciateur de ce genre passionnant qui a hélas reçu le nom français de science-fiction."[14] Jorge Luis Borges affirms Citron's claim while simultaneously acknowledging Villiers's double-edged employment of science: "Son *Ève future* (1886) est l'un des premiers exemples de fiction scientifique qu'enregistre l'histoire de la littérature, et c'est aussi une satire de la science."[15] Despite his satiric tone intermittently adopted toward technology, Villiers admired equally the proof it could offer him in his literary quest for

[14] Citron in Raitt, "Préface" to *L'Ève future* 33.
[15] Borges in *Ibid*., 33.

an extra-literary, extra-sensory ideal. As Raitt asserts in his "Préface," "Villiers a toujours été fasciné par l'idée que les méthodes de la science positive pourraient un jour fournir *la preuve* irréfutable de la réalité du surnaturel et d'un monde au-delà de celui des apparences" (emphasis mine).[16] Outward appearances, in particular, had already become loathsome to Villiers by the mid-1880s; he had spent the good part of his life fighting to uphold the integrity of his noble name but had nevertheless ended up as impoverished financially as he was depleted psychically by modernity's progress. Once inspired to write the novel, Villiers worked unremittingly during the winter of 1879, often under the most desperate conditions. As friend Gustave Guiches reveals in "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam intime," "in the icy horror of a room in the rue de Maubeuge, which had been emptied of its furniture, lying on the floor flat on his stomach and diluting in water his last drops of ink, he wrote long chapters of *L'Ève future*."[17] By 1886, the year of *L'Ève future*'s publication, Villiers and literary friends Leon Bloy and J. K. Huysmans banded together to form the Council of Paupers, what A. W. Raitt calls a "mutual aid society, as well as an unofficial club for the vituperation of all that they hated in the modern world."[18] Accordingly, *L'Ève future* equivocates on the value of Industrial progress, at one moment lauding technology's powers, while at another seemingly admonishing men's overvaluation of scientific progress.

However, Villiers's foray into his science-fiction project also attests to a disappointment on a much more personal and even Romantic level, a failed engagement to Miss Anna Eyre Powell in 1873-1874. In sum, the Faustian wager Lord Ewald makes with Edison in the novel may be the distorted mirror image of Villiers's own contract

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[16] *Ibid*., 10.
[17] Guiches in *The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* 188.
[18] *Ibid*., 296.

with a mysterious matrimonial agent named La Houssaye. In his biography of the author, Raitt rather emphatically suggests that Villiers signs a contract "which must be one of the most incredible pacts since Faust's agreement with Mephistopheles," giving to La Houssaye "a signed promissory note for two hundred thousand francs, payable upon marriage to the person to whom" he would soon be introduced.[19] Upon their meeting, the precarious engagement became a dream come true against all odds. Miss Anna Eyre Powell, an Anglo-Irish heiress with money in her background and some training as a singer, had an interest in acquiring a French husband of noble birth. [20] A letter written by Villiers to good friend Stephen Mallarmé gives the scope of his enchantment with his soon-to-be bride: "I have fallen in love very late in life and it's the first time that I've been in love. How can I compare what is incomparable? I love an Angel *whose like is positively not to be found anywhere under the sun!* She is *the last one*, my dear friend, there can never be anyone better!" (emphasis mine).[21] But what Villiers believed was the incarnation of a beautiful dream soon became one of his grandest miseries. Although accounts of what went awry differ, John Payne, poet friend of Mallarmé and Villiers's contact during his visit with Anna in England, offered the following in a letter to Mallarmé: "I fear (as I have always feared) that the unfortunate outcome is the fault of the girl, a somewhat hysterical young person and a *poseuse*."[22] All accounts, according to Raitt, do confirm that Anna Eyre Powell, who later took the stage name Anna Eyre, was a romantically minded young lady who became a singer in Paris – on the surface level, a

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[19] *Ibid*., 139.
[20] Ibid., 141, footnote 23. The Eyre Powell country house was in Staffordshire, which is also where Villiers locates the seat of Alicia Clary's family in *L'Ève future*.
[21] *Ibid*., 141. I have placed emphasis on the sections of this quotation that directly replicate the sentiments expresses in the book of *Ecclesiastes*, excerpted epigraphically at the commencement of Part Two.
[22] *Ibid*., 143.

possible prototype for Alicia Clary. Raitt enforces the comparison in his "Préface" to *L'Ève future*: "Le souvenir de cet échec cuisant lui fait attribuer à Alicia bon nombre de traits visiblement empruntés à Anna Eyre ... il semble bien aussi que la mentalité d'Anna n'ait pas été très différente de celle d'Alicia."[23]

Because the new Eve is Industrial – "A la place de l'Eve de la légende oubliée, de la légende méprisée par la Science, je vous offre une Eve scientifique" – the concept rests on a compilation of proofs, or theorems, that reveal the motivation toward her conception as well as the means to create her. Conceivably, Villiers identified with Adam's misplaced trust in Eve; in *Paradise Lost,* Adam calls Eve the "last and best" of God's creations, just as Villiers calls Anna both his first love and "the last one" in his letter above. After being duped by Eve into committing Original Sin, Milton's Adam inveighs against not having "proof enough" of her once seeming virtuousness. Likewise embittered, Villiers's entire novel directly answers the call of Adam by being written as a theorem for a new Eve, or a new Anna, to more adequately supplement man's loneliness and proffer renewed happiness. As we will examine, the ultimate proof *is* Hadaly, the new and improved love object in the age of technological reproduction. And, in the reverse, the ultimate love *is* proof itself. Consequently, I shall focus in this section on two types of proof, mathematic and photographic, offered by Edison within the novel as mitigative blueprints for artificial woman.

i. The Algebra of Identity

[23] Raitt edition of *L'Ève future* 12.

Edison's most consequential mathematic "proof" for Hadaly begins with the story of an already deceased Edward Anderson, an inventor and friend who had fallen victim to the charms of a theater performer named (Eve)lyn Habal, whose name suggest she embodies the plight of *Ecclesiastes* – vanity.[24] The undoing of Anderson frightens Edison so drastically as to influence him to create a female simulacra *before* Ewald ever comes to visit, in a curious temporal reversal that mimics Edison's desire to reproduce a future Eve just *before* the Eve of the past was ever created. In the same manner that the myth of Adam and Eve acts as the foundation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Anderson-Evelyn tale acts as the primary narrative impetus for the Ewald-Alicia story, which unfolds in the real time of the novel. In brief, the background story goes as follows. One night at the theater Anderson falls for the paltry charms of theater performer Evelyn; Edison's telling of the story to Ewald not surprisingly suggests Anderson's innocence in the matter. As a result of their tepid affair, Anderson leaves his wife and children, loses his job, and falls into debt as well as psychic disrepair. Anderson ultimately ends his own life and his death incites Edison to undertake his andréïde project, which he now employs to avoid Ewald from meeting the same fate as Anderson. As Edison himself explains, "'Alors, continua Edison, ayant ainsi rassemblé ces preuves que mon malheureux ami n'avait jamais serré dans ses bras qu'une morne chimère et que, sous cet attirail non pareil, l'être hybride de sa passion se trouvait être aussi faux lui-même que son amour, — au point de ne plus sembler que de l'*Artificiel illusoirement vivant*'" (274). Edison draws from scientific reasoning that there must be "des milliers de cas à peu près identiques à celui-ci" (274). Edison undertakes this project because the fear instilled by the Anderson-Evelyn

[24] As A. W. Raitt footnotes in the 1993 Gallimard edition of *L'Ève future*: "Villiers avait mis en épigraphe à L'Annonciateur dans les Contes cruels en 1883 la phrase: 'Habal habalim, vêk'hôl habal', c'est-à-dire la 'vanité des vanités' de l'Ecclésiaste. Le nom signifie donc 'Vanité' (420).

prototype story threatens the livelihood of men collectively – neither Anderson nor Ewald is an original.

After presenting the Anderson-Evelyn story as *preuve*, Edison comes to the conclusion, "d'obtenir de la Science une équation de l'Amour." He tries to quell the now collective epidemic brought upon man, and to act as universal savior of men, by reducing the problem to a simple mathematical proof, or what Sylvie Jouanny calls the novel's "l'algèbre de l'identité."[25] Edison claims quite matter-of-factly, "Miss Evelyn me représentait l'*x* d'une équation des plus élémentaires, après tout, puisque j'en connaissais deux termes: Anderson et sa mort" (252). The foundational mathematical terms derived from the Anderson-Evelyn story are understood accordingly: woman with consciousness (+1) negates male identity (-1). Woman's projection of consciousness negates man's control over the meaning of her image. Edison recognizes that man cannot make a positive identity out of a negation already inherent in the subjectivity of woman. In place of Anderson's all-too-real "l'être hybride de sa passion" Edison crafts an equally artificial, hybrid creature, but of a scientific sort instead. He builds the blueprint for the *andréïde* upon a revised attempt at providing man with *love degree zero*: negate consciousness in woman (-1) by projecting (both psychically as well as photographically) male desire on female form (+1) = Hadaly, or the Ideal.[26]

ii. Proto-Cinematic Woman and the Dance of Death

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[25] Sylvie Jouanny, *L'actrice et ses doubles: Figures et représentations de la femme de spectacle à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Genève: Droz, 2002) 310.

[26] Edison claims that "le nom de Hadaly est gravé en ces mêmes lettres iraniennes où il signifie l'IDÉAL," to which Villiers adjoins the following footnote as "proof" of the usage: "Selon Gilbert Lazard, orientaliste consulté par Pierre Citron, le mot n'existe pas sous cette forme en iranien, mais 'had-é-ali' (en iranien: limité supérieure) peut être pris métaphoriquement au sens d' 'être suprême'" (209).

Edison turns Evelyn into a symbol (x) in an algebraic equation but, even more tellingly, he submits her to becoming a photographic proof as well, making a trial print of her in order to visually investigate 'woman,' for her re-production into Hadaly.[27] It is the photographic proof Edison compiles to illustrate Evelyn as "une morne chimère" that not only strips the performer of her ability to duplicitously disillusion but also provides Edison with the very technological platform to replace woman with a simulacra. In the chapter entitled "Dance Macabre," Villiers narrates the process of an archaic cinematic projection, a film Edison takes of Evelyn before her death in order to illustrate the seductress's true 'nature:'[28]

> Une longue lame d'étouffe 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'étouffe, 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.
>
> La vision, chair transparente, miraculeusement photochromée, dansait, en costume pailleté, une sorte de danse mexicaine populaire. Les mouvements s'accusaient avec le fondu de la Vie elle-même, grâce aux procédés de la photographie successive, qui, le long d'un ruban de six coudées, peut saisir dix minutes des mouvements d'un être sur des verres microscopiques, reflétés ensuite par un puissant lampascope. (265)

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[27] In terms of photography, according to the *OED online*, a proof is usually taken to mean a "trial print from a particular negative" or "a test print made for the purpose of evaluating subject composition: density, color, balance, etc."

[28] The title of this chapter, of course, is a direct allusion to Baudelaire's poem of the same name from *Les Fleurs du mal*. The chapter's focus on the proto-cinematic female ideal can be regarded as double-edged. It speaks to a desire from within the narrative (Edison's) but also from Villiers's real detestation of industrialization. A. W. Raitt discusses the literary relevance of Villiers's friendship with and admiration for Baudelaire in *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement Symboliste*. Raitt writes "Baudelaire autant que Villiers est horrifié par la façon dont ses contemporains se sont entichés de l'idéal du progrès scientifique; telle attaque de Villiers contre cette idée semble reprendre les expressions mêmes de Baudelaire. Celui-ci écrit par exemple: 'La mécanique nous aura tellement américanisés, le progrès aura si bien atrophié en nous toute la partie spirituelle, que rien, parmi les rêveries sanguinaires ou anti-naturelles des utopies, ne pourra être comparé à ses résultats positifs'. Et Villiers s'écrie: 'Ces 'conquêtes de l'Homme moderne', enfin, leur semblaient infiniment remarqués, surtout, le quasi-simiesque atrophiement du Sens-surnaturel qu'elles coûtent (...) et l'espèce d'ossification de l'âme qu'elles entraînent'" (77).

Rather than being drawn to Evelyn dancing, Villiers's reader is instead directed to marvel over the dance's technological reproduction, "grâce aux procédés de la photographie successive" in the hands of Edison. Evelyn's real skin no longer holds any fascination after being turned into an illusive representation "miraculeusement photochromée," gracing the body of "l'apparition en sa taille humaine."

It is not the real woman but the filmic one, this archaic cinematic projection as successive photography, which grasps our utmost attention. Edison is able to control and contain Evelyn's performance; she is now "caught" on film, the actress taken over by the director. As Rhonda Garelick contends in *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle*: "Edison's performance seems to overtake Evelyn's in importance. Any element of interest or appeal in her Mexican dance has been replaced by fascination with the movements of mechanical reproduction … This slippage from cabaret dance to filmic or photographic procedure announces the conflation of women's bodies and the mechanical, cinematic images that will come to characterize mass culture."[29] Villiers's novel professes to replace the real with something infinitely more realistic, the simulation of the real, forcing his reader to ultimately discern the real as a *lie*. Instead, Edison creates Hadaly because the collective male desire here, reflected through the figure of the adorned dancer on film, is the cult of the fake. It is the artificial that engenders this novel's *truth*.

In the chapter "Dance Macabre," the process of successive photography mechanizes Evelyn. To be sure, the living Evelyn is no longer of consequence in the

[29] Rhonda Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 90.

filmed scene of her Mexican dance.[30] Here, the novel predisposes Ewald to loving Hadaly by forcing the reader to recognize that Edison falls in love with the very *idea* of a photographic, artificialized woman: "L'électricien semblait plongé dans une extase d'amoureux: l'on eut dit qu'il s'attendrissait lui-même" (266). Woman becomes mechanical in the narrative even *before* the emergence of *andréïde* Hadaly. Edison contrives the concept of a mechanical woman from this proto-cinematic mechanization of the woman's image. On film, woman is composed of "chair transparente, miraculeusement photochromée," an image that provides a fitting foreshadowing of the *andréïde* that Edison creates from this photographic proof, a being literally enrobed in photo-chromatic skin. In the chapter entitled "L'Épiderme," Edison explains to Ewald the scientific equation of fitting Hadaly with mechanically produced skin, which Edison contends will be as true as the real thing:

> Les verres coloratifs impriment donc sur cet épiderme factice (une fois celui-ci adhérent au moulage même de la carnation) la teinte stricte de la nudité que l'on reproduit: or c'est la qualité du satinage de cette molle substance, si élastique et si subtil, qui vitalise … et ceci au point de bouleverser complètement les sens de l'Humanité. Il devient tout à fait impossible de distinguer le modèle de la copie. C'est la nature *et rien qu'elle*. (330)

Edison asserts that the cinematic copy of woman will be indistinguishable from the living woman. This passage further suggests, in its capitulation of the origins of cinematic projection and its conflation with the representation of the woman, that woman symbolizes more than the mere object in front of the camera's lens. Rather, the very representation of the female establishes the psychic substratum for the cinema as a modernized, mechanical means of representing the ideal. Annette Michelson offers that Villiers's novel stages the female body not merely as voyeuristic object, but more

[30] Andre Bazin takes this scene as a primary instance of the development of cinematic technology catching up with the mythology of representation of the woman in "The Myth of Total Cinema."

vigorously as "the fantasmatic ground of cinema itself."[31] Incidentally, some of the earliest films produced by Thomas A. Edison used the figure of the dancing woman as the mesmerizing force for projection via kinetoscope, the earliest motion picture device, which was invented by Edison and his employee William Kennedy Dickson between 1889 and 1892. In 1894, eight years after the publication of *L'Ève future*, Annabelle Whitford Moore, one of the first onymous women in early cinema, performed the *Butterfly Dance* and the *Serpentine Dance* in Edison's Black Maria studio (see Fig. II). Her *Butterfly Dance,* in particular, was the very first film to be viewed the way we view films today, by means of what was to be marketed by Edison himself under the name vitascope.[32]

However, the primitive film in the narrative also holds the authority to negate the illusory power of the female performer by capturing what Edison would conversely call "*la vraie*" of the living woman's fakery. In other words, the male projection of the filmic female image overturns the power of Evelyn's own force of self-representation as a performer in the theater.[33] Immediately after the pleasurable film of Evelyn dancing and singing, Edison shows Ewald one of an entirely other character: "Une seconde bande

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[31] In her 1984 article "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy," Annette Michelson opens up the very question of how we might "begin to think that body in its cinematic relations somewhat differently? Not as the mere object of a cinematic iconography of repression and desire – as catalogued by now in the extensive literature on dominant narrative in its major genres of melodrama, film noir, and so on – but rather as the fantasmatic ground of cinema itself." Annette Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy," *October* Vol 29 (Summer 1984) 19.

[32] The kinetoscope was renamed the vitascope in order for the Edison Manufacturing Company to agree to market the invention, under a new name that would be associated only with Edison. Upon its premier in 1896, *The New York Times* proclaimed, "The views were all wonderfully real and singularly exhilarating." For more information see *Thomas A. Edison and the Modernization of America*, 131. For more information on the cinematic projection of the Butterfly Dance see Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[33] Evelyn's skill as a performer is similar to that of Alicia Clary's. Early on, Ewald tells Edison: "Des personnes compétentes lui ayant assuré que sa voix était fort belle, ainsi que sa figure, et qu'elle représentait fort bien, elle était fondée à croire qu'elle aurait du 'succès'" (144). Though these women act as good re-presenters, ultimately they are bad copies.

héliochromique se tendit […] commença de glisser devant la lampe avec la rapidité de l'éclair, et le réflecteur envoya dans le cadre l'apparition d'un petit être exsangue, vaguement féminin, aux membres rabougris, aux joues creuses, à la bouche édentée et presque sans lèvres" (266). By capturing these indelible images of Evelyn Habal stripped of her feminine ornamentation, Edison handily proves that the actual woman under the makeup and mirage is monstrous: a shriveled up, bloodless imp of a figure, vaguely female in gender. The 'real' woman is not real at all but a chimerical monster, an apparition drained of all blood and life, only vaguely representative of a woman. Making her the object rather than the subjective force of the performance by technological means, Edison does not create a monster but instead reveals the true monstrosity that is (Eve)lyn. Edison uses this photographic, cinematic proof of Evelyn's hideousness in order to begin his sensible assault on Ewald's insensible enchantment with Miss Alicia Clary.

Mythologized through the artificial woman, the quest for masculine literary subjectivity becomes a photographic drive by the turn of the century. As a result, the ideal woman in *L'Ève future* is not only objectified by the eye of the camera and rendered static, but she also symbolizes the photographic process itself, the lens through which man sees his ideal self by means of making woman a photographic object. Edison amplifies the appropriateness of photographic reproduction for his project by showing that, in both the case of the "living" woman (Alicia) and his future Eve (Hadaly), man's love is nothing but a matter of *projection*. As film theorist Raymond Bellour suggests in his article "Ideal Hadaly," "Instead of acting as a mirror, and 'naturally' refracting everything, Alicia becomes this 'creature of death' who destroys both look and thought

'in her horrible *camera obscura*.'"[34] Lord Ewald's disequilibrium caused by "cette maîtresse, dualité animée" (164) parallels what Bellour suggests is the impossibility, in completing the *camera obscura* metaphor, of Ewald striking the "optimum distance where he would be reflected by the mirror-body of the love object."[35] In fact, the narrative remodeling of woman from Alicia to Hadaly corresponds to the reformation of the photographic process, from the rudimentary capabilities of the camera obscura to the sophisticated aptitude of the cinematic apparatus for the representation of illusory life.[36] As Jonathan Crary proposes, by the early 1800s "the rigidity of the camera obscura, its linear optical system, its fixed positions, its categorical distinction between inside and outside ... were all too inflexible and unwieldy for the needs of the new century."[37] The inability to find within Alicia the true projection of Ewald's desire mirrors the impossibility of striking a harmonious distance from the camera obscura, an inefficient 'technology.'

We return to the necessary allusion to the dilemma of Narcissus – the impossibility of taking one's projected image as love object. Edison's labor for love makes possible this impossibility, as the story of Pygmalion does in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and allows man to partake in an illusory existence wherein his beloved is an artificialized and feminized object of his own psychic, subjective projection. Edison triumphantly proclaims to Ewald, "Sa 'conscience' ne sera plus la négation de la votre,

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[34] Raymond Bellour, "Ideal Hadaly," *Camera Obscura* 15 (Fall 1986) 115.
[35] Ibid.,115.
[36] From the Latin for "darkened chamber," the camera obscura is an optical device consisting of a box with a pinhole in one side, which projects an image when light from the external scene passes through the hole. It was invented in eleventh-century Egypt and was consistently developed until the eighteenth-century, forming the basis for more modern camera inventions and photographic processes developed by Joseph Niépce, Louis Daguerre and William Fox Talbot in the early nineteenth-century.
[37] Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision," *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988) 42.

mais deviendra la semblance d'âme que préférera votre mélancolie. Vous pourrez évoquer en elle la présence radieuse *de votre seul amour*, sans redouter, cette fois, qu'elle démente votre songe!" (286). Edison knows that both Anderson's Evelyn Habal and Ewald's Alicia Clary function as *chimères*, hollow shells of being, and that man's love for these "real" women is nothing but an illusion: "Enfin, c'est cette vision objectivée de votre esprit, que vous appelez, que vous voyez, que vous CRÉEZ en votre vivante, *et qui n'est que votre âme dédoublée en elle"* (196). The objectivity of the photographic apparatus as it is employed in *L'Ève future*, as Raymond Bellour asserts, "is merely an apparent dialectic of illusion. The external image, the simulacrum which it reproduces, depends on the internal, mental image which can alone make it true for the mind."[38] In this context, a photographically objectified woman paradoxically becomes a subjective supplement for modern man – an extension of his psychic needs as well as an extension of his technological advancements.

III. Artificial Intelligence and The New Navel

I would like to offer a question, borrowed from Mary Jacobus, to frame the reading of *L'Éve future* at this point. It is simply, "Is There a Woman in This Text?" This question is the basis of inquiry, in her article of the same name, into the role played by the woman figure in Sigmund Freud's "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva," as well as the theoretical debates over the erasure of the woman in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While in our early examination of the *andréïde* we determined the figure to be a woman, in fact, Hadaly functions only as a Symbol of an Ideal femininity

[38] Bellour, "Ideal Hadaly" 113.

inaccessible through any of the 'real' women in the novel. She is primarily female because she masquerades that way. Both Alicia as actress and Hadaly as *andréïde* function as performers; however, Alicia has control over her representations while Hadaly does not. Hadaly *only acts like a woman*. She bears no genetic markers of her femininity. She has not been equipped with any sexual organs, so she is reproduced but *never* reproductive essentially. Acting like an actress is just another way Hadaly represents the second copy within a technologically enhanced environment wherein the copy supersedes the model. Mostly, Hadaly resembles women, either in the way she passively mimics Alicia's physical appearance or stands in as modernity's indexical Eve. 'Woman' as Symbol fulfills man's aforementioned desire to reconstitute her from a being with identity to being identical. The directorial control now lies undoubtedly with man. Unlike Eve or Alicia, though, Hadaly is unmistaken about her role. As she sheepishly acknowledges in her efforts to please Ewald, "Mais … voici que je t'adresse des questions, comme une femme! — Et il ne faut pas que je devienne femme" (383). Though she has been built to act like woman, she is never meant to be one. In actuality, Hadaly is a second copy, like the novel's first epigraph – for the real appeal of Miss Alicia is her resemblance to the *Venus victrix*. A copy of what is already a copy, Hadaly becomes a copy without an original; in turn, Hadaly becomes an original produced from a copy.[39]

Villiers produces a Symbol for the very ability to produce such a singular being, paradoxically, through the use of technologies that makes endless repetition possible. It is within this paradox that the reader may ascertain the novel's impossible veracity. What

[39] See Marie Lathers, "The Decadent Goddess" 61; she claims, in relation to her discussion of the statue of the Venus de Milo, that "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."

Villiers's novel conceives of is precisely something inconceivable, and yet something now readily accessible within the reproductive powers of these new technologies. In turn, Hadaly will be the first, the original, and the last of an entirely other species: an original without a copy. As with Victor Frankenstein, Edison's invention could easily lead to a factory for the mass production of *andréïdes*, of Hadalys. However, Edison dares not reproduce Hadaly a second time by the story's end, nor will she herself ever reproduce. The novel depicts the scientific reproduction of a female body using technologies that make endless reproducibility possible yet the *andréïde* body is made sterile deliberately. Void of any reproductive organs and wielding a dagger to enforce her chastity, Hadaly represents the blockage to any sense of reproduction. Like Frankenstein's wretch, she is the first and last of an entirely other species. Upon deeper reflection, Villiers's book of genesis becomes conversely an incredibly vampiric text, bestowing artificial life only to have it draw all real life out.

We may be able to return to the notion of the stereoscope and adopt its technological function as a reading strategy, to interpret the complex intermix of female characters in Villiers's novel. Of course, all of the female characters are of little consequence by the novel's climax because they become fragmented and fused into Hadaly.[40] Her represent-ability acts as the very locus of her power as a 'woman,' her ability to represent a multitude of female characters while retaining *une empreinte définitive* of none. Ewald causes Edison's Faustian victory at the novel's end by falling in

[40] In *Edison's Eve*, Gaby Wood finds appealing evidence that Edison in reality believed that women were perfectible creatures. I would like to offer this excerpt, as Wood does, from Edison's journal of 1885: "Thought of Mina, Daisy, Mamma G [the wife of one of his colleagues]. Put all 3 in my mental kaleidoscope to obtain a new combination à la Galton. Took Mina as basis, and tried to improve her beauty by discarding and adding certain features borrowed from Daisy and Mamma G"; *Edison's Eve* (New York: Knopf, 2002) 146.

love with Hadaly, unaware that she is *not* Alicia.[41] Ewald proves further that his love is predicated upon Hadaly's identicality to Alicia and not any true identity on the part of the woman. When he asks her at this moment of horrifying recognition "qui es-tu?" Hadaly must admit that she is *no one*, specifically because she is a multiplicity, the embodiment of reproduction as an Idea and the representative of Theory itself (374). She tries to make Ewald understand that her identity is as shape-shifting as his very desires: "C'est bien facile; si tu appuies le doigt de mon collier, je serai transfigurée en une femme de cette nature – et tu regretterais la disparue. J'ai tant de femmes en moi qu'aucun harem ne pourrait les contenir. Veuille, elles seront! Il dépend de toi de les découvrir en ma vision" (382). Herein, the concept behind Hadaly turns out to be even more enigmatic for the reader. While she contains within her the 'nature' of all female characters, she artificially represents her male lover as well. She is the ultimate realization of the fulfillment of male desire. Even further, Hadaly represents the corpus of men's knowledge and experience.

Hadaly represents artificial intelligence, then, on two levels. First, she is the product of the artificial intelligence that creates her, Edison and his machines. Technology constructs her body: two golden phonographs as lungs, photochromatic skin, etc. More notably, she becomes the sum of man's knowledge. Literature designs her speech. By means of the phonographic recordings made by her 'lungs,' Hadaly speaks the words already written by famous authors. However, love, too, is required, for without a forlorn lover Edison would never have been able to give life to the eternal feminine Ideal. In response to Ewald's query, Edison explains what Hadaly stands for: *"Une*

[41] This novel is fraught with difficulty in regards to allowing us a final interpretation of Villiers's authorial stance on technology (i.e. its benefit or its inherent destruction) through the narrative's final gestures (Ewald falling in love with Hadaly and later, when Hadaly burns aboard the ship on her voyage back to England with Ewald). Villiers's own take on technological advancements were, as previously determined, often paradoxical, which makes the novel's conclusions difficult to interpret on a moral level.

intelligence? non: l'INTELLIGENCE, oui." She is not a singular being, but a representative of the Symbolist's version of being-in-the-world. If the artificial is the novel's truth, then Hadaly represents its *Veritas*. Man's shared literary ambition to understand his origins through artificial re-creation is equally a quest for knowledge and mastery. Though Villiers's literary invocation of her is partly contemptuous, Hadaly answers the call for both and validates Villiers's novel as a book of genesis. Hadaly functions as a tropological Symbol of the very thing she lacks: a navel, of women and of 'woman.'[42] *L'andréïde* represents modernity's Symbolic and technological point of origin.

The ultimate promise Edison makes Ewald at one of the most exciting points of the novel is that man can regain his "paradis perdu" through this very possibility of a double projection, psychic and photographic. Accordingly, man can replace woman with an eternal, technological symbol of the feminine. However, the problem seems to dictate that woman was, in fact, *never* an original, and always a copy. To define her accordingly forces us to realize why the woman provides the ultimate provocation for the male author's ventures into technological reproducibility at this point in the cultural history. As Marie Lathers argues in "The Decadent Goddess," in "*L'Eve future*, femininity itself is the non-existent original, the copy that no woman can embody, and that Villiers and Edison try so desperately to (re)construct."[43] Edison reveals to Ewald the key equation in order to revolutionize the concept of woman – *technological reproduction between men*:

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[42] I am appropriating the understanding of the navel of women in Freud's dream of Irma's injection as discussed by Shoshana Felman in "The Dream from which Psychoanalysis Proceeds." Here, Hadaly functions as the navel by representing this 'knot' of women – Miss Alicia, Evelyn Habal, Sowana – from within the narrative as well as symbolizing the very notion of a technological navel, that is to say, a modern, prosthetic point of origin. For further discussion of the 'navel' and the knot of female figures in Freud's dream, see *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 68-120.

[43] Lathers, "The Decadent Goddess" 65.

"Tenez, mon cher lord, à nous deux, nous formons un éternel symbole: moi, je représente la Science avec la toute-puissance de ses mirages : vous, l'Humanité et son ciel perdu" (200). Strangely, *L'Ève future* reaffirms the quality of the human life borne of Adam and Eve in a most inhuman and curious range of substitutions: *andréïde* for female love object, man for mother. But Edison steadfastly asserts that these most unnatural stand-ins will, in turn, allow Ewald to regain his ability to be happy, to be human. As Edison challenges, "Et vous pèserez ensuite, au profond de votre conscience, si l'auxiliatrice Créature-fantôme qui vous ramènera vers le désir de la Vie n'est pas plus vraiment digne de porter le nom d'HUMAINE que le Vivant-spectre dont la soi-disant et chétive 'réalité' ne sut jamais vous inspirer que le soif de la Mort" (196-197).[44] Here, Villiers explodes the category of the human, revealing the intricate relationship between man and his mechanical Eve. Villiers alludes to the fact that to understand our own humanity we must paradoxically measure ourselves against the non-human, the post-human. This revelatory reaffirmation of life reflected off the non-living will renew Ewald's desire to live, at least momentarily.

IV. Vanité-Veritas-Vanitas

Nevertheless, we may reunite *L'Ève future* and *Frankenstein* (and their 'parent' text, *Paradise Lost*) regarding their inescapable, all too human endings – death. For *L'Ève* will consciously return to what we have suggested to be its textual prototype, the book of *Genesis*, but not until its very last chapter when, despite all attempts to repel

[44] This consideration of the 'real' woman as a "Vivant-spectre" reminds us of an earlier prototype of the Alicia Clary character (and perhaps the origin of her name as well), E.T.A. Hoffmann's fiancée Clara in *Der Sandmann*, who is considered by protagonist Nathaniel to be the real automaton. Villiers directly engages with the Hoffmann story, using a citation from it as the epigraph for the chapter "Phonograph's Papa," suggesting metaphorically a parallel between the Coppelius character and Edison in Villiers's novel.

time, it is *trop tard*.[45] The "Fatum" of the novel symbolizes the ultimate punishment for mankind's transgression of the Divine. That which man tries so vehemently to escape only inevitably returns – "Or Dieu se repentir d'avoir créé l'homme sur terre, et, pénétré de douleur en son cœur: Je détruirai l'homme, dit-il."[46] In the final chapter, Edison reads a story in the newspaper that reveals the fate of Lord Ewald, Hadaly and Miss Alicia Clary aboard the steamer the *Wonderful,* en route back to England.[47] The ship's rear cargo area catches fire, "enflammé[s] par une cause inconnue" and further incited by strong winds off the water. One might suggest that in an act of Divine retribution the mythological fire stolen by Prometheus, translated into the fire of electricity used to create Hadaly, serves to destroy them all by engulfing their ship in flames. The news story continues, telling of an "incident étrange" that occurs as the ship's captain ushers women and children onto the lifeboat: "Un jeune Anglais, Lord E***, s'étant saisi d'une barre d'écoutille, voulait pénétrer, de force, au milieu des flammes, parmi les caisses et colis en combustion. [...] Tout en se débattant, il déclarait vouloir sauver, à tout prix, du feu devenu terrible, une caisse renfermant un objet si précieux qu'il offrait l'énorme somme *de cent mille guinées à qui l'aiderait à l'arracher au sinistre*" (411). The news story also includes a list of lives lost when the first lifeboat capsizes. The first name on the list is "Miss *Emma-Alicia Clary, artistique lyrique*." At the very moment Edison flings this newspaper aside he receives a telegram from Ewald. The telegram reads: "*Ami, c'est de Hadaly seule que je suis inconsolable – et je ne prends le deuil que de cette*

[45] This last chapter's ("Fatum") epigraph is the only one from the Bible's book of *Genesis*.
[46] Villiers uses the Latin version of this citation for the actual epigraph of the chapter "Fatum"; this is the footnote by Satiat of the French translation, 409.
[47] Ewald tells Edison that he and Hadaly will be going to the "château d'Athelwold," if he wants to write. Villiers probably took the name of the castle from William Smith's *Athelwold: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1842).

ombre. –*Adieu*." Unfazed by the death of Alicia, Ewald mourns only for the loss of his Ideal, Hadaly. The reader is left to presume that Ewald reverts back to his only option, death, after losing his artificial love object, his proof of life.

In *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative*, Felicia Miller Frank suggests that "If the android is able to embody a reproduction of the hated and beloved Alicia that is proof against death, she is also a kind of messenger of death herself, metonymic of its realm, not only artificial Eve, but an artificial Eurydice as well."[48] A fuller examination of the figure of Hadaly in the book induces an understanding that she acts as the bearer of death, both its keeper and its trigger. All along, as Frank writes, "Hadaly is persistently garlanded by the iconography of death."[49] When she is first introduced, both to Ewald and to the reader, she stands as if by a tomb, shrouded in darkness and holding up a lantern at the entrance to the passage to Edison's laboratory, his underground Eden. She travels aboard the *Wonderful* in a coffin, inscribed with her name – Hadaly – on the front plaque. Indeed, Ewald had actually pronounced his wish for his ideal woman early on as *a dead woman*, who still retains the *appearance* of her living human features: "Contempler morte Miss Alicia serait mon désir, si la mort n'entraînait pas le triste effacement des traits humains!" (164). It is "la présence de sa forme" that Ewald desires, and in this way Hadaly responds to his need – a living snapshot of man's history, an artificial form divorced from matter, substance. But this equation also means death, not just *la morte Miss Alicia* and the death of the maternal function, but the destruction of the male artist, who will perish for having been led so astray by his own vanity. Although Hadaly is created indirectly as a response to the

[48] Felicia Miller Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 159.
[49] Ibid., 158.

feminine *vanité* inherent in the figures of Evelyn Habal and Alicia Clary, she comes to represent its irresistible return as the male artist's *Vanitas*. In art history, a seventeenth-century genre of Dutch still-life painting came to be known as *Vanitas*, incorporating symbols of mortality or mutability, the most prominent being the skull (see Fig. III & IV). From the Vulgate translation of *Ecclesiastes*' "vanity of vanities," Vanitas paintings became aesthetic reminders of human vanity and the futility of life. Hadaly, rather than embody the traditional concept of Vanitas as still-life painting, instead makes death into a modern, moving picture. Once seeming to be the "magnificent evocation" or artificial generation of Life by men, the novel only ends up re-inscribing, through a variety of exchanges, the *vanité* from which it sought asylum: from the *vanité* of the female performer, to man's illusory discovery of *Veritas* within the mechanical feminine, to the futility of a modern, cinematic *Vanitas* of which *L'Éve future* becomes apotheosis.

V. Postscript: Making Man into a Statue

In the spirit of *Ecclesiastes,* Villiers's future Eve reaffirms the vanity of male enterprise by the novel's end; however, Leon Bloy chose this literary figure as the prime Symbol of Villiers's artistic immortality as well as the mode for his symbolic resurrection. In life, Villiers had failed to ever achieve a permanent or harmonious relationship with a woman. From a broken engagement with Estelle Gautier in the early 1860s to the betrayal of betrothed Anna Eyre in 1873, Villiers's romantic life became a mixed catalogue of delusions and defeats. In his biography on the author, A. W. Raitt writes that "His impossibly lofty dreams led to traumatic awakenings [...] as real women obstinately (and understandably) failed to live up to them, so he increasingly took refuge

in a biting and cynical misogyny."[50] Villiers's writing of *L'Ève future* coincided with the beginning of his last romantic association, with a poor washer woman named Marie Dantine, with whom Villiers would stay, along with their illegitimate son Totor, until the end of his life. But in his last few years Villiers had truly become a pauper. A large group of literary friends, including Mallarmé and Huysmans, banded together to send set, monthly sums of money to Villiers, under the guise of royalties, to make sure he had enough to make ends meet. Villiers died in 1899 and his burial was as impoverished as his life had become. Huysmans and Mallarmé were able to buy a five-year plot for him in the Cimetière des Batignolles only after the unexpected generosity of Francis Magnard of *Le Figaro* made it financially possible.[51]

In 1906, Leon Bloy published *La resurrection de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, a pamphlet aimed at convincing people, and specifically the real Thomas A. Edison, to contribute funds for the erection of a statue of Villiers by Frédéric Blou. The statue, the frontispiece of Bloy's text, depicts the deceased Villiers in his casket, while his Ideal Woman lifts the lid of the sarcophagus (see Fig. V). This powerful image restores Villiers to life as a work of art – in a strange moment of mise-en-abyme between the real Villiers and his characterization of Alicia or Hadaly (as a living work of art) – and also restores symbolically the dream dashed at the end of his novel. An excerpt of Bloy's accompanying text instills the power and consequence of Villiers's literary reputation, manifest in his Promethean endeavor to revolutionize a new Eden and a new Eve for modern man:

> La centrale préoccupation, l'ombilic du poète singulier que fut l'auteur de l'*Eve future*, et ce qui doit être tout à fait intolérable aux imbéciles, c'était son besoin

[50] Raitt, *The Life of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* 374.
[51] *Ibid*., 364.

vraiment inouï d'une restitution de la femme. . . . Il s'agit d'un renouveau du Paradis terrestre, après le rigoureux hiver de six mille ans. Il s'agit de retrouver ce fameux Jardin de Volupté, symbole et *accomplissement* de la Femme, que tout homme cherche à tâtons depuis le commencement des siècles. [...]

Il en avait un besoin si furieux qu'après l'avoir cherchée, vingt ans, parmi les fantômes de ses rêves, il essaya résolûment de la créer, comme eût fait un Dieu, avec de la boue et de la salive.

L'*Eve future* est le résultat de cet effort de Titan et c'est presque une question de savoir si cette Eve, antérieurement à la catastrophe qui la détruisit, était capable de vivre. . . . En tout cas, elle vécut en lui, de quelle bouillonnante vie ! et c'est elle que je vois arrachant les planches de son cercueil.

Chapter Four

SALOMANIA:
The Unnatural Order of Things in Wilde's *Salomé*

I: Miss Representation: *Salomé*'s Otherness and the Cult of the Actress

By naming the last chapter of his book *Daughters of Eve* "Eve in the Spotlight: Sarah Bernhardt," author Gamaliel Bradford suggests that, at least metaphorically, one famous French actress did take on the ultimate *rôle* played by Villiers's fictional, pseudo-actress Miss Alicia Clary in *L'Eve future*.[1] As Bradford contends, although the prolific actress's pieces for the theater were as faithful as mechanism, Sarah Bernhardt was, like the archetypal Eve, "constantly and enormously human."[2] Yet her performances led most men in the art world to identify her power to be an Artificial Eve of the stage as well. For example, in response to Bernhardt's performance in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* in New York (1880), the *New York Herald*'s William Winter wrote of "her passionate abandon that 'set free the soul of humanity, and redeemed the commonness of the mortal world.'"[3] Upon further inspection, it seems that Bernhardt may have played an even more direct role within Villiers's novel, her coincidental presence lurking within many of the narrative occurrences. In the novel, Miss Alicia arrives in Menlo Park via New York in order to be convinced by Edison that she should be appropriately 'recorded' – orally, sculpturally, etc. – not only for her success on the stage but in order to preserve her artistic personality for future generations. We should not let it escape our attention that Thomas A. Edison

[1] Bernhardt played, in one way or another, many of the evocative, female figures with which this dissertation project is concerned: Cleopatra, Salomé, The Sphinx, etc. But perhaps even more could be said of the fact that many of her roles, even those that were modeled on famous, historic icons, were created specifically for her; for instance, playwright Victorien Sardou wrote seven plays alone as vehicles for Bernhardt, including Fédora, Théodora and La Sorcière.
[2] Gamaliel Bradford, *Daughters of Eve* (New York: New Impressions, 1969) 271.
[3] Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *The Divine Sarah: A Life of Sarah Bernhardt* (New York: Knopf, 1991) 170.

was actually visited by an actress whom he recorded on his then newly invented phonograph. In 1880, years prior to the publication of *L'Ève future*, Sarah Bernhardt was staying in New York City in order to star in productions of *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and *La dame aux camélias*. One night after a performance, Bernhardt crossed the river to visit Edison at his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey. After Edison dazzled Bernhardt with his newly invented light bulb, he proceeded to record Sarah reciting from her most famous role: Phédre.[4] We find that Villiers's choice for the means of Hadaly's nightly preservation – a coffin – is even more striking in terms of the dubious history of the ever-enigmatic Sarah Bernhardt. Well-known as a provocateur both on and off the stage, Bernhardt was followed by a grandiose mythology that claimed that she, like a vampire of sorts, would renew herself nightly by sleeping in a coffin. Bernhardt clearly had a hand in fashioning her own mythology because she did indeed have herself photographed in supposed her coffin-bed, conveniently situated under a mantel on which one of her own artistic creations, a sculpted bust, rests (Fig. 4.1). She was an actress who seemingly had constant command over her performances.

The last chapter cast light on Villiers's vituperation of the actress – a figure, like Eve, exemplifying female deception. Villiers's *L'Ève future* participates in a contemptuous mockery of the figure of the actress that, as discussed in the previous chapter, was affiliated with Villiers's own real-life, romantic disappointments. His failed engagement to Anna Eyre – who poet John Payne directly refers to as a *poseuse*, as if her

[4] Bernhardt was brought to Edison's home by her agent, Edward Jarrett, who, like Bernhardt herself, was always eager for headlines." The following day's headlines read "THE MOST FAMOUS MAN IN THE UNITED STATES MEETS THE MOST FAMOUS WOMAN IN FRANCE." For more information see *The Divine Sarah: A Life of Sarah Bernhardt* 174. The recording of her recitation of some lines from Phédre that Edison made on that evening in 1880 can be heard today. The audio file has been preserved by the Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project at the Donald C. Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

posing was the very roadblock to her being a proper beloved – acts as an impetus for Villiers's characterization of Miss Alicia Clary. We might venture further and suggest that Villiers's Miss Alicia, and the andréïde Hadaly for that matter, reflect some of the historical concerns over the cult of the stage actress at this particular period of the 1880s. At this point in history, famed actresses commanded European stages as powerfully as the male artists who wrote their performances. Though the andréïde in Villiers's novel represents a venture toward sameness and stability between male-lover and female-beloved, this hybridized woman-machine, meant as an escape from the flux of modernity, also functioned much in the same way as the actress. As Villiers writes of the andréïde, "l'être de cette présence mixte … dépend de la volonté libre de celui qui osera le concevoir." Of course, the male artist/scientist/lover had directorial control over the essence of the andréïde, Hadaly.

But while Villiers regarded the duplicitous woman as a problem that needs to be directed and controlled, Oscar Wilde saw the *poseuse/poseur* as a solution. Representing quite the reversal of attitude, Wilde allies his philosophical views with the artistic values offered by the actress, reveling in the freedom of heterogeneous, artistic expression accessible through the powers of *represent-ability*. Even before maturing into an artist in his own right, Wilde paid homage to a great number of famous fin-de-siècle actresses, including Lillie Langtry, Ellen Terry and the Divine Sarah Bernhardt. One of the earliest caricatures of Wilde, "The Bard of Beauty" by Alfred Thompson for *Time* April 1880, shows the author holding a plate in each hand, one offering a sonnet made to actress Ellen Terry, and the other a platter with a triolet for Sarah Bernhardt (Fig. 4.2). Wilde

greatly admired these female self-fashioners and looked upon them not only as artistic muses but also as objects of affection.

The cult of the actress was Oscar Wilde's panacea, and Sarah Bernhardt one of his favorite, theatrical muses. Wilde participated happily in the theater of admirations for Bernhardt; over-exaggerated gestures had come to be expected from the admirers of an actress as melodramatic and revered as Sarah Bernhardt had proven herself to be by the 1880s. According to Richard Ellmann in his biography on Wilde, the author and the actress met in 1879; upon Bernhardt's arrival in Britain "someone was heard to say, 'They will soon be making you a carpet of flowers'" after which, Wilde "sensing his cue, said '*Voila!*' or its English equivalent, and cast an armful of lilies at her feet."[5] Though Villiers may have been rejecting the force of female performance in *L'Ève future*, Wilde celebrated Bernhardt's autonomous powers of symbolization, of artistic creation. In a letter written to Oscar Browning dated June 1879, Wilde writes "Sarah Bernhardt's Phèdre was the most splendid creation I ever witnessed … It seems foolish to call French Tragedy stilted: the scene last night was not a bit … [out of oak and stone] but the most impassioned human nature."[6] In truth, Bernhardt's facility to be both histrionic and historical on stage was her main claim to fame: she would prove herself masterful enough as a *poseuse* to flit effortlessly between life and death, male and female, good and evil, history and pure fiction. In *The Art of the Theatre*, Bernhardt writes,

> Il n'est donc point d'artiste digne de ce nom sans un dédoublement incessant de la personnalité. … Car ne croyons point qu'on puisse avoir une âme pour le dehors et conserver la sienne ; ne nous imaginons pas un instant qu'on puisse se créer un extérieur artificiel et gardant intacts ses sentiments ordinaires. Le comédien ne

[5] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 117.
[6] Merlin Holland, ed., *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Letters* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003) 38.

> peut se partager entre lui-même et son rôle ; il perd son « moi » durant tout le temps où il se tient sur la scène–et ainsi sa conscience vole d'âge en âge...[7]

By the successful suppression of her own "moi," Bernhardt was able to make herself the figurehead of her own theatrical cult of personality. The ability to be *more human than human* on stage, to passionately play any and every character, demanded that Bernhardt exploit her very own otherness.[8] Interestingly, Bernhardt gives this advice to her reader in order to help them avoid learning the hard way that in order to be successful on the stage, "Il faut en quelque sorte qu'il s'oublie lui-même." It seems that she had learned this lesson herself, by letting the sight of her ill mother, "très malade d'une affection du cœur," affect her to the point of ruining one of her performances at *la Comédie Française*.[9]

It has come under much debate whether or not Wilde wrote *Salomé* unequivocally for Bernhardt, his actress-other. Wilde began the text's composition during his stay in Paris in the winter of 1891, following the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* earlier that year. Sarah Bernhardt was set to star in the dramatic vehicle at the end of her London season of 1892, a development that led Wilde to proclaim ecstatically in a note written to novelist Pierre Louÿs (to whom *Salomé* is dedicated), "Vous savez les nouvelles, n'est ce pas? Sarah va jouer Salomé!!"[10] Kerry Powell argues, for instance, that by writing *Salomé* in French Wilde hoped to reserve the title role for "the one actress who in his view had the necessary histrionic panache and vocal distinction to succeed in

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[7] Sarah Bernhardt, *L'Art du théâtre* (Paris: Editions Nilsson, 1923) 104-105.
[8] "More human than human," the motto of the Tyrell Corporation in Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982), is meant to suggest that the company's replicants are better than the real thing, more real than real people. For further discussion, see Elissa Marder's "Blade Runner's Moving Still," *Camera Obscura* No. 27 (Sept 1991) 89-107.
[9] Bernhardt 100.
[10] Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis eds, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000) 529.

it."[11] This suggestion is further bolstered by the fact that Bernhardt "did not know English – despite having had lessons, hoping to act in Shakespeare in his own language – and performed, like the rest of her ensemble, entirely in French."[12] As soon as Bernhardt read the play she agreed to play the title character, which she probably believed was written expressly for her: "At a party at Henry Irving's she remarked to Wilde that he should write a play for her one day," to which Wilde replied with irony, "I have already done so."[13] However, when in February 1893 *The Times* wrote off-handedly that Wilde composed the play for Bernhardt, Wilde responded swiftly to the Editor:

> The fact that the greatest tragic actress of any stage now living saw in my play such beauty that she was anxious to produce it, to take herself the part of the heroine, to lend the entire poem the glamour of her personality, and to my prose the music of her flute-like voice – this was naturally, and always will be, a source of pride and pleasure to me … But my play was in no sense of the words written for this great actress. I have never written a play for any actor or actress, nor shall I ever do so. Such work is for the artisan in literature, not for the artist.[14]

Many critics, like both Kerry Powell and Nicolas Frankel, affirm that Wilde's above disclaimer is simply not true. In fact, Wilde did capitalize upon his relationships within the theatrical, literary and social scenes in London as well as in France. As Frankel points out, Wilde's own letters offer proof that he had George Alexander and Herbert Beerbohm Tree in mind when writing *Lady Windemere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*.[15] Powell writes that "On the first leaf of the manuscript of *The Duchess of Padua*, furthermore, appear these words in Wilde's hand: 'written for Mary Anderson.'"[16]

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[11] William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 12.
[12] Kerry Powell, Osc*ar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 40.
[13] Ellmann 371.
[14] *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Letters* 164.
[15] Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 49.
[16] Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* 41.

On the other hand, it mattered little that many of Wilde's texts were informed by real people; more relevant was the fact that these people were reproduced as fictional personalities and caricatures, all cast through Wilde's artistic imaginations as performative, aesthetic likenesses of the real person/thing. In effect, this is Wilde's unnatural order of things – quite the reversal of Villiers's artistic goals in *L'Ève future*. Villiers was inspired to repel progress by mummifying the future in terms of its quizzical pre-history, rewriting the actress Alicia as the andréïde Hadaly, a substitute Eve, and illustrating Edison as the adulterated copy of the human profile on an ancient coin. He is the reproduction: "il offre, confronté avec d'anciennes estampes, une vivante reproduction de la médaille syracusaine d'Archimède" (100). In Wilde's *The Decay of Lying,* Vivian says of the "highest art" that "It is the ages that are her symbols," and Wilde lionized Bernhardt for being, like Art, "not symbolic of any age" but rather, capable of encapsulating all of them.[17] Indeed, Wilde solicited the assistance of actress Lillie Langtry to search "among the Greek coins in the British Museum for Sarah Bernhardt's profile."[18] Here, Wilde takes Bernhardt as the prototype and source, not looking for an ancient Greek coin that she resembles but *one that resembles her*. Bernhardt epitomized the timelessness of art in such a way that her own age held little relevance for Wilde, particularly regarding her ability to re-present the myriad roles she came to define on the stages of late nineteenth-century Europe. In one of his last letters written before his death in 1900, Wilde writes to Leonard Smithers, London publisher and co-founder of *The Savoy*, that his most notorious female *rôle* for the stage could *only* be played by Bernhardt. He writes, "What has age to do with acting? The only person in

[17] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" 43.
[18] Ellmann 118.

the world who could act Salomé is Sarah Bernhardt, that 'serpent of the old Nile', older than the Pyramids."[19] If in regards to Wilde's *Salomé* we may repeat the question borrowed from Mary Jacobus, *Is there a woman in this text,* we might discover that Sarah Bernhardt is not the woman within the text but the necessary one outside of it, the vehicle for its dramatic embodiment. Although the extent of her influence on Wilde's early ambitions for the play may remain obscure, the extension of her influence upon the play once its composition began is unassailable. She became, indeed, the authentic incarnation of Wilde's Salomé.

What occurs in Wilde's *Salomé* is the growth of an aesthetic subjectivity that identifies unavoidably with its own otherness - the text's thoroughly alienated condition is both the condition of the play's action and the reason it represented a zenith of Wilde's goals as an artist. Since his days as a budding artist at Oxford, Wilde passed as both artist and model, playing multitudinous characters, encompassing the delightful parts he cast himself in, as well as the more tragic roles others cast for him. As John Stokes affirms, "An artist who became her own model, Bernhardt was one of the great self-fashioners of her age, although for a time she did have a rival, Oscar Wilde."[20] And Wilde's initial emergence on the literary scene was not so much the consequence of any text he authored. Wilde became a fast celebrity when in 1882 he embarked on his American lecture tour, entitled "The English Renaissance," an adapted homage to Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Previously, Wilde was a cultish figure of Aesthetics in England who had published a small book of poems. At the behest of

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[19] *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* 834. That 'serpent of the old Nile,' as Wilde refers to Bernhardt, is the moniker for Cleopatra in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, Act I, scene v.
[20] John Stokes, *The French Actress and Her English Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 138.

booking manager Richard D'Oyly Carte, Wilde was launched into the position of spokesman for the Aesthetes, dispatched on his lecture tour simultaneously with the U.S. run of the opera *Patience*, written by W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. *Patience* satirized the aesthetic movement and, though Wilde was not the *original* model for the aesthetes in the opera, he became the poster child of the movement subsequently.[21] Soon after the tour ended, on July 23, 1883, *The New York Times* wrote under its "Current London Gossip" that Wilde "was not a lecturer before he went out, nor an art critic of any newspaper, nor a journalist, nor anything […] and when Gilbert & Burnand (of *Punch*) burlesqued a *something in art that does not exist*, they elected Oscar to the position of their puppet. He accepted the satire, and no doubt fancied that he was unconsciously or otherwise the representative of some sort of an art craze." From the start, Wilde reveled in the opportunity to play a part, an actor himself. During the lecture tour, Wilde coined himself a new personality – "The Professor of Aesthetics."

i. Posing: Impostures of Originality

While writing the play in French might have been prompted by the possibility of having the Divine Sarah play the lead role, there exists another, less dubious motivation for Wilde's composing it in a foreign tongue. Within the context of the play Wilde had already retreated to the ideals of French aestheticism and his use of the French language seems to suggest his thinly veiled desire to ingratiate himself more fully into the French literary *fraternité*, throwing himself quite garishly into the *Salomania* that had captivated an entire generation of French artists and authors. The daughter of Herodias, who by dancing incites the beheading of John the Baptist in the Bible, was the most infamous and

[21] Some of the original targets of the satire included Dante Gabriel Rossetti and James McNeill Whistler.

degenerative daughter artistically disseminated throughout the latter half of the nineteenth-century. In *Salome and the Dance of Writing*, Françoise Meltzer charts the periods during which Salome becomes an object of interest, illustrating how her popularity during the Middle Ages fades until the nineteenth-century, upon the publication of Heinrich Heine's *Atta Troll* in 1842. Though not a direct illustration of the biblical figure, Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) early incited the Salome frenzy as well, compelling Symbolist author Stephane Mallarmé to compose the poem "Hérodiade" (1869) and painter Gustave Moreau to add Salome to his already existing catalogue of *femmes fatales*, which included Helen of Troy, Cleopatra and the Sphinx. In 1876, Moreau exhibited two paintings at the Salon Palace of the Champs Elysées that were inspired by Flaubert's novel – *Salomé dansant devant Hérode,* done in oils, and *L'Apparition*, done in watercolors.[22] From Flaubert's young, Far-Eastern girl depicted in *Salammbô* dancing on her hands, Moreau conceptualized Salome dancing at Herod's request in order to satisfy her mother's self-serving purposes (requiting the wrongs done by John the Baptist's slanderous condemnation of her), ultimately securing his head on a silver platter. Moreau's paintings only bolstered the stamina of the Salome promulgation in the aesthetic world by naming the daughter of Hérodias properly. In turn, Moreau's paintings inspired a bevy of literary copies and ekphrases, even another by Flaubert, who had rejoined what had by the 1870s become a representational maelstrom via his tale *Hérodias* (1877). Moreau's paintings inspired Joris-Karl Huysmans as well, inciting him to directly internalize them within his 1884 novel *À Rebours*. Huysmans's novel enacts an ekphratic representation of Moreau's *Salomé* paintings wherein the novel's

[22] Francoise Meltzer, *Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 19.

protagonist, Des Esseintes, reflects unequivocally on the dancing girl as the paintings' subject as much as on Moreau's inspired paintings as *objects d'art*. The cultural swell in this collective desire to re-produce Salome's story was nothing short of a mania that engulfed the multitude of European men of art and letters. Her mimetic representation became emblematic of the French artistic *fraternité*, and she, like a token to be redeemed only by the 'true' artist, was passed amongst authors, painters, and composers like a secondhand plaything. This feverish and perpetually repetitive encounter of artist-subject and feminine-object ensured a dangerous similitude between art and life, male and female, finally reaching an apex of blurred boundaries in Wilde's version.

By the spring of 1892, Wilde's manuscript circulated widely amidst an audience of French symbolist poets who lent their editorial talents, thus becoming an object as eroticized as the titular subject of the drama. In his 1929 autobiography, Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, Wilde's lover whom he met immediately preceding his composition of *Salomé*, declared that Wilde wrote the play in English originally and that his translating it into French, with the assistance of Pierre Louÿs and Andre Gide, was all part of "a rather ridiculous pose."[23] In *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*, Nicholas Frankel calls attention to the fact that Douglas's autobiography was quite self-serving. It functioned, perhaps, as part of an attempt to revise his *fin-de-siècle* reputation as Wilde's boy-toy and to solidify a more respectable reputation for himself after becoming a husband and father. As Frankel points out with certainty that all surviving drafts of Wilde's *Salomé* are written in French in his own hand, so Douglas's claim that Wilde wrote it in English originally is simply untrue. However, the concept that his writing the play in French was part of a "pose" is a suggestion worth taking seriously because Wilde *did* solicit the editorial

[23] Frankel 51.

assistance of many fraternal Symbolists. For instance, Pierre Louÿs's handwritten corrections survive on the second draft manuscript, now preserved at the Rosenbach Foundation in Philadelphia, and Marcel Schwob corrected proofs of the play in 1892. Frankel writes, "as Douglas's account makes abundantly clear, the point is not *what* the symbolists altered so much as *that* they altered Wilde's work – that *Salome* was at this early stage in its history a thoroughly homosocialized work."[24] And despite, or perhaps because of, the text's emphasis on its own inclusion in this fraternal society, many Symbolists were led to praise the play's queerness, its praiseworthy detachment, a quality that had come to characterize the literature of French *modernité*.

Wilde's play hinged itself upon other people, such as Sarah Bernhardt and the Symbolists, as well as other *things*, which caused Wilde's figuration of *Salomé* to be hybridized by this incessant heterogeneity of others, both persons and things – a far cry from Gautier's artistic crusades toward *singularité* despite Wilde's adulation of *l'art pour l'art*. In 1902, Guatemalan writer Gomez Carrillo wrote a piece for *La Plume* entitled "Comment Oscar Wilde rêva Salomé," in which he clarifies the essential multiplicity of Wilde's distinctly subjective *Salomania*: "His 'Salomé' I say, and I am in error: for there were ten, no, a hundred Salomés that he imagined, that he began, that he abandoned. Each painting he saw in a museum suggested a new idea; each book he found in which the object of his interest was mentioned filled him with self-doubts."[25] Carrillo tells of the innumerable Salomes saturating Wilde's artistic imaginings: the Salomes that filled the Prado Museum, especially the one by Titian (1515), who Wilde proclaimed "paints with human flesh!"; the beautiful and yet ultimately unsatisfying Salome of Leonardo; and the

[24] Frankel 51.
[25] Enrique Gomez Carrillo, "How Oscar Wilde Dreamed of Salomé," *Oscar Wilde: interviews and recollections*, ed. E. H. Mikhail. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979) 195.

most evident counterpoint to Wilde's version, the painting of Gustave Moreau that "rendered clearly his dreams of the soul of the legendary dancer-princess." But Carrillo reveals, more strikingly, that Wilde's Salomé was as real as she was artificial, the embodiment of the persons and things on Parisian streets. "Sometimes women passing by in the street made him dream of the princess of Israel," Carrillo writes, while other times looking in jewelers' windows would cause him to imagine "the perfect jewellery for the adornment of his idol's body." Quite simply, Wilde's Salomé was limitless in her otherness far before she arrived on the printed page.

By the time Oscar Wilde actually published his textual edition of *Salomé* in 1893, she was a copy born of such a heterogeneous multiplicity that many critics derided the work, written by an author as fierce about his authenticity as Wilde, for representing *absolutely nothing original* – except, as some insisted, an irredeemable sense of utter depravity. The text was impure and alienated from the start. Though Wilde purported himself publically as the autonomous master of his literary works, they often proved to be influenced greatly, if covertly, by myriad relationships, whether literary intertexts or religious scripture, art movements or fads in fashion. Powell contends that "Impostures of originality were not unusual with Wilde, who portrayed himself as an artist set apart, one for whom it was unthinkable to be influenced by another dramatist or the requirements of a fashionable actor."[26] Indeed, Wilde planned to stage the play with Bernhardt in the summer of 1892 but soon into the rehearsals the Lord Chamberlain banned it based on old English law prohibiting the depiction of biblical characters on stage. Wilde seemed to expect this level of censorship. Before the official ban, Wilde threatened indignantly, "If the Censor refuses *Salome*, I shall leave England to settle in France ... I will not consent

[26] Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* 41.

to call myself a citizen of a country that shows such narrowness in artistic judgement."[27] Wilde's above exclamation proves to be unfaithful to itself almost automatically, betraying any possible sincerity by way of the fact that it seems to be, as did most everything Wilde said and did throughout his artistic career, *a performance*.

"Others" populated Wilde's text from the very start, and his use of the French language only serves to heighten the play's queerness, its impulse toward otherness. The text's hybrid form from the onset may have been one of the reasons Wilde valued *Salomé* as one of his most subjective pieces, aligning with his own beliefs in aesthetic heterogeneity. Before Wilde completed *Salomé* as a drama he played with an assortment of literary genres for its expression. Of course, Wilde's knowledge of the biblical story in its many generic transmutations was vast, which seemed to offer an equivalent array of models for Wilde's version. According to Gomez Carrillo, Wilde had first conceived of telling the tale in prose-form and then decided upon poetry. But it seems that the tale could only become intelligible after Wilde literally made it so by orally transmitting his story to a group of young men during his stay in Paris in 1891. That evening Wilde returned to his chambers in the boulevard des Capucines and began writing the story, which would become a drama ultimately, in a blank notebook on the table. The writing of *Salomé*, then, was always already secondary to its performance. At the level of the text, the fact that Wilde chose to write the play in French, a tongue foreign to him, indicates that he intentioned for the piece's language to be alienated from the very start.[28] In an

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[27] Ellmann 372.

[28] Ironically, it was the play's first, unorthodox translation into Wilde's native English tongue by Lord Alfred Douglas that proved quite unnatural. Wilde found himself quite unsatisfied by Douglas's schoolboy translation and so he helped translate it himself, to the point that it is unknown how much of the current English edition is actually attributable to Douglas. Despite this, Wilde kept Douglas's name on the edition as the official translator.

interview published in 1892, Wilde admitted, "I have one instrument that I know I can command, and that is the English language." But Wilde found himself intrigued by "another instrument to which I had listened all my life," expressing his desire "to touch this new instrument to see whether I could make any beautiful thing out of it."[29] It seems, that the estrangement Wilde elicits between his art and its language of expression only accentuated his feeling of authorial intimacy and ingenuity, creating an implausible harmony. In February 1893, Wilde wrote a letter to Florence Balcombe Stoker, asking her to accept a copy of *Salomé*, which he calls "my strange venture in a tongue that is not my own, but that I love as one loves an instrument of music on which one has not played before."[30] This literary voyage into the unfamiliar that Wilde identifies, and which in this chapter we will interrogate, helps to distinguish *Salomé* as Wilde's most unexpectedly subjective work. In a letter to Bosie meant to encourage his young lover's growing, artistic aspirations, Wilde wrote, "I would say that my unique position was that I had taken the Drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the Lyric or the Sonnet, while enriching the characterisation of the stage, and enlarging – at any rate in the case of *Salomé* – its artistic horizon." Out of that foreign instrument, Wilde did produce a "beautiful thing"; indeed, he would come to call *Salomé* one of his most "beautiful coloured, musical things."[31]

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[29] Wilde, in Joseph Donohue, "Distance, death and desire in Salome," *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde,* ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 118.
[30] *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Letters* 161. Florence Balcombe was Wilde's first, young love. She ended up marrying Wilde's childhood friend Bram Stoker, an Irish author most famous for writing the Gothic novel Dracula (1897). Wilde remained friendly with the Stokers through adulthood, at least until his imprisonment in 1895 after his conviction for gross indecency, which caused the disintegration of most of Wilde's friendships.
[31] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (New York: Modern Library, 2000) 93. In *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*, Nicholas Frankel writes that the 1894 text of Salomé could also be "the physical embodiment of what Vivian, in 'The Decay of Lying,' would call a 'beautiful, untrue thing'" 72.

II. Problems of Interpretation: The Dark Side of the Moon

Unsurprisingly, due to its constant recourse to otherness, both textual and contextual, *Salomé* has generated a seemingly inexhaustible proliferation of readings. Also because of its hefty relationship to religious and artistic traditions, Wilde's *Salomé* has been read in numerous ways. When conflated with Wilde's perplexing autobiography, as most of his works infamously are, the task of elucidating any definite Truths within the play becomes increasingly difficult. Many critics have interpreted the play's complex and pervasive topography of sadism, scopophilia and castration anxiety through a homocentric and psychoanalytic perspective, as if in an attempt to pin down which fictional character Wilde meant for his own avatar. Of course, this predilection is handicapped by the fact that Wilde had been adopted as a pioneering artist-as-homosexual as this sexual 'type' emerged in the fin-de-siècle. Wilde was also quite woman-centric in his fashion and his philosophies, perhaps due to the strong influence his mother, Lady Esperanza Wilde, had upon him. Because Wilde admitted that *Salomé* was one of his most personal works, some liken the artist to the depraved dancer, a comparison that was temporarily enforced by Richard Ellmann's mistaken identity of Wilde cross-dressed as Salome in his biography of the author (Fig. 4.3).[32] Other readers, like Franz Meier, suggest that Wilde would have identified with the Christic figure of

[32] Ellmann entitled the photograph "Wilde in Costume as Salome," thinking he had chanced upon a photograph that exposed Wilde's secret life as a cross-dresser that paid complement to his homosexuality. The error influenced some critical work that emerged in the years following the publication of Ellmann's biography. For example, in her book *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siècle*, Elaine Showalter also argued that this unearthed photograph constituted the "mystery," one of the "play's buried and coded messages." She even suggested the parallel between Wilde's self-identification with his Salome figure and that of Flaubert/Madame Bovary with her coining of Wilde's imaginary proclamation, "Salomé, c'est moi"? (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 156. In his essay "Biography and the Art of Lying," Wilde's grandson Merlin Holland reveals that Ellmann was mistaken in his identification of the photograph, which actually captured the Hungarian opera singer Alice Guszalewicz in a performance as Salome in 1906.

Iokanaan, through which Wilde "manifested his 'masculine' rejection of female sexuality."[33] I would suggest that it is near absurd to attribute so many human qualities and motivations to Wilde's Salomé without acknowledging, as we will in the course of this chapter, that she represents an aesthetic, visual imperative and transforms into, in Wilde's genesis, a terrible mechanism of desire.[34] In *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*, Nicholas Frankel proposes that, "In searching for a deeper, less contradictory *Salome*, the truth-tellers risk losing their heads."[35] And indeed, Wilde credited criticism (and vice versa, "The Artist as Critic") as its own art, thus conjuring up an interactive model for aestheticism.

The critical problem of *Salomé* is the very problem of the ever-mobile symbolic structures on which the play is built, and the most unsettling of these fluctuating signs is also the play's most all-powerful one – the moon. Wilde had long been fascinated by the figure of the moon, and although Salomé functions as the central focus of the performance, Wilde confirmed on occasion that the moon was, in fact, the main character. Wilde animates the moon in order to invert and invest in its traditional, dramatic potential as the inconstant moon that Juliet warns Romeo against swearing by, "Lest that thy love prove likewise variable."[36] Throughout the play, characters use the interchangeable moon as a mirror, imparting their own subjective visions upon this vacillating and vacant signifier. Both the moon and Salomé start out as blank canvasses

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[33] Franz Meier, "Oscar Wilde and the Myth of the Femme Fatale in Fin-de-Siècle Culture," *Importance of Reinventing Oscar: Versions of Wilde During the Last 100 Years*, ed. Uwe Boker, Richard Corballis, Julie Hibbard, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 127.

[34] Shelton Waldrep writes that, "The characters in [The Importance of Being] Earnest seem already to have begun the process of making themselves into desiring machines," *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 55.

[35] Frankel 76.

[36] William Shakespeare, *Romeo & Juliet* (II.ii.111), in *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

upon which he who gazes may inscribe whatever he so pleases – or whatever he may fear. The very beginning of *Salomé* reveals not only the primacy of its visual register but also, by association, the text's underlying conundrum, otherness, which translates Symbolically into an impossible differentiation between *persons and things*. First and foremost, this problematic and endless exchange arises from the obvious lack of interlocution between characters. They are, on the whole, completely oblivious to each other; what is spoken often falls on deaf ears. At the play's beginning, a brief exchange between the Young Syrian, Narraboth, and the Page of Herodias, illustrates this ontological dilemma:

> LE JEUNE SYRIEN
> Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir!
> LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS
> Regardez la lune. On dirait une femme qui sort d'un tombeau. Elle ressemble à une femme morte. On dirait qu'elle cherche des morts.
> LE JEUNE SYRIEN
> Elle a l'air étrange. Elle ressemble à une petite princesse qui porte un voile jaune, et a des pieds d'argent. Elle ressemble à une princesse qui a des pieds comme des petites colombes blanches … on dirait qu'elle danse.
> LE PAGE D'HÉRODIAS
> Elle est comme une femme morte. Elle va très lentement. (13-14)

As readers we must struggle to determine who, or what, these characters speak of here. A slippage materializes between the woman-subject, the princess Salomé who looks beautiful on this particular evening, and the moon-object, which ushers in the evening and itself resembles a princess. There is already confusion over the subject under discussion. All at once, people and things are impossibly remote from one another and yet too close, too similar. So similar, it seems, that not only does the person become a thing in the immediate, abrupt directive for the young Syrian to "Regardez la lune" rather than Salome, but the thing, this moon, becomes *like* a person. To be more specific, the

moon becomes a woman. The Page of Herodias perceives the moon to be like a dead woman, "une femme qui sort d'un tombeau," a liminal figure acting as portent of ensuing tragedy. However, Narraboth sees the moon as Salomé particularly and in a similarly prophetic way. It, now a she, "ressemble à une princesse qui a des pieds comme des petites colombes blanches … on dirait qu'elle danse." Though the play will end with the climax of Salomé dancing for Iokanaan's death – his head on a silver charger – its very first visual already gives the audience a glimpse of her *dance macabre* through her doppelgänger, the moon.

Intriguingly, Salome's dance, the most pervasive and provocative feature of the story in its continual reinterpretation from biblical times, is the weakest and most evasive of the visuals within Wilde's play. In the written text, the dance is only made available through Wilde's simple stage direction: *(Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles.)* Though Wilde properly names the dance of the biblical daughter, he offers no further elaboration on its visual qualities. In fact, as Rodney Shewan points out, Wilde only added this stage direction to the text *after* the play's London-based production was banned in 1893. Previously and conceptually, he had relied, so it seemed, on the performance of Sarah Bernhardt to interpret the dance on the stage. The fact that Wilde was obliged to add a stage direction implies that the dance didn't exist firstly in the artist's mind inasmuch as it was meant to be created through the interpretative performance of the piece's leading actress. As Nicholas Frankel points out, "There is a crucial difference, therefore, between the play as it might be performed on a stage, and the play as it is textualized in the form of a printed book" because "the text calls on its reader to perform a silent act of imagination," characterizing the dance as "a crucial moment in the work's understanding

of itself."[37] In other words, though the dance has become one of the most famous and functional symbols of the Salome story, Wilde's dance remains marginal, silent and self-conscious for the reader, thus according to Frankel throwing "our reading into a kind of crisis."[38] In the moon, various characters see this dance, or at least a variety of subjective reproductions of what the dance is meant to symbolize: desire. What is ultimately at stake in the play's fluctuating and interchangeable signs and symbols is the representation of desire, unfettered by any social or sexual edicts. Although historically the dance had become strongly associated with a heterosexual imperative, its blankness in Wilde's text allows it to be visualized according to the whims of its audience.

The audience realizes, in the play's first moments, that the sun has already set and that instead it is the moon looming large over Wilde's expansion of *Salomé*'s "artistic horizon."[39] The one-act play unfolds on the moonlit terrace of Tetrarch Herod's palace, set above the banquet hall, with the cistern in which the prophet Iokanaan is imprisoned set in the background. The play opens with these secondary characters – including the First and Second Soldier, the Page of Herodias and the young Syrian, Narraboth – on the balcony deliberating about a complex of visuals: the beauty of Princess Salome, the somberness of Tetrarch Herod, the strangeness of the moon. Soon, the voice of the prophet Iokanaan comes from within the cistern in which he is imprisoned (we are told that this was also the site for the imprisonment of Herodias' first husband, Salomé's father). Salome enters the scene and, upon hearing the voice of Iokanaan, demands to see him. By promising Narraboth, the young Syrian, that the next day she will look at him

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[37] Frankel 65.
[38] Ibid., 65.
[39] Wilde writes this in a letter, written to Bosie in June 1897, which will be discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

through her veils and let fall a little green flower for him – thus playing on his desire for her by offering to make *him* the object of her gaze – Salomé gains access to the prophet. Salomé soon finds herself amorous of Iokanaan's body and seduced by his voice, which is like wine to her. However, Iokanaan spurns her advances and condemns her, the daughter of the sinful Herodias, as the emblematic daughter of sin in general, referring to her as "fille de Babylone" and "fille de Sodome" (36). While Salome persists in her sensual addresses to Iokanaan, Narraboth slays himself and his corpse falls between Salome and Iokanaan, as if in a failed attempt to impart a separation between them. After the Page of Herodias expresses his sorrow over losing Narraboth, whom he calls "plus proche qu'un frère," Hérode and Hérodias enter the scene (42). Hérode is not only looking for Salomé but he also seems to be looking for signs principally, like Narraboth and the Page of Hérodias, in the moon and its reflections. He gets a clear sign, "un mauvais présage," when he slips in the blood of Narraboth's corpse. Despite Hérodias' warnings for him not to look at her daughter, Hérode proceeds to offer Salome various comforts of which she does not partake. Most notably, Hérode invites Salomé to "venez manger du fruit avec moi. J'aime beaucoup voir dans un fruit la morsure de tes petites dents. Mordez un tout petit morceau de ce fruit, et ensuite je mangerai ce qui reste" (48). But Salomé refuses to be the Eve to his Adam; frustrated by the repeated dismissals of his offerings, Hérode proceeds to make his infamous request for Salomé to dance for him.

Rather than incite her to dance in order to avenge her mother's reputation, Hérodias instead tells her daughter *not* to dance. It is Salomé herself, after affirmation from Hérode that he will give her whatever she demand, "fût-ce la moitié de votre royaume," who decides to dance what only exists in Wilde's simple stage direction:

(Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles) (68, 74). Of course, she asks for the head of Iokanaan, and although Hérodias celebrates her daughter's request as "bien dit," Salomé makes it clear that she is the autonomous agent of this pitiless destiny. She tells Hérode, "C'est pour mon propre plaisir que je demande la tête d'Iokanaan dans un basin d'argent" (77). After numerous attempts to offer her substitutive pleasures, such as "une grande émeraude ronde que le favori de César m'a envoyée" and "beaux paons blancs," Hérode gives her Iokanaan's head on a silver charger despite his assuredness that "il va arriver un malheur" (78, 79, 84). Salomé fulfills her sensual destiny to obtain the object of her affections and, in one of the play's most repeated and most outrageous images, to kiss the mouth of the prophet's head: "Ah! Tu n'as pas voulu me laisser baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan. Et bien! Je la baiserai maintenant. Je la mordrai avec mes dents comme on mord un fruit mûr" (86). Horrified by this monstrousness – instead of eating the fruit offered her, Salome consumes her beloved Iokanaan *like fruit* – Hérode orders the lights to be turned out on Salomé both literally and figuratively: "Cachez la lune. Cachez les étoiles. […] Tuez cette femme" (90-91).

Between Salomé and the moon there occurs an uneasy yet valuable sense of identification. Detecting that she is the object of the gaze of Hérode, Salomé apprehends that it is "étrange" that her mother's husband stares at her "comme cela"; however, she seems to release this erotically charged idea by projecting her enviable qualities on that ever-inconstant, objectified moon: "Que c'est bon de voir la lune! … Elle est froid et chaste, la lune … Elle a la beauté d'une vierge … Elle ne s'est jamais donnée aux hommes, comme les autres Déesses" (24). As Rhonda Garelick asserts, "Salome rhapsodizes about the moon, acknowledging neither the self-referential quality of her

words nor the fact that they repeat the lines of other characters."[40] But although Salome's affections are seemingly inauthentic and already *other*, this does not make them any less powerful. One must see oneself through things, as a thing, in order to survive.

However, to define oneself Symbolically through things also, and paradoxically, conducts the subject toward his/her own demise. Narraboth's suicide is the play's internal sacrifice to the traditional iconography of unrequited love and the perils of self-regard. We can recognize that Wilde modernizes the age-old dilemma of Ovid's Narcissus in *Salomé*, an allegation confirmed through the play's iconography and activity. Upon Salomé's entrance in the play, Narraboth glimpses his own personal future by actually seeing Salomé, his beloved, as an object forewarning his destruction: "comme un narcisse agité du vent … Elle ressemble à une fleur d'argent" (22). After hearing Iokanaan's "étrange voix" carry from within the cistern, Salomé convinces the soldiers and Narraboth that she must see him and speak with him simply because *she wants to*. Like a petulant child, Salomé ignores the first soldier's reiteration that it is "impossible," stubbornly insisting "Je le veux" (27). Of course, she succeeds, mainly by playing on the young Syrian's own desire for her, thus luring him into yielding to her demands. But during her valuation of Iokanaan's body through the lustful language of *The Song of Songs*, Narraboth kills himself and his corpse falls between Salomé and Iokanaan. Straightaway, the Page of Hérodias bewails the death of Narraboth, who, it seems, was oblivious to the fact he was someone else's beloved. The Page admits that to him, Narraboth was "plus proche qu'un frère" and that he had given him gifts, "une petite boîte qui contenait des parfums et une bague d'agate qu'il portait toujours à la main" (42). The Page had also discovered the reason that he would never be truly *seen* by his

[40] Garelick 136.

beloved in any mutual exchange of affection – because, like Narcissus, Narraboth was too busy *looking only at himself*. The Page admits, in the scene with both the first and second soldiers, that Narraboth "aimait beaucoup à se regarder dans la rivière" and that he had warned him against such habits.

This first of the play's many tragedies is amplified by the fact that, while the Page tells of his heartbreak over the loss of his beloved, *no one is listening*. Before the Page speaks the first soldier announces that they must move Narraboth's corpse because the Tetrarch "n'aime pas regarder les cadavres" (42). After the Page laments the loss of his beloved Narraboth, the second soldier says "Vous avez raison; il faut cacher le cadavre." Clearly, the second soldier is responding to the first soldier's suggestion to move the body, as if the Page's lamentations were never heard by anyone. The play kills off the traditional Narcissus figure to make way for a more postmodern embodiment of the relationship between desire, image and reflection. Indeed, Narraboth dies in a frustrated, structural position, trapped between a lover and beloved, with no recourse available except to meet his death. On one hand, he finds himself wedged physically between Salomé and her love object, Iokanaan. More powerfully, however, he finds himself summoned to death by Salomé's own object of self-reflection: the moon. The Page of Hérodias had warned Narraboth from the beginning not to look at Salomé, but he denounces himself further for not hiding his beloved from Salomé's double, the moon: "Ah! Pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas cache de la lune? Si je l'avais cache dans une caverne elle ne l'aurait pas vu" (40). The only character hidden safely from the moon is the prophet Iokanaan, who is imprisoned in a cavern the moon cannot infiltrate, although he will be one of the play's ultimate sacrifices against all of the play's irrational logic.

III. Degeneration and the Supreme of Artifice

Wilde philosophized at length on the aesthetic value of the mask and the mirror as reflexive metaphors of artistic subjectivity, but in *Salomé* he uses the moon as the paradigm for such an "identity surface." Like the mirror and the mask, the moon embodies "both aspects of the paradox of reference in autonomy," referring "first to themselves … and at the same time to self-reference itself, as a problematic property of human desire."[41] In turn, the protean reflections of the moon ensure that the "scandalous abandon" of visual, signifying structures causes a corresponding deformation of the value of language within the play. In this way, the moon functions as a grotesque exaggeration of a Symbol insomuch as it eradicates any singularity of meaning. If Villiers used Symbolism as literary system for the production of meaning, Wilde chooses the moon as the ultimate Symbol of the system's undoing. Wilde pushes away from the traditional symbol for knowledge and illumination, the sun, and instead employs the sun's necessary other, the moon. In turn, Wilde's *Salomé* became another text that caused critics of the time to declare Wilde the "high priest" of the Decadents, the vanguard of a movement attacked for its degenerative qualities.

It is not the least bit surprising that such cultural evolution heralded anxiety concerning the devolution of the human species. If the idea of (Darwinian) evolution was concerned with the development of the species toward higher forms of life, degenerationism came to denote "evolution reversed and compressed … a terrible

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[41] James Winchell, "Wilde and Huysmans: Autonomy, Reference, and the Myth of Expiation," *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde* (New York: GK Hall, 1991) 226.

regression, a downward spiral into madness, chaos, extinction."[42] Biological heredity was scrutinized as a source of contagion rather than a medium for progress. As a medical term, 'degeneration' came into vogue upon the publication of Benedictin Augustin Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* in 1857. Morel, a monogenist who believed that all human races evolved from the first couple in the Garden of Eden, opened the door for degeneration theory to become "a tool for measuring the moral health of society as well as the health of the individual."[43] By the end of the century the concept extended across all aspects of society as a means to explore and explain the sense of human degradation emerging as an adverse effect of modernity, the city and technology– a slipping of culture toward more primal and ultimately uncultured ways. In consequence, according to many leading physicians and social critics at the time, people were becoming corrupted into degenerates of 'type' such as the hysteric, the homosexual and the New Woman, just to name a few. But most loathsome of these 'types' within the art world was the Decadent, which an anonymous critic at *The National Observer* calls an "invention as terrible as, and in some ways more shocking than, the New Woman."[44] While the last chapter discussed the figure of the andréïde as a woman turned into a technological object, here we have a personality type turned into a modern 'invention.'

One of the voices emerging at the end of the century was that of Max Nordau, a Hungarian physician and author whose major work *Degeneration* (1895) enacted a

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[42] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin de siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 66.
[43] Hurley 71.
[44] Sandra Siegel, "Literature and Degeneration: The Representation of 'Decadence'" in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 209.

moralist censure on degeneracy in the world of art and literature.[45] Nordau leveled his reproach at a whole slew of artistic movements of the nineteenth-century and those figures who spearheaded them, including the Pre-Raphaelites, Symbolism, Richard Wagner, Parnassians, Decadents and Aesthetes, and Ibsen and Nietzsche, who he labels 'ego-maniacs.' Because it banishes all that is natural in favor of the artificial Nordau credits Decadentism, which he traces through Gautier and Baudelaire and as having kinship with the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolism, with artistic debauchery. Predictably, Oscar Wilde holds a notable place in Nordau's catalog as a "cultivator of the Ego" and the principle agent of the growth of the French-born *décadent* into the English *Aesthete*.[46] Nordau writes: "The ego-mania of decadentism, its love of the artificial, its aversion to nature, and to all forms of activity and movement, its megalomaniacal contempt for men and its exaggeration of the importance of art, have found their English representative among the 'Aesthetes,' the chief of whom is Oscar Wilde."[47] Nordau maintains that art should have a social and moral function, and so his main objection against Wilde and the Aesthetes is leveled against their conception of the work of art as its own aim, as well as their belief that art need *only* be beautiful: "Beauty lies in the form. Hence the content is a matter of indifference."[48] One of the main premises of Nordau's evaluation of degeneracy is that homogeneity in art, purity of word/form, had been overthrown in favor of heterogeneity and the infection of this manic, artistic disease. Nordau laments that artistic language itself had become infected, and that words could no longer be counted upon to house any stable, unique meaning. Nordau aspired for sameness and the stability of the

[45] Originally published in German in 1892 under the title Entartung.
[46] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1895) 319.
[47] Ibid., 317.
[48] Ibid., 327.

referent, but Wilde's version of art offers solace in an instable identity, one constantly in flux according to style and never reliant on a stable, linguistic referent. For Wilde capitalizes on the utter instability of linguistic reference in order to expand the artistic panorama to account for the fact that all meaning is multiple.

Wilde empties language of its value in exactly the way Nordau feared, by breaking down concrete concepts in favor of their slippery, abstract potential. In *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian fin de siècle*, Stephen Arata addresses Nordau's theory of degeneracy and the issue of language usage. He writes,

> For Nordau, degenerate works in all their varied forms – and there are many – share one overriding feature. They signify promiscuously. Nothing induces more anxiety in Nordau than the suspicion that language is not, as it out to be, 'clear, homogeneous, and free from internal contradictions' (91). The healthy mind recognizes innate bonds between words and things, since 'every word, even the most abstract, connotes a concrete presentation or a concept' (57). The degenerate writer refuses to respect such firm correspondences, and his texts as a result generate meanings with scandalous abandon.[49]

The disloyalty between words and their meanings exploited within the play parallels the dangerous resemblances between subjects and objects. Early in *Salomé*, for instance, an exchange of views between secondary characters – the Cappadocien, the Nubian and the first and second Soldiers – actualizes Wilde's aesthetic belief in the transformative potential of things and the dangerous value of words.

> SECOND SOLDAT : Le tétrarque aime beaucoup le vin. Il possède des vins de trois espèces. Un qui vient de l'île de Samothrace, qui est pourpre comme le manteau de César.
> LE CAPPADOCIEN: Je n'ai jamais vu César.
> SECOND SOLDAT : Un autre qui vient de l'île de Chypre, qui est jaune comme de l'or.
> LE CAPPADOCIEN: J'aime beaucoup l'or.
> SECOND SOLDAT : Et le troisième qui est un vin sicilien. Ce vin-là est rouge comme le sang.

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[49] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian fin de siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 30.

> LE NUBIEN: Les dieux de mon pays aiment beaucoup le sang. Deux fois par an nous leur sacrifions des jeunes hommes et des vierges
> […]
> PREMIER SOLDAT: Les Juifs adorent un Dieu qu'on ne peut pas voir.
> LE CAPPADOCIEN: Je ne peux pas comprendre cela.
> PREMIER SOLDAT: Enfin, ils ne croient qu'aux choses qu'on ne peut pas voir.
> LE CAPPADOCIEN: Cela me semble absolument ridicule. (16-18)

To these characters, the very thought of believing in something non-visual is "absolument ridicule." But even more striking is the inability of these characters to hold any type of two-sided conversation. They can only understand things if they assimilate them into their own subjective experiences. When the second soldier announces that one of the Tetrarch's wines is purple like César's cloak, the Cappadocien responds, "Je n'ai jamais vu César." When he says the other is yellow like gold, the Cappadocien responds "J'aime beaucoup l'or," thus transforming the metaphoric property of the wine into a blunt, tangible thing. One might say that the Cappadocien is portrayed as a child, a subject who cannot see beyond his own immediate, subjective needs. The perpetual sliding into otherness and the inescapable exchange between persons and things within the play begets egos/selves that may function as narrowly as the "things" that enrapture them.

In lieu of Nordau's sirens' call for artistic propriety, Wilde offers imagination, and complex multiformity, as the method of escaping what *he* identified as degenerative: Victorianism's propulsion toward "greater simplicity." Bruce Haley writes,

> Enlarging Arnold's definition of culture, Wilde conceived of the cultivated person not just as knowing the best that has been thought and said, but becoming, insofar as he can, all that has been imagined. Whenever one stops imagining, one ceases the healthy process of realizing one's self in a multiplicity of forms. One then stops growing and starts degenerating toward greater and greater simplicity. That is why the decay of lying in a culture indicates the decay of that culture. It means the social domination of the sincere: the single or homogeneous personality.[50]

[50] Bruce Haley, "Wilde's 'Decadence' and the Positivist Tradition," *Victorian Studies* Vol 28, No 2 (Winter 1985): 223.

But Wilde's commitment to the disingenuous, as well as his lamentations on 'the decay of lying,' equate to Wilde's own perverse, aesthetic Truth. Instead of the Arnoldian dictum that the artist must "see the object as in itself it really is," Wilde credited art's value in representing the object-as-it-can-be, always imaginatively transforming. Rather than the *real* object, Wilde presents his audience with the multiplicity of the object, the word or the character in all its artificial and imaginative possibilities. Not only was Wilde "able to see the imagination as a principle of heterogeneity" but the "mythopoeic faculty now became for him the basis of an advanced and vital culture, not as before the sign of an infantile or unprogressive one."[51] Unlike figures like Nordau, Havelock Ellis determined that the decadent style "was really a refinement on the classic, an 'advance' on it, 'a further specialization, the homogeneous, in Spencer's phraseology, having become heterogeneous. The first is beautiful because the parts are subordinated to the whole; the second is beautiful because the whole is subordinated to the parts.'"[52] The multiplicity inherent in Wilde's conception of artistic objectivity was necessary for the development of the self. Wilde maintains that "The good we get from art is not what we learn from it; it is what we become through it."[53] Nordau failed to perceive that the alterity of Wilde's own proper inflection of aestheticism is its very sincerity, representative of Wilde's honest belief that any word or thing can just as easily represent its very opposite. Culture and the arts only develop, for Wilde, in direct proportion to the development of individual subjectivity: people are defined by the things they become, the clothes they wear; actors by the parts they play.

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[51] Ibid., 221.
[52] Ellis in Haley 228.
[53] Allison Pease, "Aestheticism and Aesthetic Theory," *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, ed. Frederick S. Rosen (New York: Palgrave, 2005) 111.

For Wilde, art "depends on the intensification of personality," and for Wilde "personality" was not innate; instead, "personality" was always multiple, the very opportunity for a person to self-commodify based on their fancies.[54] Wilde believed in the theory of artificial multiplicity ardently enough that even in July 1896, during his imprisonment in Reading Gaol for gross indecency, he proved himself the consummate actor by playing the part typecast for him by Nordau in order to improve his prison environment. In a 2,000-word document written to the Home Secretary, Wilde attempted to justify his need for additional reading materials, greater than the two books per week allowed. Joseph Bristow affirms that, "Hoping to persuade the authorities to take pity on his condition, Wilde claimed that his 'monstrous sexual perversion' could be explained through 'the works of eminent men of science such as [Cesare] Lombroso and Max Nordau' which had identified 'the intimate connection between madness and the literary and aesthetic temperament.'"[55] Bristow asks what seems to be an insoluble question, whether Wilde "honestly" believed Nordau's pseudo-scientific theories, and if he "truly" thought that Nordau's study "provided a plausible account of his literary success and his sexual behavior."[56] It seems quite reasonable that Bristow uses such perilous words as "honestly" and "truly" in order to reveal that a *true and honest Wilde* is an oxymoron of sorts. Wilde "stood at the crossroads where ideas of a 'genuine self,' in Matthew Arnold's nostalgic phrase, began to be superseded by an unstable, performance-based subjectivity."[57]

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[54] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying."
[55] Joseph Bristow, "Biographies," *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, ed. Frederick S. Roden (London: Palgrave, 2004) 28.
[56] Ibid., 28.
[57] Kerry Powell, *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theater, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 4.

i. *À Rebours*

> 'I flee from what is moral as from what is impoverished,' said Wilde to Gomez; 'I have the same sickness as Des Esseintes.'
> –Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*

Within literature, the Decadents' "supreme of artifice" reached a pinnacle in the book that Arthur Symons referred to as "the breviary of the Decadence" – J. K. Huysmans' *À Rebours*.[58] Though the decadent style finds itself subject to an ever-oscillating set of interpretations, Huysmans' novel and its protagonist, Des Esseintes, are quite often considered the paradigm of the movement. Sandra Siegel contends that, "In the 1890s 'decadent' typically referred to style, in its widest range of meanings," and that Des Esseintes "is made to stand for the representative 'decadent' in whom [Arthur] Symons finds 'the sensations and ideas of the effeminate, over-civilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of society.'"[59] In the Prologue, J. K. Huysmans introduces the reader to the novel's protagonist in the following manner:

> A en juger par les quelques portraits conservés au château de Lourps, la famille des Floressas des Esseintes avait été, au temps jadis, composée d'athlétiques soudards, de rébarbatifs reîtres. […] La décadence de cette ancienne maison avait, sans nul doute, suivi régulièrement son cours ; l'efféminations des mâles était allée en s'accentuant ; comme pour achever l'œuvre des âges, les des Esseintes marièrent, pendant deux siècles, leurs enfants entre eux, usant leur reste de vigueur dans les unions consanguines.
>
> De cette famille naguère si nombreuse qu'elle occupait presque tous les territoires de l'Ile-de-France et de la Brie, un seul rejeton vivait, le duc Jean, un grêle jeune homme de trente ans, anémique et nerveux, aux joues caves, aux yeux d'un bleu froid d'acier, au nez éventé et pourtant droit, aux mains sèches et fluettes. (1-2)

[58] Meltzer 13.
[59] Siegel 207.

Des Esseintes is the product of biological devolution, a blood-less and frail china doll of sorts. A wasted copy of his forefathers, Des Esseintes retains no resemblance to the portraits "composée d'athlétiques soudards, de rébarbatifs reîtres." On a practical level, however, something else has gone terribly awry in the above narrative. Des Esseintes degenerates into something very unnatural – an unmanly man – because *sex* has become unnatural here, at least by social standards. He is a product of incest. Even though incestuous sex is 'normatively' reproductive, it is an abominable version of the reproductive norm. Unsurprisingly, then, "l'artifice paraissait à des Esseintes la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme" (31). The novel founds itself upon his singular musings on catalogue upon catalogue of artificial things. Many of the chapters focus on one variety of art object that Des Esseintes owns, longs for and/or obsesses over: chapter III is books, chapter V is paintings, chapter X is perfumery. He refers to nature as "cette sempiternelle radoteuse" who has exhausted "la débonnaire admiration des vrais artistes, et le moment est venu où il s'agit de la remplacer, autant que faire se pourra, par l'artifice" (31). He revels in the idea of *artificial generation*: that man can give life to these inanimate objects – jewels, paintings, locomotives. Accordingly, des Esseintes finds a certain *puissance* in owning or admiring these products of male, creative ingenuity. Both through his biological ancestry and his literary lineage, des Esseintes represents the apex of the artificial and the emergence of the decadent dandy.

For the Victorians, any disruption of conventional standards of sex and gender was unsettling at best; the decadent, as well as his wellspring of counterpart stereotypes, most notable among them the *femme fatale*, complicate what is essential in nature. As Franz Meier writes in "Oscar Wilde and the Myth of the *Femme Fatale* in *Fin-de-Siècle*

Culture," "If the New Woman was considered to be and often caricatured as a sort of masculine female, the Dandy was described as an effeminate male and was thus almost synonymous with the homosexual."[60] Meier continues, "Contradictory as these stereotypes may seem, they all converge in a deviant, unproductive attitude towards sexuality that subverts gender boundaries and was thus considered a threat to the male-dominated symbolic order of Victorian culture." Huysmans's novel, in particular, marked a crowning point for the interchangeable representation of the dandified decadent and the new *femme fatale*, who often acted as a substitute for society's New Woman and the fears she evoked in equivalent measure. In particular, Francoise Meltzer claims that, "the metaphor for the entire poetics of A Rebours, the model for what he seems to do with the novel, is Gustave Moreau's Salome."[61] In his notebooks, Moreau depicted Salome as "an emblem of sensuality, of unhealthy curiosity, and of that terrible fate reserved for searchers after a nameless ideal."[62] Accordingly, she became the most visible symbol of the Orientalist idealism toward which French Symbolists and Decadents strived.

In his biography, Richard Ellmann claims that the "principal engenderer" of Wilde's *Salomé* is the exceedingly synthetic "account in the fifth chapter of Huysmans's *A Rebours* of two paintings of Salome by Gustave Moreau, and in the fourteenth chapter of the same book a quotation from Mallarmé's poem 'Hérodiade.'"[63] Although it seems certain that Wilde's Salome sprung from a far greater number of contextual sources, it is telling that the play's "principal engenderer, according to Ellmann, is such a self-conscious, artistic hybrid – a novel quoting a poem and performing ekphrases of

[60] Meier 119.
[61] Meltzer 15.
[62] Donohue 128.
[63] Ellmann 340.

paintings. In other words, an art form that must exploit *other* art forms. In the novel, Huysmans writes that "Après s'être désintéressé de l'existence contemporaine," Des Esseintes decides to purchase "une peinture subtile, exquise, baignant dans un rêve ancien, dans une corruption antique, loin de nos mœurs, loin de nos jours" (70). The decadent male protagonist identifies with this *femme fatale*, the embodiment of the obstinate paradoxes that typify his aesthetic. Des Esseintes contemplates Moreau's Salome, "more refined yet more savage, more hateful yet more exquisite than before […] the charms of a great venereal flower, grown in a bed of sacrilege, reared in a hot-house of impiety" (68). Like des Esseintes, Wilde defines his artistic subjectivity through the figure of the dancing daughter, and any incompleteness he felt for the art object in question led him to be equivalently filled with self-doubts. Wilde has his same sickness: Des Esseintes "expresses the artist's desire" and "experiences a kind of mimetic desire for the princess" as he stands in the same position as the "old king … crushed, annihilated, close to vertigo, before this dancer."[64]

But this decadent notion of artifice, as we might expect, is not so one-dimensional. It is not as simple as the real being replaced by the fake. Artifice instead usurps the real, and the artifice that Des Esseintes longs for, in a horrifying reversal of expectations that we have come to expect, is a real that *looks* like a fake. In essence, Des Esseintes is asking to be tricked, he's looking to find himself in this hedonistic masquerade: "Après les fleurs factices singeant les véritables fleurs, il voulait des fleurs naturelles imitant des fleurs fausses" (118). As Françoise Meltzer writes, "Like the artificially induced flowers in Des Esseintes's hothouse, far more beautiful than those

[64] Garelick 131.

found in nature, the novel outdoes God at his own game, for writing produces 'life' where there is none, precisely by insisting upon the superiority of artifice."[65]

Wilde spoke of Salome as "the cardinal flower of the perverse garden" and, indeed, his play performs a sort of return to the Garden of Eros.[66] The images of degeneration familiar to the nineteenth-century were equally indebted to theological interpretation, specifically regarding their inability to uphold the traditional gendered positions dictated by the book of *Genesis* and the mother and father of humanity therein, Adam and Eve. In a way, Wilde's Salome returns to a time before (like Villiers), or at least beyond, social mores restrictive of sex and gender. Of all the negative criticisms heaped upon Wilde's play upon its publication, the loudest were usually aimed at the unbridled eroticism of its female protagonist. As Regenia Gagnier suggests, "Had it been performed, a play like *Salome* would have confronted Victorian audiences with a spectacle of purposeless, 'unnatural,' unproductive, and uncensored art and desire."[67] She continues that, "With *Salome*, Wilde expected … to confront Victorian audiences with their own sexuality. In the work that he felt was his best illustration of art for art's sake, through the figure of Salome, he portrayed sex for sex's sake."[68] Of course, subjective desire on the part of Salome held no consequence within the biblical story of Herod's stepdaughter who danced for the head of John the Baptist. It was for her mother's vengeance that the biblically unnamed daughter dances in the Bible. As Gomez Carrillo affirms, Wilde found the biblical story "dry and colourless; without lavishness,

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[65] Meltzer 28.
[66] Ellmann 344.
[67] Reginia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) 141.
[68] *Ibid*., 165.

extravagance or sin."[69] Instead, Wilde wanted his heroine "to become the supreme incarnation of sexual love." Yet, Salome's original story possessed little in the realm of passions and pleasures, and Wilde seemed to find little inspiration in her original form, as "this poor girl who obeys her mother." Unlike Villiers, Wilde was not searching for the daughter of obedient artificiality but one characterized by exquisite deviance, and an alarmingly labyrinthine lineage of contextuality.

Upon its publication a multitude of critics discerned that Wilde's Salomé had the same problems as Huysmans's Des Esseintes: deep-rooted corruption, amorality, ungodliness. And Wilde's *Salomé* was so deeply enmeshed into this profusion of historical, artistic representations, into such a multitude of 'first' authors, critics contended that not much of her was actually indebted to the artistic authority of Wilde. "*Salomé* is a mosaic," writes an anonymous critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1893, "a library in itself."[70] Wilde's heroine is, he claims, "the daughter of too many fathers," naming Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, and Maurice Maeterlinck specifically as her most indispensable, literary forebears. The critic extends the metaphor, announcing tenaciously that, as the persistently reduplicated and thus disreputably degenerative female Symbol of the arts, *Salomé* functions as a symptom of a disease. He alleges that, like Des Esseintes, "she is the victim of heredity. Her bones want strength, her flesh wants vitality, her blood is polluted."[71] By the fin-de-siècle, Salome had become the poly-semantic icon for the Victorian era's social woes, which stemmed from aggrandizing, sexualized blights on society: prostitution, syphilis, even the New Woman. But on the grounds of *Salomé* being the adulterated *fille* of far too many artistic progenitors, Wilde

[69] Carrillo 194.
[70] Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theater of the 1890s* 45.
[71] Ibid., 45.

may have greeted the review with delight rather than offense. Wilde believed rather brazenly, even paradoxically, in the act of copying as a developmental requirement for an artist. As Wilde quipped to friend and contemporary literary critic Max Beerbohm, "Of course I plagiarise. It is the privilege of the appreciative man. I never read Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* without signing my name at the end of it. *Que voulez-vous?* All the best Hundred Books bear my signature in this manner."[72] So when the *Pall Mall Gazette* critic declares summarily that with *Salomé* Wilde proves, "not for the first time, that he can mimic, where he might have shown – for the first time – that he could create," he did not realize that Wilde's very intention for the piece was not creation, but perhaps instead, *simulation*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines simulation as an "unconscious imitation," "a surface resemblance," and the "tendency to assume a form resembling that of *something else*" (emphasis mine). Wilde's literary mimicry gravitates toward performance and every book he read offered another role for him to play, a mask for him to model. The ability to be a dramatic personality surely overpowers the strength of any one-dimensional representation, whether a painting or words on a page. Rhonda Garelick contends that, "The ruminations of Huysmans' Des Esseintes before Moreau's two masterpieces offer the best example of how Salome fits into the decadent aesthetic of the performing woman."[73] But Des Esseintes is somewhat paralyzed by the static painting, suspended in a state of vertigo, impressed by the artist's powers of mimesis while at the same time dizzied by the impossible gulf that separates him, the seer, from the art object seen. Drama offered Wilde a means to signal a shift of French Symbolist

[72] Ellmann 376.
[73] Garelick 131.

Salomania, moving into a space wherein the *femme fatale* can be unleashed and this drama of differential mimesis may be staged.

The composition of the play, a patchwork at least on the unconscious level, pays homage to the notion of performance to such a degree that Salomé's frighteningly kaleidoscopic character, as well as her doppelgänger, the moon, actually reflect the play's key personality: the actress. Reflecting back to our earlier discussion, we can locate within the play's textual structure additional affirmation that Wilde's intentions for *Salomé* were impregnated by the idea of Sarah Bernhardt, the actress. She already permeated the theatrical consciousness as the character of Salome *before* she was ever slated to play the role in Wilde's aborted, 1892 production – and before Wilde actually composed any of the play as well. Bernhardt's cult of personality was so strong that she became emblematic of the catalogue of *femmes fatales* that pervaded fin-de-siècle, French literature. Three years earlier, in a July 1889 review of Bernhardt, theater critic A. B. Walkley writes that,

> In following out the line of her destiny she has certainly given us a new type (new, that is to the stage) which one would not willingly have missed. I mean her embodiment of Oriental exotism: the strange, chimaeric, idol-woman: a compound of Baudelaire's Vierge du Mal, Swinburne's Our Lady of Pain, Gustave Moreau's Salome, Leonardo's enigmatic Mona Lisa. […] But at what cost has she given us this! The essence of the type is a sort of nightmarish exaggeration, something not in nature, the supreme of artifice. To 'create' a stage-type that is nothing if not exaggerated, unnatural, artificial, what a danger for the artist![74]

Bernhardt was able to typify the ensemble of French literature's ideal women, *femme fatales* … figures through which extremes like life and death, desire and disgust collide. Like Edison's Hadaly, however, the artificialized nature of Bernhardt's protean performances comes at a cost to mankind. Hadaly played the role of recorder, able to

[74] A. B. Walkley, *Playhouse Impressions* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984) 241.

recite the catalogue of man's written history; Bernhardt functions as a bizarre recording, playing back the roles penned by the most famous artists, yet somehow authenticating these roles in her own fashion. Villiers kept his Promethean figure Edison, and his andréïde, tucked away in the folds of fiction. Yet Walkley's review suggests that Bernhardt's acting allowed her to reach the brass ring of artificiality, and that her own Promethean endeavors of embodying this "supreme of artifice" were staged for all the world to see, thus coming at the "cost" of threatening nature in ways previously inaccessible to the author.

IV. Cult of Personality: Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

But before Huysmans's *À Rebours* further influenced Wilde to create a Salome of his own, the novel impacted what could be considered Wilde's first work in the vein of French Symbolism, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[75] When Wilde took the stand under cross-examination by Edward Carson during his 1895 Queensbury trial *À Rebours* was exposed as the influential "yellow book" that Lord Henry gives to Dorian Gray within the pages of Wilde's infamous novel.

Fueled by his own personal, artistic obsession with surface images, Wilde's novel upholds the literary principle made famous in the later nineteenth-century, the transformation of a person into an *objet d'art*. Artist Basil Halliward realizes his own artistic capability to mimetically reproduce beauty, painting a portrait of modern Adonis Dorian Gray, a portrait that becomes an object of love as well as an instrument of destruction within the novel. Soon after finishing his painting at the story's beginning,

[75] Merlin Holland affirms that, "Dorian Gray has been described as the only French novel ever written in English and it was unquestionably Wilde's fascination with the French décadents which partly inspired it." Cf. *The Wilde Album* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997) 137.

Halliward already recognizes that the creation of such a captivating body of art – the thingification of such an intoxicating personality – comes at the price of self-sacrifice to form. Basil admits to Lord Henry that when he sees Dorian for the first time, in a moment that mirrors when Gautier's Romuald catches his first glimpse of Clarimonde, he grows pale and "a curious sensation of terror" comes over him. He reveals, "I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (142). In a moment reminiscent of that when Frankenstein's creature awakens, Basil forewarns of this immediate reversal of power between artist and creation, declaring "I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray" (142). The ultimate reversal: the artist metamorphoses from the authorial master to the objectified, the mastered, and the portrait usurps the role of the all-powerful subjectivity. So, his mimetic power realized, Basil experiences a harrowing awakening that rivals that of Dr. Frankenstein: "As the painter looked at the gracious and comely *form he had so skillfully mirrored in his art*, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake." Already defenseless against Dorian's beauty, Basil ensures his defeat by realizing his love of Dorian's form through his painting.

Wilde's Dorian Gray plays the role of Narcissus for the network of male characters in the novel, ultimately signifying the self-absorption of art for art's sake.[76] Basil's love is not for the person Dorian so much as for Dorian's personality, or what the

[76] Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 183.

aura of Dorian's personality represents – ancient Greek values, beauty, love, art. He tells Lord Henry, "Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art. You might see nothing in him. I see everything in him. He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there" (144). Before his self-portrait is ever finished, Dorian is a thing, a captivating personality, an idea(l). The novel presents an inherent confusion over Dorian, whether at any given moment he, or his portrait, should be considered a person or a thing:

> "You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry."
> "Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?"
> […]
>
> The painter bit his lip and walked over, cup in hand, to the picture. "I shall stay with the real Dorian," he said, sadly.
>
> "Is it the real Dorian?" cried the original of the portrait, strolling across to him. "Am I really like that?" (152)

Basil contends that, "An artist should create *beautiful things*, but should put nothing of his own life into them" (144, emphasis mine). In fact, the portrait ends up being Basil's undoing precisely because it is a self-portrait more than it was ever a portrait of Dorian Gray. As Basil admits, "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter…it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself" (141).

Walter Pater, one of Wilde's aesthetic mentors, famously defined Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* as an "image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams" and, of course, da Vinci's dreams seem to be made of the self-same substance: artistic creation. And presence of the Mona Lisa "is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire." Pater writes that hers "is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or

beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!"[77] Pater's envisions that the *Mona Lisa* stands for what Villiers also seemed to be striving toward, an artificial Eve, or, humanity's enigmatic existence rediscovered through aesthetics. A vehicle for history itself:

> She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave … The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.[78]

The feminine work of art not only allowed a space for the ascendance of the male artist over the female mother but also, in turn, represented a medium for fracturing the boundaries of self and art, male and female, past and present. Consider the continuing mystery encapsulated within the *Mona Lisa* at present. The painting has acquired resurgence of critical interest (not that it ever declined) in January 2010 at the suggestion made that "the woman with the inscrutable smile may not be a woman after all." Italy's National Committee for Cultural Heritage has undertaken an investigation into whether or not "the Mona Lisa may be a self-portrait, da Vinci in drag."[79]

Artistic creation, for Basil as for Wilde, is an act of idolatry, but it may also be a medium for private desires. In accordance with Pater's interpretation of da Vinci's relationship to his Mona Lisa, Basil Halliward does not want the painting to be seen, forcing it to be hidden from view, because, he admits, "I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (141). In the novel, Basil tells Lord Henry of the portrait, "I

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[77] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 98.
[78] Ibid., 99.
[79] Nick Watt and Ammu Kannampilly, "Is Da Vinci's Mona Lisa a Self-Portrait?" http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/leonardo-da-vincis-mona-lisa-self-portrait/story?id=9662394

have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak." But Patrick R. O'Malley points to how in the original version of the story, which appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890, Basil's emphasis is on the erotic: "Because I have put into it all the extraordinary romance of which, of course, I have never dared to speak to him" (181). Dorian is "connected to the Greek tradition of the beautiful masculine beloved, and through Basil Halliward's desire for him to a Paterian model of a romanticized, aestheticized masculine object of desire."[80] There are many notable correspondences between the description of Dorian in the novel and Wilde's descriptions of his lover Bosie, mainly in letters. For instance, in the last chapter of the novel Dorian stands in front of the mirror and recounts that "one who had terribly loved him had written to him a mad letter, ending with these idolatrous words: 'The world is changed because you are made of ivory and gold. The curves of your lips rewrite history'" (251-252). In a letter dated March of 1893, Wilde borrowed some of his literary sentiments to express his admiration for real-life Bosie: "Dearest of all Boys – Your letter was delightful – red and yellow wine to me – but I am sad and out of sorts – Bosie – you must not make scenes with me – they kill me – they wreck the loveliness of life – I cannot see *you*, so Greek and gracious, distorted by passion; I cannot listen to *your* curved lips saying hideous things to me – don't do it – you break my heart."[81] This letter already suggests that Bosie, here likened to Art – 'so Greek and gracious' – will destroy 'the loveliness of life.' Wilde himself confirmed that their relationship was his inevitable downfall in *De Profundis*, a pseudo-love letter he writes to Bosie while in Reading Gaol, in which he tells him, "Of course, I discern in all our relations, not Destiny merely, but

[80] Psomiades 183.
[81] The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde. The concept of his words being like wine, of course, seems inspired by the imagery in Salomé.

doom." The publication of *Dorian Gray* immediately preceded Wilde's meeting of his life's own love object, "Bosie," and according to many scholars acts as a prophecy for the impending doom Wilde inevitably suffers through his own fair-haired Narcissus. Ironically, it has been suggested that Bosie was interested to meet Wilde based on him being the book's author.

In truth, the novel's prophetic vision deepens when one discovers that Bosie's own family history was directly linked with Wilde's fictional characters. Many scholars believe that Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* influenced Wilde's own *Dorian Gray*. A writer and a politician who would become Britain's first and only Jewish-descended Prime Minister (1868, 1874-1880), Disraeli imbued his many stories with sexual ambivalence, which proceeds seemingly from his own dandyism. The other well-known romance that he wrote was entitled *Sibyl*, the name of another important character in Wilde's novel, the actress Sibyl Vane, with whom Dorian falls in love briefly. It seems quite plausible that Disraeli's *Sibyl* influenced the naming of a member of the well-connected Montgomery family, with whom he was friendly – specifically Sibyl Montgomery, who in 1869 became the mother of Wilde's future lover, Lord Alfred Douglas.[82] Both the woman and the book were born in 1845, a truth that tempers the modest proposal of this uncanny relationship between Wilde's life and literature.

Wilde's most blatant manufacture of the *poseuse* occurs within the pages of *Dorian Gray*, through the figure of Sibyl Vane. While the influences at work in the tripartite relationship of Lord Henry, Basil Halliward and Dorian Gray (both the portrait and the personality) remain obscure and critically in flux, one of the clearest desires

[82] For more, yet brief, information on Bosie and his mother's biographical background see Neil McKenna's *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: Century, 2003) 150.

discernable in the story is Dorian's love for Sibyl Vane. He discovers her performing Shakespeare at a fairly dismal theater, "a tawdry affair," and reports to Lord Henry on her glorious ability to play an endless multiplicity of characters. Dorian proclaims, using language that echoes the sentiment of Pater's description of the *Mona Lisa*:

> She is everything to me in life. Night after night I go to see her play. One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She has been mad, and has come into the presence of a guilty king, and given him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent, and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I have seen her in every age and in every costume.[83]

Here, though, Sibyl's timelessness is linked directly to the notion of performance rather than painting, and specifically those performances that transcend time and gender. Dorian Gray finds himself overwrought with desire for an actress as the proprietor of infinite poses: a woman who, like Villiers's Hadaly, represents "tant de femmes [en moi] qu'aucun harem ne pourrait les contenir" (387). However, Sibyl Vane does not encapsulate a harem and is more than just a 'recording'; instead, she is the performative embodiment of Shakespearian form, a mechanism for the recitation and vivification of his complete works.

Wilde may have commented persistently on objects of innumerable affections for both himself as well as his literary characters, but this alliance between the performativity of the actress and the enactment of desire leads us to acknowledge that Wilde's unique twist is not to define desire's ultimate aim but to find it within the process of becoming –

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[83] We recognize that Sibyl Vane only plays Shakespearean heroines: Rosalind from *As You Like It*, Imogen the daughter of the King in *Cymbeline*, and Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet*. Of course, Jaques's famous monologue from *As You Like It* offers an apt sentiment for Wilde's theory of theatrical performance as, in itself, a representation of human growth and existence: "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts, / His acts being seven ages" (II.vii.139-143).

not one thing but *any and every thing*. As D. G. Mitchell questions in *Reveries of a bachelor; or, a book of the heart*, "Who is going to dam these billowy tides of the soul, whose roll is ordered by a planet greater than the moon, and that planet Venus? Who is going to shift this vane of my desires, when every breeze that passes in my heaven is keeping it all the more strongly to its fixed bearings?"[84] Sibyl Vane, by the very etymology of her name, is a paradox, an unpredictable prophecy. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, a sibyl is "one or other of certain women of antiquity who were reputed to possess powers of prophecy and divination," a prophetess. A vane, a common addition to the spires or other building pinnacles, is a plate of metal that will show which direction the wind is blowing, a weather-telling instrument. It was also used in Shakespeare's time and beyond to connote "an unstable or constantly changing person or thing." Finally, we might suggest that the wordplay between 'vane' and 'vain' would be additionally provocative here, though ironically it is Dorian's vanity and not Sibyl's that leads to the novel's fated and tragic conclusions.

When Sibyl's own love for Dorian becomes too real and anchored to *its fixed bearings*, only then, in a reversal of expectations, does she become stagy and her acting "wrong in colour" – and so Dorian's passion for her permanently dies. Her sincerity ensures that "Her gestures became absurdly artificial." The only *real* passion is for the woman on the stage, and by suggesting that she would leave it for a real life with Dorian – hence, erasing her performative multiplicity in favor of her own static persona as woman and wife – she enacts her own death-sentence. As Gagnier suggests, "Sibyl Vane embodied Wilde's ideal–until she thought to give it all up for a part in a middle-class

[84] D. G. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor; or, a book of the heart* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1853) 133.

marriage. For that Wilde killed her."[85] Sibyl describes falling in love with Dorian in terms of what she discerns as the dichotomous relation of art to life. She laments, "It was only in the theater that I lived… The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real." Sibyl revels in the overthrow of these theatrical 'shadows' in favor of what she calls "reality." She claims that Dorian, "brought [me] something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection." But Sibyl's reversal of sentiments shatters Dorian's illusions, as he tells her quite cruelly that his love for her has died because she now "simply produce[s] no effect" (182). Her "true" emotions get in the way of her acting, so that ultimately Sibyl represents a shift from good art to bad art. As Hannon insists, "She is making her life into bad art, assuming that most irritating pose of being natural."[86] In Wilde's *The Decay of Lying*, one of Vivian's doctrines of art reads, "all bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals."[87] In fact, it seems that giving into her natural, 'real' affections for Dorian in order to become his real-life beloved causes her to reach a paradoxical state of non-being. Lord Henry advises Dorian, who is saddened by her suicide, that he shouldn't grieve for a woman *who was never real*:

> No, she will never come to life. She has played her last part … The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare's plays and left them lovelier for its presence, a reed through which Shakespeare's music sounded richer and more full of joy. The moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn for Ophelia, if you like. Put ashes on your head because Cordelia was strangled. Cry out against Heaven because the

[85] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* 99.
[86] Patrice Hannon, "Theatre and Theory in the Language of 'Dorian Gray,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol 19 (1991): 158.
[87] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" 52.

> daughter of Brabantio died. But don't waste your tears over Sybil Vane. She was less real than they are. (189)[88]

Thinking that art reflects a higher Love, Sibyl gets it dead wrong. By renouncing art in favor of the real, she rescinds the life that art sustains.

[88] Sibyl as a "reed through which Shakespeare's music sounded richer" seems like a sentiment directly borrowed from Sarah Bernhardt, who, in describing the occupation of the actor-artist, notes that "L'artiste doit être un de ces plateaux sonores qui vibrant à tous les vents, qu'une brise légère agite" "The artist must be like one of those sounding discs which vibrate to every wind, and are agitated by the slightest breeze" (*L'art du théâtre*, 103).

Chapter Five

Regeneration:
Paradise Regained in Wilde's *Salomé*

I. Wilde's Garden of Eros

i. *The Song of Songs*

In *L'Ève future*, Edison laments his inability to capture moments in history objectively, through technological mediums such as phonography and photography, in order to restore man's faith in humanity by being witness to those events that built his civilization and culture. But Wilde believed strongly that history is subjective, and therefore begging to be rewritten. As he writes in "The Critic as Artist," "The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it."[1] Both authors rewrite biblical stories in their very different styles of Symbolism: Villiers tries to restore and repair the story of *Genesis*, but Wilde tries to enlarge the scope of Salome's story both aesthetically and subjectively. Wilde's project, then, compels itself toward the very radical otherness – or, the inevitable reconciliation between history and modernity – from which Villiers sought refuge.

In the original story, dating back to *The New Testament* (*Mark* 6:17-29, *Matthew* 14: 3-11), the princess Salome dances for her stepfather Herod, the Tetrarch of Judea, at his birthday feast, pleasing him so much that he offers her anything she desires. Salome requests the beheading of John the Baptist because of the encouragement of her mother, Herodias – whose marriage has been condemned by John as incestuous – and thus is

[1] Spoken by Gilbert, in dialogue with Ernest, who insists that Gilbert treats "the world as if it were a crystal ball," reversing it "to please a wilful fancy." Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1968) 359.

looked upon as the *femme fatale* responsible for the prophet's unfortunate demise.[2] The climax of Wilde's version resembles that of the biblical tale: Salome dances for her stepfather Herod to obtain the head of Iokanaan on a silver charger. However, most other facets of this particular, biblical story are mixed, magnified, or fictionalized in Wilde's version, especially on the level of character. As discussed earlier, Wilde emancipates his Salome from her mother's mandate and instead acts according to her own proper desires. Iokanaan differs greatly from the figure of John the Baptist familiar through European iconography. As Katherine Brown Downey writes, he "does not have the appearance of the wild man dressed in animal skins and sustaining himself on locusts, as John the Baptist of tradition did – a tradition even the soldiers and others in the play maintain when they discuss what they had heard about Iokanaan. Rather, he is lovely to behold: thin, pale, and passionate."[3] Salome seems wholly unaware of the history of the prophet, she takes him as a visual thing to behold and desire in the moment, unfettered by any historical prejudice. And notably, as Robert Ross remarks in his Preface to *Salomé*, Wilde conflates Herod the Great, Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa intentionally into one Herod character, to make of him a type, a symbol, rather than a historical figure. Other than Herodias, the rest of Wilde's cast of characters is largely his own invention, though as Rodney Shewan acknowledges, one might be "glancing at times towards Maeterlinck, Flaubert, J.C. Heywood, or Wilde's earlier fables."[4]

If Wilde's play can be considered a revisionist narrative akin to *L'Ève future*, it is because it attempts to recapture Paradise insomuch as it allows for the possibility of

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[2] According to *Matthew*, when he heard of the fame of Jesus after John's death, he thought that it was John the Baptist risen, "and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."
[3] Katherine Brown Downey, *Perverse Midrash: Oscar Wilde, André Gide, and the Censorship of Biblical Drama* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 101.
[4] Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1977) 134.

eating the fruit and sexually possessing the other – not for reproduction but solely for pleasure.[5] Fittingly, Wilde turned to another biblical intertext that better suited his aesthetic aims: the Song of Songs. The Song of Songs, also known as "Solomon's Song" or "The Song of Solomon," is part of *The Old Testament* and probably best described as a collection of lyric love poems. As Marcia Falk asserts, "if we think of the lyric as sensual, the exquisitely rich imagery of the Song would certainly qualify the Song as lyric poetry … [fitting] the etymological definition, which proclaims the lyric to be musical or songlike."[6] Most likely, Wilde, uninterested in staying true to the biblical edicts of Salome's story, found himself drawn to the Song's lyrical quality and its very plentitude of sensorial imagery as well as its abundance of unfixed orientations. Falk outlines the variety of interpretations of the Song, including its characterization as a cycle of wedding poems and as an allegory of love between God and the people of Israel, only to conclude that her main objection to classical readings is "their imposition of fixed personae and either plot or contextual unity on a text that seems instead to present a variety of voices speaking in a range of settings and without narrative sequence."[7] This contextual chaos, or what she calls "the variegated material of the Song," parallels Wilde's theatrical advancements toward a tangible experience incited by what Elliott Gilbert calls *Salomé*'s 'tumult of images': "And in the long catalogues of jewels and flowers, 'strange dyes, strange colors,' in the 'tumult of images' that Wilde puts into the mouths of his characters, we see the poet's language actually seeking to escape its

[5] Certainly, in the course of the analysis we will uncover that things are not so simple, for as idyllic as this makes the play sound, Wilde characterized it as a tragedy. Of course, there are two types of tragedies for the ever-paradoxical Wilde: getting what you want, and not getting what you want.
[6] Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) 113.
[7] Ibid., 103.

traditional obligation to order, abstraction, and hierarchy and aspiring instead to the physicality and simultaneity of graphic art."[8]

Wilde mimics the opulent carnality of The Song's most erotic language not only through this tumult of images but by having Salome praise her beloved through metonymical images identical to those in *The Song*.[9] The Song pays thorough attention to the body, which is wholly uncharacteristic of biblical writings. We are told in the first chapter of *Genesis* that human beings are made in the (spiritual) 'image' of a bodiless God and are offered no other visual clues except that these bodies are designated as two sexes, male and female. Yet physical beauty brings pleasure in the biblical world as well and *The Song* is one of the few, and the most graphic, accounts of this dimension. Here, these lovers detail each other's attributes seemingly as an expression of their own desire, using similes, metaphors, metonymy and synecdoche. The Biblical speakers look outside toward nature for linguistic resources for comparison, and "desire once awakened doubles back to these details, making them targets of lust-filled speech."[10] In *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex*, Ewa Kuryluk surveys the most obvious correspondences between Salome's monologues and this ancient biblical poem. Many of the images that Salome invokes to describe Iokanaan part-by-part are slightly altered versions of the images in *The Song*. Salome focuses on three aspects of Iokanaan's physicality – his body, his hair, and his mouth – and expresses her captivation (and subsequent disgust) with each as if she were performing ekphrases of a triptych painting. She begins with his body, of which she is amorous, a body "blanc comme le lys d'un pré que le faucheur n'a

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[8] Elliott L. Gilbert, "'Tumult of Images': Wilde, Beardsley, 'Salome,'" *Victorian Studies*, Vol 26, No 2 (Winter 1983): 133-159.
[9] Garelick 138.
[10] Carey Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: religion, the erotic and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 58.

jamais fauché," "blanc comme les neiges qui couchant sur les montagnes," the whitest of all things as she proclaims "Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps" (36). But when he bluntly rebuffs her advances by making clear that he obeys only the voice of the Lord God and not that of the daughter of Babylon, as he calls her – because, after all, "C'est par la femme que le mal est entrée dans le monde" – Salome changes her tune, calling his body hideous, "comme le corps d'un lépreux," "comme un sépulcre blanchi, et qui est plein de choses dégoûtantes" (36). She then proclaims that, instead, she is enamoured of his hair, "ressemblent à des grappes de raisins … qui pendent des vignes d'Édom dans les pays des Édomites," "comme les cèdres du Liban," "longues nuits noires, les nuits où la lune ne se montre pas," "Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux" (37). Again, after his subsequent repudiation she calls his hair "horribles," "une couronne d'épines qu'on a placée sur ton front" – an obvious allusion to Jesus Christ's fate at the crucifixion (37). Ultimately, she crusades passionately for Iokanaan's mouth, which, in some of the more blatantly *Song* inspired images, she likens to "une pomme de grenade coupée par un couteau d'ivoire," cooing that "Les fleurs de grenade qui fleurissent dans les jardins de Tyr et sont plus rouges que les roses, ne sont pas aussi rouges" as Iokanaan's mouth (37). *The Song* itself begins with a foundational desire that quite closely resembles Salome's main yearning in Wilde's play: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (1:2) Wilde puts an imperative version of this desire into the mouth of Salome, who, after Iokanaan spurns her advances a third time, reiterates no fewer than ten times at this point in the play some variation of "Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan," "Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche." She takes to repeating, like a madwoman, her prophecy – that she *will* kiss his mouth.

In "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," Francis Landy suggests that *The Song of Songs* shares the same preoccupation as the story of the Garden of Eden and presents itself as its "inversion, since it portrays Paradise in this world, rediscovered through love."[11] In The Song, the lover and beloved are allowed to reenter their sensual paradise: "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (4:16). And underneath all of its various intertextual allusions, Wilde's *Salomé* bestows upon its audience a version of the biblical beheading characterized by love and desire – and a return to the garden – more than any previous incarnation.[12] Salomé equates the procurement of her object of affection, in the overly sexualized image of kissing a beheaded man's mouth, to consuming him like fruit, "comme on mord un fruit mûr" (86). "[N]i le vin ni les fruits ne peuvent apaiser mon désir," she proclaims, because like a carnivorous Eve she is only hungry for his body: "J'ai faim de ton corps" (88). As Eve consumes the fruit that was pleasing to the eye in the Garden of Eden, Wilde's Salomé longs to consume the object of her sensual longings.

In *The Song of Songs*, love is the supreme value and "the generative force through which society perpetuates itself." Wilde's *Salomé* ventures toward the sensuous utopia of the Song within an enclosed space, like a garden. Wilde deftly used a tightly circumscribed time and place in order to induce an outbreak of desire, the likes of which were expelled after the Fall from Eden in favor of socialized commandments on the use of sex for reproduction, and within the confines of the husband-wife relationship. *The Song* invokes gender fluidity greatly divergent from the rigid sexual constructions that

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[11] Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol 98, No 4 (Dec 1979): 513.

[12] It seems that Wilde's original title for the piece, when it was early imagined to be a work of prose, was *The Double Beheading*. Cf. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome* 15.

emerged from the Fall. Whereas the Fall ushers in the doom of mortality, additionally, it dictates the unidirectionality of woman's desire to her husband. *The Song*, instead, offers a more pliable and equitable relation between lover and beloved. In progression, it reads: "My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his" (2:16), "I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine" (6:3), "I *am* my beloved's, and his desire *is* toward me" (7:10). It provides a fitting context considering that Wilde's independent magnification of the myth in terms of Salome's proper desire for Iokanaan reverses traditional gender roles and "contributes to the play's insistence upon the fluid, communal nature of desire."[13] It seems that some variant of sexual desire motivates most all of the main characters; ironically, Hérodias, who is the most vilified character in historical and biblical accounts of the tale, is the only character fairly untainted by sexual desire in Wilde's version. As Norbert Kohl writes, "The lasciviousness of the virgin lusting after the chaste prophet, and the desires of the sterile old man lusting after his stepdaughter – this certainly represents a decadent variation on the old romantic theme of love."[14] And Salomé's eventual yearning for the male scopic position, as Kramer indicates, suggests that she encodes the desire of one man for another, a mirror image of the male couple, Narraboth and the Page of Herodias, represented at the play's onset.

ii. Blind Eros and the Emptiness of Beardsley's Images

Illustrator Aubrey Beardsley's vision for the text's accompanying illustrations unveiled *Salomé*'s unwieldy otherness, especially sexual perversity, to such a heightened degree that his images were in danger of hollowing the play of any remnant of unified

[13] Garelick 138.
[14] Norbert Kohl, *Oscar Wilde: The works of a conformist rebel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 182.

meaning. Though Beardsley was chosen specifically to illustrate *Salomé* based upon his drawing of Salome holding the head of John the Baptist in *The Studio*, April 1893, Wilde also famously dismissed Beardsley's final illustrations for being too Japanese, when he was going for something rather Byzantine, like Gustave Moreau's.[15] Wilde seemed to discern the alterity of Beardsley's images as a threat to his own artistic designs, which has resulted in their relevance to Wilde's play being hotly contested by a majority of critics. However, the illustrations prove valuable in their outright otherness. The title of this section comes from the frontispiece to the 1894 *Salomé* text, a drawing by Beardsley entitled "The Woman in the Moon" (Fig. 5.1). It depicts two naked characters – the young Syrian, Narraboth, and the Page of Hérodias – being gazed down upon by the moon. This illustration holds special meaning; it was originally titled "The Man in the Moon" because, in fact, in the moon Beardsley has drawn the likeness of Wilde's face alongside an emblematic rose, which resembles a monocle given its proximity to Wilde's eyes. This was not the only image through which Beardsley put Wilde into art most literally. In "Entrée d'Hérodias," Beardsley paints Wilde into the bottom right-hand corner in a curious costume that resembles a jester's. What is most striking about Wilde in this image is that he holds in his arm a copy of *Salomé*, Beardsley's demonstration that Wilde's self and his art are temporally confused and inextricably conflated. Though Wilde produced and perpetuated caricatures of himself and others throughout his artistic career, he disliked his obvious caricaturing by Beardsley in his illustrations for *Salomé*.[16]

Of the critics who actually discuss Beardsley's drawings in their reading of the play, many concede that Wilde's moon-face watches over these two male figures, the

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[15] Ellmann 376.
[16] Donohue, 122. Beardsley draws Wilde within four of his illustrations for *Salomé*.

only example of a homosexual liaison readily available within the play, as if in union with and support of their same-sex desire. This reading is only bolstered by the fact that Wilde dedicated a copy of *Salomé* to Aubrey Beardsley with the following inscription: to "the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance." We might suggest that this invisible dance is a substitutive allusion to the silent "love that dare not speak its name," in consideration of the fact that Beardsley was also homosexual and that Wilde may have harbored affections for him.[17] The "love that dare not speak its name" is a euphemism for homosexuality that was coined by Wilde's young lover Bosie in his poem "Two Loves," published in the same year as the English edition of *Salomé*. Although it may have originally been meant to label a surreptitious kind of love, the phrase came to signify "gross indecency" as well, the crime for which Wilde was convicted in 1895. In *De Profundis* the "love letter" Wilde writes to Bosie from prison, he acknowledges the full spectrum of his love for his young lover, which, now that he finds himself imprisoned because of his attempts to defend Bosie, has turned equally to hate. Of course, the exchange of *a love that cannot be heard* for *a dance that cannot be seen* fits within the context of *Salomé*, a play in which the visual and the verbal become dangerous playmates. However, much like in *The Song of Songs*, desire in *Salomé* flows indiscriminately, in complete disregard of any social or sexual imperatives. The fatherlessness of *Salomé* – the legitimate father of Salomé and husband of Hérodias replaced with the licentious and illegitimate father/husband figure, Hérod – opens up a space for the play's insistence on overcoming sublimation and capitalizing on errant desire, reaching a crescendo within the image of Salomé orating her desire to the head of the dead prophet, as she succeeds in kissing his mouth.

[17] Wilde also claimed that he had "created" Beardsley (Ellmann 307).

Even though they diverge immensely from Wilde's intentions for the text's accompanying illustrations, Beardsley's drawings serve to emphasize the pervasive, sexual ambiguity of Wilde's play. Nicholas Frankel asserts that Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations "tease us with the prospect that they contain dangerous and perverse meanings, if only by the sheer profusion of undraped body parts and sex organs dispersed throughout."[18] In the image Beardsley created for the play's title page, for instance, a queer figure who rises out of the jungle of vines and roses is depicted with horns, Adam's apple, breasts with eyes for nipples, an eye where the navel should be, a penis and testicles emerging from beads of hair that look more like the pubic region of a female (Fig. 5.2). This proliferation of body parts, which we might assume to be signs of value regarding the figures' sex and/or gender, extends into many of the illustrations. In "Entrée d'Hérodias," for example, Hérodias has breasts and the large stature of a man, while her Page, despite his visible testicles, has the flowing hair, cheekbones and delicate body of a woman (Fig. 5.3). In Beardsley's front cover design for the first edition, the lines of the thighs of the impish, winged figure in the bottom right corner aren't smooth, but instead are rippled in the shape of a string of breasts. To try and follow these figures' red thread of sexual orientation proves maddening. The sexual signifiers in Beardsley's indiscriminate proliferations have been drained of meaning. Frankel asserts that, "Just when we think we glimpse the truths at which they hint, their 'signifieds' seem to collapse into their 'signifiers,' as if in a state of perpetual convertibility."[19] Even though Beardsley's panoply of sexual hybrids strike barely any resemblance to the characters within the play, and sometimes fail to resemble themselves from drawing to drawing, the

[18] Frankel 73.
[19] *Ibid*., 73.

illustrations succeed in indicating that in *Salomé* there is no governing sense of sexual difference, just as there is hardly any differentiation between persons and things. Villiers' *L'Ève future* tries to use technology as a meditative medium for the erasure of sexual difference, but in Wilde's *Salomé* characters are wholly indifferent to the differences between each other, instead preferring to blind themselves to any disparities in their individual, Symbolic perceptions.

Despite the importance of artifice in the perpetuation of Symbolic Salomes and the proliferation of visual components in Wilde's play – internally, on Salomé's desire for Iokanaan through images largely borrowed from *The Song*, and somewhat externally, the text's accompanying illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley – *Salomé* actually resists the cult of the image in favor of what art historian Erwin Panofsky called Blind Eros. Panofsky charts the development of Blind Eros back to classical philosophy: Plato's belief that the lover is blinded about what he loves, thus judging wrongly of the good and honorable. In *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics*, Patricia Flanagan Behrendt contends that, "Blind Eros highlights the self-involvement of the lover with his or her own emotions and the subsequent disregard of negative factors which might interfere with the experience. In other words, Blind Eros signifies that the lover is enthralled with his or her own experience while the love object – its nature, its needs, its responsiveness, its capacity for reciprocity – is not only secondary but perhaps irrelevant."[20] Indeed, Wilde's canon is pervaded by the demands of Blind Eros, an inexhaustible catalog of material representations of his characters' love for material *things*: in *Dorian Gray*, artist Basil Halliward is in love with a picture; in "The Fisherman and his Soul," a naiad makes love

[20] Patricia Flanagan Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 43-44.

to the dead body of a fisherman. Most of the titles of his literary works shift away from the main character titles common to Romanticism – like *René* or *Adolphe* – and instead define their subjects by these hybridized subject-objects: *A Woman of No Importance*, for instance, or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The title of his play *Salomé* might suggest a shift away from this predilection. But his only work titled by the name of its female protagonist plays into the same system, for Salomé is nothing more than a thing.

II. Wilde and Terrible Music

> Ce qu'on ne peut dire et ce qu'on ne peut taire, la musique l'exprime.
> –Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*

In Paris, on the night when he began to physically record his story of Salome, Wilde went out to the Grand Café and told the leader of the orchestra, "I am writing a play about a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved for and slain. I want you to play something in harmony with my thoughts."[21] As Ellmann relates in his biography, the "wild and terrible music" played by the orchestra leader not only quieted all those present but also incited Wilde to return and finish writing *Salomé*. Reviews by Lord Alfred Douglas and William Archer, as well as content of a variety of Wilde's letters and interviews, indicate that Wilde saw *Salomé* as a literary composition approaching musicality, a major triumph of Aestheticism in the vein of Pater's declaration in *The Renaissance* that "*all art aspires to the condition of music*," therefore offering music as a model for aesthetic transcendence.[22] According to Wilde, "In a very ugly and sensible age, the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other," but none was

[21] Ellmann 344.
[22] Cf. Brad Bucknell, "Re-reading Pater: The Musical Aesthetics of Temporality," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol 38, No 3 (Autumn 1992): 597-614.

as fluid and versatile as music in terms of the artist's self-expression.[23] In *De Profundis*, the love letter Wilde writes to Bosie from prison, Wilde reveals his belief that music was the one form "in which all subject is absorbed in expression and cannot be separated from it," thus eliciting a passionate symbiosis between artist and art form.[24] In a letter written to Bosie in June 1897, one month after his release from Reading Gaol, Wilde requests that Bosie find an art form through which he can best express his own personality. The underlying sentiment that Wilde shares with his beloved is that to be a true subject, a true artist, he must turn himself into an aesthetic thing in the spirit of *Dorian Gray*:

> Of course your own personality has had for many reasons to express itself *directly* since then, but I hope you will go on to forms more remote from actual events and passions. One can really, as I say in *Intentions*, be far more subjective in an *objective* form that in any other way. If I were asked of myself as a dramatist, I would say that my unique position was that I had taken the Drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the Lyric or the Sonnet, while enriching the characterisation of the stage, and enlarging – at any rate in the case of *Salomé* – its artistic horizon. […] The recurring phrases of *Salomé* that bind it together like a piece of music with recurring *motifs*, are, and were to me, the artistic equivalent of the refrains of old ballads.[25]

Wilde enlarged the "artistic horizon" of drama in *Salomé* by deconstructing the specific meaning of words in favor of a molten style of musical expression; this musicality of *Salomé*'s language totally absorbs all the play's characters, visuals and action. Wilde realized that the self was "socially constructed through language, which was why he waged a life-long subversion of conventional speech patterns."[26] Music, "the least discursive of the art forms," allowed Wilde to subjugate a patriarchal language that would

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[23] Wilde, "Pen, Pencil and Poison."
[24] Wilde, *De Profundis*, 67.
[25] Letter written to Lord Alfred Douglas [?2 June 1897] from the *Hôtel de la Plage, Berneval-sur-Mer*, in *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Letters* 254.
[26] Regenia Gagnier, "Wilde and the Victorians," *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 20.

only betray his artistic subjectivity. Instead, he found it within "an art that is essentially and actively other."[27]

The critics who lambasted Wilde's *Salomé* for being deviant and unnatural are quite accurate in their impressions; however, the play's inauthenticity only serves to heighten its versimilitude. The dialogue in *Salomé* is as excessively artificial as the ultimately nonsensical exchanges between the characters of *Dorian Gray*. David Wayne Thomas writes that the play "suggests a kind of musicality in its elaborately artificial, highly mannered patterning of dialogue."[28] Whereas *Dorian Gray* quests to make sameness its masterpiece – love amongst the same sex, the quest to never age and always look the same – *Salomé* exploits its innate otherness through its recourse to musicality. *Salomé*'s ever-fluctuating associations between subjects and objects – as well as persons and things, words and meanings, desire and disgust, real and artificial – are made dramatically harmonious through its musical style, and are drawn together through repetitions of words and phrases that function as refrains. For example, we can reference the moment that Salomé persuades Narraboth, the Young Syrian, to allow her access to Iokanaan:

> SALOMÉ: Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth, et demain, quand je passerai dans ma litière, sous la porte des vendeurs d'idoles, je lasserai tomber une petite fleur pour vous, une petite fleur verte.
> LE JEUNE SYRIEN: Princesse, je ne peux pas, je ne peux pas.
> SALOMÉ *(souriant)*: Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth. Vous savez bien que vous ferez cela pour moi. Et, demain, quand je passerai dans ma litière, sur le pont des acheteurs d'idoles, je vous regarderai à travers les voiles de mousseline, je vous regarderai Narraboth, je vous sourirai, peut-être. Regardez-moi, Narraboth. Regardez-moi. Ah ! vous savez bien que vous allez faire ce que je vous demande. Vous le savez bien, n'est-ce pas ? … Moi, je le sais bien.

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[27] David Wayne Thomas, "The 'Strange Music' of Salome: Oscar Wilde's Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality," *Mosaic* Vol 33, Issue 1 (2000). *Literature Resource Center*. Web.
[28] *Ibid*.

> LE JEUNE SYRIEN *(faisant un signe au troisième soldat)* : Faites sortir le prophète …, la princesse Salomé veut le voir. (29-30)

Salomé's continual reiteration of elementary phrases – *Vous ferez cela pour moi* – as well as repetition of the same linguistic structures – *je vous regarderai, je vous sourirai* – lend rhythmic power to her utterances, empowering her as a subject despite the fact that oftentimes she simply parrots the sentiments of others. Thomas asserts that *Salomé*'s "studied dialogue is congruent with Western forms of musical exposition, wherein elementary patterns are proposed and developed through progressive elaborations on initial ur-patterns or motifs … interconnection and development."[29]

If we were to closely inspect the language of the linguistically seductive Lord Henry in *Dorian Gray* it would illustrate that his penchant for epigrams and other definitive and neatly packaged sentiments vanquishes any absolute value of his spoken words. His language is excessively artificial: "Lord Henry's language should be considered ephemeral, preeminently occasional, and impure, which is to say, sullied by environmental linguistic influences and, we are to imagine, dramatic motives."[30] But the more synthetic Henry's words are the greater the authority they have over Dorian, for he too hopes to make himself synthetic by escaping time. Instead, Henry seems primarily motivated by the form of language, its stylistic flourish, which allows him the power to influence Dorian – a power far greater, it seems, than Basil's ability to mimetically reproduce the young man. Although the painting is positioned to be his influential double, Dorian admits that he remains most passive and ultimately overpowered by Lord Henry's speech, the transformative power of his verbal music:

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[29] *Ibid*.
[30] Hannon 152.

> Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words! (147-148)

Like Lord Henry's verbal quips, Salomé's words are like music, seducing and influencing not just one character within the text but all those outside it: the audience. They are, indeed, meant to be complicit in the spectacle. As Gagnier writes,

> when Wilde himself imagined his play on stage, he envisioned a synaesthetic picture, appealing to the aural, visual, and olfactory faculties, and emphasizing Salome's effect on the audience. Salome's words were 'like music'; he first wanted her to be costumed in shades of yellow, then in gold or silver, then green like a lizard, then as unadorned as Victorian stages would permit; he wanted braziers of perfume wafting scented clouds before spectacular sets. Before the British censor intervened, he and Sarah Bernhardt planned how best to affect the audience. He consistently stressed that Salome, rather than Herodias, Herod, or Iokanaan, was to be the focus for the audience. And this emphasis would result in the audience's unavoidable focus on itself.[31]

From Wilde's perspective, the dramatic arts degenerate when they fail to produce any effect. We can revisit Dorian Gray's scornful reproach of Sibyl Vane for failing to remain worthy of his love, not because of any inherent character flaw but, instead, because her refusal to continue to play dramatic characters ensures that she "simply produce[s] no effect" on him (182). For Wilde, *all the world is a stage*: the stage opens up a space for a new world, a space for life to occur as an aesthetic synaesthesia, employing all the senses. The audience needed to be affected; Wilde's conception of art was not only born of thought, it also had to be carried through all the human faculties. Wilde's vision for *Salomé* necessitated a rupture through the fourth wall, the imaginary wall at the front of the stage that served as a convention of theatrical realism, consequently expanding the

[31] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* 165.

horizon of the theater broadly enough to provide a universal moment of Narcissistic reflection for the audience, who becomes yet another "other" that Wilde includes within the play subversively. In identifying with Salome the audience must also identify with the thing she has become as well as the object she resembled from the beginning, the moon. Just like the persons and things caught in the glare of the moon on stage, the audience is forced to see their reflection in its silvery glare. And the play's intoxicating, "strange music" that envelops the audience orally also forces them to acknowledge that the betrayal between words and meaning offers access to a higher plane of aestheticism. The repetition of already established sentiment creates a rhythmic blending of sounds, overpowering any value of authentic emotion in favor of the visceral sensations produced by this network of inauthentic metaphors, impressed upon the characters within the play and the audience outside it alike.

In the Imaginary Order, the subject is permanently seized by his own mirror-stage image; the play's constant glimpses of the moon ensure that all persons and things, all subjects and objects, access this space of artistic Imaginary.[32] On the whole, *Salomé* destabilizes both Symbolism and the Symbolic Order; its subversion of the laws of the theater mimics its desire to depose language and the law. Symbolic matters have gone haywire on purpose, turning symbols into pseudo-symbols, thus emptying each and every one of any absolute meaning. Only Hérodias, a completely tertiary character in Wilde's treatment of the story, refuses to believe in prophets, symbols and maledictions. She is the only one reasonable enough to suggest "La lune ressemble à la lune, c'est tout" (44).

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[32] Gagnier, *Idylls*: "*Salome* is the only one of his plays that seems as if it could have been constructed on the models articulated by Artaud in the 'First Manifesto' of the Theater of Cruelty … 'It is not a question of suppression the spoken language, but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams,' wrote Artaud" (166).

For every other character, the moon reflects, reveals, foreshadows, curses; it holds far more power than any of the play's language, although as a symbol, the Moon's authority corresponds to its own Symbolic futility. Hérod becomes self-aware of the fact that he, like the other characters, causes his own downfall by looking too much at things, and into signs. He accepts that "Il ne faut pas trouver des symboles dans chaque chose," because all this *seeing things* makes life unbearable –a cautionary lesson, perhaps, for Wilde's audience, as he intended them to be immersed in the synaesthetic spectacle as well. As Nicholas Frankel explains, "The play takes an adamantly materialist approach to language; and its characters so self-consciously and consistently interrogate each other about what they mean, and about whether signs might be taken for wonders, that it becomes impossible to accept the logic of symbolic production."[33] All of the play's symbols, then, become as reflective as the moon, not meaningful in themselves but producing meaning nonetheless. The play's very fatherlessness – textually enacted through the substitutive and lascivious stepfather Herod, who is powerless to deny Salomé her wish to invalidate the power of Iokanaan by removing his head – allows for the passage into a meeting place for the theatrical spectacle and the Imaginary.

i. The Eros of the Artist: or, eating one's heart out

Indeed, *Salomé* is a tragedy not because it is a failed aesthetic quest, like *Dorian Gray*, but a successful one. If Wilde's play epitomizes Aesthetic pseudo-scripture, the most valuable lesson it imparts upon its audience is that *looking (with desire) is dangerous*. Because by looking I mean both the subject who looks (at the object), and the object that looks (*like* the subject, and vice versa), no one or thing is exempt from this

[33] Frankel 72.

perilous relationship. Wilde was famously interested in the symbolic capabilities of the mask and the mirror and, like a mirror, the play's moon catches everyone and everything in its glare, thus transmitting a bevy of dangerous resemblances indiscriminately amongst persons and things. In defiance of expectations, Wilde ensures the play's prioritization of fate not through the figure of the religious Prophet but through the symbolic moon, which predicts and authorizes the play's ultimate tragedy: desire's fulfillment. Although advocating for the ultimate value of the visual, the play also demands its spectators to recognize that those who look in lustful ways, as well as those who desire blindly, will bring punishment upon themselves. As we recognize from the Page's early warning to the young Syrian as he gazes too much upon Salomé, "Il ne faut pas regarder les gens de cette façon … Il peut arriver un malheur" (14).

Wilde's subversive strategy perversely challenges, perhaps even deconstructs, the 'pleasure' found through the binary opposition between seer and seen. Accordingly, *Salomé* calls into question the very aesthetic foundations upon which it is built. As Rhonda Garelick writes, "Wilde borrowed from decadent literary conventions for his versions of Salome – but with a different result. Refashioning this biblical legend as drama, Wilde luxuriated in the jeweled, orientalist prose of the French decadents he so admired. Then, using their language, he told the story of the demise of their aesthetic, announcing the emergence of his own modern and unambiguously camp revision of it."[34] In this sense, Wilde's *Salomé* becomes a burlesque, a con-text that not only relies on its extra-textual history (its *context*) but willing participates in its own self-deception (a *con*, a sham).

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[34] Garelick, 128.

Textually, the play simulates Symbolism with the intent on glorifying aestheticism while, caught in contradiction, undermining the literary movement's very foundations. Wilde quipped most famously, in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "All art is at once surface and symbol" and that those who strive to glimpse underneath, "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril" (138). One might say that this 'peril' Wilde warns against is the conflation of art and life, or, the necessity of assigning a singular, quotidian meaning to the Symbol. Or, it might mean that if we dare to look beneath the surface of the symbol, we will only become aware of its nothingness, for if life's pleasures were to be found in Art then the destruction of such aesthetic mirages could only result in the painfulness of life's demise. Of course, like everything else, Wilde took his artistic symbols so seriously that they became incompatibly comical. Take, for instance, the matter of the green carnation that Salomé offers to drop for Narraboth in Wilde's play. In order to gain access to the guarded and imprisoned Iokanaan, she tells Narraboth, "Vous ferez cela pour moi, Narraboth, et demain, quand je passerai dans ma litière, sous la porte des vendeurs d'idoles, je lasserai tomber une petite fleur pour vous, une petite fleur verte" (29). The green carnation was designated as a badge of dandyism and homosexuality in the late nineteenth-century. According to Reginia Gagnier, it became concurrently an emblem "of the triumph of the artificial over Nature and things called 'natural.'" By having Salomé promote the green carnation as her own symbol of want within the play, Wilde suggests an alliance between the *femme fatale* and the dandy, literary daughter as a reflection of the artist. On the other hand, however, W. Graham Robertson's description of Wilde's idea for staging *Lady Windemere's Fan* emphasizes that Wilde's symbolism willingly approaches the

nothingness from which Villiers's and the Symbolists sought refuge, specifically within the realm of the spectacle. Wilde told Robertson that he wanted as many men in the audience as possible to wear a green carnation and one character on stage. Wilde explained his desired effect: "A young man on the stage will wear a green carnation; people will stare at it and wonder. Then they will look round the house and see every here and there more and more little specks of mystic green. 'This must be some secret symbol' they will say. 'What on earth can it mean?'" When Robertson asked Wilde what it *did* mean, Wilde responded "Nothing whatever, but that is just what nobody will guess."[35] Rhonda Garelick determines that, "Salome's green flower is Wilde's gesture toward his public image; and it is intended to blur the distinction between himself, his work, and the audience."[36] Rather than act as the sign of a singular meaning, the green carnation acts as a theatrical manifesto for Wilde the "serio-comic…High priest of Aestheticism," who would succeed in turning "the audience itself into an object of artifice."[37]

So indulgent in its own glorifying decadence and its characters' equivalently fervent desires, Wilde's play remains blinded to what lies outside the walls of its Garden of Eros and turns against itself, ending in tragedy. Salomé wants to kiss Iokanaan on the mouth and she does, kissing the prophet's severed head in a scene where her desire's fulfillment only gives way to a near universal disgust on the part of all who witness "The Climax" (Fig. 5.4).[38] From Wilde's viewpoint, however, we might venture to suggest

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[35] W. Graham Robertson, "Of Oscar Wilde," *Oscar Wilde: interviews and recollections* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979) 213.
[36] Garelick, *Rising Star* 145.
[37] Robertson 213; Garelick 145.
[38] The Beardsley drawing from *The Studio*, April 1893, was originally titled "J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan"; this drawing led Bodley Head publisher John Lane to commission Beardsley to execute a series of illustrations for the first English edition of Wilde's *Salomé* (1894), in which the reproduction of this image was named "The Climax." According to Sir Kenneth Clark, *The Studio* drawing "aroused more horror and indignation than any graphic work hitherto produced in England" (*The Annotated Wilde*, 313).

that, while *Salomé* is a tragedy, its musicality also makes it an artistic triumph. Admittedly, Wilde never got the chance to see the play – which we might argue was the most High Drama of all his texts, both textually and contextually – performed on the stage. But before the Lord Chamberlain banned the production in London in 1892, Wilde was able to witness Sarah Bernhardt bring the character to life in rehearsal. Wilde told an interviewer that hearing in rehearsal "my own words spoken by the most beautiful voice in the world has been the greatest artistic joy that it is possible to experience."[39] The eros of the artist, or Wilde's own aesthetic climax, depends upon Wilde's Pygmalionesque exultation of hearing his words vivified by the *most beautiful voice* – the actress of actresses reciting Wilde's own climactic song of songs. *Salomé* resists being constructed in static, linguistic systems; instead, Wilde saw it as a piece to be played, as if on musical instruments. Earlier, we discovered that Wilde used French, a language known to him yet foreign, as "an*other* instrument," as he confesses wanting "to touch this new instrument to see whether I could make any beautiful thing out of it." And the play's performance necessitated a voice, the archetypal musical instrument, which Sarah Bernhardt considered to be her most powerful artistic medium. As she writes in *L'Art du théâtre*, "La voix est l'instrument le plus nécessaire à l'artiste dramatique. C'est elle qui fixe l'attention du public, c'est elle qui lie l'artiste et l'auditoire."[40] Indeed, after seeing her at the first night of *Phèdre* in London June 1879, Wilde commented that it was "'not until I

The illustration depicts Salomé holding the head of Iokanaan, which resembles the head of Medusa. Droplets of what seem to be blood (the illustration was done in black ink with green watercolor wash) fall from the head and into a pool at the bottom of the image, from which springs forth a flower – a lily. The lily was Wilde's favorite flower and many illustrations were made of Wilde holding or contemplating flowers, including narcissi and sunflowers, while some even depicted Wilde's head as a flower. Of course, the lily was also the flower with which Wilde's good friend, actress Lillie Langtry – the "Jersey Lily" – was associated. Cf. *The Wilde Album*.

[39] Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre* 42.

[40] Bernhardt 45.

heard Sarah Bernhardt in *Phèdre*… that I absolutely realized the sweetness of the music of Racine.'"[41]

The play's musicality represents the real triumph and tragedy of the play – love. Upon the reopening of the newly renovated William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at UCLA in 2007, Merlin Holland, grandson of Oscar Wilde, delivered a lecture on "Oscar Wilde and Music." Holland charted Wilde's interest in music as a poetic device and his authorial development of "sonorous and effective phrases" in order to illustrate that for Wilde, music, above all, was "'a mood and a metaphor' most often of love and beauty." Holland professed that for Wilde, to be 'music-less was the worst tragedy' of all."[42] Historically, Wilde had likened romantic unions to music. In a love letter written to wife Constance in 1884, he rejects the need to yearn for her physical presence; he swears to her that it "would not make you any more real." Instead, his heart delights because the "air is full of the music of [your] voice," as he tells her, revealing, "my soul and body seem *no longer mine*, but mingled in some exquisite ecstasy with yours" (emphasis mine).[43] And music was the only form that could allow Wilde's obstinate paradoxes to intermingle in perfect harmony, especially when love turned to loss, as it did quite infamously for Wilde. In "To L. L.," a poem written to actress Lillie Langtry, Wilde's second to last stanza prophesizes: "Well, if my heart must break, / Dear love, for your sake, / It will break in music, I know, / Poets' hearts break so."

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[41] Ellmann 118.
[42] Merlin Holland in Tiffany Perala, "'Oscar Wilde and Music': A Lecture by Merlin Holland at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 14th October 2007." *The OScholars*, Issue no 42, October/November 2007. http://www.oscholarship.com/TO/Archive/Forty-two/And_I/AND%20I.2.htm
[43] This is one of the only surviving letters that Wilde wrote to his wife Constance, probably because, following his incarceration for gross indecency, most of their correspondence would have been destroyed by her family. The letter was postmarked the 16th of December 1884. Cf. *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Letters* 85.

Wilde's play ends with Salomé's lengthy address to the head of Iokanaan, in which she affirms, like Hérod, that people shouldn't look so much at things – but for Salomé this is because, she concludes, "Il ne faut regarder que l'amour" (88). Love incites Salomé to pursue Iokanaan single-mindedly, and this love is located primarily in the sound of Iokanaan's *musique étrange*. She admits, seemingly in one-sided conversation with the head of the prophet:

> Ta voix était un encensoir qui répandait d'étranges parfums et quand je te regardais j'entendais une musique étrange! Ah! Pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan? … Eh bien, tu l'as vu ton Dieu, Iokanaan, mais moi, moi, tu ne m'as jamais vue. Si tu m'avais vue, tu m'aurais aimée. Moi, je t'ai vu, Iokanaan, et je t'ai aimé. Oh ! comme je t'ai aimé ! Je t'aime encore, Iokanaan. Je n'aime que toi. J'ai soif de ta beauté. J'ai faim de ton corps. Et ni le vin ni les fruits ne peuvent apaiser mon désir … Ah ! Ah ! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan ? Si tu m'avais regardée tu m'aurais aimée. Je sais bien que tu m'aurais aimée, et le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort. Il ne faut regarder que l'amour. (88)

Hearing Iokanaan's strange music causes Salomé to become a terrible, desiring machine. She has no quotidian, bodily needs; admitting in the above citation that neither wine nor fruit can quench her desires, she is only hungry for Iokanaan's body, a carnivorous Eve. Her use of the verb "voir" ("to see") indicates that *seeing* Iokanaan means loving him, loving him so consumingly that she must, in turn, consume *him*. And such power to internalize her beloved Other becomes possible in Wilde's perverse garden. Here, rather than bear progeny painfully as Eve is commanded – punishment for eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge – Wilde's Eve of artifice is empowered with a subjectivity that allows her to eat that which is pleasing to the eye, that which is desired by the heart. She tells Iokanaan's disembodied head, "Je la mordrai avec mes dents comme on mord un fruit mûr" (86).

But this bizarre and sensuous vampirism might actually be the *most* spiritual element of the play. The tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden represents God inasmuch as eating its fruit means acquiring the Divine traits that it represents. The tree as totem represents God. In the Christian mythos (of which Iokanaan function as prophet) eating such fruit would be inherently cannibalistic. For the Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is foundational, the bread and wine that have been transubstantiated from the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. If death came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of forbidden immortality, consuming the Body and Blood of Christ restores life.[44] Iokanaan refused to *see* Salomé, to love her, and for that he has to die, so that she can consume him in a eucharistic parody.

Salomé's act of cannibalistic lust is primarily an act of love, a horrid yet harmonious union of subject and object, lover and beloved. Indeed, cannibalism emerged quite literally within the French tradition as early as the sixteenth-century with the publication of Michel de Montaigne's essay "Des Cannibales." In observing the act of cannibalism within savage civilizations, which was usually constituted by the eating of one's ancestor and sometimes of one's enemy, Montaigne recognized it as an act of respect and a sign of love – the internalization of the desired object, whether it be adored or admired for its fearlessness. This most inhuman act then turns out to be quite human, foundational to subjectivity itself. As J.M. Blanchard writes, "it is perhaps instructive that the essay on the Cannibals is one of the few … where 'I' ('je') never means Montaigne's self, but rather serves to introduce what constitutes this 'je,' by delineating the field of

[44] In *The King James Bible*, John 6:51 recounts the promise made by Jesus to his people: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

knowledge, of its experience: of its culture … *Des Cannibales* emblematizes … some sort of pre-Rimbaldian '*Je est un autre*.'[45]

In one of his last works, *De Profundis*, Oscar Wilde affirms his allegiance to this artificial generation of writers we been tracing in this project, acknowledging the debt for his own artistic subjectivity, by parroting Gautier's self-realization that began chapter one. Wilde writes, "Like Gautier I have always been one of those *pour qui le monde visible existe*."[46] But by the time he writes this, during his incarceration in Reading Gaol for gross indecency, Wilde has come to acknowledge that sometimes *being* art fails to enrich one's life, or at least causes one to be blind to the mechanisms of real society. He writes,

> Still, I am conscious now that behind all this Beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some Spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this Spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Life, the Mystical in Nature–this is what I am looking for, and in the great symphonies of Music, in the initiation of Sorrow, in the depths of the Sea I may find it.[47]

Though he had always been *like* Gautier, Wilde becomes equally wary of the illusion inscribed into this artificial generation.

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[45] J. M. Blanchard, "Of Cannibalism and Autobiography," *MLN*, Vol 93, No 4, French Issue: *Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject* (May 1978): 667.
[46] Wilde, *De Profundis* 115.
[47] *Ibid*.

Chapter Six

Hitchcock's See-Through Woman in *Vertigo*: *From the Dead or There'll Never Be Another You*

I. Cinema and the Cult of Death

French film critic André Bazin imparts upon cinema the same function as the Pygmalionesque literature we have been discussing in this dissertation – animating, or artificially generating, these dead and inanimate bodies that have occupied us from the beginning:

> Une psychanalyse des arts plastiques pourrait considérer la pratique de l'embaumement comme un fait fondamental de leur genèse. A l'origine de la peinture et de la sculpture, elle trouverait *le « complexe » de la momie*. La religion égyptienne dirigée tout entière contre la mort, faisait dépendre la survie de la pérennité matérielle du corps. Elle satisfaisait par là à un besoin fondamental de la psychologie humaine : la défense contre le temps. La mort n'est que la victoire du temps. Fixer artificiellement les apparences charnelles de l'être c'est l'arracher au fleuve de la durée : l'arrimer à la vie. … Il ne s'agit plus de la survie de l'homme, mais plus généralement de *la création d'un univers idéal à l'image du réel* et doué d'un destin temporel autonome. … Si l'histoire des arts plastiques n'est pas seulement celle de leur esthétique mais d'abord de leur psychologie, elle est essentiellement celle *de la ressemblance* … (emphases mine) [1]

Antonia Lant suggests that Bazin's famous trope of the *le « complexe » de la momie* is not unique to the cinematic medium nor to the twentieth-century, because the alliance between "illusory forms of representation and ideas about Egypt" have been "detectable at least since the French Revolution" and have persisted throughout the nineteenth-century.[2] Indeed, in the first chapter we identified a sense of the cinematic mode of representation within Gautier's Egypt-inflected aesthetic of resurrection. In her article about "How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania," Lant extends numerous alliances

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[1] André Bazin, *Qu'et ce que le cinema? I: Ontologie et Langage* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1958) 11.
[2] Antonia Lant, "The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania." *October*, Vol 59 (Winter 1992) 90.

between ancient Egypt and film, including the "association between the blackened enclosure of silent cinema and that of the Egyptian tomb," "a noted parallel between mummification as preservation for a life beyond life and the ghostliness of cinematic images," and the "link between the chemistry of mummification and that of film development and printing."[3] Gautier used the resurrection of ancient Egypt, through the discursive figure of the mummy, to represent timelessness and the conquest of death, at least for a moment in fantasy; these are aesthetic aptitudes that the cinema inherited in the evolution of these aesthetic modes of representation. But, although the cinema offers mastery over death, it also demands the medium's perpetual encounter with it.

The photogenesis of the human on film offered a technological advantage in this quest for aesthetic memorialization. In the manner of nineteenth-century French literature, film becomes the modern, artistic medium most agile at promoting an artificially generated, alternate reality fed by this persistent creation fantasy and mankind's unending obsession with Pygmalionesque generation. As a mode of fantasmatic representation, the cinema emblematizes the matter of artificial generation. But although film can embalm time, the sense of history it conveys through its *living scenes* proves as illusory as it is real. Even Bazin, who treated the cinema as a phenomenological system, writes that the film screen fed on a reality for which it planned to substitute, thus inscribing a necessary illusion into his reality scribing system.[4] According to early French filmmaking pioneers, the Lumière brothers, early cinematic representations mirror the very creation fantasy of nineteenth-century France: "Instead of holding to a reproduction of life (Lumière was adamant in later years: 'the film subjects I

[3] Lant 90.
[4] Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 13.

chose are the proof that I only wished to reproduce life'), it holds to *a reproduction of the image of life*" (emphasis mine) – a copy of life that turns out to be exceedingly real.[5]

As we witnessed in our discussion of Villiers's *L'Ève future*, the very function of cinema gets mapped onto the female body artificially re-produced, and re-animated on screen in a quest for "the satisfying projection of a basic oneness."[6] Annette Michelson writes, in relation to *L'Ève future*'s entanglements with the cinematic body and the possible conflation of body, text and theory, "Those acts of magic perpetrated upon the female subject, as by Edison and Méliès in the films of the primitive period" permit "the obsessive reenactment of that proleptic movement between analysis and synthesis, which will accelerate and crystallize around the female body in an ultimate, fantasmatic mode of representation *as* cinema."[7] Villiers's novel substantiates an artificially generated love object that is feminine symbolically and exclusively photographic, prefiguring the cinema as a medium for animating the feminine ideal and signaling a shift of Pygmalionism from literature to film.[8] Indeed, early cinema made habitual use of the very same female figures we have examined in this project. In the first few years of cinema production at the turn of the century, films of dancing women abound, including Edison's four different versions of Annabelle Whitford Moore's Serpentine dance. And the late nineteenth-century's obsession with Salome as the dancing *femme fatale* also translated into film. Tom Gunning argues that female stage performers like Loie Fuller, who gained the cult-like devotion of the Symbolists for her serpentine and Salome dancing, "created the

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[5] Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 4.
[6] *Ibid*., 38.
[7] Michelson 19-20.
[8] Cf. Michelle E. Bloom "Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut," *Comparative Literature*, Vol 52, No 4 (Autumn 2000) 300.

cinema before cinematography by wedding movement to light."[9] As Lant points out, "Egypt played midwife to film's birth … as subject matter" as well, causing several major film companies sending crews to Egypt well before the first World War.[10] "Five versions of Cleopatra were filmed between 1908 and 1918 alone," while at the same period "mummy films proliferated in America," "with Egypt providing the logic for the cinema's magic."[11] And finally, the robot-woman becomes the emblem of German expressionist cinema in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), for which his wife, Theo von Harbou, borrowed from Villiers's *L'Ève future* in writing the screenplay.

Just as Villiers's Hadaly turned out to be more representative of death than a life-giver – not an artificial Eve as much as a manufactured Eurydice – so the cinema was impregnated by an identical fascination with death. Dead women have haunted the cinema since its birth, but one of the most perverse and self-aware examples of a film that revolves around the notion of a dead woman is Alfred Hitchcock's Orphic romance, *Vertigo* (1958). Hitchcock created films reliant upon the invocation of the woman as narrative locus as well as the node of impossible narration, thus inscribing textual meaning and tension through visual paradigms fulfilled through feminized objects of visual fascination. The film re-produces yet another copy of the story that kept repeating itself throughout the nineteenth-century, what in regards to *Vertigo* Robert Samuels calls "a constant alternation between the attempt to control and shape the feminine form on the one hand, and on the other hand, a deep awareness of masculine loss and lack."[12] In

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[9] Tom Gunning, "Loie Fuller and the Art of Motion" Body, Light, Electricity, and the Origins of Cinema," *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, ed. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003) 85.
[10] Lant 101.
[11] Lant 102, 103.
[12] Robert Samuels, *Hitchcock's Bi-Textuality Lacan, Feminisms and Queer Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 77.

particular, the film reenacts with striking similarity the cinematic embodiment of woman as the site for the conversion of absence into presence, of "lack into a form of representational plentitude" and of death into life. In *Vertigo*, the feminine figure is subjected to her artificial generation as both *fascinante* and *revenante*, figures characterized within the first chapter in our reading of Gautier's *La Morte amoureuse*. In "Hitchcock's World," Charles Higham asserts that in surrendering to it, "the film invades one's consciousness with rules of its own," making it "one of those films … which completely creates a decadent, artificial world unrelated in any way to the real one."[13] It is, indeed, the most artificial and fantastical film that Hitchcock created.

II. The French Hitchcock: *Vertigo* and the *auteur*

Despite his history in the film studios in Germany, England and America, Alfred Hitchcock and his cinematic œuvre were praised and largely adopted by the French critical tradition. Hitchcock's filmmaking career began in London in 1919 as the illustrator of title cards for silent films. Through the early 1920s he acted as assistant director at London's Players-Lasky studio as well at Germany's UFA Studios, an experience that help account for the Expressionistic character that would come to characterize many of his later films. His earliest directed picture was *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), an Anglo-German production; from *The Lodger* (1926) to *Jamaica Inn* (1939), Hitchcock directed films in Great Britain that would help him build his own prototype of suspense films. In 1940, Hitchcock directed his first Hollywood film, *Rebecca*, which would also be his most critically acclaimed piece. Never returning to the British film system, Hitchcock made over 30 films in Hollywood from 1940 until his last

[13] Charles Higham, "Hitchcock's World." *Film Quarterly*, Vol 16, No 2 (Winter 1962-1963) 15.

film, *Family Plot*, in 1976. His most inspired period of filmmaking, however, occurred from the 1950s to the early 1960s, a period during which he created the ultimate in sophisticated thrillers like the Grace Kelly vehicle *Dial M for Murder* (1954) and *To Catch a Thief* (1955), meta-cinematic masterpieces like *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958), and his masterwork of horror, *Psycho* (1960). French critical interest in "le cas de Hitchcock" began around 1950, due in large part to the emergence of *auteur theory* from the annals of *Cahiers du Cinema*. One of the founding elements of *auteur* film criticism was Alexandre Astruc's notion of the "caméra-stylo" (1948), granting film directors the right to employ their cameras just as authors wield pens. In the very first issue of *Cahiers* (April 1951), Astruc wrote two articles on Hitchcock who, according to Astruc, "proved himself capable of writing cinema with the camera, with style, grace, and internal unity worthy of Milton."[14] In 1954, François Truffaut first applied the term *auteur* in its newfound, cinematic sense in his essay, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français." The writers of *Cahiers*, such as Truffaut and Eric Rohmer, impacted the direction of film criticism tremendously in the 1950s with their consideration of film direction as a form of authorship, and directors less as technicians than as authors, engaged in creating a corpus of works that cohesively testify to a singular, artistic vision.

Truffaut and Rohmer adopted Hitchcock as one of the prime examples of a film *auteur* with an unmistakable visual style and a body of work that attested to him being more than just a director: rather, the considered him a creator, an artist. In February 1955, *Cahiers* published its second issue devoted to Hitchcock, which revolved around the director's recent interview with François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol. The interviewers asked Hitchcock about an upcoming film project that promised to be, perhaps, his most

[14] James M. Vest, *Hitchcock and France: The Forging of an Auteur* (Westport: Praeger, 2003) 22.

French-influenced film. At the time, the film project bore the name *From the Dead*, the English translation of the title of the French novel on which it was to be based, *D'Entre les morts*, written by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac. Hitchcock had wanted to purchase the rights to Boileau and Narcejac's earlier novel, *Celle qui n'était plus*, but was beaten out by Henri-Georges Clouzot, who adapted the story into the immensely successful French film *Les Diaboliques* (1955). Hitchcock's admiration for *Les Diaboliques* was unsurprising considering his own desire to have told that particular story on film, and considering the fact that Clouzot, who was often called "the French Hitchcock," had many of the same directorial attitudes to themes such as obsession, paranoia and morbidity.[15]

In his interview of Hitchcock, Truffaut hinted quite strongly that the storyline of *D'Entre les morts* – which would later become *Vertigo* – seemed so perfectly tailored to Hitchcock's cinematic concerns that it could have been written *for* him. In fact, in a letter by Truffaut to Jacques Rivette, which was appended to the end of the interview, Truffaut states that there was reason to believe that the French novelists had concocted the story, with its thematic debts to Hitchcock films such as *Rebecca* and *Strangers on a Train*, explicitly for the director. James M. Vest maintains that in doing this, "Truffaut indirectly gave the *Cahiers* writers credit for the origins" of *Vertigo*, by Truffaut's "suggesting that specific themes – themes identified and promoted by *Cahiers* writers – were purposely

[15] In *French Cinema: from its beginnings to the present*, Remi Fournier Lanzoni maintains that "one associates Henri-Georges Clouzot, known as the "French Hitchcock," with the development of psychological thrillers in France during the postwar era" (New York: Continuum, 2005) 172. However, the nickname also gets used for French film directors Claude Chabrol and Louis Malle. Cf. Joan Hawkins, "'See It From The Beginning': Hitchcock's Reconstruction of Film History," *Framing Hitchcock: selected essays from the Hitchcock Annual*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb and Christopher Brookhouse (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002) 384.

introduced into the novel on which *Vertigo* is based."[16] This strange trajectory implies that the *auteur* system of interpretation was already inscribed into the original French text, which would be turned into the film that many film critics would consider Hitchcock's most masterful and most personal.[17] But by the time *Vertigo*'s screenplay was finished in 1957, its resemblance to the original novel was increasingly remote and had become stamped indelibly with the Hitchcock touch, his signature style. However, it persists as the most French of Hitchcock's films, most distinctly in consideration of its visual reproduction of the same Pygmalionesque delusions that largely overwhelmed nineteenth-century French literature.

Vertigo's main protagonist, John "Scottie" Fergusson, is haunted from the very beginning of the film. The film opens with a chase scene across the rooftops of San Francisco: a criminal (we assume) being chased by two law enforcement officials, an unnamed policeman and Scottie (we learn later), following quickly behind. Though the criminal and the policeman manage to leap from one roof to the next, Scottie's jump falls short and he slides down the roof's slope and hangs from the gutter, which bends under the force of his weight. Dangling from such a height, Scottie is seized by an attack of vertigo when he looks downward, which is illustrated by Hitchcock's famous, signature forward zoom / reverse tracking shot. Rather than continue the chase, the policeman turns back to help Scottie, but while he stretches out his arm he tumbles off the roof to his death on the city street below. In the next scene, Scottie is in the apartment of friend Midge, his college sweetheart and ex-fiancée. Injured after the chase, Scottie has mainly recovered from any pain except that he wears, at least for one more day, a "darn corset"

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[16] Vest 98.
[17] Cf. Vest 168.

that binds – a fitting metaphor for the frailty of the male protagonist. Though he looks forward to the next day, when the corset comes off and he'll be able to scratch himself "like anybody else," he has no static plans for getting past the past or planning for the future. We learn he has quit the police force because of what he perceives as his inability to perform such duties, now that he suffers from acrophobia. When Midge asks him "What happens after tomorrow?" Scottie determines that since he is a man of "independent means" he doesn't have to do *anything*, thus giving the audience a clear indication that he is *still*, despite his miraculous and mysterious escape from the roof after his near-death fall, in a state of suspension.

In the next scene, Scottie ventures to the shipyards to visit an old school chum, Gavin Elster, who wants to hire him to follow his wife. Elster believes that "someone out of the past" takes possession of his wife, Madeleine, from time to time, and that this "someone dead" will cause her harm. During her fits, Elster tells Scottie, Madeleine is "somewhere else, away from me, someone I don't know," and when she returns to her self again, she "doesn't even know she's been away." Although Scottie, retired based on his disability, is reluctant about reentering detective work, Elster invites him to come to Ernie's restaurant that night, where they will be dining, in order to see Madeleine. Scottie finds himself easily lured into the mystery behind Madeleine's strange behavior and follows her as she wanders, unconsciously we would assume, to a variety of spots across San Francisco. Scottie follows her first to the florist and then to Mission Dolores, where Madeleine pays her respects at the gravesite of Carlotta Valdes (1831-1857). Madeleine proceeds to stop at the art gallery in the Palace of the Legion of Honor, and Scottie watches her as she sits on a bench in front of a particular portrait, enraptured by it. The

portrait contains visual clues relevant to Scottie's unraveling of Madeleine's mystery. In the painting, the woman holds a bouquet of flowers just like the one Madeleine had picked up during her first stop at the florist. The identification between Madeleine and the woman in the portrait intensifies when Scottie looks at Madeleine's hair, pinned in the back into a swirl, and realizes that the woman in the portrait has her hair fixed in the same way. The museum guard tells Scottie what he had already suspected, that the woman in the portrait is Carlotta Valdes, the same woman resting in the grave Madeleine visited earlier. Madeleine's last stop is the McKittrick Hotel; Scottie watches her enter and then appear in the window of one of the second floor rooms, but somehow she disappears mysteriously. Scottie's now obsessive curiosity over the figure of Carlotta leads him to request Midge introduce him to an "authority on San Francisco history," who turns out to be Pop Liebl, the owner of the Argosy bookshop. Liebl tells them the story of Carlotta Valdes, the beautiful mistress of a wealthy man, who built the McKittrick Hotel originally as a home for her. Carlotta bore his child but he still "threw her away," which led her to become "the sad Carlotta" and then "the mad Carlotta," eventually committing suicide.

Scottie follows Madeleine again to Old Fort Point and saves her from drowning after she throws herself in San Francisco Bay. He takes her back to his apartment, where he discovers that she does not remember what had happened to her. When Scottie speaks to Elster on the telephone, Elster admits that Madeleine is the same age (26) at which her great-grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, committed suicide. The next day Scottie follows Madeleine as she drives around the streets of San Francisco, but this time the only stop he follows her to is his own apartment; she wanted to return, after slipping out while Scottie

took the call the night before, in order to bring him a "formal thank you note." They soon go out "wandering" together, and Scottie learns that Madeleine has hallucinations of death and that she does indeed identify (unconsciously, it seems) as the long dead Carlotta. She believes that the only explanation is that she is "mad." She tells him of a recurrent dream she has, set in a Spanish mission, and Scottie, desperate to unravel the mystery and free Madeleine from her "possession," unveils that her dream setting is real. The next day he takes her to the site of these dreams, San Juan Bautista, blissfully optimistic that he has solved the mystery and therefore can free the woman he now loves from her possession, in order to possess her himself. But she becomes distraught and runs up the stairs of the bell tower, and because Scottie's vertigo impedes him from reaching the summit he cannot keep her from throwing herself from the tower to her death.

During a brief courtroom inquest Scottie is freed from any legal blame in Madeleine's death; however, the dream sequence that follows suggests that Scottie has somehow gone mad. He spends a year in an asylum, where Midge, unsuccessfully, plays him Mozart to "sweep the cobwebs away." But even after his release, Scottie's obsession perseveres and he returns to the same settings in which he had seen Madeleine while she was alive. He soon spots a woman, Judy Barton from Salina, Kansas, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Madeleine. After he follows her home, she reluctantly agrees to go to dinner with Scottie, obviously enamored with her based on her resemblance to Madeleine (though Judy is more unrefined). Before their rendezvous, however, Judy sits down to write a letter, the contents of which are narrated for the audience and accompanied by a flashback sequence, explaining that she played the role of Elster's wife Madeleine all along as part of a cover up. Wanting to get rid of his actual wife, Elster

hired Judy to play his wife and lure Scottie into this artificialized mystery of Carlotta Valdes. While Scottie fails to fully ascend the tower at Old San Juan Bautista, Elster throws his murdered wife's body from the top, and Scottie watches a body fall to its death that he can only be lead to presume is "Madeleine." The rest of the film follows Scottie as he molds Judy in Madeleine's image, dressing her in the same clothes, forcing her to recreate Madeleine's iconic blond hair bun. Judy gives in to Scottie's charade in the hopes he will return her love, optimistic that he will one day come to love her and not just the Madeleine he resurrects through her. But once she has been successfully remodeled into the image of Madeleine, she makes the fatal mistake of putting on the same necklace from the portrait of Carlotta, obviously a sentimental keepsake from Elster. Scottie, suddenly understanding everything, drives Judy to San Juan Bautista in order to "be free of the past." He forces her up the stairs of the bell tower while he verbally stages the scene of Madeleine's death. He berates Judy for having been "the copy, the counterfeit," and tells her "It's too late, there's no bringing her back." Suddenly, a nun appears in the shadows and Judy, in fright, throws herself from the tower.

Though Hitchcock was regarded as "the master of suspense," *Vertigo*, of all the films in his canon, undermines the traditional formula of the genre in which the director had become marvelously proficient; consequently, the film is a somewhat perplexing, cinematic hybrid. Certainly, it qualifies as a "suspense" film inasmuch as Hitchcock considered the development of his distinctive formula to derive from the literary talents of nineteenth-century author Edgar Allan Poe. In "Why I am Afraid of the Dark," Hitchcock admits that "very probably, it's because I liked Edgar Allan Poe stories so

much that I began to make suspense films," contending that he and Poe "are both prisoners of a genre: suspense."[18] However *Vertigo*, theatrically released in May 1958, failed to achieve the commercial success expected from a Hitchcock film largely, it seemed at the time, due to the film's deviation from the traditional romantic-thriller formula (as well as what the audience deemed to be the film's unnecessary length). The most idiosyncratic feature of the film was Hitchcock's insistence on giving away the secret – that Judy really *is* Madeleine – just a bit over halfway through its running time. This ensured that the film differed markedly from the traditional suspense formula, with a sustained building of tension to be resolved in the end. Boileau and Narcejac's novel did not reveal Judy's true identity until the very end, according to this formula, so that both reader and male protagonist discover the secret at the same time. However, Hitchcock insisted on unveiling the secret mid-film, causing the discontent of everyone involved in the production, including screenplay writer, Samuel Taylor. Unveiling the secret prematurely ensured that the second half of the diegesis allowed the audience to forego the mystery of the woman's identity in favor of the build up of anxiety within the male subject, effectively splitting the film into two main parts; this, indeed, makes *Vertigo* one of Hitchcock's most introspectively psychological films. In his interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock confirmed that his interest was to "give the public the truth about the hoax so that our suspense will hinge around the question of how Stewart is going to react when he discovers that Judy and Madeleine are actually the same person."[19] Noël Carroll argues that, despite the film's classification as suspense, it is more accurately deemed a romance, based on its intensity of passions within the film's affairs. However, as Lesley Brill

[18] Hitchcock, "Why I am Afraid of the Dark," *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 143, 145.
[19] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967) 185.

claims, "Hitchcock's romantic films are organized around quests that lead … to the creation (or recovery) through love of the protagonists' personal and social identities," and that, conversely, the "miscarrying of that search constitutes the central frustration of *Vertigo*."[20] Indeed, *Vertigo* strays from 1950s Hollywood's formula for romance, instead offering the audience a frighteningly bleak love story, the first Hitchcock romance to end in "abject failure."[21]

One might determine that the film's resistance to a fixed genre causes it to become defined as case-specific, and that its hybridity of form defines its singularity. In 1958, *Cahiers* critics Rohmer and Chabrol pointed toward Hitchcock's ever-present Platonism, calling the *auteur* "one of the greatest 'inventor of forms' in the whole history of film," and indeed with *Vertigo*, "the form does not embellish the content. It creates it."[22] Film theorist Robin Wood reclaimed some attention for the film when he published *Hitchcock's Films* in 1968, in which he esteems *Vertigo* as "Hitchcock's masterpiece to date and one of the four or five most profound and beautiful films the cinema has yet given us." As one of five films owned by Hitchcock himself, *Vertigo* – which Hitchcock told Truffaut was one of his favorites, albeit reluctantly – was removed from circulation between 1973 and 1983, which curbed theoretical discussion of the film.

However, during the last year that *Vertigo* was available to the public (1973), film theorist Laura Mulvey wrote "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," an essay that analyzed how classical Hollywood cinema reflected the patriarchal order by which it was

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[20] Lesley Brill *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 207.
[21] Patrick McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New York: Harper, 2003) 548.
[22] Discussion of *Vertigo* by the *Cahiers* contributors proved minimal and the first book-length, critical examination of Hitchcock – *Hitchcock: Classiques du Cinéma* – was published in 1957, the year during which Hitchcock filmed *Vertigo*. The book, written by Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer, ends on an analysis of Hitchcock's forty-fourth film, *The Wrong Man*; *Vertigo* is his forty-fifth.

dominated. Mulvey's essay uses feminist-inflected "psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him."[23] She uses *Vertigo* as an example exegetical of her premise, that the cinema develops scopophilia, or desire in looking phallocentrically, "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance" wherein "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female."[24] Indeed, she interprets film as a signifying system determined by a gender dichotomy that, at its foundation, recalls the traditional, Pygmalionesque structure. She writes that, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" so that the woman "displayed as sexual object is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle … she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire." But her analysis of Scottie's fetishistic investments are overly simplified and her reading deceives itself into promoting the same patriarchal Symbolism of the cinema that, simultaneously, it decries. Mulvey writes that Scottie, "a policeman" with "all the attributes of the patriarchal superego," sadistically "follows, watches, and falls in love with a perfect image of female beauty and mystery," consequently "break[ing] her down" and "exposing her guilt."[25] Though Mulvey's claim that Hitchcock uses the process of identification to show "its perverted side," she has somehow doubly perverted the psychoanalytic complexity of the film's narrative.

It is quite difficult for the modern viewer to consent to Mulvey's characterization of Scottie as an empowered, sadistic subject when the film makes apparent that he is a

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[23] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 203.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*., 207.

man afflicted by myriad delusions – all of which may be gathered under the blanket term "vertigo" – from the film's beginning to its end. Scottie does not break woman down; rather, she shatters *him*, through both the supposed death fall of "Madeleine" as well as Judy's fall to her very real death at the film's end. Indeed, though one of Scottie's main preoccupations, especially after losing Madeleine after she falls from the tower, is to be "free of the past," the film itself obsesses over man's history as an idealized past, a time during which man had "the freedom and the power." But, aside from Gavin Elster's ability to carry out the murder of his wife and never get caught, man's "freedom and power" is neither palpable nor present within the film's narrative. The past is just that, a long departed concept to be mourned. Although we may find ourselves interpreting Scottie's fetishistic refashioning of Judy into Madeleine as an attempt to regenerate his subjective power and control, by the film's end, we cannot but consider it a failed endeavor.

Vertigo is a film dominated by the past to such a degree that its narrative represents a hollowing out; rather than demarcating the presence of the present here-and-now, the narrative conjures mainly absences, voids, and missed encounters. Scottie embodies the very sentiments that predominate over the story: lack, guilt, and repression. Before Scottie falls in love with a dead woman (who is as good as dead, at least, in her supposed desire to commit suicide like her great grandmother, Carlotta Valdes), he is marked by the death of the policeman that will effectively end his law-enforcement career, a career that the audience only knows about by witnessing the fall that marks its demise and consequent absence from the story. But Scottie, dangling from the roof after the policeman falls in his attempts to come to his aid, is as good as fallen himself, as if

the story begins at the very moment he is ejected from an Eden-like environment. The rooftop scene ends on the shot of Scottie still dangling from the rooftop's gutter, and since the explanation of how he got off the rooftop is not part of the film's diegesis, Scottie remains throughout the film, at least in a metaphorical sense, dangling over the abyss of death.[26]

III. *Vertigo*'s See-Through Woman

Hitchcock's films are largely reliant on Symbolic codes constructed purposefully by the director himself, and on the one hand, *Vertigo* confronts us with powerful Symbols that codify meanings within the film. Yet, on the other hand, the narrative relies ultimately on the misrecognition of these very Symbols, and the consequent undermining of the film's interpretative system. In order to illustrate this juxtaposition, we should consider that failure, or visual mis-representation and the necessary deconstruction of fantasy, are built into the very narrative of the film. The internal narrative pits paternal forces, signified through the protective husband (Gavin Elster), against maternal ones, signified through the diseased, matrilineal lineage (Carlotta Valdes), which has supposedly passed suicidal tendencies from mother to daughter, like a particularly feminine, degenerative disease. Scottie tries to read and interpret these images, not knowing they are synthetic, false, and that they are being projected upon him by way of performance *for his eyes only*: a subjective piece of theater. As Deborah Linderman argues in "The Mise-en-Abîme in Hitchcock's Vertigo," "the determination of the textual

[26] Cf. Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited: Revised Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 111. Wood claims that when the opening scene ends, "We do not see, and are never told, how he got down from the gutter: there seems no possible way he *could* have got down. The effect is of having him, throughout the film, metaphorically suspended over a great abyss."

system to mis-represent" becomes most conspicuous when Judy writes a letter to Scottie, which tells the truth of Elster's murder scheme and her involvement, only to destroy it.[27] But the film's reliance on the audience's (and Scottie's) stupendous misrecognition performs an important function: it gives us, identifying with Scottie's point of view, our own sense of vertigo. As James Vest contends, "Hitchcock's strength lay in the fact that his keys opened the door of a mystery that led to another mystery that connected to a third and left viewers wondering whether the first key truly unlocked the initial door, resulting in a very real sense of vertigo. The resulting impression of dislocation, of the uncanny, invoked in the viewer a vertiginous disequilibrium."[28] After being hired by Elster to follow his wife to see where she goes, Scottie amasses clues to this woman's mystery, left for him like breadcrumbs, up until she falls to her death off the bell tower. And although these projected images seemingly lead to an "elsewhere" – the mystery of her female lineage – they really only cause Scottie's identification, forcing him to look inside himself on an uncanny cinematic return "home." In his 1962 interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock affirms that his desire to unveil the mystery to the entire narrative prematurely proved quite unpopular with most of the film crew. Hitchcock explains,

> Everyone around me was against this change; they all felt that the revelation should be saved for the end of the picture. I put myself in the place of a child whose mother is telling him a story. When there's a pause in the narration, the child always says, 'What comes next, Mommy?' Well, I felt that the second part of the novel was written as if nothing came next, whereas in my formula, the little boy, knowing that Madeleine and Judy are the same person, would then ask, 'And Stewart doesn't know, does he? What will he do when he finds out about it?'[29]

i. Miss Representation Redux: The copy, the counterfeit

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[27]Deborah Linderman "The Mise-en-Abîme in Hitchcock's Vertigo," *Cinema Journal*, Vol 30, No 4 (Summer 1991).
[28] Vest 180.
[29] Truffaut 184-185.

Slavoj Žižek maintains that the persistence of critical misrepresentations in Hitchcock studies demand their own theoretical resonance, and that one of the outstanding cases of misrepresentation in *Vertigo* involves the scene in Ernie's restaurant, when Scottie sees Madeleine for the first time.[30] In the scene, Scottie sits at the bar in the front room of the restaurant and a long panning shot scans the restaurant from front room to back room, with the camera finally resting on the "*fascinum* which fixes our gaze," the exposed back of a beautiful woman, who the audience concludes, is Madeleine. This tracking shot seems to permit us access to Scottie's subjective point of view as he scans the room for the target of his investigation; however, sitting at the bar means that Scottie's back is turned toward the room and the only visual access he can acquire are in the form of glances backward, not gazes head-on. Elster and Madeleine rise from the table and walk toward the exit, which causes them to pass directly behind Scottie sitting at the bar. In the scene's most famous shot, Madeleine pauses immediately behind Scottie and the camera captures her for a moment in fixed profile. This frame, her face in profile against the rich background of the restaurant's red wallpaper, approximates a carefully composed painting (see Fig. 6.1). In consideration of Scottie's Pygmalionesque fixations on Madeleine, illustrated in his re-producing Judy in her aesthetic image in the last third of the film, many have presumed this shot to be from Scottie's subjective point of view, as if he represents a lover of Madeleine-as-art, captivated by her at the specific moment he captures her image, aestheticized and idealized, in profile. But Scottie does not turn around in his seat at the bar 180 degrees, the requirement for him to have seen her profile behind him from head-on. So only we, the audience, see Madeleine's portrait-like profile

[30] Slavoj Žižek , "Vertigo: The Drama of a Deceived Platonist," *The Hitchcock Annual Anthology: Selected Essays from Volumes 10-15,* ed. Sidney Gottlieb and Richard Allen (London: Wallflower Press, 2009) 212.

even though Scottie becomes "mysteriously captivated by it." As Žižek suggests, in this shot we encounter the "kino-eye," a shot that is subjectivized without the subject, the eye functioning "as the 'organ-without-body,' directly registering the passion of an intensity that cannot be assumed by the (diegetic) subject."[31] The film's objectification of subjective perception undermines Scottie's control, which, in turn, emphasizes the importance of seeing things imaginatively, fantastically. But this is not a lesson for Scottie within the narrative but one for the film audience who must give in to their own imaginations while viewing *Vertigo*.

The character of Madeleine offers a canvas for the film's self-aware meditations on the concept of an artificially generated woman in ways hinted towards yet (visually) inaccessible in the last century's literary repetitions. In "The Cut of Representation: Painting and Sculpture in Hitchcock," Brigitte Peucker notes, "A film about a female portrait 'brought to life', *Vertigo* also tells the tale of a body rigidified into a statue."[32] In our first sighting of Madeleine in Ernie's restaurant her face is framed in profile, suggesting that at the very moment she becomes real, or at least visually accessible to the audience, she is also rendered static and deadened into art. When the camera follows her after this shot, as she exits the restaurant with Elster, it "lingers on her motionless body, surrounded by the draperies of stole and dress, and focuses on the marmoreal whiteness of her naked back and neck." When the shot finally does represent Scottie's subjective point of view, she is centered again but within the frame of the restaurant's doorway, a threshold space, and then "she begins to move, creating the effect of a sculpture not quite

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[31] Žižek 213.
[32] Brigitte Peucker, "The Cut of Representation: Painting and Sculpture in Hitchcock," *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès (London: BFI Publishing, 1999) 150.

fully brought to life, her movements interspersed with static shots that present her face in profile, in cameo-like relief."[33]

Scottie pursues Madeleine, equally an object of investigation and an object of his own fascination, to settings that further promote her being defined as an art object, and the irrevocable connection between her living body and the ideas of death she solicits. Scottie follows her to the graveyard at Mission Dolores and he lurks behind the hedges watching her from a distance, the color of her grey suit reflecting the grayness of the row of grey tombstones amongst which she stands. Peucker suggests that in this scene, "her unmoving body [is] positioned as though it were a funerary sculpture next to the grave and headstone of Carlotta Valdes" (see Fig. 6.2).[34] Thus, Madeleine mirrors the death of Carlotta through her costuming and her posing, a visual indicator of the death that has already taken her over psychologically – her psychic drive (however feigned) toward killing herself just like her great grandmother Carlotta did at the same age. But it is at the art gallery in the Palace of the Legion of Honor, yet another site of memorialization, where Scottie and the audience identify Madeleine most strongly with a work of art. Madeleine sits on a bench in front of a portrait, and the camera, standing in for Scottie's gaze, watches her from behind her back. Although Madeleine sits in front of the painting, rather than objectify the portrait by way of her gaze, the shot of her gazing at it from behind suggests her continuity with the portrait. The shot also encourages the audience's awareness of a direct connection between Scottie and the portrait, with Madeleine in the position of a go-between, or a screen, between the two. Scottie's glance between the real – the bouquet lying next to Madeleine on the bench and her hair fashioned into a bun –

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[33] *Ibid*., 150.
[34] *Ibid*.

and the artificialized – the identical bouquet the woman in the portrait (Carlotta) holds, with her hair fashioned into an identical bun – allows for the collapse between Madeleine and the painting and the expansion of her figure as representative of the ever-permeable thresholds between real and artificial, subject and object, life and death. The shape of her hair, swirled into a bun, represents Scottie's vertigo, which on a metaphorical level is directly linked to this failure to discern between these very dimensions, while literally it represents the delusion of three-dimensionality. As Victor Stoichita maintains, this painting within the film "implies a complex play of nesting images, since it places a fixed image within a mobile image," and that symbolically the mobile image represents "action, movement, life" while the fixed represents death.[35] The very complication of vertigo is that it symbolizes, both theoretically and meta-critically, a crisis in perception between life and death, thus the delusion of movement it stimulates is also the inability to rely on such symbolic connotations.

In another sense, however, we might suggest that, contrary to these expectations, the film bears the possibility that it is real women, not artificial ones, who incite Scottie's malady. The extremely un-artificial and all too realistic Midge character serves to amplify the film's encoding of feminine artifice. Indeed, Midge was not part of the original novel on which the film was based. Writer Samuel Taylor added the character, a foil for Madeleine, to the first draft of his 1957 screenplay, which was characterized by its whimsical title *From the Dead or There'll Never Be Another You*.[36] Madeleine represents a riddle to investigate and solve; conversely, Midge seems to have all the

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[35] Victor I. Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 184.

[36] Dan Aulier, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 51. Taylor had the very actress who played the role of Midge, well-renowned Broadway actress Barbara Bel Geddes, specifically in mind when creating the character she would play on-screen.

answers. Knowledgeable about a bra that offers "revolutionary uplift" based on the principles of the cantilever bridge, she reminds Scottie, who is a "big boy" now, that he should understand such things.[37] When Scottie asks for an expert on San Francisco history, Midge delivers him to Pop Liebl's bookshop. She even has the formula – a preemptory cocktail and dinner – for getting Scottie to take her to a movie. In the mental ward, she juggles all sorts of musical balms for whatever ailment, "music for dipsomaniacs, and music for melancholiacs." Everything about Midge is matter-of-fact, of flesh and blood reality; the very idea of Midge resists the notion of femininity as mysterious or chimerical. Yet none of her real-life solutions succeed in curing Scottie, not even a little. In fact, Scottie manifests signs of being unwell most perceptibly during scenes with him and Midge. For instance, during the film's early scene in Midge's apartment when the two chat about Scottie's plans for after retirement, Midge fetches a yellow step stool for him to climb in an effort to prove he can "lick" his vertigo. But when he gets to the top, he experiences another attack and collapses limply in Midge's arms. And during the scene in the mental facility, after Madeleine's supposed death causes him to go mad, Scottie sits unmoving and unresponsive, plunged into psychosis, as Midge plays the music of Mozart in an attempt to break him free of his mental illness. But the music fails to reach him and Midge, bankrupted of any more solutions, tells the doctor in the last scene she appears in the film, "I don't think Mozart is going to help at all!" Hence, Midge is reasonable enough to recognize that neither playing "mother" nor playing Mozart will help save Scottie from his romantic delusions.

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[37] This is the last day that Scottie must wear his "darn corset" and asks Midge whether she thinks many men wear them, to which she responds, "More than you think."

Despite her exceptional independence and her incredible dexterity in the real world, Midge proves irreconcilable within a film that derives its dominant image structure from a constant interplay of doubles and doppelgängers, subjects and objects. Midge fails miserably when she returns to her first love, painting, seemingly in order to make her other first love, Scottie, accept her visually as a love object. In one of the film's most tragicomic scenes, Midge decides to reproduce the painting of Carlotta Valdes from the art gallery, except with one major revision: she paints her head onto Carlotta's body. While in her apartment, she invites Scottie to look at the painting; in the shot, we see through Scottie's eyes as they pan up the woman's painted dress and quickly land on the face of Midge where the face of Carlotta should be. Indeed, Scottie's expectations are thwarted; this female figure is chimerical, but in all the wrong ways. The shot quickly cuts to Scottie, who shows his vexation quite clearly as he shakes his head disapprovingly at Midge. It is the next shot, however, that truly signifies what is at stake in this scene. The film cuts quickly from Scottie shaking his head to the shot of what he sees behind the canvas with the camera panned out a bit further. It gives the effect of a split-screen, with the painting in the foreground on the right and Midge sitting in the background on the left. In effect, this perspective shows Midge doubled; quite literally, she sits at the very angle at which Carlotta's body is posed in the painting. But this shot differs markedly from the one of Madeleine and the original portrait in the museum (see Fig. 6.3, 6.4). In that scene, we watch Madeleine absorbed in the painting as she looks at it *as if looking in a mirror*, and we too are absorbed, like Scottie, into her mystery. Her own self-reflection is erased from the film, and preconditioned by a painting of someone else, a dead woman. Madeleine is introduced in the film most cogently through the shot of her facial profile

framed like a cameo against the blood red wallpaper at Ernie's. Theoretically, then, the doubling effect between Madeleine and the portrait of Carlotta serves to provide the complete profile, falsely filling the gap in Scottie's knowledge of the woman. But the side-by-side view of Midge and her counterfeit portrait gives us *too many faces* – a startlingly, unnatural excess.[38] The film illustrates the magnetism of the artificial woman, Madeleine, by showing her obliquely, in profile, or from behind. Midge, in contrast, is always seen squarely, the roundness of her glasses serving to magnify the fullness of her face. Rather than evoking fantasy, Midge's light-hearted attempt to double herself in her self-painted portrait only destroys it entirely. Not amused, Scottie vacates her apartment abruptly, leaving her to face her dreadful mistake quite literally. Clearly upset, Midge slashes at the canvas with the brush a few times and then throws the brush against the window, and the scene ends with Midge's fleeting yet uncomplicated self-reflection in the glass. We are left to see what Midge sees when she looks in the mirror: her own face (see Fig. 6.5)

During his second pursuit of Madeleine, the day after fishing her out of San Francisco Bay, Scottie follows her trajectory toward an imperative "somewhere else" only to end up uncannily at his point of origin, his own home.[39] By this point in the film,

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[38] Hitchcock was sent laundry lists of possible titles for the film, even after he came up with *Vertigo*, which was not so popular with the studio's advertising executives. They sent a message from the New York office that reads: "No execs like *Vertigo* and believe it handicap to selling and advertising picture whether potential customers know what word Vertigo means or not – believe decidedly better title would be 'Face in the Shadow.'" Other suggested titles included "The Face Variations" and "The Mask and the Face." Cf. Aulier 113.

[39] Madeleine gives the quasi-explanation of how she found Scottie's apartment in order to return to deliver him a thank you note for rescuing her. She tells him that she couldn't send the thank you note without his address, but that she did remember Coit Tower as a landmark, which leads her straight back to his apartment. Scottie responds, "That's the first time I've been grateful for Coit Tower." As a landmark, the Tower proves to be an unconsciously symbolic choice on the part of Hitchcock (who claimed he used it simply as a "phallic symbol"), because it was built in 1933 at the behest of a woman who bore the same name as the director, Lillie Hitchcock Coit. She was one of the more eccentric female figures in San Francisco history, earning a reputation as a very "unladylike lady" for smoking cigars and often dressing in

we become aware that Scottie attempts to elude his own trauma by mastering Madeleine's mystery, and when the two join each other in their "wandering," amongst the ancient redwoods and along the rocky shores of the Pacific Ocean, the dialogue between them reveals the compulsive nature of Scottie's displaced need to be "free of the past" by freeing Madeleine from her past and her "possession" by Carlotta. Though Scottie may be striving for a somewhat sadistic possession of Madeleine, as Mulvey contends, careful attention paid to the visual clues within the film suggest that he never captures her optically; instead, he is captured by her. Tania Modelski maintains that during the scene when Scottie peers at Madeleine in the florist shop from the door's tiny opening, we watch as "Madeleine turns around and comes toward the camera, and with the cut we expect the reverse shot to show that … the man is in visual possession of the woman."[40] Like Donald Spoto, Modelski recognizes that "by implication he (and we) may be seen as her reflection" but she suggests further that this shot prophesies the film's repetition of Scottie's "mirroring relationship" with Madeleine and her desire, "as if he were continually confronted with the fact that woman's uncanny otherness has some relation to himself."[41] And Scottie's dream sequence composes a visual tableau of his identification with the feminine and death, and consequently demarcates the moment he goes "mad," just like the "mad Carlotta." Indeed, *Vertigo* presents identity as a construction of visual projection and "Madeleine" is like Oscar Wilde's moon, not so much an image as an endless refraction of images in an intricately executed *dance*

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men's clothes. She was also a firefighting enthusiast from childhood until her death, and today she is considered the patron saint of the city's firefighters. For more information, see *The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco* at www.sfmuseum.org.

[40] Tania Modelski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 92.

[41] *Ibid*.

macabre of portraits, masks, and false memorials. But we must remember that here Scottie's mirroring relationship with Madeleine is, more specifically, a relationship to a woman objectified, therefore a woman *without* desire. That is to say, "Madeleine" is *never* real. What we actually witness in the first half of the film is this dilemma: what happens when a man falls in love with an actress, playing a role solely for him, and he doesn't recognize that she is acting? Scottie falls in love with a woman objectified, a woman who is already a double, a copy. She is also his reflection because she is purely reflexive and Scottie falls in love with "Madeleine" the same way that Lord Ewald fell in love with Hadaly, or Narcissus with his own image. As Scottie pursues her and falls deeper into his obsession, "she is transfixed by images that will reconstitute her as pure scopic object" so that "her look … tautologically vehiculates his – to herself as an image."[42] Hence, the relationship between Scottie and "Madeleine" echoes that of Lord Ewald and Hadaly the andréïde; Madeleine is *see-through*. She casts herself as a voyeuristic object willfully in these "repeated self-objectifications," artificial reproductions both for man and "of man." In the end, "Madeleine" is nothing more than a role played willingly by Judy. This is only confirmed by the fact that the film never acknowledges or recognizes the true Mrs. Madeleine Elster. In fact, the "real" Madeleine only shows up onscreen once, during the flashback sequence accompanying Judy's letter-writing, when we see Elster holding her dead body in his arms about to throw it off the bell tower.[43] So, in the only filmic moment that renders the "real" Madeleine present to the audience, she is already departed, dead and gone. Like Hadaly, she turns out to be an artificial Eurydice. And this constant interplay of doubles – most notably, the doubling of

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[42] Linderman 62.

[43] Though Kim Novak is credited as playing the dual roles of Madeleine and Judy, she did not play the "real" Madeleine. The role of "Mrs. Elster" was played by actress Jean Corbett.

Scottie as Madeleine in his dream of falling/being buried – marks the film's direct engagement with its own objectivity and what it means to be a film, a screen replica of life and therefore the phantom of life – an art form determined by its association with death.

In many ways, the film represents Scottie's journey beyond the pleasure principle. In Freudian terms, his instinctual desire for death manifests itself in his drive –tailing her in pursuit through the streets of San Francisco, and psychologically, his irresistible urge toward her – to be (with) Madeleine. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud uses the "fort-da" game his grandson plays as evidence of the child's own invention of symbolism, his re-presentation of the absent object, his mother, in a present object, a wooden reel he would play with by throwing it over the edge of his bed to have it disappear (*fort*, German for "gone"), only to pull it back to himself to have it once again (*da*, German for "here").[44] There are many ways that *Vertigo* plays with the theoretical notion of the mother figure. We are conducted to read Midge as a mother figure explicitly in the here-and-now, and Madeleine as an evocation of the absent, dead mother through her (however feigned) drive toward repeating her great grandmother's death. But perhaps the film's most maternal figure is, somewhat predictably, its most mysterious. The film's opening credits are stamped over shots of parts – lips, nose, eyes – visually fractured from an anonymous female face. Symbolically, the film positions this dis-figured woman as its archaic and abjected mother, key to the narrative yet exiled from it, an Eve imperiled by the cinematic apparatus. As Deborah Linderman writes, this "depersonalized feminine face … is both the object of the camera's scrutiny and the

[44] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989) 14.

source from which the vertigo emanates."[45] Of course, this means the shot of her frightened eyes in particular, that in some way these eyes mirror Scottie's own anxieties, possessing him in the way he hopes briefly to possess Madeleine. Vertigo, then, is the filmic equivalent of the fort-da game played by Freud's grandson, except the subject has turned into the object. As R. Barton Palmer asserts, Scottie's "self-canceling movement away and toward the object of desire becomes the film's central figure, as expressed in the famous zoom in / track out that characterizes the main character's perceptual malady, his disorienting and paralyzing vertigo."[46] As if the wooden reel was suspended in mid-air and *came alive*, Scottie experiences both the "fort" and "da" in his vertiginous sensation of falling while stationary.

This issue of doubling becomes even more problematic to interpret regarding the last sequence of the film, during which Scottie meets Judy and tries to re-form her image into that of the dead Madeleine, whom she already resembles so uncannily. While, in the first half of the film, Scottie misrecognizes that Judy has been 'cast' to play his love interest, in the second half he is unmistaken about and unwavering in his desire to repeat this very gesture, molding Judy's outward appearance so that she may perform the role of his lost love. As Marian Keane writes, when Scottie "'casts' Novak/Judy as Madeleine, he undertakes to re-create a human being who exists in his private fantasies, as though he were casting a part in a play."[47] Yet, he is not re-creating a human being as much as he is re-producing that which is already a counterfeit, not a being but a performance. Scottie's

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[45] Linderman 60.
[46] R. Barton Palmer, "The Hitchcock Romance and the 70s Paranoid Thriller," *Alfred Hitchcock: Influence, Imitation and Intertextuality*, ed. David Boyd and R. Barton Palmer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) 86.
[47] Marian E. Keane, "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and *Vertigo*," *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1986) 246.

direction over Judy's performance as Madeleine, then, is a repetition, causing Judy to re-resemble the woman she has *already* played under the direction of Gavin Elster. Both men "try to transform the Real Judy into a Symbolic substitute."[48] Yet, despite the fact that she *is* Madeleine, Scottie can never truly love the "real" Judy. Like Midge, she is *too* real. In her apartment on the day she and Scottie meet, Judy goes to her dresser to retrieve her license to prove her identity. She looks up from her purse on the dresser and into the mirror, where her face is directly reflected. But although Scottie stands immediately behind her on the left, Hitchcock takes the shot from such an angle that Scottie, like a mythological vampire, has no reflection in the mirror – a visual that suggests the impossibility for Judy, who reflects herself in the mirror, to ever be the mirror of Scottie's desire (see Fig. 6.7).

If we pull our focus outside the very film narrative itself, we see that there is an even longer chain of duplicitous roles being played: the actress, Kim Novak, plays Judy playing Madeleine playing Carlotta. And this chain of performances, or the linked substitution of one personality for another, lends to the audience what Victor Stoichita calls a sense of "intoxication caused by the successive nesting of simulacra."[49] But as Scottie reveals in the film's final scene in the bell tower, the fact that his role for Judy to play is a replicate of Elster's makes his love for Madeleine, in every sense, counterfeit as well. Indeed, it seems bizarre that so much scholarship insists on treating Madeleine as a person Scottie loves, a person he ends up reflecting, when indeed, as concerns the film, Madeleine *is not human*. As Elisabeth Bronfen asserts in *Over Her Dead Body*, "The brilliant twist introduced by Hitchcock is that the desired beloved is not merely an image

[48] Robert Samuels, *Hitchcock's Bi-Textuality* 78.
[49] Stoichita 184.

and a revenant but in fact a masquerade, a false image, the dissimulation of a revenant."[50] In the literal sense, Madeleine is not a person but a projection, and Scottie has not been "in love with a woman so much as with – almost in the platonic sense – an Idea."[51] Scottie represents another reproduction, then, of the male protagonists who have occupied us from the beginning of this project – Gautier's Romuald, Villiers's Lord Ewald – a man who suffers from the ailment of "this rejection of life for an unattainable Idea," set into an ever-paradoxical, artistic production of "the triumph of illusion, the perfect re-creation of the dream," which, at its core, represents something fundamental to humanity.[52]

Although Scottie's ability to reach the top of the bell tower suggests his health has been restored, the film's perplexing final scene might also demonstrate that Scottie has fallen fully into the chasm of delusion. He drives Judy out to San Juan Bautista in order to finally be "free of the past." But, now that he knows Judy is Madeleine, whatever does this mean? What we do know is that when they reach the bell tower Scottie reproduces the scene of the crime step-by-step, a theatrically reproduced mise-en-scène of the mysterious murder. He berates Judy for having been "the copy, the counterfeit" and an "apt pupil," betraying his rage over the fact that Elster made her over just like he made her over, "only better," "not only the clothes and the hair, but the looks, and the manner, and the words." There is no greater disappointment than falling in love with someone else's Galatea, an Other's beloved. As Žižek contends, Scottie plays the role of the "deceived Platonist" shocked not so much by the traditional deception, when "the original turns out to be merely a copy – but that (what we took to be) *the copy turns out*

[50] Bronfen 340.
[51] Robin Wood 126.
[52] *Ibid*., 127.

to be the original."[53] Once they make it to the top of the tower, in what should be a triumphant moment, he tells Judy, "It's too late, there's no bringing her back." We have no choice but to be left a bit stunned by Scottie's lament, for who, indeed, is the "her" he wants to bring back? If he has truly recognized that Madeleine never existed, and that all along Judy had been playing the role of the Madeleine he fell in love with, then who is the woman it is "too late" for? Even more quizzical is the fact that Scottie tells Judy, "I loved you so, *Madeleine*" (emphasis mine). His fear of heights may be cured but Scottie has certainly failed to access any healthy "real." As he stands on the ledge of the tower and looks down, Scottie's body is posed as if it were the one sprawled on the ground, his limbs positioned in the exact same way as when he envisioned his corporeal shadow falling from the tower in his mad dream (see Fig. 6.8, 6.9). If we read Scottie's vertigo metaphorically as an illness that causes him to teeter on the limits between real and illusion, then we must accept that Scottie plunges irrevocably into the abyss he spent the film dangling over. And the film leaves us, as Scottie was at the beginning, hanging off the edge.

Michelle Bloom argues that the cinema "embodies the longstanding human desire for the animation of the inanimate," and contends that the "illusion of movement is the key element to rendering cinema 'Pygmalionesque.'"[54] Primarily a balance disorder wherein one experiences the sensation that the environment moves when in fact no movement occurs, vertigo then operates metaphorically for Pygmalionism, as it doubles for the cinema itself. Scottie experiences vertigo as false sensations of movement, a

[53] Žižek 215.
[54] Michelle E. Bloom, "Pygmalionesque Delusions" 292.

condition that may emblematize the fact that all of cinema's perceptions, according to Christian Metz, are fake too:

> Or rather, the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror. It will be said that literature, after all, is itself only made of replicas (written words, presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does (giving more and taking as much, i.e. taking more). The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very onset. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.[55]

While *Vertigo* appears to echo the myth of Pygmalion on a narrative level, the camera's equal objectification of the male artist-subject (Scottie) suggests that *it*, rather than he, plays the role of creator. Hitchcock trusted the camera as the ultimate master of pure cinema, his films reliant on meaning's conveyance through cinematography and the image above all else. To restate the issue, Hitchcock seems to replace his subjective directorship in many ways with the all-perceiving object, the camera, able to propagate a more subjective point of view for the audience as a whole – a subjective eye beyond a single subject. Many of his collaborators, such as *Vertigo* script supervisor Peggy Robertson, reveal that Hitchcock never even looked through the camera's viewfinder. His films were so meticulously scripted visually and storyboarded by the director beforehand, it was as if he imagined them as if his mind was the camera, and therefore had no need to step behind the actual lens.[56]

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[55] Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 732.
[56] Cf. *Vertigo* dvd extra, documentary *Obsessed with 'Vertigo,'* narrated by Roddy McDowall (1997).

IV. Hitchcock's Fall from Grace

In his biography on the director, Patrick McGilligan relates a poignant moment of exchange between Hitchcock and Kim Novak during the filming of *Vertigo*. Novak came to Hitchcock on set "with all sorts of *preconceived* notions" that, he "couldn't possibly go along with" (emphasis mine). One particular example was Novak squabbling with costumer designer Edith Head about wearing Madeleine's iconic grey suit, its color being the only imperative that Hitchcock insisted upon, because grey was not an ideal color to be worn by a blond. In attempts to "direct" Novak's performance, Hitchcock tried to get her to access a more authentic and less predetermined space of acting. He told Novak that she had a lot of expression on her face, but that he did not want any of it.[57] He explained to her that, metaphorically, this was like "taking a sheet of paper and scribbling all over it." It would be "much easier to read," Hitchcock claimed, "if the piece of paper is blank."[58] And Novak presented an exceptional case of an actress Hitchcock felt needed to be directed deconstructively because she was certainly not Hitchcock's original choice to play the role. Hitchcock had plans to make actress Vera Miles a star, specifically by playing the lead role in *Vertigo*, and the film's early screen tests and costume fittings involved her. However, reality intervened in Hitchcock's star-creation fantasy. Recently married to her *Tarzan* co-star Gordon Scott, Miles found herself pregnant and unable to play the role of Madeleine. But the bitterness of this particular loss was probably doubled because Miles was already a substitute for Hitchcock's Ideal actress, his former "apt pupil," Grace Kelly.

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[57] McGilligan 554.
[58] *Ibid*., 555. Hitchcock's directions for Barbara Bel Geddes, who played Midge, were very similar. He seemed to have given her only one important instruction as they began shooting her scenes: "Don't act." Cf. *Obsessed with 'Vertigo.'*

It is impossible, of course, to overlook the fact that *Vertigo*'s Pygmalionesque reformation of the blond beauty within the filmic narrative echoes Hitchcock's own proclivity for fashioning his leading ladies according to his aesthetic template. Donald Spoto, biographer of both Grace Kelly and Alfred Hitchcock, calls Grace Kelly the director's "willing and winsome Galatea."[59] While filming *Rear Window*, for example, Hitchcock meticulously constructed Grace's screen image, "virtually clinical in his precise ideas for Grace's wardrobe"; according to costume designer Edith Head, "There was a reason for every colour Grace wore, every style," believing that by making Grace "appear like a piece of Dresden china, something slightly untouchable" Hitchcock "was really putting his dream together in the studio."[60] The director certainly harbored Pygmalionesque delusions about Kelly, which it seems were founded on his own personal obsessions with her. In his biography of Kelly, Spoto claims that, "Hitchcock was … in love with her – but "in love" the way a schoolboy develops a hopeless crush on an unattainable object of desire; in his case, however, the love seemed to be accompanied by a sense of futile possessiveness."[61] As *To Catch a Thief* (1955) neared completion, Hitchcock envisioned Grace's future (or, he envisioned his own film-making future through her), and he expected their collaborations to "resume with a film of James M. Barrie's ethereal romance *Mary Rose*."[62] But the fleeting ownership Hitchcock possessed

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[59] Donald Spoto, *Spellbound by Beauty: Alfred Hitchcock and His Leading Ladies* (London: Hutchinson, 2008) 144.
[60] *Ibid*., 147.
[61] Donald Spoto, *High Society: Grace Kelly and Hollywood* (London: Hutchinson, 2009) 135-136.
[62] *Ibid*., 136. The association between Kelly and Hitchcock's planned role for her in *Mary Rose* evinces further the association between Kelly and the loss of Madeleine in *Vertigo*. Before Hermann was commissioned to do the entire score of the film, Hitchcock had early planned to use Norman O'Neill's lost score for J.M. Barrie's 1920 ghost story *Mary Rose* for *Vertigo*, but requests to Paramount British Productions only turned up a few "scratchy and ghastly" records. Cf. Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 25. This was more than Hitchcock turned up the first time he tried to obtain the music from Barrie's piece for his 1940 film *Rebecca*. The other pertinent connection

over her screen image quickly dematerialized when, in 1956, Kelly married Prince Rainier and became Her Serene Highness, Princess Grace of Monaco.

Vertigo reflects Hitchcock's own anxieties over the loss of his own filmic, ideal woman, and the frustrations over her irretrievable loss. After Grace's abrupt departure from Hollywood, Hitchcock experienced the effects of withdrawal, and later tried to fashion actresses like Vera Miles into copies of Kelly, disciples faithful to his image as it reflected so brilliantly through Grace. Donald Spoto claims that he "always told them some variant of something like 'I will make you into the next Grace Kelly.'"[63] But neither Vera Miles nor Kim Novak proved to be suitable substitutes. But in 1961, while sipping his morning coffee with his wife Alma, Hitchcock found himself attracted instantly to the model in the black-and-white commercial for a liquid diet supplement. Despite the fact that Nathalie "Tippi" Hedren had no experience or training as an actress, Hitchcock directed his agent to find her and she was signed to a contract immediately. *The Birds* production designer Robert Boyle recalled that it was apparent Hitchcock was once again undertaking "the Svengali approach to his leading lady."[64] At least, Hitchcock professed, Tippi had "nothing to unlearn," and so as she was being cast officially in *The Birds* (1963) he made her over, supervising "the style of her own hair, and for each subtle element of her makeup," taking "weeks to select jewelry and accessories appropriate."[65] But Hitchcock became overpowered by his compulsive desire to possess Hedren, or at least her image, and Rod Taylor, Hedren's co-star in *The Birds*, recollected that she was

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between the two films – *Rebecca* and *Vertigo* – is that Hitchcock first conceived of the filmic effect of the "vertigo" shot for *Rebecca*, based upon his experience of the feeling of fainting, but was not able to succeed with the effect until 1958's *Vertigo*. Cf. Dan Aulier, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic*.

[63] Spoto, *High Society* 142. Hitchcock even told the editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, "Vera Miles is the girl who is going to replace Grace Kelly." See also Spoto's *Spellbound by Beauty* 153.

[64] Spoto, *Spellbound by Beauty* 245

[65] *Ibid*., 248.

"like a precious piece of jewelry he owned" as Hitchcock tried "to isolate her from everyone so that all her time would be spent only with him."[66] Unsurprisingly, Hedren reacted to the treatment with resentment and repulsion, and her claims of being mistreated by Hitchcock persist to this day. Hitchcock tried to withdraw himself from reality, like Scottie in *Vertigo*, by indulging in the illusory, "carefully designed beauty of an actress," and the fantasy feeding medium of film.[67] And although Hedren went on to play the lead role of *Marnie* (1964), which Hitchcock had hoped to be the vehicle for Grace Kelly's return to the screen, she failed to live up to playing the role of Hitchcock's Ideal – leaving him without an original or a suitable copy.

[66] *Ibid*., 250.
[67] *Ibid*., 158.

Fig. 3.1, Anonymous, Photograph of *Venus de Milo* (ca. 1870).

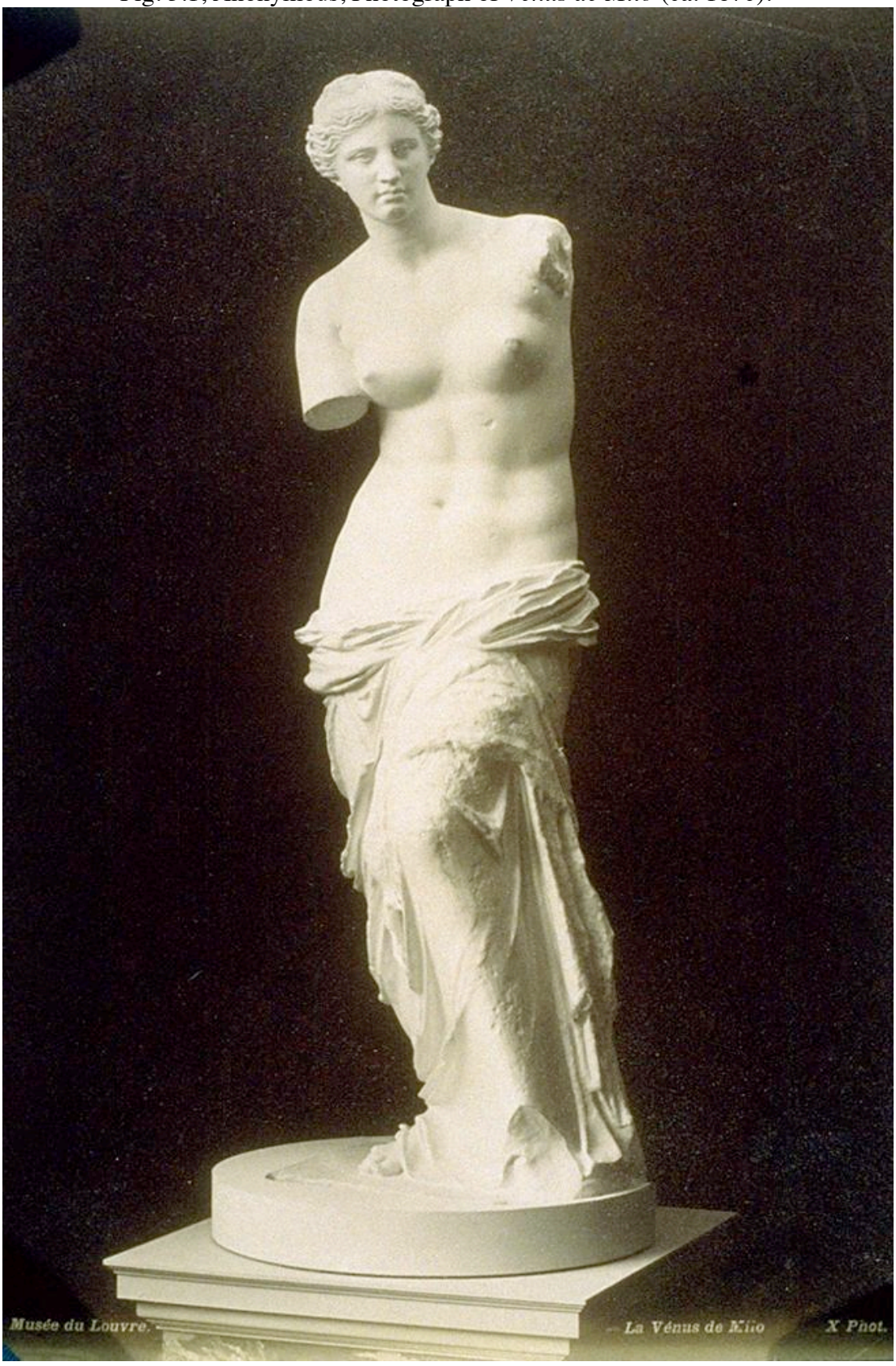

Fig. 3.2, Annabelle Whitford Moore, *Butterfly Dance* (ca. 1894-1895), dir. Thomas A. Edison.

Fig. 3.3, *Vanitas* (ca. 1665), artist Pieter Claesz (c. 1597-1660), Dutch still life painter.

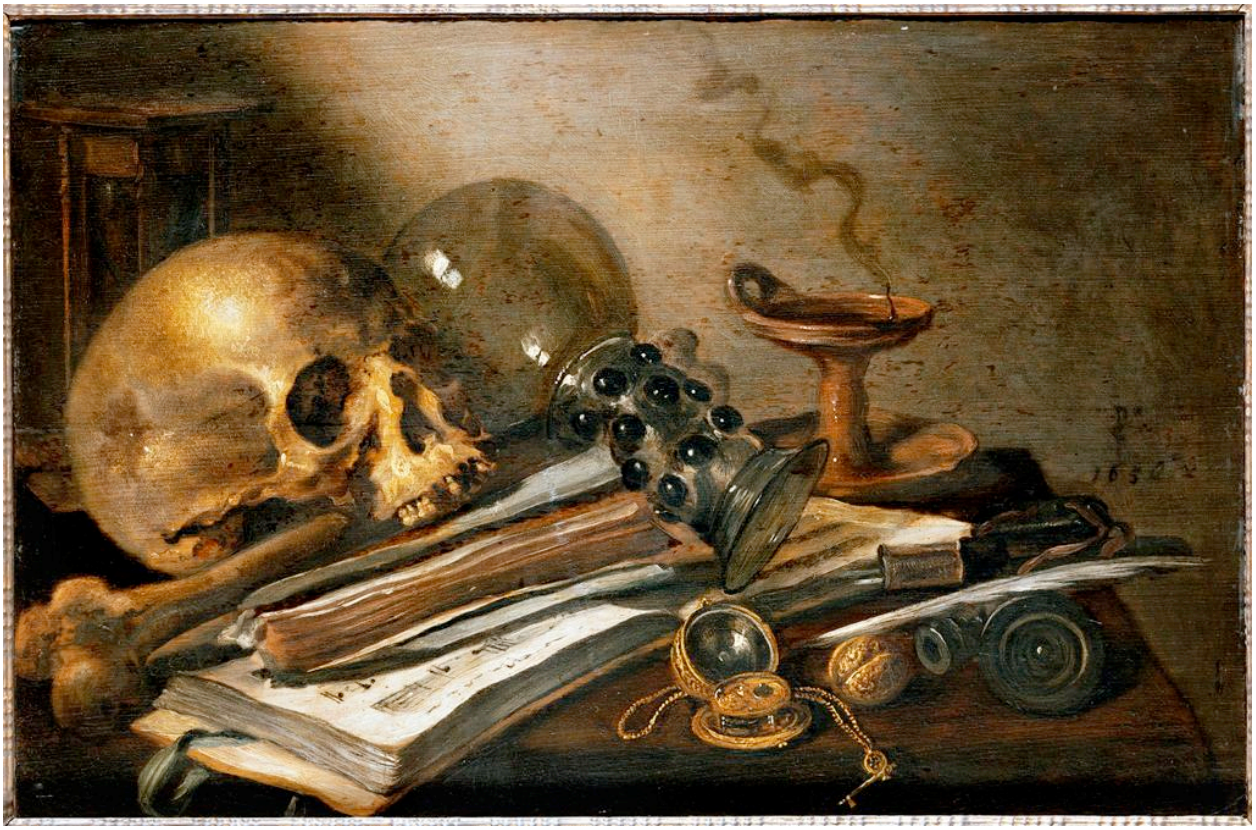

Fig. 3.4, *All is Vanity* (ca. 1892), C. Allen Gilbert (c. 1873-1929), American illustrator.

Fig. 3.5, Reproduction of monument by Frédéric Blou in the memory of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam; Leon Bloy, *La Résurrection de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* (Paris: Lecampion, 1906).

Fig. 4.1, Melandri, *Sarah Bernhardt Posing in Her Coffin*, (ca. 1880). Albumen print cabinet card. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes, Paris.

Fig. 4.2, Alfred Thompson, caricature of Wilde entitled "The Bard of Beauty," published originally in London *Time* 1880.

THE BARD OF BEAUTY..

Fig. 4.3, Photo of the Hungarian opera singer Alice Guszalewicz as Salome in Strauss's opera based on Wilde's play, 1906; depicted by Richard Ellmann in his biography of the author as "Wilde in Costume as Salome." Reprinted from "Biography and the Art of Lying," an essay in which Wilde's grandson, Merlin Holland, exposes Ellmann's error in identification.

Fig. 5.1, "The Woman in the Moon," illustration by Aubrey Beardsley for the 1894 Bodley Head edition of Wilde's *Salomé*.

Fig. 5.2, Aubrey Beardsley's design for the title page of the 1894 Bodley Head edition of Wilde's *Salomé*.

Fig. 5.3, "Entrée d'Hérodias," illustration by Aubrey Beardsley for the 1894 Bodley Head edition of Wilde's *Salomé*.

Fig. 5.4, "J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan," illustration by Aubrey Beardsley first published in *The Studio* magazine (ca. 1893), reproduced as "The Climax" for the 1894 Bodley Head edition of Wilde's *Salomé*.

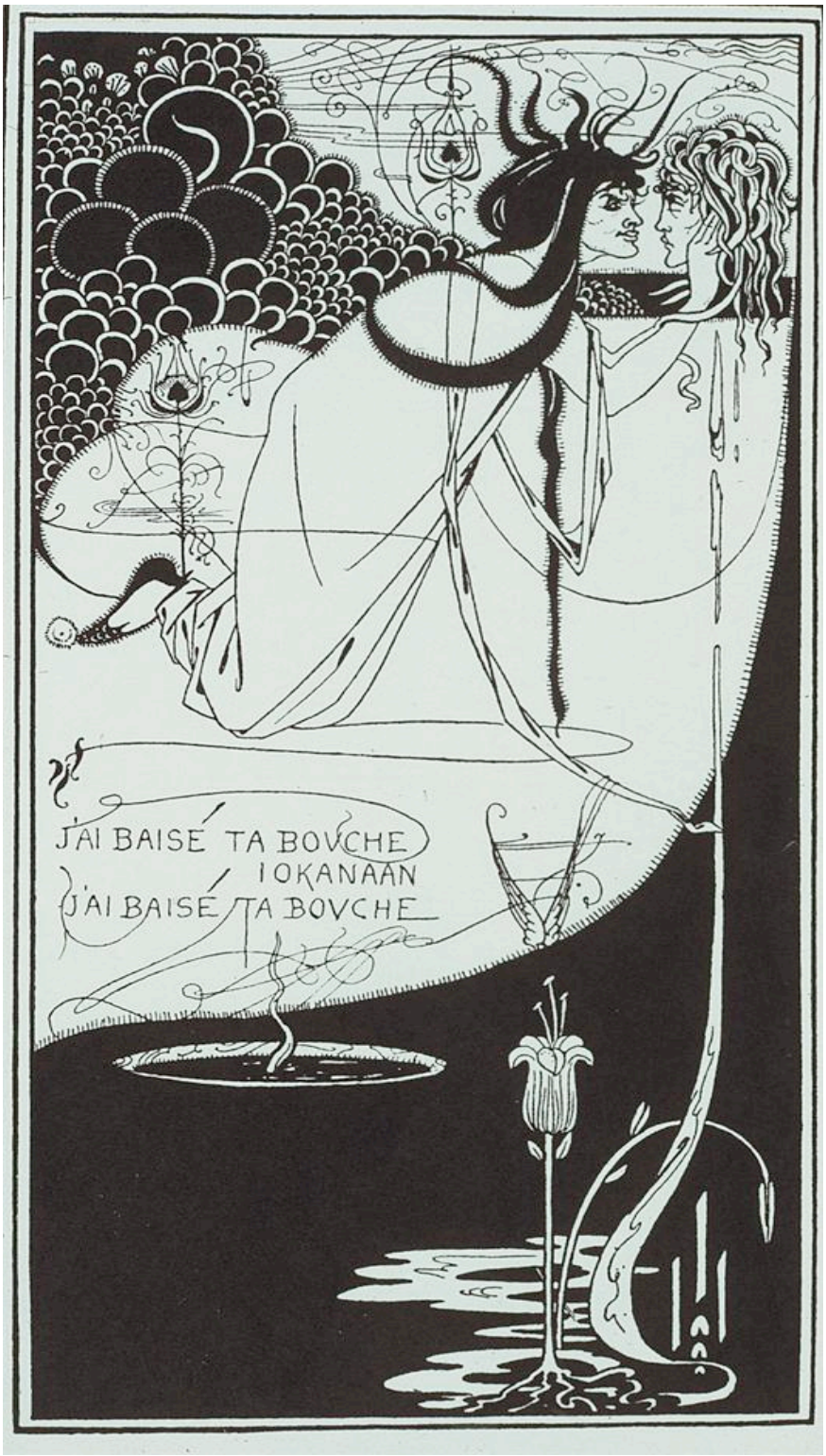

Fig. 6.1, Side profile shot of “Madeleine” (Kim Novak) in Ernie’s Restaurant.

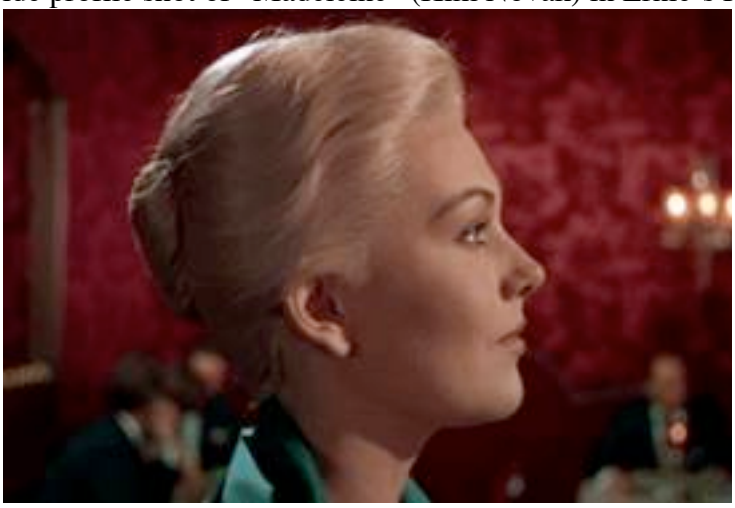

Fig. 6.2, Long-shot of Madeleine at the grave of Carlotta Valdes, from Scottie’s p.o.v.

Fig. 6.3, Shot of Madeleine looking at the portrait of Carlotta in the museum, from Scottie's p.o.v.

Fig. 6.4, Shot of Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) and her self-portrait as Carlotta, from Scottie's p.o.v.

Fig. 6.5, Midge's self-reflection in her apartment window.

Fig. 6.6, Judy's (Kim Novak) reflection in her bedroom mirror and the remarkable absence of Scottie's (James Stewart).

Fig. 6.7, When Judy is turned back into Madeleine, it is her shadow that is more clearly defined visually, suggesting that Judy has now become a shadow of herself.

Fig. 6.8, Scottie's dream image of his falling from the San Juan Bautista tower in Madeleine's stead.

Fig. 6.9, Scottie standing on the San Juan Bautista tower after Judy falls to her death at the film's end.

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