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The ivory damsel is bored: changing female dynamics for the Ovidian Galatea in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Identificazione di una Donna* (1982)

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Abstract: The Pygmalion myth as told by Ovid gave rise to a literary tradition that cinema sought to eternalize in films such as *Pygmalion et Galathée* (Méliès, 1898), *Funny Face* (Donen, 1957), etc. In these, normally the female is submissive to the male. The same premise may also be indirectly found in Antonioni's *Identificazione di una Donna* (1982), but under a different concoction. Instead of adopting a submissive stance towards Niccolò, Mavi, the *ad hoc* Galatea, is seen as a passive character in the way that she does behave uninterested towards loving Niccolò, the Pygmalion figure. This poise is characteristic of the typical *ennui* that permeates female characters in Antonioni's films. This paper attempts to intersect the *dramatis personae* of the Ovidian myth with characters Niccolò and Mavi from Antonioni's film and provide further analysis on the possibility of Mavi becoming a powerhouse for the liberation of the ivory damsel in contemporary narratives. Whilst conditioned to a specific environment of Antiquity, Ovid's ivory *jeune* is set to behave according to what is expected of her — a voiceless extension of Pygmalion. Conversely, when exposed to contemporary metaliterary media, the ivory damsel can set free and rebel against a dominant male taxonomy.

Keywords: Pygmalion myth, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ovid, female emancipation

Resumo: O mito de Pigmalião tal como contado por Ovídio deu origem a uma tradição literária que o cinema procurou cristalizar em filmes como *Pygmalion et Galathée* (Méliès, 1898), *My Fair Lady* (Cukor, 1964), etc. Neles, normalmente a heroína assume um papel submisso face ao herói. A mesma premissa pode ser encontrada, indirectamente, na obra *Identificazione di una Donna* (1982), de Antonioni, mas sob uma diferente roupagem. Em vez de adoptar uma postura submissa em relação a Niccolò, Mavi, a Galateia gerada *ad hoc*, é passiva, pois desinteressa-se do amor de Niccolò, o Pigmalião de serviço. Esta postura é característica do *ennui* das personagens femininas de Antonioni. Este artigo pretende um cruzamento literário entre as *dramatis personae* de Ovídio e as personagens Niccolò e Mavi de Antonioni, fornecendo uma análise aprofundada sobre a possibilidade de Mavi se poder tornar num símbolo de emancipação da donzela de marfim ovidiana em narrativas contemporâneas. Quando condicionada a um ambiente específico da Antiguidade, a donzela de marfim de Ovídio é obrigada a comportar-se de acordo com o que se espera dela - uma extensão afónica de Pigmalião. Inversamente, quando exposta aos média metaliterários contemporâneos, a donzela de marfim pode libertar-se, contrariando a taxonomia dominante masculina.

Palavras-chave: mito de Pigmalião, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ovídio, emancipação feminina

Introducing the *eburnea virgo*

In episode four of the HBO original *The Idol* (2023), female popstar Joselyn (Lily-Rose Depp) sings “I don’t want to decide things for myself on my own” to *quasi* boyfriend Tedros (Abel Tesfaye), the Pygmalion figure who is set on saving the popstar and her craft from self-destructive tendencies. The line she sings encapsulates the sentiment of the Pygmalion myth, as seen through the perspective of the ivory damsel, a statue, and therefore a passive character, that is enlivened in the Ovidian tale.

Like Sam Levinson’s *The Idol*, Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Identificazione di una Donna* (1982) approaches a similar and compact, yet different, perspective of the Pygmalion myth. Closing in on Joselyn and Tedros’ dynamic, Mavi (Daniela Silverio) and Niccolò (Tomás Milián) follow a literary tradition that cinema sought to eternalize decade after decade in films such as *Pygmalion et Galathée* (Georges Méliès, 1898), *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *The Song of Songs* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933), *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964), *Un Beau Monstre* (Sergio Gobbi, 1971), *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), and the like. In these films, the female lead is generally more or less submissive and undergoes psychological or physical transformation at the hands of a dominant male character. Antonioni’s piece grows different from these productions in the sense that Mavi — the ideal lady (the *ad hoc* ivory damsel, more generally known as Galatea¹) — independetizes from Niccolò — the Pygmalion figure — and does not transform. She remains the same as she was and individualizes herself further, after connecting with the Pygmalion figure.

This article attempts to intersect the *dramatis personae* of the Ovidian myth with characters Niccolò and Mavi and provide further analysis on the possibility of Mavi becoming a powerhouse for the liberation of the ivory damsel in contemporary narratives. Whilst conditioned to a specific environment of Antiquity, Ovid’s ivory *jeune* is set to behave according to what is expected of her, i.e. a voiceless extension of Pygmalion. Conversely, when exposed to contemporary metaliterary media, the *eburnea virgo* can set free and rebel against a dominant male taxonomy wearing the skin of Mavi.

Awakening Mavi

Cinema has grown accustomed to resemantising the Pygmalion myth, be it more popularly in the forms of Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) in *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001)² and Cady (Lindsay Lohan) in *Mean Girls* (Mark Waters, 2004), or more intellectually in the manner of films such as *Pygmalion* (Leslie Howard, 1938) and *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964). To the female characters of such movies a pseudo-somatic transformation is set early on. Many other movies, as those cited above³, adhere to similar premises, the focus of which is prompting feminine transformation accommodating to a new (masculine) ideal. Females may observe different types of transformation instantiations: on one hand they can transmute on a physical level, on the other they can follow a psychological metamorphose at the hands of a male *pygmalionic* figure. Even though both instances may overlap in Antonioni’s *Identificazione*, this paper explores more solidly the latter situation on his film —from a metaphysical and subconscious standpoint. The Pygmalion-statue (Niccolò-Mavi) dynamic found in

¹ The name is a modern concoction. It was first ascribed to the ivory damsel by Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe after a novel in 1741. (Vd. Reinhold, 1971, p. 317).

² She fashions her persona to a masculine ideal she believes will secure the ex-boyfriend back in her life.

³ Also, *infra* n. 5.

Antonioni's movie is not, however, conventional like the films mentioned *supra*, since Mavi is an unorthodox and revolutionary Galatea-type figure. Thus, is Mavi one of the first metatextual *personae* of the female sex to break the Galatea spell and oppose certain behavioural norms? We hope to delve pertinently into these matters.

The Ovidian premise can be expounded in the following terms: a man sculpts a statue of a beautiful damsel and pleads Venus for his ideal woman to come alive (Ov. *Met.* 10. pp. 238-297). He is in love and she submits to his wish. This story is indirectly found in Antonioni's piece, under a different concoction: instead of submissive, Mavi adopts a passive stance towards the feelings of Niccolò in the way that she behaves uninterested in relation to the loving Pygmalion figure. This poise is characteristic of the typical *ennui* permeating female characters in Antonioni's films who are generally indifferent and apathetic towards men, despite reciprocating some feelings (Tomasulo, 1996, p. 55; Kelly, 1984, p. 37). Niccolò, as a customary character, stands for the typical Pygmalion ventriloquist. Like the Cyprian king, he is devoted to his love for Mavi and makes her the centre of his life — his muse, his *orbis terrarum*, his *locus amoenus*.

Figure 1
Niccolò's visual board



Source: Screenshot of *Identificazione di una Donna* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1982)

Figure 2
Mavi sleeping



Source: Screenshot of *Identificazione di una Donna* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1982)

Mubi's online page to Antonioni's *Identificazione di una Donna* provides a briefing of the film: "After his wife leaves him, a film director finds himself drawn into affairs with two enigmatic women, while at the same time searching for the right subject (and actress) for his next film". Niccolò is in fact looking for a leading lady — an ideal woman — for an upcoming project. Amidst his search, he falls in love with Mavi, a mysterious aristocrat, who disappears. Following her disappearance, he (re)connects with Ida who helps him track down Mavi. Niccolò desperately wants Mavi to be his Galatea — the *eburnea virgo*. But only intimately, and not cinematographically — he says so himself when confiding in his friend; Mavi is not to be filmed, she is his lover only. Initially, Mavi reciprocates his sentiments, but being free-spirited and not wanting to become chained to one lover, soon senses Niccolò's monogamic pretensions and tactically seeks independence and liberation. Before they meet, they speak on the phone, and he inquires: "Do you mind telling me what you look like?" To which she replies: "Why? You want to use me in a film?" And he responds: "I don't know. I don't know you. I'm uneasy when I can't visualize [...]" (Antonioni 1982, 00:11:47). In actuality, from the get-go Mavi is not so profoundly invested in a romantic relationship as one would infer. She proudly says so, declaring that she enjoys meeting new men each Spring. Preoccupied with the movie he is to make, Niccolò searches newspapers and magazines for faces of women,

assembling a visualization board⁴ (fig. 1), but the search is abruptly interrupted due to his distractions: he checks on sleeping Mavi — his muse. Unable to work, he yields into contemplation of Mavi’s sculptural almost naked figure (fig. 2). He dares not touch her, but gently brings the bedsheets to her, so that she bares less skin (a nod to the Ovidian myth, *Ov. Met.* 10. 267-69). As Niccolò falls deeply in love with Mavi, she takes away his creative ability/genius. He says to friend Mario (Marcel Bozzuffi) that whilst in love he can’t think about himself nor the film he wants to make. While he doesn’t know the story to the film, he is certain, due to inner feeling, that the lead is a female: “I’m looking for a face”, he says, “an idea for the character, but all I can think of is her” (Antonioni 1982, 00:41:08). He shuffles the pages of a women’s catalogue and Mario asks whether Mavi can be the leading personage. “Why the hell should Mavi be in my film? She’s in my life” (Antonioni 1982, 00:41:25), he replies. From this point on, there is a general understanding that Niccolò separates his love life from his filmmaking life, avoiding the merging of the two worlds. He fantasises about relationships with women as if they were a subjective experience, as though he were contemplating nature when speaking to them: “I’d like to be silent with a woman. Have the kind of relationship with her that you have with nature. Unless you are crazy, what do you do at the ocean or in the woods? You just look in silence” (Antonioni 1982, 00:43:30). He further explains to Mario his individual relationship with looking at nature, by equating women with nature: “But though you don’t realize it, there’s still a dialogue [between oneself and nature]. You speak and you answer, as if it were another person. My ideal woman would be like that other person” (Antonioni 1982, 00:42:56). To this Mario inquires: “Are you waiting for the ideal woman?” (Antonioni 1982, 00:43:11). He responds affirmatively. This scene is met with some ambiguity — we no longer know whether he’s speaking about an ideal partner or an ideal leading female for his movie. Ultimately, he cannot concentrate on his work and gradually becomes paranoid over an impending masculine figure that hovers over Mavi. She asks about why he’s overly hesitant about saying “I love you” and instructs him to tell her those words, after which he must confess the true meaning of love. When he doesn’t comply, she concludes that he doesn’t love her: “That’s not love. You need me in order to live or to survive” (Antonioni 1982, 01:04:58). After the diatribe she distances from him while revealing a lascivious and disruptive character.

Mavi undergoes a *tour de force* that provokes her to awake from romance and detach from Niccolò. At the same time, when she’s with him, Niccolò cannot find peace of mind, nor procure a female face for the movie he is looking into making. Film critic William Kelly describes Niccolò as “the most ethically disoriented of the film’s major characters” (Kelly, 1984, p. 38). While Niccolò becomes Pygmalion, Mavi slowly removes herself from the immobile stance on which pedestal Niccolò had placed her — which had consolidated the beginnings of her crystallization as Galatea. Mavi manages to suspend that very transformation. Not only doesn’t she want to be rendered in stone, but she wants to remain flawed, humane, promiscuous. Usually, the Pygmalion/Galatean transformation presupposes a kind of sublimation that Mavi, on account of coming into consciousness, rejects peremptorily. This happens in part, arguably, due to Mavi’s prescient approach to Niccolò who Kelly describes as being overcome with bad masculine habits: “selfishness, egoism, irresponsibility” (Kelly, 1984, p. 38). The critic further explains that to “Niccolò, a woman is more a habit than an individual. Although Niccolò professes to search for the ‘ideal woman’ as inspiration for his next film, he views the real women in his life as objects, or interchangeable parts” (Kelly, 1984, p. 38), or,

⁴ Strikingly evocative of the literary portrait present in *Luc.Im.3-10* in which the beauty of a specific *puella* is described via a visual congregation of the beauty of different goddesses that serve as examples of female pulchritude so as to achieve a most emphatic dramatic literary effect at describing a beautiful woman.

according to what Niccolò confides in Mario, as something akin to nature, therefore devoid of intrinsic humanity. This subconscious approach to women is paralleled in the Pygmalion myth further detailed below.

Awakening the *eburnea virgo*

For understanding the weight of the Pygmalion myth as a substratum to *Identificazione di una Donna* there is need to study the mytheme in concreteness. The leitmotif of the ivory damsel is transversal to many genres within Cinema — the realm Jean Cocteau said to be presided over by the tenth Muse (Winkler, 2005, p. 395). Film has sought to portray, since its very beginning, different versions⁵ of the *eburnea virgo* in the garments of blonde bombshells, candid brunettes, lascivious *fantômettes*, chaste females and the like. Arguably, all consubstantiate an idyll— a male idyll⁶. The lady of ivory has therefore stood the test of time as an idyll of Antiquity since the tale of Pygmalion, the sculptor-king.

The best well-preserved memory of the ivory damsel is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Rocki Wentzel spoke recently about the Ovidian myth in the following manner:

The most well-known account of the Pygmalion myth can be found in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Having become disenchanted with women, Pygmalion carves a beautiful statue with which he falls in love. Pygmalion treats his statue as though it were a human lover, fondling and kissing it and adorning it with jewelry. Eventually, he prays to the gods for a maiden like his statue, but Venus, goddess of love, senses his true desire and brings the statue to life. In this way, love gives life to Pygmalion's creation. (Wentzel, 2018, p. 1)

⁵ Cinema shows females, often metonymically and metaphorically, in the guise of the *eburnea virgo*, such as in the following examples: *Pygmalion et Galathée* (Méliès, 1896), *The American Venus* (Tuttle, 1926), *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927), *Glorifying the American Girl* (Webb, 1929), *Ladies of Leisure* (Capra, 1930), *Le Sang d'un Poète* (Cocteau, 1932), *Baby Face* (Green, 1933), *Night Life of the Gods* (Sherman, 1935), *Pygmalion* (Howard, 1938), *That Hamilton Woman* (Korda, 1941), *Flesh and Fantasy* (Duvivier, 1943), *Laura* (Preminger, 1944), *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Carné, 1945), *One Touch of Venus* (Seiter, 1948), *The Barefoot Contessa* (Mankiewicz, 1954), *La Donna Più Bella del Mondo* (Leonard, 1955), *La Venere di Cheroinea* (Tourjansky, 1957), *Funny Face* (Donen, 1957), *Afrodite, Dea dell'Amore* (Bonnard, 1958), *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* (Resnais, 1961), *Living Venus* (Gordon Lewis, 1961), *Now About these Women* (Bergman, 1964), *My Fair Lady* (Cukor, 1964), *Sandra* (Visconti, 1968), *Le Calde Notti di Lady Hamilton* (Jaque, 1968), *Le Calde Notti di Poppea* (Malatesta, 1969), *Un Beau Monstre* (Gobbi, 1971), *The Night Porter* (Cavani, 1974), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975), *L'Hypothèse du Tableau Volé* (Ruiz, 1978), *Runaway Bride* (Marshall, 1999), *Innocents* (Bertolucci, 2003), etc. Some references are more direct and others not so direct. A change in meaning of the *eburnea virgo* is clearly within the image's cinema seeks to capture to the audience. It goes without saying that reinterpreting images and giving them new meaning is paramount to the processes of birthing film in general. The new contents attached to the images of "new cinematographic" ivory damsels offer innovative and updated ideals/assertions about modern instantiations of the Pygmalion lady, a subject we will discuss further along this manuscript. At the same time, they do not necessarily channel a focused interest on the Ovidian myth *per se* (or on Philostephanus account for that matter, see below). Instead, the mythic story grows significant for the subtext or substratum from which modern narratives develop, producing meta-textual channels of great usefulness for the modern artist to reinterpret and resemantise. It is relevant that iterations of the ivory damsel replicate throughout cinema history, but this does not imply a direct concern for the myth itself — maybe only a very residual preoccupation with myth. We will return to this later.

⁶ An interesting approach to the value of females from the perspective of male contemplation and androcentric culture in the Baroque age, and the ancestry from which it stems, is available in Eduardo Franco, 2007, pp. 04-33.

Despite being the most famous retelling of the story, the Ovidian premise is not the oldest. According to Clement of Alexandria (circa 150-215 CE), the mythic tale had been divulged by Philostephanus in the third century BC (Law, 1932, p. 337; Rodrigues, 2007, pp. 65-66; James, 2011, pp. 25-35, p. 191, n.19). This older version of the tale shed light on a statue of Venus with which Pygmalion was besotted:

[...] if one sees a woman represented naked, he understands it is ‘golden’ Aphrodite. So the well-known Pygmalion of Cyprus fell in love with an ivory statue; it was of Aphrodite and was naked. The man of Cyprus is captivated by its shapeliness and embraces the statue. This is related by Philostephanus. (Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4. 50-51, trans. Butterworth, 1919, p. 131)

An even earlier literary instantiation of the lady of marble *topos* is recounted by Euripides in *Andromeda* (412 BCE) (Silva, 2023, p. 140), of which a few fragments survive, when Perseus watches Andromeda for the first-time, para-textually linking her to a statue: “Ei! Que rochedo é este que vejo, cercado pela espuma do mar? Que imagem de donzela, | esculpida em pedra que bem lhe reproduz a forma, estátua saída de mão de artista?” (Eur. *Fr.* 125)⁷.

Later reinterpretations of the Ovidian maiden forged onto life via meta-textual incantation are also produced by Lucian (somewhat)⁸ in the second century CE. Aristaenetus too, in the fifth to the sixth centuries CE⁹, engenders his own reading of the ivory maiden recurring to a *dramatis puella* that in fact is a lady that had been painted by artist Philopanax:

I painted a beautiful girl — and fell in love with my own painting. Art, not Aphrodite’s arrow, filled me with longing. I was shot by my own hand! O miserable me — to be born with a talent for painting! After all, I would not have fallen in love with an ugly picture. Now people pity me for my desire as much as they admire me for my art: my wretchedness in love appears to match my brilliance in painting [...]. I, however, can be with my darling as much as I want, the girl is good looking, and when my hand reaches out for her, she stays, steadfast and unshaken, without losing her own shape. She smiles at me sweetly, her lips slightly parted, and one could say that a word crouches at their very tip, ready to jump out of her mouth at any given moment. (Aristaenet. *Ep.* 2.10. trans. Bing, Höschele, 2014, pp. 81-82)

A canny and distinctive version of the Pygmalion lady is additionally found in Phryne’s myth/story, the alluring female model of sculptor Praxiteles. Historiographical traditions put Phryne living all the way back in the fourth century BCE and literary fiction concerning her character is traced to various epochs, including anecdotes and biographical records in the century in which she thrived. Hyperides¹⁰ in fourth century

⁷ We have decided to keep the Portuguese translation of the fragment in the text. In English it goes in the following manner: “Hold — what promontory do I see here, lapped by seafoam, and what maiden’s likeness, a statue carved by an expert hand to her very form in stone?” (Collard, 2008, p. 141).

⁸ This is unearthed when Lucian introduces visitors to Cnidus and to the Cnidian Aphrodite and their subsequent infatuation with the goddess; in the same episode, the tale of the man who made love to the same statue of the goddess is also pertinent; both reveal a capacity for imbuing the sculptured goddess with the spirit of divinity. (Luc. *Am.*, pp. 13-16).

⁹ A great deal of uncertainty pervades the life and exact dating of the existence of epistolographer (Aristaenetus. Bing, Höschele, 2014, pp. xii-xiv).

¹⁰ The record of Hyperides is autobiographical: “I have been intimate (with her). It’s not the same thing for one man to try to save her by every possible means and for the other to do everything to destroy her. Why

BCE, Clement of Alexandria¹¹ in second/third centuries CE, Athenaeus¹² in the second/third centuries CE and Alciphron¹³ also in the second/third centuries CE are amongst some of the authors who write about her. Seeing that the history of Phryne was met with early registers (i.e. Hyperides), in comparison to those of Philostephanus and the Cyprian king or those of Ovid and the Pigmalion/ivory lady, it is safe to say that the story of Phryne, the model, sets a literary precedent to the Pygmalion myth. Praxiteles' muse was often connected to social debauchery, and when she went to court facing charges of *asebeia* (like Socrates), it was requested that she reveal her body naked to the judges and audiences as an attempt at dramatizing her condition in the manner of a suppliant and gain the favour of the justice authorities with such spectacle¹⁴. In this way, Phryne was able to win the erotic desire, if not the judicial favour, of the men that constituted the ancient Areopagus before which she was urged to appear. This meant that she gave them a spectacle of nudity and divinity, visually consubstantiating *in situ* a sort of personification standing for the allegory of truth — the naked truth¹⁵. In a similar manner, the ivory lady also gave a visually striking performance to Pygmalion when revealed naked before him. Concerning the myth, it is essential to note that the king of Cyprus sculpted an ivory woman out of dissatisfaction with real women, ultimately

is she to blame if a stone hangs over Tantalus' head? Ask him (Euthias) for anything, and you will find yourself setting fire to the dockyards or destroying the laws.” (Frs., pp. 171-179, trans. Cooper, 2001, p. 148). Speaking about this historiographical remark, Athenaeus, in the *Deipnosophists*, says that, “In his speech *On Behalf of Phryne*, Hyperides admits that he was in love with her and had by no means escaped these feelings when he moved the Myrrhine [another courtesan] mentioned above into his house.” (Ath.13.590. Trans. Douglas Olson, 2010, p. 411).

¹¹ In proto-Christian fashion, Clement refers to Phryne when dismissing the work of sculptors and painters: “When Phryne the Thespian courtesan was in her flower, the painters used all to imitate her beauty in their pictures of Aphrodite, just as the marble masons copied Alcibiades in the busts of Hermes at Athens. It remains to bring your own judgment into play and decide whether you wish to extend your worship to courtesans.” (Vd. Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4. p. 47).

¹² Athenaeus writes in the *Deipnosophists*: “Phryne was from Thespieae, and when Euthias successfully indicted her, she escaped the death penalty; Euthias was so angry about this that he never argued another case, according to Hermippus (fr.68a I Wehrli). Hyperides spoke in support of Phryne, and when his speech accomplished nothing, and the jurors seemed likely to convict her, he brought her out in public, ripped her dress to shreds, exposed her chest, and at the conclusion of his speech produced cries of lament as he gazed at her, causing the jurors to feel a superstitious fear of this priestess and temple-attendant of Aphrodite, and to give in to pity [...]” (Ath.13.590. Trans. Douglas Olson, 2010, p. 411). The report continues: “And after she had been acquitted a decree was passed that no person speaking in a defendant's behalf should indulge in lamentation, nor should the accused man or woman on trial be bared for all to see. As a matter of fact, Phryne was more beautiful in the unseen parts. Hence one could not easily catch a glimpse of her naked; for she always wore a tunic which wrapped her body closely, and she did not resort to public baths. At the great assembly of the Eleusinia and at the festival of Poseidon, in full sight of the whole Greek world, she removed only her cloak and let down her long hair before stepping into the water; she was the model for Apelles when he painted his Aphrodite rising from the sea. So, too, the sculptor Praxiteles, being in love with her, modelled his Cnidian Aphrodite from her [...]” (Ath.13.590. Trans. Gulick, 1999, p. 187).

¹³ Alciphron's Letter 4.3 praises Hyperides for defending Phryne (Vd. Hörschele, 2014, 131): “We courtesans are all grateful to you, and each one of us is just as grateful as Phryne.” (Trans. Fobes, 1949, p. 255). In the famous Letter 4.1 Alciphron vicariously crafts a sentiment of love born inside Phryne for sculptor Praxiteles: “[...] have no fear; for you have wrought a very beautiful work of art, such as nobody, in fact, has ever seen before among all things fashioned by men's hands: you have set up a statue of your own mistress in the sacred precinct” (Trans. Fobes, 1949, p. 251).

¹⁴ In Plato's *Apologia*, Socrates explains the process by which the accused defend themselves by resorting to stratagems of the like, in the manner of supplicants. (Vd. *Pl.Ap.34b-c, 35a-b*).

¹⁵ Marcel Carné's film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) offers a glimpse into a supposed instantiation of Truth, the allegory of Truth — *La Vérité* —, at the mid nineteenth century, at the opening of the film. The Truth is shown as a sequence to a variety show or cirque, concealed within a tent, to which public access was made available by payment. The actress is nude and concealed in a tub inside of which she poses gazing immobile at a mirror. This very scene can be considered as a cinematic *tableau vivant*.

creating his ideal, yet naked, companion. There exists a sardonic subtext in identifying Phryne with Pygmalion's sculpted lady, as Pygmalion explicitly rejects prostitutes (Ov. *Met.* 10, pp. 243-247). This intertextual link between Phryne and the ivory lady reveals a nuanced irony: while Phryne mirrors or summons the ivory virginal figure, she embodies the very type of woman Pygmalion disdains. This juxtaposition underscores the complex interplay between the myth and Phryne's biography. Though his act reflected his desires and, through Ovid, Pygmalion expressed disdain for women, particularly prostitutes, this plot twist provides a compelling interpretative blend of Pygmalion's myth and Phryne's biography that will later serve as subtext for approaching the role of Mavi in Antonioni's *chef d'oeuvre* and Niccolò's *quasi* misogynistic tendencies: Phryne, a prostitute, mirrors the ivory virgin; Pygmalion, the sculptor, scorns sex workers; yet Phryne as an ivory damsel *avant la lettre* embodies prostitution and virginity. These dual images are met with intertextuality, corruption and sublimation at once suggesting an intersection of woman and sculpture, of sex and purity. Is Phryne therefore a hybrid when merged with the lady of marble, not sexual *in toto*? Does this fusion approach call into consideration a chauvinistic sublimation for Phryne, by rendering her intertextually linked to Pygmalion's damsel? The ivory damsel is a byproduct of male idealism. By associating and conniving with her, Phryne might be pushed towards the path of sublimation, a register which her biographical notes riposte. But, for the time being, let us leave Phryne be — a powerful prostitute.

From the gathered testimonies and registers, there is reason to assume that Phryne and the ivory lady are beautiful female specimens meta-textually linked and recaptured by educated/*literati* men of Antiquity and Late Antiquity. The historical/mythical Phryne (as an antecedent to the ivory damsel) and the *eburnea virgo* both share two particularities: they are beautiful and naked (at some point in the story). The separate events of each female's account present a common trace: they are both subjects of male contemplation, besottedness and reverie. As such, besides serving the mere purposes of contemplation, Phryne and the ivory lady can be seen as two curated and prepared objects for exhibition — female exhibition to a male audience.

This very concept of 'female exhibition' is unearthed in the figure of Laïs, a female *hetaira* (in the same way as Phryne), who was considered "reputed to excel in looks all women we had ever yet lived" (Hyperides apud. Ath. 13.587)¹⁶ and who went on to charm Apelles, the painter. Athenaeus tells the story in his *Deipnosophists*, when speaking about philosophers who proclaim to undermine the wonders of Venus, but indulge in lovemaking with courtesans:

When Laïs was still a girl, the painter Apelles saw her fetching water from the Peirene spring, and he was so astonished at how stunning she was, that he eventually took her to a party given by some friends. When the other guests made fun of him from bringing a young girl rather than a prostitute to the party, he said: "Don't be surprised; because in less than two years I'll put her on display as a beauty guaranteed to make people happy."¹⁷ (Ath. 13.588. Trans. Olson, 2010, p. 399)

Myrtilus, the narrator of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, then proceeds to speak about a similar situation involving Socrates and a courtesan. But soon recuperates Laïs to the conversation by saying that at "one-point Laïs was in competition with Phryne" on the occasion of beauty and lovers. The crux of the matter is that all these female specimens

¹⁶ Translation (Gulick, 1999, p. 167).

¹⁷ Gulick's translation varies a little: "Don't be surprised; for I shall show you that she will be in less, altogether, than three years, a beautiful woman for men's delectation." (Gulick, 1999, p. 173).

are devised by sculptors, painters and intellectual men who yield onto contemplative and erotic desire upon interacting with them. Therefore, these female bodies accommodate, to a large extent, to men's desires and sexual appetites, as seen through the written sources. It is not a novelty, then, to say that women are taken as objects of desire and coveted by men since the earliest of times. In light of these matters, the Pygmalion myth has been recounted many times throughout history, holding also onto a Phrynian intertext. In Antiquity as with Late Antiquity, it garnered special attention and was subjected to recreation by different authors, dressing itself with various meta-textual garments whilst presupposing different ramifications.

Is this input at all relevant to understanding Mavi? Yes, because it provides the context to fictionalize Mavi around an Ovidian/Pygmalion substratum. We have previously laid down some affinities between the ivory damsel and Mavi, both in the prefatory segment of this article and in the subsequent section dedicated to summarizing Antonioni's movie. By exploring the context of the Pygmalion myth, the character of Mavi is better understood as an artefact of intertextuality, echo, ventriloquism and (re)imagination. This is not, however, a matter of allusion, nor influence, but more a matter of confluence, intertext and shared metaphysical and meta-psychological traces/signs¹⁸. The mediating link is Pygmalion and the *eburnea virgo* (and, secondarily, Phryne's story and other extant ramifications), a mythical tale which provides founding echo that modernity (and cinema, in concreteness) can amplify and/or diminish at its wish. This allows the *eburnea virgo*, even while paradigmatically distant in matrix and time to Mavi, to be fully integrated as reverberation in the cinematic *opus* of Michelangelo Antonioni, not only by way of synthesis and remote literary regurgitation, but also by virtue of the mirroring effect that Mavi, as seen through the lens of Niccolò (who in effect is a film director) as an object of oppressive male desire (effect thus akin to Pygmalions' objectification of Galatea), is subjected to. As such, Pygmalion and the ivory damsel are not involved directly as *dramatis personae* in *Identificazione di una Donna*. They are neither invoked as allegory or mimesis. Yet, they float as silent phantoms, as feelings that linger, as echo - still, an indelible and sophisticated presence that is felt in the dynamics of both Mavi and Niccolò via an invisible umbilical cord that links both narratives meta-textually across time and space¹⁹.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Dan Curley who generously went over these matters with me at the fourteenth edition of the Celtic Conference in Classics (Coimbra, 2023).

¹⁹ A brainstorm of words is in order to illustrate what has been said, which sometimes can be difficult to grasp, since the connection between old and new is not of simple transposition to the present or of metaphor use (in the way that is often seen in Reception Studies of the Classics in which a literary association is more or less directly established, although many times indirectly). Words as the following prove quite useful to grasping this reading: metonymy, periphrasis, indirect mnemonic, distant metaphor, mimicry, compositeness, ventriloquism, vicarious assimilation, infidel translation, *poikilia*, assemblage, hybridity of meaning, regurgitated simulacra, resemantisation, memory of images (i.e. *nachleben*, *Atlas Mnemosyne*, afterlife of images in warburgian tint), indirect inheritance, meta-textuality, *metagoge*, perhaps allegory in a Baudelairean or Benjaminian sense (Ryan, 1993), cautious literary distance (Ryan, 1993, p. 1132), "spectator's detour" (Mulvey, 2014, p.28), "palimpsest" (Mulvey, 2014, p. 29), "extra-textual-reverie" (Mulvey, 2014, p.33), a *mise en abyme* of images, the link within the link, etc. In *Mouse or Rat: Translation as Negotiation*, Umberto Eco consubstantiates a "theory of translation" based on the concept of "intersemiotic translation" that explains the stages of "transformation of a novel into a film, or of a painting into a poem and so on" (Vd. Eco, 2013, p. 3). This helps elaborate reflections on reception processes within cinematic frameworks. On theories/chains of reception (Vd. Hinds Scott, 2023) (CCC July). In Hinds Scott's paper presentation, she argued about the relevance of moving "beyond the epic, asserting the significance of dramatic [ancient] texts as sources even in epic film, and to move beyond adaptations that seek to directly retell ancient narratives in ancient settings". She further speaks about the "concept of postmodern pastiche, an approach currently activated in, for example the Netflix series *Stranger Things*. Pastiche is used here to scaffold the narrative by signifying both character and action through reliance on

Leaving hermeneutic and ontological considerations aside and having discoursed about the issues of reception and inter-semiotic reception, there is an additional inescapable sensation concerning the Pygmalion myth and Antonioni's film. Even while physically distant, the *eburnea virgo* is unavoidably inter-semiotically integrated in *Identificazione di una Donna*. From here on we wish to emphasise the way in which the ivory lady grasps "reality", becoming palpable in modern times via the character of Mavi. This appropriation *by proxy* in *Identificazione* ultimately garners the power to release the *eburnea virgo* from the chains of a dominant Pygmalion taxonomy. Mavi is "real" (in the cinematic universe she inhabits) and stands in (*faire semblant*) for the absent figure she echoes.

Mavi as an artefact of Niccolò's reverie: emancipation is immanent

As the ivory damsel gains plasticity through the skin of Mavi, one ponders about the way in which this new skin is produced. In a stunning essay, Laura Mulvey speaks about literary insertions disrupting the linear structure of a text, by which the insertion of texts within other texts are the basis of the premise she ventures into. As Mulvey puts it when discussing a "fabric of quotations" pertaining to Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), Camille (Brigitte Bardot), the female lead, seems to conjure up some literary ghosts of the cinematic past when she shares an open-air space with some iconic movie posters:

As she stands against the backdrop of posters, she personifies new cinema, a new kind stardom, as well as a new kind of glamour, European as opposed to Hollywood. In the last resort, she stands for the personification of cinema. If Godard tends to fuse cinematic beauty with that of his female star, this is particularly so in *Le Mépris*. But the presence of the *Vivre sa Vie* poster creates its own distinctive chain of female beauty reaching back across the history of cinema. Later in the film, Camille wears a black wig, bobbed in the style worn by Anna Karina in *Vivre sa Vie*, which in turn cites Louise Brooks. Much admired by the director of the Cinémathèque Française, Henri Langlois, for an insouciant seductiveness in films such as Hawks' 1928 *A Girl in Every Port* to Pabst's 1929 *Pandora's Box*, Louise Brooks might be seen as a pre-figuration of Godard's fascination with a feminine beauty that fused with the beauty of the cinema. (Mulvey, 2014, p. 33)

As explained by Mulvey, this is a scene that adds meta-textual layers to the space Camille inhabits in Godard's very own work. Is this pattern somewhat familiar to what is expected of Mavi? Perhaps. Mavi is a character that goes further back to the past to fetch a millenary reference. And if she is inviting a millenary reference, the character she summons is bound to be attached to the aegis of a very solidified construct of the male form of gazing. Is the male gaze from Niccolò to Mavi at all different from the way in which Pygmalion contemplatively approaches the ivory damsel? It should be remembered that the way the ivory maiden is contemplated is twofold: on one hand, Ovid inserts

audience expectations of the very artefacts of popular culture they are drawing from." I extend my gratitude to Aimee Hinds Scott for generously providing her paper presentation, enabling me to directly quote from it. On a different note, after reading Judith Ryan's "More seductive than Phryne's" paper essay (Vd. Ryan, 1993, pp. 1128-1141) on the effects of the ever-growing interpretative ambiguities inherent to literature and painting of the nineteenth century, that ultimately summon chiasmic allegory and many anxieties, one ponders that cinema, once being introduced to the pantheon of the arts, has meddled belatedly with such hermeneutic issues — reception studies being one of the main channels on which this relationship with hermeneutics is more well established.

Orpheus as the narrator for the *Metamorphoses*, having him sing about the history of Pygmalion, on the other hand, there's Pygmalion himself, the sculptor, speaking about his *savoir faire*. In this sense, it is important to argue for the double masculinity on the gaze of Orpheus and Pygmalion upon the *eburnea virgo* who stands without agency or authority.

It might happen that Niccolò, the modern Pygmalion, reads Mavi visually in two overlapping ways — as a lover and as a filmmaker, despite not wanting to make Mavi the subject of his film. In a seminal essay, Mulvey speaks about women as images:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle [...]. (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11)

If Mavi is to be regarded in this light, conforming to a “to-be-looked-at-ness”, then she, like the ivory maiden, is a byproduct of male *fantasization* (i.e. to fantasize over a subject or object), with no escape from Niccolò's tunnel vision. Mulvey further elaborates on the binomial nature of male/female dynamics:

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychological structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. [...] The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action. (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 12-13)

If male *peeping toms* are casuistically bound to control narratives, then Niccolò's effort may signify a tragic attempt at it.

In a film review, William Kelly expounds about *Identificazione* consolidating a “petty battle of male egos” (Kelly, 1984, p. 39). He says that overall Niccolò's character forms an “unflattering portrait of the modern male, one which might best be titled ‘Objectification of Women’” (Kelly, 1984, p. 39). He further pursues the idea that “the actual title is somewhat ironic as it suggests that which Niccolò is incapable of accomplishing, much less conceiving; for how could someone who views all women as essentially the same think of identifying *a* woman?” (Kelly, 1984, p. 39). The following paragraph to Kelly's approach to Niccolò is worth quoting in full:

A recapitulation of this failing of Niccolò's occurs near the end in one brief shot of him returning to his apartment building after the trip to Venice. From a medium close-up of a statue of a woman, the camera tilts down to reveal Niccolò turning away from the statue. The statue, like the ever-growing collage of photographs of women that

Niccolò amasses in his apartment, defines the extent of his relationship with women: remote objects to be contemplated, completely void of any genuine emotional association. The tilt itself, by barring Niccolò from sharing the frame with the statue, expresses the separation between Niccolò and his chosen object(s) of contemplation. (Kelly, 1984, p. 39)

This reading of Niccolò draws him further close to the Cyprian king in his approach to women, who are translated into statues or objects. This is also how he reads Mavi. Even though Mavi is an iteration of the Pygmalion ivory damsel, she refuses the sublimation that the subtextual identification with the Ovidian statue implies.

As a modern iteration of Galatea, Mavi can be considered a *fantômette*. What are *fantômettes*? *Fantômettes* can be film or literary characters. The *fantômette* is in essence a term that pertains to a female variegation allowing intertextual comparisons to a *hypotext*-type character or a prototype character — through which other characters, *fantômettes*, eventually form. In the present case, the ivory damsel in the Pygmalion myth is the *hypotext*-type character to which Mavi alludes. We argued elsewhere (Diogo, 2023, p. 1-10) about the surfacing of the *fantômette* phenomenon apropos of the many Galateas that have emerged in cinema and other media embodying the ivory damsel of the Ovidian mythological framework. The *fantômette* conception can therefore migrate to different texts and intertexts to refer to female *personae* that summon literary memory by visual echo — a concept similar to the warburgian idea of the afterlife of images, the *nachleben*, that is channelled here for women and feminine roles. In previous work (Diogo, 2022, pp. 209-220), we argued for the emergence of the *fantômette* through a detailed intertextual analysis encompassing Jean Cocteau’s novel *Les Enfants Terribles* (1929), Jean-Pierre Melville’s film adaptation (1950), Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Dreamers* (2003), and the music video *365 FRESH!* by Triple H. These varied texts each evoke the archetype of Élisabeth or Isabelle, the quintessential *fantômette*, echoed in each of the visual pieces. In another mentioned work (Diogo, 2023, pp. 1-10), we extended the concept of the *fantômette* to analyse the manifestation of Galatea-like personas in contemporary music videos. Though the original focus of the *fantômette* was Isabelle (the concept of the *fantômette* was in fact created for her), we saw pertinent to redirect the spotlight of the *fantômette* to Galatea-type characters in music videos. We concluded that not only feminine variegations therein explored are not mere replicas of the ivory damsel, but they serve as metaliterary agents that echo Pygmalion’s sculpture via reconceptualization. Modern *fantômettes* therefore reflect a narrative which comes through a metamorphose that does not stop in Antiquity. Even though they are all “women of Pygmalion”, Ovidian *fantômettes* do not limit themselves to this genitive cognomen nor their individuality is castrated by the Pygmalion identification as a patronymic lifestyle. This means that Galatean *fantômettes* point to a transformational process set in an ancient literary framework that is yet ongoing, adding to the contemporary *ethos* of Galatea.

In cinema history, many iterations of Galatea come to the fore. Mavi is yet another modern mirror of the *eburnea virgo*. For reference, let us briefly compare *Identificazione*’s Mavi with *Salon Kitty* (Tinto Brass, 1976)’s Margherita (Teresa Ann Savoy), a modern licentious hypostasis of Galatea. Being both Galateas, the most revealing difference between Mavi and Margherita is that Margherita, contrary to Mavi, turns into an effigy *ipsa facta* of the *eburnea virgo* as the film commences — she undergoes transformation immediately, becoming an object at the hands of the SS. Mavi, in comparison, does not yield to metamorphose. It is only after Margherita falls in love with a deserter of the Nazi party that she comes to regard the world in its true form, falling to her senses.

Figure 3

“I want you too in my private dream”

Source: Screenshot of *Salon Kitty*
(Tinto Brass, 1976)**Figure 4**

“I can do anything I want”

Source: Screenshot of *Salon Kitty*
(Tinto Brass, 1976)

After learning about the assassination of her lover by an SS commandant (the Pygmalion figure, played by Helmut Berger) to whom she erotically assists, she orchestrates a complot to have him killed. But prior to that realization and subsequent revenge, she had voluntarily surrendered to the Nazi machinery and the SS commandant. She transforms to Galatea and is rendered into an object by the very words of the SS individual. He explains the role of Margherita by saying “I want you too in my private dream” and she replies, “You need another ghost like your wife?”, “It is my wish, and your duty”, he says. She then argues, “You want me to lose my body, my very me?” and he inquires, “Would you rather stay as you are now?... My aims are higher... I have a goal, power” (Fig. 3) (Brass 1976, 01:17:26). And later he insists: “I can do anything I want. I manipulate emotions, as I manipulate things with little power. That’s how I want you, with no will. You belong to me, you’re mine. I want you as my accomplice” (Fig. 4) (Brass 1976, 01:18:48). Further along the narrative he overtly signals a Pygmalion/Promethean/Frankensteinean complex by adding, “You are my creation. I invented you. You are my accomplice” (Brass 1976, 01:51:21). As seen through these dialogues, the SS commandant wants Margherita yield to his authority and have no agency.

We must remember that Pygmalion repudiated prostitutes. It is rather humorous devising great androcentric similarities between the Cyprian king and the SS commandant when he defiantly says to Margherita, “I despise whores — they are paid toilettes”, and she replies with confidence, “What am I then?... I’m still a whore” (Brass 1976, 01:51:12). On the same tinge, this dynamic of Margherita and the SS special is reminiscent of the way in which Aristaenetus’ Philopanax renders his painted lady by stating: “I, however, can be with my darling as much as I want, the girl is good looking, and when my hand reaches out for her, she stays, steadfast and unshaken, without losing her own shape” (Aristaenet. *Ep.* 2.10). Are therefore prostitutes and courtesans supposed to meet at a male intersection that asserts control over the female body?

Following the narrative, even though Margherita was seen as the SS commander’s “invented” creature, she emancipates from that very prescription by denouncing him to the Nazi corps, revenging the death of her beloved. Margherita is poetically decadent but manages to escape the Galatean corset. Conversely, in comparison to Margherita, Mavi is, since the very beginning, anti-Galatea, and, overall, does not subsume to an *eburnea virgo* direct identification. The interpretation of Mavi as Galatea is but an indirect instance. In spite of this, the capacity for Mavi to dress the skin of the ivory damsel is

commendable and reflects the ability of modern taxonomies to shift power dynamics via reference and literary renovation of images.

Therefore, it is safe to say that Galatea didn't stop transforming in Antiquity, to which Mavi, Margherita and others are testaments. Mavi, Margherita et al. are metaliterary agents, doubles of Pygmalion's statue that metamorphose centrifugally via film, text, and all sorts of media. They all eventually fall under the Galatea-type trope. On this matter, we quote a passage from a previous work introducing the fact that different media have:

[...] the ability to activate a memory of past images that jump over to Antiquity and reprise the myth of Pygmalion to some extent, under a taxonomy that permits a continuum of negotiations between Galatean tropes. This “moving memory” or “memory in motion” houses an ancient paradigm that is arguably under construction in popular media towards the reframing of women. In a nutshell, selected *corpora* present different feminine guilds or *fantômettes* that may be still-like or move towards emancipation. Ultimately, the constricted frames they're housed in all point towards emancipatory evolution that mythical Galatea lacked under the authority of Pygmalion. Classical receptions and interest in the *nachleben* of the figure of Galatea point to discourses on female agency alongside erotic femininity liberated from masculine dominancy. Here, discussion of roles and emancipatory hermeneutics permit questions about definitions of female dominant stances on which feminine voices stay relevant [...]. This phenomenon points to a transformative process set in ancient literary frameworks, still ongoing with additions to the contemporary *ethos* of Galatea²⁰. (Diogo, 2023, pp. 6-7)

Both Mavi and Margherita, as many others, summon the concept of the *fantômette* as a feminine mnemonic collective standing in for the *eburnea virgo*, a character that repeats throughout literary and metaliterary history. As with George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), in which Eliza Doolittle finds liberation from Professor Higgins, many modern Galateas (oddly except Sherman and Cukor's film renditions of Shaw's play, against the playwright's wish) are filtered through emancipatory hermeneutics that liberate them from a Pygmalion's predatory lens. In this sense, modern Galateas such as Mavi can be considered as symbols of feminine emancipation, a feat that was barricaded from the ivory damsel in Antiquity (even though Phrynian subtexts push the Galatean iteration towards that avenue).

Concluding thoughts: the marble lady in motion and the castration of the male hero

Cinema has done much to emphasise the way in which their reprised characters are seen as 'real' and 'palpable'²¹ in the *mise en scène*, often recuperating texts and subtexts until now subconsciously assimilated by the audience. It is the duty of theorists and scholars to unearth the connections between these different universes and shed light on the figures that were until recent times cast in the shadow. Repetitive *fantômettes* are only retrievable via archaeological excavation of visual and literary memory (in an Aby Warburg [warburgian] sense) and Scholarship throughout the twentieth century,

²⁰ We have refined the text a little bit for precision and adequation to the present subject.

²¹ A habit inherited from the nineteenth century *art for art sake's* movement that especially in painting, i.e. Jean-Léon Gérôme, (but also in literature, i.e. Charles Baudelaire), wanted to straighten the ties between the artwork, or depicted subject, and external reality. (Vd. Ryan, 1993, pp. 1128-1141).

especially since the fifties and the sixties authorship shifts (i.e. the death of the author gave rise to the ascension of the reader, Barthesian speaking), has been adamant in studying the underlying meanings of texts, films and other pertinent media. We hope to have contributed to this weave of meanings, especially in what concerns the lady of marble and its more modern accretions or facsimiles via specific links: the Pygmalion myth, the biographical mythology of Phryne and other ramifications of interest, some pertaining to Athaenetus and Alciphron.

In short, we must remember that Mavi, as Margherita, is similar to Phryne due to being promiscuous and sexually progressive. Phryne is a courtesan that, depending on the ancient record, arguably reverts to or is urged to show her body for supplication, becoming naked for male contemplation. So too Mavi and even more so Margherita, like Phryne, cater to dominant masculine audiences by exposing their bodies or enacting the Pygmalion myth in some respects. What lends credence to our argument is the notion that by embracing innovative registers all Galateas transform into agent figures, amassing power through the accrual and amalgamation of powerful reinvented gynocentric narratives through the reinvention of feminine characters. By changing power dynamics, Galateas consubstantiate new horizons free of male domination. And it is by tantalizing the Pygmalion figure (i.e. Niccolò, the SS commandant) that he is rendered passive, underground, so that female voices echo further beyond his persona. When the ‘women of Pygmalion’ emerge as proactive protagonists in their narratives, they ultimately transcend the confines of the traditional male Pygmalion gaze and the prescribed roles traditionally imposed upon them. By becoming active protagonists, Galateas, or *eburneae virgines*, perspicaciously castrate Pygmalion figures — therefore male subjects no longer represent the *acme* of debate, and narratives cease to be exclusive to their soliloquies²². This leads to a curious inversion of the Pygmalion effect, whereby the ivory lady assumes protagonism, diminishing the centrality of the male hero.

Post scriptum: bodies replacing sculptures

There are two main ways that the Pygmalion myth can become inverted: when one wishes to render a human being into a statue by descriptively comparing it to a sculpture (i.e. an ephrasis, by objectualizing or rendering someone abstract, in other words as personification in reverse or chiasmic *metagoge*) or by making the subject look like a statue or act like one (*tableau vivant*, *pose plastique*, *attitude*²³); then, there’s the instance in which Pygmalion and the ivory damsel trade places, in which men assume passive roles and women in turn are dominatrixes, signaling a Phrynian complex, whereby the damsel/statue pursues the sculptor (*demiourgos*) into being her lover (almost symbolically adhering to a Stockholm’s syndrome complex). The symbolism established in the Pygmalion myth further betokens a literary and psychological paraphilia named Pigmalionism/Agalmatophilia that roughly translates to ‘love for statues’. It is a paraphilia that spreads throughout literary history as a famous thematic *leitmotif* fettered to an instance in which a human subject falls in love with a statue or an object resembling a human being (i.e. robots, dolls, mummies, etc.)²⁴. The underlying texture of this very

²² For example, the *Barbie* (Gerwing, 2023) movie is a recent testament to a change in power dynamics.

²³ Modern artforms.

²⁴ For reference, note the novel *Isabelle* (1911) by André Gide revolving around a scholar that becomes infatuated with the portrait image of a woman. Film *Laura* (Preminger, 1944) also carries a similar expedition pertaining to a detective investigating the death of a woman and becoming enamoured with her painting.

motif is also tantamount to the establishment of the *tableau vivant* artform in modern art history. Ultimately, Agalmatophilia is implicated in *tableaux vivants*, *attitudes* and *poses plastiques*, all of which operate as consolidated artforms that channel surrogates for sculpted bodies. These registers become metonymically and aesthetically interwoven in *Identificazione* and *Salon Kitty*, when one considers a Pygmalion or Phrynian substratum to the narratives in which female bodies evoke and/or replace sculptures.

Here, the point of the sculpted body is to emphasize female liberation, by rendering premises upside down and Galateas taking up the agential role. In Pygmalion-inspired narratives, such as those explored at present, female subjects ultimately dominate the register. The feminine assertion and new-found agency in contemporary media can be seen as a subsidiary of a compensatory need that shifts the customary algorithm of historically submissive poises towards the goal of emancipation. When reflecting on this, it is clear that there lays evident a symbolic need for freedom and transformation that modern times and new media finally accomplish for females. Female liberation and emancipation are thus made possible in filmic representations of women.

Is Mavi the first lady of marble to find liberation in the cinema? No, she isn't. However, she represents a remarkable example at doing so by avoiding pygmalionistic predatory tactics and not becoming emotionally dependant on the male hero. Niccolò ultimately can't place Mavi on his female visualization board whilst attempting to capture the image of the perfect lady. Realizing the impossibility of this task, he decides to create a science fiction movie where the sun becomes the primary focus. Perhaps through this he is able to connect more closely with nature.

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