Si non obstet reverentia:
Pygmalion and his ivory maiden in 21ˢᵗ c. science fiction

Scholarship within classical reception has observed significant connections between contemporary androids and ancient automata figures (e.g., the golden mechanized beings assisting Hephaestus in his workshop, Faraone 1987) as well as ancient manufactured—or "womanufactured" (Sharrock 1991; cf. James 2011)—women, such as Pandora and Pygmalion's animated ivory statue (Liveley 2006, 2020; cf. Buxton 1998). These ancient, manufactured females are produced to meet the differing needs and wants of their male creators.

This paper seeks to explore further the ways that manufactured women in Greco-Roman myth, especially Ovid's ivory maiden, have shaped the production of synthetic women in recent science fiction. Embodied artificial woman of late 20ᵗʰ c. and early 21ˢᵗ c. productions (e.g., *Blade Runner* [Scott 1982], *Splice* [Natali 2009], *Ex Machina* [Garland 2014], *M3GAN* [Johnstone 2022]) emerge in dialogue with less tangible, but equally feminized systems of artificial intelligence (*S1M0NE* [Niccol 2002], *Her* [Jonze 2013], *Blade Runner 2049* [Villeneuve 2017], *Artifice Girl* [Ritch 2023]): what features of Ovid's myth have become more salient and how can these features help us understand both the dilemmas we confront in managing our capacity to create human-like ("android" or "humanoid") entities and the persistently gendered structures that frame the dilemmas themselves?

The tendency of newer disembodied AI models of woman to redirect the conversation surrounding technology, patriarchy, and (post) human evolution is well exemplified by the gradual displacement of those "pleasure models" (e.g., Pris [Daryl Hannah]) from Scott's original *Blade Runner*, based on PK Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and their equivalent, Joi (Ana de Armas), the protagonist K's holographic AI lover from the 2017

film. Both embodied and disembodied manufactured women reflect on Ovid's preoccupation with Pygmalion's convincing artistry, verisimilitude so precise that the artist himself is confused by his creation's non-human status (*Met.* 10.250-53; *ars adeo late arte sua*, 253). Moreover, the implicit question of whether one can love a synthetic being, apparent in Pygmalion's initial desire to make his creation his wife (275-6), is explored in physically realized androids as well as in disembodied AI. Perhaps the most pressing aspects of Ovid's rendering in recent incarnations of artificial woman, and especially apparent in the disembodied AI version, are the questions it raises about consent and autonomy. While Ovid leaves readers with only a glimpse of a very compliant Eburna, he has posited earlier in his narrative the possibility of her desires (*credas…si non obstet reverentia, moveri velle*, 250-51), desires that are disturbingly transferred to successive generations in the form of Myrrha's transgressive love for her own creator, Cinyras, whose tale immediately follows Pygmalion's. While contemporary science fiction explores the autonomy and free will of AI with perhaps a more sympathetic lens (*Blade Runner 2049*, *Artifice Girl*), it raises similarly urgent questions about the interdependence governing the relationship between creator and creation.

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