

## The Eroticism of Artificial Flesh in Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *L'Eve Future*

Patricia Pulham

In October 2006, Channel Five aired 'Guys and Dolls', a documentary which looked at Real Dolls (uncannily realistic sex toys) and the men who buy them.<sup>1</sup> In September 2007, *Lars and the Real Girl* (director: Craig Gillespie; screenplay: Nancy Oliver), another tale of a man and his doll, premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and was recently distributed in the United Kingdom. While the Channel Five programme appeared in the 'extraordinary people' series and was billed as a serious examination of such paraphilia, Gillespie's film adopts a whimsical tone, and centres on a community's complicit acceptance of a troubled man's love for Bianca, 'his half-Danish, half-Brazilian, wheelchair-using, missionary [silicon] girlfriend'.<sup>2</sup>

Recent interest suggests that this form of 'unnatural' love is a modern phenomenon, yet the concept of the sex doll is by no means a new one. By the time Villiers de L'Isle Adam published *L'Eve Future (Tomorrow's Eve)* in 1886 in which a fictional version of the inventor Thomas Edison constructs a complex, custom-made android for the Englishman, Lord Ewald, as a substitute for his unsatisfactory lover, the French term 'dame de voyage', describing a roughly-made female doll of cloth used by sailors on long journeys, had long existed. Hadaly, the android, whose name according to Edison means 'the IDEAL' in Iranian, has a number of literary and cultural precursors and successors.<sup>3</sup> Her most commonly accepted ancestor is Olympia in E. T. A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' (1816). Among her fascinating descendants are Oskar Kokoschka's 'Silent Woman'; Model Borghild, a doll designed by German technicians during World War II; 'Caracas' in Tommaso Landolfi's short story 'Gogol's Wife' (1954); a variety of gynoids and golems from the realms of science fiction, including Ira Levin's Stepford wives (1972);<sup>4</sup> and, most recently, that silicon masterpiece – the Real Doll. All, arguably, have their genesis in the classical myth of Pygmalion to which I will return later.

Villiers's novel is clearly indebted to Hoffmann's tale, a debt that is tacitly acknowledged early in the text by an epigraph from 'The Sandman' that opens the second chapter in Book I ("Tis he! ... Ah! Said I, opening my eyes wide in the dark, it is the Sand-Man!" [TE 8]). Hoffmann's tale centres on a highly-strung student, Nathaniel, whose increasing obsessions and violent expressions of them in

dreams and poems alienate his first love, Clara. He attributes her inability to understand him to her ‘cold, unreceptive’ heart, becomes disillusioned with her ‘cold, prosaic disposition’, and finally declares her to be a ‘lifeless accursed automaton’.<sup>5</sup> Strange, then, that he should transfer his love to Olympia, a woman described as a ‘beautiful statue’ (*SM* 109), who manifests physically that coldness that Nathaniel perceives in Clara’s character. Dancing with her at a ball, he finds that her hand is ‘icy cold’ and feels ‘a coldness as of death thrill through him’ (*SM* 113-14). Yet, as he looks into her eyes, ‘which gazed back at him full of love and desire’, it seems as though a pulse begins ‘to beat in the cold hand and a stream of life blood [...] to glow’ (*SM* 114). Later, as he leaves, he bends down to kiss her and encounters lips that are also ‘icy-cold’ and as he touches her cold hand, is ‘seized by an inner feeling of horror’, suddenly recalling an old ‘legend of the dead bride’, but, as they kiss, her lips seem to ‘warm into life’ (*SM* 115). Nathaniel’s happiness, however, is short lived and the discovery that she is nothing but ‘a lifeless doll’ tips him into madness (*SM* 120).

In Villiers’s story as in Hoffmann’s, the anxieties surrounding the doll centre on male satisfaction and, as Michelle Bloom has noted, it is no accident that Alicia Clary, the woman who serves as the model for the Edison’s doll, bears a name that ‘recalls that of Hoffmann’s Clara’.<sup>6</sup> While Olympia ‘expresses’ interest in Nathaniel and his work, she is a ‘beam of light from the Promised Land of love’, a ‘heart’ in which his ‘whole being is reflected’ (*SM* 114). In contrast, Lord Ewald’s mistress, Alicia Clary, does not reflect the image of her lover and must therefore be replaced by the android, Hadaly, who will: Ewald, like Nathaniel, seeks an ‘objectified projection’ of his own soul (*TE* 66). Edison promises Ewald an undemanding companion, one who is to be ‘a shadow’ of his spirit ‘realised from without’; he tells him: ‘the Being called Hadaly depends on the free will of him who will DARE to conceive it. *Suggest it to her from the depths of your self!*’ (*TE* 68, original emphasis). However, while Hoffmann’s Olympia may be an early prototype of Hadaly, it is clear that the latter’s sophisticated construction exceeds that of the simple automaton. Edison makes her superiority apparent. He calls those who produced earlier automata ‘Poor fellows’ whose ‘ridiculous monsters’ are

‘outrageous caricatures’ of humanity that ‘deserve to be exhibited in the most hideous of wax museums’ (*TE* 61). In comparison, Hadaly, as ‘Android’ is more than ‘An Imitation Human Being’, she is, as Edison tells Ewald, ‘an Apparition whose HUMAN likeness and charm will surpass your wildest hopes, your most intimate dreams!’ (*TE* 63).

In the twentieth century, Hadaly’s most notorious counterpart is arguably Oskar Kokoschka’s doll, based on his ex-lover Alma Mahler. In 1918, following the end of their troubled three-year relationship, the artist and writer ‘then resident in Dresden [...] commissioned a Stuttgart toy manufacturer, Hermione Moos, to make him a lifesize doll’ (see **fig. 1**).<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 1** Puppenfetsch nach Alma Mahler, 1919, Vintage Prints, 10.5 x 15 cm, Privatbesitz, Dresden.

Although the replica was to be based on his own paintings and sketches, the doll, as Francette Pacteau observes, nevertheless becomes, under his instruction, ‘a composite of different feminine types’.<sup>8</sup> In a letter to Moos, Kokoschka writes:

The hands and feet must be well articulated. Take, for example, your own hand as a model. Or think of the hand of a well-groomed Russian

woman who, furthermore, rides a horse. And the foot, for instance, could be like that of a dancer: Karsavina for example.<sup>9</sup>

The doll was clearly intended to have a ‘sexual’ function: the breasts and buttocks were to be ‘squeezable’;<sup>10</sup> the skin was to feel ‘like a peach’ and Kokoschka enquired of Moos, ‘Will the mouth open? And are there teeth and tongue inside?’<sup>11</sup> When the doll arrived, Kokoschka’s disappointment was enormous; the reality could not live up to the creature of his imagination. As if attempting to exorcise the horror, Kokoschka featured the doll in a number of his paintings and sketches (see fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Oskar Kokoschka, *Mann mit Puppe*, bpk Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Foto: Jorg P. Anders.

It became known as ‘The Silent Woman’ and, for the duration of its existence, was dressed in fine clothes and lingerie. It ended its days at a lavish farewell party, decapitated, and drenched in red wine by her unhappy owner.<sup>12</sup>

The doll featured in Tommaso Landolfi's story 'Gogol's Wife', Caracas, is a strange cross between Kokoschka's 'fetish' and the more common blow-up doll. Landolfi's tale is narrated by Foma Paskalovitch, the biographer of the 'genius' Nikolai Vassilevitch Gogol, and tells the story of his 'wife', Caracas, who is 'not a woman. Nor [...] any sort of human being, nor any sort of living creature at all, whether animal or vegetable [...]. She [is] quite simply a balloon'.<sup>13</sup> Her unusual construction seemingly allows her to change her appearance at will:

She could sometimes appear to be thin ... and at other times to be excessively well-endowed ... And she often changed the color of her hair, both on her head and elsewhere on her body, though not necessarily at the same time [...] She could even to a certain extent change the very color of her skin (*GW* 3).

This enviable control over her appearance, however, stems from 'nothing else but the will of Nikolai Vasselivitch himself'; he would

inflate her to a greater or lesser degree, would change her wig and her other tufts of hair, and would grease her with ointments and touch her up in various ways so as to obtain more or less the type of woman which suited him at that moment (*GW* 3-4).

According to the narrator, Caracas is anatomically correct in every detail, constructed around a rudimentary skeleton with 'every smallest attribute of her sex properly disposed in the proper location' and we are told that

[p]articularly worthy of attention were her genital organs [...] [which] were formed by means of ingenious folds in the rubber. Nothing was forgotten, and their operation was rendered easy by various devices, as well as by the internal pressure of the air (*GW* 5).

In addition, Caracas's mouth is adorned with 'splendid rows of white teeth' and her dark eyes 'in spite of their immobility, perfectly simulated life' (*GW* 6).

The narrator traces the trajectory of Gogol's relationship with his 'wife'. We learn that in the early years, she and Gogol had been happy but that the relationship faltered as Caracas 'began to show signs of independence' and autonomy (*GW* 8). Disturbingly, Gogol begins to believe that she has acquired 'a personality of her own', a personality which remains intact despite her physical changes – he notes that 'between all those brunettes, those blondes, those redheads ... those plump, those slim, those dusky or snowy or golden beauties, there was a certain something in

common’ – a personality that Gogol perceives as increasingly hostile (*GW* 8-9). This gradual development into an organic being brings its own problems: Caracas falls ill with syphilis, or rather Gogol does, ‘though he was not then having, nor had he ever had, any contact with other women’, from which Gogol infers that “‘what lay at the heart of Caracas [...] was the spirit of syphilis’”: a disease that, in Caracas, ‘did not seem to be easily curable’ (*GW* 8-9). As the years go by, Gogol’s love for Caracas remains unabated, but he cannot hide his distaste for her, as Paskalovitch explains:

Toward the end, aversion and attachment struggled so fiercely with each other in his heart that he became quite stricken, almost broken up. His restless eyes [...] now almost always shone with a fevered light [...]. The strangest impulses arose in him, accompanied by the most senseless fears. He spoke to me of Caracas more and more often, accusing her of unthinkable and amazing things (*GW* 10).

These ‘amazing things’ include ageing and ‘giving herself up to solitary pleasures, which he had expressly forbidden’ (*GW* 11). Such transgressions cannot be tolerated, and Gogol summarily inflates Caracas until she bursts.

Landolfi’s imaginary doll is undoubtedly a precursor of Hadaly’s most interesting, and perhaps most disturbing successor – the ‘Real Doll’ (see **fig. 3**).



**Fig. 3** ‘Stacy’, F8B2a: Face 8, Body 2 in tanned skin tone. Photographer: Stacy Leigh of [www.StacyThePhotographer.com](http://www.StacyThePhotographer.com).

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In 1996, American Matt McMullen, launched his widely successful RealDoll company, producing silicon beauties to meet every taste, and offering customised versions at a cost. These dolls, are described as ‘the most realistic love doll[s] in the world’, and, according to Meghan Laslocky, resemble ‘Barbie[s] dosed with growth hormones’.<sup>14</sup> One may choose from ten body types; sixteen ‘interchangeable’ faces; five skin, and eleven eye colours; twenty hairstyles in nine different shades and ‘three different versions of pubic hair (shaved, trimmed or natural)’ (*RD* 1).<sup>15</sup> A standard female costs in the region of \$6,500; if you can’t afford a full doll, you can acquire a Real Doll torso (hips to top of thighs) for a mere \$750; a ‘flat back torso’ (neck to top of thighs) for \$1,299, or a ‘lingerie bust’ (face and breasts) for \$1,699. McMullen’s clientele, unsurprisingly, is predominantly male. Like the Alma Doll, and Caracas, the Real Doll can be any woman you’ve ever wanted.

While, in contrast, Hadaly is based on one specific woman, Alicia Clary, she also encompasses two others: Sowana, the spirit being of Edison’s assistant, Mrs Anderson, who animates Hadaly’s ‘soul’, and Evelyn Habal, the ‘deadly female’ who ruins Anderson’s husband, Edward (*TE* 112). A ‘film’ of Evelyn is shown to Ewald while her image is figuratively dissected by Edison, who remarks:

What hips! What beautiful blonde hair; really, it’s like burnt gold! And that complexion, so pale and yet so warm! Note the curious long eyes! And those rosy fingernails where the dawn seems to have wept tears of dew, they glitter so brilliantly. And those delicate blue veins [...]. The youthful freshness of arms and neck, do you see it? Her pearly smile, her rich red mouth? Those elegant brows of arched gold? [...]. That breast, so firm and full, which seems to be straining under its satin? Those delicate legs, so beautifully modelled? Those delicate feet, so finely arched? (*TE* 117).

In a chapter entitled ‘Exhumation’, Edison reveals that Evelyn’s ‘beauty’ is nothing more than make-up and padding. Opening a ‘dark drawer’ by which Hadaly stands ‘like a statue at the side of a tomb’, he shows that her hair is a wig, that she owes her red lips and glowing cheeks to rouge, her fine eyes to pencils and kohl, her pearly teeth to dentures, her breasts and hips to foam, her youthful legs to tights, and her little feet to carefully constructed high-heeled shoes (*TE* 119-21). As in Jonathan Swift’s ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’ (1732), woman is revealed to be false and,

indeed, diseased. Having stripped Evelyn of her beauty, he strips her of even the most basic human feeling, condemning ‘the malady’ such women ‘spread and which some people choose to call love’ (*TE* 123). ‘Exhumed’ and therefore corpse-like, Evelyn represents putrefaction, contagion, and death. Like Evelyn, Hadaly is composed of composite parts. Edison, like McMullen, Kokoschka and Gogol, pays close attention to the detail of her flesh, mouth, teeth, hair and eyes and Villiers dedicates chapters to almost every feature. In Book V, there are sections entitled: ‘Flesh’, ‘Rosy Mouth, Pearly Teeth’, ‘Physical Eyes’, ‘Hair’, ‘Epidermis’; in ‘Physical Eyes’, Edison reveals a selection of potential eyes that ‘cast a thousand glances’ at Lord Ewald, indicating the possibility of mass production (*TE* 150-62). Jennifer Forrest argues that this examination of Hadaly’s body parts functions as an autopsy on her ‘mechanical cadaver’.<sup>16</sup>

Hadaly, not yet ‘animated’, serves as a corpse for the purpose, but with the distinction that no internal organ carries signs of the presence of a terminal disease. The medical procedures of engineering function in contradistinction to human medicine, reversing the autopsy’s natural progression from birth to death, and making life – in the total absence of disease – the final destination in the automaton’s cycle (*LHR* 26).

Significantly, neither in his dissection of Hadaly, nor, indeed, in his instructions to Ewald, does Edison mention her sexual parts and Forrest suggests that, by such omission, ‘Villiers refers to two of the most widely discussed topics of the latter half of the nineteenth century: the female sexual anatomy and its role in disease’ which are certainly implicit in Edison’s discussion of Evelyn Habal (*LHR* 26).

These concerns would continue to prompt the design of later versions of the sex doll. During World War Two, Heinrich Himmler introduced an initiative originally labelled the ‘field-hygienic project’ which was later called ‘The Borghild [or Burghild] Project’.<sup>17</sup> The brief was to produce a doll conceived as a hygienic substitute for the prostitutes whose diseases depleted the energies and health of German soldiers. The project was supervised by Franz Tschakert, a technician from the Museum of Hygiene in Dresden who, in 1927, had designed the ‘woman of glass’ whose anatomical composition could be clearly seen beneath a transparent layer of plastic skin (*BP* 1). Also involved were SS Dr Joachim Mrurgowsky,



Danish SS Dr Olen Hanussen, a psychiatrist, Dr Rudolph Chargeheimer, and a sculptor, Arthur Rink. The idea was that these ‘galvonoplastical dolls’ should follow the Stormtroopers in disinfection-trailers into enemy territory, in order to stop them visiting brothels (*BP* 2). Like Kokoschka and Gogol’s dolls, Borghild was to be an amalgamation of a number of different women: ‘Tschakert hoped to plastercast from a living model and a number of famous female athletes were invited to come to his studios, among them Wilhemina von Bremen and Annette Walter’ (*BP* 8). Deciding that their forms were not good enough the team elected to create ‘a “female bestform”, a “perfect automaton of lust”, that would combine the “best of all possible bodies”;

three types were planned, but all were to reflect the aesthetic ideal of the Nazis: white skin, fair hair and blue eyes (*BP* 8). However, for the German soldier, as for the Real Doll owner and Ewald, the simulation of reality and, more particularly, the eroticism of the flesh are vitally important. Chargeheimer pointed out that no real man would prefer a doll to a real woman until the technicians could ensure that the following standards were met:

- The synthetic flesh [had] to feel like real flesh
- The doll’s body should be as agile and moveable as [a] real body
- The doll’s organ should feel absolutely realistic (*BP* 7).

If McMullen’s success is anything to go by, his advice was correct. The contemporary model seemingly fulfils and exceeds these criteria as the following features of the Real Doll demonstrate:

- Elastic – flesh can withstand over 300% elongation
- Lifelike – anatomically correct, parts moulded from life-casts
- Realistic Feel – pliant and soft in all the right places
- Flexible – wide range of joint movement
- Sexy and Pleasurable – provides effective aid to sexual fulfilment

Moreover, unlike real women, they are also ‘safe’ and ‘always ready & available’.<sup>18</sup> By 1941 a prototype of Model Borghild had been constructed, but the project was

shelved due to the military pressures that mounted as the war progressed and it is likely that it was destroyed in the Dresden bombings of February 1945 (*BP* 14).

In *L'Eve Future*, Villiers appears to have anticipated Dr Chargeheimer's stipulations. Hadaly's artificial flesh 'easily absorbs the gentle warmth created by [Edison's] elements, responds to our touch with the magic illusion, the resilience, the fresh firmness of living tissue; [and] creates that indefinable sentiment of affinity with human life' (*TE* 151). Her movements are 'a perfect imitation of human motion'; her waist has 'that graceful yielding quality, that firm undulation, that elegant elasticity which is so seductive in a mere woman' (*TE* 139). Despite being created 100 years after the fictional Hadaly, Matt McMullen's Real Dolls do not quite achieve the hyper-reality of Edison's model. Certainly, as Laslocky observes, McMullen, like the fictional Edison, is credited with taking 'technology – in this case silicone – that magical one step further' developing and 'crafting bodies that were softer and more inviting to the touch': '[t]o make them movable, he designed an internal skeleton not unlike that of a mannequin'; the dolls' 'silicone flesh' 'holds heat well and becomes more pliable when body-temperature warm' (some doll-owners warm them with electric blankets to increase pliability) (*RD* 5). Nevertheless, the Real Doll does not move on its own, although McMullen is working on a wireless animatronic system to allow the reproduction of facial expressions (*RD* 27).

So does McMullen aspire to Edison's achievement in Villiers's novel? It seems not. In her article on Real Dolls, Meghan Laslocky notes:

McMullen has no plans for Real Dolls to go robotic. While he concedes that the concept of an android love doll is in theory attractive, the technology isn't advanced enough, yet, to shoehorn a robot into a Real Doll. McMullen doesn't think that is what his customers want anyway. 'I think a lot of people like the fact that it's just a doll. I don't see the dolls walking and talking. I don't see them doing domestic stuff around the house. Keep your love doll in the bedroom' (*RD* 27).

In fact, one of McMullen's clients, interviewed by Laslocky, traces his attraction to artificial women back to a childhood encounter with a department-store mannequin, and to his admiration for 'the beauty of her stillness' (*RD* 7). While McMullen's customers may purchase his dolls for a variety of reasons – e.g. physical inadequacy,

loneliness, bereavement, violent fantasies etc. – a significant proportion seem to prefer dolls to human women because the doll is, like Nathaniel's Olympia, 'beautiful, loyal, and a great listener'; she offers companionship without distraction, and she promises to fulfil all 'desires and dreams' (*RD* 1, 12). Like Ewald, Nathaniel, Gogol and Kokoschka, McMullen's clients seek still, silent, unemotional partners on which they can project their own desires and desired responses.

Underlying these fictional and cultural manifestations of the doll is the myth of Pygmalion. The dolls discussed are essentially versions of Pygmalion's statue brought to 'life' by technological advancement. Hadaly is 'the statue waiting for Pygmalion its creator'; like a marble statue, she is modelled on a terracotta sculpture of Alicia Clary who is herself the image of other sculptural figures: the 'Venus Anadyomene' and the 'Venus Victorious' as the Venus de Milo was formerly known (*TE* 151, 36, 40). For Kokoschka, the Alma doll becomes a 'still-life model' and – Pygmalion-like – 'by means of a painterly (and graphic) metamorphosis', 'new life' is breathed into her as a 'figure of art'.<sup>19</sup> The Model Borghild team employed their own 'Pygmalion', the sculptor Arthur Rink, to create its Galatea; Gogol, taking on the roles of both Pygmalion and the goddess Venus literally 'breathes life' into his work when he inflates Caracas for his sexual pleasures; and Laslocky likens McMullen (who 'takes months to sculpt in plasticine clay' his 'studio Eves', or 'prototype bodies and heads') to Pygmalion (*RD* 9).

While not all of the 'Pygmalions' mentioned above are sculptors of their own objects of desire, their actions nevertheless resonate with those of their legendary counterpart. Like Model Borghild, Pygmalion's statue is designed as an alternative to prostitutes – the Propoetides – for whom he expresses his disgust. Caracas, too, as the unexplained 'spirit of syphilis' would also seem related to these shameless women. In intimate moments the mythical Pygmalion, who adorns his statue with clothes, rings, necklaces, and pearl earrings and calls it his 'bedfellow', foreshadows Oskar Kokoschka who 'bought dresses and lingerie' for his doll 'from the best Parisian houses'<sup>20</sup> as well as McMullen's clients who caress, kiss, dress, adorn and sleep with their dolls:

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Often he [Pygmalion] ran his hands over the work, feeling it to see whether it was flesh or ivory, and would not yet admit that ivory was all it was. He kissed the statue, and imagined that it kissed him back, spoke to it and embraced it, and thought he felt his fingers sink into the limbs he touched, so that he was afraid lest a bruise appear where he had pressed the flesh.<sup>21</sup>

Given the similarities, it is hardly surprising that the name ‘pygmalionism’ is given to paraphilia or sexual fetishes that entail an attraction to statues and/or dolls. Other terms used are ‘statuephilia’ and the more clinically recognised ‘agalmatophilia’. Unlike McMullen’s Real Dolls, Pygmalion’s statue reputedly comes to life thanks to Venus. When Pygmalion returns home after praying to the goddess, he finds that the statue ‘seemed warm’ and ‘at his touch’ the ivory loses its hardness, growing soft ‘just as wax of Hymettus melts in the sun and, worked by men’s fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes’.<sup>22</sup> Yet Pygmalion takes his ivory woman to bed prior to animation and we must therefore take it for granted that she truly does come to life. As Kenneth Gross suggests, the myth seems to play interestingly with the idea of necrophilia:

Ovid blurs his focus [...] avoiding any explicit description of this contact of living and fictive nakedness, and hence modulating the impression of fetishism or necrophilia. But there is something no less disturbing in the way the text invites us simply to contemplate the weird transgressive literalism of a statue’s being taken down from its formalized repose on a pedestal and laid down stiffly, even painfully, on the softness of a bed; Ovid asks us also to consider the strangeness of inanimate, fictive flesh covered with real jewels and clothes, things that do their formal and symbolic work mainly insofar as they ornament, organize, and, as it were, make a statue of a living body.<sup>23</sup>

Matt McMullen’s clients naturally resist any suggestion that their own sexual engagement with the doll is akin to necrophilia. One of Laslocky’s interviewees tells her that when he first came across Real Dolls on an internet website, he found that ‘[t]hey said they were one step above [...] corpses’ (*RD* 10). Positing the doll-owners’ arguments against necrophilia, gleaned from over fifty postings on a specialised internet chat room, Laslocky writes:

*Doll lovers are not to be confused with necrophiles* [original emphasis]. Remember that many doll lovers heat their dolls before using them, and necrophiles like their lovers cold. One owner, Bunster, points out that

women aren't accused of necrophilia for using dildos ('dead penises!'), so men who sleep with dolls shouldn't be either. 'There's no difference [he argues] between a dildo and a realdoll in the functional process of getting the job done (*RD 22*).<sup>24</sup>

However, as a psychiatrist consulted by Laslocky points out, there is a significant difference between dildos and the Real Doll 'because lifelike dolls, unlike vibrators, are simulated humans – they have what he call[s] "pull" [and, as he says] "[a]ll of the stimuli are telling you it's human"' (*RD 24*).

Writing in 1975 of the apparent rarity of algalatophilia, classicist A. Scobie, and clinician, A. J. W. Taylor, claim:

[I]t would appear that agalmatophilia is no longer prevalent, but it could be that it might merely have changed its form because the burgeoning plastics industry has rendered obsolete the pathological focus on stone statues *per se*. Yet, in the absence of data about the production, distribution and sale of substitute human beings or 'sailors' friends' from the modern sex shops, the matter must rest.<sup>25</sup>

Meghan Laslocky, writing in 2005, finds that the website [www.realdoll.com](http://www.realdoll.com) receives in the region of a million hits per month. It seems that agalmatophiliacs are alive and well, even if their objects of desire seem somewhat 'dead'. This tension between the 'animate' and the 'inanimate' doll is at the heart of clinical discussions of pygmalionism and algalatophilia. Scobie and Taylor try to distinguish between the two paraphilias:

Algalatophilia is the pathological condition in which some people establish exclusive sexual relationships with statues [or dolls]. The condition is neither to be confused with pygmalionism nor with fetishism, although confusion sometimes arises about these three different manifestations of immature sexuality [...]. The myth of Pygmalion can apply to those who actually bring statues to life, and not to those who use statues for their own sexual purposes without bringing them to life [...]. An agalmatophiliac [...] establishes a personal relationship with a complete statue as a statue. He does not bring the statue alive in his fantasy as would a pygmalionist, and he does not use just a part of a statue as a symbolic substitute for an entire female as would a fetishist.<sup>26</sup>

Given that it is impossible to know whether the Real Doll owner 'animates' his silicon lover or not, there is inevitably confusion between the terms 'pygmalionist', 'agalmatophiliac' and 'fetishist', not least because less wealthy agalmatophiliacs are

willing to buy fetishistic torsos instead of the full-bodied Real Doll. Moreover, it is difficult to divorce the agalmatophilic or the pygmalionist entirely from the necrophiliac.

In his essay on the wax dolls of Lotte Pritzel, the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke makes a clear association between the doll and the corpse. Faced with their ominous silence, Rilke relives his childhood experience of the doll:

At a time when everyone was concerned to give us prompt and reassuring answers, the doll was the first to make us aware of that silence larger than life which later breathed on us again and again out of space whenever we came at any point to the border of our existence. Sitting opposite the doll as it stared at us, we experienced for the first time [...] that hollowness in our feelings, that heart-pause which could spell death.<sup>27</sup>

In her discussion of Rilke's essay on dolls in relation to Freud's 'The Uncanny' Eva-Maria Simms observes that, for Rilke, the disturbing quality of the doll lies in her 'lifelessness and her indifference and unresponsiveness to the child's emotions'.<sup>28</sup> Rilke acknowledges a 'hatred, which unconsciously has always been part of our relationship with her' and notes that, looked at from the perspective of adulthood she would be seen, 'finally without disguise: as that gruesome alien body for which we have wasted our purest warmth; as that superficially *painted drowned corpse* [my emphasis], lifted and carried by the floods of our tenderness until it dried out and we forgot it somewhere in the bushes'.<sup>29</sup>

There is a similarly interesting slippage between 'life' and 'death' in the depiction of Hadaly, Ewald's 'doll', in Villiers's novel; she is 'a Being in Limbo'; a 'Shade'; an 'Android phantom', indicating her liminal existence (*TE* 59, 64, 79). More significantly, incarnated as a reformed Alicia Clary she is effectively a 'dead' woman, for as Ewald explains to Edison before the latter confirms his ability to grant his wish:

What I really would like would be to see Miss Alicia dead, if death didn't result in the effacing of all human features. In a word, the presence of her form, even as an illusion, would satisfy my stunned indifference, since nothing can render this woman worthy of love (*TE* 46).

Furthermore, as Edison prepares to incarnate his creation and displays her internal workings to a bemused Ewald, Hadaly lies on a table ‘like a corpse on the dissecting table in an amphitheater’ (*TE* 125), recalling other early counterparts of the Real Doll, the anatomical models commonly called Venuses constructed ostensibly for medical purposes (see **fig. 4**).<sup>30</sup>



**Fig. 4** Anatomical Venus. Natural History Museum. ‘La Specola’. Florence. Photo: Saulo Bambi.

The cultural critic, Ludmilla Jordanova, notes that these figures lie ‘on silk or velvet cushions, in passive, yet sexually inviting poses [...] adorned with flowing hair, pearl necklaces, removable parts and small foetuses’.<sup>31</sup> Like Pygmalion’s statue, adorned with jewels, these figures lie on soft pillows eliciting a similar fantasy of desire and animation. Jordanova points out that ‘the use of wax to imitate flesh produces texture, and colour, which eerily resembles “the real thing”,’ and ‘the naturalistic colouring of all the anatomical parts together with the meticulous details such as eyelashes and eyebrows further reinforce a simultaneous admiration of and unease about the likeness’.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, repeating ‘positions and gestures from well-known works of art’, and displayed in ‘anatomical museums [that] were visited like the great art museums of the eighteenth century’, these models are clearly related to statues.<sup>33</sup>

Like these wax models, who lie in glass coffins, Hadaly seems to be ‘alive’ and yet ‘dead’ and, importantly, rests, when not required, in ‘a heavy coffin of ebony lined with black satin’ symbolising her vampiric status as one of the ‘undead’ (TE 76). The eroticism that underpins Ewald’s engagement with Hadaly’s body arguably therefore centres on ‘dead’ or ‘death-like’, rather than ‘live’ flesh. The spectre of necrophilia haunts both Villiers’s novel, and, despite their protestations, the complex engagements of men with their ‘Real Dolls’. This is particularly evident if one takes a wider view of the term ‘necrophilia’. As Lisa Downing has shown in her book, *Desiring the Dead* (2003), despite dictionary definitions that often define ‘necrophilia’ as specifically concerned with ‘sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges or behaviour involving intercourse with dead bodies’, not all necrophiliacs engage in sexual activity with the dead.<sup>34</sup> Discussing Brian Masters’s analysis of Dennis Nilsen, the serial killer commonly considered a necrophiliac, Downing notes Masters’s conclusion that ‘the phenomenon of necrophilia can be seen in a person’s overwhelming love of, or attraction to, death and destruction per se’ and that ‘A necrophiliac is not *only* a man who violates a corpse sexually (as popular belief holds), but a man for whom death is the ultimate beauty’ (DD 3-4, original emphasis). She therefore suggests that ‘necrophilia is as much an aesthetic, a mode of representation, as it is a sexual perversion’ (DD 4). She also quotes Erich Fromm’s own interpretation of the term in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) in which he argues that the necrophiliac character is revealed by ‘*the passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something which is unalive*’ (DD 4, original emphasis). Fromm’s suggestion that the necrophiliac wants to transform ‘that which is alive into something which is unalive’ recalls Freud’s definition of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in which he identifies it as an urge to return to an inorganic state, a state identified with death in that it precedes existence.

Given Ewald’s desire for Hadaly as the ‘dead’ Alicia Clary, and given Edison’s ‘exhumation’ of Evelyn Habal, and ‘autopsy’ of Hadaly’s body, both men would appear to reveal necrophiliac tendencies. In her analysis of Gabriel von



Max's *Der Anatom* (1869), a painting that depicts a beautiful female corpse on the point of being dissected by an anatomist, Elisabeth Bronfen argues:

The moment von Max has chosen to arrest in his painting is one where beauty is defined in its contrast to destruction. On the one hand, the soul has departed from the woman's body, but her beauty has not yet begun to disappear, as it will in the natural process of decomposition. On the other hand, the anatomist has not yet begun his dissection, in the process of which he will cut into and destroy the lines of her perfectly shaped body [...]. This image of a feminine corpse presents a concept of beauty which places the work of death into the service of the aesthetic process, for this form of beauty is contingent on the translation of an animate body into a deanimated one.<sup>35</sup>

The translation of the 'animate' Alicia Clary into the initially inanimate Hadaly, takes place in similar circumstances, but in Villiers's novel the dissected body shares its beauty with the final pristine product. Beginning his 'autopsy' of Hadaly's body, Edison addresses Ewald before applying 'his scalpel to the central apparatus fastened at the level of the cervical vertebrae':

—My Lord ... I have no surprises to set before you. What would be the point? Reality, as you are about to see, is surprising enough in itself without any special tricks of mine. You are about to witness the birth of an ideal being, since you will be present at an illustrated explanation of the inner workings of Hadaly. Can you imagine a Juliet submitting to such an examination without causing Romeo to faint? [...].

But the Android, even in her first beginnings, offers none of the disagreeable impressions that one gets from watching the *vital processes* of our own organism. In her, everything is rich, ingenious, mysterious. Look here (*TE* 129-30).

Like the anatomical Venus designed to 'mask death', to 'eliminate the impure state' of mutability by replacing the corpse with 'a pure and immutable wax body double', Hadaly's artificial body masks the 'death' of Alicia Clary.<sup>36</sup> Yet, Alicia is herself in some sense always already 'dead'. As the double of the Venus Victrix, she is 'already a simulacrum'. 'She is "made of marble," impassive as a statue'.<sup>37</sup> Redoubled in Hadaly, she exists in an uncanny limbo between life and death and is in fact superseded and effectively replaced by her own simulacrum.

Approached unawares by the completed Hadaly, Ewald mistakes her for Alicia Clary. Responding to what he believes to be her sympathetic responses,

Ewald is 'in ecstasy'; he no longer gives a thought to Hadaly, now described as '*the other*, the terrible new creation' (original emphasis) and cannot believe that he was prepared to accept 'a ridiculous, senseless doll' (*TE* 192). When Hadaly reveals the truth, he is initially distraught, but then recovers and experiences an epiphany:

Then he felt a thought flare up at the dark depths of his understanding, a sudden idea, more surprising all by itself even than the recent phenomenon. It was simply this: that the woman represented by this mysterious doll at his side *had never found within herself the power to make him experience the sweet and overpowering instant of passion that had just shaken his soul* [original emphasis].

Without this stupefying machine for manufacturing the Ideal, he might never have known such joy. The words proffered by Hadaly had been spoken by the real actress [Alicia Clary], who never experienced them, never understood them. She had thought she was 'playing a part', and here now the character had taken her place within the invisible scene, had not only 'assumed' but *become* the role. The false Alicia thus seemed far more *natural* than the true one (*TE* 194, original emphasis).

Hadaly becomes the perfect simulacrum, she does not merely represent Alicia, she exceeds her existence and becomes more 'real' than the original. In doing so, she marks what Baudrillard delineates as the final phase of the image at which point 'it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum'.<sup>38</sup> Alicia Clary has been artificially 'cloned' and, as a clone, Hadaly is a manifestation of the death drive for, as Baudrillard asks:

What, if not a death drive, would push sexed beings to regress to a form of reproduction prior to sexuation [...] and that, at the same time, would push them metaphysically to deny all alterity, all alteration of the Same in order to aim solely for the perpetuation of an identity, a transparency of the genetic inscription no longer even subject to the vicissitudes of procreation.<sup>39</sup>

This 'perpetuation of identity' raises the spectre of mass production implicit in those artificial eyes that shoot a 'thousand glances' at Ewald as he watches Edison construct his custom-made substitute for Alicia Clary. Yet as Walter Benjamin famously observed, 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art' and, in this case, the 'work of art' is that timeless object of the scopophilic gaze – woman.<sup>40</sup>

In her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey argues that, always implicit in the male gaze, is the threat of castration, which is counteracted by two common avenues of escape: either the woman is investigated, her mystery demystified and devalued, or castration is disavowed by the 'substitution of a fetish object' or by 'turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous', building up 'the physical beauty of the object transforming it into something satisfying in itself'.<sup>41</sup> The dolls discussed here function arguably as fetishes that act as substitutes for 'real' women. Kokoschka referred to his doll of Alma Mahler as his 'fetish'; Gogol fetishises, devalues and demystifies his 'wife' in turn; McMullen's clients fetishise their silicon girlfriends and Edison's 'autopsy' demystifies Hadaly even as he is building her physical beauty, so that the doll becomes a fetish in itself. Yet these fetishistic engagements with the dolls' bodies reinforce the necrophiliac impulse implicit in such 'relationships'. Lisa Downing argues:

In the case of necrophilia, we see the operation of a parallel mechanism to that which operates in fetishism. The disavowal of 'what I really know' [...] becomes an avowal of what the unconscious cannot know: 'I cannot die, and yet here is a dead other which I recognise as being different, yet with which I identify, therefore I know that one (I) can die'. The corpse is to the necrophile as the snakes of Medusa's head are to the castration-anxious fetishist (*DD* 52).<sup>42</sup>

It is perhaps no accident then that, in the texts discussed in this essay, the doll occupies an uneasy space between life and death. Kokoschka treats his doll as if it were alive, yet pointedly she is unable to replace the living woman and it seems significant that he should choose to terminate her existence by decapitating her, externalising perhaps his own fears of castration. Gogol's power over his 'wife' is undermined by what he perceives to be a growing autonomy which challenges his control and she, too, must be destroyed. In Villiers's novel, an obsession with death is evident in Ewald's suicidal tendencies and in the continual slippage between the living and the dead 'bodies' of the women in the text. However, it is the aesthetic potential of necrophilia that is particularly intriguing. Recalling the words of McMullen's client who so admired 'the beauty of [a mannequin's] stillness', one might argue that the Pygmalion myth, as it is developed in Villiers's text, highlights

not a fantasy of animation, but a love of sculptural stasis. At the end of the novel, both Hadaly and Alicia Clary die, lost at sea – merged in death. Villiers's work is not a version, but in fact a *perversion* of the ubiquitous myth of Pygmalion.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> 'Guys and Dolls' can be watched online at: <<http://quicksilverscreen.com/watch?video=37314>> [accessed 4 October 2008].

<sup>2</sup> Margy Rochlin, 'Lars and the Real Girl: Guy and doll and the woman behind them', *International Herald Tribune* (8 October 2007) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/movies/07roch.html?scp=2&sq=>> [accessed 11 August 2008], para. 2 of 15.

<sup>3</sup> Villiers de L'Isle Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve [L'Ève Future]*, trans. by Robert Martin Adams (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 76. Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *TE*.

<sup>4</sup> These also include such figures as part-borg, part-human Barbie doll 'Seven of Nine' from the *Star Trek: Voyager* TV series (1995-2001) and the female cyborg in the film *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, dir. Jonathan Mostow (Warner Brothers Pictures, 2003). To these we might also add an early prototype, the aborted she-creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

<sup>5</sup> E. T. A. Hoffman, 'The Sandman', in *Tales of Hoffmann*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale et al. (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 85-125 (pp. 104-106). Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *SM*.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle E. Bloom, 'Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut', *Comparative Literature*, 52:4 (2000), 291-320 (p. 301).

<sup>7</sup> Tim Ashley, 'The Old Man and the Doll', *Opera House: The Magazine of the Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera*, 10 (1999), 16-22 (p. 16).

<sup>8</sup> Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Oskar Kokoschka, letter to Hermione Moos, Berlin, 10 December 1918, qtd. in Pacteau, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Ashley, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd. in Pacteau, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ashley, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Tommaso Landolfi, 'Gogol's Wife', in *Gogol's Wife and Other Stories*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal et al. (New York: New Directions, 1963), pp. 1-16 (p. 2). Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *GW*.

<sup>14</sup> Meghan Laslocky, 'Real Dolls: Love in the Age of Silicon',

<<http://www.saltmag.net/images/pdfs/RealDollsPDF.pdf>> [accessed 7 October 2008], 1-28 (p. 1). Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *RD*. A shorter version of this article appeared under the title 'Just Like a Woman' at <[salon.com](http://salon.com)> on 11 October 2005.

<sup>15</sup> In contrast only one male body type is available, although buyers may choose from six skin tones and six different penis sizes for approx \$7,000. By the time of Laslocky's original article in 2005, only six male Real Dolls had been sold since first developed in 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Forrest, 'The Lord of Hadaly's Rings: Regulating the Female Body in Villiers de l'Isle Adam's "L'Eve future"', *South Central Review*, 13:4 (1996), 18-37 (p. 25). Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *LHR*.

<sup>17</sup> Norbert Lenz, 'The Borghild-Project – a discreet matter of the III. Reich', <<http://www.borghild.de/indexe.htm>> [accessed 3 July 2007], para. 2 of 14. Further references to relevant paragraphs will be given after quotations in the text as *BP*.

<sup>18</sup> See <<http://www.realdoll.com/cgi-bin/snnav.rd?action=viewpage&section=frealdoll>> for full details.

<sup>19</sup> Anon., 'The Silent Woman', <[http://www.alma-mahler.at/engl/almas\\_life/puppet.html](http://www.alma-mahler.at/engl/almas_life/puppet.html)> [accessed 3 April 2008], para. 5 of 14.

<sup>20</sup> Anon., 'The Silent Woman', <[http://www.alma-mahler.at/engl/almas\\_life/puppet.html](http://www.alma-mahler.at/engl/almas_life/puppet.html)> [accessed 3 April 2008], para. 10 of 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 231.

<sup>22</sup> Ovid, p. 232.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> I use the noun 'necrophiliac' as both adjective and noun throughout this essay whereas Laslocky and Lisa Downing (below) often use the alternative noun 'necrophile' in their own work.

<sup>25</sup> A. Scobie and A. J. W. Taylor, 'Perversions Ancient and Modern: Agalmatophilia, The Statue Syndrome', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 11 (1975), 49-54 (p. 49). In her article, Laslocky connects the love of statues to desire for the Real Doll. She also notes that 'doll love – minus statues – is known as "pediophilia"' but given the common confusion with 'paedophilia' chooses, like myself, to use the term 'agalmatophilia' (pp. 3-4).

<sup>26</sup> Scobie and Taylor, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Dolls: On the Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel', in *Essays on Dolls: Kleist, Baudelaire, Rilke*, trans. by Idris Parry and Paul Kegan, ed. by Idris Parry (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 26-39 (p. 33). Rilke saw Lotte Pritzel's dolls at an exhibition in Munich in 1913. Pritzel's dolls, intended as art objects, are figures made of wire and wax adopting poses which suggest dance movements.

<sup>28</sup> Eva-Maria Simms, 'Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud', *New Literary History*, 27

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(1996), 663-77 (p. 670).

<sup>29</sup> Qtd. in Simms, p. 670.

<sup>30</sup> These models were manufactured in Northern Italy towards the end of the eighteenth century and, as a result of their popularity, were used all over Europe. One of the largest collections was that in La Specola (Royal and Imperial Museum of Physics and Natural History) set up between 1766 and 1780 in Florence.

<sup>31</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science Between the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Jordanova, p. 45. The anatomical perfection of these figures is especially interesting and specific attention is given to the sexual parts, extending to the provision of pubic hair.

<sup>33</sup> Jordanova, p. 45; Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Legenda: University of Oxford, 2003), p. 3. Further references will be given after quotations in the text as *DD*.

<sup>35</sup> Bronfen, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Bronfen, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> Carol de Dobay Rifelj, 'La Machine Humaine: Villiers L'Eve Future and the Problem of Personal Identity', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 20 (1992), 430-51 (p. 435).

<sup>38</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Baudrillard, p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>> [accessed 3 April 2008], para. 2 of 20.

<sup>41</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Here Downing refers to Freud's 1922 essay 'Medusa's Head' in which he formulates the equation: 'To decapitate equals to castrate'.