

“I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else!”: Re-Animating Galatea in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

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Abstract

In the myth of Pygmalion, according to Ovid, a sculptor falls in love with a statue he has carved, which the goddess Aphrodite transforms into a living woman named Galatea. This myth has inspired numerous adaptations over the years. Among these adaptations and retellings, George Bernard Shaw's 1914 play *Pygmalion* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offer reinterpretations that expose deep-seated perspectives on gender and objectification. Shaw's play, set in early 20th-century England, focuses on a linguistics expert named Henry Higgins, who attempts to turn the flower girl Eliza Doolittle into a refined Victorian lady. Similarly, Shelley's Gothic novel features a monster who demands a female companion from his creator in order to put an end to his loneliness. This paper examines the treatment of Eliza and the monster's "bride" through the feminist lenses of Luce Irigaray's "Women on the Market" and Gayle Rubin's "Traffic in Women". These analyses reveal that both Shaw's play and Shelley's novel opaquely criticize capitalist and patriarchal commodification of women, reducing them to mere objects in male-centric transactions. By tracing these modern narratives back to the myth of Galatea, this study reveals the apparent shift from a focus on artistic and romantic transformation to a critical examination of women's roles as commodified objects in patriarchal and capitalist societies.

Keywords: pygmalion, galatea, george bernard shaw, mary shelley, Frankenstein

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In The myth of Pygmalion, as narrated by the Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, originally points to the transformative impact of art and the human desire that ceaselessly strives towards perfection. In the myth, a sculptor from Cyprus, Pygmalion falls in love with the statue he has carved out of ivory. Naming the statue Galatea, he pretends that this perfect figure of a woman is flesh and blood. Intriguingly, Pygmalion's genuine feelings for his own creation are so intense and desperate that the goddess of love, Aphrodite/Venus takes pity on him, and then, decides to transform Galatea into a real person. In the end, Galatea also falls in love with her own maker and the two live happily ever after. Much can be discussed about the myth in relation to not only the power of art, but also objectification of women without a doubt. Accordingly, many poets and playwrights have adapted and re-interpreted this tale in order to handle a variety of themes all through history. In 1598 John Marston wrote "Pigmalion", in 1697 John Dryden wrote "Pygmalion and the Statue", and in 1926, Robert Graves wrote "Pygmalion to Galatea" and "Galatea and Pygmalion". All of these retellings of the myth focus on transformative aspect of love. Regardless, perhaps the most famous adaptation of the myth today is Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw's 1914 play *Pygmalion*. As a loose adaptation of Ovid's tale, set in the early 20th century, concentrates on a linguistics expert named Henry Higgins who bets that he can transform an ignorant flower girl called Eliza Doolittle into a proper, sophisticated Victorian lady. Therefore, in Shaw's reimagining, the roles of the "maker" and the "creation" still exist, but they solely exist in a metaphorical sense. In my paper, I scrutinize the characterization and treatment of Eliza in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and trace echoes of Galatea in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* within the passages where the monster begs for his creator to make him a female companion in the light of Luce Irigaray's "Women on the Market" and Gayle Rubin's "Traffic in Women" which interrogate the oppression of women and their relationship to the means of production. From this standpoint, taking several cues and themes from the original myth, both Shaw's play and Shelley's gothic novel underscore the fact that capitalist and patriarchal cultures heavily commodify women by reducing them to mere objects that solely exist as bodies as opposed to human beings. Thereupon, as re-interpretations of Galatea, Eliza Doolittle and the unseen "bride" of Frankenstein's monster, encapsulate this notion of constant commodification in the way women are exchanged, instrumentalized and used as leverage in negotiations between male characters

who show no concerns for the formers' agency and goals other than satisfying their own desires.

When we look at Mary Shelley as an author and the period *Frankenstein* was written, each component of the text that causes it to stand out among many others becomes rather opaque. Born in 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft Goodwin was the daughter of the pioneering feminist journalist and philosopher, Mary Wollstonecraft. Therefore, despite various limitations and modes of oppression women encountered during 1800s, she had the opportunity to get education and equal treatment thanks to her visionary family upbringing. As Mary Wollstonecraft is the author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", her daughter was familiar with the unfair conditions women had to endure under, making her aware of a great deal of feminist issues which we will discuss in *Frankenstein*. Belonging to the Romantic period, she, just like her husband Percy Shelley and close friends Lord Byron and John Keats, is also concerned with imagination, nature and beauty in response to the Enlightenment, the emerging Industrial Revolution and capitalism. Hence, one can argue that *Frankenstein*: or the Modern Prometheus reflects this reaction against the frightening shifts happening in society that are linked with scientific developments and mechanization of human labor in the 19th century. It is also worthy of note that Shelley's novel refers to the Greek myth of Prometheus in the title and the ambivalent relationship between the God and Adam pertaining to Victor Frankenstein's creation of his "monster". As the titan who stole fire from the mount of Olympus, Prometheus is infamous for defying the gods and taking away the secret of life and immortality, and the Biblical story of creation is about how "man" was created from dust, and given a soul only by its omnipotent and omnipresent divine creator.

Both intertextual allusions refer to Victor's aspiration to play the role of the God, having the skill to animate a lifeless whole of stitched together body parts. This role, arguably, puts him in the same league as Pygmalion of the classical mythology as well. Accordingly, some critics such as Geoffrey Miles see *Frankenstein* as "a kind of dark shadow of Pygmalion, a myth embodying the horror rather than the joy of lifeless matter becoming alive" (1999, p. 320). In the Romantic sense, Victor Frankenstein is also an artist similar to Pygmalion, but his creation brings horror and destruction due to the fact that it is spawned from scientific and material tools rather than divine intervention. Even though what happens in the Ovidian myth is uncanny and grotesque, neither Pygmalion nor anyone else is disturbed when an ivory statue transforms into a real human being; because she is exceptionally beautiful, blazing with the light of Aphrodite, and in patriarchal societies a woman exists only "to be looked at" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 835). Yet, when Victor Frankenstein's male monster comes to life, he is immediately rejected even by his own maker.

Though seemingly diametrically opposed pertaining to the consequences of creating a human being, the myth of Pygmalion and Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be juxtaposed when it comes to the dynamics between the artist and the creation. Indeed, Victor is a dark mirror to Pygmalion, however the actual parallel story to the Ovidian tale resides between the lines of Shelley's novel when the "mate" Frankenstein monster wants Victor to make to satisfy his desires, his "bride". Never appearing in the text as a character and only existing as a "thought", "desire" and "promise", the bride of the monster is the dark shadow of Galatea; not a corporeal being, but a manifestation of a man's sexual urges and needs for companionship. In his lament, Frankenstein's monster expresses his surge of emotions caused by his loneliness:

Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred. (Shelley, 1998, p. 274)

It is evident that the monster's desire for a friend, as depicted in the aforementioned lines, is fueled by his own feelings of inferiority and social marginalization. The comparison to Satan suggests that he is perceived as being inherently evil or twisted in the eyes of society, leading him to yearn for a companion who is his equal and can accept him for who he is, regardless of his physical deformities and "evil" behavior. In essence, he wants a female who will love him unconditionally, much like Galatea, an artificial woman brought to life and ultimately fell in love with the first man she saw. This desire for a compliant and like-minded companion is a manifestation of the monster's constant need for validation and acceptance in a society that has rejected him. In other words, he

is writing some sort of a recipe for his ideal mate, implying that a “woman” is nothing more than a product, a commodity that only has the function to serve a man. This dark Galatea, if we are to use Luce Irigaray’s incorporation of Marxist thought to the discussion of feminism in her article called “Women on the Market” in which she claims that “the possession of a woman is certainly indispensable to man for the reproductive use value that she represents; but what he desires is to have them all” (2004, p. 174), represents the monster’s desire to have a female commodity existing solely for his own pleasure and satisfaction.

By the same token, the monster discusses the “terms and conditions” of their deal with Victor and uses the female figure as a means of negotiation when he says “with the companion you bestow, I will quit the neighborhood of man and dwell, as it may chance, in the most savage of places. My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy” (Shelley, 1998, p. 283). According to the deal, the monster promises to leave Victor alone and refrain from harming his loved ones in exchange for a female companion. This notion, undoubtedly, falls directly in line with Irigaray’s theory that the patriarchal culture “is based upon exchange of women” (2004, p. 170). This homosocial exchange is eerily reminiscent of purchasing products from a market, and more alarmingly, it almost always occurs exclusively between “masculine subjects” (2004, p. 177). Therefore, as a woman/commodity, the bride of the monster remains as a simple “object” of transaction, making it impossible to talk about agency and individuality on her behalf. In “Traffic in Women” Gayle Rubin examines many oppressive rules of gender division and obligatory heterosexuality in kinship systems underlining that they “dictate some sculpting of sexuality” (1975, p. 182). This sculpting, metaphorical in Rubin’s essay, but literal in Ovid’s and Shelley’s texts, calls attention to the problem of girls “promised in infancy” (1975, p. 182) in the kinship system. These girls do not have the right to refuse to participate as adults, due to the fact that it “would disrupt the flow of debts and promises” (1975, p. 182). Likewise, this bride of the monster is promised by Victor on the condition that his creation leaves him alone. She is, in other words, waiting passively to be sculpted as a bride not even in infancy, but when she exists as a thought form.

If a woman’s mere existence “depends upon a ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly” (Irigaray, 2004, p. 171), can we posit a social order based on equality without exploiting women? Shelly’s text, rather bleakly, does not offer any sense of escape for women from their terrible “condition as commodities-subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on, by men alone” (2004, p. 189). Apparently, the exchange does not begin and end with the abstract “companion”, it also directly involves Victor’s wife, Elizabeth. When Victor decides not to go along with their initial plan and refuses to complete the creation of the monster’s mate, the monster vows, “I will be with you on your wedding-night” (Shelley, 1998, p. 312). Since Victor does not complete the transaction, the monster breaks into Elizabeth’s room, and kills her. Even before her death, Elizabeth’s position in the text was not less problematic than that of the unnamed mate, as throughout the text she is referred to as Victor’s “companion”, a word later used for the monster’s bride. Thus, both the mate and Elizabeth are equalized as commodities and exploited in relation to their “value” as prospective spouses of the male characters.

Although she does not make an appearance in Shelley’s novel, the monster’s dark Galatea has been used in several adaptations of the text. Perhaps the most famous of them, director James Whale’s cult classic film *Bride of Frankenstein*. The movie refers to this enigmatic character in the title, highlighting the importance of her in the narrative. Contrary to the novel, she shows up in person at the end of the movie as a recently animated corpse but does something unexpected: She screams when she sees the monster, refusing to be forced in a marriage with him.

Whale’s bride is not the only Galatea figure who rejects this transaction of oppressive heterosexual union: A similarly subversive ending is also present in George Bernard Shaw’s re-telling of the myth, the play, *Pygmalion*. Written in 1914, the play is a modernized take that excludes divine intervention and supernatural elements. Instead, it focuses on the metaphorical transformation of a simple girl into a lady. In the play, a phonetics professor Henry Higgins and his friend Colonel Pickering make a wager on a flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, and the wager includes changing the way the girl speaks, her accent, the way she is dressed and her overall manners. Akin to how Mary Shelley includes some questions regarding female agency and a skeptical look towards new scientific innovations in her text, Shaw, as an Irish poet and political activist, showcases problems regarding the system of social stratification and privileged individuals in his play.

The central element in the play, especially within its first two acts, is the wager itself and how it plays out. The fact that a female figure is yet again located between two men in a context that involves a transaction, it becomes clear that, similar to the deal between Victor Frankenstein and his monster, there is the notion that women are “exchanged, but as women to some common feature- their current price in gold, or phalluses-and of would represent a plus or minus quantity” (Irigaray, 2004, p. 175). In other words, Eliza only has value because she is used in a transaction between two men. As Mitchell comments on, Higgins “has given no thought to Eliza as a person, or what will happen to her when the experiment is over” (Shaw, 1994, p. 323). The actual terms of the wager are not given enough emphasis, rather, whether she can be a lady is what motivates both Higgins and Pickering, making Eliza’s prospects seem like a topic of entertainment between them. There is also criticism on the class conflict in the text, as Eliza is looked down on due to her job as a flower-seller, and her accent is not seen as “proper” even though her accent reflects where she comes from, or to put it another way; her sense of self. Higgins declares his interest of dressing Eliza “beautifully and make a lady out of” (Shaw, 1994, p. 23) her. Given this, this goal of changing Eliza pinpoints the fact that “in order to become equivalent, a commodity changes bodies. A super-natural, metaphysical origin is substituted for its material origin” (Irigaray, 2004, p. 179). Accordingly, Eliza’s potential to metamorphose into a presentable lady has mythical undertones. Through this mythical metamorphosis, she can increase her value as a commodity. Correspondingly, contemplating on the works of Freud and Levi-Strauss, Rubin talks about “a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products” (1975, p. 158). What Shaw presents in the play, indeed, is two men’s attempt at domesticating Eliza by making her socially acceptable in their circles.

It is interesting to note that the stage directions in the play serve to reinforce Eliza's connections to her social class, just as other characters do. Prior to the midpoint of the second act, the stage directions consistently refer to her simply as "the flower girl," indicating that her identity is tied to her occupation and social class. It is only when Higgins and Pickering ask for her name that it is actually shown in the text, suggesting that she is not seen as an individual with her own unique identity, but rather as a product to be bought and sold. In a way, she is reduced into what she sells, flowers, until upper class men need to refer to her. What she needs is not questioned, as each working woman identity’s looks exactly like one another, making them interchangeable:

They all have the same phantom-like reality. Metamorphosed in identical sublimations, samples of the same indistinguishable work, all these objects now manifest just one thing, namely, that in their production a force of human labor has been expended, that labor has accumulated in them. In their role as crystals of that common social substance, they are deemed to have value. (Irigaray, 2004, p. 175)

If we consider Eliza's profession as a flower seller as the defining characteristic of her identity before her transformation, it can be argued that it is only after she becomes a lady that others begin to recognize her humanity. During her time as a flower seller, Eliza is commodified and objectified, much like Galata's existence as a lifeless ivory statue. However, once Eliza undergoes her transformation, she is afforded the same recognition of personhood that Galatea receives upon coming to life:

LIZA [defiantly non-resistant] Wring away. What do I care? I knew you’d strike me some day. [He lets her go, stamping with rage at having forgotten himself, and recoils so hastily that he stumbles back into his seat on the ottoman]. Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can’t take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That’s done you, Henry Higgins, it has. Now I don’t care that [snapping her fingers] for your bullying and your big talk. I’ll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she’ll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.

HIGGINS [wondering at her] You damned impudent slut, you! But it’s better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn’t it? [Rising] By George, Eliza, I said I’d make a woman of you;

and I have. I like you like this. (Shaw, 1994, p. 211)

As can be seen, the relationship between Eliza and Higgins change significantly after the flower girl becomes a lady. Shaw's Galatea analogue gains subjectivity and the ability to stand for herself, towards which Higgins answers by striking her. Although the directions leave the extent of violence ambiguous, the scene equalizes the professor with the monster of Frankenstein where he strangles Victor's wife, Elizabeth to death.

Unlike the ending of the Ovidian tale in which the animated statue falls in love with Pygmalion, Eliza in the play rejects her "creator" at the end simply because she "has no use for the foolish romantic tradition that all women love to be mastered, if not actually bullied and beaten" (Shaw, 1994, p. 409). Compared to the original myth's so-called happy ending where the heterosexual union between two sexes is guaranteed, here the audiences witness a female character with independence and respect for herself, evidenced by the stage directions that reads "she sweeps out" as she exits her final scene. Hence, Shaw is expressing in his play that the only way for a Galatea figure to turn into a real woman is through acquiring self-respect and agency. Two conceptions that are nowhere to be seen in the myth since she is never given a chance other than being enamored by the man who sculpted her. Upon close inspection, Shaw's progressive ending carries the same message Whale's Bride of Frankenstein: A Galatea figure does not have to obey her Pygmalion. In the wake of the viewpoints of Irigaray and Rubin we discussed and juxtaposed, we can realize both of these female figures display an unconventional desire for claiming their own agency, resulting in their eventual flight from the "traffic" of women in their respective societies against all odds.

However, it is important to note that the film adaptation of the play, *My Fair Lady* conveys an entirely different message as it leaves the transaction intact. The 1964 movie, directed by George Cukor and starring Audrey Hepburn, ends with a typical Hollywood romantic comedy ending with the domestic bliss of Eliza and Higgins, accentuated by Higgins's infamous "Eliza...where the devil are my slippers?" (Cukor, 1964) question. This scene underscores, if we are to borrow from Rubin's terminology, "domestication" of Eliza effectively. Not only does she occupy an inferior position to Higgins, but she also lets the professor have the last word, contrary to the play where she sweeps out after expressing her frustration clearly. Therefore, it is obvious that in the movie, the transaction of the female figure is successfully completed in favor of Higgins. Fortunately, the most recent Broadway musical adaptation of the film in 2018 finally restores Shaw's original final scene and adds new elements that involve Suffragettes, leading to what critics call "a #MeToo makeover" (Teeman, 2018).

In conclusion, the characters of Eliza Doolittle in Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the bride of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be seen as modern reinterpretations of the myth of Galatea, in which women are objectified and commodified by a capitalist and patriarchal society. By examining these characters through the theories of Luce Irigaray and Gayle Rubin, it becomes apparent that both Shaw's play and Shelley's novel highlight the ways in which women are reduced to objects that are exploited and exchanged in homosocial transactions by men who do not consider their agency or goals at the slightest. The shift that has happened between Ovid's myth, which is essentially about the power of love and art, and its retellings and adaptations, which choose to concentrate on the battle of sexes, exposes the gradual commodification of women in value-based capitalist cultures where constant exchanges of women are naturalized.

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