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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S *VERTIGO* AND THE PYGMALION MYTH RECONSIDERED

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Abstract: Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958) has attracted the interest of classical reception scholars because of its adaptation of Ovid's Pygmalion myth. Scottie, the film's main character, has been interpreted as a re-enactment of Pygmalion, a character in the *Metamorphoses* who sculpted his ideal woman out of ivory. In this article, the idea of a direct line of reception from Ovid to Hitchcock is challenged. Rather, the principal model of the film is identified as George Bernard Shaw's drama *Pygmalion* (1913). However, Ovid's Pygmalion story does constitute a model for the film as well, though it does so on a more indirect level. In fact, all the film's main characters display Ovidian traits. These add an extra layer of meaning to the understanding of the film and the complexity of its characters, and allow for an unexpected re-interpretation of Scottie and his desires.

Keywords: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion, Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The psychological thriller *Vertigo* (1958) is one of Alfred Hitchcock's best-known and most praised masterpieces. The film has attracted the interest of scholars of classical reception because of its purported adaptation of the Pygmalion myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* Scottie, the main character in the film, has been interpreted as a cinematic re-enactment of Pygmalion, the man who sculpted his ideal woman in ivory and brought her to life through Venus' intercession. In this article, I challenge the idea of a direct line of reception from Ovid to Hitchcock and argue that the film's principal model is George Bernard Shaw's drama *Pygmalion* (1913). Ovid's Pygmalion story does constitute a model for the film, but it does so on a more indirect and subtle level. I demonstrate that, in fact, all main characters in the film (viz., Scottie as well as the three female characters Madeleine, Judy and Midge) display Ovidian traits. Some of these traits appear as parallels to Ovid's Pygmalion story, whereas others can be viewed as elements of inversion. I argue that, in sum, these Ovidian intertexts add extra layers of meaning to the overall understanding of the film and, in particular, to the complexity of its characters, and they allow for an unexpected re-interpretation of Scottie and his desires.

2. PLOT SUMMARY OF *VERTIGO*

The protagonist of *Vertigo* is John "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart), a former police officer and bachelor whose only close acquaintance is his former fiancée Marjorie "Midge" Wood (Barbara Bel Geddes). Suffering from acrophobia, Scottie has retired early after the death of one of his colleagues, for which he blames himself (his colleague died in a rooftop chase while trying to help Scottie, who was paralyzed by vertigo). Scottie is then hired as a private detective by his friend

Garvin Elster (Tom Helmore) in order to protect Elster's suicidal wife Madeleine (Kim Novak). Madeleine seems to be possessed by the spirit of her great-grandmother Carlotta Valdes, who took her own life one hundred years earlier. Scottie follows Madeleine and witnesses her fixation on a portrait of Carlotta in a local museum. He saves her from drowning – her first suicide attempt – and thus they become acquainted and eventually fall in love. However, Scottie's acrophobia prevents him from stopping Madeleine's second suicide attempt: she jumps from the bell tower at the mission of San Juan Bautista (south of San Francisco) and falls onto the roof of the monastery. Overwhelmed by guilt, Scottie becomes depressive and is treated in a mental institution.

After his release, Scottie meets Judy Barton (also played by Kim Novak), a woman who reminds him of Madeleine. He introduces himself to her, and after some resistance from her side, they eventually become a couple. Still obsessed with Madeleine, Scottie urges Judy to adopt Madeleine's dress and hair style. Scottie later catches sight of a piece of jewellery on Judy's neck that he recognizes as the one worn by Carlotta in the portrait. Scottie concludes that Judy and the person whom he knew as Madeleine must, in fact, be the same. He takes Judy to San Juan Bautista, drags her up the bell tower and forces a confession out of her. It turns out that Judy had played Madeleine, and that the story about her spiritual possession was a carefully orchestrated deception. Garvin had killed his real wife and had been waiting at the top of the tower with her corpse to throw it down onto the roof of the monastery; he had hired Scottie to protect his 'wife' because he knew that Scottie's acrophobia would make it impossible for him to reach the top of the tower. While Scottie and Judy are standing at the top of the tower, a nun suddenly appears; Judy is startled, steps backward and falls to her death. Scottie has overcome his acrophobia, but he has lost his beloved again.[1]

[1] See also the more comprehensive synopsis in the *Internet Movie Database* (Anonymous author 1: *sine anno*).

3. CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Vertigo is not only a cinematic masterpiece by Hitchcock, but also "one of the most frequently analyzed films in the Hitchcock canon, if not in cinema history in general" (White 1991: 910). Scholarly approaches to the study of this film include "[p]sychoanalytic, formalist, feminist, post-structuralist, and Marxist readings" (ibid.).[2] From the perspective of classical reception, *Vertigo* is relevant because of its adaptation of the Pygmalion myth: Scottie's attempt to turn Judy into the simulacrum of the idealized love of his life seems to be an obvious case of creative reworking of the story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about the Cyprian king who sculpts a statue of his ideal woman, which subsequently comes to life (*Met.* 10.238-297). In a research article and a book chapter, Paula James has analysed the reception of Ovid's Pygmalion by Hitchcock, arguing that "[t]he fate of Hitchcock's heroine echoes that of Ovid's ivory maiden who [...] is conceived and moulded to the emotional and erotic needs of Pygmalion" (James 2003: 65), and that "[l]ike Ovid, Hitchcock has been taken to task for focussing upon women as victims, as images to be manipulated and made over or metamorphosed by the male" (James 2011: 39). Along similar lines, Stefano Marino states that "Hitchcock uses the Ovidian Pygmalion motif in an ingenious way" (Marino 2007: 29);[3] and Martin Winkler, in his recent monograph *Ovid on Screen*, notes that "*Vertigo* [...] has become one of the best-known modern updates of both the Pygmalion and the Orpheus-Eurydice myths on screen and has frequently been analyzed from mythical perspectives" (Winkler 2020: 60).[4]

[2] For a survey of scholarship until 1997, see Berman 1997: 978-987. More recent scholarship includes, inter alia, the monographs by Belton 2017 and Pippin 2017.

[3] German original: "in genialer Weise bedient sich [...] Hitchcock des ovidianischen Pygmalionmotivs".

[4] Winkler rightly states that besides the Pygmalion myth, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is another important mythical subtext in *Vertigo* (the main point being the common motif of a man retrieving his deceased beloved and then losing her for a second

Regarding the ubiquitous question of authorial intention, Rebecca Saunders concedes that "[w]e can only speculate as to whether Hitchcock intentionally wove the conceit of the Pygmalion myth into the fabric of his film", but that "it is almost certain that he would have studied the classics and would have had an at least cursory familiarity with Ovid" (Saunders 2015: 1). This view is in line with that of Mark W. Padilla, who has studied the reception of ancient stories, motifs and tropes in several of Hitchcock's films.[5] Padilla discusses the question of Hitchcock's familiarity with classical antiquity on various occasions and argues that "there is little reason to think that a person who grew up in Hitchcock's classic-rich cultural environment would not absorb and use the narratives and themes that informed his education and societal expressions to make his own cinematic stories" (Padilla 2019: xxi).[6]

4. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S *PYGMALION* AS A MODEL FOR *VERTIGO*

As discussed, there is consensus among scholars in classical reception studies that Hitchcock's *Vertigo* can be interpreted as a cinematic re-enactment of Ovid's Pygmalion story. However, the idea of a direct line of reception from Ovid to Hitchcock is problematic. Even if we ignore the question of authorial intention (which is only marginally relevant from a reader-response perspective), it still is questionable to assume

time). Indeed, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* both myths are intrinsically tied to each other because Orpheus is the embedded narrator of the Pygmalion story, and therefore both myths clearly constitute an intertextual background to Hitchcock's film. However, my focus in this article is solely on the Pygmalion myth in *Vertigo*; on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in *Vertigo*, see Brown 1986, Poznar 1989, and Ehrlich 2003: 77-79.

[5] See Padilla 2016, Padilla 2017, and Padilla 2019.

[6] The strongest argument for Hitchcock having been familiar with the Classics is the fact that he had been a pupil at a Jesuit grammar school, the St Ignatius College in Stamford Hill, Tottenham.

that Hitchcock's Scottie really should be viewed as an embodiment of the Ovidian Pygmalion in the sense that some scholars have suggested. The Pygmalion myth has been an extremely popular and widely used literary trope for two thousand years, and thus the network of intertextuality and reception is vast and immensely complex.[7] Nevertheless, there is one milestone that has shaped the reception of the Pygmalion motif in the twentieth century more than any other, namely, George Bernard Shaw's drama *Pygmalion* (1913). In brief, this play is about a failed social experiment by Henry Higgins, a linguist who attempts to convert a working-class girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a high-society lady by improving her English accent and diction.[8] Upon closer inspection, the Ovidian and Shawian pygmalionizations[9] are fundamentally different; as Essaka Joshua puts it, "[t]he links between the two are at once both obvious and tenuous" (Joshua 2011: 97). Ovid's Pygmalion withdraws from the world because he is disgusted by the moral decay of the Propoetides – women who prostitute themselves and refuse to worship the goddess Venus (*Met.* 10.220-242). Instead, he creates his own image of an ideal woman in the form of a statue, with which he eventually falls in love. Venus later brings the statue to life as a reward for Pygmalion's continued worship. Shaw's Pygmalion figure (Higgins), on the other hand, is a man who superficially moulds a woman into something she is not and does not wish to be, without respecting her own desires and needs.

In a sense, the Ovidian and Shawian Pygmalions are contrasting figures: the former creates a work of art that is subsequently converted into a living being, whereas the latter turns an authentic person into

[7] See the anthology by Aurnhammer & Martin 2003; the studies by Dörrie 1974, Dinter 1979, Weiser 1998 and Joshua 2001; and the collected volume by Mayer & Neumann 1997. On reception as a non-linear process, see e.g. Martindale 2013 and Bakogianni 2016.

[8] Shaw's play was further popularized through the film *Pygmalion* (1938), the musical *My Fair Lady* (1956) and the film *My Fair Lady* (1964, based on the musical).

[9] The term "pygmalionization" is borrowed from Lindermann 1991: 66.

an artificial being (and hence, metaphorically, into a work of art). The story of Ovid's Pygmalion can be interpreted as a story about the cathartic effect of art, as Pygmalion is cured of his misogyny by his artistry,[10] while Shaw's *Pygmalion* opens up questions on social status and gender equity (or lack thereof). In clinical-psychological terms, the obsessions of the two men are different too. What Ovid describes is the erotic attraction to statues, called "agalmatophilia", which is a form of "objectophilia", the sexual attraction to objects.[11] Scottie's obsession, in turn, can be aligned with paraphilias such as clothes and shoe fetishism as well as scopophilia (voyeurism).[12] Moreover, Ovid's Pygmalion story has a happy ending: Pygmalion and his lady are married and have a daughter (*Met.* 10.295-297);[13] Shaw's Pygmalion story, on the other hand, ends unhappily, as Eliza leaves Higgins at the end of the play.

With this in mind, it becomes apparent that the Shawian, not the Ovidian, Pygmalion is the principal model for Scottie in *Vertigo.* The thread that the film and Shaw's play have in common is, of course, that of a man trying to mould the girl/woman of his dreams according to his own desires. The transformation, in both cases, is supposed to push

[10] Along similar lines, see Janan 1998: 124: "Pygmalion is an exceptional artist, and uses that art in the service of his own apostasy. Rejecting mortal women (like his creator), Pygmalion carves a material monument to his artistry in the form of a statue. His ivory statue of a virgin is so mimetically perfect that he refuses to acknowledge its lifelessness. Instead, he falls in love with it, as a 'perfect' beloved." Accordingly, Janan translates the metapoetic key phrase *ars adeo latet arte sua* (*Met.* 10.252) as "to such an extent does art hide its own skill".

[11] On agalmatophilia, see e.g. Scobie & Taylor 1975; on objectophilia, see e.g. Marsh 2004. At the time of writing (March 2020), a bizarre case of objectophilia was documented in the city of Basel (Switzerland), where a man performed lewd acts with a car in public (see Anonymous author 2: 2020).

[12] On scopophilia in Hollywood cinema, see the influential discussion by Mulvey 1975.

[13] This is exceptional in the *Metamorphoses*; see Spahlinger 1996: 50: "The tale of the sculptor Pygmalion belongs to the few metamorphoses the outcome of which brings unrestricted luck and success to its protagonists." (German original: "Zu den wenigen Metamorphosen, deren Ausgang für die Hauptpersonen ohne Einschränkung Glück und Gelingen bedeutet, gehört die Erzählung vom Bildhauer Pygmalion.")

the woman up the social ladder: for, like Eliza in Shaw's drama, Judy in *Vertigo* also shows the behaviour and the attitudes of a working-class girl (whereas Madeleine is an upper-class lady). Seen from this perspective, language plays a role in *Vertigo* too (although Scottie's obsession is not with language like Higgins', but with appearance): the stage directions indicate that Judy's "voice is flat and slightly nasal, in sharp contrast to Madeleine's low, husky voice", and that "Scottie winces slightly at the sound of it" when he hears it for the first time (script 103).[14] And, in both cases, there is no happy ending: Judy dies and Eliza leaves Higgins.

Scholars who have studied the Pygmalion motif in *Vertigo* have not sufficiently acknowledged the fundamental differences between the Ovidian and Shawian types of pygmalionization, and they have been too quick to draw a direct line of reception from Ovid to Hitchcock. That being said, it can in fact be argued that the Ovidian Pygmalion story should be read as an intertext for *Vertigo* on a less direct, subtler level. In what follows, I first consider the parallels between Ovid's Pygmalion story and *Vertigo*, and then identify certain elements of the Ovidian archetype that are inverted in the film.

5. PARALLELS BETWEEN OVID'S PYGMALION STORY AND *VERTIGO*

As demonstrated above, the Shawian pygmalionization can be viewed as the principal model for Scottie's attempt to convert the 'genuine' Judy into the 'artificial' Madeleine. However, upon closer inspection, the situation is more complex. From the beginning, Madeleine as played by Judy is an artificial figure created by Garvin, but neither Scottie nor the spectator knows this. The spectator is enlightened when Judy,

[14] The screenplay was written by Alec Coppel and Samuel A. Taylor (Coppel & Taylor 1957, cited as "script"). Specific references to the film are provided as references to the script.

after her unexpected second encounter with Scottie, writes a letter to him in which she reveals the truth, but then destroys it because she loves Scottie and wants to seize this second chance (script 110). From that moment on, dramatic irony is at work because the spectator knows more than Scottie. In hindsight, it becomes apparent that Judy was converted into Madeleine twice, once by Garvin and then again by Scottie.[15] In between, Madeleine, impersonated by Judy, had been reversed back to the real Judy. This reversal can be seen as an echo of the Ovidian Pygmalion story because it picks up the motif of the coming to life of a work of art.

Another connection to the Ovidian Pygmalion story is the presentation of Madeleine as an almost statuesque figure: her posture, her coiffure, the colour of her clothes (grey and white) and her hair (silvery blond), as well as the fact that she is often shown in profile; all these details trigger associations with a statue.[16] Indeed, Madeleine's appearance can be linked directly to the Ovidian description of Pygmalion's statue (*Met.* 10.247-249): *niveum mira feliciter arte / sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci / nulla potest* ("with his miraculous artistry he successfully / carved snow-white ivory and gave it a beauty which no woman can be born / with").[17] What is described here is a chryselephantine statue; and fair skin in a woman was a marker of beauty in antiquity.[18] Furthermore, Scottie dressing up Judy as Madeleine resembles

[15] It has also been argued that Scottie already becomes a creator at an earlier stage, when he rescues Madeleine from her first (faked) suicide attempt; see Kehr 1984: 17: "By pulling her up from the water of San Francisco Bay, Scotty has given birth to her; when he puts her to bed in his apartment, she is as naked as a baby. The process is natural and affirmative [...]. At this point, Scotty is still the benign creator, the artist who gives life."

[16] Along those lines, James 2003: 80 states that Madeleine is "often in profile, fragmented, statue-like, presented on the screen as if sitting for a portrait, with everything about her carefully arranged and composed".

[17] The Latin text of the *Metamorphoses* follows the edition by Anderson 1998. Translations are mine. A complete translation of Ovid's Pygmalion story (*Met.* 10.238-297) is added in an appendix to this article.

[18] See Bömer 1980: 98-99.

Pygmalion clothing his statue, and the moment when Scottie helps Judy fix Carlotta's pendant around her neck – the same piece of jewellery that is going to spark his anagnorisis – is reminiscent of Pygmalion decorating his statue (*Met.* 10.263-265): *ornat quoque vestibus artus, / dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo; / aure leves bacae, redimicula pectore pendent* ("he also adorns her limbs with dresses, / he gives gemstones to her fingers, gives long necklaces to her throat; / light pearls hang from her ears, chaplets from her breast.").[19] Yet Pygmalion's statue, when it is overloaded with adornment, is mirrored partly in Judy as well, since Judy has a predilection for cheap jewellery.[20] Seen from this angle, the process of turning a person into a work of art is not undertaken by Scottie alone, but also by Judy herself. Thus, the seemingly clear line between the 'genuine' Judy and the 'artificial' Madeleine is blurred. Judy did not play a role only when she pretended to be Madeleine; she also plays a role as Judy.[21]

With her predilection for coloured clothing, Judy too may be viewed as a statue-like figure, namely, as a chromatic statue (sculptural polychromy was common in antiquity),[22] as opposed to Madeleine's likeness to a chryselephantine statue. The statuesque appearance of Madeleine, and the way this appearance was connected to Madeleine's character, was described by Kim Novak in an interview many years after the film was released (Novak & Rebello 2004):

[19] On this parallel, see also Saunders 2015: 8.

[20] Stoichita 2008: 189 calls her, somewhat politically incorrectly, a "beautiful but vulgar bimbo".

[21] Along those lines, see also Corber 1999: 303: "Of course, her identity as Judy Barton is a cover. Her look is so different from the upper-class Madeleine's that no one, including Scottie, would connect her with the heiress brutally murdered by Elster." See also Pippin 2017: 103, n. 120.

[22] On sculptural polychromy in antiquity, see e.g. Reuterswärd 1960. There has been an increase in research recently due to improved methods of reconstruction (see e.g. Siotto, Callieri, Dellepiane & Scopigno 2015).

> [W]hen I played Judy, I never wore a bra. It killed me having to wear a bra as Madeleine but you had to because they had built the suit so that you had to stand very erect or you suddenly were not 'in position'. They made that suit very stiff. You constantly had to hold your shoulders back and stand erect. But, oh that was so perfect. That suit helped me find the tools for playing the role. It was wonderful for Judy because then I got to be without a bra and felt so good again. I just felt natural. I had on my own beige shoes and that felt good. Hitchcock said, 'Does that feel better?' I said, 'Oh yes, thank you so much.' But then, I had to play 'Madeleine' again when Judy had to be made over again by Scottie into what she didn't want to be. I could use that, again, totally for me, not just being made over into Madeleine but into Madeleine who wore that ghastly gray suit. The clothes alone were so perfect, they were everything I could want as an actress.

The Ovidian intertext further enhances the artificiality of the 'fake' Madeleine, but it makes the spectator perceive Judy as a partly artificial figure too. Thus, the seemingly static divide between the 'artificial' Madeleine and the 'genuine' Judy is deconstructed and, simultaneously, the complexity of the various transformations that are at work in the film is accentuated.

Like Madeleine and (to a lesser extent) Judy, Scottie's character also betrays Ovidian traits, in at least three ways. First, there is a conspicuous parallel in the fact that Pygmalion and Scottie are equally particular about the choice of partners. Pygmalion generalizes his contempt for the Propoetides to all women and hence develops a pathological misogyny that leads him to create his own ideal woman. In similar terms, Scottie is, as Paula James puts it, "an eligible man who has rejected available partners" and instead displays an "obsession with an idealised but ultimately unreal woman" (James 2003: 65). However, their rejection of women and marriage is not absolute. Pygmalion is

not an *a priori* misogynist; he "despises marriage and female affection not because he denies the divine power of love in general and thus the existence of the gods and goddesses of love, but because he rejects the degenerate form of love that he sees in the depravity of the Propoetides" (Spahlinger 1996: 55).[23] In contrast, Scottie's motives are more obscure. His relationship with Midge sheds some light on the question. Scottie and Midge are old college friends[24] and were engaged for a short period, but according to Scottie, it was Midge "who blew it" (script 8). In the same scene, however, Midge remarks that "there's only one man in the world for [her]", namely, Scottie (ibid.). Scottie, in turn, implies that he is not averse to a romantic relationship as a matter of principle when he refers to himself as "available Ferguson" (ibid.). The audience is left in the dark about the further particulars of their past relation, but it can be inferred that there must have been rejections and hurt feelings on both sides (Midge's role is discussed further below.)

Secondly, there is a conspicuous parallel at the end of Judy's conversion into Madeleine: Scottie seals the transformation with a passionate kiss (script 126-127), as does Ovid's Pygmalion (*Met.* 10.291-292). However, the context and the background are different: Scottie refuses to kiss (even to touch) Madeleine during the process of transformation (script 114-115, 122), whereas Pygmalion touches and kisses his statue from the beginning, before he even begins to decorate it (*Met.* 10.280-282). For Pygmalion, touching and kissing are first a way of creating an illusion

[23] German original: "[Pygmalion] verachtet [...] nicht die Ehe und die Liebe der Frauen, weil er die göttliche Macht der Liebe generell leugnet und damit die Liebesgötter selbst, sondern weil er die degenerierte Form der Liebe, die ihm in der sittlichen Verworfenheit der Propoetiden begegnet, ablehnt."

[24] Despite their recognizable age difference. In real life, the age difference between James Stewart (*1908) and Barbara Bel Geddes (*1922) was fourteen years. The age difference between Stewart and Kim Novak (*1933) was even greater (twenty-five years). However, large age gaps between romantic couples were normal in Hollywood films of the 1950s (see also e.g. Stewart and Grace Kelly [*1929] in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*).

of reality (*Met.* 10.254-258), and later become the ultimate assurance that the statue has indeed come to life (*Met.* 10.292-294): *dataque oscula virgo / sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina lumen / attollens pariter cum caelo vidit amantem* ("and the girl felt the kisses she was given, / and she blushed, and, raising her timid eyes towards his eyes, / she saw her lover at the same time with the sky.").

Finally, there is the motif of catharsis. As mentioned above, the tale of Pygmalion can be regarded as a story about the cathartic effect of art: Pygmalion is cured from his misogyny as a result of his artistry. Scottie too is healed of the psychological condition that had impaired his life – his acrophobia. In both cases, the healing is the result of an active effort (Pygmalion carving the statue and Scottie dragging Judy up the bell tower, whereas his stay in the mental institution only had a superficial effect). However, here too, the context and the consequences are different. Pygmalion is able to dispose of his misogyny, and Venus rewards him for his fidelity and veneration with a happy family life. In contrast, Scottie's healing comes at the extremely high cost of losing the love of his life.

In summary, it can be stated that reading Scottie in light of Ovid's Pygmalion reveals a combination of similarities and dissimilarities. As in the case of Madeleine and Judy, the Ovidian intertext adds an extra layer of meaning to Scottie's character and thus enhances its complexity. He is more obscure and inscrutable than Pygmalion with regard to his particularity in partner choice; his refusal to touch and kiss his 'artwork' before completion makes him appear both determined and dislikeable;[25] and his loss at the end of the film becomes more tragic when it is juxtaposed with the happy ending of Pygmalion's story.

[25] Gabbard 1998: 164 goes so far as to call Scottie's "makeover of Judy" a "form of sadistic control", and he links Scottie's behaviour to Hitchcock's "sadistic treatment of his leading ladies", which was "legendary".

6. ELEMENTS OF OVID'S PYGMALION STORY INVERTED IN *VERTIGO*

So far, I have discussed the parallels between the Ovidian Pygmalion story and *Vertigo*. I now turn to inversions. There are three aspects to be considered. First, Judy's death, which can be read as a parallel either to Shaw's *Pygmalion* (via the common motif of the unhappy ending) or to Ovid from a male perspective (via the common motif of the healing of the male protagonist's mental condition). However, from a female perspective, Judy's death is first and foremost an inversion of the Ovidian motif: in the *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion and his lady get married, have a daughter and live happily thereafter (*Met.* 10.295-297). Procreation as an indicator of good fortune was a widespread topos in antiquity, as was the idea that a woman's life-task was to be a good wife and mother (the so-called χρηστὴ γυνή, "useful woman").[26] Both topoi are inverted in *Vertigo* since the protagonists are either unmarried (Scottie, Midge, Judy) or unhappily married (Garvin and Madeleine), and all are childless.

Another point of inversion concerns Judy. When she and Scottie meet for the first time (viz., when they meet for the first time in the constellation Judy-Scottie), she tentatively agrees to go out with him and adds, "Well... I've been on blind dates before... Matter of fact, to be honest, I've been picked up before" (script 109). This remark may be understood as an allusion to a previous occupation as a prostitute, or at least to occasional arrangements for casual sex. Furthermore, Judy has a recognizable beauty mark on her left cheek, which was a typical icon of prostitutes.[27] From an Ovidian point of view, the association

[26] See e.g. the famous Herodotean story about Tellos, who was deemed the happiest man ever because he had "beautiful and smart" (καλοί τε κἀγαθοί) children and grandchildren (Hdt. 1.30.4). On the topos of the χρηστὴ γυνή, see e.g. Poseid. *ep.* 58 and 59 AB; *CEG* 530; Men. *sent.* 1.634.

[27] In the Victorian era, beauty marks were applied on the skin to disguise syphilitic ulcerations. On the use of cosmetics by ancient prostitutes to fake beauty, see e.g.

with prostitution makes Judy one of the Propoetides. Ovid's Pygmalion attempts to create an ideal counter-image to the prostitutes whom he despises, whereas Scottie converts a (former and/or latent) prostitute into the simulacrum of his beloved. Ironically, he does not know that Madeleine is not the ideal woman he thought she was (Judy's remark about having "been picked up before" may be understood as an allusion to her having had sex with Garvin). Again, the seemingly clear-cut line between Judy and Madeleine is being blurred. This impression is further enhanced by the associations that their names trigger: the name 'Judy' is the short form of the Old Testament's 'Judith', while 'Madeleine' is derived from 'Magdalene', which recalls the New Testament figure of Mary Magdalene. The Biblical Judith is an emblematically beautiful but dangerous woman who remains unmarried. Mary Magdalene, in contrast, is a repentant sinner and, according to later tradition, also a former prostitute.[28]

The opposite of Madeleine and Judy is Scottie's former college friend Midge, with whom he used to be engaged once, but now has a strictly platonic relationship – although Midge is still romantically interested in Scottie. Midge watches Scottie when he protects Madeleine, and when she finds out about Carlotta's portrait, she paints the same portrait at home, with her own face in it (script 76-77). This is perhaps the most obvious inversion of the Ovidian motif of the statue that comes to life, as Midge does the exact opposite by trying to convert herself into a piece of art. In doing so, Midge is – as Robert B. Pippin phrases it – "playfully suggesting [...] that it is possible for Scottie to have the exoticism and mystery of the 'Carlotta' side of the feminine joined together with the realistic, prudent, sensible domestic side" (Pippin 2017: 74). However, Midge's attempt to insert herself in Carlotta's painting, and thus turn herself into a woman whom Scottie may find interesting, fails badly.

Kapparis 2018: 73-98.

[28] On the complex history of Mary Magdalene as an icon of the penitent prostitute, see Ehrmann 2006: 179-192.

Midge's self-pygmalionization is as unsuccessful as Scottie's pygmalionization of Judy; in fact, the only successful pygmalionization in the film is Garvin's conversion of Judy into Madeleine. When Scottie catches sight of the painting, he becomes irritated and leaves Midge's apartment, uttering the words "not funny" (script 76). After this incident, they do not speak to each other again; the silence between the two thus seals, and emphasizes, the failure of Midge's attempt to become a Carlotta/Madeleine figure. Midge later visits Scottie in the mental health institution, but he is unresponsive to her attempts to rescue him from his depression.

In the case of Midge, too, the name is telling: the name 'Midge' is the short form of 'Marjorie', and 'Marjorie' and 'Madeleine' are phonetically similar to each other. Thus, a parallel can be drawn between the two figures. On the other hand, the associations that are linked to the two names are antipodal: the name 'Marjorie' can (by way of auditive association) also be connected to 'Mary/Maria', whereas the name 'Madeleine' triggers associations with the Biblical Mary Magdalene, as mentioned.[29] Midge is a saint-like, motherly Mary figure, but boring, so Scottie has no romantic interest in her.[30] Madeleine, on the other hand, combines the aspects of the saint and the whore, which makes her an object of interest and desire for Scottie. From an Ovidian perspective, we can see that what Scottie wants is, ultimately, the opposite of what Pygmalion wants; Scottie rejects and seeks the opposite of Pygmalion. Scottie even hints at his (potentially suppressed) desire for a 'saint-whore' when he suggests to Judy that she should no longer go to work and that he will instead "take care of [her]" (script 112) – a

[29] See also Lange-Kirchheim 2004: 99 on this point.

[30] Midge takes on a mothering role on several occasions, e.g. when she says to Scottie "you're a big boy, now" (script 7) and "Mother's here" (script 97). Thus, despite her efforts to win Scottie's heart, she makes her own enterprise impossible by pushing herself and Scottie into a decidedly unromantic relationship. It is too easy to blame Scottie for his supposed "inability to take Midge [...] as his wife", as Saunders 2015: 7 does.

remark that implies some sort of sugar daddy/sugar baby relationship *avant la lettre.* This is arguably the most significant element of Ovidian inversion in *Vertigo.*

7. CONCLUSION

The principal model for Scottie in Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* is George Bernard Shaw's Professor Higgins from the play *Pygmalion.* Scottie attempts to transform the working-class Judy into an ideal woman, just like Higgins does with Eliza Doolittle, and both men do so with success initially, but ultimately fail. Yet a closer analysis reveals that there are also numerous elements from Ovid's Pygmalion story interwoven in *Vertigo.* The sum of these elements constitutes a complex intertextual net of parallels and inversions that complements the straightforward reception of Shaw's *Pygmalion* and adds an extra layer of meaning to the understanding of the film and the complexity of its characters. One main point that results from a comparison with Ovid is the blurring of the seemingly strict divide between the character of the 'artificial' Madeleine and that of the 'genuine' Judy. Furthermore, Madeleine and especially Judy display similarities to prostitutes and therefore can be aligned with the Propoetides in the *Metamorphoses.* In complete contrast to Ovid's Pygmalion, Scottie is a character who (secretly) wishes for a 'saint-whore' and therefore rejects the one woman (Midge) who is available to him. Scottie is not a Pygmalion character; rather, he is an anti-Pygmalion. His methods may resemble those of Pygmalion superficially, but in fact he attempts to achieve the opposite of what Pygmalion wants. Ironically, he attains his goal, but only temporarily; in the end, he loses everything. Thus, in the event, the Ovidian intertext allows for a new, unexpected re-interpretation of Scottie's character and his desires. It is through the Ovidian intertext and the

resulting image of an anti-Pygmalion that the figure of Scottie becomes comprehensible.[31]

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APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF *MET.* 10.238-297 (Latin text: Anderson 1998 × English translation: Silvio Bär)

Sunt tamen obscenae Venerem Propoetides ausae
esse negare deam. Pro quo sua, numinis ira,
corpora cum forma primae vulgasse feruntur.
Utque pudor cessit sanguisque induruit oris,
in rigidum parvo silicem discrimine versae.
Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis
viderat, offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti
femineae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs
vivebat thalamique diu consorte carebat.
Interea niveum mira feliciter arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest operisque sui concepit amorem.
Virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:
Ars adeo latet arte sua. Miratur et haurit
pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes.
Saepe manus operi temptantes admovet, an sit
corpus an illud ebur; nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur.
Oscula dat reddique putat loquiturque tenetque,

But the lewd daughters of Propoetus dared to deny Venus
the status of a goddess. In retaliation for that, through the wrath of the deity,
they were the first (so it is said) to have made their beautiful bodies publicly available.
And as their sense of shame faded away and the blood in their faces congealed,
it was only a small difference for them to be transformed into rigid granite.
Since Pygmalion had seen them leading their life through wrongdoing,
he took offence at the vices that nature has copiously given
to the female mind, and without a wife he lived
as a celibate, and he abstained from a bedroom companion for a long time.
In the meantime, with his miraculous artistry he successfully
carved snow-white ivory and gave it a beauty which no woman can be born
with, and he fell in love with his own work of art.
Its appearance is that of a real girl, whom you'd believe to be alive
and, if pudency did not stand in the way, you'd believe it to want to move.
To such an extent lies art hidden in its own art. Pygmalion marvels and absorbs
in his breast the fires of passion for the artificial body.
Often he moves his hands towards the artwork, touching it to see whether it is
a body or still that ivory; and he admits that it is no longer ivory.
He gives it kisses and imagines that they are reciprocated, and he speaks to it and holds it,

et credit tactis digitos insidere membris,
et metuit pressos veniat ne livor in artus.
Et modo blanditias adhibet, modo grata puellis
munera fert illi conchas teretesque lapillos
et parvas volucres et flores mille colorum
liliaque pictasque pilas et ab arbore lapsas
Heliadum lacrimas. Ornat quoque vestibus artus,
dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo;
aure leves bacae, redimicula pectore pendent.
Cuncta decent nec nuda minus formosa videtur.
Conlocat hanc stratis concha Sidonide tinctis
appellatque tori sociam adclinataque colla
mollibus in plumis tamquam sensura reponit.
Festa dies Veneris tota celeberrima Cypro
venerat, et pandis inductae cornibus aurum
conciderant ictae nivea cervice iuvencae,
turaque fumabant, cum munere functus ad aras
constitit et timide: "Si, di, dare cuncta potestis,
sit coniunx, opto" (non ausus "eburnea virgo"
dicere Pygmalion) "similis mea" dixit "eburnae."
Sensit, ut ipsa suis aderat Venus aurea festis,
vota quid illa velint, et, amici numinis omen,

and he believes that his fingers are sinking into the members when they're being touched,
and he fears that a bruise may appear in the limbs where pressure is applied.
And one moment he employs flattery, the next moment he brings her gifts
that are beloved by girls: seashells and polished stones,
and little birds and flowers of a thousand colours,
and lilies and painted balls and, fallen from the trees,
the tears of the daughters of Helios. He also adorns her limbs with dresses,
he gives gemstones to her fingers, gives long necklaces to her throat;
light pearls hang from her ears, chaplets from her breast.
All this suits her – and yet naked she seems no less beautiful.
He places her on blankets that are dyed in purple from the city of Sidon,
and he addresses her as his bed companion, and he puts her reclining neck
on soft feather pillows as if she could sense them.
The festival day of Venus, the most celebrated in all of Cyprus,
had arrived, and the heifers – covered in gold at their curved horns –
had fallen down, struck on their snow-white necks,
and the smoke sacrifices were burning, when Pygmalion – after having performed his duty –
went up to the altar and said, shyly: "If you, gods, are able to grant anything,
then let my wife be, I pray" (he did not dare say
"the ivory girl") "exactly like the ivory one."
Golden Venus understood – as she was personally present at her own festivity –
what he wanted with those prayers, and – as a sign of the friendly deity –

flamma ter accensa est apicemque per aera duxit.
Ut rediit, simulacra suae petit ille puellae
incumbensque toro dedit oscula. Visa tepere est.
Admovet os iterum, manibus quoque pectora temptat:
Temptatum mollescit ebur positoque rigore
subsidit digitis ceditque, ut Hymettia sole
cera remollescit tractataque pollice multas
flectitur in facies ipsoque fit utilis usu.
Dum stupet et dubie gaudet fallique veretur,
rursus amans rursusque manu sua vota retractat.
Corpus erat: Saliunt temptatae pollice venae.
Tum vero Paphius plenissima concipit heros
verba, quibus Veneri grates agat, oraque tandem
ore suo non falsa premit dataque oscula virgo
sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina lumen
attollens pariter cum caelo vidit amantem.
Coniugio, quod fecit, adest dea. Iamque coactis
cornibus in plenum noviens lunaribus orbem
illa Paphon genuit, de qua tenet insula nomen.

the altar flame blazed up thrice and traced its tip through the air.
When he went back home, he sought out the replica of his girl
and, leaning over the bed, started kissing her. She seemed to become warm.
He moves his mouth to hers again, and with his hands he touches her breast:
The ivory softens under his touch and, with hardness put aside,
it buckles and yields to his fingers, just like beeswax from Mount Hymettus
becomes soft again when it is made pliable by the thumb, and into many
shapes it is bent, and it becomes usable by the act of being used.
While he is dumbstruck and hesitantly rejoices and fears that he is being deceived,
the lover touches the object of his desire over and over again with his hand.
It was a body: The veins were throbbing under the pressure of his thumb.
Then indeed, the hero from Paphos produced fulsome
words with which he offered his thanks to Venus, and finally with his own mouth
he kissed a mouth that was not forged, and the girl felt the kisses she was given,
and she blushed, and, raising her timid eyes towards his eyes,
she saw her lover at the same time with the sky.
At the wedding she's made possible, the goddess was present. And as soon as
the horns of the moon had been forced into a full circle nine times,
she gave birth to their daughter Paphos, from whom the island carries its name.