Introduction

In 1832, Mrs Jameson published a study of Shakespeare's female charac-
ters under the title *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical.*
The work went through seven editions in the nineteenth century,
changing its title in 1896 to the more accurate *Shakespeare's Heroines.* Her
original title, however, helpfully signals the universalising tendencies of
a study which derives exemplary, and implicitly prescriptive, readings
from Shakespeare's heroines. One of Jameson's most fascinating para-
digmatic moments occurs in her chapter on Hermione, whom Jameson
classifies as one of Shakespeare's 'Characters of the Affections'. She
writes thus of the moment when Hermione, who has been introduced as
a statue in this scene, descends from her pedestal to the sound of soft
music, and speechlessly throws herself into her husband's arms:

> It appears to me that her silence during the whole of this scene (except where
> she invokes a blessing on her daughter's head) is in the finest taste as a poetical
> beauty, besides being an admirable trait of character. The misfortune of
> Hermione, her long religious seclusion, the wonderful and almost supernatural
> part she has just enacted, have invested her with such an awful and sacred
> charm that any words put into her mouth must, I think, have injured the
> solemn and profound pathos of the situation.[1]

This event, she writes, is one of 'inexpressible interest'. It was a moment
which was compellingly re-enacted throughout the nineteenth century,
in new editions of Jameson, in performances of *The Winter's Tale* (where
it functioned not only as a moment of psychological, but also of spec-
tacular, interest), in domestic *tableaux vivants*, and in George Eliot's
fictional adaptation in *Daniel Deronda* (1876).
    The interest lies principally perhaps in Jameson's account of Her-
mione's return to human being as a complex and contradictory dra-
matic moment, not least because 'the feelings of the spectators become
entangled between the conviction of death and the impression of life, the

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idea of a deception and the feeling of a reality' (vol. II, p. 20). Jameson
goes on to suggest, however, that the audience's difficulty lies, not in the
incredible nature of the realised event, the 'wonderful and almost
supernatural' action of Hermione's coming to life, but rather in the
inherent difficulty of reconciling the implications of Hermione's living
state, most notably her potential for speech, with her essential character,
which has been most amply fulfilled by her statue-state: the attribute
which is singled out as 'an admirable trait of character', Hermione's
silence, is one which seems necessarily to qualify the achievement of her
return to life.

Jameson's narrative signals the contradictions inherent in the ubiqui-
tous metaphors of sculpture and statuary which were applied to nine-
teenth-century women. Specifically, she implies that the statue-state,
Hermione's manifestation as a 'sacred and awful' icon, is in fact the
character's most appropriate conclusion, and one which is irretrievably
compromised by a return to life. Jameson wonders whether we could

fancy this high-souled woman – left childless through the injury which has been
inflicted on her, widowed in heart by the unworthiness of him she loved, a
spectacle of grief to all, to her husband a continual reproach and humiliation –
walking through the parade of royalty in the court which had witnessed her
anguish, her shame, her degradation, and her despair? Me thinks that the want
of feeling, nature, delicacy, and consistency would lie in such an exhibition as
this. (vol. II, pp. 17–18)

Hermione acts best then, and is granted most authorial approval, when
she elects to adopt the dignity and silence of death, so closely allied to
and commemorated by statuary, as her resource following Leontes'
rejection. It is notable that Jameson describes as 'that most beautiful
scene', not Hermione's 'coming to life', but her being 'discovered to her
husband as the statue or image of herself' (vol. II, p. 18). Hermione is
thus most exemplary as a Shakespearean woman, her moral character-
istics most evident and best fulfilled, when she is not living, but assuming
the guise of a marble icon. It is in this state that Hermione comes closest
to, through literally embodying, the 'abstract notions of power, beauty,
love, joy' which '[haunt] our minds and [illuminate] the realities of life',
and which Jameson held were made peculiarly manifest in sculpture.[2]
For Hermione then, her physical descent from the pedestal, her return
to life, is a compromising act.

It is essential to note that this disruption is necessitated and confirmed
through the imperatives of maternity. With her son dead, and her

daughter believed to be so, Hermione had in some measure been free to be taken for dead herself. However, when Perdita returns to Leontes' court, Hermione can no longer remain hidden, but is 'brought to life'. She breaks her silence only to bless her daughter. The physical and temporal dimensions implicit in the narrative of maternity conspire to disrupt Hermione's adoption of, and others' consigning her to, the idealised state of marble and/or death. Motherhood, itself later to be idealised within Victorian culture, acts here as a troubling element which actively disrupts Hermione's status as an icon of 'immutable truth and beauty' (vol. II, p. 23). The appropriateness of the statue-metaphor for the figure of the woman deprived of maternity was recognised earlier by Henry Siddons, who in his *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1822) observes of depictions of Niobe that:

It appears to me that fixity, or want of motion, is a quality which the aspect of a *rock* impresses more easily on thought than the idea of *silence* – and that a grief, deep and full, such as a mother so cruelly robbed of her children ought to be represented, should in fact be motionless: she is totally plunged in the representation of her afflicting fate; and as the soul fixes (as we may say) with a haggard eye on this solitary idea, the whole body [...] preserves also a fixed and single attitude.[3]

Motherhood, by comparison, necessitates speech, relationship, a recognition of the temporal, finite implications of the female body which are glossed into a semantics of atemporal virtues by the conventions of Classical statuary which the maligned Hermione adopts.[4]

Hermione's descent from her pedestal then represents an uneasy conjunction of forces: it idealises the persistence of her reification whilst purporting to witness her return to 'life'. In this moment, we can, I think, begin to understand something of the dimensions and implications both of the use of Victorian statuary's celebration of the female form, and of writers' application of the sculptural metaphor. For Hermione and for the Victorians, sculpture is a way of achieving, rather than simply commemorating, the association of timeless ideals with women. The timelessness, the material persistence of sculpture, particularly in its apparently time-defying Classical mode, absorbs the contradictions between eternal ideals and temporal female forms, whilst absorbing also the life and autonomy of the female model or celebrated woman. Jameson reveals the attractiveness of the statue-state for women, the exaltation generated by that form, and the benefits of reverence and respect that may accrue to it. She is also, however, aware

of the uneasiness of the art–life relationship actually 'embodied' in the statue, and of the hampering implications for women of a too-ready identification with the marble-form. In particular, Jameson highlights the way in which speech, the access to, and necessity for, language, is denied in the identification between woman and the idealised marble, thus denying also the possibility of articulating independent subjectivity.

Implicit in her study of dramatic characters, inspired as Jameson's introduction tells us by conversations with the actress Fanny Kemble, is the extent to which the public appearances of actresses are almost ineluctably vulnerable to definition by means of sculptural reference. Valerie Traub has argued that *The Winter's Tale*, along with *Hamlet* and *Othello*, are plays which 'give women speech only to silence them [...] make women move only to still them', that, indeed, 'the plays enact the process of female objectification as the dramatic process'.[5] Traub argues persuasively that fear for their own subject-status also leads the plays' heroes variously to 'monumentalize'[6] their partners. In Hermione's case, she is turned into a statue. However, questions of agency are of course elided in this formulation, as are the complications of desire in Traub's assertion that 'monumentalizing [...] is the strategy by which female erotic energy is disciplined and denied' (p. 28). In the work which follows, I will rather be concerned to argue that, on the Victorian stage at least, it was precisely the 'statuesque' actress who was a highly charged icon of sexual desirability, whose own 'erotic energy' was variously camouflaged, denied, even facilitated by her access to the theatrical rhetoric of statuary. However, if the actress was to achieve recognition for other forms of energy, for instance, creative, interpretative, transformative, or professional, then that rhetoric had to be abandoned.

In *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*, I examine some of the various manifestations of the sculptural metaphor on the English stage, and in writings about it, concentrating on the second half of the nineteenth century. I will argue that much of the professional and personal history of the Victorian actress is defined by her negotiation with the imposition upon her of the contractual dimensions inherent in the sculpture metaphor; and that this metaphor is essentially authorised, and its dimensions determined, by the popular Ovidian myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. However, as my first chapter shows, actresses were not alone in being subject to Pygmalion-like attentions; they were simply the most public Galateas in a century which, as we will see, readily adopted the authority of the sculptor-king for its own ends.

The history of the association of statuary and the stage is a substantial one, based for a late-Western culture on its conceptualisation of its Classical inheritance. As Richard Jenkyns notes, quoting Schlegel, the legacies of sculpture and drama were closely linked. Schlegel suggested that, 'It is only before the groups of Niobe or Laocoön that we first enter in the spirit [...] of Sophocles.'[7] Much valuable work has been done in recent years on the relationship between the Victorian stage and painting, a conjunction which has been described by Michael Booth as both 'intimate and meaningful'.[8] In my own work I would like more fully to reinstate the sculptural as a similarly vital part of the spectacular Victorian stage, one which has its own distinctive cultural connotations and history, and its own specifically gendered ramifications which are not wholly absorbed by the pictorial aesthetic. As such, this work supplements that of Booth and Martin Meisel,[9] drawing implicitly on both, and on their underlying premise that the theatre is profoundly determined by its broader cultural setting: 'it is unlikely that [the Victorians'] standards of theatrical taste were formed only in the theatre' (Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, p. 3). I will, however, be arguing for a discrete genesis for the theatrical realisation of statuary. It has a different history from the on-stage tableau, though it may act as part of that tableau. It is a vital part of the contemporary spectacular stage, but its roots lie in a specifically Classical inheritance, in the practice of defining women by means of statuary, and in the later entertainments of wax-works and other popular shows which deliberately imitated sculpture.

As well as offering a new way of writing the history of Victorian actresses then, the work which follows also suggests that the Victorian interest in statuary, both contemporary and Classical, should be re-garded as a significant determining factor within a predominantly visual theatrical aesthetic. The links between stage and sculpture are cemented in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in acting manuals and in a range of Classical motifs on the popular English stage, a brief account of which is given before I turn to examine the peculiarly Victorian appropriation of the statuesque actress. As will become clear, the specific type of statuary which is consistently invoked is that from the Greek Classical Era and the Hellenistic period, and their Roman copies. I am not, however, specifically concerned with the history of Classical drama on the Victorian stage, but rather with how the connotations of a Victorian–Classical aesthetic are manifested in what I shall come to term the 'Galatea-aesthetic'; how this informs the work of the actress; and further how the concomitant assumptions of Pygmalion infiltrate

the legitimate English theatre and its conventions.[10] As will become apparent, it is in part through these conventions that the legitimate stage achieves its definition in opposition to both the French and the popular English theatres. It is no coincidence that it was in the 1880s that the neo-Classical influence was at its most prominent on the legitimate stage, and that it was also during this decade that the theatre was perceived as being most 'respectable'.

As well as looking at specific productions, I will be considering how the Galatea-aesthetic infiltrates reviewing practices and determines audience reactions, and how fictional depictions of the actress, in particular those of George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), narrativise the recourse to sculpture, and accommodate the reference to a further, plastic art-form. In my account of *Daniel Deronda*, I will also be concerned to set out the extent to which, as Jameson implies, the manipulation of language necessarily acts to disrupt the fixity, the time-bound restrictions, of the statue. In her assessment of how entrapment within the physical and sculptural is necessarily shattered by the imperatives of language and narrative, Eliot envisages a crucial qualification of sculpture's lapidary powers. The way in which the intervention of language necessarily reshapes the sculptural metaphor emerges again in my final chapter and conclusion, which consider how the Galatea-aesthetic stands up to the challenges of the 'new' drama of the 1890s: specifically how it deals with that drama's enabling actresses to achieve a more intellectual, interpretative engagement with the textuality of plays; and how it comes to be challenged by actresses' employment of a variety of forms of autobiography. Autobiographical activity became a primary form of resistance to the popular and readily available narrative of Pygmalion and Galatea for such late-Victorian actresses as Eleanora Duse, Elizabeth Robins, and particularly for Ellen Terry. The latter's personal and professional encounters with the dimensions of sculpture and the sculptor pervaded her life, stretching from her first professional appearance in *A Winter's Tale* in 1856, to the complicated publication history of her autobiography in 1908, and its revised version in 1933. Ellen Terry's story forms a narrative thread throughout this book, and makes clear the ways in which the Pygmalion and Galatea myth operated both practically and metaphorically to shape and define women's theatrical lives.

In his *Italian Journey*, Goethe uses the Pygmalion and Galatea narrative to describe his first experience of Rome:

Wherever I walk, I come upon familiar objects in an unfamiliar world; every-
thing is just as I imagined it, yet everything is new. It is the same with my
observations and ideas. I have not had a single idea which was entirely new or
surprising, but my old ideas have become so much more firm, vital and
coherent that they could be called new.

When Pygmalion's Galatea, whom he had fashioned exactly after his
dreams, endowing her with as much reality and existence as an artist can,
finally came up to him and said: 'Here I am', how different was the living
woman from the sculptured stone.[11]

Goethe's use of the Pygmalion narrative engagingly captures the won-
der of the Ovidian story, and, uniquely, places the male figure as one
transformed beyond all possibility, in this case by the marvel of Rome.
As we will see in the work which follows, however, for the later Victor-
ians there was not such a tangible difference between the sculptured
stone and the living woman as Goethe suggests.

CHAPTER I

Victorian Pygmalions

From its start, the nineteenth century in Britain was imbued with new
possibilities for the proliferation of sculpturally informed aesthetic
judgements and criteria, for it was then that Britain, France and Amer-
ica imported into their museums what were to become the best-known
examples of Classical sculpture, statues which '[entered] deeply into the
visual consciousness of educated Europe', which 'were used as touch-
stone[s] by artists, art lovers, collectors and theorists alike for the
gauging of taste and quality'.[1] However, as we will see, the statues also
came to form and inform ideological notions of femininity, and specifi-
cally the extent to which femininity might be contained by an extension
of the viewing practices applied to newly available Classical statues.
Amongst these statues were the Elgin Marbles (first exhibited in London
in 1817); the Apollo Belvedere and the Spinario (exhibited in Paris in
1798 and 1800 respectively, and then both returned to Rome and
re-exhibited there in 1816); and the Praxitelean Hermes (discovered at
Olympia in 1877, and exhibited in cast-form in the British Museum
shortly afterwards). But two of the most popular sculptures were the
Venus de' Medici and the Venus de Milo. The former was well known
to travellers in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards, but was
not seen outside Italy, except in the form of casts until, like the Apollo
Belvedere and the Spinario, it was forcibly removed from Rome by
French troops and exhibited in Paris. It too was subsequently repat-
riated. The Venus de Milo was a genuine nineteenth-century find.
Excavated by a peasant on the Aegean island of Melos in 1820, it was
shown in Paris in 1821, and was a timely replacement for the Venus de'
Medici.

Both statues achieved tremendous exposure and popularity.
Nathaniel Hawthorne, though personally undecided in his evaluation of
the Venus de' Medici, nonetheless acknowledged that for his time she
was 'one of those lights that shine along a man's pathway'.[2] Her French

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provenance notwithstanding, the Venus de Milo was prominently ex-
hibited in the Greek Court of the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1862,
where she was idealised by an admiring Samuel Phillips, author of the
exhibition guide, as affording 'perhaps the most perfect combination of
grandeur and beauty in the female form'.[3] A cast of the Venus de Milo
was installed in the British Museum for the express purpose of helping to
train artists. The young American sculptor Harriet Hosmer copied the
Museum's Venus as she passed through London *en route* to work in the
Rome studio of the English sculptor John Gibson.[4] In March 1886, the
permission of the Museum's trustees was sought to add a cast of the
Venus de' Medici, to help overcrowding around the Venus de Milo and
Praxitelean Hermes. The figure of the Venus de' Medici was, after all,
according to the Museum's Officers' reports, 'one of those which the
[Royal] Academy accepts as a test of the drawing of the candidate for
admission'.[5] The legacy of such a Classical training is most evident in
the popular art of G. F. Watts, Edward Poynter, Lawrence Alma-
Tadema, Albert Moore, Frederic Leighton, and Edward Burne-Jones,
the 'Olympian Dreamers'[6] whose works dominated the Royal Academy
in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The cultural prominence of the two figures of Venus is indisputable.
Less clear, however, is the nature of the response and popularity
accorded them and other versions of the Roman goddess of love. They
infiltrated the realm of popular culture in the form of anatomically
specific waxworks, the female versions of which were known as Venuses
(the rare male model was called Adonis). First shown in London in 1825,
an early advertisement claimed that, 'The exterior of the Model repre-
sents a Female Figure formed from the Venus de Medicis, the interior
exemplifies on dissection the various functions of the Human Body, and
displays to perfection the order and beauty that prevails throughout the
works of the CREATOR.'[7] Such exemplary motives are called into
question, however, by the evidence of separate male and female viewing
periods, and the descent of later exhibitions into what Richard Altick
terms more explicitly 'necro-erotic' spectacle (p. 339). The practice of
establishing separate viewing days for women was also observed at an
exhibition in New York of casts from the Louvre, where fig leaves were
tied on to the statues. In 1818 railings were erected around two casts of
Venus which had been 'disfigured'.[8] Similar instances of gender segre-
gation and the indecent treatment of casts were noted by Frances
Trollope when visiting the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in
Philadelphia (Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, pp. 90–1). For

east-coast Americans the minimally-draped statues smacked all too
publicly and uncomfortably of unbridled sexuality, and prompted care-
fully controlled viewing, which of course ensured mutual ignorance of
the opposite sex's reactions. By contrast, in 1840, John Ruskin wrote
from Italy that the Venus de' Medici, 'usually in her casts a foolish little
schoolgirl, is one of the purest and most elevated incarnations of woman
conceivable',[9] terms scarcely consistent either with Venus' status in
Classical literature, or apparently with the American reaction.

Particularly striking in both the American visitors' and Ruskin's
responses is the way in which they curtail Venus' narrative possibilities,
her status as a character of multiple legends; and how both her Classical
status and her antiquity are telescoped in a moment of gazing made
relevant to, and determined by, the viewer. In an admonitory, even
perhaps punitive, process the mischievous powers of Venus are counter-
ed and her objectification achieved in the present gaze of her viewer.
Devoid of the full implications of her Classical status, the Venus be-
comes more easily assimilable to a nineteenth-century context. The
purity, even blankness, of the marble state (quite unlike Classical statues'
often highly coloured forms) seems peculiarly to authorise the play of the
viewer's imaginative or ideological predilections. Her timelessness, con-
firmed by a passing apprehension of her antiquity, and modern ignor-
ance about the person of the sculptor, paradoxically facilitate a histori-
cally determined response. The viewer, not the sculptor, is encouraged
to believe that he or she controls signification and meaning, the viewer
in some measure becoming responsible for, even generating, the statue's
meaning. This responsibility is taken to extremes in 'Taken On Trust'
(plate 1) where not only the connotations, but also the actual form of the
Classical statue are reworked for an ignorant late-Victorian's conveni-
ence in a *Punch* cartoon which seems to demand both amusement and
the complicity of its viewer.

The polarities expressed in the American museum visitors' and Rus-
kin's responses to sculptures of Venus came to be absorbed by those
figures themselves. Venus is rendered simultaneously sexually available
(although not, as in her literary guise, sexually active) and angelically
idealised.[10] Of Frederic Leighton's imposing nude, *Venus Disrobing*, ex-
hibited at the Royal Academy in 1867, the *Athenaeum* protested that
'Nakedness is not the leading characteristic of the figure', and the *Art
Journal* described her as 'eminently chaste' in spite of her lack of drapery,
her actions, and her history (quoted in Wood, *Olympian Dreamers*, p. 48).
The naked, or only partially draped, Classical body becomes a signifier