



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Galatea Emerging: Self-Metamorphosis through Bodily
Transgression in Alasdair Gray's Poor Things and Madeline
Miller's Galatea

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 844

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sarah Heinz

Acknowledgements

Once upon a time, there were words – all over the page. They set out on a journey to get to know each other, for together they had something to say. And what a journey it's been.

Dear Univ.-Prof. Dr. Heinz,

Thank you for making this possible.

When I was looking for a supervisor, I approached you because I wanted to learn as much as possible in the process of writing my thesis. Now that I have written it, there are even more questions I can ask. Thank you. I am grateful for your guidance, for your invaluable feedback, and for your time. Thank you for teaching not only me but Marcus as well in what will always be his first course at university.

Marion

Dear family,

Thank you for your understanding, your support, and the time you have given me to work on my thesis. Thank you for reinterpreting my words when they did not come out quite right at times. Thank you for encouraging me to always look for the right ones.

Marion

Dear friends,

Without your support, your help and understanding, I would never have had the time to write. Thank you for listening, thank you for saying no when this paper needed a yes.

Marion

Dear Marcus,

You have as of yet no idea what I am doing, sitting in front of this glowing screen, stamping black marks on a white page, when those keys are so far more interesting than what they can write. Thank you for not deleting any of the passages I have written and for sleeping just that tiny bit longer once in a while, so that I could get a word in edgewise on that page. Thank you for all that you learn and all that you become, every single day.

Marion (Mum)

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1. Introduction - Speaking Skin

This examination centres on the audacity of a speaking female skin and her transformed body that reclaims its own narrative agency. I consider Madeline Miller's 2022 short story *Galatea* and *Poor Things* by Alasdair Gray, published in 1992, as rewritings of the "Pygmalion" myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Miller's and Gray's works reconceptualise the female body as transgressive, self-constituting and agentic. Female self-determination is increasingly challenged and threatened, which is why agency emerging from the women's bodies must be inscribed and expressed on their skin as a form of resistance through self-articulation and as a means of asserting their own authorship.

The abovementioned works of fiction are only two examples of many reworkings building on the *Metamorphoses* and the "Pygmalion" myth in particular. Maurice attributes the reason for the extensive scope of rewritings concerned with classical antiquity to the period's far-reaching and lasting allure (1), and states that ancient history constitutes a commonly emulated paragon (300). Both Miller's short story and Gray's novel, though, do not indulge in a veneration of the past. Instead, they use it as a point of departure, to invite the reader to rethink the perspective on female passivity presented in the source myth.

My thesis is that in both texts the two female creations, Miller's Galatea and Gray's Bella respectively, undergo a process of active self-metamorphosis. The bodily assemblage created through this self-directed transformation is characterised by its emerging agency. This enables Galatea and Bella to deconstruct the creator-creation binary and to subvert a deterministic existence preordained by their respective creator figures. They achieve these transmutations through acts of bodily transgression. In the process, the agency emerging from the bodily assemblage enables the women to write and rewrite their skin. Forming part of this assemblage itself, skin transforms from a concealing hide to a marked, expressive, and speaking page.

Hence, this analysis discusses the following questions, which trace the transformative processes the women undergo.

1. Which instances of bodily transgression enable an active self-metamorphosis, departing from an initial state of inertia and passivity imposed by the male creator figures?

2. How does the emerging agency of the bodily assemblage created through self-metamorphosis subvert the creator-creation binary and the female characters' preordained deterministic existence?
3. What does the change in the female characters' skin from a concealing hide to a marked, expressive and speaking page signify?

To discuss these matters, I approach the female body via Butler's notion of reiterative embodied subjectivity while combining Bennett's discussion of assemblages in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, which builds on Deleuze and Guattari's work, with Benthien's research on skin. This theoretical framework allows me to trace the formative progress of transformation that Galatea and Bella undergo.

I argue that both Galatea and Bella are initially confined to a state of inertia, which reflects the creators' perception of their creations as embodying an absolute and ultimate ideal. This stage gives rise to the conceptualisation of the female skin as hide, concealing or genuinely hiding the inside, showing only the female body as it was meant to appear in the creators' eyes, a passive, unchangeable, finished masterpiece of their making, an immutable epitome of their artistry. This comes close to Benthien's designation of female skin as an inevitably "concealing veil" (86). She observes that this is a prerequisite for maintaining "the myth of her being other", the skin encasing that which must not be shown on the outside (86). Benthien goes so far as to postulate that "[l]iving requires that we cling to the surface (of femaleness) [...]" (92), which is also corroborated by Williams and Bendelow, who observe that women being "[...] conceptualised as 'other'" permeates linguistic realities and has been widely contended (114). How, then, is it possible to depart from the inertia and finality of this male creationism? This first requires a conceptualisation of the body, according to Butler, as performative and discursively created. She states that "[...] what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (Butler, *Discursive Limits of "Sex"* 2). Therefore, "[...] performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, *Discursive Limits of "Sex"* 2). I maintain that transformation is required for a performing body to depart from externally imposed stasis, however, not in the Ovidian

sense of it being enacted upon the body, but as an active, self-determined process that enables the creation of a bodily assemblage.

Consequently, drawing on the uniting and overarching principle in Ovid's most extensive work (Williams 6), metamorphosis remains the essential foundation for the formation of a bodily assemblage, but with the crucial caveat that this transformation needs to be self-directed. Both Galatea and Bella, through acts of bodily transgression, are able to undergo a process of self-metamorphosis, enabling the creation of a bodily assemblage that exhibits its own emerging agency. Bennett defines assemblages as "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements" and characterises them as "living, throbbing confederations" (23). She stresses the ephemeral nature of assemblages as well as their constant fluidity (Bennett 24). Chiefly, Bennett asserts that assemblages do not follow one ruling component which determines its characteristics and directionality (Bennett 24). Instead, "[t]he effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone" (Bennett 24). Emergence, as defined by Bedau and Humphreys, is characterised by "[...] irreducibility, unpredictability, conceptual novelty, ontological novelty, and supervenience" (3), which again highlights the assemblage's agentive potential. Summarising this, Bennett talks of "an agency of the assemblage" (Bennett 24; original emphasis), which is not directly determined by any of its extant parts, nor their sum, and cannot be predicted.

The agency of the bodily assemblage allows both Galatea and Bella to write and rewrite their skin and to subvert and move beyond the deterministic existence their creator figures have inscribed in their very being. The two rewritings by Miller and Gray, respectively, exemplify the women's step from the passivity of metamorphosis, to which a body is subjected, to a creative and active process of transformation. The female main characters' developmental trajectory shows the inherent necessity of self-metamorphosis in the creation of a bodily assemblage. Their skin, as part of the bodily assemblage that emerges, is itself permeable, fluid, responsive, and continuously changing. It becomes a marked, speaking and expressive page. Benthien not only positions the skin as a surface of interaction (1) but as immanently meaningful and adapting, as it is "[...] constantly interpreted, read, invested with or emptied of semantic

meaning, recoded, neutralized, and stylized” (11). The process of writing and rewriting the skin, as I understand it, does not merely involve marking the body but constitutes a reflexive and performative negotiation of its meaning, where agency rests in how the skin is interpreted, situated, and made to signify within social surroundings. Through this process, the skin is enabled to speak, articulating meaning that emerges from the agentic assemblage. To foreground how Miller’s and Gray’s female figures enact transformation in contrast to the source myth’s creational stasis, it is necessary to return to the Ovidian original in order to establish the narrative and conceptual framework from which these texts depart.

To position the two rewritings according to the source myth, the latter needs to be reviewed within the larger context of Ovid’s poem. The *Metamorphoses* can be described as a work concerned with, reflective of and performing its eponymous title. Described as “one of the cornerstones of Western culture” (Brown 1) and as “one of the dominant roots of the literature of transformation in Western art” (Asker 2), the influence of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* needs no further elaboration. Brown even talks of “Ovidianism” (7) when describing the author’s, and in particular the *Metamorphoses*’, impact on later literary texts. As noted above, the common and overarching motif, the unifying factor of the individual tales, appears to be the process of metamorphosis itself, though it occurs for different reasons. It can be a “[...] reward; for many, a punishment; for others, a means of escape from one mode of existence into another; and for a few, a form of commemoration” (Williams 2). According to Williams, summarising the *Metamorphoses* proves an impossible task as the absence of a clear structure is indicative of the entire work and the sequence of stories presented shows an element of randomness (2). Brown not only echoes this lack of structure but also positions the process of metamorphosis at the metalevel of Ovid’s work. She states that “[t]he poem’s title connotes more than mere physical transformation. The *Metamorphoses* itself is metamorphic, slipping out of one genre or mood into another, eluding the reader [...]” as “[...] it embraces a range of modes, including elegy, panegyric, history and philosophy” (Brown 2). Resisting a unified structure, Ovid’s poem establishes metamorphosis as a wide-ranging process, creating a conceptual field in which transformation can take radically different forms.

Therefore, before narrowing the focus to the “Pygmalion” myth, a general definition of metamorphosis needs to be reified to serve as a framework for the subsequent discussion. According to Solodow, trying to define metamorphosis when connecting the concept to Ovid’s poem raises two issues. Firstly, the transformative process is often relegated to a brief mention in an individual story only, and secondly, metamorphoses are extremely versatile, both in reason and result (174). In his view, the definition of metamorphosis in Ovid comes closest to the meaning of “outcome” (174). He goes on to complement the conception of the transformative processes presented in the *Metamorphoses* with the aspect of “clarification” (174), describing Ovidian metamorphosis as “[...] a change which preserves, an alteration which maintains identity, a change of form by which content becomes represented in form” (174). While Asker considers metamorphosis rather generally as bodily transformation and, going beyond the human perspective, as a process that suspends the biological separation between species (17), Bruguère et al. arrive at a definition proceeding from the word’s etymological basis. “Metamorphosis (from the Greek morphe, ‘form’, ‘structure’) indicates a change of shape, leading to a loss of the initial form, which is replaced by a new one” (114). They describe a transformative process as proceeding from and leaving behind the original shape (Bruguère et al. 114). Building on these explications and Bennett’s view of the assemblage, I will broadly define metamorphosis as the emergence of a new and composite form, constituted through the reshaping of a prior embodied subject. This would still fit Williams’ observation that metamorphosis in Ovid is not only non-recurrent and unique but also final (2). However, I clearly differentiate self-metamorphosis from Ovidian transformative processes, which in the *Metamorphoses* are imposed on characters and are permanently concluded. In Chapter 2.1., I move towards a definition of self-metamorphosis, which I conceptualise as an active, open-ended process grounded in the body’s own transformative capacities through which the subject is continuously rearticulated. Through these characteristics, self-metamorphosis facilitates the formation of the bodily assemblage.

Proceeding to the “Pygmalion” myth itself, its content has been subject to markedly divergent readings. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with a statue he has crafted, who, though not named in the myth, is later referred to as Galatea

(Mayor 108). Venus brings the statue to life, allowing Pygmalion to marry her. Mayor, for instance, arrives at an interpretation that looks at the myth with an eye to the present day, advancing that “[a]lthough the Pygmalion myth is often presented in modern times as a romantic love story, the tale is an unsettling description of one of the first female android sex partners in Western history” (107). McKinley, by comparison, alludes to “a certain fairytale charm” when viewing the myth as a romantic narrative (31), while Curran focuses on patriarchal intentions, stating that “[t]he Pygmalion [sic] can fairly be read as an enactment of the male fantasy of possessing a wife who is so docile and complaisant that she might as well be his own creation [...]” (213). Readings and re-readings of the myth, including its dramatic, cinematic and literary adaptations and interpretations, vary widely, as is also the case in the two contemporary rewritings this thesis focuses on.

Poor Things by Alasdair Gray has often been read as a retelling of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and has not been immediately associated with the “Pygmalion” myth. Fiorato, by way of example, asserts that “[...] *Poor Things* can be considered as a re-writing or a parallel version of the Frankenstein story [...]” (283), a view which is corroborated by Genca (69). Hedenborg-White and Sandhoff describe the novel as “a modern recasting of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” (xi). Similarly, Diaz (118) and Glendening (80) highlight the influence *Frankenstein* has had on Gray’s *Poor Things*, while March, more specifically, talks of the novel “[e]nacting a gender-play on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” (38). Tweed (141), Vandermeer (407) and Vardoulakis (138), amongst others, equally identify the distinct presence of Shelley’s novel in *Poor Things*. Set in Victorian Scotland, the novel describes the creation of Bella Baxter, who is made by implanting the brain of the unborn daughter into the mother’s body. Though preceding this process, she is known as Victoria Blessington and calls herself by that name in her concluding letter, considering the focus on her bodily creation and for the sake of clarity, I refer to her as Bella throughout. Gray’s work traces her development, including the relationship to her creator, Godwin ‘God’ Baxter. Hence, it does tell of a (female) creation, whose physicality is constituted of parts of different bodies and focuses on the act of creation by the hands of a prominent creator figure. Nevertheless, the novel itself acknowledges the influence of rewritings of Ovid’s “Pygmalion” (Gray 273). Building on an understanding of *Poor Things* as, following Díaz Martínez, “[...] a deep meditation upon

sexual morality and upon notions of femininity” (118), I would contend that viewing Gray’s work as a rewriting of the Ovidian myth adds a novel and revealing perspective when considering Bella’s relationship to her creator and her progress.

Madeline Miller’s *Galatea* is the second rewriting of the “Pygmalion” myth that this analysis is concerned with. Though a short story, it was published as a stand-alone book and situates the plot in the realm of mythological Greek antiquity. In Ovid’s “Pygmalion”, the female creation remains unnamed, let alone is given a voice, which Miller mentions as indicative of Galatea’s original position (Miller 54). For Miller, it shows the creation’s station quite clearly in that “[s]he is meant to be a compliant object of desire and nothing more” (54). In her own words, “*Galatea* was a response, almost solely, to Ovid’s version of the Pygmalion myth in the *Metamorphoses*” (Miller 51) given that the author found herself “[...] disturbed by the deeply misogynist implications of the story” (Miller 53). In her rewriting, Miller has Galatea narrate her story, as the sculpture-come-to-life moves from serving as a creation to manipulation and control over herself, her body, and her creator. The main and salient alteration regarding the plot is that Miller continues Galatea’s story beyond that of her creator’s denouement. It does not end with marriage and childbirth. Instead, Galatea concludes the story, her story, on her own terms, changing its signification entirely, especially when considering the source myth’s contextualisation.

Upon reviewing both the Ovidian “Pygmalion” and the abovementioned rewritings, two central aspects emerge. First, returning to the myth as described in Ovid’s work, I argue that it needs to be embedded in its intra-textual context to arrive at a more comprehensive picture regarding both the creators’ view of their creations as well as the Galatea figures’ developing agency. This primarily relates to the narrative preceding the “Pygmalion” myth, which tells of the Propoetides and their metamorphosis as a punishment meted out by the goddess Venus for their lack of worship and reverence. They become the first prostitutes and are, eventually, turned to stone. Their behaviour is what appears to prompt Pygmalion’s actions and wish for a virtuous, and virginal, woman of his own creation and has to be considered with regard to Galatea’s and Bella’s acts of bodily transgression in the respective rewritings. The second aspect that has become evident upon revisiting the source myth and its current adaptations relates to the

methodology I employ in order to pursue the abovementioned objectives. I will adopt a poststructuralist perspective to deconstruct the creator-creation binary questioned in the emergence of assemblages through self-metamorphosis. According to Barbara Johnson a deconstructivist reading is defined as follows.

[...] [I]t is a careful teasing out of the conflicting forces of signification that are at work within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. This implies that a text signifies in more than one way, that it can signify something more, something less, or something other than it claims to, or that it signifies to different degrees of explicitness, effectiveness, or coherence. (347-8)

Through the theoretical lens outlined above, I argue that the emerging agency of the self-created female bodily assemblage enables the subversion of the creator-creation binary and of a male-dominated deterministic existence. Galatea and Bella move from a point of stasis, as designated and reinforced by their respective male creator figures, towards a constantly transforming and re-creating assemblage. This is possible through processes of active self-metamorphosis that are predicated upon acts of bodily transgression. The bodily assemblage's emerging agency enables Galatea and Bella to write and rewrite their skin, which signifies their transformation in that it changes from a concealing hide to a marked and expressive page. This analysis stresses the current relevance of self-metamorphic processes in the composition of the female bodily assemblage. This comes at a time when women are again increasingly deprived of the control over their bodily integrity and development. The bodily assemblage restores and relocates agency in the female body. What tells of such authority, such authorship? Skin that dares to speak.

2. Embodying Metamorphosis

2.1. Departing from Ovid towards Self-metamorphosis

How should Ovid's foundational "poem of change" (Williams 1) be approached when considering it in terms of its rewritings? Despite the aforementioned absence of structuring principles, apart from the eponymous concept itself (Williams 2), metamorphosis nevertheless acts as a unifying motif. Building on this, I propose another such element, which is at the basis of both the Ovidian narratives and the rewritings in question. Crucially, the *Metamorphoses* must be approached via the body. In order to focus on Galatea's and Bella's transformative processes as causing the creation of an acting female bodily assemblage, the Ovidian conception of the body merits closer consideration before focusing on his representation of female characters and the female body in particular. Segal asserts that Ovid's work is "all about bodies" (39). According to him, it is the centrality of the body that accounts for its proximity to physical harm: "It is the pervasive corporeality of the *Metamorphoses* that keeps the threat of violence so close and so present. Where the body is so prominent, its pain or injury is always a possibility. A poem about bodies is almost inevitably also about violence to the body" (Segal 33). Enterline positions "violated bodies" at the core of Ovid's work and its current rewritings (1). She observes that "[f]ractured and fragmented bodies from Ovid's poem cast long, broken shadows over European literary history" (Enterline 1). Centrally, Enterline conceptualises the Ovidian body as suspended and arrested in its compositionality, "[f]ractured and fragmented" (1), unable to achieve and denied wholeness. The centrality of the body in the *Metamorphoses*, as the site through which transformation is enacted and rendered perceptible, becomes especially pronounced in the treatment of the female body, which must be considered both in its compositionality and in relation to the violence it experiences. When discussing the violated body, this includes the aspect of sexual violence and rape, primarily against female characters. Ovid's portrayal of women is alluded to by McKinley, who talks about "[...] Ovid's problematic status in terms of his representations of the feminine [...]" (xv). Curran appears to attempt a more balanced, though not entirely unproblematic, view of the matter, stating that respective passages "[...] may give the impression of extravagant, if elegant, sexism [...]" while Ovid appears to show "[...] a sympathy for women and an effort

to understand, as well as a man can, women's intellectual and emotional life [...]" (213). This reflection reproduces and reinforces gender dualisms and shows that passive femininity not only permeates the Ovidian original but also some of its analyses, sustaining hegemonic power dynamics. Newlands sees the recurring depictions of sexual violence in the *Metamorphoses* as "[...] perpetuating a male bias with respect to female sexuality [...]" and focuses on the possible response of the reader who might be "[...] dangerously enticed by the spectacle of violence into the morally dubious role of voyeur" (141). He clearly asserts the centrality of violence in the interpretation of Ovid's writing, summarising that "[...] the tension between aesthetics and violence should be seen as vital to the dynamic power of Ovid's poetry" (Newlands 177). In brief, considering the female body in the context of the *Metamorphoses*, requires both a look at its fragmentary constitution as well as the physical force it is exposed to.

Both of these characteristics of the female body as depicted in the *Metamorphoses* constitute central motifs in Ovid's "Pygmalion", particularly in the depiction of the creator and his work within the myth's narrative context. Wosk attributes the myth's widespread appeal to the depiction of the female creation's body, in that it constitutes the realisation of the male imagination to craft a perfect female facsimile (9-10).

The outlines of the Pygmalion myth – and the idea of a simulated woman who comes alive – would be echoed over the centuries ahead in cultural images revealing men's enduring fantasy about fabricating an ideal female – a beautiful creature he lovingly clothes and adorns, a woman who is pliant and compliant and answers all his needs, an artificial female that is a superior substitute for the real thing. (Wosk 9)

With regard to the violated female body, not only the "Pygmalion" myth itself but also the preceding narrative of the Propoetides must be considered, as briefly introduced above. Haynes contextualises the "Pygmalion" myth, by placing it within the larger framework of Orpheus' song and linking it directly to the story of the Propoetides, which provides a stark contrast to the ensuing narrative (181). Eck presents the following summary: "The Propoetides are female inhabitants of the island of Cypris who do not worship Venus and consequently are punished by the goddess [...]" (2). Ovid describes this punishment in detail.

Even so the obscene Propoetides had dared
Deny Venus' divinity. For that
The goddess' rage, it's said, made them the first
Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms.
As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard,
They turned with little change to stones of flint. (Ovid 232)

This transformative process, which constitutes a violation of the women's bodies, happens in two stages and appears to comprise two consecutive metamorphoses which culminate in the creation of unfeeling stone statues. The tale of the Propoetides, in particular the transmutation enacted upon their bodies, provides the backdrop for the subsequent "Pygmalion" myth and serves as a comparative framework when it comes to the sculptor and his creation. Haynes positions Pygmalion himself as the direct link between these narratives, noting that "[d]isgusted by their behaviour, even though they were forced, Pygmalion vows to remain unmarried, but then immediately crafts the ivory statue that becomes the object of his erotic fixation" (181). Pygmalion clearly emerges as the protagonist and focaliser of Ovid's narration, readers see the tale and his female creation through his eyes, including his thoughts and intentionality. Correspondingly, "[i]n Ovid's telling of the Pygmalion myth, we do not learn much about Galatea" (Singer 53). In short, "[...] she remains nameless and speechless. Apparently, she is to be seen as nothing else than Pygmalion's creature and a peripheral figure of the story" (Eck 4). The female creation very much appears to be the result of the creator's genius, is given life through his craft and Venus' divine intervention. All of this happens to her and is enacted upon her body. She is decidedly not depicted as an acting figure, but, despite being positioned in antithesis to the Propoetides, her body is equally subjected to physical harm.

Approaching the "Pygmalion" myth via the body, foregrounds both the violence perpetrated against the female creation via physical transgression as well as her composite made-ness. Both of these aspects are embodied in the material Pygmalion uses to carve his statue: ivory (Ovid 232). What does it imply if a whole body is fabricated from ivory? Given the *Metamorphoses'* historical context of publication, one might directly relate the usage of ivory to aesthetic perceptions, and the wish to mimic a live body as closely as possible, given that "[i]n antiquity, ivory figures were tinted with subtle, naturalistic colors [sic] to resemble real skin tones. Ancient audiences would have

imagined her as an exquisitely sensuous, flawless female form” (Mayor 107). Moving beyond the ornamental and embellishing aspect, the material’s properties hint at the aspect of malleability and conjure a vulnerable, soft body. Ovid himself, as his statue is in the process of awakening, likens her body to bees’ wax, imparting that it

[...] yield[s] to his [Pygmalion’s] hands, as in the sun
Wax [...] softens and is shaped
By practised fingers into many forms,
And usefulness acquires by being used. (Ovid 234)

This Eck takes up in her analysis, mentioning that “Ovid’s comparison of the softness of the ivory girl’s body to formable bees wax speaks for itself” (4). According to her, it is this precise passage that opens the door to both feminist readings of the tale as well as male-dominated views (Eck 4). Pygmalion’s fingers sink into his creation’s slowly transforming body (Ovid 233) and this very plasticity inscribes the susceptibility to violence into her corporeality. Galatea’s body is immediately exposed to and associated with violence inflicted by Pygmalion as “[t]he firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields, / And fears the limbs may darken with a bruise” (Ovid 233). The softness of the ivory statue might also be seen as contrasting sharply with the stone the Propoetides’ bodies are transformed into. Ivory appears pliant, mouldable, responsive, and, above all else, submissive to the touch of the creator, giving rise to a body that is at his mercy to be violated and can, according to Ovid, through its formative genesis, be “used” (Ovid 234). Its “usefulness” rests only in “being used” (Ovid 234). Passive.

Ivory is also the key to reading the compound structure of the body. As Enterline observes, “[f]antasies of fragmentation permeate Ovidian narrative [...]” (3). When considering its compositionality, she focuses on the same interplay noted by Newlands regarding the relation of “aesthetics and violence” (177), observing that “[...] the violated and fractured body is the place where, for Ovid, aesthetics and violence converge [...]” (Enterline 1). The reader knows about the assembled nature of Pygmalion’s creation precisely because he crafts it from ivory. Given that one carving is determined by the natural occurrence of the material itself, it is normally used for according pieces of much more modest measurements (Salzman-Mitchell, *A Whole out of Pieces* 295). Upon asking why Pygmalion would choose to work in ivory in the first place, Salzman-Mitchell refers to the associations this material provokes, as well as the process of crafting.

In contrast to marble, this warmer and softer material was since very early times a sign of luxury. Some of the fascination that ivory provokes has to do with its exotic origins [...]. Ivory is also a more erotic and warmer material than stone, and thus much more appropriate to 'cuddle' with. [...] Ivory statues, as we have seen, were also probably hard to handle with their inner structure of wood and metal, yet they were certainly lighter than a single block of stone. (Salzman-Mitchell, *A Whole out of Pieces* 297-8)

Hence, the statue is made up of parts and, crucially, parts made of a malleable material, but, as Salzman-Mitchell observes, most likely consisting of a different interior. Ivory conceals a less noble inside that must not show. Ovid describes the statue as being made of ivory, there is no mention of other materials being employed. The inside does not find representation. Considering the ramifications of this process, Williams observes of Pygmalion that “[i]n shaping this idealization of what he wants womanhood to be, he’s hardly interested in anything beyond her purely physical form. Nothing is said of his creation’s inner essence and her qualities of character or personality after she’s brought to life [...]” (107). Compositionality and susceptibility to physical harm thus appear to be inscribed in the compliant female body.

At this point, the differing portrayals of male and female characters in the *Metamorphoses*, and the corresponding implications, warrant brief examination. The treatment of the female body is in stark contrast to its male counterpart, which Segal distils to their degree of permeability: “If the female body in the *Metamorphoses* is characterized by its status as a visual object, its passivity, its appropriation by the male libidinal imagination, and its role as a vessel to be ‘filled’ by male seed to continue a heroic lineage, the ideal of the male body is impenetrability” (23). The female body is only acted upon. As Sharrock observes, despite the fact that Ovid very much stresses the “subjective experience” of women in the transformative process, “[...] these highly developed accounts of the moment of metamorphosis also enact the loss of voice, personality, identity, often movement, and capacity for deliberate action which the transformation entails” (44). Hence, the female body is relegated to passivity through its transformability and the process of transformation itself. The positioning of those transformed, in turn, raises the question of which agents or forces are responsible for instigating metamorphosis.

The initiation of transformation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* often surpasses the role of any single male figure and is instead attributed to divine intervention. Those commanding the metamorphic processes can, according to Barchiesi, frequently be found in the realm of the Greek pantheon, while the reasons for the gods' interference are mainly punitive in nature or constitute an attempt at fulfilling their sexual desires (16). Gallagher ascribes the mostly divine cause for metamorphosis to the fact that, in Greek mythology, mortal beings are subject to the Fates, which reduces the gods' scope of influence to metamorphic processes as a means to enact their will (46). As is the case in the "Pygmalion" myth, though, divine intervention is not only a way of meeting out punishment or pursuing self-serving goals, but can be desired and wished for.

Pygmalion, his offering given, prayed
Before the altar, half afraid, 'Vouchsafe,
O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride
Shall be' – he dared not say my ivory girl –
'The living likeness of my ivory girl.' (Ovid 233)

Irrespective of its reason, divinely occasioned metamorphosis appears to deprive those affected of control over their own transformation. They remain in a state of passivity, their bodies violated and at the mercy of the gods' intentions. Newlands considers the role violence plays in various of Ovid's narrations as a key to their understanding and interpretation, as this perspective offers, "[...] a way of talking about power-relations – between the sexes, between gods and humans [...]" (142). These hegemonic structures also determine the female creation's position in the "Pygmalion" myth. As Mayor provocatively asserts when considering her formation through both her human creator or sculptor and the goddess Venus' intervention, she is simply "Pygmalion's ivory sex doll" (112). The transformed person is refused agency by a superior power, be it the gods, a creator figure, or a combination of the two. To facilitate an active process of transformation, to enable self-metamorphosis, what is needed is transgression, a transgression of this imposed passivity. This, I argue, is possible through the creation's female body.

Corporeality, including its composite nature and violability, and the concept of metamorphosis hold the key to the creation's enabling agency. Popescu locates the very ability of transformation within a person's physicality, stating that "[...] metamorphoses

are possible because the bodies are fluid, or imbued with restless fluids whose dynamic is similar to that of human humours [...]” (90). Perpetual metamorphosis is inscribed in the body itself and finds realisation in its transformative potential. Segal focuses on corporeal alteration within the context of the *Metamorphoses* as well and characterises bodies accordingly as “[...] vulnerable, penetrable and porous” (10). He asserts that Ovid’s work “[...] exults in the body’s seemingly endless subjection to physical change [...]” (Segal 10) and stresses the impetus that disintegration provides: “By choosing metamorphosis as his theme, Ovid focuses on the moments when stable forms and familiar norms dissolve in order to tap creative, if necessarily disorderly, energies that are usually kept beneath the surface, under the control of political, social, and symbolic systems that insist on coherence and order” (Segal 12). Metamorphosis, in the context of Ovid’s work, remains a process occasioned and determined by an external force. Nevertheless, the Ovidian body appears to harbour the potential for its own transformation.

Approaching Ovid’s magnum opus via the concepts of metamorphosis and the body, both fragmented and violated, as unifying tropes in the poem in its entirety and central within the “Pygmalion” myth, offers a point of departure. While building on these aspects, I maintain, in contrast to the Ovidian view outlined above, that the transgressing female body holds the key to its own transformation by conceptualising self-metamorphic processes as perpetual, active, and originating from itself, not an external force. Drawing on Butler, I understand the self not as distinct from the body, but as a form of embodied subjectivity that is continuously constituted and transformed through bodily instances of performance. According to Butler, “[t]he practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production [...]” (*Discursive Limits of “Sex”* 231). Embodied subjectivity is produced through the “forcible reiteration” of discursive norms (Butler, *Discursive Limits of “Sex”* 1-2). Yet, as Butler asserts, this process of repetition is not wholly constitutive (*Discursive Limits of “Sex”* 231). It is precisely the logic of reiteration that enables self-metamorphosis through transgression.

That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the

force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (*Discursive Limits of "Sex"* 1-2)

Hence, I define self-metamorphosis as an active and non-finite process originating from the transforming subject in which embodied subjectivity is reconfigured through transgressive reiterations of normative practices. Accordingly, the following chapter turns to transgression in order to clarify the practices through which women's self-metamorphosis is enabled.

2.2. Bodily Transgression Enabling Self-directed Metamorphosis

To conceptualise the body's transgressive potential, I will discuss and define how this analysis makes use of the term transgression and how it builds on existing research in this area. This chapter develops a conceptual framework of transgression grounded in Judith Butler's account of performativity and "[...] agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power [...]" (*Discursive Limits of "Sex"* 15). Building on Butler's understanding of transgression as enabled through reiteration, I view it as a creative and productive process. At the same time, I depart from Butler by foregrounding the conscious and willed dimensions of transgressive acts and by thus conceptualising transgression as facilitating self-metamorphosis.

To begin with, transgression constitutes a central means of rendering visible norms, practices, and borders of the body and at the same time holds the potential for creatively reshaping them. Rumson and Bentham observe that assumptions as to which behaviour is approved of are often inconsistent and implicit, unless it is to pinpoint acts of transgression, in effect turning transgression into a key device of making tacit cultural norms explicit (1). Conversely, Sara and Littlefield see transgression as active and originating from a body, allowing for development instead of confining categorisation. They touch on several aspects that are part of the transgressive process.

Transgression means to go across or beyond accepted practices, laws or conventions. It implies action [...]. [...] [I]t implies aberrant behavior [sic]; a breach of what is normal, standard or accepted practice. Perhaps a more accurate definition might be, then, that to transgress is to challenge, provoke or subvert accepted limits. Transgression therefore suggests a radical position: it is naughty, subversive and excessive; however, it also implies renewal and creativity, as the

outsider position inherently leads to new and alternative ways of seeing, understanding and being. (Sara and Littlefield 296-7)

In contrast to the more controlling function of transgression implied by Rumson and Bentham, they explicate that transgression indicates agency. It describes active, even deliberate, movement across existent boundaries. Crucially, for Sara and Littlefield, transgression represents a generative process and contains the impetus or holds the potential for creation. I would posit that this includes both the transgressing body, which transgresses and re-creates itself, and its interrelation with its surroundings. In her discussion of the body's elusive physical reality, Grosz observes that "[t]he body is constrained by its biological limits – limits, incidentally, whose framework or 'stretchability' we cannot yet know, we cannot presume, even if we must presume some limits. The body is not open to all the whims, wishes, and hopes of the subject [...]" (187). Yet, according to Reed, "[b]odily definitions and boundaries [...] are mutable and highly political" (33). Hence, a body's physical borders are explored, constructed and re-constructed, (self-)defined and never fixed. When speaking of the delimitations of the body, it is essential to account for its constant adaptation and fluidity in the definition as well as the body's interplay with its environment. Hallensleben delineates the reciprocal relation between the body and its surroundings further, asserting that "[...] the body shape follows the natural and cultural spaces, while the natural and cultural places become visible as corporeal topographies. In short: the space constitutes the body, and the body becomes the space" (16). Summarising, bodily transgression is not only a means of revealing normative expectations but also a creative process enacted upon the transgressing body and its boundaries as well as the surroundings with which it interacts.

Operating generatively upon bodies and their environments, bodily transgression manifests as a breach of boundaries. This can refer to a stepping across physical borders but also constitutes a (partial) dissolution of a barrier, an increased opening out, a means of disclosure. Sweetman cites the practice of invasive physical alterations, like tattoos and piercings, as an example and observes that these practices forcefully infringe on physical wholeness (177), they represent a process which "opens the body" (180). To enable and conceptualise self-metamorphosis through bodily transgression requires bodily permeability and porosity, a body that it is not sealed or hermetically contained

but instead actively interacting with its surroundings and engaged in permanent exchange. In these logics, the body is an interconnected, responsive agent. In line with this, Williams and Bendelow position the body by referring to its social surroundings and their interdependence, stating that “[t]he body, in short, provides a potent metaphor for social (dis)order; one which implies a reciprocal thinking of society through the body and the body through society” (28). They further speak of the “[...] ‘uncontainability’ of the body within any one domain or discourse” (Williams and Bendelow 162), again asserting the untenability of cast-iron physical boundaries and stressing the ephemerality of bodily definition. Transgression entails the re-negotiation of boundaries of a porous body in exchange with its surroundings.

The body, enacted through discourse, is situated within the world and interacts with that world through an unceasing negotiation, they are co-creative. In that sense, the body is interconnected with its environment, its social context, adapts and changes. Halberstam and Livingston use “umbilical cords” as a metaphor for these relationships and ties of the body which “are always multiple” (17). Not only does this metaphor signify a close and many-sided interrelation between the body and the world, but also one present from birth. This reciprocal relation also extends to the experience of the body. According to Price and Shildrick, the perception of the body is predicated upon its immediate surroundings, given that “[...] our apprehension of it, our understanding of it, is necessarily mediated by the *contexts* in which we speak” (Price and Shildrick 7; original emphasis). Wilton also frames the body in relational terms asserting that “[...] ‘body’ and ‘social’ are mutually co-constitutive” (57), while stressing not only the physical fluidity of the conceptualisation of the body but also the temporal one. She speaks of a “conversation” of the socially incorporated body with its surroundings, which are, in turn, engendered by the body (Wilton 62). The body cannot be conceptualised as isolated or outside its world. It is shaped by and shapes it.

This mutual constitution becomes even more pronounced when the body is examined within historical discourses. Aldana Reyes posits that bodily transgression challenges prevailing contemporary realities as “[...] the forms of corporeal transgression generated by non-normative sexuality, gender or race can [...] upset the status quo [...]” (11). Yet, viewing the body from a historical perspective emphasises that it both forms and is

formed by prevailing norms and discourses, and cannot exist outside them. Accordingly, Benthien asserts that, within a historical context, depictions and subjective understandings of the body are determined by a certain period in time and subject to perpetual adaptation and culture-specific construction (9). She summarises that “[...] if one looks at representations of the body as themselves manifestations of the body, one ceases to posit the unspoken assumption that there is a real body beyond the realm of culture” (10). The body is discursively produced within its socio-historical conditions. Lawson and Shakinovsky apply this to the female body.

Indeed, the extent of the representational complexities that accrue around the marked body of the woman speaks to the extent of evasion or deferral on which culture insists. There is an inextricable relationship between the representation of the marked bodies, which emerges as a site of contradiction and of phantasmagoria, and the hegemonic discourse that ostensibly denies the existence of that site. (154)

This clearly indicates the contradictory projections and tensions through which the female body is discursively shaped. As Auga succinctly frames it when referring to the body’s historical positioning, “[s]ex is made socially” (7). Shildrick and Price pinpoint the constant renegotiation of a gendered body’s demarcations, which cannot be seen as definite and require permanent repetition and control to be upheld. They summarise that “[...] we perform our sexed and gendered identities, and must constantly police the boundaries between sameness and difference [...]” (439). The gendered body is situated within prevailing power relations. Therefore, to further work towards a definition of bodily transgression, it is necessary to clarify how a body, notably a female body, realises its transgressive potential.

Butler locates the power of subversion within the gendered body. Referring to governing conventions and frameworks, she asserts that “[...] the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms” (*Discursive Limits of “Sex”* 15). She elaborates that “this constitutive constraint” frames “[...] agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (*Discursive Limits of “Sex”* 15). In effect, the body, the gendered body, is created through discursive repetition:

In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. [...] In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 236)

Through the repeated enactment of norms, power constitutes the body, but this process simultaneously enables both the possibility of transgression and the potential for subversion. Butler observes that "[a]s a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up [...]. This instability is the *deconstructing* possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which 'sex' is stabilized [...]" ("Bodies that Matter" 239). The process of discursive repetition allows for the body's transgression of established practices and delineations. Clay reflects on Butler's perspective, stating "[...] that our reflexive understanding of who we are is predetermined by this system of identity [...] rather than being a passive set of identity markers we can rummage through and paste together to 'create' ourselves. Gender performativity is about how bodies are stylised in culturally intelligible ways [...]" (292). Reed elaborates on the cultural contextualisation of bodily perception, asserting that "[...] 'reality' and 'truth' are, themselves, constructed by and through complex cultural processes implicated in relations of power. In other words, 'sex' and 'sexuality' are actively and culturally produced and do not exist a priori, waiting to be 'unmasked'" (31). Pitts goes so far as to posit that formative processes are not deliberately enacted in that "[...] performativity is shaped by powerfully gendered discourses of the self that unconsciously inform body practices" (233). In light of these considerations, the body as a performed body encourages a reconceptualisation of the notion of a physical supremacy or pre-eminence of the physical when defining bodily reality (Carnariu 83). Gatens equally reflects that "[...] difference does not have to do with biological 'facts' so much as with the manner in which culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves" (231), emphasising that social and cultural norms shape how bodies are understood and experienced. Williams and Bendelow summarise this departure from a biologically determined, naturalised, pre-existing body, stating that "[t]he pre-social body is therefore rejected in favour of a discursive body, a

body that is bound up in the ‘order’ of desire, power and signification” (117). Hence, the body is conceptualised as discursively created rather than as an a priori entity existing outside normative constraints, and it is through the reiteration of normative practices that bodily transgression becomes possible. However, in direct contrast to Pitts, and while building on but departing from Butler, I would propose introducing one crucial element to the definition of transgression that enables self-metamorphosis: namely, that it relies on normative awareness and conscious, willed reiteration. In this sense, insofar as transgression is only intelligible within the normative frameworks it reiterates, and power emerges from and is immanent to the normative framework that discursively produces the body, transgression is creative and productive rather than solely oppositional. By producing new meanings through the reiteration of existing norms, it discursively recreates the body and participates in the ongoing formation and transformation of the embodied subject who transgresses. On this basis, I conceptualise transgression as consciously willed creative reiteration, enabling the embodied subject’s self-metamorphosis.

If transgression enables processes of self-metamorphosis, these transformations must become apprehensible at the level of embodiment. The next chapter consequently focuses on the skin as the site where self-metamorphosis becomes materially and symbolically manifest. Departing from the conception of skin as a concealing hide, I approach it as a surface of showing, where embodied subjectivity is negotiated and articulated. Through its changes, the skin embodies transgression and speaks of the ongoing process of self-metamorphosis.

2.3. Written Skin Speaking – Articulating the Body

Considering recurring metaphors employed for the skin, Benthien foregrounds conceptualisations ranging from “skin as a wall”, inhabited or even serving as a prison cell (24), to being seen as “[t]he bodily garment” (24). The latter was gradually substituted by the notion of skin as house (24), attaching to the human epithelium the characteristics of “[...] solid, enveloping, and concealing forms, as rooms in which life happens” (Benthien 26). Benthien observes that women have been reduced to and equated with their physical reality and that this metaphor of the house is very closely related to their corporeality.

The house with its hollow spaces is thus commonly used as a metaphor for the female body, which can be penetrated and envelops that growing embryo, as well as for the nongendered body, which is conceived of as inhabited by a self. What explains this duplication in the metaphorical field is that, in cultural history, woman was – and is – repeatedly analogized with the body. (Benthien 26)

Given the metaphoric shift towards the house, “[...] the skin itself becomes a stony wall, a static and impermeable boundary between the self and the world” (Benthien 28). In order to transition away from these static metaphors conveying imperviousness and inalterability, and, in the case of female skin, a relegation to an empty, passive façade to be filled, the skin needs to be rethought, rewritten and respoken. Benthien’s conceptualisation of skin, in her own words, is based on “[...] the self as skin and the self as in the skin [...]” (24). She summarises the common perceptions of skin as obscuring the identity of a person and acting as a shielding enclosure, as being able to mislead and delude, or as indicative of the entire person (17). These notions find representation in language, not only when it comes to current expressions and metaphors but also regarding etymological origins. Benthien observes that “[t]he word ‘shame’ and the word ‘skin’ share the same Indo-Germanic root, which means ‘to cover’. [...] Accordingly, the desire to conceal oneself is inseparable from the philosophical as well as psychological concept of shame” (100). Given the current presence of skin in linguistic expression, it is used to refer to an individual (Benthien 18) or employed as a “*pars pro toto* for a person’s body” (Benthien 19). Benthien remarks that “[a]s a synecdoche of the body, skin is also used together with other body parts” while “[i]n older German, ‘skin’ was also used as a stand-in for ‘life’ [...]” (19). Based on these considerations, she outlines that skin adopts a dual function. It is both situated as demonstrative of the physical entity and as a screen between a person and their surroundings (Benthien 23). She observes that “[...] this is what makes it so singular, skin functions as the other of the self, by representing its cover, its prison or mask, its medium of communication with the world” (Benthien 23). Skin is positioned as both part of the body and situated in the world, it cannot be either or, neither can it function as an impermeable boundary. It represents an area of contact and permanent exchange.

Benthien situates the skin within its socio-historical contexts, which foregrounds the significance of reconceptualising it as porous and interactive rather than sealing, and of

approaching it as a surface that allows for and embodies transgressive acts. She states that while skin before modernity constituted a border to an “invisible and mysterious inside”, it came to be seen as increasingly porous and able to be transgressed (10). This Benthien attributes to the advances in anatomical investigation which “[...] created a model of knowledge based on dismemberment, extraction, and disembodiment” (11). Considering the historically contingent perception of the skin, she asserts that advances in the field of medicine impacted the general perception of the body, insofar as medical procedures and interventions bypassed the epithelial layer and were no longer administered via the skin (Benthien 41). The focus appeared to shift to the somatic interior, and, from an anatomical perspective, the skin itself was slow to regain a certain import, as “[...] the gaze returned only gradually to the surface, where more refined analysis revealed that the material that was initially flipped aside unnoticed was significant” (Benthien 53). These changes in the medical sciences equally affected the understanding of the skin’s permeability, resulting in distinct ways of conceptualising it. In the 1800s, the perception of skin as separating the body from its surroundings gave rise to the view that injuries to the epithelium meant an appalling breach of the body’s integrity (Benthien 62). Benthien observes that the movement towards a clear-cut physical entity is set against a more permeable, “grotesque” image of the body (38).

In the grotesque body, the boundaries between body and world and those between individual bodies are much less differentiated and more open than they are in the new body canon: the very boundary of the grotesque body reveals the intermingling with the world in that protruding body parts [...] are understood as projecting into the world, and the inside of the body comes out and mingles with the world. (Benthien 38)

A dissolution of the epithelial barrier, in the context of the body conceived as enclosed by the skin, was equated with aberration. Yet the grotesque body, with its blurred and permeable boundaries, exemplifies how the dissolution of strict separations between inside and outside, embodied self and world, resonates with the logic of transgression. In this sense, the grotesque anticipates the kind of bodily openness through which transgressive acts can facilitate self-metamorphosis, linking historical conceptions of permeability to the transformative potential of embodied subjectivity. The skin’s continuous reconceptualisation underscores the significance of its temporal contextualisation, as it constitutes “[...] a profoundly symbolic boundary that is subject

to historical and cultural change” (Benthien 36). Skin is not a natural, immutable fact. Rather, its construction and understanding are tied to particular and changing socio-historical circumstances. This ongoing reconceptualisation highlights the shift from understanding skin as a fixed boundary to conceiving it as a site of interrelation and a medium of exchange.

Consequently, instead of viewing skin solely as an impenetrable, demarcating boundary that separates the body from its surroundings, Benthien’s discussion positions skin as a responsive surface of interaction through which the body enters into relation with the world. Skin has to be conceived of as a site of encounter. Baumbach and Ratheiser assert that “[w]e habitually approach our environment through surfaces. Particularly by means of sight or touch, we tend to assess the outside first before we decide whether it is worthwhile to dig deeper, provided that the surface we are encountering allows for its transgression” (1). They foreground an essential condition when considering skin as a means of interrelation: its openness. The skin’s porosity allows for interactions to challenge, unsettle, or reconfigure normative boundaries of the body. Skin is characterised by a reciprocal permeability, as it spreads into its environment and is pervaded by it, making it a site where embodied subjectivity is enacted, transformed and expressed. The skin’s porosity makes it a surface through which both the subject and social norms are negotiated. Grosz observes that “[w]elts, scars, cuts, tattoos, perforations, incisions, inlays, function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body [...]” (139). The body is altered, appropriated by its social surroundings, grows into society and shows its belonging on the skin, as “[c]icatrizations and scarifications mark the body as a public, collective, social category, in modes of inclusion or membership; they form maps of social needs, requirements, and excesses” (Grosz 140). With regard to the skin as a socially inscribed surface, Benthien stresses interpersonal relationships and encounters, stating that “[h]uman contact depends unavoidably on the skin; it is the manifest place of the other that is accessible to sight and touch” (Benthien 11-2). Considering this element of expressivity, Connor summarises that “[w]e show ourselves in and on our skins, and our skins figure out the things we are and mean: our health, youth, beauty, power, enjoyment, fatigue, embarrassment or suffering. The skin is always written: it is legendary” (36). Framed in this way, skin can no longer be understood as a

static boundary but must be approached as an open, mutable, and relational surface, continuously shaped by its interconnections.

In light of this, skin has to be seen as altering and alterable, a quality that becomes particularly evident in relation to the passage of time. Changes manifest on the skin, yet they do not simply register superficial effects. Unlike a passively modified, acted-upon, non-reactive surface, the skin continuously responds to its environment, and in doing so, actively transforms. This requires a conceptualisation of the skin as fluid, permeable, and responsive, a pronounced departure from perceiving it as an impassable boundary or a concealing, produced hide. As Price and Shildrick assert, “[a]t any given moment we are always marked corporeally in specific ways, but not as an unchanging or unchangeable fixture” (8). Skin is invariably affected by time and shows that time has elapsed, its progression is drawn on its surface, in “[...] the accumulation of marks, of wrinkles, lines and creases, as well as in the literal disintegration of skin” (Ahmed and Stacey 2). Steinborn describes that it “[...] is staged as a canvas of affect, emotion, association, memory, in other words a canvas of human life” (254; my translation). Yet even though skin is both a revelatory and interactive surface, it still remains a site of demarcation.

Skin constitutes a boundary layer, but it is far from impervious. By virtue of its porosity and its integration into both body and environment, skin emerges as a site that can be written and rewritten, a process through which dualistic preconceptions are destabilised. Flanagan and Booth stress the skin’s delineating function, stating that “[o]ne’s skin acts as a boundary between one’s self and the surrounding culture, the surrounding world. The skin is always a significant border, marking age, gender, and race” (1). They identify it as an area of friction and negotiation where “[...] critical tensions between surface and depth, interior and exterior, are played out” (Flanagan and Booth 6), and define it as “[...] a portal, or a gateway, between separation and intimacy” (Flanagan and Booth 13). Imperiale takes this even further, asserting that the skin conceals, even from the person itself, the inner workings of the body and renders their apprehension impossible (266). In her analysis of bodily inscription, Schildkrout, initially foregrounds the active, embodied production of cultural borders and equally stresses the demarcating function of the skin, noting that “[...] bodily inscriptions are all about boundaries [...] between self and society, between groups, and between humans and

divinity” (238). Building on the skin’s porosity and its entanglement with its surroundings, however, I would argue that skin cannot be primarily construed as a site of separation, upholding dualisms on either side of the membrane. Instead, it has to be conceived of as integrated and interactive, as a “permeable sheath” (Jablonsiki 1). As part of the bodily assemblage, as I have already defined in the introduction and will elaborate on in chapter 2.4., it is not an inalterable separation marked solely by external circumstances. Instead, it embodies a discursively negotiated and renegotiated subjectivity. Schildkrout, continuing her discussion on marking the body, stresses the agency of the subject and pinpoints the conceptualisation of skin as a changing and transformable border, asserting that “[t]he essential ambivalence of skin as a boundary is due, in part, to the possibility of individual agency subverting externally imposed inscriptions” (323). This is exactly where I locate the process of writing and rewriting skin. Skin is continuously shaped by the subject’s own agentic capacities in negotiation with its surroundings and makes the embodiment of reiterative practices possible. I do not solely conceptualise writing and rewriting the skin as the physical process of marking skin. Rather, it indicates that interpretative authority rests with the embodied subject who shapes and lays claim to how bodily signs are read. Schildkrout takes recourse to various consciously chosen bodily modifications which enable “[...] writing one’s autobiography on the surface of the body” (238). Porous, interactive and integrating, skin, in this sense, does not uphold binary separations but instead emerges as deconstructive of dichotomous constructs through its narrative agency. As an integral part of the bodily assemblage, its permeability allows it to communicate and participate in the ongoing formation and transformation of the embodied subject.

Skin does not simply register what acts upon it, it enacts and speaks of the embodied subject. It is therefore necessary to clarify how this analysis approaches the notion of a speaking skin. Skin is expressive and should not be reduced to a passive surface of reflection. Drawing on Gilbert’s discussion, the idea that the skin is a mere mirror of the inside, which is often premised upon spiritual ideologies, needs to be revised. She summarises that “[t]hose whose idealist natural theology theorized a body that reflected the soul, and whose religion allowed for grace and redemption, perforce posited a material body that would evolve to reflect spiritual reality” (307). The body, and by

extension the skin, tended to be seen as a mere externalisation of the inside, of a person's essence, not to be actively inscribed but much rather passively expressive. This also calls into question how skin is interpreted. Just like the whole body, the meaning of the skin is discursively constructed. Even though Schildkrout describes skin "[a]s possibly the first, and certainly the most obvious, canvas upon which human differences can be written and read [...]" (319), Ahmed and Stacey acknowledge the possibility of divergent materialisations: "If the skin is always open to being read (and being read differently), we can also consider the ways in which these various techniques for reading produce skins in specific and determinate ways" (1). Gilbert similarly presents the skin as requiring interpretation and as constituted through discourse, stating that "[s]urface, in other words, becomes discursive: skin communicates, but like any signifier, it must be read and interpreted. Skin's materiality perpetually claims to be transparent, to exist in a tight coupling with the signified itself; however, its visibility both invites the gaze and evades certainty" (21). This, more than anything else, demonstrates that skin not only responds to external stimuli but can also be made to depict, enact, and perform, thereby destabilising the notion of a passively reflective physicality. Skin is not an involuntary reflection of a pre-discursive given, but a site of reiterative practice through which embodied subjectivity is negotiated and articulated.

Through its permeability and engagement with its surroundings, skin enables and embodies transgressive acts. Precisely because it can be consciously written and rewritten – in the sense that interpretative authority over what it signifies rests with the embodied subject – the skin becomes a privileged site for materialising and communicating transformation. A speaking skin thus reclaims authority and expresses the bodily assemblage's own narrative, of which it is an integral part. The following chapter therefore shifts focus from the skin to the bodily assemblage of which it speaks.

2.4. The Enabling Agency of Bodily Assemblages

To conceptualise the body as an assemblage is to approach it not as a homogeneous whole, but as an ephemeral, constantly transforming composition characterised by emergent properties. Bennett's account of assemblages provides a valuable conceptual lens for this analysis because it allows the body to be understood as a heterogeneous composition whose material surfaces, practices, and norms generate emergent forms of

agency. Although she primarily applies this framework to non-human and non-living entities, I would argue that the concept of emergent, “distributive agency” (Bennett 31), as outlined below, can complement Butler’s account of embodied subjectivity. Dichman, drawing on Butler and Bennett, calls for a reconceptualisation of the body, arriving at the following conclusion, which shows agency as going beyond a person’s being.

[Bennett’s view] is clearly different from Butler’s account of materiality, which does not really ascribe power to nonhuman bodies. In Bennett’s view, the trees, lakes, and glaciers that Butler writes about are animate bodies with a capacity to make a difference by affecting other beings. Instead of approaching a human body enabled by a surface and some surroundings – which might be close to Butler’s approach – Bennett’s perspective allows us to see the very surface and its surroundings as agentic in themselves. (Dichman 79)

Dichman emphasises that the capacities of the body arise relationally rather than residing in a fixed, self-contained subject. Bennett’s theoretical approach broadens the conception of the body by emphasising that the bodily assemblage is not confined to its material limits but is open and continuously interconnected with its environment. It is through the combination of Bennett’s account of emergent, decentralised agency and Butler’s framework of embodied subjectivity that the bodily assemblage can be understood as enabling the subversion of deterministic constraints.

The capacities for action exhibited by an assemblage arise from its emergent characteristics and cannot be predicted by examining its individual constituent parts. Bennett, in her assessment of the “political ecology of things”, the subtitle of her work *Vibrant Matter*, builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s research. She defines assemblages as spontaneous agglomerations, which she characterises as “living, throbbing confederations” (23), not subordinate to one primary entity and instead defined by their “[...] emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone” (24). Gillet maintains a similar stance positioning “[...] composed entities as qualitatively distinct from their components” (176). He expounds that “[e]very compositional level is commonly understood to have novel powers, novel properties, novel kinds of individuals, and hence novel processes. Diamonds are hard, though carbon atoms are not [...]” (Gillet 175). DeLanda takes up the idea of emergence as a key characteristic of the assemblage. He uses the term “ensemble” to replace that of the assemblage, since he claims that the

English translation lacks the procedural aspect of composition and only refers to the effect thereof (1). For the purposes of this analysis, I use “assemblage” and “ensemble” interchangeably, following DeLanda’s reading in which both terms designate heterogeneous compositions which give rise to emergent characteristics, including potentials and dispositions that may remain unrealised until activated. DeLanda states that “[a]n ensemble in which components have been correctly matched together possesses properties that its components do not have. It also has its own tendencies and capacities. The latter are real but not necessarily actual if they are not currently manifested or exercised” (5). When elements are appropriately combined, they generate new potentials that the individual elements alone do not exhibit. As Bennett stipulates, an assemblage is an “open-ended collective” which shows an inherent agency that cannot be located in the mere compilation of its components and is ephemeral (24). Bedau and Humphreys acknowledge that emergent properties are connected to and build on specific components, but “[...] are simultaneously autonomous from that base” (1). This incalculable contingency underpins the emergence of agency. Hempel and Oppenheim talk of emergence as “[...] used to characterize certain phenomena as ‘novel’, and this not merely in the psychological sense of being unexpected, but in the theoretical sense of being unexplainable, or unpredictable, [...]” (62). Seidel and Greve equally stress the core characteristic of originality asserting that “[...] emergence is impossible without novelty by definition” (7). Given the central characteristic of emergence, assemblages hold the capacity for unprecedented steps, for previously unasked questions that could not have been posed by its component parts. Crucially, though, because emergent capacities arise only through the relations between an assemblage’s constituents, they are never internally contained or immediately determined by its elements, but unfold through the assemblage’s continuously changing entanglement with its surroundings.

An assemblage is not a self-contained, fixed whole but a heterogenous, ephemeral composition in continuous interrelation with its environment. When discussing the agentive qualities of an assemblage, Bennett speaks of “the creativity of agency”, its “capacity to make something new appear or occur” (31), stressing the unprecedentedness and at the same time innovation that are characteristic of an

assemblage's emergent properties. However, assemblages are never solitary or isolated. Bennett does not locate the capacity for action in individuality. Instead, as briefly noted above, she adopts "[a] theory of distributive agency", a term I employ throughout this analysis in the sense defined by Bennett, which "[...] does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play" (Bennett 31-2). Dichman summarises that "[...] Bennett invites us to be more attentive to materiality by alternative modes of seeing, listening, smelling, tasting, and feeling. From this, we come to understand that within Bennett's conception of materiality lies a notion of shared and distributed agency in which all sorts of material come into play" (78). Bennett pinpoints the openness of the assemblage, its constant interconnectivity and the destabilisation of deterministic intentions in that results can neither be directly attributed nor predicted (Bennett 32). On this basis, Bennett establishes the assemblage as fluid and relational. Its agency arises from the dynamic interplay of multiple elements rather than from any individual component or sovereign subject.

Accordingly, distributive agency and the assemblage's emerging characteristics preclude the possibility that the assemblage is externally predetermined. Very basically, Dorato considers determinism "[...] a scientific-philosophical doctrine according to which the state of a physical system at one instant of time t [...] univocally fixes any other temporal states of that system, past or future" (340). Honderich equally offers an initial, overarching definition of determinism:

Determinism as most commonly understood in philosophy generally – as distinct from the philosophy of science – is human determinism. It is the theory that our lives consist in effects. More particularly, all of the antecedents of our actions, say contemplating possible alternatives, coming to have a forward-looking intention, choosing how to go ahead, actively intending the action and supervising it, are subject to the rule of cause and effect, and so are the actions themselves. (32)

Though subsequently referring to the complexities and questions involved in the term, Honderich defines "effect" straightforwardly as "[...] something that was made to happen by something" (8). He acknowledges that there are several additional elements to be considered and that this one definition of determinism is by no means exhaustive or universally accepted and needs further elaboration. Nevertheless, the basic idea of cause and direct effect serves the purpose of considering a deterministic view as

outlined in this paper. Given that, as made explicit by Bennet, assemblages do not follow one predominant guiding actant but exhibit an emerging agency that cannot be attributed to the total of its component parts (24) and is “distributive” (31), they elude a deterministic definition. This becomes even more pronounced when considering the assemblage’s rhizomatic characteristics as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari. Approaching the concept of the assemblage, they speak of an “[...] increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). They define a rhizome as follows:

The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available – always $n - 1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at $n - 1$ dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome. (6)

By insisting that multiplicity is produced through the subtraction of any unifying element rather than the addition of a higher-order principle, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise the rhizome as a mode of composition without a centralising authority, whose structure precludes deterministic organisation and instead sustains open-ended, emergent relations. Approaching the assemblage via its rhizomatic structure, they consider the assemblage as a concrete realisation of a “multiplicity” that grows and extends freely without a central directing unit and in the process constantly transforms (Deleuze and Guattari 6). This situates assemblages as continuously changing, ephemeral conjunctions. Adkins considers them “[...] temporary selections of a whole host of intersecting and diverging lines” (121). The assemblage’s ephemerality becomes one of its key characteristics, as it is in constant flux, a continuously changing association or affiliation. DeLanda stresses this aspect of unceasing development, as already referred to above, when critiquing the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept, as the original terminology incorporates the meaning of “[...] the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action [...]” (1). Hence, when discussing an assemblage, the process of composition and continuous alteration needs to be foregrounded. It reconstructs and reorients itself constantly.

Because their agentic capacities emerge from ephemeral compositional structures and constantly shifting relational interactions, rather than any central organising principle, assemblages exist as transient, mutable configurations of heterogeneous elements that elude deterministic constraints.

Applying the concept of the assemblage to the body foregrounds once more the significance of the assemblage's ephemerality and composite structure, highlighting the unique configuration of each assemblage. Shildrick discusses the body's impermanence and contends that "[t]he claim that there might be a body, any body, that is not modified is surely implausible. Bodies are never static givens, nor do they settle, but rather emerge in both continuous and discontinuous process" (Shildrick 327). Grounded in its constitutive structure, an assemblage's ephemerality entails the body being perpetually made and remade. The bodily assemblage cannot be discussed without reference to its compound structure, its constantly re-substituting heterogeneity, its multi-layered configuration. It may be approached via its characterising component parts, but must afterwards be allowed to become more than a mere amalgamation of fragments. Deleuze and Parnet pose the question directly. "What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'" (69). Halberstam and Livingston zoom in on this aspect by posing the following pointed and searching questions. "How many races, genders, sexualities are there? Some. How many are you? Some." (8) The bodily assemblage arises through the ephemeral, concrete formation of the elements that compose it.

Hence, although assemblages are omnipresent, each one emerges through a particular, temporally and materially situated configuration. Cole posits that assemblages must be understood in terms of the particular elements that give rise to their emergent capacities. He reflects that "Deleuze does not mean for the assemblage to apply to any collective entity [...] but should be applied to the specifics of what feeds into their ontology of emergence or becoming" (Cole 1-2). Assemblages are, within their specific context, distinctly embedded in a particular situation and moment in time. DeLanda asserts that "[...] all assemblages should be considered unique historical entities, singular in their

individuality, not as particular members of a general category” (6). When starting out from the point of a single person, the etymological routes do not allow for a meaning of heterogeneous composition. Kirby observes that “[...] the word individual comes from the Latin in, ‘not’ + dividuus, ‘divisible’ (from dividere, ‘to divide’) [...]” and describes “[...] an atomic entity that cannot be divided from itself [...]” (103). This she compares to our lived reality when contesting the view of an indivisible, discrete whole, given that “[t]he individual is both single and plural [...]” and the perception of a self-contained subject is “[...] compromised by the cross-associations and conflictual allegiances we each embody” (Kirby 102). Although each assemblage is specific, heterogeneous, and distinct, assemblages as such are universally present. As DeLanda notes, “[...] assemblages are everywhere, multiplying in every direction, some more viscous and changing at slower speeds, some more fluid and impermanent, coming into being almost as fast as they disappear” (7). He even speaks of the existence of “assemblages of assemblages” (3). Assemblages, in their ubiquity, are as unpredictable and as inimitable as their particular emerging agency. For this reason, I conceptualise bodies as assemblages, specific, relational and compositional formations that are continuously constituted and reconstituted through reiterative practices and exhibit a unique emerging agency. The bodily assemblage becomes a site in which embodied subjectivity is continuously remade, giving rise to the subject’s capacity to act.

The uniqueness of a bodily assemblage’s agency becomes even more decisive when it is considered as destabilising dualisms. When the body is approached as an assemblage, its constantly developing and integrative heterogeneity foregrounds that bodies cannot be stabilised through mutually exclusive dichotomies. This aspect becomes particularly urgent when considering the female bodily assemblage. Assemblages are inclusive and constitute a departure from binary conceptualisation, from polarity. Adkins, reviewing Deleuze and Guattari’s work, summarises this aspect of rejecting dichotomies by discussing the devaluation of women in society and argues for moving beyond a polarising perspective. In this regard, he again refers to the necessity of generating novelty through emerging agency.

There is no question that the denigration of woman and the valorization [sic] of men has been a nearly constant feature of human society. [...] Deleuze and Guattari would say that the male/female dualism is part of a hierarchical, despotic

signifying regime, as are all molar dualisms. The question that Deleuze and Guattari pose, though, is not, How do we equalize this dualism? This strategy only reinforces the molar dualism even if the relation between the terms shifts. Rather, their question is, How do we create something new that is not bound up in these dualisms? How do we make a rhizome instead of a tree? Draw a map instead of make a tracing? Become instead of be? (Adkins 149)

When these considerations are applied specifically to the female bodily assemblage, attention must be paid to women's point of departure: the imposed stasis that arrests them as unalterable, passive objects within a male-determined framework. In this context, stasis appears to function as a dualistic counterpart to the active, developing assemblage. Referring again to Deleuze and Guattari's discussions, Adkins sees assemblages "[...] as possessing in some respect both stasis and change," which do not, however, constitute "[...] two ontologically distinct properties that happen to come together in a particular thing [...]" (13). Instead an "[...] assemblage always possesses tendencies toward both stasis and change as the abstract poles of a single continuum" (Adkins 13). Roberts takes up this spectrum of constancy and motion asserting "[...] that assemblages are never purely static nor purely changing entities because they each contain both characteristics as immanent tendencies, to a greater or lesser extent" (694). Both Adkins and Roberts talk of "tendencies", crucially showing the striving force of stasis and its inherent capacity for change. As part of a transformative process, it is necessary to acknowledge that the stage of inertia enforced on the female body holds impetus. There is no dichotomy, no duality, but a constant striving and growth. This includes not abnegating an imposed stasis that has shaped and is part of the bodily assemblage. It is a component that neither stifles nor determines its emerging agency, but contributes to it. The bodily assemblage's agency, emerging from its singular configuration, dissolves binary frameworks.

The following chapters apply the theoretical considerations outlined above to the respective works, Madeline Miller's *Galatea* and Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*. While remaining aligned with Butler's account of the subject produced through embodied normativity, I build on this framework by emphasising the possibility of consciously willed and creative acts of transgression as a means of engaging with and rearticulating the norms through which the body is formed. Such transgressive practices enable processes of self-metamorphosis, through which the body is reconfigured as a bodily assemblage

characterised by its emerging agency. In this framework, the skin assumes a central role. It renders self-directed transformations legible, as the skin is written and rewritten by the embodied subject. The skin both forms part of the bodily assemblage and expresses it. The emerging agency of the bodily assemblage allows the two creations, Galatea and Bella, respectively, to destabilise the creator-creation binary and to subvert the deterministic modes of existence inscribed in their bodies by their creators, reclaiming their bodies as sites of transformation and restoring their narrative authority.

3. Becoming Galatea

While subchapter 3.1. discusses the processes of creation as well as the creators' attempt to perpetuate the initial stage of developmental arrest in their creations, the subsequent section of the analysis, in chapters 3.2.1. and 3.2.2. accordingly, draws specific attention to Miller's Galatea and Gray's Bella. This is to take into account that both women, though there are clearly identifiable parallels, follow divergent trajectories to effectuate their self-metamorphoses, and that the immediate results of their transformative processes unfold along markedly different lines. Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, through their self-directed transmutations, both Galatea and Bella attain the same end. This finds acknowledgement in the integrative conclusion that foregrounds the deconstruction of the dualistic creator-creation framework and the women's subversion of their pre-determined existence.

3.1. Created Inertia – The Creator's Envisaged Hide

3.1.1. Crafting and Confining the Body – The Process of Creation

The creative process is premised upon preventing the formation of a bodily assemblage that exhibits its own emerging agency. This is primarily achieved through the maintenance of perpetual fragmentation and the imposition of enforced inertia, inscribed in the creations through a biologically deterministic conception of the body, which is employed to prevent its discursive creation. Being equated with their physicality, both Galatea and Bella experience their bodies being transgressed upon in the creative process. The female creation is meant to reflect the male creator's inimitable ideal of a woman's body and his artistry, conforming to his image of a submissive and passive

femininity, her existence predetermined, static and reduced to her maker's vision. She is not meant to have a voice of her own but instead relinquish narrative control. The creation is confined through the hierarchical, hegemonic creator-creation binary. She is written only.

The process of creation can be equated with a celebration and praise of the unrivalled quasi-divine mastery of the artist's skill. In the Ovidian source myth, the male creator crafts a body which, in his view, personifies the epitome of female perfection that cannot be surpassed, least by the creation herself, as she "[...] embodies Pygmalion's own construction of ideal feminine beauty [...]" (McKinley xxiv). It almost seems that any action performed by the created figure can only detract from this state of externally bestowed, immutable and supreme perfection. In the "Pygmalion" myth the formation of the statue is described as follows:

Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
With marvellous triumphant artistry
And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
Than ever woman born. His masterwork
Firmed him with love. (Ovid 232)

The skill of the creator is not only foregrounded but uncontested, which is also the case in the first description of Gray's Godwin Baxter, "a surgical genius" who is able to craft a living female body (Gray IX). Baxter is even hailed as a "saviour" for his ability to construct and heal bodies using body parts (Gray 23) and shows considerable pride when first presenting his creation (Gray 29). He is fully aware of his own creative mastery. Likewise, Pygmalion in Miller's *Galatea* marvels at and contemplates his own ingenuity, for instance when scrutinising his artistic achievements embodied in Galatea's life-like fingers (Miller 9). This also extends to the physical posture of Miller's Galatea onto which Pygmalion imposes the interpretative dominance he exerts through his artistry. Kneeling in front of him, Galatea remarks, "I felt him looking at me, admiring his work. He had not carved me like this but he was imagining doing it. A beautiful statue, named The Suppliant" (Miller 22). The creator's ability forms his creation, crafts the female body, which, in turn, is denied creative agency. As Baxter observes, "[p]hysically she is perfect but her mind is still forming, yes, her mind has wonderful discoveries to make. She knows only what she learned in the last ten weeks [...]" (Gray 27). This not only anchors the body

in physical stasis but extends the creative process to the creation's mental reality. Like her body, the creation's thoughts are given to her, created for her. Her mind is presented as ready for moulding and is consequently infantilised. In Bella's case, this is to be taken literally, since she has been crafted through the implantation of her unborn child's brain into the mother's body. Nevertheless, despite them assuming the role of creator, the distinction between the sculptor or the surgeon, as entirely human, and divine intervention is clearly maintained throughout the source myth as well as the rewritings, while simultaneously encouraging a strong association with a deity, or conferring a god-like status on the creator figures. By way of example, Gray's Baxter is directly linked to divinity in Bella's sobriquet for him, "God" (Gray 47). In the case of *Galatea*, given Pygmalion's proximity to the goddess Venus, he stops short of completing his prayer before performing the speech act that brings Galatea to life, leaving the sentence unfinished and for the goddess to conclude: "'O goddess! Why must such perfection be marble and not flesh? If only she might – ' abruptly, he covered his eyes. 'No, I cannot say it.'" (Miller 13). The creations' existence is meant to materialise the perfection of the creators' near-sacred artistry.

In order to allow for the process of creation through Miller's Pygmalion and Gray's Baxter respectively, the female body needs to be transgressed upon. The creator figures appear to hold the sole power to touch, shape and open it. The women's crafted bodies are construed in relation to the primacy of masculinity. Deary highlights the tendency of "[...] establishing women, girls and otherwise 'feminised' subjects as lacking, secondary, derivative of the paradigmatic male and hence intrinsically limited and inferior" (vii). Such asymmetrical relations are already evident in the source myth, as O'Sullivan describes that "Venus allows the statue to come to life, seemingly in response to Pygmalion's touch" (135-36), centrally embedding both male intentionality and physical contact in the creative process. The same hierarchical logic extends to the material level, where the use of ivory, as discussed above, and the likening of the transforming body to wax, which can be easily sculpted, foreground the creation's malleability.

And [Pygmalion] kissed her as she lay, and she seemed warm;
Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing

And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
Wax [...] softens and is shaped [...]. (Ovid 233-4)

The female body is touched by the male creator, her skin responds according to his wishes. As Haynes observes, “[t]he path that the sculptor’s delusions take and how he negotiates his passion for this fictive body lie precisely at the threshold of the skin” (178). The woman’s created body serves her creator’s purpose, existing as his objectified, reified desire. Its key characteristic is grounded in the fact that it “[...] usefulness acquires by being used [sic]” (Ovid 234). This “usefulness” (Ovid 234) rests purely in her body responding to and fulfilling the creator’s physical and procreational needs (Ovid 234) and, at the same time, in perpetuating his ideal of corporeal femininity, heteronomous and pliable. It is not an acting body, it is “being used” (Ovid 234). This is emphasised in Miller’s view of Pygmalion, who, according to her own assertions, mirrors Ovid’s figure (Miller 56). Conforming to the male ideal of a woman’s body requires it to be made and crafted by his hand. For this reason, Miller’s Pygmalion, asked why he has not long since chosen one of the women in the vicinity, answers, “[t]hose sluts, [...] I would not have them” (Miller 11-12). Equally, Baxter exerts ownership over the drowned body of Bella himself, to be shaped and crafted according to his ambitions. The account directly following Bella’s suicide states that her “[...] body is advertised but not claimed” (Gray XIV). Bella’s body appears to await an acknowledgement of belonging, ownership to be established, which Baxter does. He operates on her and decides on the lives of mother and daughter. Diaz Matrinez reviewing Baxter’s assumption of possession, summarises that “[...] his right to claim her body rests on patriarchal authority” (128). The creators establish their proprietary claims and determine the creations’ purpose by transgressing on the women’s bodies, touching, shaping and manipulating them.

At the same time, in both rewritings, the creator figures themselves do not bear touching, their physical characteristics are described as repellent. In this regard, the creating and created hands appear to serve as an initial point of comparison and contrast, most notably with regard to the element of touch. Just like the sound of Baxter’s voice (Gray 18), brushing his hands causes revulsion in Bella’s fiancé McCandless (Gray 25). Due to the appearance of his hands, Baxter himself states that he is only allowed to administer treatment to those “[...] too poor or unconscious to have a choice in the matter” (Gray

40), which, by extension, includes Bella as well. However, she does not seem to share this general revulsion and, in Baxter's view, considers his "[...] hands as normal and necessary as [their] house and [their] daily meals and the morning sunlight" (Gray 41). Conversely, Miller's Galatea observes that Pygmalion is mesmerised at the perfect carving of her fingers (Miller 9). This description differs markedly from his own body, which she describes as bald (Miller 14) and profusely sweating (Miller 16). Hence, compared to the source myth, the bodies of both creator figures are described and observed in the respective rewritings, and, in stark contrast to their expressed need towards their creations, quell the sentiment of touch. Yet, as Baxter asserts when first directly referring to Bella, she "[...] owes her life to these fingers of mine – these skeely, skeely fingers!" (Gray 27), positioning touch as necessary in the creative process. The creators' hands touch and breach the creations' skin. The latter's consent is entirely disregarded. Conversely, the creators themselves remain beyond touch for all but their creations, whose acquiescence seems to be predicated upon their state of dependent and constructed "usefulness" (Ovid 234). From this position of untouchability both Miller's Pygmalion and Gray's Baxter determine the process of creation. To hold sole authority over their work, they confine their female creations to a purely biological composition that remains arrested at the moment of construction.

The biological reductionism on part of the creators not only naturalises the hierarchies between creator and creation but also forms the basis for suspending the women's bodies in fragmentation and imposed inertia. McCrory, discussing coercive forces exerted on the female body, speaks of "[...] women held to ransom by biology," and describes the uterus as "the site of moral battleground" (35). Birke even speaks of a "biological determinism" as "[b]iological arguments have all too often been made in ways that buttress gender divisions" (42). This implies a denial of the body's discursive formation. Yet, Birke observes that this deterministic view can already be challenged during intrauterine development:

Within this discourse of identity and determinism, 'we' unfold from the genes laid down when sperm meets egg. It is a modern version of preformationism – the eighteenth-century idea that we unfurl from a tinier version of ourselves housed comfortably in sperm (or egg). [...] Yet there are other ways of thinking about becoming. [...] The embryo actively makes over its environment, engaging with its

own development; [...] Its essence, if there is one, is not fixity, but transformability. [...] [I]t is constantly changing and having agency in that change. (46)

Birke's account thus challenges a deterministic view of biology, emphasising that even at the earliest stages of development, bodies are active, malleable, and relational, rather than fixed by their genes, a perspective that foregrounds the ways in which bodies themselves are sites of power. As Gatens summarises, "[...] the sexed body can no longer be conceived as the unproblematic biological and factual base upon which gender is inscribed [...]. Power is not then reducible to what is imposed, from above, on naturally differentiated male and female bodies, but is also constitutive of those bodies, in so far as they are considered as male and female" (230). Within this framework, both Miller's Pygmalion and Gray's Baxter define the women's bodies and thus determine their existence. Equating Galatea and Bella with their biological, female physicality firmly situates the power to define them in the respective creators' hands. Although this dynamic is evident in both Miller's and Gray's portrayals of their female characters, it becomes especially salient in Bella's creation. March draws attention to the collation of Bella's sexuality with her cognition, remarking that in the process of her surgical formation the "[...] transplantation creates a confounding of upper and lower bodily strata – the contents of the womb transferred to the skull. It also establishes links to sexuality, because Bella's pregnant state indicates a body knowledge of sex that informs the development of her newly acquired brain as the narrative unfolds" (March 338-9). In the creational process, Bella's body is reduced to its physicality, which, in turn, is understood to shape her existence. The body has long been seen as the foundation for subjectivity, as Terry and Urla summarise, stating that "[...] the idea that moral character is rooted in the body has structured a wide variety of modern medical and scientific studies, and shapes the current conditions under which popular fictions circulate about the bodies of all kinds of people [...]" (1). Baxter has been taught to adhere to a strictly biological perspective by his father, also with regard to the female body (Gray 19). According to him, Bella's body directly impacts and furthers her cognitive development (Gray 34), it has a discernible influence on her mind in that "[...] her body has stimulated the growth of her brain at a wonderful rate" (Gray 35-6). Bella is frequently reduced to her physical attributes, her body is looked at, described and classified by both her creator Baxter and her fiancé McCandless. In Godwin Baxter's first account of Bella's body, he "[...]

describes her as ‘about 25 years old, 5 feet 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall, dark brown curling hair, blue eyes, fair complexion and hands unused to rough work; well dressed.’” (Gray XIV). Similarly, McCandless, upon first meeting Bella after she has been operated on by Baxter, focuses solely on her appearance, her bodily movements and the sound of her voice, describing her to and interpreting her for the reader (Gray 29). This is continued in their second encounter after a brief interim period. He depicts Bella exclusively through her physical features and adds his associations pertaining to her alluring exotic appearance, observing that “[...] her black hair and eyebrows, sallow skin and bright golden-brown eyes seemed dazzlingly foreign [...]” (Gray 44). For him she initially embodies “[...] the acme of womanly perfection [...]” (Gray 53). Constraining the body to a biologically determined form establishes the conditions that inhibit the emergence of an agentic bodily assemblage by maintaining a state of fragmentation and arresting the body’s development.

The creative process inscribes the suppression of relationality. The created body, though enveloped by a concealing hide that mimics unity, is suspended in fragmentation. What I would describe as the patchwork body of the female creation is denied wholeness and refused agency through emergence. As Salzman-Mitchell contends, “[t]here is a tradition in classical literature whereby to create the most perfect woman, the artist has to ‘put together’ the pieces of various models. The idea is that no woman can be perfect, and real women are all far from the ideal in beauty” (*A Whole out of Pieces* 307). In addition to female perfection being attributed to a fragmented construction, this state appears to function as a means of precaution. Referring to women’s sexuality, Young asserts that “[...] there is something in whole female bodies to be feared [...]” (Young 411). This finds manifestation in the making of Ovid’s, and by extension Miller’s, Galatea. As outlined in chapter 2.1., having been sculpted out of ivory, her body is originally compositional. A similar picture of the creation’s physical constitution is presented in *Poor Things*. McCracken-Flesher observes that, upon first being introduced to her, the reader is “[...] presented with Bella, a thing of visible shreds and patches” (168). Baxter manages to construct out of parts a “[...] totality resembling a norm of human embodiment” (Bird 196). He speaks of his veneration for his own “‘internal organization’” (Gray 19), conceived as an amalgamation of component parts which produce, based on their characteristics,

a predictable result. This conception is equally applied to Bella. The interaction and development of the components as part of an emerging assemblage are precluded. McCandless, hearing Baxter's explanations regarding the creation of Bella, directly asks after "the other bits" (Gray 30), the body parts involved in Bella's origins. He further stresses her constructedness when he describes that "Bella was unknowingly seeing the father of her brain in the first husband of her body, the grandfather of her brain in the father of her body" (202). Glendening summarises McCandless' portrayal in that his "[...] narrative presents 'Bella Baxter' as a composite [...]" (77). The fragmentary constitution of Bella's body is echoed and emphasised by the drawings of individual organs and body parts interposed throughout the novel, taken "[...] from the first edition of Gray's Anatomy" (Gray XVI). When considering the structure of the female creations' bodies, their skin assumes a crucial function of concealment. Like the bodies it encloses, the skin itself is created and remains beyond the women's authority, operating as a surface imposed upon them rather than a boundary they control. It produces a visual semblance of wholeness that masks the underlying condition of bodily fragmentation and thereby enables the arrest of the body in a segmented state. Averting the threat of becoming or reconfiguration sustains the passivity required of the creations. Agency can only be attributed to the creators, whereas the creations remain confined to a prescribed, fragmentary made-ness.

As already noted above, the process of creation establishes and enforces not only bodily fragmentation but also a condition of developmental stasis, which functions to prevent the formation of an agentic bodily assemblage while simultaneously securing the realisation of the creators' intentions. The creations' inalterability constitutes the basis for the creators' emotional involvement. It is premised upon the women's passivity, being a mere projection of their makers' ideals. This brings into focus the creators' reasons for their creative endeavours, assertion of ownership over the creations' bodies and determination of every aspect of the women's existence. Baxter freely admits that his "[...] damnable sexual appetites employed [his] scientific skills [...]" (Gray 68) in the making of Bella. McCandless confronts Baxter directly regarding his underlying motives for her creation: "[...] [S]he will be wholly at your mercy [...]. [...] [Y]ou were devising a secret method of getting a woman all to yourself [...]. You think you are about to possess

what men have hopelessly yearned for throughout the ages: the soul of an innocent, trusting, dependent child inside the opulent body of a radiantly lovely woman [...]” (Gray 36). A similar observation can be made pertaining to Miller’s Pygmalion. Galatea embodies and is crafted as Pygmalion’s ideal wife and a projection of his desires. Hence, the creations in both rewritings are given a certain purpose, a certain reason for life, which is grounded in their bodies “being used” (Ovid 234). This can, however, only be maintained as long as the creation remains in the static state of creation and does not develop, does not transform. Inertia underlies and is inscribed in the creation of Miller’s Galatea and Gray’s Bella and is directly linked to the perception of the female body. Referring to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Salzman-Mitchell indicates that “[...] when a woman is described, the flow of the narration is suddenly detained and everything stops in the contemplation of an immobile figure, paralyzed by the gaze of the viewer [...] (A Web of Fantasies 68). Compared to this “stoppage in the narrative” (Salzman-Mitchell, A Web of Fantasies 116), *Poor Things* makes the element of a forced stasis explicit anatomically. Baxter talks about his late father’s medical achievements that his own work is predicated upon. His father “[...] discovered how to arrest a body’s life without ending it, so that no messages passed along the nerves, the respiration, circulation and digestion were completely suspended, the cellular vitality was not impaired” (Gray 21). Baxter himself is able to “[...] place bodies into a kind of living death [...]” (Bird 203). The body cannot develop, it is deprived of movement, of agency, its metabolism is brought to a standstill. Fiorato explains that at this stage “[...] individuals have lost their cognitive neurological functions and awareness of the environment, but retain non-cognitive functions; they are technically alive but their brain can be defined as ‘dead’”(286). When reflecting on the specific process of creating Bella, Baxter mentions similar details, explaining that he “[...] kept the body alive at a purely cellular level” (Gray 33). Stasis is enacted through the body’s constitutive elements, equally evident in the Ovidian creation’s ivory composition, where fragmentation and inertia converge at the level of the body’s smallest composite parts. With regard to Miller’s Galatea, any change or physical alteration that has not been designed or intended by the creator is foreclosed or marked as aberrant from the original state of perfection. To mention just two instances of such devaluation of physical change, Pygmalion wishes to remove the stretch marks on Galatea’s skin caused by her pregnancy (Miller 22-3), and demands rigid constancy in her physical responses, such as

her blushing at his advances (Miller 31). This already points to a second function of the creations' skin, which becomes particularly evident when considered from the creators' perspective. It is not only meant to evoke the idea of unity but to remain unchanged, fully legible to the creators, and to convey no meaning beyond their design. As the primary site of interaction between creator and creation, skin constitutes the site of bodily control. It must not respond to alterations or autonomous tendencies of the creations themselves, but is designed to embody solely the creators' intentions. In this way, the skin operates both as an inalterable, containing boundary and as a medium through which the creators' narrative is enacted. Bodily change is not merely disfavoured but actively regulated, as the female body is rendered a site of fixity rather than development. By arresting bodily transformation and enforcing constancy at a physical level, the creators foreclose the emergence of an agentic bodily assemblage capable of reconfiguring itself beyond its createdness.

The process of creation is meant to inscribe a deterministic existence grounded in biological reductionism, using the creations' bodily fragmentation and stasis to prevent the formation of an agentic bodily assemblage. The creations' hide encases the creators' composition, it is equally made. The women's skin is meant to only reflect the creators' narrative, it has been designed to function as a mere façade of wholeness. Once the skin is closed, it becomes the area of contact between creator and creation and his primary space of control. It belongs to the sculptor or surgeon, respectively, and has to be controlled by them. Hence, building on the moment of creation, the following chapter examines the creators' attempts to prevent transformation and the emergence of a bodily assemblage capable of exercising its own agency.

3.1.2. Arresting Change – Metamorphosis Controlled by the Creator's Hand

To understand the efforts to curtail and regulate the transformative tendencies of their creations, it is necessary first to revisit the motivations underlying their creation. Both Miller's *Pygmalion* and Gray's *Baxter* appear to construct Galatea and Bella as embodiments of difference from the women they have previously encountered, creating them to realise their ideals of female perfection. They assert proprietorship over their creations, thereby justifying violence, and draw on pathologisation to regulate their

behaviour. Yet, despite these measures, including the exercise of physical control and the imposition of social constraints, the creators' authority begins to unravel at the boundary they themselves have shaped: the creations' skin.

The creations are originally positioned as dependent and passive beings, existing only in reference to their creators and assuming a doll-like status defined by ownership, manipulation and use. Baxter draws this analogy directly when attempting to teach Bella. They play with a doll house, as he explains that a simple change of clothing and the way they arrange their hair would exchange an upper-class lady for the servant girl. Bella responds that “[b]oth are used by other people [...],” to which Baxter replies, “Most people [...] are *taught* to be tools” (Gray 263; original emphasis), emphasising the proprietorship that the creators exert over their creations' bodies, standing and actions. Wosk reflects on the dolls' significance, stating that “[f]emale dolls are one of the oldest forms of female simulacra, and images of women as dolls have had myriad cultural meanings and embodiments [...]. Dolls have been used to socialize young girls for their future domestic roles [...]” (181). As figures designed to be animated rather than autonomous, the creations are granted life and meaning only in the creators' view and can operate solely within their narrow circumference. As March notes about Bella, Baxter “[...] has created her to have a woman who will be utterly dependent upon him for all things [...]” (339). In light of the Ovidian source myth, the women's existence as purely dependent on the creators is further accentuated. Salzman-Mitchell, in the chapter “The Fixing Gaze” (*A Web of Fantasies* 67), refers to Pygmalion's “perfect (and immobile) maiden” (70). Her role is embedded in and emanates from the creative process, as Segal observes, noting that “[w]hen Pygmalion's statue does come to life, it restores us to the familiar hierarchies between male and female. [...] [S]he becomes the ideal sex-object [...]. Her entire existence consists in her love for her creator, to whom she owes her life” (18). The very process of her crafting sets her existence in stone. McKinley summarises that “[u]ltimately, the possibility of a living ‘Galatea’s’ subjectivity is foreclosed by the fact that the sculptor has created her, ‘flesh and bone,’ entirely from his own creative conscious and for the satisfaction of his own sexual and emotional desires” (32). The creations are fashioned as dolls, animated and directed by their creators, endowed with a purpose that secures their status as owned bodies rather than agentic subjects.

The creators secure their proprietorship by dispossessing the women of physical autonomy and mental sovereignty, precluding the emergence of bodily agency. Miller's Galatea is kept as close to the immobility of a statue as possible. She is barely allowed out of bed and is reprimanded for not "lying quietly" (Miller 4). It becomes clear that her body belongs to Pygmalion and is entirely subjected to his wishes. The extent of the creators' control, which systematically prevents agency, becomes especially apparent when considering Bella's earliest experiences following her creation. With regard to Godwin Baxter, Fiorato observes that he "[...] completely carries out his role as creator and also creates a social identity for Bella as Bella Baxter [...]" (288). As briefly discussed above, based on the physical conditions of her creation, Bella is continuously infantilised. Baxter, by way of example, comments on Bella's rapid mental development, asserting that only recently "[...] she had the brain of a baby" (Gray 30). McCandless uses a similar comparison, paternalising Bella by comparing her emotional reaction to "an angry baby's" (Gray 62). Genca observes that Bella is doubly created: "While Godwin Baxter creates Bella by operating on her dead body, McCandless also creates her through his narrative. Bella Baxter could not have come into existence without the medical intervention of the former and the narrative construction of the latter" (71). Bella is objectified and relegated to the status of possession. She is exclusively defined in relation to Godwin Baxter and, by extension, her other owners. Her former husband, General Blessington, describes her as the "prettiest thing" (Gray 215), not even referring to her relation to him. Proprietorship over Bella is further claimed by her birth father, who, using her original name, speaks about "[...] my Vicky's whereabouts [...]" (Gray 211; emphasis added). Based on the premise of possession, he demands her obedience, telling her, "You owe me that, Vicky, because I gave you life. So be a sensible donkey" (Gray 224). Blessington, in his outburst directed at McCandless, employs a similar rhetoric, stating "[...] UNHAND ME [sic] WIFE, SIR!" (Gray 213; original emphasis). Given this assertion and the complete disregard for Bella's cognitive reality, Kaczvinsky notes that, "[t]he body [...] takes precedence in legal matters [...]" (779), still tying Bella to her former husband, irrespective of the process of creation she has undergone. Ownership is exercised through Bella's body which is situated and exists only in terms of possession. This logic extends to both creations, as proprietary claims exercised by the creator figures also serve to implicate and justify coercion and the violation of the women's bodies.

The creations' bodies attest to the violence inflicted by their creators, inscribed on their skin and expressed through the control of its meaning. Miller's Galatea experiences Pygmalion's violence from the moment of creation as "[h]e beg[ins] kneading [her] hips and belly, hard, testing [her] stoniness" (Miller 15). She is exposed and subjected to his abuse. Galatea describes Pygmalion's examination of the injuries he has inflicted upon her body. "He rubbed at them, as though they were stains, not bruises. 'The colour is perfect,' he said, 'Look.' And he held up the mirror so that I could see. 'You make the rarest canvas, love.'" (Miller 33). It almost seems as though it is the creators' right to violate their creations, authority over the women's bodies resides entirely with them. Their actions preclude the possibility of alternative readings or interpretations. Meeting the creators' expectations necessitates physical suffering on part of the creations, for instance when Galatea is prepared for her husband's arrival (Miller 35). She is repeatedly raped by Pygmalion after performing for him a re-enactment of the moment of creation (Miller 15-6). Likewise, Bella's skin bears the signs of violation, including her abdominal and cranial scars resulting, according to McCandless, from her creation (Gray 107). In the creators' view, skin only records and responds to these instances of force, it bruises, scars, yields, is entirely passive. It reflects the creators' own actions back to them, while at the same time signifying an incapacity for agency on the part of the creations. The female skin exists solely as a passive hide, written upon by the creators, who possess exclusive control over its meaning and legibility. Their authority also reaches beyond the inscription of bodily surfaces, extending to the regulation and violation of the creations' reproductive rights and choices. This aspect once again foregrounds that the female creations are denied ownership of their bodies. Baxter not only terminates Bella's pregnancy without her consent (Gray 33), he attempts to prevent future conception by introducing her to contraceptive measures (Gay 59), while Pygmalion in Miller's *Galatea* decides that his creation is to have an abortion (Miller 39). Galatea and Bella are deprived of both corporeal and narrative self-determination. Dispossessed of the ability to claim their own bodies, the women are controlled through both manifest physical violence and the imposition of interpretative authority. To further arrest their development and preclude any possibility of bodily transformation or the emergence of autonomous agency, the creators rely on pathologisation.

Pathologisation is rooted in the framing of the creations' bodies as female, with their behaviour deemed a direct effect of this, and is predicated on the medicalisation of female sexuality. Williams and Bendelow refer to an emerging "*scientia sexualis*" in the 1800s (31). They assert that "[...] patriarchal ideology has permeated all social institutions, including science and medicine, where all stages of women's reproductive lives are defined as potentially 'pathological' and thus in need of 'expert' (i.e. male) control" (114). The medical profession has had a considerable impact on shaping the conception of female desire, its interpretation and regulation. Irvine mentions the pathologisation of "desire problems" which causes "[...] a subsequent adoption of the language and concepts of dysfunction" (327). Desire, in particular with regard to female bodies, was increasingly medicalised given that "[w]omen's bodies as objects of medical enquiry as well as of sexual desire became the focus for a physiological literature [...]" (Jordanova 164). Building on the conceptualisation of women's bodies as sites of medical and sexualised scrutiny, Wilton observes that "[...] practices and knowledges of medicine which have commandeered the intellectual and cultural territory of the body [...]" portray "[...] sexual 'difference' and sexual object-choice deviance as properties of bodies" (48). Medical professionals, including Bella's creator Baxter and the physician and nurse treating Miller's Galatea, are central in interpreting the female body. In Miller's rewriting, Galatea is subjected to enforced bedrest (Miller 2). She is dosed with a tea that is meant to calm her and incapacitates her completely. Galatea describes that "[t]he tea is the thing they give [her] when [she] won't lie back, and [she] hate[s] it, for they sit beside [her] until [she] drink[s] it all, and then [her] head aches and [her] tongue hurts and [she] piss[es] the bed" (Miller 8). It is meant to quiet her and render her compliant. There are clearly no medical considerations involved, since she is only administered the draught when her husband is not about to visit. As Galatea explains, "[h]e hates the smell of piss and he likes me to be able to use my tongue" (Miller 9). Pygmalion appears to have ensured that Galatea is denied credibility by framing her as physically and mentally unwell, so that his personnel dismiss her assertions, wants and wishes. Discussing her nurse, Galatea describes this in detail: "My husband had warned her that I was fanciful, that my illness made me say things that would sound strange to her" (Miller 1). Galatea is refused wellbeing to enforce her developmental arrest. Pathologisation is a means to keep her as close as possible to the condition of her creation, to uphold stasis.

A similar rationale appears to be employed in the attempt to suppress Bella's autonomous tendencies. When she is confronted with her life before her suicide, her behaviour is immediately pathologised on account of her femininity, her pregnancy and her sexuality. Dr. Picket, Bella's former physician, speaks of a "temporary derangement" (Gray 211), which a detective employed by Blessington, notably without any medical education, attributes to Bella's pregnancy, as it "[...] often drives the fair sex round the twist poor things" (Gray 211). Dr. Picket characterises Bella's condition as "[e]rotomania" (Gray 217). This is why she should have been subjected to a clitorrectomy, which, according to her doctor, Bella decidedly wished for (Gray 218-9). He asserts that he "[...] could only cure her by cutting out the centre of her nervous excitement" (Gray 218-9), thereby attempting to remedy Bella's designated behavioural aberrations by removing a part of her body. This is reminiscent of the fact that towards the end of the 18th century a certain reciprocity was assumed, as "[m]ental events, such as anger, fear or grief, were known to have physical effects, while illnesses such as fevers produced emotional and intellectual changes" (Jordanova 159). According to Picket, "[...] sexual intercourse enfeebles brain and body if over-indulging, but in rational doses does nothing but good" (Gray 217). Bella appears to have exceeded this level, and does therefore not classify as "normal", according to Picket (Gray 218). Her ascribed illness lies in her non-conformity, in going beyond and challenging the boundaries of hegemonic control. Her openly expressed sexuality poses a threat to male dominance. As Terry and Urla observe, "[t]he somatic territorializing of deviance, since the nineteenth century, has been part and parcel of a larger effort to organize social relations according to categories denoting normality versus aberration, health versus pathology, and national security versus social danger" (1). Blessington declares that "[...] the touch of a female body arouses DIABOLICAL LUSTS in potent sensual males – lusts [they] can hardly restrain" (Gray 217-8; original emphasis). Because Bella is depicted as lacking self-regulation, her sexuality should have been externally moderated and constrained, which would serve to reinforce patriarchal authority, whether exercised by her birth father, her former husband, or Baxter. Groneman observes that "[f]emale sexual desire was believed to be particularly dangerous [...]" (233), a position elaborated on by Irving, who highlights its dual perception as "[...] a cultural trope for both pleasurable satisfaction and dangerous, possibly alien, hunger" (331). This is concretised by Kaczvinsky, who asserts that "Bella

is what Victorians most feared in a wife; the sexually liberated woman who feels no shame or guilt about her erotic self. She refuses to be tamed” (786). Taking recourse to authoritative pathologisation appears to provide a remedy and reestablish control.

The creations’ behaviour and physical reactions enact and display their compliance, demonstrating adherence to the creators’ design and the roles prescribed for their existence. In this regard, as discussed previously, the creations’ skin is of particular importance, as it shows and manifests their expected and demanded conformity. This is most clearly demonstrated in the physical expression of blushing. In the Ovidian myth, the creation’s blushing is indicative of Pygmalion’s success, of him having obtained his aims. Due to their chosen way of life, the Propoetides, described in the narration proceeding the Pygmalion myth, are no longer able to blush (Ovid 232). That his creation blushes when awakened by Pygmalion indicates her innocence, virginity, chastity, and virtue, qualities that embody the sculptor’s ideals and set his creation apart from all other women in town:

[...] and at last
His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
Her eyes to his and saw the world and him. (Ovid 234)

Hence, blushing constitutes a central physical attribute, as Miller focuses on as well. Her Pygmalion accuses Galatea of indecency when she fails to exhibit this physical reaction and immediately interprets the lack thereof, as Galatea recounts: “He seized my arm, and said, you never blush. [...] He said, you do not blush anymore, that is the thing. You apologise and apologise, but you do not blush. Are you shameless now?” (Miller 31). The creation’s physical representations are meant to conform to the creator’s ideals and to confirm his possessive claims. When Galatea finally manages to comply, though for different reasons, Pygmalion concludes, “So you are not completely lost to me” (Miller 32). Galatea is only meant to blush in his presence, while for others appearing “pale as milk” (Miller 34). The expectation and enforcement of their conformity, however, is not limited to visible expressions, but centrally focuses on the women’s behaviour and carefully studied routines. The performative aspect, which both women are fully aware of, is naturalised by the creator figures. Miller’s Galatea, for instance, describes the performance she is compelled to stage for Pygmalion, reenacting the moment of her

creation, during which she is expected to “[...] lie down and arrange[...] [her]self in the right way” (Miller 9). She has to pay particular attention to the manner in which she places her fingers and to “[...] hold them just the way he likes, or it ruins everything” (Miller 9). Galatea consciously shapes her actions in accordance with Pygmalion’s demands. She “[...] [doesn’t] open [her] eyes, because [her] job [is] to lie on the couch without moving so that he might murmur, ‘Ah, my beauty is asleep.’” (Miller 12). Transformational tendencies on the part of the creations are inhibited and directed via a show of demanded conformity, and are further curtailed by the constraint of actual physical and social boundaries.

The creations are kept physically and socially separate through material confines and an appearance or behaviour that signals their origins and sets them apart from others. Miller’s Galatea is effectively imprisoned, her body is tied to the house, she is kept inside and mostly isolated in her bedroom (Miller 10). She conveys her oppressive circumstances through bodily imagery, stating that “[t]he door close[s] and the room swell[s] around [her] like a bruise” (Miller 3) and that “[...] the four wood walls seem[...] to press towards [her], like lungs that ha[ve] breathed in” (Miller 3). Rather than allow a life outside of his sphere of influence, Pygmalion would end his creation’s existence, given that if Galatea attempts “[...] to climb out of the window, [she] would not escape but die” (Miller 6). From the moment of her creation, the house offers a means to further consolidate her creator’s assertion of possession. Bella’s experience parallels Galatea’s, both in the period after her natural birth and following her creation. She is relegated to the domestic sphere by her birth father who asserts that women “[...] know nothing of business” (Gray 214). Equally, Baxter initially restricts her movements to the house, is her sole educator and entirely determines her development, cognitively, emotionally and physically (Gray 36). What follows from this is that both Galatea and Bella experience an initial and coercively enacted separation from society. The women are further precluded from social interaction as a direct result of their made-ness. Galatea asserts that she would be recognised immediately due to her physical features, citing her white skin colour (Miller 34), while Bella, in the first months following her creation, is singled out through her behavioural patterns (Gray 34-5). This facilitates the creators’ control over their creations’ development. The female bodies have been tailored exclusively to the

creators' requirements and desires. Both women seem to be kept apart on account of an element that originally occasioned their creation, their difference from women known to the creator figures.

As initially observed, the reason for the creation of both Galatea and Bella can be directly ascribed to their divergence from the creators' social surroundings. What appeals to the creator figures, both in the Ovidian myth and the rewritings, is the female creations' perceived exceptionalism, which originates in the creators' own acts and distinguishes them from other women. Baxer locates this element of difference in Bella's ability to look beyond his bodily appearance, as she is able to perceive "the inner man" (Gray 39). He emphasises an aspect which emerges prominently in the Ovidian myth, that of mutual esteem, even reverence. "*I needed to admire a woman who needed and admired me*" (Gray 39; original emphasis). For Miller's *Pygmalion*, as with the Ovidian sculptor, Galatea's chastity and immaculateness constitute her discernible and desired distinctiveness. He asserts that he would only enter a relationship with Galatea, stressing his repugnance towards the women he has encountered so far (Miller 12). Yet, deviation inscribed in a contained body poses an element of danger, as Shildrick observes.

In consequence, within the west at least, all forms of overtly aberrant or atypical embodiment – by which I mean those forms which blatantly contest the discursive ideal of normative embodiment – are highly productive of anxiety in that they threaten to overflow the boundaries [...]. The fear specifically [...] is that the putative lack of self-containment and the failure to occupy a delimited space signal the disturbing possibility of either or both engulfment and contamination. (328)

Despite the creators' efforts to prevent their creations' metamorphosis, to ensure their developmental arrest at the stage of creation, or to guide their transformation according to their plan, their attempts begin to unravel from the moment their creations' skin is closed or escapes their control, hence at the moment of creation. Paradoxically, the closing of the creations' skin appears to pose the danger of uncontainability, enables defiance and trespass. The creations' bodies gradually and increasingly resist the creators' regulatory efforts and subvert their governance. The women's skin is reconceptualised from an externally imposed façade to an actively written surface that enables the body itself to mediate its appearance and interactions. It affords the performing body the possibility for development. The creators' connection with their

creations can no longer reach beyond the hide they themselves have created, skin which was meant to reflect only their intentionality and artistry. The minute the creations are perfected, are finished in their creators' eyes, they escape their authority and their authorship. Instead the women write themselves. The creations' skin removes them from the creators' immanent control, as the passive concealing hide becomes a surface that embodies the women's potential for transformation.

3.2. Transformation Etched on the Skin – Expressive Bodily Assemblages

3.2.1. *Galatea – Closing Skin Refusing to Blush – Stretching and Sealing*

Concrete acts of transgression enable self-metamorphosis which gives rise to a bodily assemblage whose emerging agency subverts the creators' deterministic image. For Galatea, realising her body's transgressive potential relies on apparently mundane actions, a purposefully exercised corporeal consciousness and deliberate acts of manipulation and control.

Galatea shows an acute self-awareness which she increasingly, yet deliberately, communicates. This first surfaces in simple pleas to leave the house and spend time outside. Her wishes are denied on the grounds of her paleness (Miller 1) and her low body temperature (Miller 2), both of which, Galatea tries to explain, are characteristic of her origins and not indicative of illness, but she is evidently not considered an authority on her body (Miller 2). Equally, when asked by her doctor, "What would I tell your husband if you hurt yourself?" Galatea, referring back to body's constitution, answers, "I can't hurt myself from just a walk." (Miller 7). Due to her origins, Galatea perceives herself as different, she is aware of her physical composition. For example, she observes about a woman on the streets that "[h]er fingers [are] strange, like twigs on bare trees, but her skin [is] very soft" (Miller 25). Both of these features stand in contrast to Galatea's own physicality. They present a body with a history, shaped by its past and marked by ageing, while simultaneously foregrounding this woman's body as naturally born, in contrast to Galatea's fabricated one. Miller's Galatea, through her corporeal self-awareness, appears to be able to interpret and locate herself in a social context. She knows her body and is fully conscious of its origins and capabilities. This extends to her understanding of

the effect her appearance has on others. When Pygmalion dismisses the teacher of their daughter because he has seen him observing Galatea, she responds, “Of course he was.” (Miller 27-8). She clarifies her reply to the readers: “Everyone looked at me because I was the most beautiful woman in the town. I don’t say this to boast, because there is nothing in it to boast of. It was nothing I did myself” (Miller 28). She does not seem to claim entitlement to her aesthetic appeal since it does not constitute one of her achievements. Instead, she learns to use her body to attain her aims. It no longer functions merely as an inalterable work of art, but becomes the bodily assemblage through which she actively negotiates meaning and power. Her self-awareness enables her to exert control and to express only what she intends for her body to portray.

Galatea carefully enacts her body’s responses, which take the form of superficial show and deliberate deception. When she apologises for not “lying quietly” (Miller 4), she remarks that her doctor enjoys this exhibition of submissive repentance and reports to Pygmalion accordingly (Miller 5). She adds that for her physician’s “[...] sake, [she] trie[s] to vary it – looking down, biting [her] lip, twisting [her] fingers. Once, [she] burst into tears, that [was] his favourite time. [She] [is] working on trying to faint [...]” (Miller 4-5). For Galatea, active manipulation of her physical presence constitutes a central means of transgression. She is aware of her body’s ability to perform the roles and gestures assigned to and demanded of her and knows that her skin is not a direct representation of her inside but can instead be purposefully and intentionally made to present a version of herself that is expected by others. As Arthurs and Grimshaw phrase it, “[t]he body can be ‘written on’ in any way that one chooses” (6). Benthien considers the ability of the skin to conceal in linguistic terms, stating that “[...] there are many idiomatic expressions that denounce the body surface as a deceptive, illusionary integument, a false dress beneath which the inner character remains hidden [...]” (22). At the same time, she addresses the gendered connotation of bodily deception, as “[t]his noncongruence between external appearance and inner character is often linked to gender structure, in that a male speaker finds himself lead astray by a beautiful appearance” (Benthien 22). This observation may be applied to Galatea as well, yet her attempts at manipulation appear directed at distancing herself from her creator, rather than at seeming alluring. Pygmalion, however, does not seem to even entertain the possibility that Galatea is capable of inauthentic

displays. Arthurs and Grimshaw attest that “[...] the body is itself the subject of constant social inscription; it is discursively constructed and ‘written’ on by innumerable forms of social discipline: there is no possibility of a sharp distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’” (Arthurs and Grimshaw 7). Pygmalion appears to disavow this social constructedness, insofar as he conceives of Galatea’s bodily reactions as mere reflections of his artistic intentions and achievements. For him, her skin functions as he has intended and made it, and is therefore beyond Galatea’s control. He does not concede the ability of performativity or creativity to her. In his view, Galatea does not possess the necessary agency. She cannot form or re-form herself and eludes society’s influence. She is solely shaped by his art.

Yet, as already expounded above, it is Galatea’s skin that grants her the freedom of performance. She appears to ridicule Pygmalion’s need for her repetitive and obviously staged display. Every time Pygmalion enters her room in order to rape her, she has to enact a certain rite. “I didn’t open my eyes, because my job was to lie on the couch without moving so that he might murmur, ‘Ah, my beauty is asleep.’” (Miller 12). Her descriptions take on an almost mocking undertone when she continues: “And that’s when I’m supposed to open my eyes like a dewy fawn, and see him poised over me like the sun, and make a little gasping noise of wonder and gratitude, and then he fucks me” (Miller 15-6). Her compliance and conformity, which are central to the creator’s semblance of control, manifest as a consciously maintained and entirely superficial pretence, enacted with the full awareness of her body’s performative abilities. This Galatea acknowledges explicitly: “[...] I would know it was time to go arrange myself in bed, so that we might pretend again that I was waking from the stone to him” (Miller 27). Her conduct appears to observe the clear limits that her creator has established, both with regard to her behaviour as well as the purpose he has inscribed in his creation. As Clay argues, “[p]erformativity speaks directly to the creation, maintenance, and enactment of boundaries: these identities and behaviours are ‘correct’ and ‘safe’ whereas those ones are ‘pathological’” (Clay 296-7). Through her body, Galatea is able to deliberately stage acts of manipulation which are designed to feign her obedience to the constraints Pygmalion has established. She allows her body to be transgressed upon, in order to pursue her own aims. She states that “[she] let[s] [her] hands fall a little, so that

[Pygmalion] might see [her] breasts better,” to which Pygmalion reacts according to Galatea’s objectives (Miller 20). She uses her skin, bares her skin to her creator, making him believe that he sees her whole being, even her inside, while her skin expresses and communicates only that which she intends. Galatea is aware which responses her transgressions effectuate and calculates them according to her own designs. This also extends to Pygmalion’s vanity and a questioning of his craftsmanship. She factually states that “[h]e is rich because of me, if you want to know, but he doesn’t like it when I say that. He says it’s the goddess’ gift first, and then his own since he [is] the one who made me [...]” (Miller 10). Galatea can clearly discern her influence, her standing. She consciously uses her body’s transgressive potential to destabilise her creator’s arresting norms and imaginaries, creating for herself a space to change and develop, behind her self-composed, self-written skin. Galatea’s embodied subjectivity, enacted through the deliberate use of her body, also finds expression in her voice. The agency of her bodily assemblage enables her to articulate herself as a subject.

Miller’s Galatea, contrary to the Ovidian source myth, speaks. She narrates her own story. Enterline proposes to “[...] view the voice as embodied” (22). Galatea’s voice shows the emerging agency of her bodily assemblage. She not only subverts her creator’s normative constraints through her speaking skin, but also by consciously mapping her voice on her body, lying to attain her ends. She summarises Pygmalion’s disappointment at what her animation entails: “The thing is, I don’t think my husband expected me to be able to talk. I don’t blame him exactly, since he had known me only as a statue, pure and beautiful and yielding to his art. Naturally, when he wished me to live, that’s what he wanted still, only warm so that he might fuck me” (Miller 23-4). This stands in stark contrast to the original “Pygmalion” myth, in which, “[f]or love of a speechless simulacrum, Pygmalion generates a new race” (Enterline 28). Ovid’s Pygmalion appears to be aware of what Enterline terms the “perils of speaking subjectivity” (28). Miller’s Galatea comments on her creator’s expectations, stating that “[...] it does seem foolish that he didn’t think it through, how I could not both live and still be a statue” (Miller 24). Unlike Ovid’s speechless creation, Miller’s Galatea wields her voice as an instrument of agency, capable of manipulation and deception. By way of example, to gain information about her daughter, Galatea consciously modulates her voice accordingly: “I stroked his chest with

my perfect fingers. I tried to make my voice loose and easy, like a yawn. ‘How is Paphos, my love?’” (Miller 18). She attempts a similar strategy, lying to her physician. To avoid having to take her medicine, she seemingly agrees to the doctor’s advice, behaves according to his wishes and acquiesces to his authority, asserting, “You’re right, I was so tired and I didn’t know it” (Miller 8). Equally, in an attempt at conciliation, Galatea compliments her nurse, hired by her husband to care for her and monitor her behaviour. Galatea is fully aware of her ability to lie in order to mitigate the nurse’s harsh treatment as she prepares Galatea for the arrival of her husband (Miller 34-5). Using her voice, Galatea seems to know how to influence the people around her. Her lies take the form of a confirmation of the views she knows those around her hold. To illustrate, Galatea wishes to offer her daughter Paphos a chance for transgression through education, enabling her to move beyond her mother’s situation by employing a teacher for her, as noted above. She uses an according argument to convince Pygmalion, which again reflects the purpose he has intended for his creation: “No, I said, she will be useful to her husband, as I am not. And he had smiled at me. You are useful enough” (Miller 26). In the same way that Pygmalion does not entertain the possibility of a performing body, neither does he acknowledge the capability of Galatea’s voice to deceive rather than solely enact his intentions. This apparent compliance also extends to Galatea’s bodily expressions, through which she enacts her own agency.

Contrary to Ovid’s creation, Miller’s Galatea does not blush in response to Pygmalion’s advances. When discussing and summarising the original myth, Miller refers to the Propoetides, stating that “Pygmalion embraces [Galatea], and the woman, feeling his kisses, blushes deeply (in contrast to the prostitutes who began the story, who are incapable of blushing)” (52). Gilbert defines blushing as “[...] a bodily manifestation of affect – and a rather perfect example of it, as it is tied fundamentally to the concept of self-consciousness or self-knowledge, while at the same time highlighting a process of bodily affect becoming, but not yet quite defined as, emotion [...]” (65). As previously outlined, it is crucial for Ovid’s creation to blush, as this confirms to Pygmalion her innocence and submissiveness. In Miller’s retelling, when Galatea fails to do so, Pygmalion resorts to violence and unambiguous allegations (Miller 31). Gilbert asserts that “[t]he body thinks the person, whose emotions cause the body to react. Often this

entire exchange takes place without the conscious knowledge of the person of the cause, and it is the action of blushing that creates awareness – in the self or in others” (Gilbert 73). Yet, Galatea renders this process conscious. She does not blush for the reasons Pygmalion expects, but is able to express the desired response on her skin: “I covered myself with my hands, and made soft noises like a child. Blush, blush, I prayed. Blush for him or he will kill you. And I was fortunate, for it was warm in the room, and I was angry, and ashamed too, for I feared that Paphos could hear us, and the blood came to my cheeks and I blushed” (Miller 32). Even though her actual motivations for this somatic response are altogether different, Pygmalion interprets it as his persistent and possessive hold over Galatea (Miller 32). Blushing does not constitute a direct, unreflective visceral reaction to her creator’s touch. Galatea’s blushing instead constitutes a manifestation of the bodily assemblage, a fleeting, dynamic configuration in which skin, blood, affect, emotion, and environmental circumstances converge to produce a response. The emerging agency of the assemblage negotiates Galatea’s intentions, emotions, and social pressures, so that her blush becomes both an expression of embodied experience and a strategic, performative act.

Galatea’s development contrasts with Pygmalion’s new statue that he is carving for himself. Galatea sees the finished statue in Pygmalion’s studio and immediately becomes aware of the ways in which it differs from her, reflecting that “[s]he [is] perfection, every inch of her, from the sweet curls of her ribbons to her sandals painted gold. She ha[s] no scabs, and no sand beneath her fingernails. She [does] not chase the goats, and she [does] not disobey. You [can] almost see the flush on her cheeks” (Miller 44). This work of art conforms to Pygmalion’s bodily ideal and has been made completely compliant. Pygmalion ensures his continued control and authorship by directly inscribing the skin of his new creation. The blush seems chiselled into her facial expression, an attempt to arrest this girl of ten years (Miller 17) at the moment of creation, at the stage of virginity, which he appears to almost equate with blushing. As Galatea observes, “When I had once asked him how old he meant for me to be, he had said, ‘A virgin.’” (Miller 17). Galatea herself, through her eventual transformation, permanently precludes the reaction of blushing. Drowning, she states that “[...] the coolness [slides] up [her] neck and [bleeds] the colour from [her] lips and cheeks” (Miller 49). Not blushing

constitutes an instance of transgression that shows Galatea's development, her increasing resistance to her creator's formative control and her consolidating self-determination, which eventually culminates in the self-effectuated impossibility of blushing.

Galatea enacts her body's transgressive potential not only through its conscious manipulation but also through her pregnancy and motherhood. Stretch marks, resulting from her pregnancy with her daughter Paphos, are permanently imprinted on her skin, they attest to her past experiences, as Jablonski explains. "When the skin is stretched suddenly as a result of rapid growth – during pregnancy or weight gain, for example – the collagenous framework of the skin struggles to keep up [...]. With time, stretch marks fade and become less obvious, but they never go away" (133). Galatea's skin does not remain impervious and unaffected, as Pygmalion would have it appear. It undergoes and expresses irreversible changes and inevitable progress. Her creator is disappointed at the irremediable alterations, which, for him, not only tarnish his work of art, but deprive him of agency: "He frowned, pointing. 'What is that?' I looked down at my belly and saw the faint silvery tracks on my skin, caught in the light. 'My love, it is the sign of our child. Where the belly stretched.' [...] 'They are ugly,' he said. 'I'm so sorry, my love. It is the same for all women.' 'If you were stone, I would chisel them off,' he said" (Miller 22-3). This foregrounds Galatea's departure from Pygmalion's desired stasis as well as the violence implied in his insistence on it. While her creator only wishes for her body to return to its original unaltered state, Galatea seems to embrace the process of her skin stretching as indicative of her pregnancy and the development her body has undergone. The skin is marked as time passes, as Jablonski describes, asserting that "[...] it is not perfect: it ages, scars, and suffers the ravages of disease and environmental assaults" (121). Galatea's changing skin epitomises the inevitability of her transformation and, at the same time, foregrounds the untenability of the inert state Pygmalion would arrest her in. As Connor observes, "[t]he skin's way of writing time is indeed to write it out" as it acts as "[...] a soft clock, which we wind up whenever we mark it [...]" (46), highlighting its temporal and ephemeral qualities. Galatea's living, recording and constantly altering skin manifests a marked divergence from Pygmalion's desires. He is, as Galatea describes, "[...] a man who likes white, smooth surfaces" (Miller 19). Galatea relates Pygmalion's

indignation at the symptoms of her pregnancy, during which she “[...] was tired and sick and [her] feet were too swollen for the delicate golden sandals he liked to see them in. It made him angry [...]” (Miller 24). It almost appears as though the pregnancy itself, causing the concomitant bodily changes visible on Galatea’s skin, constitutes a transgression in its own right. Her body develops, not least through the influence of another body growing inside her. Galatea’s pregnancy and its impact on her body exceed and are entirely beyond the creator’s control, there is nothing he can do to arrest either the process or prevent its result. Her pregnancy becomes part of and reconstitutes her bodily assemblage, from which new ways of exercising embodied agency emerge.

Giving birth changes Galatea’s position considerably, as she is no longer a mere passive creation. Instead, the status of creator is also conferred upon her, thereby undermining Pygmalion’s prerogative and destabilising the hegemony sustained through his perceived uniqueness. Galatea emphasises that it is she who passes on her physical traits, which set her and Paphos apart, not least from Pygmalion. Mother and daughter, for instance, remain unaffected by the summer’s heat due to their bodily constitution (Miller 25). Upon leaving Paphos behind, Galatea spells Paphos’ name in the sand (Miller 42), a gesture that positions her as one who inscribes. Writing Paphos’ name in sand, though, given its inherent instability, situates this act of inscription as mutable and revisable rather than deterministic. This moment also resonates with the absence of a name for Galatea herself in the source myth, where her anonymity reduces her to made-ness instead of acknowledging her as a self-constituting embodied subject. Through naming her daughter, I would argue, Galatea asserts herself as a creator in her own right, while at the same time refusing to reproduce the logic that once rendered her an unnamed, solely made body. Galatea’s actions further reveal her acute awareness that her altered position constitutes a threat to Pygmalion, which she consciously exploits. She leads Pygmalion to believe that she has conceived again, who, at the prospect of another pregnancy, turns “almost as pale” as Galatea is herself (Miller 38). She knows how to build on her creator’s initial dismay: “Darling, I’m so happy, we shall have another child, and then another after that. And then –”, causing Pygmalion to leave the room (Miller 38). Without returning himself and instead sending only her doctor, he forces her to have an

abortion. Galatea uses the procedure she is made to undergo to act on her intention to flee.

The moment Galatea executes her plan of escape, motion is foregrounded. Movement constitutes a central means of transgression, both bodily and in the enactment of emotional and cognitive processes. She repeats twice to her nurse, “I feel something” (Miller 40, 41), pointing to her emotional unfolding. Galatea relies once again on the misinterpretation of her body’s expression, as the nurse takes these assertions to refer to the onset of contractions upon her forced abortion (Miller 40-1). Once the nurse goes to call for the doctor, Galatea’s movements become brisk and decisive. This rapid succession of intentional acts, reflected in the sudden predominance of action verbs, starts with her sprinting towards Paphos (Miller 41). Then, she “[...] kick[s] off [her] sandals and step[s] up the warm, grey branches” to climb up to Paphos’ room, where she “[...] reache[s] and pull[s] [herself] into her window” (Miller 42). She makes her way to her husband’s bedroom and “pushe[s] open the door” (Miller 43). Galatea wakes Pygmalion and then “turn[s] and [runs]” (Miller 45) until she “[throws]” herself into the ocean (Miller 46). Eventually, having taken hold of Pygmalion’s body, Galatea performs one last conscious speech act, her prayer or command to her body to turn to stone (Miller 48). This sequence illustrates the emerging agency of the bodily assemblage, which confers on Galatea the power to act. Her body is not merely a site of passive experience but a dynamic network of abilities, movements, and intentions. Each motion demonstrates the enabling agency of her embodied subjectivity. The final act, commanding her body to turn to stone, once again foregrounds the assemblage’s agentic potential, making visible its capacity to produce effects in relation to and within the world and to resist determinism.

Culminating in her transformation into stone, Galatea gradually transitions towards a body that no longer permits infringement, whose boundary is its skin. This initially takes the form of the simple act of rubbing off the rose oil that her nurse applies to Galatea’s skin prior to Pygmalion’s arrival (Miller 35-6) and continues in Galatea’s carefully enacted simulation of pregnancy, through which she subverts the authority her physician and her creator attempt to exert over her. When her doctor visits and finds Galatea, contrary to his expectations, lying down, she emphasises that she is fully aware of the fact that her illness is no more than a fabricated means of coercion, contrived to exert control: “Are

you unwell?' 'No,' I said. 'I am very well.' He was about to say, 'Then why are you lying down?' but that would have meant admitting that I was not sick to begin with. Ha, I thought" (Miller 36). Her supposed pregnancy immediately stops Pygmalion from touching her. Even before revealing it, her conscious disruption of her ritualistic behaviour, as demanded by Pygmalion, creates distance, erects a first, increasingly impervious barrier. In the course of this performance, she relies on Pygmalion's ignorance of the female body.

I arranged myself just so. 'Ah, my beauty is asleep.' And I said, 'No, I'm not.' He said, 'For your sake, I tell you to lie down, and I will return in a moment when you have collected yourself.' I said, 'I am pregnant.' He stared. 'It is not possible.' Because ever since Paphos, he leaves his semen on my belly. With the gods, all things are possible, I said. Look at my stomach. I had puffed it a little, so that it looked like a mound. And anyway, he did not know what women looked like. To him, if there was anything, it was strange. (Miller 37-8)

Through this observation, Galatea not only negates Pygmalion's skills, but also finally denies him what he believes constitutes his power over her, his ownership and knowledge of her body. Through the gradual consolidation of her bodily limits, Galatea's bodily assemblage, shaped by its emergent properties, ultimately exceeds her creator's influence and withstands his deterministic control.

A key distinction emerges between the two creations, Galatea and Bella, in the ways their respective narratives ultimately enable the subversion of their creators' determinism. While Bella's power over Baxter is mainly predicated upon his emotional dependence, as I will elaborate on below, Galatea's authority over Pygmalion is largely physical. For Galatea, this process begins by a mere hint, asking for a portrait of Pygmalion she can own (Miller 19), but rapidly develops towards full physical control. Galatea manipulates Pygmalion into following her, appropriating his own words, "Ah, my beauty is asleep" (Miller 45). He chases her, follows the path she chooses, which eventually leads to her taking complete possession of his body in order to drown him (Miller 48). She describes the futility of his struggles, in that "[h]e hit[s] at [her], but it [is] watery and weak and [she] [feels] nothing, just the solid circle of [her] arms, and the inexorable drag of [her] body" (Miller 48-9). In this moment, Galatea's body functions as a fully realised assemblage, incorporating water, gravity, and Pygmalion's movements, its emerging agency producing effects beyond his control. She condemns his body to dissolution and disintegration on

the ocean floor, by “[...] the crabs that would come for him [...]” (Miller 49), until only her body, turned to unfringeable, inviolable stone is left.

In summary, tracing Galatea’s development and the gradual emergence of her agentic potential, what can be observed is the move from allowing her body to be transgressed upon, in order to advance her own intentions, to realising her embodied subjectivity as a site of active and willed resistance and increasing impermeability that is capable of subverting the deterministic terms of existence her creator inscribed in her creation. The emerging power and agency of Galatea’s bodily assemblage culminate in its eventual self-determined unyieldingness.

3.2.2. *Bella – Skin Opening to the World – Scarring and Showing*

While Galatea’s transgression and self-metamorphosis strive towards a bodily assemblage actively shielding her against intrusion, Bella’s development follows a markedly different trajectory. Similar to the Propoetides, Bella’s transgression consists in an increasing physical porosity. Popescu observes about the Propoetides that “[b]ecause they made their bodies ‘public’, the Propoetides turn the natural openness of the female body into a life-threatening vice [...]” (Popescu 91). Bella embodies exactly this threat of women’s uncontrollable corporeality.

This first becomes apparent in her unbridled bodily movements and her uninhibited exhibition of emotion. For her, skin is by no means a surface of separation but much rather an instrument of the closest possible interaction, given that, as Steinborn asserts, tactile perception and cognitive apprehension are closely connected to individual experience (5). Bella’s sensory awareness is central to her cognitive and emotional development, she wants to touch and feel the touch of others. Skin becomes a means of interrelation, highlighting, as Benthien notes, its role in perceiving and establishing ties to a person’s surroundings (36). In this way, Bella’s tactile and sensory encounters exemplify the inseparability of body and environment, as Merleau-Ponty notes, observing that “[t]he body is the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein” (84). Through physical contact, Bella moves towards and into the world. When first meeting McCandless, “[...] she [flings] both arms out straight toward [him] and [keeps] them there” (Gray 29). Her impulsiveness attests to her

openness to and orientation towards social interconnectedness. When bidding goodbye to one of the men she has met on her journey, Bella, in her own words, “[...] [springs] to him, tie[s] his arms to his sides with [her] own and kisse[s] him until he tremble[s]” (Gray 166). For Bella, tactile perception is also central in forming a mental representation of the people she meets. She asks her biological father to “[l]et [her] hold [his] hand” (Gray 214) in order to determine his character and employs a similar procedure with her former husband (Gray 216). Her skin does not primarily act as a barrier but mainly as a means of direct communication. Bella’s uninhibited affective self-expression aligns with the 19th-century understanding that skin was not only considered responsive to and revelatory of emotion (Gilbert 143), but that “[t]he sensing, judging, and acting self was increasingly sited on the sensory surface of the body, where the embodied individual met the external world and transformed that encounter into thought and action” (Gilbert 27). Building on this, Williams and Bendelow directly connect affective and tactile perception in that “[...] emotions underpin the sensual experience of our bodies and selves, providing the existential basis of social reciprocity and exchange [...]” (154). Bella’s bodily interaction with others does not merely reflect her emotions but appears to actively shape and intensify them, as she explores feelings through touch and responds to the touch of others. Bella’s body becomes a site where affect and perception intertwine, allowing her emotional responses to be expressed and negotiated in relation to her encounters with others.

Bella does not appear to restrict her emotive involvement and responses in the slightest, nor does she recognise the necessity to do so. She often displays her complex emotional landscape, as “[...] she smile[s] and nod[s] though tears [start] flowing down her cheeks” (Gray 50). In the same vein, McCandless notes the close connection between Bella’s emotional and bodily wellbeing. Although he has witnessed her in similarly emotionally taxing situations, he expresses astonishment at how her body recovers from the turmoil of learning that she has already been pregnant and lost her child. He describes her progression from complete inactivity in response to this revelation, stating that Bella almost appears to “fall asleep” (Gray 193) to a voracious appetite, as “[...] Bella demolishe[s] most of a cold boiled ham with bread, cheese, pickles, and two or three pints of sweet milky tea. Though used to her quick recovery from shocks [he] [has] never

seen it happen so physically” (Gray 194). In his eyes, she appears to rejuvenate through her meal as “[h]er face [loses] the thin haggard look, her cheeks [grow] rounder, her brow smoother and softer, the tiny lines and wrinkles [fade] from her freshening skin” (194). Being overwhelmed by emotion also causes Bella to transgress upon and mark the bodies of others. She bites one of the men she encounters on her travels, afterwards reflecting and asserting in her letter, “I am glad I bit mister Astley” (Gray 151). Bella describes her reaction as being prompted by physical restraint. “[...] Harry Astley clapped his hand over my mouth O [sic] the sheer joy of feeling my teeth sink in. The taste of blood sobered me” (Gray 174). This act of aggression leaves a permanent imprint on the man’s skin (Gray 151). Emotion breaches skin, both Bella’s and that of the people she encounters. This also finds metaphorical representation in one of Bella’s affectively charged letters to Baxter which she pierces with her pen (Gray 144). Bella’s emotionally motivated behaviour constitutes a central means of transformation. She encounters normative expectations, which, through her uninhibited emotionality, she reenacts as transgressive moments of self-creation.

This interplay of emotion and embodied practice underscores how affect is not merely reactive but also constitutive of intentional agency. Maclaren declares that “[...] emotion is not opposed to reason, but is rather an essential element of our rational development toward autonomous ways of being” (26). Hence, Bella’s displays of emotion might be construed as a gradual assertion of her independence and as a means of positioning herself within her environment. Maclaren elaborates that the “[...] most ‘mad’ emotional behaviors [sic] are not the result of an abandonment of reason and an indulgence in the irrational. They instead arise out of our own embodied attempts to *make existential sense of the world and to find our place in reality*” (38; original emphasis). This becomes evident when Bella is confronted with the circumstances of her life prior to her attempted suicide. She shows salient physical reactions to her emotional distress. Yet, she asserts, reflecting on her former self, “I feel how that poor thing felt [...] but it will not madden me” (Gray 231). At each moment, Bella’s emotions unfold through her interactions with others and her surroundings, forming part of a bodily assemblage in which agency emerges relationally. Situated within a network of interpersonal relations, she transgresses social norms and prescribed behavioural expectations through the unrestricted physical

expression of affect and uninhibited social engagement, thereby consciously enacting her self-transformation.

Given her interconnectedness and her body's relationality, Bella's self-metamorphosis not only influences but is also shaped by her social surroundings, with the contact and interplay between her body and those of others serving as a crucial site for her development. This is particularly evident when considering, but is by no means restricted to, her sexual partnerships. Unlike her Ovidian counterpart and the complete physical arrest imposed on the Propoetides, Bella claims and acquires agency through her sexual encounters. They constitute a means of learning about and experiencing her own body, as well as of approaching the world. Through her affair with Duncan Wedderburn, one of her sexual partners, she learns that she has already been pregnant, as he reveals to her that her abdominal scar is not universal to female physicality (Gray 107). This moment not only encapsulates how bodily transgression through sexual autonomy enables her continuous transformation, but also highlights the role of Bella's skin in the process. As Jablonski observes, "[t]he skin is the largest sexual organ of the human body [...]" (119). For Bella, her skin, as a porous surface of interaction, is central to her development. Shildrick, conceptualising erotic encounters between bodies as "corporeal modification", stipulates that "[...] every instantiation of erotic touch breaches the boundaries of embodied being" (330). Against this theoretical backdrop, Bella's pursuit of sexual and reproductive emancipation and autonomy constitutes a central mode of transgression. Salzman-Mitchell refers to the metamorphic potential of an unreservedly expressed female sexuality in its capacity to rearticulate a woman as a non-normative embodied subject, stating that "[a] woman who allows herself to gaze in an erotic way becomes deviant and mobile and is forced to live in a liminal space for which usually the only possible outcome is transformation" (*A Web of Fantasies* 116). Bella transforms herself through her unapologetic and assertive embodied sexuality that confers agency. For her, the self-determination afforded through sexual transgression is integral to her reconstituting subjectivity and advances her self-directed transformation. She maintains, talking to Baxter, "[...] I am a very romantic woman who needs a lot of sex but not from you because you cannot help treating me like a child, and I cannot CAN NOT treat you like one. I am marrying Candle because I can treat him how I like" (Gray 53;

original emphasis). This is corroborated by McCandless himself. Upon their first erotic encounter, he observes that “[f]rom feeling as helpless as a doll [he] suddenly wishe[s] to be nothing else” (Gray 48). He willingly cedes his autonomy. Bella’s sole intention regarding sexual engagements is pleasure. She clearly demarcates where her interests lie, authority rests with her. When asked by McCandless, Bella asserts, “Of course I never do more than we’ve just done with MEN. More with men makes babies. I want fun, not babies. I only do more with women, if I like the look of them [...]” (Gray 49; original emphasis). Similarly, she immediately precludes physical intimacy with her creator Baxter, simultaneously discrediting his claim to exceptionality. She explains that she “[...] can’t do it with God, and that’s what is making him miserable. He’s too ordinary to have fun with in that kind of way” (Gray 51). This moment marks a shift from purely sexual encounters to a wider network of relations in which Bella’s embodied subjectivity continues to take form. Berndt describes “[...] social interactions as necessary for the development of intellectual and emotional cognition [...]” (131). In Bella’s case, this tendency also encompasses one-sided romantic attachments, as Baxter explicitly states: “On her side it was a Platonic affair. That it helped her mental growth is shown in her writing [...]. But her growth appears most clearly in the quality of her reflections” (Gray 151). For Bella, contact between her body and those of others, at various degrees of intimacy and involvement, enables transgression and thus her self-transformation. This also involves her reaction to and agency in light of others’ perception of her body and behaviour.

The construal of Bella’s sexuality, which transgresses expected normative behaviour, further enables and contributes to her self-transformation and the constitution and re-constitution of her bodily assemblage through creative reiteration. Her embodied subjectivity, enacted through her sexuality and desire, unsettles socially prescribed expectations to the point that Duncan Wedderburn frames her as monstrous, aligning her with what Arthurs describes as an “unruly woman” who “[...] inverts the power relation of gender by breaking the codes of bodily decorum” (142). When considering Bella’s relationship with Duncan Wedderburn, she consciously breaches the prevailing norms of propriety. According to Pitts, “[t]he use of deviant body practices by women appears to subvert gendered norms of female docility and beauty” (237). These “gendered norms”

(Pitts 237) can be further concretised by Gosz's elaborations who observes that "[...] the only socially recognized and validated representations of women's sexuality are those which conform to and accord with the expectations and desires of a certain heterosexual structuring of male desire" (202). This defines the demarcation that Bella crosses. Yet as Genca stipulates, "[...] a woman need not be distorted, ugly, or even cruel in order to be labelled a monster; being a woman suffices enough to earn the name. The female body and sexuality becomes [sic] a site for the monstrous" (69). Retrospectively, writing a letter to Baxter, Wedderburn cannot cope with Bella's demands and her strong inclination for lived experience. He blames Bella for his financial ruin (Gray 97) and mental instability (Gray 93). Bella's transgression enacts an overstepping of the boundaries ascribed to the female body in male hegemonic discourses, as Hedenborg-White and Sandhoff summarise.

So, what does it mean to have a 'bod [sic] for sin'? Is it perhaps enough to have a woman's body? [...] In some cases, notions of wickedness are intimately tied to gender; behaviours and traits considered acceptable for men become viewed as problematic, or even wicked and sinful, when displayed by women. Sometimes, failing to comply with societal norms regarding femininity is sufficient to be classified as evil, and in need of punishment. One of the most potent examples of this is female sexuality. (xiii)

Wedderburn's reaction to Bella exemplifies how gendered norms function to regulate female conduct. He appears to struggle to reconcile Bella's clear delineation of their relationship as entirely physical with his own expectations, as she clarifies that her emotional involvement cannot equal his, responding to his professions of love that "[she has] got another lad who does that [...]" (Gray 81). Wedderburn directly equates Bella with the monstrous on account of her unconstrained sexual agency which openly challenges dominant and dominating norms. For him, she is a "gorgeous monster" (Gray 91). He entitles his account of a comparison between Bella and biblical parallels "THE COMING OF THE BEAST" (Gray 95; original emphasis), using the monstrous in an attempt to dehumanise Bella on the basis of her experienced sexuality (Gray 107) as well as her marked skin, interpreting the scar on her forehead as "a witch mark" (Gray 89). At this point, it is interesting to note that the monstrous does by no means serve as a deterrent for Wedderburn, despite the less favourable consequences he describes. He acknowledges his ongoing obsession with Bella, characterising the enduring impact of

her words and perspectives as “a loathsome and swarming antagonist” and comparing it to “huge wasps or carnivorous bats” that “[...] [are] not really outside but INSIDE [his] brain and gnawing, gnawing. They gnaw there still” (Gray 93; original emphasis). According to Dearey et al., “[t]he sentiment that the seductive appearances of femininities are merely a ruse, and that the feminine/woman is synonymous not just with imperfection but moreover with deviousness and transgression are persistent, but this does not diminish the manifold allures of the (evil) feminine” (Dearey et al. vii). Despite his protestations, Wedderburn appears to wish for Bella’s proximity (Gray 97). An attribution of monstrosity constitutes a means of maintaining or restoring male hegemony and derives from “[...] the fear that all female bodies are in fact unspeakably monstrous – and in this monstrosity, unspeakably powerful” (Young 412). With regard to Bella, her ascribed monstrosity holds the impetus for transformation. It is precisely the possibility afforded by this designation that enables transgressive reiteration. Within this process, her bodily assemblage actively engages with and negotiates the label, as its capacities and interactions produce effects that exceed and destabilise the norms that would contain her. In this sense, her assigned monstrosity no longer operates as an imposed constraint but as a catalyst and enabler, allowing her to embody the monstrous in ways that defy social containment.

Engaging with normative frameworks, Bella deliberately subverts expectations and reconfigures the discursive and embodied boundaries imposed on women. Bella does not consider her engagement to McCandless to constitute an impediment to her affair with Wedderburn (Gray 61, 70). She describes their physical relationship in detail to Baxter in her letters, unaffected by external or personal reservations (Gray 97). Bella lacks inhibition and thus challenges societal self-perception, given that, according to Groneman, “[t]he Victorians believed that sexual restraint and adherence to highly differentiated gender roles were both evidence of and necessary for the continuation of the advanced level of civilization they had achieved” (235). For Bella, a purely physical relationship is entirely distinct from marital commitment (Gray 117). She does not see the reason for a monogamous system or why, by way of example, she should “[...] not *have a spare [...] husband somewhere [...]*” (Gray 88-9; original emphasis). Neither does she consider sex work socially stigmatised or morally reprehensible (Gray 180). As

evidenced by an incident during the time Bella is employed as a sex worker, transgression through non-compliance becomes central for Bella's self-metamorphosis, exemplifying what Rumson and Bentham stipulate. According to them, "[w]hen the boundaries of 'good woman'-hood are so exacting, so impossible to successfully navigate, with disapproval and censure around every bend, a certain freedom can be found in a wholesale rejection of goodness, and value in womanhood found instead in divergence, deviance and dissent" (Rumson and Bentham 1). When Bella is meant to undergo examination by a physician to check for venereal disease, she refuses to be examined (Gray 182). She repudiates the attribution of the stigma of illness to female corporeality, instead pointing to the male body as a source of contagion (Gray 183). Pietrzak-Franger maintains that "[d]iseased bodies are bodies outside the norm. Yet these are also bodies that are always thrown into sharp relief – be it by the subjects who notice their corporeality because of illness, practitioners who inspect them, society because of their assumed contagiousness, or the state because it has to 'solve' their problem" (108). Bella calls for the male body to be examined, to be looked at and brought into focus, demanding an alternative discursive construction of gendered physicality. Bella's transgressions of prevailing expectations and her refusal to accept normative designations of female corporeality demonstrate how her bodily assemblage actively negotiates dominant norms. In doing so, she transforms conventional boundaries into sites of discursive self-creation.

In the process, Bella gradually comes to recognise the role of her skin not only as a membrane of constant interchange and interaction but also as being in-between herself and her surroundings and not being indiscriminately permeable. She begins to perceive it as a surface upon which she can actively inscribe meaning. Upon rejecting a marriage proposal from Mr. Astley, Bella begins to regard appearance, and in particular a person's skin, as a means of concealment. Referring to him she observes that "[h]e is as poor and desperate as my lost daughter, but only inside. Outside is perfectly comfortable. Everyone should have a cosy shell around them [...]" (Gray 164). Similar to Miller's Galatea, Bella appears to realise that skin can also be a mask, a façade, and that it holds the possibility for deception. She comes to understand a notion of embodiment, which Schnackenberg defines as "[...] the subjective experience of having and using a body, the

sense of the self as located in the body, and the body as experienced both objectively and subjectively as my body” (Schnackenberg 22). She learns to shape and redefine her body, which emerges as a responsive assemblage whose form and capacities Bella continuously negotiates and reenacts, allowing her both to constitute her subjectivity and to determine her interrelation with the world. Building on her awareness of bodily boundaries and on her active engagement with the world, Bella increasingly perceives education as instrumental to transgression and a means for self-metamorphosis.

Education is central to the formative processes through which Bella redefines herself. Through transgression in her pursuit of experience and knowledge, she actively transforms herself, ultimately remaking her embodied subjectivity as a New Woman. Viewing the attainment of learning as transgressive relates to gendered preconceptions, as explained by McCrory who states that “[k]nowledge is not a quality found admirable in women in many traditional tales [...]” and identifies “curiosity and knowledge” as “double faults in women” (McCrory 31). Bella allows for her surroundings and the knowledge gleaned from them to alter her. Education is central in her transformation throughout, be it her initial instruction through Baxter (Gray 36, 264), her travels (Gray 47), discussions and self-taught moral views (Gray 156) or her eventual choice to study medicine (Gray 197). Fiorato explicitly pinpoints Bella’s choice of profession as the moment “[s]he attains the dimension of self-creation [...]” (295). According to Diaz Martinez, Bella embodies a “New Woman” (126), who “[...] is intelligent, educated, well-travelled, sexually liberated, financially secure, politically motivated and determined to join a worthwhile, fulfilling, and socially productive career” (127), a definition which King and Lee corroborate and complement, stating that Bella “[...] becomes a New Woman who is resourceful, unencumbered by social convention, and sexually active” (218-9). Although Bella is created by Baxter, this does not in itself warrant the aforementioned designation in the literal sense of creation. Rather, it is through her ongoing self-metamorphosis and the resulting bodily assemblage, to which education centrally contributes, that she comes to embody the qualities of the New Woman. In this sense, such an ascription cannot be imposed externally. It emerges from the relational, agentic capacities of her bodily assemblage.

Bella's education simultaneously enables her to consciously reject and depart from who she does not perceive herself to be. One of Bella's acquaintances on her travels observes, "You find the world horrifying Bell, because you have not been warped to fit it by a proper education" (Gray 156). While this defines education as a means of enculturation and subsumption under the social system, Bella resists the assumption that the forms her embodied subjectivity may take are pre-given. When she is told about the existence of "three kinds of people" (Gray 156), she responds "[t]here must be a fourth kind. [...] I will search as long as I live [...]" (Gray 156). She unequivocally refuses conformity. As Bella relearns and develops cognitively, she dissociates herself from her creator. Two key moments mark Bella's detachment from Godwin Baxter. Initially, when Bella is asked, "My child, have you never read God's holy Bible?" she responds, "I am nobody's child!" (Gray 135). This declaration explicitly rejects the relational position through which Baxter has defined her as his child, creation, and student. Bella instead expresses a self-understanding through which her embodied subjectivity is no longer anchored in the conditions of her making but in ongoing self-formation. Vandermeer centrally differentiates between the secluded instruction Bella has received through Baxter and her active, self-defined development, summarising that "Baxter attempts to both teach Bella about the world and shield her from it. She soon escapes her creator, however, and begins her true reeducation" (407). Bella is cognisant of the changes she has undergone. She observes herself and, writing to Baxter, refers to these self-transformations explicitly, at the same time asserting her demands: "[Y]ou must know that the Bell coming back to you is no longer the pleasure-seeking somnambulist who eloped with poor old Wedder [i.e. Wedderburn]. You must answer some difficult questions for me" (Gray 189). Bella's experience and her questioning are aimed at gaining knowledge and enabling her to retell her own story. She defines herself through her bodily experiences, the memories she actively frames, and her professional pursuits, not through her origins or the process of her creation. Building on and advancing from this, Bella reevaluates the education she has received through Baxter when she discovers that he is capable of lying (Gray 205), which constitutes the second clearly identifiable breach between her and her creator. As Fiorato summarises, "[i]n the end Bella chooses her identity autonomously, [...] separating herself both from her previous family and from Baxter [...]" (297). Through her education, Bella increasingly claims the autonomy to write her self.

This self-narrative becomes visible on Bella's skin. In this context, I focus on two concrete instances of her rewriting her skin, blushing, which, as outlined above, also assumes a significant role in the Ovidian source myth and Galatea's development in Miller's short story, and the reinterpretation of bodily scars. Blushing, if seen as an instance of immediate bodily reaction, might appear entirely beyond Bella's control. Even though Jablonski notes that "[o]ur skin often 'thinks' before we do" (112), the power of bodily signification can only rest with the women themselves. Agency is not located in the bodily response itself, but in the ways it is interpreted, situated, and made to signify. What is at stake is not sovereign control over the body, but the performative negotiation of bodily signs within normative frameworks. Here, the bodily assemblage's agency emerges from the interaction of skin, affect, environment, and social perception. In this sense, the power of bodily signification rests not in the blush or reaction alone, but in the embodied negotiation of its meaning. In contrast to Galatea, Bella blushes not due to considerations of modesty or propriety but in response to her perceived lack of knowledge (Gray 141). This draws attention to blushing as an "ambiguous signifier", which invites a re-examination of the assumptions that structure its interpretation (Gilbert 92). As Gilbert observes, "[l]iterary representations of the blush demonstrate the importance and difficulty of the mandate to read the body, seen simultaneously as legible and as requiring interpretive expertise" (10). The skin, then, cannot be translated directly. This again draws attention to the process of writing or rewriting the skin, as an active and conscious practice on the women's part, an intervention into how bodily signs are read and interpreted. This not only applies to Bella's blushing skin but also to her scars. Through them, "[...] Gray embodies absence, death, and pain: they are written on her body" (McCracken-Flesher 168), but Bella negotiates their meaning herself. In contrast to the fact that "[s]cars were often used for purposes of identification" (Gilbert 301), were looked at and read from the outside, she exercises interpretative authority, reclaiming the signification of these markings as part of her self-transformative process. She is able to retell her physicality by rewriting her skin, by actively asserting her interpretation of it (Gray 256). The skin becomes a site of self-articulation, which Prosser discusses. He states that "[a]utobiography works like a skin; it is the skin the author sends out that at once conceals and reveals the self. Skin autobiographies form an alternative skin. Writing skin is obviously an attempt to work out, to express (that is both to articulate and thus to

expel) a stigmatised skin [...]” (65). Prosser’s analysis highlights how skin can serve as a medium for self-expression, which holds true for Bella’s own embodied practice. Bella rewrites her skin and through it she establishes her self-narrative.

As analysed in detail in chapter 3.1., in direct continuation of the act of creation, the female bodies are originally governed and narrated by their male creators’ hegemonic discourses. Bella actively challenges this patriarchal framework by asserting authority over her narrative, claiming control over its representation and interpretation. Because her skin and the page she writes on both function as surfaces of inscription and sites of interpretation, her negotiation of narrative authority unfolds simultaneously on her body and on paper. The act of rewriting her skin, as a performative intervention into bodily signification, is mirrored in her handwriting and in her letters as such. In McCandless’ account, before the reader is introduced to her own depictions, Bella is described as reclaiming her space on the page in a way that anticipates her later interventions into the meaning of her own corporeality. This is already evident in the first letters she composes, dispensing with everything that does not mediate her meaning, while making sure to fill the page. McCandless observes that “[...] her writing [is] so huge that there [is] only room for a few words on each, though like the ancient Hebrews and Babylonians she ha[s] saved space by dispensing with vowels [...]” (Gray 56). Bella’s handwriting also points to the permeability of her skin, to the fact that her skin communicates, interacts and expresses much rather than secludes, considering “[...] the pressure of pen strokes which often rip[s] through the paper” in an emotionally charged letter (Gray 144). Baxter, though attempting to stress his influence, acknowledges Bella’s growth, explaining to McCandless, “Imagine I am Shakespeare’s old schoolteacher, one who taught him to write” (Gray 101). He has shown her the individual letters, but it is she who is the author. Ultimately, writing on paper and the rewriting of her skin converge in Bella’s final letter, where she herself intervenes in interpreting the meaning of her skin by offering her own reading of it.

Bella achieves the ultimate control over her own narrative when she rewrites McCandless’ version of events in her concluding letter. She discredits his depiction, both as a consequence of the quality of his writing and its contents, as she “[...] leafs through it, trying to show interest [she] [cannot] possibly feel [...]” (Gray 254). She describes

McCandless' supposedly biographical representation as an "[...] infernal parody of [her] life story [...]" (Gray 273) and accuses him that "[...] he deprive[s] [her] of childhood and schooling by suggesting [she] was not mentally [herself] when [she] first met him, but [her] baby daughter" (Gray 274). In the process of rectifying her husband's portrayal, she rewrites her marked skin. Instead of Baxter's acts of creation, she attributes the scar on her head to her own biological father's abuse and states that this injury has not caused any signs of amnesia (Gray 256). She recounts her past in detail and reflects on her education, stating that her "[m]other [...] taught [her] to be a working man's domestic slave; the nuns taught [her] to be a rich man's domestic toy" (Gray 258-9). Bella also entirely reframes her relationship to Godwin Baxter, whom she refers to as "[...] the only man [she has] truly loved [...]" (Gray 259). Looking back, she declares that "[she] wanted nobody but God to teach [her]" (Gray 264) and that she wished to enter a physical relationship and have a child with him (Gray 266), which Baxter refused (Gray 265). Her account describes their relationship not as one of subservience and reliance but of continuous emancipation and independence. McCandless represents, for both of them, a means to an end, a "vain little homunculus" (Gray 268) to be controlled and steered by Bella. Instead of yielding to Bella's solicitations, Baxter states that he wishes for her to be "equipped with a useful husband" (Gray 267), transferring the element of usefulness to McCandless. According to Tweed, Baxter, McCandless, Wedderburn and her former husband Blessington, are unable to maintain a lasting hold over Bella and are "[...] in turn rendered not only powerless but ridiculous" (148). Bella has moved beyond the determinism of her creator, and I would even maintain, of all her creator figures, by reclaiming her body's narrative.

4. Conclusion – Claiming Authorship

Through bodily transgression, Miller's *Galatea* and Gray's *Bella* actively shape their own processes of self-metamorphosis. Although their trajectories diverge significantly, they attain a shared aim. This can be conceptualised as the formation of a bodily assemblage whose emerging agency enables the women to dismantle the rigid creator–creation dualism that initially structures their existence and to shape their own embodied subjectivity. In doing so, they subvert the deterministic existence inscribed in their origins by their creator figures. The women assert narrative authority over their bodies, as the skin, once a surface of imposed signification and control, becomes a site of articulation. Hence, this chapter first reviews the specific bodily assemblages that emerge before turning to the common ends *Galatea* and *Bella* enact through these transformations.

When re-examining the bodily assemblages with which each work concludes, it becomes evident that they assume markedly distinct forms. Miller's *Galatea* moves towards impenetrability, her bodily assemblage precluding interaction and increasingly resisting outside forces of formation. Notably, her skin does not revert to the original material used by her creator, mouldable ivory. Instead, she wills her body to become stone, reminiscent of the fate of the Ovidian *Propoetides* (Ovid 232), which she chooses to share. Discussing the *Propoetides*' eventual transformation, Popescu maintains that “[t]he stone metamorphosis is thus a manifestation of a sexually overactive female” (92). *Galatea*'s decision to emulate this transformation, constitutes an embodied subversion of *Pygmalion*'s designs, manifesting in physical form precisely that which he finds abhorrent. The extent to which *Galatea*'s development diverges from her creator's ideals becomes even more pronounced when considered alongside Schnackenberg's assertion that “[m]oving beyond appearance struggles, or beyond any kind of emotional distress, requires a death – the death of the false self” (Schnackenberg 181), a process that *Galatea* appears to enact at a bodily level. *Bella*'s development, on the other hand, constitutes a progressive and active convergence towards and opening to the world. Minh-ha conceptualises this process as one of intensified corporeal and environmental engagement, observing that “[w]hen armors [sic] and defense [sic] mechanisms are removed, when new awareness of life is brought into previously deadened areas of the body, women begin to experience writing/ the world differently. This is exciting and also

very scary. For it takes time to be able to tolerate greater aliveness” (258). Bella’s skin embodies this increasing receptivity and largely represents a surface of interaction, as she interprets her corporeality through a continuous exchange between and reciprocal influence of a socially embedded body and its surroundings. Her self-metamorphosis mirrors the Propoetides’ conduct, but rather than suffering an externally imposed physical arrest, Bella gains agency. Both women, Galatea and Bella, pursue their own aims and perform conscious acts of transgression that enable their transformations. Underscoring both the individuality and the broader significance of these processes, Galatea’s and Bella’s instantiations of the bodily assemblage may be understood as taking markedly different forms, while closer examination reveals that their emerging agency is oriented towards comparable ends.

The emerging agency of their bodily assemblages confers upon the creations the capacity to write and rewrite their skin, allowing it to articulate, to narrate, their own meanings. Going back to the Galatea figure in the Ovidian source myth, Haynes observes that “[...] what signals the first moments of her metamorphosis [...] is the radical change in the nature of her skin and flesh” (179). While in the Ovidian source myth the notable alterations of his creation’s skin are indicative of Pygmalion having attained his ends, the transforming skin takes on an entirely different meaning when considering the rewritings. In Miller’s and Gray’s works, its metamorphosis commences and signifies the departure from inertia and, in this regard, from the creators’ deterministic design. This change results primarily from the women’s active rewriting of their skin. Both Galatea and Bella narrate themselves in negotiation with their respective surroundings. They determine what the body tells, how they write and rewrite their skin and what it expresses. Their transformations find physical representation that can only be articulated by the women themselves. The creations’ skin demonstrates that the interpretative power of their bodies rests with them, while their creators are consigned to superficiality and denied narrative power. This becomes evident, for instance, in Bella’s redefinition of her scars in her final letter, attached to McCandless’ account (Gray 256), or in Galatea’s reinterpretation of her skin based on her knowledge of her origins (see Miller 2). The women’s bodies are not static, sealed, or inert, as the creators would have them, and cannot be reduced to the site of a preordained narrative. Instead they constantly

transform through transgression, through conscious acts of creative reiteration. The bodily assemblage's narrative agency cannot be predetermined. It emerges.

Changes to the women's skin also attest to the integrative, ephemeral and relational compositionality of the assemblage, giving rise to the emerging potential for the destabilisation of dualistic frameworks. McCracken-Flesher contends that "Bella is inherently deconstructive" in that "[s]he brings into question [...] even her own story" and "[...] is simply too much for the text that seeks to contain her" (172). This resistance to definition is further underscored by Genca, who, referring to the many diverging views presented of Bella, summarises that "[...] she is both the combination of all of these depictions and discourses, and also none of them" (73). Bella's narrative and discursive elusiveness is mirrored in the uncontainability of her bodily assemblage. Bella herself explicitly describes a logic of emergence and foregrounds processes that arise from constituent elements yet resist any direct predictability. She observes that "[m]ovement turns dead dogs into maggots and daisies, and flour butter sugar an egg and a tableful of milk into Abernethy biscuits, and spermatozoa and ovaries into fishy little plants growing babyward if we take no care to stop them" (Gray 134). In the creations themselves, physical changes point to the transformative potential of new components of the assemblage. By way of example, for Bella, her scars constitute such elements (Gray 256). The same applies to the stretch marks on Galatea's belly (Miller 22-3). These corporeal alterations are integrated and interpreted as ephemeral parts of a continuously forming and reforming, situationally realised bodily assemblage. The women's embodied constitution comprises a complexity that represents their chronological narrative as well as their future aims, their made-ness as well as their creative potential. Through this integrative compositionality, they are able to overcome the dualism of creator as opposed to creation. Their creators' actions form part of Galatea's and Bella's constant recreation. Neither of them negates these formative influences, but they are not defined by them. Instead, they choose to reframe them. Bella summarises this as she acknowledges the shaping force of others and her own choice to move beyond it. Her "usefulness" (Ovid 234) becomes grounded in her agency. The dissolution of binary contrasts appears to be reflected directly in Bella's physical appearance.

[...] [A]s she spoke the lines of her figure and face relaxed into their proper softness, her hair began to settle, her eyes recovered their usual depth, size, and golden-brown warmth. She said, 'Thank you for giving me life, Father, though from what you say my mother had most trouble making me and you took none at all. Besides, a life without freedom to choose is not worth having. [...] Thank you for mending me, God, [...]. And Candle, how good to have a man I need not thank at all, who I cuddle and who cuddles me every night, is pleasant company in the mornings and evenings, and leaves me alone every day to get on with my work.' (Gray 232)

In this moment, Bella explicitly acknowledges the formative interventions that have shaped her while refusing to be circumscribed by them. Gratitude is articulated not as submission, but as a retrospective reconfiguration of influence, one in which past constraints are neither denied nor determinative. Her bodily composure and relaxed physicality mirror this dissolution of binary relations, as dependence and autonomy, creation and self-fashioning, are no longer opposed but form part of and interact within an agentic bodily assemblage. The scope of agency grounded in the bodily assemblage, considering its relational and integrative complexity, allows Galatea and Bella to move beyond the narrow confines of dualism and to follow a trajectory that has not been externally predetermined.

This movement beyond deterministic structures is enabled by the bodily assemblage as a relational configuration embedded within wider networks. Assemblages are inherently interdependent rather than solitary, shaping and being shaped by their surroundings, and are characterised by distributive agency. Elaborating on this relationality, Bennett stresses the embeddedness of agency describing “[...] human intentions as always in competition and confederation with many other strivings, for an intention is like a pebble thrown into a pond, or an electrical current sent through a wire or neural network: it vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected” (32). Accordingly, the emerging agency of the creations’ bodily assemblages participates in shaping the dynamics of the wider networks in which they are situated. This is especially apparent in the way Galatea and Bella impact their creators’ actions and existence. Returning to the physical reaction of blushing, as represented in Miller’s *Galatea*, it functions as an embodiment of both Pygmalion’s ideal of femininity and his deterministic hold over his creation. Observing the chiselled blush on Pygmalion’s new creation, Galatea chooses not to let him wake her (Miller 44), thereby ending his work and preventing him from

resuming control over creation. Turning to Bella, the interplay between her and Baxter takes a different form, resulting in his complete dependence on her and the alignment of his actions with her approval (Gray 59). Occasioned by the transformations of their creations, these processes eventually result in the deaths of the creators. For Miller's Galatea, this constitutes a direct, physical act, as she drowns Pygmalion in the sea through her willed bodily self-metamorphosis to stone (Miller 48). Galatea's transformation grants her corporeal strength that completely deprives her creator of any perceived physical power over her body. She declares that "[h]e ha[s] no chance really. He [is] only flesh" (Miller 49). Bella, on the other hand, though equally bringing about her creator's death, does so through the mental strain her choices and transformations exert (Gray 242-3). Contrary to McCandless' account, however, Bella explicitly claims an active role in her final letter. Responding to Baxter's request given his irreparable health, she injects the drug causing his death (Gray 272). Galatea's and Bella's bodily assemblages, constitutively affecting their surroundings, extend their agency to Pygmalion and Baxter, ultimately culminating in the deaths of the creator figures.

This paper placed a pronounced focus on the female creations' empowering agency. Had the scope of this enquiry allowed, a more extensive exploration of the creator figures' development would have contributed a further dimension of analysis. Revisiting Ovid's "Pygmalion", metamorphosis describes a process that is concluded and results in a stage of externally effectuated and enforced stasis. As initially outlined, the primary distinctions in self-metamorphic transformation lie in the process's active character and its constitutive non-finality. These considerations could equally be applied to the respective creator figures and their progress, as they are undeniably affected by their creations. Similarly, it has to be acknowledged that the creator-creation relationship, which constituted the main area of analysis due to the focus on the creations' physicality, is far from the only interrelation that contributes to and impacts the formation of the women's bodily assemblages. For instance, the narrative control McCandless exerts over Bella's origins and development or the influence of Galatea's physician on his patient's physical and mental confinement would merit further consideration. In addition to discussing these dynamics and the creators' trajectories, a more comprehensive examination of the absence of certain bodily expressions would complement this

analysis. By way of example, due to its central position in the Ovidian source myth, I foregrounded the instance of blushing. Placing an emphasis on the physical reaction of paling, also centrally regarding the creator figures, could offer a more nuanced perspective, not only of the developmental dynamics of the respective relationships but also of the individual formation of embodied subjectivities. Such considerations could contribute pertinent insights into contemporary concerns that have acquired renewed urgency in recent discourse: Who claims authorship over the skin? Who writes it? What or whom does it speak of?

Applying a deconstructive approach to *Poor Things* by Alasdair Gray and *Galatea* by Madeline Miller, as rewritings of the contextualised Ovidian “Pygmalion” myth, offers the opportunity to specifically focus on the development of the female protagonists’ bodily assemblages. Miller’s *Galatea* and Gray’s *Bella* prompt and enable their respective self-metamorphoses through conscious acts of transgression. They are not merely transformed, as is the case for Pygmalion’s creation in the Ovidian source myth, but actively shape metamorphic processes that constitute and reconstitute their bodily assemblages. Even though their emerging assemblages are wholly distinct, having pursued markedly divergent trajectories, they can be considered instantiations of a unifying objective. They are not only ephemeral in their constant development, but exhibit a unique emerging agency that cannot be predicted and is inherently creative. It is through their self-metamorphosis into bodily assemblages that both Miller’s *Galatea* and Gray’s *Bella*, moving beyond the creator-creation dualism, subvert the determinism inscribed in the act of creation and acquire unassailable authority over, and authorship of, their corporeality. Their assemblages confer the agency to write and rewrite their skin and to realise its power to speak.

Galatea’s and *Bella*’s bodily assemblages write different responses to the Propoetides’ fate. *Galatea* deliberately chooses to emulate the Propoetides’ transformation, while *Bella* transgresses through an opening of her body to the world, following the Propoetides’ example but without incurring the consequences they faced. Through their self-directed metamorphoses, the female creations are able to lastingly elude enforced transformation. *Galatea*’s skin becomes impermeable, unapproachable stone, while *Bella*’s is increasingly porous and connected. What both women’s skin speaks of, though,

is the untenability of an externally imposed existence. It tells of the myriad of everything and everyone that is them and the inexorable agency that emerges from them. Their bodily assemblages move beyond dichotomising absolutes and render outside determinism void. The female bodily assemblage, giving rise to a creative, enabling agency, can offer an empowering response to the current anti-feminist backlash, in particular the curtailing of female reproductive rights and the infringement on and governmental jurisdiction over their bodies. Its perpetual development, uncontrollability and uncontainability have to find unequivocal, self-assertive and emphatic expression on its speaking skin. Subverting and transcending the confines of an externally determined existence, the female bodily assemblage restores the power of narrative agency.

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6. Appendix

6.1. English Abstract

The Ovidian myth of “Pygmalion”, part of the author’s magnum opus *Metamorphoses*, has provided the basis for numerous and highly diverse rewritings. Similarly, the creator-creation relationship articulated in the source myth and its subsequent reconceptualisations have constituted a frequent area of study. My thesis contributes to this ongoing discussion by analysing two contemporary reimaginings of the source myth, with particular attention to the development of the female creations Galatea in Madeline Miller’s eponymous short story and Bella in Alasdair Gray’s novel *Poor Things*. It adopts the concept of the assemblage, as defined by Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, and combines it with Benthien’s discussion of skin to trace the women’s formative processes.

My analysis employs a deconstructivist approach to discuss the female characters’ transformations. Moving beyond the overarching concept of externally enacted metamorphosis in Ovid’s work, it explores the women’s self-metamorphosis through acts of bodily transgression, which I conceptualise, drawing on but departing from Butler, as conscious practices of creative reiteration. I argue that this process of self-directed transformation facilitates the formation of a bodily assemblage, subverting the creator-creation binary. I conclude that the emerging agency of the respective bodily assemblages enables Galatea and Bella to defy their deterministic existence preordained by their creator figures and to write and rewrite their skin. Originally imposed on them as a concealing hide by their creators, in the course of their self-metamorphoses, the women rearticulate their skin as an expressive and speaking page.

6.2. German Abstract

Der Mythos des „Pygmalion“, Teil von Ovids Opus Magnum *Metamorphosen*, bildet die Grundlage für zahlreiche und äußerst vielfältige Neuinterpretationen. Ebenso bildet die im Ursprungsmythos dargestellte Beziehung zwischen Schöpfer und Schöpfung eine häufig behandelte Thematik. Die vorliegende Arbeit reiht sich in diese Diskussion ein, indem sie die Entwicklung der weiblichen Schöpfungsfiguren Galatea in Madeline Millers gleichnamiger Kurzgeschichte sowie Bella in Alasdair Grays Roman *Poor Things* analysiert. Sie bedient sich dabei des Konzepts der Assemblage, wie es von Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* definiert wurde, und kombiniert dieses mit Claudia Benthens Ausführungen zur Rolle der Haut, um die Selbstgestaltungsprozesse der Frauen zu beleuchten.

Diese Analyse folgt einer dekonstruktivistischen Interpretation, um die Transformation der weiblichen Figuren zu betrachten. Über das zentrale Konzept der Metamorphose im Werk Ovids hinausgehend, wird die Selbst-Metamorphose der Frauen, ermöglicht durch Handlungen körperlicher Grenzüberschreitung, aufbauend auf und in Abwandlung von Butler, definiert als bewusst gesetzte Handlungen kreativer Reartikulation, diskutiert. Dieser Prozess der selbstbestimmten Transformation ermöglicht die Formierung einer körperlichen Assemblage, welche die binäre Struktur von Schöpfer und Schöpfung aufhebt. Die emergente Handlungsfähigkeit der jeweiligen körperlichen Assemblage ermöglicht es den weiblichen Charakteren, sich über ihre, durch die Schöpferfiguren vorgegebene, deterministische Existenz hinwegzusetzen und ihre Haut selbst zu prägen. Ursprünglich von ihren Schöpfern als verbergende Hülle auferlegt, reartikulieren die Frauen im Zuge ihrer Selbst-Metamorphosen ihre Haut als expressive Interaktionsfläche, als selbstbeschriebenes Blatt.