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Patricia Pulham, *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 245 pp.
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Patricia Pulham's *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* offers a fresh perspective on the erotic charge attributed to statues and sculptures throughout history. From Ovid's myth of Pygmalion to the *tableaux vivants* of 'living statues' regularly performed on London's music hall stages (p. 14), the study provides convincing evidence that the long-held erotic resonance of statuary is fuelled by a 'tension between animation and stasis' and its unique placement within 'the liminal spaces between movement and stillness, life and death' (p. 13).

Pulham offers new insight into how this liminality adds to the eroticism of the ancient sculptural body by focussing on the use of the sculptural form to articulate, aestheticize, and normalize provocative expressions of desire in the nineteenth century. She notes in the introduction how the sexual nature of artefacts excavated from Pompeii became a source of increased curatorial unease, prompting curators to actively 'seek solutions, to restrict access' (p. 2) by sequestering the objects in secret museums or archives otherwise unavailable to the public. Yet desires that were too shocking to be expressed openly still found public exposure through the (often nude) sculptural forms on display in British and European art galleries and museums, and through the more intimate medium of the novel.

Pulham conducts a thorough and engaging exploration of how such works express a sexually charged sense of the haptic. While sculpture on display in museums and galleries remained physically untouchable, nineteenth-century texts were full of statue-like bodies that, for all their coldness and aloofness, remained responsive to human touch. Pulham terms these works a textual 'Secretum', a 'repository for forbidden love' (p. 2) that pays particular attention to this sense of the 'forbidden' and the taboo, often by portraying the relationship between the sculptor and their

sculpture in erotic terms. Throughout her study Pulham cites a range of examples spanning art, fiction, and poetry that illustrate the cross-gendered pervasiveness of this phenomenon. These include significant works such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) as well as lesser-known examples, such as Thomas Woolner's poem *Pygmalion* (1881), George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1895) and Olive Custance's 'Antinous' (1902).

In the first chapter, Pulham discusses the Victorian fascination with the Pygmalion myth that inspired such works, including an investigation of the myth's origins and legacy that is impressive in its scope and depth. As well as considering Ovid's version, Pulham highlights little-known earlier interpretations of the Pygmalion narrative. The discerning analysis of the variations between these texts demonstrates this study's relevance to classical scholars and enables further discussion of the enduring influence, malleability, and subversive erotic capability of the Pygmalion narrative. Pulham notes that within Ovid's version of the myth, Pygmalion's relationship to his statue is infused with an overt eroticism. The statue's transformation into a living, breathing woman becomes the precursor to a sexual encounter which culminates in the statue bearing Pygmalion's child – a fantasy of 'female passivity and masculine control' that 'clearly resonated with nineteenth-century Pygmalions' (p. 33). However, earlier variations of the Pygmalion myth associate Pygmalion's statue-love with transgression, and sexual and moral violation. These differing responses to the same narrative demonstrate how the Pygmalion myth constructed a 'conflict between lewdness and impurity' that 'afflicts the story from its earliest incarnations' (p. 30) and filters down to reach the nineteenth century, where it was noted by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. As Pulham observes, Ellis defined the term 'Pygmalionism' as the condition of 'falling in love with statues' (p. 32) and linked it to necrophilia (p. 91), an aspect Pulham scrutinizes in further detail in Chapter 5.

Pulham returns to the Pygmalion myth's negotiation of feminine purity and passivity in a close reading of the sexual politics of William Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris, or The New Pygmalion* (1823) and William Morris' 'Pygmalion and the Image' (1888). She details how these examples followed

on from other nineteenth-century Pygmalion narratives where the statue-woman is transformed back to her original impassive state, a concept referred to as 'reverse pygmalionism' (p. 33). This reading outlines how the Victorian appropriation of the Pygmalion myth encouraged the aestheticization of an impossibly ideal female body, which was then promoted as a site of artistic fantasy and escapism, reflecting a wider, entrenched cultural anxiety surrounding sexuality, desire, and embodiment.

Pulham's analysis of both Morris' work and Woolner's twelve-book poem *Pygmalion* provides further valuable discussion of the complex sexual politics behind touch, tactility, and the haptic at work within the Pygmalion narrative. Pulham observes how both narratives break away from the Ovidian version of the myth in their hesitation to describe any sexual congress between the sculptor and the image; ultimately it is the goddess Aphrodite's touch which imbues the sculpture with life (p. 43). Haptic hesitancy and tension over the sensual are implied in Edward Burne-Jones' *Pygmalion and the Image* series and made overt in the imagery of repression, restraint, and ethereality in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), which, as Pulham argues, anticipates Morris' later work (p. 55). Chapters 2 and 3 offer closer scrutiny of the creative yet sometimes fraught interplay between imagination, desire, and sculpture. Chapter 2 explores the problematics of touch and 'reverse pygmalionism' within Arthur O'Shaughnessy's poetic series 'Thoughts in Marble' (1881) and Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* (1897). Pulham articulates in detail how O'Shaughnessy's knowledge of 'the heightened cultural awareness of classical sculpture' (p. 71), interest in Parnassianism (p. 68) and enthusiastic engagement with the work of leading decadent figures such as Algernon Charles Swinburne (p. 69) and Théophile Gautier (p. 68) resulted in his work reflecting intersections between poetic, artistic, and sculptural craftsmanship, and a 'tension between art, aestheticism and desire' (p. 77). Within O'Shaughnessy's 'Thoughts in Marble', the purity of form evoked by classical sculpture is questioned by an increasingly sensualized portrayal of gaze and touch.

The same conflict between desire, sculpture, and purity is visible in Hardy's implicit treatment of the Pygmalion myth in *The Well-Beloved*. As Pulham shows, both O'Shaughnessy's poetic work and Hardy's novel result from their engagement with classical sculpture and aestheticism and exemplify how the proliferation of Victorian Pygmalion narratives blurred the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate in order to construct transgressive fantasies of aestheticized desire. The associations between sculpture, death, and eros are further highlighted in Pulham's discussion of the necrophiliac aspect of the statue-sculptor relationship. Drawing on the work of critics such as Elisabeth Bronfen and Lisa Downing, Pulham offers new insight into how the spectral imagery and language bestowed upon statuary worked to express necrophiliac desire. As Pulham argues, the plethora of sculptural bodies that haunt works such as *The Well-Beloved* displace the natural cycle of decay by effectively re-animating the bodies of the deceased, beloved women that they represent (p. 95).

Chapters 3 and 4 expand on this discussion by exploring transgressive sexual desire and homoeroticism within the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and Oscar Wilde. In analysing Hawthorne's treatment of the sculptural body in *The Marble Faun,* Pulham reconsiders Hawthorne's distaste for classical nude sculpture as a reflection of his unease over the paganly sensual connotations of neoclassical statuary. Pulham's analysis demonstrates how the titular marble faun – in fact the Faun of Praxiteles – becomes emblematic of pagan eroticism and the homoerotic bond between the four friends – Hilda, Miriam, Kenyon, and Donatello – at the heart of Hawthorne's novel. Scholars of Hawthorne will no doubt welcome Pulham's attentive reading of Hawthorne's work and his association with the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer, an association which lays the foundations for Pulham's insightful argument that both Hawthorne's and Hosmer's work suggests homoerotic desire. The study highlights how such desire is articulated through Donatello's resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles – 'Donatello's double' (p. 109) – and 'other aesthetic doublings that occur in the text' (p. 111), such as the intense relationship between Hilda and Miriam and their mutual fascination with Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice Cenci.

Pulham draws upon the work of Terry Castle, Lilian Faderman, and Vivien Green Fryd in discussing the homoerotic elements of Hosmer's own 1857 sculpture of Beatrice Cenci, arguing that lesbian desire is also reflected in Hawthorne's portrayal of Hilda and Miriam; a reading that has often been critically overlooked in favour of a focus on homoeroticism between the male characters (p. 114). Pulham notes that a similar desire to 'express "comradeship" through the tactility of sculpture and preserve the intensity of attraction across time' is also present within Wilde's poem 'Charmides' (p. 153), which she views as an implicit 'ode to homosexual and "perverse" love' (p. 155) that draws from the odes of John Keats. A similar subliminal homoeroticism can be found in Henry James' *Roderick Hudson* (1875), which, as Pulham argues, has strong parallels with Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. Both texts express a tactile, visual, and aesthetic homoeroticism through the medium of statuary, setting up an interplay between desire, touch, and the gaze.

In Chapter 5, Pulham provides persuasive evidence that nineteenth-century engagement with the Pygmalion myth was not limited solely to male creative figures, but also a rich source of inspiration for women artists and writers. Pulham notes how Hosmer and poets such as Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) and Olive Custance utilized sculpture to express same-sex desire and gender nonconformity, a reading that will assuredly be of interest to researchers of Field's and Custance's work. Pulham cites work such as Custance's 'Antinous' and Field's 'To Apollo—The Conqueror' to demonstrate how these writers subverted classical figures such as Apollo and Antinous into figures of encrypted same-sex desire. Pulham observes that the figure of Apollo in particular 'inspires Michael Field's decadent poetics', for the *Apollo Belvedere* acts as a 'sculptural counterpart' that 'encrypts the doubly transgressive desire between Bradley and Cooper' (p. 184). This appropriation foregrounds how an engagement with sculpture facilitated Field's own articulation of same sex desire.

Pulham returns to the concept of encrypted desire in her discussion of the 'figurative "burial" and containment of an active and transgressive eroticism that is retrieved from the

sculptural body through touch and metaphors of tactility' (p. 194). The study observes in detail how sculpture, with its sepulchral associations and imagery of excavation and confinement (pp. 194-95), can be used to express sexual ambiguity and forbidden desire – what Pulham terms 'libidinal entombments' (p. 183). As Pulham argues, within texts such as Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun,* O'Shaughnessy's 'Thoughts in Marble', Custance's 'Antinous', and James' *Roderick Hudson,* love and desire are often linked to the sepulchral, resulting in strikingly sensual textual and artistic monuments to death, loss, and grief. In her comparison of necrophiliac imagery within *The Marble Faun* and *Roderick Hudson,* Pulham pinpoints how Hudson's aestheticized corpse 'acquires a sculptural form' (p. 195) that still retains a tactile, 'sexually alluring and poetic' (p. 196) quality comparable to Edward Onslow Ford's 1893 *Shelley Memorial* (p. 195).

Pulham concludes that the 'libidinal economy that circulates between artworks, social transgression, and sexual repression in the Victorian sculpture gallery remains entombed but is revealed through metaphors of tactility that also inspire creative endeavours' (p. 197). In revealing the origins, function, and impact of this economy, Pulham's study leads the way in raising thought-provoking new questions over how love, desire, and beauty were moulded onto the sculptural body, transforming statuary into monuments that honoured transgressive desire and underscored the importance of touch. In foregrounding the impact of this creatively fecund cycle of inspiration and reinterpretation upon both significant nineteenth-century figures and lesser-known writers and artists, the study provides a rich, expansive, and incisive history of the nineteenth-century fascination with the Pygmalion myth, which Pulham asserts is a cultural phenomenon deserving of extended critical attention. The study's skilful discussion of statuary as a visual, tactile and immersive experience in the nineteenth century, and its clear, concise and confident analytical style will no doubt ensure its place as an essential resource for scholars, academics, and researchers keen to broaden their knowledge of this area of criticism.