Reconstructing Woman

Kelly, Dorothy

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If the writers we have examined thus far use the fantasy of the artificial woman in different ways, their representations are similar because the creation of woman is not realized in a literal way in the narratives: there is no character who actually creates a real artificial woman. The fantasy appears rather in themes and structures scattered throughout their works that form a kind of subtext that figures the possibility of constructing a woman, social or physical. However, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam at the end of the century does represent the literal construction of an artificial woman. This author, who in *L’Ève future* refers both to Balzac’s *La recherche de l’absolu* and to Flaubert’s *Salammbô* (but who, disliking naturalism, would not give place of preference to Zola), seems to pick up disparate elements of his predecessors’ texts, elements relating to this fantasy of creation, to inscribe them in the story of *L’Ève future*, in much the same way that Thomas Edison uses literary texts to help him manufacture, with the help of the desire of Lord Ewald and the spirit of Sowana, the voice of his perfect android woman.

In Villiers’s novel, this creating of Hadaly is achieved by means of inscription: the perfect artificial woman can be made when the form of the body of a real woman is “inscribed” on an artificial machine/body by means of Edison’s scientific encoding. Here a human-like machine, which on a more symbolic level is constructed by cultural codes in the other
texts we have studied, is literally “built” in the creation of Hadaly. In this novel, it is science that enables man to inscribe new bodies.

To speak of Villiers’s relationship to science is an enterprise fraught with danger, because his attitudes toward science and its creations are as paradoxical and ambiguous as was his life. This thinker, who was, as Henri de Régnier describes, “une protestation vivante contre l’esprit positiviste et réaliste de son temps” [a living protest against the positivist and realist spirit of his times], wrote this convincing and informed piece of science fiction about Thomas Edison and his inventions.¹ Villiers is a man who at one time favored the commune and who also believed firmly in the restitution of the monarchy. One must therefore approach Villiers’s writings with an understanding of these contradictions and allow his conflicting images their right of place in his representations.² Indeed, Villiers’s stance toward the crisis of distinction, the ambiguities feared and shunned by his predecessors, is quite different from theirs. Villiers exploits the crisis of distinction, between animate and inanimate, natural and artificial, and turns this ambiguity to his advantage.

Villiers rejected realism and naturalism in favor of his own brand of idealism. His fiction is, at heart, a desire to cure the illness of his contemporary world and to make the ideal real, a process in which his writing would participate. Villiers hoped for “a total regeneration of society” (Raitt, Life of Villiers, 118), which his L’Ève future suggested in its representation of the regeneration of woman. Thus, although he might reject the utilitarian nature to which the science of his time was being put, in this novel he changed the goals of science, bent its technologies to his idealist uses, and imagined science as an art that might work toward a reengineering or rewriting of that society, a refabrication of “nature” that would improve on it. In his attempt to rid the world of bourgeois values, to save a kind of aristocracy, he “used” the scientist, Edison (who ironically made possible, as Rhonda Garelick states, the levelings of mass culture³), to compose the story of the way this ignoble culture could go beyond itself.


Villiers’s was a typical criticism of bourgeois culture, one he shared with Flaubert, whom he admired, in its rejection of commoditization. The real world in *L’Ève future* is a fallen one in which money has replaced old, superior values. It is Alicia Clary, the woman whom Lord Ewald loves, who represents all that is wrong with the times. A clear example of her base nature is that, having erred in her past, she feels not noble remorse or defiance but rather crass materialist regret: “Maintenant, ce que cette femme regrette dans sa faute, loin d’être l’honneur lui-même (cette abstraction surannée), n’est que le bénéfice que ce capital rapporte, prudemment conservé.”

[Now what this woman regrets in her mistake, far from being honor itself (that antiquated abstraction), is but the profit that its capital yields, when it has been prudently preserved.] She is an alluring body impurely filled with bourgeois codes and identity, an ugly mix: “une Déesse bourgeoise” (*L’Ève future*, 1:804) [a bourgeois Goddess]. Like Flaubert, Villiers suggests that language itself is linked to this bourgeois identity in its mechanical repetition of coded forms. Language is a cliché, constantly repeated: “Improviser! . . . s’écria Edison: vous croyez donc que l’on improvise quoi que ce soit? qu’on ne récite pas toujours? [. . .] En vérité, toute parole n’est et ne peut être qu’une redite” ([1:918]). [“Improvis! cried Edison. “Do you believe then that we can improvise anything? That we don’t always recite? (…) In truth, every word is only and can be only a repetition.”] The human being mechanically repeats and parrots.

Because Alicia’s identity has been written by bourgeois codification, Ewald actually considers trying to rewrite Alicia’s character himself; he would be another new Pygmalion. Ewald recounts how he had hoped

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5. This is something that Jules Michelet had suggested in *L’amour; la femme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985). According to Michelet, the young, newly married woman “veut commencer une vie absolument nouvelle, sans rapport avec l’ancienne. Elle veut renaitre avec lui [son mari] et de lui: ‘Que ce jour, dit-elle, soit le premier de mes jours! Ce que tu crois, je le crois: Ton peuple sera mon peuple et ton dieu sera mon dieu.’ [. . .] Il faut [. . .] la [la femme] refaire, la renouveler, la créer [. . .] Nous sommes des ouvriers, créateurs et fabricateurs, et les vrais fils de Prométhée. Nous ne voulons pas une Pandora toute faite, mais une à faire” (75) [wants to begin an absolutely new life, without any relationship to the past. She wants to be reborn with him (her husband) and from him: “Let this day be,” she says, “the first of my days! What you believe, I believe: Your people will be my people and your god my god.” (…) She [woman] must be (…) remade, renewed, created (…) We are the workers, the creators and the makers, and the true sons of Prometheus. We do not want a Pandora ready made, but one to be made]. For Michelet, the woman is a kind of child that one must educate: “La femme de dix-huit ans sera volontiers la fille, je veux dire, l’épouse docile, d’un homme de vingt-huit ou trente ans” (*L’amour; La femme*, 75). [The eighteen-year-old woman will willingly be the daughter, I mean to say, the docile spouse, of a twenty-eight- or thirty-year-old man.]
that he could succeed in turning Alicia into a mirror reflection of his own thoughts and self:

Une femme! n’est-ce pas une enfant troublée de mille inquiétudes, sujette à toutes influences? [...] Une joie naturelle doit nous porter [...] à doucement reprendre, à transfigurer par mille transitions lentes—et dont elle nous aime davantage, les devinant,—à guider, enfin, un être frêle, irresponsible et délicat qui, de lui-même et par instinct, demande appui.—Donc, était-il sage de juger aussi vite et sans réserve une nature dont l’amour pouvait bientôt (et ceci dépendait de moi) modifier les pensées jusqu’à les rendre le reflet des miennes? (L’Ève future, 1:797)⁶

[A woman! Is she not a child troubled by a thousand concerns, subject to any influence? (...) A natural joy must lead us (...) to reform her gently, to transfigure her by means of a thousand slow transitions (for which she, guessing them, loves us more), in a word, to guide this frail, irresponsible, and delicate being, who herself instinctively asks for support.—Thus, was it wise to pass judgment so quickly and completely on a nature whose thoughts could soon be modified by love (and this depended on me) to the point that they might become the reflection of my own?]

But this is not possible because the false bourgeois surface has become the very nature of Alicia’s “soul.” It was not that Alicia was playing the social role of the bourgeoisie; rather, the social role, here symbolized by her career as an actress, had become her essence: “Que d’évidences, alors, il a fallu pour me prouver que la comédienne—ne jouait pas de comédie!” (L’Ève future, 1:807) [How much evidence, then, it took to prove to me that the actress—was not acting!]. In a sense, the artificial coding has become her nature, and Alicia is the creation of the bourgeois culture that has written her identity; she is a kind of mass-produced, common subjectivity. This real woman is but an artificial product of her surroundings; she is the artificial doll, “la poupée” (1:837).

Thus we have once again in Villiers’s work the nineteenth-century theme of the constructed nature of human identity. However, it must be

⁶. Villiers actually acted a part in an informal representation of Charles Cros’s play, which had a title that is particularly significant here: “La Machine à changer le caractère des femmes” (Raft, Life of Villiers, 160) [The Machine That Changes Women’s Characters].
said that in *L’Ève future* it is more particularly *woman’s* identity that appears to be shaped by her bourgeois milieu; Lord Ewald and Thomas Edison, the two male main characters, seem to belong to an elite few who have a different, more noble identity, noble in its more modern, ungenealogical, Stendhalian sense. Thus, an inscribed, inferior bourgeois cultural identity becomes equated with *woman*.

Indeed, this insipid character of Alicia is not simply an unfortunate characteristic of one individual; it comes to represent all women in Edison’s and Ewald’s worlds, and women thus become the locus of imperfection. Many of the lengthy conversations between Ewald and Edison entail a litany of misogynist complaints, particularly in a chapter entitled “Dissection.” Baudelaire’s influence can be seen in this aspect of Villiers’s thought, in which *woman* is the animal nature of humans: “C’est de la pure animalité” [It is pure animality], as opposed to man who “a l’air d’un dieu qui a oublié” (*L’Ève future*, 1:889) [has the look of a god who has forgotten].

This text calls forth familiar anxieties about the female body that are typical of the fin de siècle and of Flaubert’s and Zola’s texts: the contagion of seduction and the physical dangers of syphilis, the threat that woman will devour man, the threat of emasculation.

The only two women to have good qualities are not really whole persons: one has an ill body, and the other is bodiless. Mistress Anderson, who suffered a nervous attack after her husband’s ruin and death, sleeps constantly. Her body is “inhabited” by the second good woman, Sowana, who is either a spirit or a kind of “multiple personality” of Mistress Anderson. And Edison believes that, of

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7. Raitt, *Villiers de l’Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* (Paris: José Corti, 1965), 79–81, links this idea of *woman* with Baudelaire’s.

8. Edison found in Evelyn Habal’s possession certain chemicals used to treat syphilis. Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, *L’Ève future*, ed. Nadine Satiat (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1992), 272 n. 168. Women are compared to man-eating birds (1:886) and to vampires and vipers (1:892), and they are poisoners (1:891). They are emasculators: Delilahs (1:807), petrifiers (1:818), and they freeze man’s senses (1:820). Woman is a pestilential being: “Oui: telles sont ces femmes! jouets sans conséquences pour le passant, mais redoutables pour ces seuls hommes, parce qu’une fois aveuglés, souillés, ensorcelés par la lente hystérie qui se dégage d’elles, ces ‘éparpdlées’—accomplissant leur fonction ténébreuse, en laquelle elles ne sauraient échapper à la réalisation—les conduisent, forcément, en épaisissant, d’heure en heure, la folie de ces amants, soit jusqu’à l’anémie cérébrale et le honteux affaissement dans la ruine, soit jusqu’au suicide hétéro-bére de Anderson” (1:890). [Yes, such are these women: playthings of no consequence for the passerby, but fearful for these men alone; because once these men are blinded, sullied, bewitched by the slow hysteria that emanates from them, these “frivolous women”—accomplishing their dark task, through which they cannot themselves avoid becoming what they must be—lead these men inevitably (while heightening their insanity by the hour) either to the point of cerebral anemia and shameful fall into ruin, or to the dazed suicide of Anderson.]
the rest of women, the worst seducers should be summarily executed: “[J]e conclus que le droit, libre et naturel aussi, de cet homme sur elles [. . .] est la mort sommaire” (L’Ève future, 1:891). [I conclude that the unrestricted and natural right of this man over them (. . .) is a summary death.]

Thus, as in Zola’s texts and to a certain extent in Flaubert’s texts, behind the desire in L’Ève future to construct an ideal woman lie fear of and disgust for woman and her reproductive body. To construct an artificial woman would allow one to leave behind the dangers her real body poses. Let us not forget Léon Bloy’s statement that “l’ombilic du poète singulier que fut l’auteur de L’Ève future [. . .] c’était son besoin vraiment inouï d’une restitution de la Femme”9 [the central concern (umbilicus) of the singular poet who was the author of L’Ève future (. . .) was his truly unprecedented need for a restitution of Woman]. The ideal, artificial woman could negotiate man’s desire without contact with the feared object—somewhat like a fetish.10

In fact, the text provides us with a remarkable symbol that combines Edison’s murderous impulses toward woman and the ideal fetish. When Ewald contacts Edison by telegram to inform him of his upcoming visit, the telegram falls on a woman’s arm lying on a table in Edison’s workshop. When we first see this arm, the text suggests in the context of the passage either that it was the arm of a woman who had been in a train accident (which, significantly, was Edison’s fault) or that it was a medical experiment carried out by Edison. The arm could be seen as a symbol of the woman as the object of the violence she threatens.

However, later we find out that this arm is in fact a preliminary experiment on Edison’s part to construct artificial flesh. The arm, so surprisingly alive-looking, is a step in the process of creating the artificial ideal woman. It is the arm that could come to life and symbolically provide the missing arms to the Venus de Milo’s perfect form to make Hadaly, the android that will perfect both art (the armless statue) and nature (Alicia), “une Vénus victorieuse [. . .] ayant retrouvé ses bras au fond de la nuit des âges et apparaissant au milieu de la race humaine” (L’Ève future, 1:810) [a Venus victorious (. . .) who has found her arms again in the depths of the

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night of ages and who appears in the midst of the human race]. The missing perfection of the female body—she is not a man, she has no phallic nature, she does not send back Ewald’s reflection to him—can be repaired by a mechanical fetish/prosthesis, the artificial and superior (limb or android) (1:830–32).\footnote{Here we might think of Flaubert’s Hippolyte. See Lathers, “Hypnotic Feminine,” 47–48, for an analysis of a different direction for this fetishism. Noiray, Le romancier et la machine, 2:287–88, gives a description of the prosthetic devices that were shown at the Exposition of 1878, which Villiers likely visited.}

Science makes possible the invention of a prosthetic device that could change the imperfect real and improve on nature, which is, in this text and more generally in the cultural context of the time, a woman: “Et, entre nous, la Nature est une grande dame” (L’Ève future, 1:831). [And, between us, Nature is a great lady.] Early in the text, Villiers describes some of Edison’s real inventions, machines and devices that improve on the imperfect abilities of human bodies. For example, he mentions (in information he most likely got from an article) the invention of a kind of hearing aid that allowed the somewhat deaf Edison not only to improve his hearing but also, according to Villiers, to hear better than a normal person.\footnote{Seltzer, Bodies and Machines, 10, notes the prosthetic nature of these early technological breakthroughs: “the earliest typewriters were designed for and sometimes by the blind, as the first telephone and the first gramophone were designed by the nearly deaf (Bell and Edison).” John Anzalone (“Danse macabre, ou le pas de deux Baudelaire-Villiers: Essai sur un chapitre de L’Ève future,” in Jeering Dreamers, 118) pursues a similar analysis when he describes how Edison makes the invisible visible.} Villiers describes Edison as “le magicien de l’oreille (qui, presque sourd lui-même, comme un Beethoven de la Science, a su se créer cet imperceptible instrument—grâce auquel, ajusté à l’orifice du tympan, les surdités non seulement disparaissent, mais dévoilent, plus affiné encore, le sens de l’ouïe)” (1:768) [the magician of the ear (who, nearly deaf himself, like a Beethoven of Science, managed to create for himself that imperceptible instrument—thanks to which, fitted to the orifice of the eardrum, deafness not only disappears, but also imparts, even more sharply, the sense of hearing].

A French scientist, Étienne-Jules Marey, who worked and published at the time Villiers was writing, pursued this ideal of the creation of technology to enhance human perception. A kind of medical engineer, Marey, like Villiers’s Edison, recognized that machines could make up for the limitations of the human body. He invented equipment that went beyond the confines of human sense perception and that, as a kind of prosthetic supplement, could detect, relay, and record reality and thus
make possible the replication of events that unaided humans could not perceive. Many of his experiments involved the recording and replication of natural movement: the photography of motion, the inscription of the body’s language, and the creation of artificial reproductions of movement. A brief detour through Marey’s work, and Marey’s presence on the scene of French science, will enrich our understanding of the context of Villiers’s representations.

The Graphic Method

The Universal Exposition in Paris in 1889 attracted to its exhibits three important thinkers in our study. Villiers, at death’s door, was taken around, perhaps in a wheelchair (Noiray, *Le romancier et la machine*, 2:281), to the exposition where Edison’s inventions, from the light bulb to the phonograph, were displayed, as other Edison inventions had been displayed in the previous exposition that Villiers likely attended in 1878. In 1889, Villiers must have seen firsthand many of the devices he had described in *L’Ève future*. Edison attended that 1889 exposition in the company of our scientist and inventor, Marey. After the 1889 exposition, Edison left Paris and returned to America, and out of this visit came Edison’s famous kinetoscope (Braun, *Picturing Time*, 189), an invention similar to one that Villiers imagined in the novel he had completed a few years before.

Marey’s inventions and experiments had frequently appeared in the pages of the popular journal *La nature*, from which Villiers most likely gleaned much of the science needed for *L’Ève future*, and Villiers probably read certain issues of 1878. In the issue of 28 September 1878, Marey published an article on “moteurs animés” [animated motors], which would certainly have been intriguing for Villiers and in which Marey describes what he called “physiologie


14. It is significant that Marey came close to creating moving pictures, another way of inscribing body movement, and is sometimes seen as one of the inventors of cinematography before Lumière: “But while the final ‘trick’ was due to Lumière’s ingenuity, the spirit of a cultural machine that could bring the image to life came from Marey, who called for and designed it” (François Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey: A Passion for the Trace*, trans. Robert Galeta with Jeanine Herman [Cambridge: Zone Books, 1992], 155). Dagognet’s book is an excellent introduction to and resource for information on Marey.

graphique” [graphic physiology] and his “graphic method.” This particularly interesting article contains illustrations of machines, graphs, horses, and, most significant, bas-reliefs of horses—in other words, artistic artifacts combined with “scientific” understandings of motion.

In the same year of that journal, one finds an article on Edison’s “tasimeter,” which Villiers describes in his novel in a manner similar to that of the prose of the journal. Here is Villiers’s description: “Cela sert à mesurer la chaleur d’un rayon d’étoile” (L’Ève future, 1:941) [It serves to measure the heat of a star’s ray]; the author of the journal article states that Edison “espère arriver à mesurer la chaleur des étoiles et la lumière du soleil” [hopes to be able to measure the heat of stars and the light of the sun]. It certainly seems possible that Villiers, in looking through this and other 1878 issues, might have come across this Marey article (particularly because both appear in the same table of contents) and other articles by Marey; in any case, what is of real interest here is the dovetailing of their thoughts about the “scriptibility” and the “graphing” of the human body.

Marey had a profound influence on many aspects of French thought, including art and science; Dagognet asserts that, as a “physician, or more precisely a physiologist, [he] had a revolutionary effect on medicine, art, technology and culture” (Dagognet, Étienne-Jules Marey, 11). For our purposes, it is first the link between the animal and the machine in Marey’s work that is important, as we see in the first pages of one of his well-known books: “Very often and in every era, living beings have been compared to machines, but it is only in our time that we can understand the scope and appropriateness of this comparison.” This comparison works, on the one hand, because the animal is a type of machine, as Marey’s title, La machine animale, makes perfectly clear. It is movement or a kind of work produced by the animal body that Marey views as being machine-like: “Seen from this point of view [the production of movement], the animal organism differs from our machines only in its superior

17. Both Dagognet and Rabinbach emphasize the artistic aspects of Marey’s works and his influence on the world of art. Marcel Duchamp credited Marey’s photographs for inspiring his “Nude Descending a Staircase” (Rabinbach, The Human Motor, 115). Dagognet actually views Marey’s work as residing somewhere between science and art (Dagognet, Étienne-Jules Marey, 132), just as Villiers at times represents Edison’s work as both art and science in L’Ève future.
efficiency.” On the other hand, he saw that the technical machines being created at that time went beyond mere pulleys and gears, that they were, in a sense, a kind of body: “Modern engineers have created machines much more precisely comparable to animated motors. These motors in fact, by means of a bit of fuel consumed, produce the force necessary to animate a series of organs and to make them carry out the most varied tasks” (Marey, *La machine animale*, v–vi). Thus Marey’s interests clearly fall in line with the preoccupations of our previous authors—specifically, the amorphous border between man and machine.

In the context of Villiers’s novel, the most important of Marey’s goals was his desire to “record” nature, to inscribe its workings and the workings of the animal machine. He aimed to make raw, physical reality communicate its secrets by determining just how to transcribe it so that man could understand it. And he would do this by developing the appropriate machines for the task.

Some of his first experiments dealt with the attempt to record the human pulse. Clearly, vivisection (our surgical context) was not appropriate for the study of the living functions of the human body, so Marey decided to capture the rhythms of the body and figure out how to record them on paper so that they could be studied and understood. Around 1860 he developed what he called a “sphygmograph,” which greatly improved on previous attempts to record pulse, and he was able to deduce from it important new information about the heart and blood flow. This was a device that translated the pulse to a stylus that actually wrote a line on paper, thus tracing the action of the human heart in a kind of body-writing. He developed a number of these inner-body recorders and later set to work to record the movements of the outer body through photographs and other means.

The basic principle for Marey is that bodies have their own language caused by movement (which for him is the essence of life), the “language of nature” (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 43). As Marey stated: “If a

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21. See both Rabinbach and Dagognet for fascinating analyses of this “language.” Rabinbach further cites Benjamin’s discussion of a “super-language,” “nameless, non-acoustic languages . . . issuing from matter” (Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 95). The strangest instance of the connection of this brute body-language with a machine that would read it is noted by Kittler: Rilke fantasized the use of a phonograph needle to listen to the wavy lines that knit together the human skull. Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 38–46.
metaphor were really necessary, I would prefer to compare the study of natural sciences to the work of archeologists who decipher inscriptions written in an unknown language, who try several meanings for each sign, one after the other [. . .] and succeed only at the end in understanding the principles which will help them to teach others how to decipher this language" (Marey, *Du mouvement*, 24). Attempts to observe and record this language by means of human senses alone were insufficient because the senses are limited and cannot come up to the task of observing many phenomena: "What makes the new method valuable is that it does away with most of the difficulties that the study of life phenomena presented in the past, that it makes up for the insufficiency of the senses, and that it introduces precise measurements in the domain of science that didn’t seem to permit them."  

Machines, however, could be made to do this work for man. They could break down movement into smaller pieces that could be seen and analyzed. Movement was transformed into lines and nature inscribed itself in a “direct writing” of life (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 20). By recording the body’s movement in this way, Marey managed to unite “the body’s own signs (pulse, heart rate, gait, the flapping of wings) with a language of technical representation” (Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 97). Marey even felt that this graphic language was one that everyone could understand—a kind of universal language, and one that is natural. We must add that Villiers’s good friend Charles Cros was also an inventor who was interested in this same kind of body-tracing and in the understanding of the workings of the human machine.  

Once the natural phenomenon was recorded, the scientist had to decipher it, to “read” it, to continue Marey’s own metaphor of the interpretation of the inscription of the language of the animal machine. Biology became an exegetical science, a “biogrammatology,” and science became a kind of “writing-reading system” (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 86, 52). How apt, then, that Marey was compared with Mallarmé (Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 88), another close friend of Villiers.

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It is here that Marey’s thinking coincides so well with Villiers’s. Villiers too, through Edison, described the natural world as a crude text that could be recorded: “les vibrations du son, autour de nous, s’inscrivent en traces que l’on peut fixer comme une écriture” (L’Ève future, 1:784) [the sound vibrations around us are inscribed in traces that can be set down like writing]. In Villiers, the human body is a kind of language. It is thus not only human social identity that is encoded, as we have seen in the fact that Alicia’s identity was coded by her bourgeois milieu. Alicia’s physical body also bears traces of encoding that can be read. Edison claims that Alicia’s resemblance to the famous Venus victrix was brought about when the image of the statue was actually imprinted on her flesh, scripted, by some strange kind of family coding: Alicia does not see that “cette ressemblance avec la statue dont on reconnaît l’empreinte en la chair de cette femme, oui! que cette ressemblance—n’est que maladive, que ce doit être le résultat de quelque envie, en sa bizarre lignée” (1:969) [this resemblance to the statue, whose imprint one can see on the flesh of this woman, yes! that this resemblance is only pathological, that it must be the result of some desire in her bizarre lineage]. Thus, although Alicia’s body is “nature,” it is always already inscribed, a transcription of another body/text (a human creation, the statue). In a sense, there is no nature, only text.

The same idea of inscription surfaces also in Villiers’s Claire Lenoir (2:148), where, for the scientist Bonhomet, insect nerves are like “une écriture très ancienne” [a very ancient writing] and where images, both real and supernatural, can be physically inscribed on the body, specifically on the eye (the image of the murder imprinted on Claire’s retina) or on the bodies of gestating babies: “Avez-vous réfléchi sur ces monstres humains tigrés de taches bicolores, de fourrures,—sur les céphalopodes, les hommes-doubles, les fautes horribles de la nature, enfin, provenues d’une sensation, d’un caprice, d’une vue, d’une Idée, pendant la gestation de la femme?” (2:193). [Have you thought about those human monsters with bicolor spots, with fur—of cephalopods, double-men, horrible mistakes of nature, in fact, who originated in a sensation, a caprice, a vision, an idea, during the woman’s gestation?]

Because the body is a kind of written language, Villiers’s Edison, like Marey, will use machines to record and transcribe the body language—in

24. Marie-ÈHéline Huet, Monstrous Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 223, reads this imprint of the statue on Alicia’s body as the “visible imprint of a mother’s unsatisfied desire.”
Villiers’s case the body language of several women. This mechanical inscription of woman appears first in the celebrated “talking cinema” scene of the recording of Evelyn Habal’s dance, which is described by Edison as a scientific experiment: “Miss Evelyn Habal était donc devenue pour moi le sujet d’une expérience . . . curieuse” (L’Ève future, 1:896). [Miss Evelyn Habal had thus become for me the subject of an experiment that was . . . curious.] Edison had taken pictures of the original dance in succession, “la photographie successive” [successive photography], thus breaking her performance into small parcels, “dissecting” it, just as Marey did in his photographic experiments in movement. All her movements reproduced themselves, as Villiers expresses it in the reflexive form of “se reproduisaient” (1:897). Thus Evelyn Habal’s body has inscribed itself on the film.

As Edison looks at the film with Lord Ewald, he slowly enumerates the various body parts of Evelyn Habal, thus verbally repeating the original “dissection”: “Quelles hanches! quels beaux cheveux roux! de l’or brûlé, vraiment! Et ce teint si chaudement pâle? Et ces longs yeux si singuliers? Ces petites griffes en pétales de roses [. . .]?” (L’Ève future, 1:897–98). [What hips! What beautiful red hair! Burnished gold, really! And this complexion so warmly pale? And these singular elongated eyes? These small nails like rose petals (. . .)?] In a second film Edison takes Evelyn Habal even further down the road of revelation when he completes the “dissection” and captures her without the accoutrements of artifice, without her makeup, hair, teeth. He has gotten down to the original language of her body, which he has recorded and which is repulsive.

Edison finally takes Evelyn apart one last time when he literally takes the artificial body parts previously “amputated” and enumerated, as well as the makeup that beautified Evelyn, out of the drawer for Ewald’s contemplation. (These artificial body parts remind us again of that uncanny, lifelike arm.) This process of breaking down and enumerating parts is linked to language, the enumeration being called a “nomenclature” (L’Ève future, 1:902). For Villiers, the prosthetic attributes of Evelyn are themselves a language, as expressed when the transformations wrought by this artifice are described as a kind of translation in language: “Ce n’est plus qu’une question de vocabulaire; la maigreur devient de la gracilité, la laideur du piquant, la malpropreté de la négligence, la duplicité de la finesse, et caetera, et caetera” (1:899). [It is no more than a question of vocabulary; skinniness becomes slenderness, ugliness becomes piquancy, uncleanliness becomes nonchalance, duplicity becomes cleverness,
et etcetera, etcetera.] Evelyn translates her original body language into a new, artificial, more seductive one.

What becomes clear in Evelyn Habal’s case (and she is a representative of all women) is that what is most desirable about her is what is most artificial, the dressed-up body, the prosthesis, “l’Artificiel illusoirement vivant” (L’Ève future, 1:904) [Artifice illusorily alive], an echo of Raphaël’s tastes in La peau de chagrin. However, Villiers, through the voice of Edison, goes beyond the mere declaration of the desire for artifice to speculate that in fact there is only artifice (just as bodies are already texts). Villiers suggests through Edison that there is no difference between the real and illusion, that because everything is ultimately an illusion, all comprehension exists in the realm of ideas: “Nul ne sait où commence l’Illusion, ni en quoi consiste la Réalité” (1:789). [No one knows where Illusion begins, or of what Reality consists.]

Thus the real can never be known in itself; we have only artificial, duplicate ideas of the real. In that sense, then, everything is “artificial.” Women, for Villiers, simply cover themselves with an artificial identity of their making that can better manipulate the illusions of the men they want to seduce. Edison suggests that instead of accepting these illusions created by women why not create an illusion oneself? “[P]uisqu’en un mot la Femme elle-même nous donne l’exemple de se remplacer par de l’Artificiel, épargnons-lui, s’il se peut, cette besogne” (L’Ève future, 1:905). [Since in a word, Woman herself gives us the example of replacing herself with the Artificial, let us spare her, if possible, that task.] Thus Villiers poses the question that if all is an illusion, why not choose the best illusion, one that is better than the one offered to us?25 If all women are artificial, why not choose the perfect artificial woman for Ewald: “[C]himère pour chimère, pourquoi pas l’Andréide elle-même? […] Essayons de changer de mensonge!” (1:905)? [“Chimera for chimera, why not have the Android herself? (. . .) Let us try to change lies!]

Indeed, after a time, the illusion will become second “nature,” and Ewald will know instantly all the commands that make Hadaly work: “Avec un peu d’habitude […] tout vous deviendra naturel” (L’Ève future, 1:858).26 [With a bit of practice (. . .) everything will become natural to you.] Because the ideal Alicia would be the beautiful body filled with an

25. Franc Schuerewegen discusses a kind of “choice” of what is real, in “‘Télétechné’ fin de siècle: Villiers de l’Isle-Adam et Jules Verne,” Romantisme 20, no. 69 (1990), 81; as does Raitt, Villiers et le mouvement symboliste, 248.

26. This reminds one of the way in which Bourdieu describes how artificial social constructs eventually are perceived to be natural.
equally beautiful soul, Edison’s science gives him the ability to embody the ideal in this machine: “Je forcerai, dans cette vision, l’Idéal lui-même à se manifester, pour la première fois, à vos sens, PALPABLE, AUDIBLE ET MATERIALIZED” (1:836). [I shall force, in this vision, the Ideal itself to appear, for the first time, to your senses, PALPABLE, AUDIBLE, AND MATERIALIZED.] In this way, the new artificial Alicia would become the “real” Alicia: “Eh bien! avec l’Alicia future, l’Alicia réelle, l’Alicia de votre âme, vous ne subirez plus ces stériles ennui’s” (1:913). [Well then! With the future Alicia, the real Alicia, the Alicia of your soul, you will no longer endure these sterile problems.] In sum, because all is illusion, one should not be concerned to know which is the copy, which is the model, and one should pick the best illusion and take it for the real. Once again, there is no crisis of distinction here because the artificial has been declared the universal.

Thus Edison goes ahead with his experiment, and his machines (the camera and the phonograph) decode and record the language of Alicia’s beautiful body, which is itself already a transcription of the Venus victrix. He then replicates that transcription in an artificial being: Edison has found the “formula” that will allow him to duplicate the object of man’s desire and to improve on it (L’Ève future, 1:905).

Just after the “film” scene, in which the artificial Evelyn is taken apart, Edison proceeds to explain how he is putting together the new, perfect being as he examines the nearly completed android. It is almost as if the taking-apart of the artifice of Evelyn Habal sets the stage for the verbal dismantling of the android that Edison now “dissects” for Ewald. Edison here enumerates all the scientific wonders that go into Hadaly’s manufacture: the artificial flesh, the phonograph voice, the mercury-balanced gait. In order to show her inner workings, Edison uses a crystal scalpel to open her: “[L]a table (. . .) reprit sa position horizontale avec l’Andréide à présent couchée sur elle comme une trépassée sur une dalle d’amphithéâtre. ‘Rappelez-vous le tableau d’André Vesale! dit en souriant Edison; bien que nous soyons seuls, nous en exécutons un peu l’idée en ce moment.’ Il toucha l’une des bagues de Hadaly. L’armure féminine s’entrouvrit lentement” (L’Ève future, 1:907). [The table (. . .) went back to its horizontal position with the Android now lying on it like a dead woman on a slab in an amphitheater. “Remember the picture by Andreas Vesalius!” said Edison smiling; “even though we are alone, we are in a way carrying out that idea right now.” He touched one of Hadaly’s rings. The feminine armor opened slowly.] In the famous Vesalius image, a woman lies on the dissecting table, her abdomen cut open to reveal the area of the womb, and
she is viewed by a large group of men. Both Edison and Vesalius look into the origins of “life,” either natural or artificial.

If Edison’s lecture on Hadaly’s body follows the pattern of a kind of dissection, the images of her creation unsurprisingly portray it as a kind of gestation (we recall here from our Introduction the words of Jordanova as she specifically links the interest in the dissection of the human body not simply with the quest for knowledge but also with the desire to create life: “once you think about pulling the body apart in order to build up skeletons for study or to examine its constituent parts, you are close to the enormous transgression of Frankenstein” [Jordanova, Sexual Visions, 108]). Hadaly’s veiled face is like that of an unborn child: “[E]lle a pris l’attitude de l’enfant qui va naître: elle se cache le front devant la vie” (L’Ève future 1:906). [She has taken on the aspect of the child about to be born: she hides her face before life.] Ewald witnesses the first stirring of his potential “lover,” which would be undesirable in the natural world (as it would have been for Flaubert): “En vérité, si l’on pouvait voir, d’une façon rétrospective, les commencements positifs de celle que l’on aime et quelle était sa forme lorsqu’elle a remué pour la première fois, je pense que la plupart des amants sentiraient leur passion s’effondrer” (1:909). [In truth, if we could see in retrospect the concrete beginnings of the one we love and what her form was when she stirred for the first time, I think the majority of lovers would feel their passion plummet.]

Here we have, once again, the fantasy of the scientist giving birth in these metaphors of gestation. Villiers, influenced by Nerval’s translation of Faust, replays some of that text here. Edison is like Vagner, the scientist who combines just the right elements in his beaker to make a human being, as Nerval renders Goethe:

De ce moment, la femme devient inutile; la science est maîtresse du monde [. . .]

“Bon! dit Vagner: une femme et un homme, n’est-ce pas? C’était là l’ancienne méthode; mais nous avons trouvé mieux. Le point délicat d’où jaillissait la vie, la douce puissance qui s’élançait de l’intérieur des êtres confondus [. . .] tout ce système est vaincu,

27. In the seventeenth century, in fact, Vesalius “described the human organism as a ‘factory’” (Rabinbach, The Human Motor, 51).
dépassé; et si la brute s’y plonge encore avec délices, l’homme doué de plus nobles facultés doit rêver une plus noble et plus pure origine . . .”

En effet, cela monte et bouillonne; la lueur devient plus vive, la fiole tinte et vibre, un petit être se dessine et se forme dans la liqueur épaisse et blanchâtre; ce qui tintait prend une voix. Homunculus, dans sa fiole, salue son père scientifique.29

[From this moment, woman becomes unnecessary; science is the mistress of the world (…)]

“Good!” said Vagner. “A woman and a man, no? That was the old method; but we have found better. The delicate point when life bursts forth, the gentle power that springs out from the interior of beings joined together (…) that entire system is defeated, outmoded; and if the brute plunges into it once more with delight, the man with more noble faculties must dream of a nobler and purer origin . . .”

And sure enough, it rises up and froths; the light becomes brighter, the vial rings and vibrates, a little being takes shape and forms in the thick, whitish liquid; what was ringing gets its voice. Homunculus, in his flask, salutes his scientific father.]

Like Vagner, then, Edison is a “father” who gives symbolic birth to this gestating fetus, the android; the “natural” woman is no longer necessary and will disappear, as announced in an early version of L’Ève future entitled L’Andréide paradoxale d’Edison: “Vingt hommes sérieux, travaillant dix ans, avec moi, et j’anéantis la femme! A tout jamais! Oh! non pas en tant que femme, compagne libératrice, idéal vénéré, charme de l’âme,—mais en tant que misérable, infernal, grotesque et puant l’animal.”30 [Twenty serious men, working for ten years with me, and I can annihilate woman! Forever! Oh, not woman who is the liberating companion, the venerated ideal, the soul’s charm, but woman who is miserable, infernal, grotesque and stinking of the animal.] Given that creating the android seems to be, once again, the fantasy of male birth, it is also not surprising to find that the underground laboratory where Hadaly is made appears to be a kind of womb, reminiscent of the machine room in Salammbô, and a

30. “L’histoire du texte,” 1:1513. Edison’s dissection of Hadaly is then a kind of dissection of the fetus not yet born, a bit like Pascal’s dissection of the pregnant women in Zola.
contemporary of the mechanical wombs of Zola. In order to gain access to her dwelling place, Edison and Ewald descend a long passage in a kind of elevator, where they find themselves “dans la plus noire obscurité, en d’opales et humides ténèbres, aux exhalaisons terreuses” (*L’Ève future*, 1:868) [in the blackest darkness, in impenetrable and damp shadows with earthy emanations]. After this long, dark passage, they arrive in a “spacieux souterrain” (1:869) [spacious underground area].

The final physical incarnation of Hadaly and replication of Alicia are completed once Edison has dissected the particulars of Alicia’s body language in the same way as Evelyn’s, by image and sound recording. In this way he obtains the necessary “words” that allow him to inscribe the language of Alicia’s body onto the surface of Hadaly’s mechanical apparatus, allow him to have simulated hair, eyes, and other body parts manufactured for her, and allow him to transfer Alicia’s voice onto the cylinders of Hadaly’s lungs. This final inscription is presented as a kind of “printing” when Edison says he can read, decode these inscriptions like a master printer reads print face in reverse (*L’Ève future*, 1:912).

Marey too did not limit himself to reading and writing the language of nature. Once the body’s language had been properly inscribed and understood, there was no impediment to reproducing that language, to creating a new animal machine by, in effect, “rewriting” it. As a scientist, he constructed an artificial heart and circulation system, and an artificial insect. He studied the way bird wings worked and made important contributions to the understanding of flight, so that man could “imitate” that movement. These contributions directly inspired Tatin, who around 1879 built a model “automobile” of the sky that flew for a short time (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 121–22). What Marey did, then, was make machines that could imitate the language of nature once one had learned its laws: “We will thus try to analyze those very rapid actions that are produced in the flight of insects and birds; we will then try to imitate nature […] Already we can affirm that, in the mechanical acts of terrestrial, aquatic, and aerial locomotion, there is nothing that can escape the analytic means at our disposal. Would it be impossible to reproduce a phenomenon that we have understood? We won’t push skepticism that far” (Marey, *La machine animale*, ix). “You saw me apply the laws of physics when

31. Thus the machine is the father’s creation, his own child. Noiray points out an earlier Villiers text in which a machine is a child; the locomotive is man’s first child of industry in the poem “Chemins de fer,” which appeared in 1860 (*Le romancier et la machine*, 2:265 n. 7).
I operated those rudimentary apparatuses that help us imitate certain phenomena that appear in living beings” (Marey, *Du mouvement*, 67).

Thus, if one could inscribe the body and understand this inscription, one might be able to replicate it—clearly an idea that is evident in Villiers. As a child, Marey built a robot, “Mr. Punch,” with a friend (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 7). Dagognet even speculates that Marey might have been “pushing toward robotization. It was less a man-machine or even a human machine that Marey wanted than a machine capable of replacing man, who was considered to be a machine of low productivity. It was enough to record and calculate the results of this machine to replace it with something better” (170).32

In sum, human imperfection and the prosthetic improvement afforded by the mechanical is a fundamental theme in *L’Ève future*. Marey studied the language of life, movement, in order to understand it and then to translate it for artificial reproduction and improvement.33 Villiers envisioned the success of such an enterprise. The superior machines become the real, a better real, and one could open a “manufactory d’idéals” (*L’Ève future* 1:930) [factory of ideals]. Thus the beautiful, artificial orchid manufactured by Edison plays back the song of a dead nightingale and is better than what the reality once was (1:872–74) (the nightingale reminds one of Marey’s work on bird flight).

32. Marey also devoted some of his time to the science of gymnastics and its possibilities for the improvement of the human body; if one could understand the proper movements to perform in exercise, one could succeed in improving performance. This push for perfecting humans (particularly soldiers) was likely in part the result of anxieties about the 1870 defeat of the French (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 165, 168–70). It is interesting that Villiers was an excellent boxer and made some money giving instruction in boxing.

33. It should be emphasized that Marey was not just copying nature but inscribing life, movement, which involved time, and in his reconstructions, exact imitation was not the main principle. What was important was to imitate the formal information that the inscription made visible (Dagognet, *Étienne-Jules Marey*, 137). For instance, he dressed a man completely in black before a black background, placed white lines on the side of his body, and had the man run as Marey took a rapid series of photographs on one photographic plate. The resulting image is a formal sequence of lines and dots moving across the image (Marey, *Le mouvement* [Paris: G. Masson, 1894], 61). (This “chronophotograph” can be seen on the website of the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Médecine: http://194.254.96.21/livanc/?cote=extacad32516&ps=67&do=page). This was an attempt not to copy the human body but to make visible the formal forces at work in movement, so that they could be understood and used. The photographs, then, are not imitations of nature but rather translations of what is already a language. The language of the body allows for replication.
The Cyborg

If Edison were to follow Marey’s path at this point, Hadaly would be a pure machine replicated from the inscriptions of another body. However, Villiers goes beyond this to create a scientific fantasy in which a soul could come to dwell in this “electric” body; it would be, in our terms today, a strange kind of cyborg: part human, part machine. Indeed, as Noiray suggests, the android could be considered a prosthetic body that could lodge Sowana’s spirit (Noiray, *Le romancier et la machine*, 2:310). It is magnetism (in the sense of hypnotism) in its combination with electricity that provides Villiers with the scientific metaphor that enables him to represent the bridge between the “spirit” and the physical worlds. One finds echoes of Balzac’s heroes in Edison’s talents as a hypnotizer: he puts Mistress Anderson and Alicia Clary under whenever he wants to. As he says, his mesmeric talents are the means to dominate and control another human being: “[J]e me sens, aujourd’hui, la faculté d’émettre, à distance, une somme d’influx nerveux suffisante pour exercer une domination presque sans limites sur certaines natures” (*L’Éve future*, 1:1004). [I feel I now have the ability to emit, at a distance, enough nervous fluid to wield an almost limitless domination over certain natures.]

Villiers’s vision of hypnosis is similar to that of Mesmer: there is a current of magnetic substance that can travel from person to person and that allows one person to “magnetize” the other. Villiers’s hypnotism is linked as well to many of the traditional elements of psychiatry in Charcot’s time: the hypnotic trance is related to sleep and to the somnambular state, and Hadaly calls herself “Un être de rêve” (*L’Éve future*, 1:991) [A being of dream]. Charcot believed that the hypnoid state and the hysterical state were the same; Mistress Anderson/Sowana, who appears to suffer from hysteria brought on by her husband’s infidelity, can be completely hypnotized by Edison. His strong control of a magnetized person enables him to give special powers to the hysteric; he claims that he can bring a closed vial containing a drug close to a hysteric and she will begin to react to the drug through the container (1:1008–9). The text in fact makes reference to one of the popular magnetizers who publicly displayed his power over women,34 and thus hypnotism in Villiers’s work is linked to the male control of woman, as it is in the texts of Balzac and Flaubert.

Villiers adds to this type of magnetic hypnotism the idea of electricity and its relationship to a kind of corporeal magnetic current. Mesmerist currents and electricity are both “fluids”: “[L]a Science, à la fois ancienne et récente, du Magnétisme humain est une science positive, indiscutable,—[. . .] la réalité de notre fluide nerveux n’est pas moins évidente que celle du fluide électrique” (L’Ève future, 1:1004). [The Science of human Magnetism, both that of the past and that of recent times, is a concrete and indisputable science—( . . ) the reality of our nervous fluid is no less evident than that of electric fluid.] But, more important, nervous fluid and electric fluid seem to be similar, as Noiray points out (Le romancier et la machine, 2:308–9). Indeed, at this time electricity was linked to life itself, “for the century of Hermann von Helmholtz, electricity, energy and life were synonymous.” 35 Electricity was even believed to be able to cure the ills of the times: just as Villiers would like to cure the ills of womankind, electricity held out the promise of restitution for degeneration and fatigue (Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night, 71). Thus human life fluids and inanimate electric fluids are similar if not identical, and this electric substance thus can flow between the animate and inanimate.

This idea of the flow between different entities plays an important role in the replication of the body; through the flows of different “currents,” information and souls can travel. On the one hand, because the voice can be inscribed, as demonstrated by the phonograph, and because it is transportable through the flow of a current, as demonstrated by telegraph and telephone, Alicia’s voice could be reinscribed in an artificial machine—significantly in Hadaly’s lungs (the location of the breath of life). 36 On the other hand, in the context of Villiers’s magnetism, an electric soul can travel to and inhabit different bodies just as electricity can flow through different objects. Sowana inhabits Mistress Anderson’s body and can “animate” the body of the machine, just as the electrical currents flow through the machine’s parts: “Sowana—comme en proie à je ne sais quelle exaltation concentrée—me demanda de lui en [de l’Andréide] expliquer les plus secrets arcanes—aﬁn, l’ayant étudiée en totalité, de pouvoir, à l’occasion, s’y incorporer elle-même et l’animer de son état

Surnaturele” (L’Ève future, 1:1006). 37 [Sowana—as if absorbed in I know not what concentrated exaltation—asked me to explain to her its (Hadaly’s) most secret mysteries—so that she, having studied it completely, would be able, when the opportunity arose, to incorporate herself in it and animate it with her “supernatural” state.]

The fact that Edison has found the secret to the mixing and control of the different types of electric currents shows his ability to combine the disparate realms of the animate and the inanimate; he sees the bridge between them and can link them. Hadaly combines electric and nervous fluids, physical electricity and Sowana’s electric spirit, a “synthesis of electric fluid and nervous fluid” (Noiray, Le romancier et la machine, 2:341). As she says, she is in a kind of “état mixte et merveilleux [. . .], toute saturée du fluide vivant accumulé en votre anneau” (L’Ève future, 1:774) [mixed and marvelous state (. . .), all saturated with the living fluid accumulated in your ring].

This image of the mixture of two disparate realms, such as organic and inorganic, machine and human, expands into other contexts. Two different persons can combine artificially to make a superior being in another way—for example, through composite photography (here of Edison and Gustave Doré): “Leurs deux photographies d’alors, fondues au stéréoscope, éveillent cette impression intellectuelle que certaines effigies de races supérieures ne se réalisent pleinement que sous une monnaie de figures, éparcies dans l’Humanité’’ (1:767). [Their two photographs from that time, blended in the stereoscope, give rise to that intellectual impression that certain effigies of superior races realize themselves in their totality only in faces struck on coins, faces that are scarce in Humanity.] The technical revision of the real creates the ideal: “The artificial world no longer appears here as the reverse, the negative of the real world, but as a door opened to the beyond, closer to the ideal” (Noiray, Le romancier et la machine, 2:318–19). In this fantasy, Villiers embraces technology in the service of the ideal. Furthermore, instead of fighting the crisis of distinction, as our other authors do, Villiers embraces it and uses it to imagine the exciting possibilities of ideal combinations: machine with human (Hadaly), human with human (composite photographs), nature with technology, science with art.

In sum, what makes Edison’s android possible is that equation among voice, electricity, spirit, and inscription. The perfect android would enable Edison and Ewald to control her absolutely (as we shall see, this does not

37. Villiers’s “scientific” interest in the paranormal was partly influenced by the English chemist and physicist Sir William Crookes (L’Ève future, 1:1628 n. 1).
happen). Such control shows in Edison’s mastery of Sowana, who has been hypnotized so well that if she puts on a certain ring, they can communicate across great distances, effecting a kind of “long-distance call” by means of which Edison makes her obey him:

J’en vins donc à établir un courant si subtil entre cette rare dormeuse et moi, qu’ayant pénétré d’une accumulation de fluide-magnétique le métal congénère, et fondu par moi, de deux bagues de fer (n’est-ce point du magisme pur?),—il suffit à Mistress Anderson,—à Sowana, plutôt,—de passer l’une d’elles à son doigt (si j’ai l’autre bague, aussi, à mon doigt), pour, non seulement subir, à l’instant même, la transmission, vraiment occulte! de ma volonté, mais pour se trouver, mentalement, fluidiquement et véritablement, auprès de moi, jusqu’à m’entendre et m’obéir,—son corps endormi se trouvait-il à vingt lieues. Sa main tenant l’embouchure d’un téléphone, elle me répondra ici, par voie d’électricité, à ce que je me contenterai de prononcer tout bas. (L’Éve future, 1:1004)

[I was thus able to establish a current so subtle between that exceptional sleeping woman and me, that, after I infused an accumulation of magnetic fluid into two iron rings of related metal cast by me (is this not pure magic?), it suffices that Mistress Anderson—Sowana, rather—put one of them on her finger (if I have the other ring, also, on my finger), not only to experience at that very instant the transmission—truly occult!—of my will, but also to find herself mentally, fluidly, and truly next to me, to such an extent that she could hear and obey me—even though her sleeping body might be twenty leagues away. While holding the mouthpiece of a telephone in her hand, she will respond by means of the pathway of electricity to whatever I please to say here very quietly.]

This communication is a method of control that belongs to the volonté [will] of Edison, who also controls Alicia Clary by means of hypnosis (L’Éve future, 1:965–66).

The control that comes with hypnotism represents, in fact, the ultimate condition of the perfect woman in this text. She is the creation of the man, made in his image and made to do what he desires: “Enfin, pour vous racheter l’être, je prétends pouvoir—et vous prouver d’avance, encore une fois, que positivement je le puis—faire sortir du limon de l’actuelle Science
Humaine un Être fait à notre image, et qui nous sera, par conséquent, CE QUE NOUS SOMMES À DIEU” (L’Ève future, 1:836). Finally, in order to redeem your being, I maintain that I am able (and can prove to you in advance, once more, that I can really do this) to extract from the dust of current Human Science a Being made in our image, and who will consequently be to us WHAT WE ARE TO GOD.] This is accomplished first of all when Edison chooses the words she will speak, which were commissioned from the best writers: “[S]es paroles […] sont imaginées par les plus grands poètes, les plus subtils métaphysiciens et les romanciers les plus profonds de ce siècle, génies auxquels je me suis adressé,—et qui m’ont livré, au poids du diamant, ces merveilles à jamais inédites” (1:910). [Her words (…) have been devised by the greatest poets, the subtlest metaphysicians, and the most profound novelists of this century, geniuses to whom I addressed myself—and who sold me marvels that will remain forever unpublished and that cost their weight in diamonds.] And although her conversation is “pre-recorded,” it is Ewald who controls the conversation by imagining first his part of the dialogue, to which she will reply in a preordained way: “Ce sera donc à vous d’en créer la profondeur et la beauté dans votre question même” (1:913). [It will thus be up to you to create depth and beauty in your question itself.] This ideal woman needs man, like Sleeping Beauty, to affirm her: “ATTRIBUE-moi l’être, affirme-toi que je suis! renforce-moi de toi-même” (1:991). [Attribute being to me, affirm to yourself that I am! Strengthen me with yourself.] The ideal woman cedes to the man’s will: “Qu’il en soit donc selon sa volonté!” dit, après un instant et après un léger salut vers Lord Ewald, Hadaly” (1:829) [“Let it thus be so according to his will!” said Hadaly, after a moment and after a slight nod to Lord Ewald]; she serves man just as Hadaly serves the two men sherry (1:883). Hadaly indeed materializes the scientific desire to create and to control life.

Ultimately, however, this creation escapes from Edison’s control and comprehension, and we discover that, in fact, Edison has been a pawn of a higher power. First of all, it is Hadaly/Sowana who claims to have controlled Edison by influencing his thoughts: “Je m’appelais en la pensée de qui me créait, de sorte qu’en croyant seulement agir de lui-même il m’obéissait aussi obscurement” (L’Ève future, 1:990). [I would call myself

38. Lathers, “Hypnotic Feminine,” 47, also notes the importance of hypnosis in the re-creation of Eve, which “depends on the power of hypnosis to isolate, immobilize, and transform flesh and blood women.”
into the thoughts of the one who was creating me, so that while he thought he was acting on his own, he was also obscurely obeying me.] Even though he made the physical being of Hadaly (with Sowana’s help as a kind of sculptress), Sowana throws a “wrench” into Edison’s machine when she joins her spirit with the android to create a being that Edison did not predict and now cannot control: “L’œuvre effrayait l’ouvrier” (1:1006). [The work frightened the worker.] It is the triumph of a kind of scientific supernatural over reason, normal science, and nature. What the scientist invents escapes from his control: “tout couteau peut devenir poignard” (1:834) [every knife can become a dagger]. One might view the “death” of Hadaly at the end of the novel as the destruction of this failed attempt at the control of creation. One might also view the birth of Hadaly as an artificial/natural being born both from a man (Edison) and a woman (Sowana); they create a new being, a cyborg, through the idea.

Even though science takes second place to the supernatural, it is science such as Edison’s that has made this incarnation of the supernatural possible. That is because good science is an art, an art of creation. Edison is compared with various artists, such as Beethoven, and his science rivals the imaginary power of “Les mille et une nuits” (L’Ève future, 1:998). Just as the best artists create, “Les seuls vivants méritant le nom d’Artistes sont les créateurs” (1:810) [The only living people who merit the name of Artist are the creators], so Edison is a creator of a new kind of being.

Thus science and art in L’Ève future are two aspects of the same creative process. Whether it is science that creates a new flesh that is a “chef d’oeuvre” (L’Ève future, 1:831), or art that, by scientific means, sculpts the body of Hadaly, the two have the same performative function, that of an idea that is materialized to create a new entity, an idea that becomes real, whether a statue or artificial flesh. And the new creation is made possible because of the language of nature, which can be recorded and replicated. Thus a kind of equivalence is set up in the text between art and science, and among sculpture, engineering, and writing.

The idea that identity is constructed, that humans are made of a mixture of previous codes and rules, are all ideas that we have seen from Balzac on. But Villiers takes this one step further to a deeper fantasy about writing

39. Anzalone, “Golden Cylinders,” 42, notes similarly that Edison’s devices “can transcribe words and images, but they cannot control the way the recordings will be received.”

40. Jennifer Forrest also observes the link between scientist and artist in “The Lord of Hadaly’s Rings: Regulating the Female Body in Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s L’Ève future,” South Central Review 13, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 18–37.
and about his own novel. In *L’Ève future*, everything is a kind of writing that can be scientifically inscribed: speech, gestures, the way one carries oneself, facial expressions. It is by means of “writing” Hadaly that she exists—in a sense, one “writes” her into existence. The deep fantasy here is that a writer could be like Edison, could give birth by scripting a new Eve. What better person than Villiers de l’Isle-Adam. (It is notable that many names of important characters in the novel begin either with E [Ewald, Edison, Edward] or with A [Anderson, Any, Alicia], for Eve and Adam; in a sense, these names are in various ways the creators of the new being.)

Accompanying this fantasy of writing are many related ideas about language that we have seen in some of the other authors. Language acts and creates reality for us in Villiers as it does in Balzac and Flaubert. In one instance in Villiers, a word used over and over makes a person become that thing: “Nos maniaques s’imagent, et souvent avec raison, que la seule vertu de ces syllabes confère, à qui les articule, même distraitement, un brevet de capacité. De sorte qu’ils ont pris la lucrative et machinale habitude de prononcer, constamment, ces vocables,—ce qui, à la longue, pénètre ces hommes de l’hystérie abrutissante dont ces mêmes vocables sont imbus” (*L’Ève future*, 1:809). [Our maniacs imagine, and often correctly, that the mere virtue of these syllables confers a certificate of competence on anyone who articulates them even distractedly. Thus they have acquired the lucrative and mechanical habit of constantly uttering these terms—this repetition eventually penetrates these men with the mind-dulling hysteria with which the words are filled.] And there are references to the biblical performative, “Fiat lux” (1:770, 792); “Et que l’Ombre soit!” [And let there be Shadow (or Darkness)] (1:969). As Raitt, through Anatole France, points out, Villiers believed in the incantatory power of words (Raitt, *Life of Villiers*, 225). In this light, the word “evoke” takes on a stronger meaning when used in relation to Hadaly: “Arrivée au seuil, elle se retourna; puis, élevant ses deux mains vers le voile noir de son visage, elle envoya, d’un geste tout baigné d’une grâce d’adolescente, un lointain baiser auxquels elle avait évoquée” (*L’Ève future*, 1:829). [Having reached the threshold, she turned; then, raising

41. Carol de Dobay Rifelj notes that all the female names have similarities that link them together and that the male names link male characters in her “*La machine humaine: Villiers’s L’Ève future and the Problem of Personal Identity,*” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 20, nos. 3–4 (Spring–Summer 1992), 430–51, 437.

42. Villiers, writing about the purpose of the publication he wanted to establish, stated its goal as “to change, through deep study and new analysis, the minds of those people whose views are formed in good faith and are befogged only by too strong prejudices, too exclusive beliefs” (Villiers quoted by Raitt, *Life of Villiers*, 211).
her hands toward the black veil on her face, she sent a distant kiss with a gesture bathed in adolescent grace to those who had evoked her.

This performative function of language thus makes this very book the inscription of words that will change humankind, create a new humanity, because we are “written.” Indeed, there is a clear equivalence between this very text and Hadaly, an equivalence noted by several critics. First, Gasché notes, Hadaly is a kind of “book” that Edison opens for Ewald and the reader: “When Edison sets out to explain her machinery, he opens the android’s chest like a volume and makes Lord Ewald read the numerous inscriptions of her potentialities, those, in particular, of her intelligence which are imprinted on the golden leaves of her lungs” (Gasché, “The Stelliferous Fold,” 321). Schefer notes that “the woman Lord Ewald cannot love is declined in all her aspects (form, gait, voice …); this declension constitutes the simulacrum. Declension here is the order and chronology of what is recited; it opens up a structure at the same time” and “the body parts of the Android are in fact parts of the story, each section constituting a chapter (there is thus an episode about the dermis, about hair, about teeth).”43 Kai Mikkonen observes that “narrative development is metaphorized in Villiers’s novel as an electric current” and that “woman’s body and its partitioning functions as an allegory for the metonymic development of the plot.”44 This book itself is thus the inscription of Hadaly’s body that will be written, encoded on the reader, and will write the new Eve. If, as we saw, Villiers felt the “besoin vraiment inouï d’une restitution de la Femme” [the truly unprecedented need for a restitution of Woman], Léon Bloy’s next words ring especially true: “Il s’agit de retrouver ce fameux Jardin de Volupté, symbole et accomplissement de la Femme, que tout homme cherche à tâtons depuis le commencement des siècles [. . .] Il en avait un besoin si furieux qu’après l’avoir cherchée, vingt ans, parmi les fantômes de ses rêves, il essaya résolument de la créer, comme eût fait un Dieu, avec de la boue et de la salive” (Bloy, “La résurrection de Villiers de l’Isle-Adam,” 11–12). [It involves finding that famous Garden of Pleasure, the symbol and completion of Woman, which every man has been blindly seeking since the beginning of time (. . .) He had such a furious need for her that, after having looked for her for twenty years among the phantoms of his dreams, he tried resolutely to create her, as a God would have done, with dust and saliva.] In the fantasy of this metaphor, Villiers would radically regenerate woman via this text itself.
