Change Your Shoes, Change Your Life
On Object Play and Transformation in a Woman's Story

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This article asks why adults play dress-up and investigates the role of object play in the making of magical thinking and the reforming of adult identity. The author looks at a wide spectrum of narratives and their genres—the fairy tale "Cinderella," the film comedy *Some Like it Hot*, the epistolary novel *Pamela*, the film melodrama *Now, Voyager*, the psychoanalytical case study of "Miss K.," and the memoir *My Judy Garland Life*. She asserts that these narratives help define what constitutes "a woman's story" as a story of transformation by setting its representation in relation to objects or aesthetic worlds, into which the woman changes or immerses herself with the same intensity and single-mindedness as a child at play. The author draws on the works of psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas to explain the transformational object seeking and aesthetic moment of these narrative representations and argues they model a woman's longing for transformation and make it imaginable to the adult mind. **Key words**: adult identity; a woman's story; Christopher Bollas; comedy; dress-up play; fairy tale; melodrama; memoir, object play; psychoanalysis; transformation

Introduction—Fairy Tales: Playing with Nouns

Consider the adage: You can't really know somebody till you walk a mile in her shoes. We know this expression does not mean that to know somebody you really have to walk a mile in her shoes. Even though the maxim says that is what we really must do, that is not what it means. Saying one thing, the words mean another when understood as a figure of speech. And as a figure of speech, the expression reveals that its meaning resides within or below the surface of the literal claim, as in the analogy: to perceive life as another perceives it feels to our imaginations as wearing her shoes and walking in them for a mile would feel to our feet. Somewhere in that slipping on of her difference (from the feet up, or from the feet in), she would grow more understandable to us. The axiom does a remarkable thing. It uses a figure—walking in somebody else's shoes—to embody an abstract idea: how to solve the problem of other minds by attempting

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to imagine living as another, of being another. The figure gives us an embodied account of a highly abstract, difficult idea as a means of opening up cognitive space for us to see ways into that idea. The analogy concretizes what resists expression. And in its very materiality, it builds a mental bridge to help mark off a space for the idea's coming to thought. The figure of speech metamorphoses from itself to an abstraction.

We need objects and their signifying presence in language—nouns—to help us get closer to thinking and feeling what is difficult to imagine precisely because it has no image, no form, no material presence for us to grasp. This is the work of metaphor. As James Geary (2011) writes, "Metaphorical thinking creates a kind of conceptual synesthesia, in which one concept is understood in the context of another. The abstract is understood in the context of the concrete, the metaphysical in the context of the physical, the emotional in the context of the biological. Through metaphor, body and mind are inextricably linked" (93). Geary describes embodied cognition, how the mind imagines an idea using the physical experience of the body.

But what would it mean to take the shoe adage literally, not figuratively? However much we can allow for and enjoy the word play of metaphor, such magical thinking—to imagine that by performing the concrete prompt, to put on her shoes and walk, you really would know her in the sense of become her—seems to belong to the realm of fantasy. Freud offers us an early theoretical model for considering why we associate such magical thinking with childhood or fantasy. He writes about how we outgrow the pleasures of nonsensical sound play but find a way to still enjoy something like those early childhood pleasures of freedom from sense in the kind of adult word play of joking. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1960), he writes:

> If now we survey the course of development of the joke, we may say that from its beginning to its perfecting it remains true to its essential nature. It begins as play, in order to derive pleasure from the free use of words and thoughts. As soon as the strengthening of reasoning puts an end to this play with words as being senseless, and with thoughts as being nonsensical, it changes into jest, in order that it may retain these sources of pleasure and be able to achieve fresh pleasure from the liberation of nonsense. Next, as a joke proper . . . it gives its assistance to thoughts and strengthens them against the challenge of critical judgment. (168)

Freud intended to trace how jokes evolve from our earliest experiences of playing with sounds before reason, critical judgment, and suppression impose their rules, values, and power over our minds and force our playful relation to nonsense underground or into sublimation as jokes, dreams, and parapraxes. Further, in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), Freud works backwards from the adult creative writer to the child at play to trace the sources of the adult writer's imaginative materials. About our early attachment to play, he writes: "The child's best-loved and most intense occupation is with his play or games. Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?"(143). Freud's evolutionary account of how jokes emerge from play as a response to the psychical pressures exerted on the developing mind becomes here an account of how the creative writer evolves from the child at play to the growing child who fantasizes by day and night to become the imaginative writer. Freud's insight—that the human desire to play is not lost in adults—grants play an original and persistent role in human mental development.

But if we do not outgrow the impulse to play, must it morph or be sublimated into more adult forms of socially accepted behaviors? What really does the adult world and mind-brain allow or not allow? Must we accept Freud's limited account of the play available to us in adulthood? Must jokes function as the only means to exercise our desire to be verbally playful? Must we be creative writers or be actors or be in therapy to share our fantasies? I think not. Adults engage in something like rough-and-tumble play (Panksepp 2005) while gaming in the sports arena, cooking in *Iron Chef America's* Kitchen Stadium, or gambling with money on Wall Street. And they pursue forms of make-believe (Winnicott 1971) or magical thinking (Huizinga 1955) while engaged in retail-therapy shopping for the toys that will make them look good and feel better. And, together, in dyadic partnerships or in groups, men and women create moments of improvisation, banter, game play, and other ordinary pursuits of intimacy and happiness (Cavell 1981; Boyd 1971; Spolin 1999; Young 2001). Stories, I assert, make evident how play travels from children's literature to adult narratives and suggest meanings for why the impulse to play reveals itself over the course of a life that mimics its earliest manifestations and connects us to our earliest selves in revisionary ways.

Fairy tales help return us to some of those earliest memories of imaginative play because they portray the object world as a space of wonder. Stories

essentially about nouns, fairy tales seem to know nothing of nouns as analogies, figures of speech, or metaphors in the service of abstract thinking. Instead, they signify a child's first symbolic encounters with the world of things as themselves, literal encounters, fresh, indeterminate, alive. What function can nouns as themselves serve? A little red riding hood, magic beans, a magic mirror, a glass slipper are nouns that reveal identity, or truth, or the possibility of metamorphosis. In the fairy-tale world of object magic, a girl is a little red riding hood, beans do grow into the tall beanstalks of giants, a mirror can reflect back the truth, and a glass slipper will fit only one foot to determine the one true love. The fairy tale, often our first experience of story, narrates the mysteries of magical nouns while children simultaneously experience in their lives the object world as mysterious.

Fairy tales tell us to keep our eyes on the nouns because there—in the literalness of the object itself—the truth is revealed, the metamorphosis occurs, the magic happens. This comes not in the cognitive movement "up" from object as thing to object as metaphor for idea, but in the movement "down" in the encounter between human and thing itself. And putting on the object, wearing the noun, placing self in relation to the literal thing or its signifying noun creates a potential space for change within the interrelation it establishes. Fairy tales concretize the effect of a body-to-object encounter as the concrete embodiment of change. Cinderella slips on the glass slipper and metamorphoses from scullery maid to the Prince's beloved by becoming recognizable through the transforming object—still Cinderella, but discernible now to him; still Cinderella, but changed to herself—visibly now a princess. If the fairy tale "Cinderella" defines a woman's story as a tale of metamorphosis, how that transformation unfolds has little to do with her own imagination but much to do with the telling presence of a glass slipper, the rescuing presence of a prince, and the authoring presence of a fairy godmother.

The classic comic film *Some Like It Hot*, the melodramatic eighteenth-century epistolary novel *Pamela*, the also melodramatic 1942 film *Now, Voyager*, the psychoanalytic case study of "Miss K.," and a memoir by the daughter of Lucian Freud, Susie Boyt, entitled *My Judy Garland Life,* all echo the understanding of the Cinderella fairy tale, i.e. that a woman's life story is a tale of metamorphosis. Luck, rescue, or magic, however, is not what accounts for the woman's change in these narratives. Instead, these revisionary Cinderella stories represent the woman's capacity to imagine change for herself—when deeply engaged in the creative, self-reflective, transformational object play of dress-up and of aesthetic immersion. Trying on a change of costume, using a different noun, discovering

how a work of art functions as a new object of attachment make possible new ways of imagining and of being—make even metamorphosis possible.

Comedy: "It's a whole different sex!"

Dressed as women and running from Chicago's Mob, Jack Lemmon as "Jerry" and Tony Curtis as "Joe" in Billy Wilder's comic film, *Some Like It Hot* (1959) trick themselves up as women to elude discovery. Joining an all-girl band set to board the Florida Limited is their ticket, not just to freedom, but to staying alive. But somewhere in the midst of all the running and panic, when Jerry slips on high heels, he slips into his own discovery, a shocking discovery: "It's a whole different sex!"

Jerry: Oy!
Joe: What's the matter now?
Jerry: How do they walk in these things? Hah? How do they keep their balance?
Joe: Must be the way the weight is distributed. Now come on.
Jerry: It's so drafty. They must be catching cold all the time.
Joe: Would you quit stalling. We're gonna miss the train.
Jerry: I feel naked. Feel like everybody's staring at me.
Joe: With those legs? Are you crazy? Now come on.
(Marilyn Monroe as "Sugar" passes by them on the train track, as the train blows off steam.)
Jerry: Would you look at that! Look how she moves! Just like Jello on springs. Must have some built-in motor or something. I tell you it's a whole different sex!
Joe: What are you afraid of? Nobody's asking you to have a baby!

Before cross dressing, Jack Lemmon's Jerry cannot imagine what it is to be a woman. Wearing a woman's clothes and feeling the accompanying draft and loss of balance, then seeing the real thing in Sugar, Jerry discovers the "not he," meaning "the she," an experience that he names, "It's a whole different sex!" If the wonder of that discovery for Jerry starts from trying literally to walk around in her shoes and then witnessing how Monroe's Sugar manages it—"Just like Jello on springs"—the wonder of *Some Like It Hot* for us is Jerry's metamor-

phosis from this moment into his adopted personae, "Daphne." Tony Curtis's Joe also walks in her shoes and talks in her voice, but he remains very much a man, essentially untouched by wearing the signifiers of her. On the other hand, Jerry comes to discover through the experience of wearing her, becoming her—Apollo's Daphne, the maiden who metamorphoses into a laurel tree, the man who metamorphoses into a "phallic woman" (Freud 1927, 1933).

However difficult it becomes to define the characters Jerry or Daphne over the course of the film, one part of his identity remains constant. "What-if…?" "Suppose…?" he keeps asking. Such verbal ticks reveal Jerry as a worrier. If Joe is always thinking of a way to get ahead, Jerry is thinking of the consequences—and they are never good. Jerry longs for security at any cost. "Why would a guy want to marry a guy?" Joe asks Jerry, when he learns that Daphne has accepted the marriage proposal of the presumably duped male millionaire Osgood (played by the remarkable Joe E. Brown, who has been sitting in a rocking chair on the veranda of a hotel in Florida waiting for his next bride's arrival. Jerry, it seems, is that bride.) Jerry's response—"Security!"—is offered with an immediacy that sounds convincing and thoroughly serious.

The act of imagining the impossible occurs when there is something at stake, when there is something to lose, like Jerry's security when the Mob chases him. Becoming a Daphne is easy to bear and even delightful, if it makes possible the preservation of what matters most—his life, even as a girl. The evolution itself distinguishes Jack Lemmon's performance of Daphne—from being a man who needs to wear a dress, wig, make-up, and heels to discover "It's a whole different sex!" to being a man identified with that different sex. To watch Lemmon closely over the film's progression is to watch the emergence of Jerry's understanding from the outside in of this metamorphosis—Jerry is still there, but Daphne is, too. Feeling increasingly safe from the reach of the Mob, Jerry grows increasingly aware of what it means to be a girl, from the time he first declares, "Would you look at that!" to his first experience of what it feels like to be "that," slipping his feet into high heels, playing bow fiddle as one of the girls in the band, finding Osgood's attentions increasingly less annoying. At first just a time-killing distraction to keep Osgood away from his yacht while Joe has his assignation with Sugar, Jerry's tango lesson evolves into an entanglement Jerry—and for that matter Osgood—does not want to end. The exchange of a carnation from one mouth to the other signals not only that their lips are meeting but that the transformation is all but complete, that they have passed their own laurel branch between them.

Jack Lemmon described the cross-dressing gag of *Some like It Hot* during a brief Turner Classic Movie biography of Billy Wilder as "a five-minute burlesque sketch the screenwriters Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond extended to last through most of the two-hour film." But as much as he plays dress-up by cross dressing, something happens to him because of the gag. He is a man who "becomes" a woman—or a boy who needs to be reminded he's a boy. No matter the disguise, his partner Joe is Joe, the "no-goodnik" tenor sax player whose only transformation by the film's close is to admit the truth of his identity to Sugar. But Jerry is not always just Jerry. If Joe's transformation is only skin-deep, Jerry's is porous. Whatever touches his skin, it seems, has the chance to change him or allow for change to occur. When at the film's stunning close, Jerry declares finally to Osgood, "I'm a man!" and takes off his wig to reveal himself to be a man, Osgood's "Nobody's perfect" allows the play between this emergent couple to continue and for their course to remain marriage, as they sail off into the sunset together in Osgood's boat. The transformation no longer requires props. With or without a wig, to Osgood, Jerry is Daphne.

The representation of meaning—about the fluidity of what it means to be a woman—finds a space for expression in the signifying practice of changing clothes, in how those changes signify how he becomes she or how she becomes her real she. If fairy tales make a garment the objective fact that holds or prompts a magical relation to identity and metamorphosis (Little Red Riding Hood; the glass slipper), and if mythology and comedy make possible the imagining of interspecies transformation (Daphne to laurel tree; Jerry to Daphne), these forms of figuring identity and change through costume change are prompted from without. The fairy-tale universe makes the rules; the mythological universe has gods to answer Daphne's plea for help; and the comic universe makes inventiveness the adaptive means to survive. Choice is not the point. Knowing how to survive is.

Melodrama: Changing into Something More Comfortable

By contrast, epistolary fiction and films of melodrama are about a woman's problems, not her survival. They do not make objects the deus ex machina that solves a woman's problems. Playing dress-up to cross gender lines, to surprise, and to evoke laughter by breaking society's rules is a favorite device of comedy.

Melodrama—a genre aimed at eliciting tears through its focus on "the woman's story," which Stanley Cavell (1981) describes as "a story or myth that seems to present itself as a woman's search for a story, or of the right to tell her story" (3)—does not rely on dress-up in the same way fairy tales or comedies do. However, melodrama's stories often share in comedy's fascination with trying on clothes and the possibility of transformation that follows.

The eponymous heroine of Samuel Richardson's 1740 melodramatic epistolary novel *Pamela* and Charlotte Vale, the protagonist (played by Bette Davis) of Irving Rapper's 1942 film melodrama *Now, Voyager,* both share Jack Lemmon's Jerry and Daphne's capacity to be touched and metamorphosed by choosing and wearing clothes, especially shoes. Both Pamela and Charlotte Vale spend much of their narratives playing dress-up. Both women often seem confused about what to wear because of the dominating master or mother who maintains control over what each wears in order to maintain control over her.

In her rags-to-riches Cinderella story, Pamela recognizes that clothing marks class. She most often wants to be legibly of her class. And she wants to resist accepting clothing as favors or as markers of her acceptance of her Master B's advances. Allowed only to wear the clothes chosen for her by her mother, Charlotte Vale's chief symptom, perhaps the root of her nervous breakdown, seems to be not knowing what to wear. Both figures stimulate radically different responses to what they wear and the way it sets them off from others. I am most interested in how both feel wearing their garments, in how—for both—their costume changes effect a metamorphosis, in how slipping into something from without (*Now, Voyager* refers at one point to Charlotte's "borrowed wings") creates slippages within, so that by wearing a different pair of shoes, or a hat, each knows herself differently because she looks different.

Melodrama often tells us that clothes remake the woman or that how a woman chooses to dress literally figures what is possible (or impossible) for her life, her identity, her imagination, her story. The very point of melodrama is what a character imagines and how. The "melodramatic imagination," Peter Brooks (1955) writes, seeks to

> express all. . . . Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of the relationship. . . . The middle ground and the middle conditions are excluded. Melodrama proposes

> the total enjoyment of excruciating situations in their unadulterated state. . . . Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign. (4, 36, 56)

If *Pamela* and *Now, Voyager* share the drive to express all in words—"all" meaning heightened feelings defining poles of existence as good and bad without much by way of a middle ground—they acknowledge as well how words fail to represent all, how the message "must be formulated through other registers of the sign," which means they must be expressed through other forms of symbolization. I take Pamela and Charlotte Vale's interest in clothing to be their chosen alternative to speech in symbolizing or concretizing the changing self. The representation of meaning—in this case, about the fluidity of the women figured—finds a space for expression in their signifying practices of changing clothes, in how those changes signify how each changes.

Pamela

Presented as an epistolary novel, *Pamela, Or, Virtue Rewarded* (Richardson [1740] 1985), recounts the story of a fifteen-year-old maidservant whose employer's death opens the way for her son Mr. B to attempt to seduce the innocent girl. In one of her letters, Pamela recounts that she has received various forms of apparel from of "my Lady's closet" from B. who is interested in bestowing them on her "by his own hands." As a good Puritan record keeper, Pamela keeps a running account in her letters of the numbers of shifts, handkerchiefs, aprons, shoes, buckles, ribbands, stockings, and stays and of their fabrics and kinds—cambric, Holland, silk, Flanders, silver, white cotton—that she receives. Her reiterated refrain after each receipt—"too rich, too good for me, to be sure"—belies something of the delight she feels from the list making and stockpiling.

By Letter XX, Pamela determines that she wants to go home and knows that at home "this fine silk and linen and shoes of my lady" will not do. So she buys of Farmer Nichols's wife and daughter, "a good *sad-coloured* stuff of their own spinning, enough to make me a gown and two petticoats" and then she "bought of a pedlar two *pretty-enough* round-eared caps, a little straw hat… and two yards of black riband for my shirt-sleeves, and to serve as a necklace" (emphasis mine, 77). For Pamela, the sad-colored cloth and the pretty-enough

round-eared caps move, however, from the register of the fallen to the enlivened when they make their way to Pamela's body and she sees herself anew in response to the change of clothing.

> And so, when I had dined, up stairs I went, and locked myself up into my little room. There I tricked myself up as well as I could in my new garb, and put on my round-eared ordinary cap; but with a green knot, however, and my homespun gown and petticoat, and plain leather shoes; but yet they are what they call Spanish leather. A plain muslin tucker I put on, and my black silk necklace, instead of the French necklace my lady gave me; and put the earrings out of my ears, and when I was quite equipped, I took my straw hat in my hand, and with its two green strings, and looked about me in the glass, as proud as anything. To say the truth, I never liked myself so well. . . .
>
> So I went down to look for Mrs. Jervis, to see how she liked me . . . "Why you surprise me," said she: "What, Pamela, thus metamorphosed! How came about this?"
>
> . . . She then stepped to me, and told me, I must go in with her to my master. . . .
>
> I dropped a low curt'sy, but said never a word. I dare say he knew me as soon as he saw my face; but was as cunning as Lucifer. He came up to meet me, and took me by the hand, and said, Whose pretty maiden are you? I dare say you are Pamela's sister, you are so like her; so neat, so clean, so pretty! Why, child, you far surpass your sister Pamela!
>
> I was all confusion, and would have spoken; but he took me about the neck. Why," said he, "you are very pretty, child: I would not be so free with your sister, you may believe; but I must kiss you."
>
> "O sir," said I, as much surprised as vexed, "I am Pamela, *her own self!*"
>
> "Impossible!" said he, and kissed me, for all I could do. "You are a lovelier girl by half than Pamela"; and again would kiss me. . . .
>
> At last I disengaged myself, and ran out of the parlour, very much vexed, you may well think. (87–90)

For Pamela to "trick herself up" means to play dress-up. Donning the objects she bought for herself, redesigning them with, for instance, a change in

ribbon, replacing her lady's French necklace with the black silk one she makes for herself, Pamela reconstructs herself—to make herself again legible as a member of the serving class and to see herself as her own object of design as opposed to B.'s sexual object of design. Pamela uses her experience of buying, arranging, and wearing clothing as a signifying practice of self-exploration. If her letters give an account of what happens to her and her response, this moment of dressing herself expresses something of Pamela's desire to design another possible self—to tell her own story of a self visibly in a state of metamorphosis who surprises and delights her. The metamorphosis Mrs. Jervis claims to see is apparently one of illegibility—this woman is not Pamela; she is not the serving girl got up in her lady's objects. Mrs. Jervis understands the change of clothes as a costume change and introduces the "unknown" Pamela to B., as if she is an unknown character on the stage, one whose identity he must guess and by naming for himself remake for himself. Pamela's apparent desire to signify "someone else" by changing clothes means to her audience that they have entered a space of charades, a space B. can use to his advantage to reclaim the woman who no longer wears the clothes that he gave her to signify "his" Pamela, through another means of causing her to wear him—by planting kisses on her instead: "I would not be so free with your sister, but I must kiss you."

What Mrs. Jervis and especially B. miss is the time Pamela spends alone, putting together her outfit, admiring herself in the mirror, feeling, "I never liked myself so well," meaning feeling herself, not "someone else." What Pamela experiences for a few moments alone, locked up in her little room, dressing herself in clothing of her own design is Pamela's self-fashioning, Pamela's capacity for pride and pleasure when she steps into shoes of her own choosing and sees a metamorphosed image reflected back—herself as fluid, herself as surprising, herself as "visible."

The detail of Pamela's account of how she tricks herself up attests both to Pamela's control over her body and how she chooses to portray it. It also signifies the way in which she uses her body for play. Gazing into the mirror at her image, she makes herself her own object. Hers is an active gaze of the subject to herself, a gaze informed by a complex understanding of her body as a space whose boundary can be transformed by her own design. The attachment her detailing evokes between herself and the things she strews about her body (particularly around the head—her hair, neck, ears) creates an identification between her sense of self and the ornaments that adorn her body. She discovers meaning in the relation between ornaments, body, and image of the self. Looking in the mirror, Pamela

can say: "This figure whom I see, who wears my things, who takes pleasure in my things and the image they make, is myself." She discovers how well her body responds to her hand and seeks an audience to appreciate her creation. Yet while she dresses, she offers no account of the body trying on the clothes; we learn only that she likes the image she sees, an image she keeps to herself.

The audience she chooses, Mrs. Jervis, understands Pamela as metamorphosed in Mrs. Jervis's lack of recognition. The transformation of the boundary space works for Mrs. Jervis as a transformation of the whole body: she is not Pamela. The audience she does not choose, but to whom she must present herself takes the power of her self-definition away by speaking to her as if she were another, while knowing she is not. When Pamela enters B.'s presence, she becomes the object of his game, a space under the control of his hand, not her own. Whereas in most scenes of the narrative, B. acts as a hidden voyeur who approaches her body from a position of surprise, here the staging of the relation of object to audience replicates in the open the pattern of spatial arrangement around Pamela's body and the coming into the presence of B.'s body by virtue of its relation to Pamela. Beyond the activity of spying, B. asserts his bodily presence in the staking out and poaching of Pamela, as if she were caged prey.

Yet, in response, unlike the bodies at risk of other heroines of epistolary fiction—Clarissa, of Richardson's massive masterpiece *Clarissa* (1747–8), Julie of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and Madame de Tourvel of De Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangéreuses* (1782), all of whom fall prey to the seductive force of the men pursuing them—Pamela maintains a controlling power over her body in her abstinence from sexual relations with B. B.'s actions—taking her by the hand, taking her about the neck, kissing her—give to Pamela's body, like the wearing of earrings or a hat, a bodily presence in the sense that her body "wears" the touching he presses on her. Her body works as a space that enables their interaction, however unwanted or unsolicited. It is the blurring of her appearance as mistress and as maid that disorients and attracts B., a man of the gentry who becomes lost in his desire to seduce and then to marry a serving girl, his Cinderella. However, the transformations she chooses for the "environment" of her body are designed not for the confusion of those who navigate around her but for the enjoyment and sense of meaning she derives from controlling and changing her image. While B. restricts her movements, she alters her appearance as a means of retaining control over her body through camouflage and as a means of creating pleasure for herself.

Now, Voyager

"Who is the fat lady with the heavy brows and all the hair?" asks Jeremiah Duvaux Durrance, Jerry for short, played by Paul Henreid, as he looks at a photo of Bette Davis, which neither she nor we as her film-going audience can recognize. If Pamela looks into the mirror and says, "I never liked myself so well," Charlotte Vale, the character in *Now, Voyager* (1942) played by Bette Davis, is lost to herself as she looks at her own image—an image that mirrors back not the glamorous Hollywood star, but the image the character's aged, controlling mother has of her. *Now, Voyager* makes the metamorphosing body of Betty Davis as Charlotte Vale its subject over the course of her ongoing entrances throughout the film. The film progresses by marking these entrances of Charlotte before captive, expectant eyes—of the psychiatrist, of fellow cruise passengers, of her family. Davis/Vale is the focus of the camera, the image on which it dwells when, for example, in the opening shot of her body, it first moves from her hands to her feet walking down a stairs to a full frontal shot (figure 1). Her ugly black shoes, her black-and-white, flowered dress, her old-maid hairstyle, her granny glasses, and her padding alter Bette Davis from the star we know and recognize into this ugly duckling created by Charlotte Vale's mother. This ugly-duckling version of Charlotte must learn to take command of the signifying practices of her body—to dress herself as herself.

If Pamela's position as the young serving girl under B. establishes for him his authority over her image making (and his desire for Pamela is as much authorial as sexual), Charlotte's position as the daughter of her mother's old age, as the unwanted child, sanctions for her mother her control over her daughter's dress, a control that severs the character Charlotte Vale from the actress Bette Davis. Charlotte's severed appearance from Davis begins to metamorphose into a Charlotte with something of the familiar star quality of Bette in part as a response to the imprint of each man who arrives to set her free from the mother's controlling construction of Charlotte's figure—Dr. Jaquith the psychiatrist, played by Claude Rains, and her lover Jerry. But the imprint of each man marks only stages in the butterfly's emergence. Quoting Dr. Jaquith, Charlotte, says to her mother and to herself, "Independence is reliance on one's own will and judgment." Charlotte's independence from mother and from men in the film represents an emerging assertion of her freedom to dress herself and rely on her own sense of style.

The metamorphosis of a Charlotte severed from Bette to a Charlotte-Bette combining portrayed character with star quality occurs on her maiden voyage, when she is set free for the first time from her mother—free to try on another

woman's clothes, free to make visible another self. The camera once again tracks Charlotte's body as in the opening, but replaces the old image beginning at her feet with elegant, white-and-black heels, moving up to a svelte black suit with white trim, and coming to rest on the astonishing white broad-brimmed hat with black veil (figure 2). Her appearance could not be more different. The reversals

Figure 1. *Now, Voyager* (1942). DVD. Warner Home Video, 2010.

of black and white, the removal of flesh, hair, and glasses, and the juxtaposition of her legs moving down the stairs into the mother's somber Beacon Hill living room with her legs now stepping down the runway of a pleasure cruise, all of these signify Charlotte's metamorphosis. Back from her maiden voyage, Charlotte walks down the runway once more, but this time into New York for a quick shopping spree before returning home, where she will be armed with a black gown of her own to wear in front of her mother and declare her new self. In borrowed wings no more, the metamorphosed fritillary flies to Beacon Hill in clothes of her own. The signifier transforms the signified, as Charlotte slips on the wings that free her to slip into Charlotte-Bette.

If melodrama imagines an internal life where all—that is, our deepest feel-

Figure 2. *Now, Voyager* (1942). DVD. Warner Home Video, 2010.

ings—is expressed, all is heightened and polarized, then I would suggest *Pamela* and *Now, Voyager* are melodrama depicting how their female protagonists discover the meaning of their lives between the internal and external poles of their existence. Their metamorphoses happen from the inside out, determined by the way each woman expresses herself. Letters written from "inside Pamela," as the expression of her deepest feelings, are sent out by post. The hidden story of the repressed spinster Charlotte gets uncovered first by her analyst, then by her lover, and then by the little girl in need of mothering.

But the words sent from the inside out do not appear enough to tell it all. Unrepressed and pure, the words alone cannot make Charlotte Vale's desire for change find expression in a world that refuses to imagine change. Like a metaphor that opens a cognitive space for imagining an abstraction, playing dress-up holds open a space for imagining the self. In response to what she sees and feels, Pamela says about herself, "I never liked myself so well," and Charlotte-Bette says first to her mother, "I'm not afraid, Mother," and then to herself, "*I'm not afraid*." With the space of change held open by each woman's visible change, the world that holds her starts to refashion itself in response to her metamorphosing presence. Like Cinderella or Jack Lemmon's Daphne, Pamela slips on her lady's silk shoes, "just fit for me (for my lady had a very little foot)" (51). Wearing her lady's silk shoes, discovering that they "just fit," works its metamorphosing magic—but they do so not because Pamela has become what B. dressed her to be, but because *she* has worn *him* down. The reformed rake, the metamorphosed B., is virtue rewarded—the Cinderella story emerges from what began as its inversion. Pamela's resistance throughout to B.'s fashioning of her and insistence on finding ways to signify her own self—her letters, her clothes, her refusals—by novel's end prompt the shoes, the house, and the suitor to fit her. For Charlotte, the in-flight signification of the butterfly-woman fluidity happens through the hands of the dresser—herself—and by film's close comes to rest with Charlotte-Bette on the floor holding a set of architect's plans. There are other worlds to change now, other dreams to construct, other creations for her hands to design.

How is the woman of melodrama to know her deepest feelings, to become herself, and to tell her story when the master or the mother who holds her captive wants to forbid it? Changing clothes creates a space within that space where she is held captive—a space for (re)imagining the self, for changing into something more comfortable. With the space of change held open by the woman's visible change, the world that holds her captive starts to refashion itself in response to

her metamorphosis. Pamela and Charlotte choose the metamorphosing magic of a change of costume to effect change from the outside in because it creates a space that concretizes the possibility for both women to discover what D. W. Winnicott calls "the true self" (1965).

Case Study and Memoir: On the Aesthetic Moment as Transformational Object

For analyst-philosopher Jessica Benjamin (1995) to have a self requires another's recognition: this basic human need—the fundamental emergence of selfhood—prompts Charlotte-Bette forward in her search. Her psychiatrist, Dr. Jaquith recognizes the despair of one born to play the part of the ugly duckling, and he offers her a safe space to help loosen the grip of the metaphor. In doing so, he opens the space for Walt Whitman's "untold want" to be heard and to take shape. Benjamin asserts that the power of recognition is mutual. Charlotte, when she first meets Jaquith, recognizes in him a lifeline, a space of hope. Crying, she asks him, "Can you help me? When you were talking downstairs about the fork in the road. There are other forks further down the road. So many." Help me choose which way to go, she asks him, meaning, help me change. The film *Now, Voyager* depicts how the recognition by another helps enable the emergence of the real self.

"Clinical Material"

Consider Martin Silverman's psychoanalytic case study of his patient "Miss K." and her longing for change. Entitled "Clinical Material" (1987), the case study is its own form of storytelling or life narrative, one written by the analyst using the dyadic exchange between analyst and analysand to report its significance. For me, the most fascinating aspect of the report is the way Miss K. uses the film *Now, Voyager* as an aesthetic object to instruct Dr. Silverman how to help her change. The film functions for Miss K. as a mirror of herself, which she uses to help Dr. Silverman recognize her. Something profound has happened between Miss K. and *Now, Voyager*. Choosing to watch the film repeatedly, Miss K. seems to replace the telling of her own narrative in therapeutic sessions with repeating the film's story—its dialog, its visuals, and its experience. For Dr. Silverman, Miss K. repeats the film as her own story, as if her experience and that of the film are now one. What kind of object play is this?

The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1993) writes about the use we make of the object to effect change through our discovery of what he calls the "aesthetic moment." "The aesthetic experience occurs as *moment*. Eliseo Vivas describes it as 'rapt, intransitive attention' . . . . A spell that holds self and other in symmetry and solitude, time crystallizes into space, providing a rendezvous of self and other (text, composition, painting) that actualizes deep rapport between subject and object. The aesthetic moment constitutes this deep rapport between self and object and provides the person with a generative illusion of fitting with an object. . . ." (40)

Bollas's recognition of the aesthetic moment as transformational object helps us understand or at least find words for those moments when a work of art feels to us sacred, sublime, transporting, etched in our minds as somehow outside of time and space, beyond the real and yet wholly informing of its meaning. This is not just about slipping on a pair of shoes to know difference from the toes up, but rather experiencing a work of art as another world into which one wholly enters. Such a moment speaks to the possibility of feeling the immersion of self into object, object into self, so that boundaries cease to exist, as does the need to continue the search. In *The Shadow of the Object* (1987), Bollas writes more generally of the meaning of our search for the transformational object.

> I think we have failed to take notice of the phenomenon in adult life of the wide-ranging collective search for an object that is identified with the metamorphosis of the self. . . .
>
> The search for such an experience may generate hope, even a sense of confidence and vision, but although it seems to be grounded in the future tense, in finding something in the future to transform the present, it is an object-seeking that recurrently enacts a pre-verbal ego memory. . . . However, such occasions, meaningful as they, are less noteworthy as transformational accomplishments than they are for their uncanny quality, the sense of being reminded of something never cognitively apprehended but existentially known, the memory of the ontogenetic process rather than thought or phantasies that occur once the self is established. Such aesthetic moments do not sponsor memories of a specific event or relationship, but evoke a psychosomatic sense of fusion that is the subject's recollection of the transformational object. This anticipation of being transformed by an object—itself an ego memory of the ontogenetic process—

> inspires the subject with a reverential attitude toward it, so that even though the transformation of the self will not take place on that scale it reached during early life, the adult subject tends to nominate such objects as sacred. (16–17)

For Bollas, not only is it the object seeking that helps us experience metamorphosis, but it is the uncanny feeling that can accompany the object's discovery, or the sense of fusion the subject can feel with the object that contributes to its reverential, even sacred quality. This is particularly true of the experience of the aesthetic moment as transformational object. This uncanny power of the moment resides in its relation to what he calls "the first aesthetic moment"—"the mother's idiom of care"—meaning her "style" of care that transforms-as-it-forms the little human's experience of being.

I read the aesthetic moment as transformational object to be a response to the desire for change from the known to the unknown. Bollas writes from his belief in the presence and power of the existential memory, the "unthought known" or,"the more than we can say that we know," meaning the unconscious memory of the mother's idiom of care. I write with attention to what I call the "unknown thought," meaning the untold want for the unknown. The search for the object and the expression of feelings of attachment to the object in stories heralds for me less a return to the existential memory than the longing to change in future-directed, unknown ways.

In the case study, Miss K. says to Dr. Silverman, "Guide me. Tell me what to do. Talk about this and that. I guess make it easier for me, so I don't have to do it, which is more difficult. . . . I liked the way Claude Raines talked to troubled Bette Davis. He said, 'People have to make decisions in life, and I'm there to say not this way but that way. . . .' He's soft spoken, all knowing in a quiet way, not dominating, but giving her the time, not hurrying her." Claude Raines is not Miss K.'s dominating father; nor is he her frightened, absent mother. Watching Claude Raines with Bette Davis, Miss K. sees him make possible her own transformation—a picture she can hold in mind when she leaves the experience of watching the film to continue to imagine a longed-for way of being, unknown to her in life, but imaginable and made possible as a "future" by the film. For Miss K., the film as aesthetic moment speaks directly to what she longs for most—it gives her that "generative illusion of fitting with the object." Most apparently, it gives her a narrative counter to the one she has known in life. What Miss K. knows is her pain: what she recognizes is

its source and how it spreads out and infects her life. For Miss K. the question is, must this always be so?

> My father didn't give me what I wanted from him and I got mad and reacted by taking it out on all men and turning on and turning away from all men; and then I met you [Dr. Silverman] and I got mad at you for not giving me what I wanted from him and want from you, and I'm taking out on you what I feel about my father and all men! You're going away and leaving me, and I'm angry and sulking and insisting on being miserable! Am I going to spend my whole life angry and sulking? . . .
>
> She [Charlotte/Bette] had strong, fond feelings for the psychiatrist. He helped her turn her life around and get free. I relate to her. There she was fat, dumpy, having a nervous breakdown, and is transformed into a sophisticated woman who begins to enjoy life rather than hiding from it. I fantasize that happening: *I'm going to be transformed*. (Emphasis mine, 162)

The transformative work of the aesthetic object *Now, Voyager* for Miss K. does not stop with her experience of encountering a counternarrative to her own life story. It becomes a means for her to translate her longings to Dr. Silverman as an object they can both watch, discuss, and understand. Her recognition of her own transference, "I got mad at you for not giving me what I wanted from him and want from you," is clear. But having a relation to the film *Now, Voyager* enables her to go further.

I understand Miss K. to be inviting Dr. Silverman to enter her aesthetic moment with her and to transform himself in order to be her transformational object. Miss K. knows she wants to make use of Dr. Silverman—she wants him and the analysis to function as her transformational object. She is instructing Dr. Silverman in how to be that object for her—not like her father, but like a psychiatrist played by the wonderful Claude Raines. This is the told want, the known longing. If Miss K. hungers to be told what to do to feel better, to have Dr. Silverman be her Claude Rains, how Dr. Silverman shows up in response to that hunger is what matters. Without the analyst's understanding of her longing and a willingness and capacity to play her transformational object, Miss K. feels unmet.

This is a failure in attunement. Angry, despairing, not able to name the change she seeks, and not yet able to imagine the change for herself, Miss K.

pleads, "Am I going to spend my whole life angry and sulking?" This is the untold want. The film *Now, Voyager* functions as Miss K.'s transformational object, her aesthetic moment, the experience she can "try on" like a dress-up of the mind into which her imagination enters to help her picture the possibility of the change she longs for. If the nature of the change remains unknown, having its experience as the aesthetic object, with which she feels "deep rapport," being able to hold it in mind, knowing it exists in some concrete form as this object in the world which she can watch again and again, gives her hope, makes it possible, sets her on a path of discovery, and defines what constitutes the urgency of her life—which is to search for that feeling of attunement somewhere else, in someone else.

My Judy Garland Life

Like Miss K. who makes use of the film *Now, Voyager* as her transformational aesthetic object, Susie Boyt discovers in *Judy Garland: The Concert Years,* a Public Broadcast Service (PBS) show, the transformational object she needs to hold her pain, a pain she learns she can survive and from which she comes to discover meaning. *My Judy Garland Life*, the title of Boyt's memoir, defines her life literally in the terms of her transformational object. Alone, grieving the traumatic loss of a love to an accidental death, unable to be soothed by the presence of any thing or any one, Boyt turns to Judy Garland. Somewhere in her repeated viewings of the PBS special and her hearings of the arresting, all-or-nothing naked vulnerability and crescendos of strength and sorrow of Garland's remarkable voice and presence, Boyt feels herself receive the "something that just wasn't available elsewhere." Like the arrival of a magic gift, the images and sounds that come to her from the outside world in the form of an art object—*Judy Garland: The Concert Years*— in which Boyt immerses herself every day for a year lead her to feel held in their mirroring embodiment of her own pain. Boyt (2010) describes this aesthetic moment as the arrival of the transformational object which saves her.

> During the worst period of my life, after my boyfriend was killed suddenly in a climbing accident, two months before his twenty-first birthday, I watched a PBS special called *Judy Garland: the Concert Years* every day for a year, receiving from it something that just wasn't available elsewhere.
>
> What are you to do when you are 20, bereaved and grieving, living alone, an owner-operated pain factory dwelling right at the edge

> of what you can bear? You can't foist yourself on friends or family, however kind, for repeatedly provoking and enduring their alarm is more than any of you can take. You're a risky prospect. You may not have the courage or wherewithal to let a professional take up the vast unholy slack of you; besides, you do not wish to pathologize your grief or have the dead person's electric absence counseled right out of your life for good. And then you scarcely even want the pain to diminish, because without it you have absolutely nothing to your name.
>
> So I sat with Judy and she sat with me. Most days our meetings, in my drafty sitting room with the low hum of the condemned gas fire sending out damp heat and fumes, were absolutely terrible, almost blacker than death or hell, but it was an arena in which it felt possible for me to stay a person. No one else, it seemed, knew how much I felt and could bear it. This is what the world sometimes is, Judy sang to me. There is a sort of ancient private human dignity in what is happening to you, however squalid and desperate you feel.
>
> There was such a huge weight of camaraderie between us, and then, oddly, and with a lack or regard for good taste that was quite breathtaking, from nowhere notes of elation would creep in. Where had they come from? And the humor! This is so completely terrible it's almost funny, she would remind me now and then. Is it? I asked. Is it? I couldn't see it, but the idea certainly appealed.
>
> The tiny figure in clown's garb, sitting on the apron of the stage at the Palace in the half dark, where it isn't clear if she is young or old, black or white, male or female, did not know of my specific loss—she had been dead for twenty years. But that didn't count for a minute. She had something I needed, and she gave of it freely, repeatedly, and it kept me functioning in a very modest way, until the experts came in. Although nothing she did diminished the pain exactly, she brought me to a sense of its value and a sense of my own, and knowing that meant there was just about enough to survive. I don't quite know what the opposite of never forgiving someone is, but that's how I feel toward Judy about that time. (258, 264)

To feel Garland's singing presence as "the opposite of never forgiving someone" means, I think, something well past what she does not define—that is, "always forgiving someone." Instead, Boyt describes what "the opposite of never

forgiving someone" feels like—"so I sat with Judy and she sat with me"; and "there was such a huge weight of camaraderie between us"; and "there is a sort of ancient private human dignity in what is happening to you, however squalid and desperate you feel." The aesthetic world, *Judy Garland: The Concert Years*, offers Boyt a world where she finds camaraderie, understanding, and forgiveness, a world with the capacity to embody a reflection big enough and raw enough to hold and reflect her pain. This pain, which separates Boyt from all others, becomes, in her experience of the aesthetic moment, that which binds her to others, that "ancient private human dignity," that which makes it possible for her to return to living again in the world of others.

Conclusion

Other human beings are our most special, powerful, life-changing "objects." To play and create with another, to share one's aliveness with another, to feel one's self grow, expand, and become because of one's relation to another, to feel free to change and to welcome another's capacity to change—what else could be so transformative? But because we are human beings, we often fail to be one another's "good objects" by not understanding, by not being compassionate, by not playing, by resisting change, by abandoning. When we are disappointed by a Dr. Silverman, or surrounded by wicked stepsisters, or pursued by gangsters, or cornered by Apollo or by the boss, or driven mad by a mother, or when no prince appears to rescues us—high heels and a Judy Garland special will do—more than do. However limited their transformational potential, our objects of play do not disappoint us and do make possible discoveries within of our own potential spaces for transformation. This is what narratives of transformational object play teach us—what touches the body, touches the mind. This is the magic of the object and of the human imagination.

"The untold want by life and land ne'er granted, / Now Voyager sail thou forth to seek and find," Walt Whitman writes to those who long for change and who seek it.

But do so in a pair of new shoes and a fabulous hat.

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