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MYTH, TECHNOLOGY, AND LOVE IN SPIKE JONZE'S *HER* (2013)

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ABSTRACT

The myth of Pygmalion has been appropriated in numerous films and series, such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *Ex Machina*, and *AI: Artificial Intelligence*, to explore love between humankind and their post-human creations. Among them Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) explores the relationship humans have both with and through technology and calls into question how "real" or feasible those relationships can be. Set in the not-too-distant future, *Her* tells the story of Theodore (Theo) Twombly, a heartsick man recovering from a difficult divorce. Much of Theo's life activities are situated in the false or the virtual: his occupation involves writing heartfelt letters for people to send to one another, while he spends his free time playing immersive video games and having phone sex with strangers. In this way he fully embodies the role of Pygmalion as he casts his desire onto "unreal" objects. Theo's ultimate Pygmalion act is his acquisition of an operating system named Samantha, whose identity he helps to shape and with whom he falls in love. This paper considers what reading *Her* through the Pygmalion myth has to offer in terms of the growing concerns about consumers' attachment to their devices and the authenticity of relationships through associated social media. Exploring the connection between Pygmalion and Narcissus in this context illuminates how technology reflects the self, while considering Pygmalion's evolution into tragedy in the 19th century makes it possible to turn that reflective experience into a productive one. Although Theo's disillusionment, like Narcissus', threatens to be destructive, it ultimately proves therapeutic as Samantha presents the opportunity for Theo to become the audience of his own tragedy, learn from his experience, and consequently give realness another chance.