

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* X.243-297

November 28, 2024

Book 10, lines 243-297 of *Metamorphoses*: Pygmalion and Galatea. Compared with the story of Icarus and Daedalus (VIII.183-235), Pygmalion is rewarded for aspiring beyond mortal bounds.

Definitely an interesting story that can be analyzed in many ways.

Again, an attempt at a literal translation. Phrases may sound verbose, clunky, and rife with "having been." I tried to place the translated lines as close to the original Latin as possible.

Quās quia Pygmalion aevum per crīmen agentēs
vīderat, offēsus vitiīs, quae plūrima menti
fēmineae nātūra dedit¹, sine coniuge caelebs

245

vīvēbat thalamīque diū cōsorte carēbat.

Intereā niveum mirā fēliciter arte

sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, quā fēmina nāscī

As Pygmalion had seen them living life through crime,
having been offended by vice, very many of which
nature gave to a womanly mind, he was living as a
bachelor

without a spouse, and was lacking a consort in the
bedroom for a long time.

Meanwhile he happily sculpted snow-white ivory by
marvelous art

and he gave a form, with which no woman is able to be
born,

¹Unfortunately sexism is an inherent part of old literature. If you ask me, Pygmalion here sounds kind of like a modern day incel, but whatever.

nūlla potest ², operisque suī concēpit amōrem.
 Virginis est vērae faciēs, quam vīvere crēdās, 250
 et, sī nōn obstat reverentia, velle movērī;
 ars adeō latet arte suā. Mīrātur et haurit
 pectore Pygmalion simulātī corporis ignēs.
 Saepe manūs operī temptantēs admovet, an sit
 corpus an illud ebur, nec adhūc ebur esse fatētur. 255
 Ōscula dat reddīque putat ³, loquiturque ⁴ tenetque,
 sed crēdit tāctis digitōs īnsīdere membrīs
 et metuit pressōs veniat nē līvor in artūs.
 Et modo blanditiās adhibet, modo grāta puellīs
mūnera fert illī ⁵, conchās teretēscue lapillōs 260

and conceived love for his own work.
 The face is of a true maiden, whom you would believe to
 live,
 and, if shame should not block, you would believe that it
 wanted to be moved;
 art lies hidden so much it its own art. Pygmalion is
 amazed and drinks
 with his soul the fire of the simulated body.
 Often he moves his hands to the work, testing whether
 that is a body or ivory, nor still does it confess to be ivory.
 He gives kisses and thinks they are returned, and speaks,
 and holds,
 but later he believes that his fingers will settle on limbs
 having been touched
 and fears that a bruise may come on a limb having been
 pressed
 And now he applies flatteries, now carries to her gifts
 pleasing to girls, conches and smooth stones

²Similarly to Daedalus (VIII.183-235), Pygmalion performs arts that seem to overstep mortal bounds.

³Keyword introducing indirect statement

⁴Deponent: passive form, but meaning is active.

⁵Getting a tad more obsessive, are we?

et parvās volucrēs et flōrēs mīlle colōrum
līliaque pictāsque pilās et ab arbore lāpsās
Hēliadum lacrimās ⁶. Ōrnat quoque vestibus artūs;

dat digitīs gemmās, dat longa monīlia collō;
aure levēs bācae, redimīcula pectore pendent. 265
Cūncta decent; nec nūda minus fōrmōsa vidētur.

Conlocat hanc strātīs conchā Sīdōnide ⁷ tīnctīs
appellatque torī sociam acclīnātaque colla

mollibus in plūmīs tamquam sēnsūra repōnit.
Festa diēs Veneris tōtā celeberrima Cyprō 270
vēnerat, et pandīs inductae cornibus aurum
conciderant ictae niveā cervīce ⁸ iuvencae,
tūraque fūmābant, cum mūnere functus ad ārās

cōstitit et timidē ‘Sī, dī, dare cūncta potestis,
sit coniūnx, optō,’ nōn ausus ‘eburnea virgō’ 275

and small birds and flowers of a thousand colors
and lilies and painted balls and the tears of the Heliades
having fallen from the tree. He also adorns the limbs with
clothing;

gives gems to fingers, gives long necklaces to the neck;
light pearls hang from ears, ribbons hang from the chest.
They fit the whole; nor does she seem less beautiful
unclothed.

He arranged this with Sidonian conch on stained blankets
and calls [her] a companion of the bed and places the
rested neck

on soft feathers as if about to feel.

The festival day of Venus celebrated in entire Cyprus
had come, and on bent horns, young cows covered in gold
having been struck on the snowy neck, had collapsed,
and incenses burned, when Pygmalion, having performed
his duty, stopped at the altars,

and timidly, ‘If, gods, you are able to grant
everything, let it be a wife, I hope,’ not having dared to

⁶Poetic description of amber

⁷Purple dye (from “Sidonean conch”) was rare, only available for the extremely wealthy. Sidon was the name of a town with a large purple dye industry.

⁸Abl. of place where—“on the snow-white neck”

dīcere, Pygmalīōn ‘similis mea,’ dīxit, ‘eburnae.’

Sēnsit, ut ipsa suīs aderat Venus aurea festīs,

vōta quid illa velint et, amīcī nūminis ōmen,

flamma ter accēnsa est apicemque per āera dūxit.

Ut rediit, simulācra suae petit ille puellae 280

incumbēnsque torō dedit ōscula; vīsa tepēre est.

Admovet ōs iterum, manibus quoque pectora temptat;⁹

temptātum mollēscit ebur, positōque rigōre

subsīdit digitīs cēditque, ut Hymettia sōle

cēra remollēscit tractātaque pollice multās 285

flectitur in faciēs ipsōque fit ūtilis ūsū.

say ‘ivory maiden’

he said ‘similar to my ivory.’

As golden Venus was present for her own festival, she

sensed

what those prayers wish and, as an omen of friendly

divine will,

the flame was lit thrice and led the tips through the airs.

When he returned, he seeks the likeness of the girl

and leaning on the couch, gave a kiss; she seemed to be

warm.

Again he moves his face, he also tempts the heart with

his hands;

the ivory, having been touched, softens, and it sinks

down, with the stiffness having been ordained,

to his fingers, and withdraws, just as the Hymettian wax

softens again by the sun, and having been handled by his

thumb,

is bent into many faces and becomes pliant by the use

itself.

⁹For the sake of appearance, I’m interpreting *pectora* as “heart,” but a more accurate word would be “chest.” You know what, maybe I should’ve found a less risqué text to translate.

Dum stupet et dubiē gaudet fallīque verētur,

rūsus amāns rūsusque manū sua vōta retractat.

Corpus erat; saliunt temptātae pollice vēnae.

Tum vērō Paphius plēnissima concipit hērōs¹⁰ 290
verba quibus Venerī grātēs agit, ōraque tandem
ōre suō nōn falsa premit; ¹¹ dataque ōscula virgō

sēnsit et ērubuit, timidumque ad lūmina lūmen¹²
attollēns pariter cum caelō vīdit amantem¹³.

Coniugiō, quod fēcit, adest dea¹⁴, iamque coāctīs 295

While he is stunned and rejoices in doubt and fears to be
deceived

again and again the lover handles again with his hand
and prayers.

She was a body, the veins, having been touched, leap up
from the thumb.

Then truly the Paphian hero takes up the fullest words,
with which he gives thanks to Venus, and at last
he presses mouths not false with his own mouth; and the
maiden sensed the kisses having been given
and blushed, and lifting timid light to lights,
equally saw her lover with the sky.

For the marriage, which she made, the goddess is present,
and now

¹⁰Interesting that Ovid paints Pygmalion to be a hero in his own right. Pygmalion isn't a hero in the usual sense, but it's not like he's a normal guy either.

¹¹There's all sorts of ways to view this. On one hand, it could be a happy story with the hero getting what he wants. Pretty interesting that by overstepping mortal arts (in a way), Pygmalion is rewarded, while Daedalus is punished. On the other hand, the fact that Pygmalion artificially created a love interest puts a snag in the whole romantic trope. Going even further, it might deal with taboo topics—this statue is something Pygmalion created, or even part of himself. Loving that...it's kind of questionable.

¹²"Lights" meaning eyes here

¹³"One loving," or just "lover"

¹⁴Venus

cornibus in plēnum noviēns lūnāribus orbem ¹⁵

illa Paphon ¹⁶ genuit, dē quā tenet īnsula nōmen ¹⁷.

with the horns of the moon having been collected into a
full sphere nine times,
she gave birth to Paphos, from whom the island holds
name.

¹⁵Nine moon cycles, or nine months

¹⁶Greek accusative. The boy's name is Paphos.

¹⁷The island is also called Paphos. Interesting fact: the boy's name "Paphos" is masculine, but the island's name "Paphos" is feminine.