

TEXTS

P1 Ovid, from *Metamorphoses*, c. AD 10. Trans. A. D. Melville, 1986^o

The story of Pygmalion is one of those told by Orpheus in book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid/Orpheus prefaces this story of Venus's benevolence to a faithful worshipper with two short examples of her vengeance on those who offended her: the Cerastae, who practised human sacrifice, and (in the opening lines below) the Propoetides, the first prostitutes.

- Even so the obscene Propoetides had dared
Deny Venus' divinity. For that
The goddess' rage, it's said, made them the first
290 Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms.
As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard,
They turned with little change to stones of flint.
- Pygmalion had seen these women spend
Their days in wickedness, and horrified
295 At all the countless vices nature gives
To womankind lived celibate and long
Lacked the companionship of married love.
Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
With marvellous triumphant artistry
300 And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
Than ever woman born. His masterwork
Fired him with love. It seemed to be alive,
Its face to be a real girl's, a girl
Who wished to move – but modesty forbade.
305 Such art his art concealed. In admiration
His heart desired the body he had formed.
With many a touch he tries it – is it flesh
Or ivory? Not ivory still, he's sure!
Kisses he gives and thinks they are returned;
310 He speaks to it, caresses it, believes
The firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields,
And fears the limbs may darken with a bruise.
And now fond words he whispers, now brings gifts
That girls delight in – shells and polished stones,

^o from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, book 10, lines 238–97 (of the Latin), pp. 232–4. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

- 315 And little birds and flowers of every hue,
 Lilies and coloured balls and beads of amber,
 The tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun.^o
 He decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers
 Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck,
 320 Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast;
 Lovely she looked, yet unadorned she seemed
 In nakedness no whit less beautiful.
 He laid her on a couch of purple silk,
 Called her his darling, cushioning her head,
 325 As if she relished it, on softest down.
- Venus' day came, the holiest festival
 All Cyprus celebrates; incense rose high
 And heifers, with their wide horns gilded, fell
 Beneath the blade that struck their snowy necks.
 330 Pygmalion, his offering given, prayed
 Before the altar, half afraid, 'Vouchsafe,
 O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride
 Shall be' – he dared not say my ivory girl –
 'The living likeness of my ivory girl.'
 335 And golden Venus (for her presence graced
 Her feast) knew well the purpose of his prayer;
 And, as an omen of her favouring power,
 Thrice did the flame burn bright and leap up high.
 And he went home, home to his heart's delight,
 340 And kissed her as she lay, and she seemed warm;
 Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
 Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
 Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing,
 And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
 345 Wax of Hymettus^o softens and is shaped
 By practised fingers into many forms,
 And usefulness acquires by being used.
 His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving,
 Delight and terror that it was not true!
 350 Again and yet again he tried his hopes –
 She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!

^o **tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun:** in book 2 Ovid described how the daughters of the sun god Phoebus, grieving for their brother Phaethon, were transformed into trees which wept tears of amber.

^o **Hymettus:** a mountain near Athens, famous for its free-range bees.

And then indeed in words that overflowed
 He poured his thanks to Venus, and at last
 His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
 355 Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
 Her eyes to his and saw the world and him.
 The goddess graced the union she had made,
 And when nine times the crescent moon had filled
 Her silver orb, an infant girl was born,
 360 Paphos, from whom the island takes its name.°

P2 Clement of Alexandria, from *Exhortation to the Greeks*, c. AD 200°

Clement of Alexandria, c. AD 150–c.212, influential Greek Christian theologian. In the course of an argument against pagan idolatry he refers to an alternative version of the Pygmalion legend, citing as source the third-century BC historian Philostephanus.

Why, I ask you, did you assign to those who are no gods the honours due to God alone? Why have you forsaken heaven to pay honour to earth? For what else is gold, or silver, or steel, or iron, or bronze, or ivory, or precious stones? Are they not earth, and made from earth? . . . The Parian marble° is beautiful, but it is not yet a Poseidon. The ivory is beautiful, but it is not yet an Olympian Zeus. Matter will ever be in need of art, but God has no such need. Art develops, matter is invested with shape; and the costliness of the substance makes it worth carrying off for gain, but it is the shape alone which makes it an object of veneration. Your statue is gold; it is wood; it is stone; or if in thought you trace it to its origin, it is earth, which has received form at the artist's hands. But my practice is to walk upon earth, not to worship it. For I hold it sin ever to entrust the hopes of the soul to soulless things.

We must, then, approach the statues as closely as we possibly can in order to prove from their very appearance that they are inseparably associated with error. For their forms are unmistakably stamped with the characteristic marks of the

- ° **Paphos:** in other versions, Paphos was a boy. According to legend, her (or his) son Cinyras founded the city of Paphos, one of the main centres of Cyprus and site of a great temple of Aphrodite that was still a place of pilgrimage in Ovid's day. The claim that the whole island of Cyprus was named after Paphos seems to be Ovid's invention.
- ° from *Exhortation to the Greeks*, ch. 4. Reprinted from the Loeb Classical Library from *Clement of Alexandria: The Exhortation to the Greeks; The Rich Man's Salvation*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1919.
- ° **Parian marble:** marble from the island of Paros was particularly prized for its gleaming whiteness.