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A WHOLE OUT OF PIECES: PYGMALION'S IVORY STATUE IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

PATRICIA SALZMAN-MITCHELL

The story of Pygmalion's love for his statue is best known from Ovid's version in *Metamorphoses* 10.243–97. Ovid tells how Pygmalion, an artist from Cyprus, disgusted with the licentious sexual conduct of the Propoetides, created a statue of a most beautiful woman and fell in love with it. After Venus granted his wish to bring the statue to life, Pygmalion and his maiden had a child named Paphos and lived happily. This paper discusses how Pygmalion seems to have made his statue, what it was made of, and why the artist chose ivory as his medium. Various contentions are put forward: that ivory is an appropriate material for an idealistic (rather than mimetic) work of art; that its pliability echoes the “change-ability” of forms in *Metamorphoses*; that Pygmalion's maiden as ideal woman is a construction made of different parts and not a whole; and that the creation of the ivory maiden “out of pieces” resembles and acts as a symbol for *Metamorphoses*, also a “whole” epic made out of smaller narrative segments, and for Ovid's conception of *ars*, and erotic *ars* in particular.¹

SOURCES, TEXT, AND INTERTEXT

Although Ovid gave the myth of Pygmalion its literary form, the tale existed before him. The Christian authors Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius recall the story of a Cypriot named Pygmalion who fell in love with a statue of the goddess Aphrodite. Their source is Philostephanus of

1 I would like to thank Genevieve Liveley, Prudence Jones, Jean Alvares, and Tim Renner for helpful suggestions.

Cyrene, a prose writer of the early Hellenistic period and author of a lost cycle of Cypriot stories (Rosati 1983.54–55). Clement says (*Protrepticus* 4.57.3):

ὁ Κύπριος ὁ Πυγμαλίων ἐκεῖνος ἐλεφαντίνου ἡράσθη
ἀγάλματος· τὸ ἄγαλμα Ἀφροδίτης ἦν καὶ γυμνὴ ἦν.
νικᾶται ὁ Κύπριος τῷ σχήματι καὶ συνέρχεται τῷ
ἀγάλματι.

Pygmalion of Cyprus fell in love with an ivory statue. It was a naked statue of Aphrodite. The man from Cyprus is captivated by its shapeliness and joins sexually with the statue.²

Similarly, Arnobius, citing Philostephanus, says that Pygmalion was a Cypriot king who fell in love with a statue of the goddess and used to join with her as if she were his wife (*Adv. Nat.* 6.22):

Philostephanus in *Cypriacis* auctor est, Pygmalionem regem Cypri simulacrum Veneris, quod sanctitatis apud Cyprios et religionis habebatur antiquae, adamasse ut feminam mente anima lumine rationis iudicioque caecatis solitumque dementem, tamquam si uxoria res esset, sublevato in lectulum numine copularier amplexibus atque ore resque alias agere libidinis vacuae imaginatione frustrabiles.

Philostephanus tells in his *Cypriaca* that Pygmalion, king of Cyprus, fell in love, as if she were a woman, with an image of Venus that was considered sacred and venerated by the Cyprians from old times. His mind, his soul, the light of his reason, and his judgment were blinded, and in his madness, as if it were his wife, having lifted the divinity to the couch, kissing and embracing her, he used to have intercourse with her and do other vain things, carried away by his foolish and lustful imagination.

2 All translations of Greek and Latin texts are my own.

Both versions probably refer to a single original found in Philostephanus. The story is always set in Cyprus, and its likely origin is in a local cult involving a fertility goddess corresponding to the Greek and Roman Aphrodite/Venus. The very name Pygmalion is Phoenician.³ Critics have seen in this story a Cypriot legend relating to the practice of sacred prostitution. Gianpiero Rosati believes that it is possible that Ovid read Philostephanus directly and took the idea of the story from him (1983.56).⁴

Two other ancient stories of agalmatophilia, or the love of statues, are relevant intertexts of the Ovidian account.⁵ Pseudo-Lucian tells that a young man fell in love with the famous statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles in Knidos, locked himself in the temple, and had sex with it. After this event, a mark appeared in the goddess's thigh (Ps.-Lucian *Amores* 13–16).⁶ Likewise, in Euripides' *Alcestis* (348–53), Admetus says that he will ask a sculptor to make an image of his dead wife in marble and that he will lie with it in their bed and hold it in his arms.

Ovid says that Pygmalion, with great art, made a statue of ivory. But here the statue is not of Venus, but, apparently, of a woman. Likewise, in the two sources above, and in Arnobius in particular (who mentions a statue venerated from old times), Pygmalion falls in love with a statue made by someone else, not by himself. In Arnobius and Clement, the statue doesn't come to life, unlike in *Metamorphoses*. We also note that the king whom Arnobius mentions is not an artist, as is Ovid's Pygmalion (*Met.* 10.247–49):⁷

interea niveum mira feliciter arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.

Meanwhile, he sculpted the snowy ivory successfully with
wondrous art, and gave it beauty with which no woman
can be born, and fell in love with his own work.

3 The name itself probably sounded exotic and oriental, i.e., the name of Dido's brother in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Cf. Rosati 1983.56, O'Bryhim 1987 ch. 4, and Tomás and Justo 2005.7–9.

4 A different genealogy for Pygmalion is given in Apollodorus 3.14.3.

5 On agalmatophilia, see Scobie and Taylor 1975 and Gross 1992.

6 For a thorough discussion of this statue, see Mitchell Havelock 1995.

7 The text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is taken from F. J. Miller's edition: *Ovid: Metamorphoses* (rev. G. P. Goold, 1994). Cambridge, Mass.

The phrase *niveum sculpsit ebur* at first sight makes us imagine the sculptor chipping away the ivory and carving the body of his beloved out of it.⁸ The words *sculpsit* and *arte* emphasize Pygmalion's artistry, in contrast with the other sources. The verb *sculpo* means "to work (material) into some form by carving or engraving," "to fashion (from some material) by carving or engraving."⁹ This second meaning appears to be based precisely on this line of *Metamorphoses*, which the *OLD* cites. In our episode, Pygmalion does not sculpt his statue out of only one piece of ivory; rather, as I will explain, he must carve several pieces and then put them together. By using *sculpo*, Ovid seems to be playing with the reader's imagination and enticing us to think of a lump of stone rather than separate pieces of ivory. The singular *ebur* contributes to this impression. Yet it is also possible that *sculpsit ebur* may refer generally to his work in the material, which involves working on various pieces. As we will see later, in *Metamorphoses* 15.792, Ovid uses the word *ebur* to refer to a group of ivory statues.

Pygmalion also touches his ivory statue (*Met.* 10.254–55):

saepe manus operi temptantes admovet, an sit
corpus an illud ebur, nec adhuc ebur esse fatetur.

Often he nears his hands to the work to test whether it is
flesh or ivory, and he does not admit it yet to be ivory.

Pygmalion, in his illusion, after he begins to kiss and caress the statue, almost feels that his fingers are sinking into her flesh: "et credit tactis digitos insidere membris" (*Met.* 10.257). Ivory, a warmer material than marble, may give the impression of life and pliability. Later Pygmalion, at a festival of Venus, not daring to ask for his ivory maiden as wife, requests a wife "like" his ivory statue (*Met.* 10.274–76):

8 For a good overview of the uses of ivory and different types of stones in *Metamorphoses*, see Bauer 1962.

9 See the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *sculpo*. *Sculpo* is a back-formation from cpds. of *scalpo*, which in its turn means "to scratch," and sometimes may even have amorous connotations as in Pompon. *Com.* 76: "videt Dossenum . . . non docentem condiscipulum, verum scalpentem natis" ("He saw Dossenus . . . not teaching his classmate but scratching his buttocks"). It can also mean to "sculpt" or "engrave."

"si, di, dare cuncta potestis,
sit coniunx, opto," non ausus "eburnea virgo"
dicere, Pygmalion "similis mea" dixit "eburnae."

"If you, gods, are capable of granting anything I ask
for"—not daring to say "my ivory maiden"—Pygmalion
said, "a wife similar to my ivory maiden."

After the festival, he reclines in bed with the statue and the maiden seems to be warmer (*visa tepere est*, *Met.* 10.281). Then the ivory begins to soften just like wax ("temptatum mollescit ebur positoque rigore . . . ut . . . cera," *Met.* 10.283–85)¹⁰ until she becomes flesh (*corpus erat!* *Met.* 10.289).

HOW TO MAKE AN IVORY STATUE

So in Ovid, Pygmalion clearly makes his statue of ivory. But how did he do this? Ivory (*ebur*) usually comes from elephant tusks.¹¹ The size of individual ivory pieces is limited to the size of the tusks. Even with elephant tusks, only a small solid part (most of it is hollow) can be used. Therefore, most individual works carved out of one piece of ivory are small, not larger than one foot in height and a few inches wide. Among these small works of ivory, we find many statuettes in human form representing both gods and mortals, including examples of women and goddesses in the nude.¹² There are also a few examples of larger statues made of assembled pieces of ivory. It is possible that life-size nudes of Aphrodite or other females were carved out of ivory, since smaller male nude figures assembled from different pieces of ivory survive. Potentially then, one could make a life-size statue only of ivory pieces. Yet, the evidence is scant.¹³

10 A good simile also because wax and ivory can have similar color; see Anderson 1972 on *Met.* 10.282–86.

11 For *ebur* see *OLD*. Elephant tusks are the principal source of ivory, but the material is also obtained from "the tooth of the hippopotamus in the Near East and the tusk of the walrus in Northern Europe." Historically, when ivory was unavailable or was too expensive, bone replaced it; Bergman 1983.4–5.

12 Carter 1985.1. See Lapatin 2001.40 and 45. Ivory is also often used in Latin poetry to indicate fair and attractive skin, and this type of imagery appears frequently in Ovid.

13 For example, a statuette of Apollo Lykeios in the Agora Museum made of various pieces of ivory is only thirty inches high. Making a five-foot-tall figure would be an entirely different story; see Lapatin 2001 fig. 247.

Greek artists also developed a technique to create large chryselephantine statues of gold and ivory. The flesh areas were normally of ivory, while clothing was made of wood covered with gold. Such statues were often decorated with precious stones and glass (Carrà 1970.33). Ivory itself could be painted or even occasionally gilded.¹⁴ Likewise, the wood in these pieces could also be painted. Working ivory was in many ways similar to working wood (Lapatin 2001.18–19 and 43). Since the amount of exposed flesh on some of these statues far surpassed the size of individual tusks, by the mid-fifth century, Greek sculptors began to “unscroll” tusks into sheets of ivory with larger dimensions. “Classical and medieval sources, moreover, preserve recipes for chemically softening ivory in order to mould it to a desired shape” (Lapatin 2001.21).¹⁵ The different pieces of ivory used to represent human flesh could be attached to a framework of wood and metal rods with dowels, tenons, and iron pins or glue (Lapatin 2001.23, 27, 45); the wood for the surface layers, which usually would be painted or gilded, and the gold were attached to this structure.¹⁶ Great care was taken to place the close joins between the pieces of ivory in inconspicuous places, like the shadow of the jaw, and to mask them with jewelry. Ivory was polished before and after assembly and then colored when appropriate (Lapatin 2001.77–78).

The most important examples of this technique, both made by Phidias, were the statue of Pallas Athena in the Parthenon and the seated cult statue of Olympian Zeus, which was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.¹⁷ Unfortunately, these works are lost. Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* records more than two dozen other chryselephantine

14 Homer, for example, compares the wounded thigh of Menelaos to painted ivory (*Iliad* 4.141–45).

15 In ancient authors, there are references to “ivory softeners” or molders such as fire, beer, oil and vinegar; Lapatin 2001.75–76. See also Pausanias 5.12.2.

16 Buitron 1983.12. A passage of Lucian, the second-century A.D. rhetorician, about chryselephantine statues humorously comments on the contrast between the surface and interior of these works: “I pitied myself for being no better than the great kolossoi that Phidias or Myron or Praxiteles made, each of which is outward a beautiful Poseidon or Zeus, made of ivory and gold, with a thunderbolt, or a flash of light, or a trident in his right hand; but if you stoop and look down inside, you will see a tangle of bars and struts, and dowels driven right through, and beams and wedges and pitch and clay, and a quantity of such ugly stuff housing within, not to mention legions of mice and rats that sometimes conduct their civic business there. That is what monarchy is like” (*Gallus* 24). Translation taken from Lapatin 2001.71.

17 For more on these statues, see Lapatin 2001 ch. 5.

statues of deities in Greek temples and shrines. In general, ivory was used for statues of the gods, but there are some examples of important human beings portrayed with this technique.¹⁸ During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, however, most chryselephantine statues were apparently commissioned by individuals rather than by *poleis*, and they depicted notable mortals as well as deities (Lapatin 2001.120).¹⁹

In the Roman world, ivory was used especially in furniture and jewelry. But there were also images of the gods made of the material (Lapatin 2001.121ff.). The literary evidence is rather lacking, but it has been assumed that many of the statues in the new Roman temples were made of gold and ivory. The most remarkable chryselephantine statues in the Roman period were Pasiteles' Jupiter in the temple of Jupiter Stator, a replacement statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus, the ivory statue of Saturn in the Forum Romanum, and Hadrian's statue of Zeus Olympios at Athens.²⁰

THE LINK TO THE SOURCES

Let's now return to our question: why did Ovid have Pygmalion make his statue of ivory rather than from the more common marble? In contrast to marble, this warmer and softer material was since very early times a sign of luxury. Some of the fascination that ivory provokes has to do with its exotic origins, as elephants come from Asia and Africa (Bergman 1983.3–4). Ivory is also a more erotic and warmer material than stone,

18 Philip II of Macedonia commissioned chryselephantine statues between 338 B.C.E. and 336 B.C.E. to be displayed in the Philippeion at Olympia. The statues were of Philip II himself, his parents Eurydike and Amyntas, his wife Olympias, and his son Alexander the Great (Pausanias 5.20.10; Buitron 1983.13). On this group, see also Lapatin 2001.115–19. The choice of size and materials for this statuary group probably has to do with Philip's attempts to associate himself with the gods: Lapatin 2001.118. Diodorus Siculus (17.115) comments that after the death of Alexander's companion Hephaistion, the king tried to make "likenesses of Hephaistion in ivory and gold." As Lapatin (2001.119) explains: "The ideology behind the dedication is perhaps clarified by Alexander's attempts to deify his deceased friend."

19 Ptolemy II Philadelphos commissioned a chryselephantine statue of his parents, Ptolemy I Soter and Berenike I.

20 Herodes Atticus also erected statues of Tyche and Poseidon. In the first century B.C.E., the senate decreed that an ivory statue of Julius Caesar should appear in the circus games together with the statues of the gods (Dio Cassius 43.45.2–4). Tacitus (*Annales* 2.83) reports that Germanicus was posthumously "honored with an ivory statue that was to be carried in procession into the circus," and there was apparently an ivory statue of Britannicus dedicated by Titus. See Lapatin 2001.126.

and thus much more appropriate to “cuddle” with. Likewise, stone is much heavier, and Pygmalion could not have manipulated a marble statue and placed her in his bed so easily. Ivory statues, as we have seen, were also probably hard to handle with their inner structure of wood and metal, yet they were certainly lighter than a single block of stone.

Perhaps Ovid was simply following his sources for the story, in particular the version reflected in Clement of Alexandria. Since in the Hellenistic version we have a statue of Aphrodite, the image was likely made with the chryselephantine technique. Yet Ovid felt free to change many points about the myth, such as the fact that we have a woman and not Aphrodite here, so this model is not enough to explain why he kept the ivory. If, in Ovid, we had a ritual statue of Aphrodite, ivory would be an appropriate material. Yet we probably need to assume that a ritual statue would be dressed and perhaps decked with jewelry in some form or else the joints in her body would have been difficult to mask.²¹ However, Ovid presents us with a naked woman of ivory, not a statue of the goddess. The naked Aphrodite made of ivory mentioned by Clement may be just part of a legend, or she could have been partly dressed. In any case, there is no archeological record of this statue, and Clement in general identifies all naked statues with Aphrodite (*Protrepticus* 57.2). Let us remember that we have no surviving evidence of life-size, naked, ivory statues of women or goddesses.

Shawn O'Bryhim (1987) suggests that the Pygmalion story forms part of a series of Amathusian (from the city of Amathus in Cyprus) myths found in the song of Orpheus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10. These stories would be adapted versions of myths and rituals of Canaanite (or what the Greeks identified as “Phoenician”) origin. Cyprus was the site of many Canaanite colonies and was influenced by Canaanite religion. O'Bryhim proposes that the stories of the Cerastae, the Propoetides, and Pygmalion all have roots in Canaanite ritual and together form a narrative of the life of the Phoenician god Baal.

In particular, O'Bryhim believes that the story of Pygmalion told by Ovid is the same story to which Philostephanus referred. Although Ovid does not identify Pygmalion as a king, but as an artist, for O'Bryhim (1987.118–59) there is no reason why he could not be both. And indeed, he

21 A “ritual” statue forms an active part of the religious rite. It can be paraded, and one prays to it, in contrast with a dedicatory or decorative statue that would not necessarily form part of a religious ceremony or act.

even suggests that Pygmalion was a king who was also a priest of Astarte/Aphrodite and that his statue was an ivory ritual statue of the goddess. The fact that Pygmalion's child, Paphos, founded the island of Paphos could be taken as evidence that Pygmalion was a king. However, working with his hands as an artisan would not have been a fitting activity for royalty. There is general agreement, though, that the story originates in the eastern ritual known as *hieros gamos*, "sacred marriage with a goddess."²²

Yet Ovid does not say that Pygmalion was either a priest or a king; neither does he say that the statue was of Aphrodite. While Jas Elsner believes (1991) that Pygmalion's statue was just the representation of a woman, Alison Sharrock (1991b.171) sees many overtones of divinity, especially in the ritual moving of cult statues and in the way Pygmalion cares for his "Eburna," as she names it.

Ovid was a highly self-conscious poet who often explores the creative process in his poems. He calls Pygmalion's statue a *virgo*, "maiden" (*virginis est verae facies*, "It is the face of a real maiden," *Met.* 10.250, and *eburnea virgo*, *Met.* 10.275) and a *puella*, "girl" ("simulacra suae petit ille puellae," "He seeks the likeness of his girl," *Met.* 10.280). These are rather inappropriate epithets for Venus, and she is not usually called so in Latin. Philip Hardie suggests (2002.190) that Venus may be present at the festival concluding the episode in the form of a golden statue (or perhaps chryselephantine statue, since chryselephantine statues were often referred to as simply "golden," Lapatin 2001.4). The text reads: "*ipsa suis aderat Venus aurea festis*," "Golden Venus herself was present at her festival" (*Met.* 10.277). Hardie believes that *aurea* ought to be taken in a literal sense as the material of a statue of Venus and that this is how we must envision the goddess's "presence."²³ When Ovid refers to Pygmalion's statue, he only mentions ivory, but at the festival, if we follow Hardie's idea, there is another statue of Venus made (perhaps only in part) of gold.

This is an interesting point. As we saw above, ritual statues of deities were often made of ivory and gold. Indeed, we have evidence of a chryselephantine statue of Aphrodite Ourania at Elis made by Phidias (Pausanias

22 O'Bryhim 1987.147. In this ritual, "a king was thought to have intercourse with a goddess equivalent to Venus . . . the goddess was represented by her cult statue until the marriage was consummated in her temple, at which time one of her priestesses took her place." See also Rosati 1983.51ff. and Sharrock 1991b.171.

23 See also Liveley 1999.205.

6.25.1) that stood with one foot on a tortoise.²⁴ This statue seems to have had some kind of drapery.²⁵ However, Ovid never mentions gold in connection with Pygmalion's creation, just ivory, and his statue is completely naked. While one could suppose that Pygmalion's statue used gold as well as ivory, Ovid doesn't say so.

OID'S TECHNICALITIES AND CRITICAL MISREADINGS

Ovid may have envisioned the process of creation of Pygmalion's woman in various ways. First, and most likely in my view, we may think that "Eburna" was built in the same fashion as chryselephantine statues. It is possible that Ovid himself had seen chryselephantine statues, and many of his readers would have seen some of the gold and ivory statues of the gods in Greece and Rome. In Book 15 of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid mentions that at Caesar's funeral, ivory statues were paraded: *mille locis lacrimavit ebur*, "In a thousand places the ivory (statues) shed tears" (*Met.* 15.792). Parallel evidence is found in Dio Cassius 43.45. There was indeed a well-known statue of Julius Caesar made of ivory to honor him after the victory of Munda in 45 B.C.E. with which Ovid himself was probably familiar.

Yet we have several problems here. If we believe with O'Bryhim that Pygmalion's creation was a statue of Venus (Astarte/Aphrodite), the statue should probably have been made of both gold and ivory and have had some kind of drapery and jewelry. This is clearly not the case in Ovid's story. In fact, Ovid is probably cleverly alluding to other versions by including a possible statue of Golden Venus at the end, thus drawing attention to the differences between his own creation and the versions he has rejected.

24 After listing several cult traditions about Aphrodite, Cicero says: "The first Venus is the daughter of Caelus ("Sky") and Dies ("Day"); I have seen her temple at Elis," *de Natura Deorum* 3.21–23. Other possible examples of ivory statues of Aphrodite are an arm from Corinth and a recently recovered ivory face and other components now in the Palazzo Massimo. But this is all conjectural. "There is also a vague reference to an ivory Aphrodite (size uncertain) 'constructed of close joined ivory' in Philostratos *Imagines* 2.1. Three other Aphrodites listed in [Lapatin's] Appendix on 194, are likely clothed, given their 'early' date" (Lapatin's e-mail to the author, 07-10-06).

25 As Lapatin suggests (2001.90): "Phidias' Aphrodite might have been adorned with elaborate jewelry that would have served to accentuate her magnificence as well as to mask joins in the ivory." Phidias's portrayal of Aphrodite was, like many of his other works, inspired by Homer, who describes Aphrodite "clothed in a robe more brilliant than gleaming fire" and with "spiral bracelets and shining earrings" (*Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 86–90).

After Pygmalion makes his statue, he stands in awe and burns with passion at the image of her *corpus*, a word that makes us think of her naked body ("miratur et haurit / pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes," "Pygmalion is amazed and burns in his heart with the love of the simulated body," *Met.* 10.252–53). He also plays at dressing and undressing her with what appears to be actual cloth and adorns her with jewelry (*Met.* 10.263–66):

ornat quoque vestibus artus,
dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo,
aure leves baccae, redimicula pectore pendent:
cuncta decent; nec nuda minus formosa videtur.

He also decks her limbs with clothes and gives precious stones to her fingers, and puts a necklace on her neck, light pearls in her ears, fillets hang on her bosom. All of these became her, yet naked she does not seem less beautiful.

It is clear from these lines that Pygmalion has the option of having her dressed or naked, with or without jewelry, and thus the statue itself must be naked and the clothes and ornaments real ones (not part of the statue). Alison Sharrock (1991b.171) suggests that this dressing in fine clothes and jewelry is "typical of the treatment of cult-statues and must have religious overtones." As we know of no large-scale, ritual, ivory statue of a deity that was made entirely naked, this is a bit problematic.

Second, as I mentioned before, while it was theoretically possible to make a full-bodied naked statue of ivory only, such a statue (with no wood, gold, or precious stones on the surface), would be not only very unusual, but also incredibly costly—and thus some are led to think that only a king could afford it. Further, to fill the interior parts of the sculpture, which cannot be seen, with the precious material would be a real waste of ivory. Third, there is the bizarre chance that Ovid, oblivious to the technicalities of ivory work, could have imagined tusks so big that one could carve a whole statue out of them. However, there is evidence that elephants were paraded in several triumphs, so the Romans would have seen them and been familiar with the size of the tusks. Finally, that the statue was a miniature carved out of one ordinary-size ivory tusk would be even more far-fetched, since there are no references in the episode to the statue increasing size to become a full-size woman.

Although these last explanations are rather strange, there is the possibility that Ovid is here disregarding the practical implications of working with ivory and really envisioning his statue as one of stone, as many of his modern successors imagine.²⁶ While it is true that sometimes, as with Arachne's tapestry, Ovid does disregard or seems to ignore technical aspects of a craft,²⁷ the insistence on ivory (six times: *ebur*, 248; *ebur*, 255 twice; *eburnea*, 275; *eburnae*, 276; *ebur*, 283) drives us to believe that he really meant ivory and not something else. Ovid uses marble and stone repeatedly throughout *Metamorphoses*, yet here he specifically concentrates on the precious tooth.

Some critics, however, understand the statue to be made out of marble rather than ivory. A clear example is Joseph Solodow (1988.2), who affirms that "this is Pygmalion, who at the end succeeds in converting marble into the living flesh of a woman." W. S. Anderson (1972.498) likewise says that "the Roman audience would picture a statue like those brought from Greece to Roman porticoes and private villas or copied for Roman gardens, e.g., Praxiteles' incomparable nude Venus." There are various problems with this statement. First, ivory statues would not have been placed in porticos or gardens because the very fragile material would have quickly succumbed to the inclemency of the weather (Lapatin 2001.43). Ritual ivory statues, though perhaps paraded outside briefly, were usually placed inside temples, like the statue of Athena inside the Parthenon or the statue of Zeus at Olympia. Further, Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite at Knidos, a naked statue, at least as she appears in Pseudo-Lucian's *Amores* (*Am.* 13–16), was actually made of marble and thus is not a good object of comparison for Pygmalion's ivory maiden.

The problem of the material of Pygmalion's statue has been overlooked, and even Jas Elsner, a very knowledgeable Roman art historian, seems to be vague about it. He describes Pygmalion as the "sculptor of a

26 See, especially, the many representations of Pygmalion's maiden in Jean-Léon Gérôme. For a full discussion of these paintings, see Hardie 2002 ch. 6.

27 Ovid describes the different scenes of the tapestries of Arachne and Minerva as if they had been woven one by one, when we know that the loom weaves a textile from bottom to top and thus different parts of different images must be woven simultaneously. See Salzman-Mitchell 2005.60 and Miller 1986.290 n. 9. Yet this technical mistake may simply be a product of ekphrasis, the fact that to describe a tapestry, the poet must tell about each finished image—it would make no sense to describe lines of threads and colors as the weaving moves up in the loom.

realistic statue out of mere ivory" (1991.159), and he refers to the fact that "the desire of the beholder-lover is explicitly not for what was originally there (a lump of ivory)" (1991.161), as if the statue was made out of only one piece of ivory. As we have seen, if it was a "lump," it could only produce a rather small statue, and if "mere ivory" means "only ivory," Elsner is oblivious to the fact that the interior of these statues was usually a structure of wood and metal rods—unless Pygmalion had decided to waste much precious ivory by filling the interior of his maiden with the material. While Elsner (1991.162–63) discusses the qualities of ivory in his piece on Pygmalion, he does not mention the problem of the construction of a life-size statue.

Perhaps, however, Ovid's insistence on ivory and the fact that the statue was made with "wondrous art" may hint at the supernatural skill of the artist. Given the technical difficulties, this would be an extremely difficult, costly, and unprecedented work unless Ovid wanted to stress the extraordinary capabilities of Pygmalion as artist by using poetic license and imagining that the statue was made only of ivory. Since large ivory statues are rather foreign to modern critics, this may have led to the conceptualization of Pygmalion's maiden as made of stone. Likewise, most scholarly discussions of the episode have been produced by literary critics and not art historians; thus the problems that the realities of making an ivory statue in antiquity pose for this episode have been overlooked.

THE IVORY MAIDEN AND *METAMORPHOSES*

I believe that Ovid purposely made Pygmalion's maiden of ivory and that he was not taking the material in a metaphoric sense. He understood that this perfect ivory girl would have been made out of several elephant tusks. First, this pliable material is very appropriate to the stylistic nature and literary philosophy of *Metamorphoses*. As we mentioned before, the ancient world had developed techniques to soften, mold, and unscroll ivory. This hard material could become soft and then harden again. Ivory is thus able to "change form," to make the transition from one shape to another. Hardening and softening of bodies is a central theme in *Metamorphoses*. Soft Daphne becomes the wood of the laurel: "mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro," "Her soft breast was surrounded by a delicate bark" (*Met.* 1.549). Dryope, Myrrha, and the Heliades harden into trees. In contrast, weeping Arethusa and Acis "mollify" and become water. Stone can also, of course, change form, and there are indeed characters that turn to stone in *Metamorphoses*,

such as Medusa's victims, Battus, Aglauros, Phineus, and Anaxarete. The stones that Deucalion and Pyrrha throw soften and become human bodies (*Met.* 1.401–02), just like Pygmalion's maiden. But stone cannot soften and harden as easily and naturally as ivory. The pliability of ivory is more appropriate for a body that, I suggest, represents what *Metamorphoses* is about. It is thus also ideal as the material of a woman, an object of love, like the many eroticized women in the poem who harden and soften. Thus the maiden made out of ivory is an emblem of all those characters who solidify and mollify in Ovid's epic, warm bodies that change form (*mutata corpora*), just like ivory.

As we observed in previous sections, the major differences between Ovid and what we imagine from Philostephanus's text lie in the fact that we do not have a king and a goddess but an artist and a woman, and that in the Hellenistic sources, Pygmalion falls in love with someone else's work, while in Ovid he makes the statue himself and falls in love with it. Ovid is also the first to have the statue come to life. I believe that Ovid made Pygmalion an artist and "Eburna" a woman to emphasize the importance of art. This woman is entirely a product of the sculptor's imagination, his absolute creation, which would not be possible if this were a statue of Venus for whom so many models were available. In addition to the sculptural examples, Pygmalion would have had to conform his beloved to Aphrodite, her personality, physical traits, history, and characteristics. Instead, he has the opportunity to make a woman from scratch. Since, as has been noticed by Sharrock and others, the episode can be read metacritically as referring to Ovid and his art, it was important to have an artist who, somewhat narcissistically—another concept dear to *Metamorphoses*—might be able to fall in love with his own creation. Yet this creation, I will suggest, is not necessarily the embodiment of Elegy, as Sharrock proposes, but rather of *Metamorphoses* and its poetics.

D. F. Bauer cleverly observes how piecing different parts together to make an attractive "whole" could well be a metaphor for the literary program of *Metamorphoses* itself. He suggests that ivory is "doubtless, the most challenging medium, for it exacted a skillful joining of numerous pieces and fragments" (Bauer 1962.16), and he even explains why the comparison with melting wax as the body comes to life ("ut Hymettia sole / cera remollescit," "as the wax of Hymettus melts under the sun," *Met.* 10.284–85) is rather clever: "In the case of ivory, the application of a wax would surely have concealed the myriad joints and minute blemishes of its surface. But the number and felicity of the transitions uniting the many segments of the

Metamorphoses place a further, figurative significance upon this allusion to joinery" (Bauer 1962.16–17).²⁸

Bauer is indeed one of the few critics who thinks about the possible implications of working with ivory for *Metamorphoses*. Wax is in many ways similar to ivory, and in this Bauer's observations are sagacious. Further, wax can soften and harden and is a particularly changeable writing surface. It is actually interesting to think of the whole of the statue made out of fragments as a metaphor for the whole of Ovid's own art work: the poem as a whole made out of different narrative segments. Let us not forget that wax is a metacritically charged word, recalling waxed writing tablets with which, as we see in elegy, lovers exchanged messages. Bauer's discussion of joinery is also apt. Ovid takes great care in joining the different (often almost unrelated) stories in *Metamorphoses*. Transitions in the poem are very carefully crafted, and the poet strives to make these narrative junctures as smooth and as imperceptible as possible, a task that requires great artistic skill (*arte*), especially given the diverse nature of many of the myths—for example the stories of Daphne and Io in Book 1 are only linked by the fact that their fathers are river gods whose daughters are loved by gods. Ovid then struggles to give these separate stories an appearance of unity.

But here there is more than a simple allusion to joinery that mirrors the way *Metamorphoses* is constructed. With the construction of the ivory statue, Ovid reveals his conceptualization of art. In fact, the term *arte* (*mira feliciter arte sculpsit*, 10.247–48) is particularly fruitful to think with. The word *ars* in its original sense means: "skill in joining something, combining it, working it" (Lewis and Short). The *OLD*, however, gives the more general sense of "professional, artistic or technical skill." *Ars* is etymologically connected with such words as Latin *artus*, "limb," and *ritus*, "rite." In fact, both *ars* and *artus* appear to derive from a Proto-Indo-European root **ar-* preserved in Latin also in *coarto*, "to force," meaning "to join."²⁹

28 Lapatin 2001.77: "The process of molding the ivory as described by Heraclius, moreover, appears to have been remarkably akin to the pressing of sheets of wax into moulds employed in the indirect method of lost wax-bronze casting, a technique practiced in Greece from at least the late sixth century BCE." A fifteenth-century A.D. text even states: "Infused in this water half a day, ivory is made so soft that it can be cut like wax" (Lapatin 2001.77).

29 This original sense of the word *ars* is clearly seen when Deucalion prays to have the skill of his father Prometheus, who joined earth and water together to form human beings. See *Met.* 1.364 ("O utinam possim populos reparare paternis / artibus atque animas formatae infundere terrae! "Oh, I wish I could restore the nations with my father's art and to

Emile Benveniste (1973.380) links the stem **ar-* to the Indo-European idea of order (cf. Grk. *ararísko*, “fit, adapt, harmonize”; Grk. *artús*, “order”; and *artúno*, “arrange, equip,” for example). Benveniste also observes (1973.380) that “everywhere the notion is still perceptible: order, arrangement, the close mutual adaptation of the parts of a whole to one another.”³⁰

This connection was probably not lost to a poet with great skill at joining words, in putting them together in a metrical way. In this sense, the fact that in numerous metamorphoses in the poem the word *artus*, “joint, limb,” indicates what happens to parts of the body in transformation is noteworthy. Among other passages, we find it used in Daphne’s transformation: “vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus,” “Scarcely was her prayer finished, when a heavy torpor came upon her limbs” (*Met.* 1.548); in Salmacis’ power to render men’s limbs soft: “quare male fortibus undis / Salmacis enervet tactosque remolliat artus,” “How Salmacis with her powerfully evil waters weakens and softens the touched limbs” (*Met.* 4.285–86); in the transformation of the Minyades into bats: “dumque petunt tenebras, parvos membrana per artus / porrigitur,” “And while they seek darkness, a thin membrane covers their little limbs” (*Met.* 4.407–08); for Phineus’s and Anaxarete’s petrification: “sanguine defectos cecidit collapsus in artus,” “He fainted and fell, his limbs having lost their blood” (*Met.* 5.96), “paulatimque occupat artus, / quod fuit in duro iam pridem pectore, saxum,” “And gradually stone fills her limbs, which was already present in her hard heart before” (*Met.* 14.757–58). Also for the Sirens: “artus / vidistis vestros subitis flavescere pennis,” “You saw your limbs become golden with growing feathers” (*Met.* 5.559), and Arethusa’s dissolution into water: “occupat obsessos sudor mihi frigidus artus,” “Chilly sweat possesses my overwhelmed limbs” (*Met.* 5.632). In these examples, the power of transformation seems to invade the limbs of the characters, and by using the term *artus* at the very moment of transformation—and thus juncture—between one form and another, one story and another, Ovid recalls in a metapoetic way, the different “limbs” or sections of narratives that must be artfully and in good order joined together. This adds to the significance of the ivory maiden and

breathe life into the molded clay”). Earlier in the poem, this process is described as “tellus . . . quam . . . mixtam pluvialibus undis, / finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum,” “Earth . . . which . . . mixed with running water, he shaped into the form of the gods who control it all” (*Met.* 1.80 and 82–83).

30 For examples in other Indo-European languages, see Benveniste 1973.380–81.

Ovid's poem as works created by skillfully (*arte*) piecing together separate parts (*artus*). *Ars* is for Ovid not carving a solid piece of marble, but joining pieces together, and as in the case of Pygmalion, concealing the process with great art and giving it a sense of wholeness ("ars adeo latet arte sua," "to such extent is art concealed by art itself," *Met.* 10.252).

Sharrock (1991a) suggests that the very body of Pygmalion's statue is assimilated to the writing material of erotic poetry. "Eburna" is thus a figure for elegy. Yet we could also quite aptly understand that she is actually a metaphor for *Metamorphoses* and its poetics, a poem whose disjointed sections are put together to form an aesthetically coherent whole, a complete object of admiration for the reader. Just as the artist/viewer Pygmalion pieces together a statue of ivory for the viewer's erotic/artistic enjoyment, Ovid pieces together myths for the reader/viewer's delight.

A WHOLE OUT OF PIECES

There is a tradition in classical literature whereby to create the most perfect woman, the artist has to "put together" the pieces of various models. The idea is that no woman can be perfect, and real women are all far from the ideal in beauty. It is said, for example, that "when Zeuxis was in the city of Croton to paint his portrait of Helen, he chose five virgins, in order to copy the finest feature of each" (Kris and Kurz 1979.44). While Zeuxis "copies" parts of women and thus creates a somewhat mimetic work, the final product is not an imitation of an external object. As Elsner shows, "realistic art" seems to assume a prior reality, a real referent. "Perfectly sculpted flesh" would then evoke "a real body" (Elsner 1991.156). In Pygmalion's case, while the text calls the statue a likeness of his girl (*simulacra suae puellae*, *Met.* 10.280), Pygmalion really has no external model. Just like Zeuxis, Pygmalion takes body fragments and forms with them a whole body of a woman. In Zeuxis, these parts belong to different real women, in Pygmalion, the diverse pieces of ivory are transformed into ideal body parts by the sculptor's imagination.

After rejecting the reality surrounding him, Pygmalion forges a fantasy of the perfect woman in his mind and then goes in search of different fragments of ivory to construct her. Pygmalion is idealistic; he does not accept the reality he has available (women like the Propoetides, for example), and thus he needs to construct an "ideal" woman. His statue is born from a mental image that he can only bring to actual existence by putting together different pieces of some concrete material. In a sense,

one could suppose that a statue of marble is already a reality latent inside the stone, but ivory is a more appropriate material for an “unrealistic” or, rather, “idealistic” sculpture. When working the ivory, the artist does not uncover a complete body that was already inside the stone as a unity (with its perfections and imperfections), but rather carefully chooses different pieces of ivory and organizes them to his own taste and for his own pleasure. Pygmalion’s maiden is thus a sort of female Frankenstein, but pretty, an android constructed out of pieces, not a whole.

Before creating his statue in ivory, Pygmalion must create her in his mind. He has a mental picture of a complete and perfect woman. Then he must find different pieces of ivory in order to transfer this idea into reality. Thus in Pygmalion’s ivory construction, we see a fetishistic “dismemberment” of the female body for male sexual pleasure. As Carol Adams observes: “Parts are less than a whole. A whole person has autonomy and individuality. A woman served into sexualized body parts cannot be whole or autonomous or an individual” (2003.75–77).

Now it may be argued that Pygmalion’s case presents the humanization rather than the dehumanization of a woman. But if we take the original image of a woman as Pygmalion’s idea, his mental picture, in the first transformation of her ideal image into separate and fragmented pieces of ivory (let’s imagine the sculptor concentrating with care on her lips, her buttocks or breasts, one piece at a time, or perhaps softening the scrolled ivory to give shape to separate parts), we see here a fragmentation of the whole “ideal” woman. The second transformation (statue to woman) may be seen as the reversal of the initial process—yet she can never be a complete whole due to the fact that she is composed of fragments. Thus ivory seems a very appropriate medium for first fragmenting the image of a woman and then “piecing her back together” after a process of looking at fragments of her body and working on them.

It is worth pointing out that throughout *Metamorphoses* and much of Latin poetry, ivory is used as a metaphor for the dazzling whiteness of the body, and of specific body parts in particular. In Book 3, Narcissus’s neck is ivory-like (*eburnea colla*, *Met.* 3.22). Hermaphroditus’s neck is also ivory (*eburnea colla*, *Met.* 4.335), the color of his blush is like painted ivory (*ebori tincto*, *Met.* 4.332), and even his whole figure later resembles an ivory figure incased in glass (*Met.* 4.354). Pelops has a shoulder of ivory (*Met.* 6.405) from when, they say, the gods pieced him back together again (*membra ferunt iunxisse deos*, *Met.* 6.408). Naked Atalanta has an ivory back (*terga eburnea*, *Met.* 10.592). In general then, ivory alludes to pieces

of bodies: shoulders, necks, backs, which are, as in the previous cases, often eroticized. Unlike these characters who have one specific body part "of ivory," Pygmalion's girl has been made out of many pieces of the precious material. This somewhat fetishistic way of constructing the object of love, drawing attention to diverse body parts, is not unique to *Metamorphoses* and appears in Ovid's elegy as well.

Pygmalion's ivory maiden can be seen as the ultimate expression of Ovid's conceptualization of Woman. The links between "Eburna" and Latin elegy are many, and they have been well explained by Sharrock and others. We can add that this particular way of constructing a beautiful woman/beloved out of body parts is epitomized in Ovid *Amores* 1.5. This is the first time that Corinna's name appears in the collection, and Ovid visually constructs her as a list of body parts (*Am.* 1.5.19–24):³¹

quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!
 forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
 quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!
 quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur!
 singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi
 et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.

What shoulders, what arms did I see and touch! The shape of her breasts, how fit for touching was! How flat the stomach under the faultless bosom! What a long and beautiful side! What a youthful thigh! Why should I recall each detail? Nothing not praiseworthy did I see. And I pressed her naked against my body.

Just as Pygmalion the poet/lover focuses with care on one body part at a time, and just as Pygmalion carefully works on each piece of ivory, the poet/viewer in *Amores* 1.5 focuses on the girl's shoulders, breasts, stomach, "side," thigh one at a time, and crafts words that will represent the different parts of Corinna's body. As Trevor Fear states, comparing the Pygmalion episode with *Amores* 1.5: "The sculptor creates a woman out of ivory and

31 The text of the *Amores* is taken from Showeman's edition: *Ovid: Heroides and Amores* (revised by P. G. Goold, 1986). Cambridge, Mass.

the elegist a woman out of words.”³² Two fragmented bodies are being put together by Pygmalion and the poet/lover, and we can say that Pygmalion is the ultimate Ovidian lover and artist, for he constructs his *puella* out of ideal body parts.

In this paper I hope to have shown how the creation of Pygmalion’s statue is a much more complex process than most critics have assumed. Her Frankenstein quality, as a being made out of parts (not a whole), raises many issues related to Ovid’s conceptualization of women. While the visual artist Pygmalion makes his perfect woman out of pieces of ivory turned into body parts, the elegiac poet/lover creates his mistress with words as a collection of body parts. Pygmalion’s maiden is also a metaphoric figure for the aesthetic ideology of *Metamorphoses*. Her construction emblemizes Ovid’s conception of what art, and erotic art in particular, is: to join pieces together in harmonious order to form a “whole.” Ivory as the material for Pygmalion’s statue is a clever Ovidian choice, since its pliable qualities also echo the ease with which bodies change form in the *Metamorphoses*.

Montclair State University

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32 Fear 2000.224. Fear, focusing on the *puella* as prostitute, sees that Corinna has more to do with the promiscuity of the Propoetides than with Pygmalion’s maiden in her moral standards.

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