

Poet and *Puella*: Elegiac Analogies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Generic mutability is a basic feature of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, programmatically announced in the opening lines of the text. Ovid's borrowings from love elegy have warranted particular attention in earlier scholarship on the poem (Tränkle 1963, Knox 1986, Harrison 2002, et al.). This paper examines the implications of one such elegiac borrowing: Ovid's use of the word *puella* in describing the artist Pygmalion's unconventional beloved. My contention is that Ovid's use of the word *puella* forms the basis for an extended analogy with elegiac poetry, in which Pygmalion ultimately stands in for the elegiac poet and his statue for the genre of love elegy itself.

In tracing Ovid's development of this analogy, I demonstrate that he first uses the word *puella* in two passages that reflect Pygmalion's subjective experience of his own desire. The first of these passages shows Pygmalion lovesick to the point of delusion, fearful that he may bruise his statue as he embraces it (*Met.* 10.250-56). The second passage describes Pygmalion's statue as it comes to life, vividly evoking Pygmalion's sensation of ivory turning to human skin as he holds his *puella* in his arms (*Met.* 10.280-86). I argue that this close focus on the subjectivity of a male character in thrall to his beloved assimilates Pygmalion to the figure of the elegiac lover, with Pygmalion's statue playing the role of the elegiac mistress.

Drawing on work that demonstrates the fictive character of the elegiac *puella* (Veyne 1983, Wyke 1987), I then show that because Pygmalion has created his own mistress, he can further be assimilated to the figure of the elegiac poet. However, this extended analogy is complicated by the fact that Ovid also refers to Pygmalion's statue as *virgo* (*Met.* 10.250, 10.275, 10.292). It has been argued that Ovid uses the words *virgo* and *puella* in the poem as markers of

sexual modesty and immodesty, respectively (Chappuis Sandoz 2005). But given that the referent here is mostly inanimate, I suggest that we should instead understand these words as reflecting qualities projected by Pygmalion onto his love object.

I argue, finally, that like the other mistresses of elegiac poetry, Pygmalion's statue can be read in metapoetic terms as symbolizing the genre of love elegy, and that her transformation from *virgo* to *puella* and back again thus reflects the generic instability that characterizes the text of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole.

Works Cited

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