The Pygmalion Touch: Ovid's Thumb in Persius Satire 5

In his fifth satire, Persius transitions from his opening stylistic endorsement of *verba togae* and *acris iunctura* to a satiric diatribe built around the Stoic dictum that only the wise person is truly free by offering himself for examination to his lauded mentor, Annaeus Cornutus. Persius describes Cornutus' influence on himself as if he were the product of a craft:

> …teneros tu suscipis annos
> Socratico, Cornute, sinu. tum fallere sollers
> adposita intortos extendit regula mores
> et premitur ratione animus uincique laborat
> artificemque tuo ducit sub pollice uoltum. (5.36–40)

Reckford (2009) and Freudenburg (2018), among others, note how this description, along with Cornutus' skill at "recognizing what rings solid" (*dinoscere cautus/quid solidum crepet*), recalls the analogy of the Stoic proficient as a leaky pot in *Satire* 3, a philosophical analogy going all the way back to Plato. In this paper, however, I focus on the work that Cornutus employs in this image of self formation to argue that Persius casts himself as an art object by combining images drawn from two passages of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, each centered around the work of the thumb. On the one hand, Persius casts Cornutus as the god Apollo to be misjudged by Midas, while on the other, Persius imagines himself as the statue brought to life by Pygmalion.

As Hooley (1997) thoroughly explores, Persius' whole collection is very self-consciously interacting with his satiric predecessor Horace's, and the Stoic diatribe that follows is modeled on *Sermones* 2.7; however, he also shows how Persius draws on many other poetic models (consonant with Bellandi: 19960, including Ovid's corpus (though perhaps with less distaste than

Bramble (1974)); one such example is the phrasing of 5.66 (*cras hoc fiet. idem cras fiat*) which parallels Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* 104 (*cras quoque fiet idem*) (Hooley 1997: 91–92). Gowers (2005) and Bartsch (2015) also highlight the bodily images of mouths and cannibalism that surround this passage, placing Persius in a lineage of hexameter poetry going back through Ovid and Vergil to Homer and adding elements of the tragic and mythic alongside.

The mythic reference to Midas that I suggest appears in Satire 5 is one that recalls the first satire's lament about the level of style in Neronian Rome: "*auriculas asini quis non habet*" (1.121). Sullivan (1978) connects this reference to Midas back to Ovid's specific presentation of the myth of Midas in *Met.* 11. In the artistic competition Midas (wrongfully) judges, Ovid focuses on the work of Apollo's hands: *artificis status ipse fuit. tum stamina docto/ pollice sollicitat* (11.169–70). With the same pairing of *artifex* and *pollex*, Persius thus casts Cornutus as a divine artist in his own right, and one who has the right ears to properly evaluate (Persius') literature. However, as part of the *acris iunctura*, Persius transfers the role of *artifex* to his own face under Cornutus' thumb. This mixture also recalls the work of another Ovidian artist's hands, for at *Met.* 10.184–86, Ovid describes the statue coming to life in Pygmalion's hands as wax molded into a face (*ut Hymettia sole/cera remollescit tractataque pollice multas/flectitur in facies ipsoque fit utilis usu*). Persius' rebirth as a learned Stoic is into the form of a woman, and given this happens in Cornutus' *Socratico sinu*, it suggests that Cornutus himself has a motherly rather than fatherly role in Persius' development. Thus, in spite of the outwardly masculine tone of Roman satire generally, Persius' use of these Ovidian thumbs connects the restoration of Roman literature and his own moral progress with feminine personal relationships.

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