

# [Pygmalion poetry deconstruction](https://assignbuster.com/pygmalion-poetry-deconstruction/)

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PoetryDeconstruction: The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue (1713 translation) The poem “ The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue” was originally written in Greek by Ovid, and is found in Book Ten of his work, Metamorphoses. It was translated into English in 1713, and this translation employs techniques to appeal to the readers of the day, and reveals their views on a variety of topics, including obsession and narcissism. Pygmalion, a sculptor, shunned all women for their frivolity, instead turning to his art.

He created a sculpture out of ivory of a woman so perfect that he grew to love her, and wished for his ‘ ivory virgin’ to be real. The goddess granted his secret desire, and blessed the couple with a son. The readership of the poem would have consisted predominately of eighteenth century upper class males, so the poem is, in many parts, structured to interest this group of individuals. The eighteenth century gentleman would have identified with the line “ Well pleas’d to want a consort of his bed”, as a mistress was the only thing that was not provided instantly for them.

Pygmalion, a man who is able to function without this, would have been held in high esteem by the reader, and perhaps would have inspired them to follow his example in being independent. The line, “ Yet fearing idleness, the nurse of ill”, shows the society of the time’s attitude towards inactivity, in that it is, or leads to, a sickness. This metaphor relates to the saying, ‘ idle hands are the devil’s playthings’, which would have been the view of the community at the time of the translation.

Another quote that shows the opinion of the people of the eighteenth century is “ the pow’rful bribes of love”, indicating that love could be bought. In 1713, this would not have been an oxymoron, as many married someone to gain their wealth, making this statement ring true to the eighteenth century reader. The poet also refers to the birth of Pygmalion and the statue’s child, as a way that they “ crown their bliss”. This metaphor signifies a very happy ending, especially to the gentleman reader, as procreation was a very important issue; an heir was necessary.

Note also that the child is male. This engineers a perfect close to the story of Pygmalion. ‘ Crown’ could also be a symbol of the patriarchal values present, as it was rare for a woman to rule (wear the crown). A question to pose it what the eighteenth century gentleman thought of Pygmalion’s obsessive nature and narcissism. The fact that he “ Abhorr’d all womankind” makes it appear as if he thinks he is above women, as he has lumped them all into the same, generalised bracket, including those who do not follow the lifestyle choices he disapproves of.

The alliteration used in “ loathing their lascivious life” emphasises Pygmalion’s misogyny, and therefore his very high opinion of himself. His narcissistic nature is further explored through the use personification; “ Nature could not with his art compare”. Here, he is praising his own amazing skill for creating something better than Nature, or God, could make. The line “ Pleas’d with his idol”, reminds on of Genesis, where God is pleased with himself after he creates the world. Pygmalion is comparing himself to God, revealing his large ego.

The poet delves into his obsessive nature with the caesura in the line, “ he commends, admires, Adores;” forcing the readers to pause and examine the depth of Pygmalion’s obsession towards the statue of his creation, and by extension, himself. This is emphasised again in the repetition in the lines “ And all the sparkling stones … and od’rous green”. The word ‘ and’ is repeated five times in these four lines, highlighting the excessiveness of his gift giving and his over the top behaviour.

Due to the positive finish, where Pygmalion’s ‘ bliss is crowned’ with the birth of a son, and the lack of consequences for his terribly high opinion of himself, one might conclude that over-extravagant pride was considered commonplace in the eighteenth century, and obsessiveness was not considered unhealthy, perhaps because it served to combat idleness. The various ideas in the poem support this. The translation of “ The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue” effectively utilises techniques and devices in order to appeal to its readership, the upper class gentleman of 1713 and onward. 715 words