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John Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598):
Beyond the Elizabethan Epyllion

La metamorfosis de la imagen de Pigmalión, de John Marston (1598):
Más allá del epilio isabelino

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyse an erotic-mythological and narrative poem of the Elizabethan period called *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image,* written by John Marston and first published in 1598. The main purpose of this paper is to assess Marston's intentions when writing what most critics consider a burlesque of one of the most fashionable genre at that time, that is to say, whether Marston's poem had a satiric sense or whether it was just another example of the late Elizabethan epyllion. This paper compares the poem with its source (the Ovidian version of the myth in *Metamorphoses* X, 233–323), and studies the context of its composition, as well as its relation with other contemporary poems of its kind. Furthermore, this paper surveys the most relevant research on this poem: a critical summary of significant secondary sources shows a variety of topics and perspectives in relation to the study of Marston's poem. Despite the difficulties which any argument about final intentions of past authors pose and the diversity of contemporary critics' opinions, this paper argues that Marston's aim was ultimately satiric and ironic, as pointed out in the poem's text and paratexts.

KEYWORDS: Marston, John (1576-1634); *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*; Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC-AD 17/18); *Metamorphoses*; Elizabethan Poetry; Mythology; Satire; Epyllion.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza un poema erótico-mitológico y narrativo del periodo isabelino llamado *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*, escrito por John Marston y publicado en 1598. El propósito principal del trabajo consiste en averiguar si era satírica la verdadera intención del autor a la hora de escribir lo que gran parte de la crítica ha considerado una parodia del género del momento, o si el poema de Marston es simplemente otro poema característico del epilio tardío isabelino. Para ello este análisis se ha basado en la comparación con su fuente primaria, en este caso la versión de Ovidio del mito en cuestión (*Metamorfosis* X, 233–323), así como un estudio del contexto en el que se compuso y su relación con el resto de poemas coetáneos. Además, nuestro trabajo se ha centrado en un estudio de las cuestiones más relevantes que trata el poema a partir una lectura previa de las fuentes secundarias sobre autores contemporáneos y sus enfoques críticos de los distintos temas. Pese a la dificultad para conocer a ciencia cierta el verdadero objetivo de un autor del pasado y a la diversidad de opiniones de la crítica sobre este poema, los resultados apuntan a que la verdadera intención de Marston era más bien satírica, tal como apuntan el propio texto del poema y sus paratextos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Marston, John (1576-1634); *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*; Ovidio (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC-AD 17/18); *Metamorfosis*; poesía isabelina; mitología; sátira; epilio.

1. INTRODUCTION: TOPIC CHOICE, AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

Greco-Roman mythology became one of the main focal points of English Renaissance literature. Ovidian-mythological poetry was one of the major poetic forms of the late Elizabethan period. By using Ovidian myths as subject matter of their works, the main poets of this era provided fresh interpretations of these well-known stories. The controversies around these different ways of understanding Ovid and the Ovidian poems during the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first years of the seventeenth century have been the main motivation of this essay. Our focus is one of those writers that have attracted less attention and gained less recognition. John Marston, especially in his role as a poet, continues to be one of the most neglected authors of the period. Marston's epyllion took a backseat in Renaissance poetry mainly because he is regarded as a playwright and a satiric poet. Although most critics turn either to Marlowe's or to Shakespeare's poem as models for the Elizabethan epyllion, John Marston's brief but fundamental contribution to the genre needs to be emphasised. *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598) stands out for the ambiguity of its author's intentions and its erotic nature, which critics continue discussing even today. This essay assesses Marston's intentions when writing a mythological narrative poem considered immoral — we would use the word "pornographic" — by his contemporaries. The question at the outset is to determine whether the author's real intentions were mainly satirical or whether Marston just intended to create one more example of the fashionable late Elizabethan epyllion.

The above aim will be accomplished through the following methodological steps:

1) A comparison of the poem with its source (the Ovidian version of the myth in *Metamorphoses* X, 233–323).

2) A study of the context of its composition, as well as its relation with other contemporary poems of its kind.

3) A review of significant secondary sources that examine a variety of topics and perspectives in relation to the study of Marston's poem. These opinions range from considerations of the poem as a transitional example marking the decay of the Ovidian epyllion to critical examinations of Marston's views of gender and sexuality.

4) A critical reading of Marston's poem in relation to other poems by the author and its paratexts.

As far as the relation of Marston's poem to the Ovidian source is concerned, we have studied both texts simultaneously in order to analyse two different ways of understanding the same story, or better, Marston's Renaissance updating of Ovid's classical text. For this purpose, it has been useful to bring to the discussion other Renaissance poems written in the same tradition, which have obvious formal and generic similarities to Marston's. The most significant precedents are Thomas Lodge's *Scilla's Metamorphosis Interlaced with the Unfortunate Love of Glaucus* (1589), Christopher Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander* (1593) and William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593). All these poems, which helped shape what we know today as "epyllion", were composed and published in a very short time-span (ten years) at the end of the sixteenth century. Marston's poem is the last sixteenth-century example, and its structure and content announces the decay of the genre and advances a new vogue for satiric poetry at the turn of the century.

In consonance with this selection of texts, our methodology consists of a critical assessment by means of a close reading of the poem that also takes into consideration the source (Ovid) as well as the rest of works that belong to the same contextual, literary and generic framework. In order to do that, a wide range of secondary sources have been consulted in relation to the following topics: Marston's relation to Ovid, his view and use of the epyllion as genre, and his views of women and sexuality in light of recent critical perspectives.

A brief word needs to be said about abbreviations: quotations from Marston's poems use the abbreviations *MPI* (for *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*) and *SV*, VI (for the Sixth Satire in his volume *The Scourge of Villainy*). Quotations from these text follow the modernised spelling text in Braden's edition. Other poetic texts by Marston are quoted from the original editions, and in those cases the original spelling has been preserved in the quotations.

2. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MARSTON'S POEM: A BRIEF STATE OF THE ART

In order to carry out a deep analysis of John Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image,* we must take into account the different contributions that authors have made on this subject hitherto. Although Marston's poem has never been placed on top of the canon of Renaissance narrative poetry, it has caused enough controversy and there are multiple ways of approaching the text. For the purposes of this brief survey, three major lines will be considered: the first engages with the poem from more traditional perspectives of literary history, source and genre studies; the second focuses in a more detailed way on the language and rhetoric of the poem, sometimes stressing its debt to Renaissance visual culture; the third includes more recent approaches, particularly from the point of view of poststructuralist gender studies.

Within the first one we can include those articles and books that deal with the text in a more traditional manner, that is to say, they are based on the study of the poem from the perspectives of the literary genres. Within this group we find key studies ranging from Douglas Bush's *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (1932) to Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid* (1986). These have taken into consideration the study of the different genres that influenced Marston, especially the Ovidian epyllion (or "minor epic"), but also the poem's debt to satiric poetry. The critical interpretation of this poem from these perspectives can be exemplified in Douglas Bush's assertion that the poem is "an ironic piece of studied excess", and that its author "derived a vicarious gratification from detailed accounts of the vices he attacked" (81).

The second kind of approach we can find has to do with those books which approach the text from rhetorical perspectives. They have studied Marston's poem by focusing on its self-conscious status as artifice, as well as the relation between

poetry and visual arts. The best example of this is Clark Hulse's book *Metamorphic Verse* (1980), in which the critic highlights "the metamorphic qualities of the minor epic", which "may refashion our image of that system into something less static, more fluid" since he considers Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "a system where recurring instances of flux build toward a view of a world in process" (4). Although this paper does not analyse the relation of this poem to visual culture in depth, it benefits from this kind of interpretation in considering the poem and others of its kind an unstable, complex, ambiguous and open texts that resist final interpretations.

And finally, the last way of approaching this text is by means of more contemporary perspectives which deal mostly with feminist issues, also with a psychoanalytic take, as in the case of Lynn Enterline's *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (2000), where she treats topics such as the trope of the female voice in the *Metamorphoses,* and especially the gynophobic exclusion of the female body in Marston's poem.

The present paper is clearly indebted to these three approaches in trying to argue for the complexity of the text, and for an idea of Marston's perspective as caught between moral satire against vice and male incitement to kinds of sexual pleasure that deny female presence and active participation.

Greco-Roman mythology was a thematic focal point of Renaissance poetry. Classical authors were a source of inspiration and were considered essential models for writers and artists. This huge interest in the rediscovery and study of Greek and Roman classical literature began with the expansion of the Renaissance movement through Europe and the new intellectual and philosophical ideas that it brought into literature and education (Wakelin 7).

The use of mythology is manifested in the poetry of the period in the form of permanent allusions to myths and their moral and symbolic significance. But the second half of the sixteenth century saw the rise of Ovidian-mythological poetry as the most obvious example of classical influence upon the Elizabethan literary mind. An important event in the reception of the *Metamorphoses* in England is the publication of a full translation by Arthur Golding in 1567 (a work that is still influential today). The traditional way of interpreting Ovid's works along the sixteenth century was by allegorizing and moralizing his erotic tales and poetry. However, this this was not always the case. As Hallett Smith has argued,

> The Ovidian tradition emerged from the Middle Ages as heavy allegorical didacticism, evolved in the sixteenth century in an emancipated glorification of the senses and the imagination, and returned in the seventeenth century to philosophical interpretation. (64)

Smith detects distinct phases in the reception of Ovid's works, particularly the *Metamorphoses*. During the Middle Ages, Ovid's poems were read allegorically. Christian allegory became a way of suppressing or concealing the licentious and erotic meanings of these poems. By allegorising and moralising these poems, these

could elude accusations of immorality in an age when Christian doctrine dominated education and art (Bate 25). The medieval view was abandoned and replaced by other sorts of interpretations. For instance, the seventeenth-century English translator George Sand, in his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1632), conceived the story of Pyramus and Thisbe as an example of successful secret love and careless parents, whereas the Christian interpretation of this myth had represented Pyramus as Christ, Thisbe as the human soul and the Lion as the embodiment of Satan (Gamel 60).

These new and more sophisticated explanations of myths emerged by the second half of the sixteenth century. As commented before, authors began to interpret them in more subtle and philosophical ways, often emphasising controversial themes. An example of this is the poem that this paper will analyse in detail, John Marston's poem *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598): Marston seems to avoid criticism about the pornographic elements contained in his version of Ovid's myth by claiming his moral and satirical intentions when writing it. The complexity of Renaissance authors' hidden intentions and the controversies in interpretation found in this age have motivated us to centre our essay on the analysis and interpretation of Ovid's myths made during the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first years of the seventeenth century.

The reasons for these new critical interpretation were due to didacticism and its great relevance in the Renaissance poetic theory. As T. W. Baldwin proves in *Shakespeare's Small Latine Lesse Greeke* (1944), rhetoric was an important method for people (mostly men) to enter into civic and political life. The majority of upper schools incorporated rigorous rhetorical training, which included verse-writing exercises, extensive reading and memorising of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Thus boys were expected not only to translate into Latin but also to generate rhetorical adaptations conceived as variations or amplifications of Ovid's original.

By the last decade of the sixteenth century, Ovid was considered by many writers and readers, as Jonathan Bate remarks, "a source of poetic and even licentious

delight rather than moral edification" (32). This new Ovidianism was constituted by the genre called "epyllion", a term which "applied to post-classical literature, especially the erotic treatment of mythological narratives in Renaissance poetry" (Ousby). The main topic of these mythological narratives revolved around unrequited love, especially in complicated relationships between Gods and human beings. Therefore, the existence of this new genre meant a turning point with respect to the traditional aims of poetry. Whereas before and during the sixteenth century the function of poetry was essentially to delight and to teach the reader by applying moralistic lines, after the last decade of that century we begin to find a kind of poetry that stresses just the pleasant and enjoyable functions by appealing to the senses. This involved a considerable change, among other a new direction in the way of analysing Ovidian tales. This paper focuses on this turning point at which allegorical interpretations, especially those of a moralistic nature related to the medieval tradition, were overshadowed by what began to be regarded as merely "erotic poetry".

Although the epyllion was framed within the Renaissance age, there is evidence for precedents during the Hellenistic period. The Hellenistic epyllion had a length which ranged from 100 to more than 1000 lines. In fact, its length depended on the dimension of the papyrus book roll. These mythical narratives in the form of short poems prevailed over the heroic tradition, due to its new focus on formerly marginalized characters, such as the poor, the elderly, women, herdsmen and even animals. The main topic revolved around romance or emotional ties between people of different status – such as amorous relationships between gods and human beings (Gutzwiller 454). This kind of poem comprised a single episode, which contains in turn a digressive secondary story, sometimes in the form of an *ekphrasis*, that is, "a form of writing, mostly poetry, wherein the author describes another work of art, usually visual. It is used to convey the deeper symbolism of the corporeal art form by means of a separate medium" ("Ekphrastic"). Ovid's Pygmalion episode (*Metamorphoses* X, 233–323) is an example of a secondary story

or digression, since this tale appears as one of the stories told by Orpheus after having lost his wife for a second time. Therefore, it constitutes an ekphrastic poem written inside a major story.

After the Hellenistic era, the epyllion form began to appear within other genres. For instance, in the Augustan Age some works of famous writers such as Virgil and Ovid were re-elaborated as a series of epyllia, as in the case of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In addition, due to these two writers (between others) eroticism firmly entered in the epic tradition and continued in this line until the Renaissance era. Notwithstanding, erotic poetry as well as the epyllion form have shown variations throughout time depending on the sociocultural influence and the author's view. As Moulton argues,

> "Eroticism" is in many ways a subjective quality that is ultimately judged by the reaction of the reader rather than the content of the text itself. Judgments about what is erotic, like judgments about what is funny, are extremely personal and seldom swayed by external opinion ... It can also be revelatory about cultural fears and fantasies regarding various forms of sexual activity. (455)

Hence, subjectivism plays an important role when defining the erotic parameters of a specific genre. For instance, with respect to the Renaissance epyllion, some writers have tried to create eroticism as a subjective quality rather than an objective one. In other words, they have tried to claim that eroticism is in fact supplied by the reader's perception, especially by means of their visual senses. For example, Marston's poem *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* directs the reader to a certain perspective by means of descriptions of erotic encounters. However, in accordance with the definition above, we can say that the author provides the necessary means, but it is in fact the reader's own imagination that supplies eroticism.

One of the differences that the Renaissance epyllion has shown in comparison with previous forms is its delight in the artificial. Concretely, authors of Elizabethan

epyllia stress the rhetorical and aesthetic aspects of the poem by using an aureate, inflated style full of figures of speech instead of focusing merely on plot. Most Renaissance writers simply used the core of a myth for their storyline and applied rhetorical devices and ingenious invention in order to embellish and ornate their poems. For example, Thomas Lodge's *Scilla's Metamorphosis Interlaced with the Unfortunate Love of Glaucus* (1589) just depends on two facts from Ovid: Glaucus's love to Scilla and Scilla's transformation into a monster. The rest of the poem is designed by his own imagination, for instance, by inventing new details, places and even new characters. We can appreciate the insertion of the poetic voice as a character who interprets the role of a suffering lover that has a conversation with Glaucus in which he accounts for the similarities of their love stories. This insertion of the poetic voice emphasizes the Renaissance idea of the importance of the poet as individual. The poetic voice represents the author as the centre of the poem.

Although most authors decided to use Ovid's myths to highlight certain moral and rhetorical aspects, there were some of them who preferred to rely more on narrative features. Within this group, we find poems such as William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593), in which the poet is more interested in the causes of love rather than in its morality. Unlike Lodge, Shakespeare used the core of the myth as the essence of his composition, without changing too much its storyline (Smith 84–88). Despite their differences, Lodge's *Scilla's Metamorphosis* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* became the main representatives of the Elizabethan epyllion, together with Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (composed *c.* 1593 and published in 1598). Although it was published some years later, it quickly gained a high reputation, since most of the other Ovidian mythological poems were deeply indebted to it.

Beyond these major figures of the Elizabethan epyllion, we can appreciate a great contrast with respect to high reputation between those Elizabethans who were close to the new century and those who died before it. Works written by authors close to

the new century like George Chapman (1559–1634), Fulke Greville (1554–1628), John Marston (1576–1634) and Walter Raleigh (1554–1618) have been neglected and given little recognition. Philip Hobsbaum identifies three main reasons for that:

> One reason for this is certainly the nineteenth century anthologists' fixation upon the sweet and conventionalized treatment of love. Another is the twentieth century academics' respect for the dull … And yet a third reason is the curiously British reluctance to consider any but watertight categories of literature as being acceptable. (Hobsbaum 207)

Nevertheless, our focus here shifts particularly to one of those "secondary" authors who had gained less recognition. In the first place, our purpose is to figure out, by means of a critical reading of Marston's poem *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*, the reason why the poem has been placed far down the list of importance in the canon of the Renaissance epyllion and to consider whether this place is actually deserved or not. Marston's epyllion took a backseat in the Renaissance poetry partly because he is basically regarded as a playwright. Notwithstanding, within Marston's works the most outstanding pieces are his satires. His easy cynicism and harsh verse towards the trite and static conventions of Petrarchan love and affected poetic expression place him on the top of the list of authors that created the precedent of Neoclassical English satire. Nevertheless, the outbreak of satires did not take place until the last three years of the century, when the erotic-mythological poem was in high vogue. That is why Marston also decided to incorporate this kind of new genre to his repertoire by writing *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598).

Even knowing that impressionable Elizabethan poets turned either to Marlowe's or to Shakespeare's poems as models for their epyllion, Marston's brief but fundamental contribution to the genre should not be minimised. As Hernández-Santano asserts,

Marston's erotic epyllion is certainly the most original one because of its ambiguity and powerful diction, in spite of the fact that it was considered pornographic by his contemporaries ... However, the poem maintains a balance between seriousness and humour that questions Marston's real intention when writing such lascivious verse. (261)

Therefore, as we can see, his poor acknowledgement is mainly due to the nature of his intentions, which critics continue discussing even today.

Another aspect that makes Marston different with respect to the rest of Elizabethan poets is his focus on Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* While the main theme of the rest of poems deals mostly with unrequited love, this book contains those myths related to 'unnatural' desire, or as Jonathan Bate calls it, "sexual beastliness" (53). Apart from the fetishism of Pygmalion and his statue, we can find in this book other conceptions of love even more peculiar such as the incest between Myrrha and her father, the first prostitutes, the Propoetides, etc. All of them seem to have been apt to satisfy the Elizabethan and Jacobean interest in unnatural sex. This theme was typically used in tragedies such as one by Marston himself called *Antonio and Mellida* (1600). In fact, Marston is one of the few authors who dared write about it in an era in which love and sex matters were still controlled and limited by strict moral standards.

Considering all aspects commented above, some of our aims in this essay are to figure out the reason and consequences of Marston's selection of Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and concretely of a fetishist poem, and also to try to throw some light on his intentions when writing such licentious verse. A short introductory note to the author's life and works is provided before moving to a closer reading of the poem.

4. *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598): A Study of the Poem

4.1. *John Marston (1576-1634): A Short Biographical Note*

Our author is known as mainly as a dramatist, poet and one of the most vigorous satirists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. He was the eldest son of John Marston of Coventry, an eminent lawyer of the Middle Temple in the city of Coventry, and Maria Marston (née Guarsi), the daughter of an Italian physician, Andrew Guarsi.

John Marston decided to devote his professional career to the study of poetry, playwriting and literature in general, despite his father's will that he follow his paternal profession instead of going after "insignificant vanities" ("Biography"). From the beginning, Marston showed affinities with Italian literature, partly due to his family links with that culture and society. He began his literary career in 1598 by publishing *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1598). Although he started writing in the fashionable genres at that time, such as the epyllion, his poem served as precedent for the rest of his work, since he also published three books of satires during the same year: *Certain Satires, Satires of Juvenal* and *The Scourge of Villainy*. Hence, we can appreciate those satiric aspects in his poem that make it different from the rest of Elizabethan epyllia. In spite of his brief professional career and little writing experience, as suggests, his satires depart from the traditional standards at that time because of their obscure, savage and misanthropic style and their idiosyncratic vocabulary ("Biography"). Perhaps that is the reason why Marston decided to use the pseudonym of W. Kinsayder to publish them.

In 1599, Marston decided to make a change of direction in his professional career by taking a chance as a playwright. *Histriomastix* (1599) is his first play. It was performed by students, as well as much of his work, as he wrote mostly for

children's theatre companies. Their plays were mainly performed in private playhouses. They consisted of erotic plays for an audience composed of educated young men and members of the inns of court. Within his main plays, the most outstanding one is *The Malcontent* (1604). Other important pieces are *The Wonder of Women, or the Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1606) and *What You will* (1607).

Marston's satiric playwriting left no one indifferent since, as in his poems. As Minto comments about Marston's plays:

> They make no pretence to dramatic impartiality; they are written throughout in the spirit of his satires; his puppets walk the stage as embodiments of various ramifications of deadly sins and contemptible fopperies, side by side with virtuous opposites and indignant commenting censors. His characters, indeed, speak and act with vigorous life: they are much more forcible and distinct personalities than Chapman's characters. (438)

In fact, Marston attacked many famous people at that time. For instance, he and his major enemy, Ben Jonson, launched attacks on each other in their plays for more than three years. Finally, they put an end to their feud by working together on the play *Sejanus His Fall* (1603). Marston even dared to satirise the king in plays such as *Parasitaster*, or *The Fawn* (1604), although he immediately apologised for that. Finally, in 1607, he put an end to his dramatic career after writing *The Entertainment* at Ashby, a masque for the Earl of Huntingdon. After that, he decided to sell his shares to the company of Blackfriars and at the age of thirty-three and retired to study philosophy at Oxford. He moved to a parish of Christchurch in Hampshire, where he took orders and served as vicar until his death in 1634. His unexpected departure from the literary scene makes critics think that the real reason was the banning of another play, now lost, which offended the king.

Marston's erotic narrative poem *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* was published in the year 1598 in a volume filled out with a linking poem, 'The Author in prayse of his Precedent Poem', and a sequence of five verse satires named 'Certain Satires'. However, there are reasons to believe that it had already been circulating before 27 May 1598 in manuscript or any other edition that has not survived. Even though the book was published anonymously, Marston used the pseudonym signature of 'W. Kinsayder' both in *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* and in a subsequent book of satires named *The Scourge of Villanie* (1599). This is probably the reason why readers were more intrigued by the real identity of the author than by the content and relevance of his satires.

Despite the fact that Marston's poem has been categorized within a fashionable genre at that time, the Ovidian epyllion, there are disagreements as to whether it is an Ovidian amatory poem designed with a lubricious intention in the manner of *Hero and Leander* (the poem expands Ovid's 55 lines to 234), or a sophisticated burlesque of the Ovidian vogue in consonance with its author's satiric vein in other works (Finkelpearl 333). To figure out Marston's real intentions when writing such lascivious verses we must take into account the paratexts of the poem, as well as the rest of Marston's work written approximately at that same time. Firstly, as Finkelpearl suggests (334), we can already detect some kind of satiric intention at the beginning of the book with a dedication to "The Worlds Mightie Monarch Good Opinion" (Marston 1598, A3^{r-v}). This elaborate paraphernalia of dedication, argument and invocation has clearly burlesque intentions, and it was probably addressed to the members of the Inns of Court, as these constituted the natural readership of learned poems like Marston's.

This first dedication is followed by a plot summary or "argument of the poem", to which a new verse dedication, now to the poet's "Mistress" follows. This is clearly a fictional dedication, and it expresses a typically Petrarchan plea to the beloved,

begging her acceptance of the poet. This poet's beloved's acceptance can be seen in the following words:

> As thou read'st, (Faire) take compassion,
>
> Force me not to envie my Pigmalion.
>
> Then when thy kindness grants me such sweet blisse,
>
> I'le gladly write thy metamorphosis. (Marston 1598: A5^r)

Through this dedication, the poet is actually asking his beloved to let herself succumb to his charms and to be metamorphosed in just the same way as Pygmalion's statue did: from cold stone into a warm body, from a hard-hearted woman into a compliant mistress. This address to his mistress gives the poem a highly personal tone, which makes it different from the rest of mythological Ovidian narrative poems. Nevertheless, critics such as Horne assert that Marston's attitude in this poem is in fact "an ironic stance exemplified by his use of mock-Petrarchan (and mock-naïve) apostrophes to his 'Mistress'" (18), since the poet does not want his verse to describe whimsical events in the manner of Petrarch's. That is to say, he criticises the Petrarchan way of enjoying the beloved's company without achieving sexual intercourse, since his real intention in the Pygmalion poem is to persuade his mistress to give him sexual satisfaction.

Tonally and thematically, these two dedications with which the book starts pave the way for Marston's interpretation and treatment of his Ovidian subject. Most former interpretations of Marston's poem have been strongly influenced by the comments and dedications found in the paratexts of the poem. Other clues about Marston's real intentions in his version of Pygmalion's tale are found in *The Scourge of Villainy,* a volume of satires published four months after *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image.* Along eighty lines of the sixth satire of his book Marston (not always entirely seriously) reveals some of his former poem's aims, and mocks the way in which the poem had been interpreted by its early readers.

> Hence, thou misjudging censor! Know I wrote
>
> Those idle rhymes to note the odious spot
>
> And blemish that deforms the lineaments
>
> Of modern poesy's habiliments. (Braden, SV, VI.23–26)

Marston explains in these lines that his real intentions were mainly satirical, so he seems to imply that those who had understood the poem's meaning as merely erotic had "misjudged" it. The poem acknowledges the banality of his own material ("idle rhymes"). But this trivial verse should not be understood as an end in itself but as a vehicle to denounce the immorality of the genre that he parodies. In these lines, Marston appropriates the bodily lexicon typical of the erotic epyllion to launch his attack on the genre. "Modern poesy" is imagined as a body whose '"lineaments" and "habiliments" are "deform(ed)" by "odious spot(s)" and "blemish(es)."

4.3. *Metrical Form and Narrative Structure*

The rhyme scheme of some Renaissance epyllia followed the stanzaic pattern used by Thomas Lodge in *Scilla's Metamorphosis.* This is the six-line stanzaic form in iambic pentameters rhyming ABABCC. This rhyme pattern was also employed in similar poems such as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis,* and Marston followed the example of those "modern Poesies" in *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image.* It is not surprising that Marston has used the same rhyme as Lodge's poem, since, apart from the fact that Lodge's poem is earlier than Marston's, there are also many features that link Marston's poem to the first major instance of the Ovidian epyllion in English. Therefore, we can say that Lodge's poem, and to a lesser extent Shakespeare's, acted as a literary model for Marston's.

With respect to narrative aspects, we can appreciate three different parts in the poem that have to do with the way Pygmalion treats and engages his beloved. As Buckridge asserts, during the first part (from stanza 1 to 4, lines 1–22) Pygmalion is

totally conscious of the inability of response of his beloved, since during this phase there is not any settled delusion about the statue as a whole entity. Pygmalion just refers to the beauties of its constituent parts, and the way he examines its secret parts by showing any limitations reinforces the idea that the statue is just an inanimate object and their relationship is totally fetishist: "O what alluring beauties he descries / In each part of his fair imagery!" (21–22)

The second phase of Pygmalion's devotion to his statue occurs since the moment when he begins to treat it as a real female body, but still as a merely fetishized, sexual object (from stanza 4 to 28, lines 23–166). He salutes her and refers to it as 'her' for the first time. He is conscious of this fetishist relationship, but rather than treating his beloved as an inanimate object anymore, he makes the statue an object of courtly seduction: "Peer through her fingers, so to hide her shame / When that her eye, her mind would fain bewray" (57–58).

Finally, the third phase occurs since the moment of literal transformation: the metamorphosis takes place and the statue becomes a "woman of blood and flesh", but one whose statue-like passivity and muteness remains until the end of the poem (from stanza 28 to 38, lines 167–234). Since then, the narrative voice stops reporting Pygmalion's enjoyment of his beloved, since it can already be considered pornographic, so he leaves them to the reader's imagination: "Ye gaping ears that swallow up my lines, / Expect no more" (224–225).

4.4. *Source: Marston's Ovid*

As mentioned above, it is not a coincidence that Marston based his poem on Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* This book stands out from the rest due to its stories of unnatural love. Marston may have felt particularly attracted to it, since it enables him to treat a wide range of new topics in the context of the poetry of his time.

Among the issues that Marston takes from Ovid and emulates in his poem, we can find the interest in the "rhetorical" and "libidinal economies" of Ovid's

pornographic imaginary. Marston tries to imitate, in a comic way, Ovid's habit of moving between literal and figural levels of meaning. Perhaps that is the reason why Marston's and Ovid's Pygmalions are both unable to differentiate their own creation from a real woman. They are in fact incapable of seeing the difference between body and image, and between body and object (Enterline,127–130).

However, there are clear differences between the two versions. The first reason is that Marston expands Ovid's 55 lines to 234. This considerable amplification follows Marlowe's method in *Hero and Leander.* Therefore, although the beginning and ending of Marston's poem are very close to Ovid, the erotic descriptions are far longer and more explicit in Marston, since the majority of its stanzas are devoted to Pygmalion's admiration to his own creation.

Aware of the importance of the connection between art and literature during the Elizabethan period, Marston laid emphasis on the visual depictions in his work. He, like other Elizabethan writers, tried to make the reader imagine the described object (in this case the statue) as if it were physically present, even if the subject never actually existed. This was used as "a demonstration of both the creative imagination and the skill of the writer" (Munsterberg). This particular kind of visual description is a Greek literary form called "ekphrasis" that was also very common at that time. Notwithstanding, not only is Marston's poem remarkable for its visual descriptions, but also for its appeal to the rest of senses. There are considerable references to smell and taste, although the poem is particularly notable for its appeal to touch and sight. Much in this poem refers to the protagonist's sensual confusion, that is to say: what he feels, or thinks, or believes is the effect of his wish to take the statue for a flesh-and-blood woman. Therefore, all the senses play a crucial role:

> His eyes her eyes kindly encountered;
> His breast her breast oft joined close unto;
> His arms' embracements oft she suffered;
> Hands, arms, eyes, tongue, lips, and all parts did woo.
> His thigh with hers, his knee played with her knee:

A happy consort when all parts agree. (Braden, *MPI* 97-102)

This stanza is perhaps one of the most sensuous of the poem. As we can see, it appeals to all the senses in order to make a more realistic description of the sexual act between Pygmalion and the statue.

Another characteristic that differentiates Marston's poem from its predecessor has to do with the different narrative voices we can find in the story. While Ovid uses just an omniscient narrator throughout the entire poem, Marston intermixes two narrative methods. On the one hand, we can find an omniscient storyteller, who describes what Pygmalion sees, feels and does. Besides, we can detect throughout the story, as the following lines show, the use of first-person asides accompanied by leers and winks directed to the audience, perhaps with the intention of mocking the actions and emotions described in the course of the story. This poetic persona is responsible for the satiric tone:

> I oft have smiled to see the foolery
>
> Of some sweet youths, who seriously protest
>
> That Love respects not actual luxury
>
> But only joys to dally, sport, and jest. (Braden, *MPI*: 108-111)

Notwithstanding Marston's frequent use of the first-person asides, as Enterline asserts, sometimes he "evokes and quickly evades the Ovidian tradition's trademark critique of speaking subjectivity as a state of linguistic crisis, of constitutive alienation from within the voice itself" (144). In other words, although Marston imitates Pygmalion's view on some occasions implying that he as narrator shares Pygmalion's attitudes and opinions, in others Marston makes clear the difference between the character and the narrator's perspective. For instance, when Marston refers to those "peevish papists" who are slavishly devoted to a "dumb idol" (Braden, *MPI*: 79–84), apart from the fact he is criticising Catholics for worshipping images of saints, he is distancing himself from Pygmalion's view by mocking the character's love for an inanimate statue.

Unlike Ovid's objective narrator, by means of the first-person asides Marston builds a strong link between audience and narrator and between poet and reader, thus creating a greater level of intimacy with the reader and a greater involvement on the reader's part. This can be seen, as commented above, in the conclusion of the poem, when Marston asks the reader to complete the story by using his own imagination. We are using the possessive "his", since we assume that Marston is clearly constructing a male readership. Besides the fact that at that time the majority of the readers of this kind of literature were male, and the direct addressee of this poem were presumably the members of the Inns of Court, Marston is invoking an idea of sexual enjoyment from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, as the final lines show: "Let him conceit but what he himself would do" (199); "Ye gaping ears that swallow up my lines" (224).

Although Marston imitates Ovidian rhetoric in many ways, unlike his Latin model, he avoids the question of the female voice. Despite the fact that he refers to his mistress in the preface of the book, during the poem he never addresses his mistress directly but refers to "ladies" as a group. Nor does he follow Petrarch's elliptical definition of two voices. As Enterline says, "the rhetorical economy of Marston's poem [...] responds to the challenge of its libidinal economy by aggressively reducing the resistant female voices of the Ovidian tradition to silence" (150). That is to say, Pygmalion excludes the female speaking subject from the poem by portraying the female character like a stone: mute and inanimate. Therefore, as we can appreciate, Marston's version of the poem becomes more masculinist than Ovid's.

All in all, the most striking difference between Marston's *Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* and his Latin predecessor, as Horne says, is that this Elizabethan epyllion consists of a "number of ironic levels built up over a substratum of stock scenes and tags from Ovidian epyllia and Petrarchan love sonnets" (1). Therefore, despite their similarities, Marston's poem can be considered in many ways a

counter-Ovidian work: while Marston's intentions were mainly ironic, Ovidian tales were read primarily as moral lessons.

4.5. *Attitudes to the Female Sex*

Despite the fact that Marston's poem has been considered by many critics a satiric work which mocks both Petrarchan and Platonic ideals, sometimes we can find many parallelisms among them that lead us to doubt the very essence and intention of Marston's mock-epyllion. Marston insists on identifying his poem with the Petrarchan poetic conventions. For instance, as Hernández Santano asserts, the poet envies Pygmalion's freedom to enjoy his mistress's virtues and the Petrarchan manipulation of the lady's body. "O that my mistress were an image too / That I might blameless her perfections view" (Braden, *MPI*: 65–66)

This set of descriptions of Pygmalion's reactions to the parts of the statue's body coincides with the manner of Petrarch's, by which he depicts women as a composite of details, that is to say, he describes his beloved part by part, since for Petrarch the female body seems less than a composite of some of its parts. As feminist analyses have made clear, this kind of bodily disintegration was common both in the Ovidian context as in Petrarchan texts, and was subsequently adopted by later Renaissance poets (Vickers 267–269).

The different descriptions we can appreciate throughout the poem also match with the canons of beauty of the Petrarchan lady. Thus, the statue becomes the perfect prototype of an Elizabethan woman both physically and psychologically, since, as Hernández Santano says, "she utters no words, her existence is framed by men and according to men's needs ... and the hardness of her ivory heart alludes to the Petrarchan mistresses' cruelty" (259).

If the female statue represents the conventional Petrarchan beloved, then Pygmalion himself symbolises the love poet, because, and despite his attempts to woo and seduce his beloved, Pygmalion suffers from unrequited love, like the

conventional Petrarchan lover. But in this case Pygmalion's misfortunes are due to the inability of volition of the object of love, that is to say, Pygmalion's unrequited love is not due to his beloved's rejection: since as it is an ivory statue, it does not have the ability to reject or accept Pygmalion's charms.

Notwithstanding, although for 16th century lyric poets Pygmalion was regarded as another example of a Petrarchan thwarted wooer, most contemporary critics assert that Marston intends to drift apart from Petrarchan conventions by using ironies, exaggerations and mockeries which appear in his asides. For instance, according to Horne,

> Marston uses ironic phrases to point out the essential absurdity of
> his use of the Petrarchan tradition of the 'relentless' love object
> and ardent wooer, the absurdity that Pygmalion's Idol is in fact
> precisely that, an Idol. (19)

The absurdity to which Horne refers to is emphasised in expressions such as: "And thus admiring, was enamorèd/ Of that faire image himself portrayèd" (Braden, *MPI*: 17-18); or, "She with her silence, seems to grant his suit" (Braden, *MPI*: 79).

In addition, another feature that differentiates Marston's version of Pygmalion from the rest of epyllia is the poem's pursuit of sexual satisfaction against the Petrarchan idealisation of unfulfilled desires, and against the Platonic idea that true love is just accomplished by regarding and beholding the beloved's image. As Gross declares, "Marston rejects the aesthetic idealism of the Neo-Platonists as well as the polite fictions of courtly love" (4). For this reason, he made clear his sexual intentions from the very beginning when he wrote the dedication "To his Mistress". Thus, the need to grant sexual favours becomes the real aim while writing his lascivious verses, since he begs the statue to pity him and not to force him to envy Pygmalion.

Therefore, Pygmalion is one of the few protagonists of Elizabethan epyllia who succeeds in obtaining his sexual desire. In fact, consummation ensues right after metamorphosis: lovemaking is the first thing they do when artist and statue meet for the first time in their human shapes. This fact opposes the Petrarchan notion that love will make you suffer no matter whether you control your passion or not. This notion about the lovers' suffering is shown in other Elizabethan poems such as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, when the protagonists have a fatal destiny after consummating their love, and in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, when Adonis rejects Venus's love and ends up dead.

Another subject of criticism in the epyllion is the Petrarchan poet's narcissistic love for the images he himself creates. Marston criticises not only the fact that Petrarchan poets love their images more than their mistresses but, as Enterline says, the fact that "these poets love more what they see of themselves in those images" (129). In fact, the title Marston has given to his epyllion still has some ambiguity in it. Perhaps the poet tries to make the reader think about the real sense of the poem: that is to say, whether the poem concerns "the image that belongs to Pygmalion" (just like the owner of a female statue) or "the image that reflects Pygmalion" (the statue which represents Pygmalion himself)

One of the most controversial issues in Marston's poem is its attitude to the female sex. A general misogyny can be appreciated throughout the text when it emphasises ideas related to "men's perfection" and "women's flaws". Nevertheless, there is no real evidence about Marston's misogynist feelings since we do not know for sure whether Pygmalion is just portrayed as a misogynist character to satirise the idea about men's superiority, or whether Marston shares his character's point of view. As Enterline comments: "We don't know whether Marston's opinion about 'men's perfection' may differ considerably from that of his deluded character' (137). Hence, we are going to analyse this aspect of the poem in order to see whether Marston's misogynist notions are part of the satire or not.

Firstly, the fact that Marston has chosen Ovid's story in Book X of *The Metamorphoses* makes us think that it is not by chance, since Pygmalion's, like many of the tales in Orpheus's song, has to do (in a more indirect way) with female sexual corruption. After being disgusted with the sexual degradation of the Propoetides for being turned into prostitutes by Venus, Pygmalion rails against women's imperfections and begins to fear real love. In this way, he shunned any contact with women and devoted himself to the world of art. Finally, he carves an ivory figure of the ideal woman, adapted to men's needs and desires; "so fair an image of a woman's feature / That never yet proudest mortality / Could show so rare and beauteous a creature" (8–10). A beauty proper of a goddess, but made by the hands of a prodigious male artist. Here, the function of the beauty of Pygmalion's statue, as Hernández Santano argues, is "that of reasserting the worth of her creator's art" (259). Therefore, this fact reinforces the narcissist male attitude we have commented before by portraying men as self-sufficient human beings who are able to satisfy their own desires regardless of women's consent.

Consequently, the poetic persona, in Petrarchan fashion, shows no real love for his mistress, but, as Enterline says, "a fascination with the 'Laurel' or poetic 'image' replacing her is what 'moves' her inventor" (129). Hence, besides sexual purposes, according to this type of poems, women's function is also poetic, since they are used both as a poetic image to whom the writer can direct his speech, as well as a narcissistic representation of himself.

Notwithstanding, Marston makes clear that his vision of the "perfect lady" coincides with that portrayed in the poem. Even when Pygmalion prays for his idol to be able to "equalize affection", Marston wishes just the opposite for his mistress. "O that my Mistress were an Image too / That I might blameless her perfections view" (65-66). As Enterline says, he prefers his mistress to be wordless so that he may take his pleasure. Then, Marston talks about this wish for a woman's petrification in a joking aside that deals with the masculinist cliché that women talk too much. (143) Besides this mockery about "women's quackery", Marston also

mocks, as Hernández Santano says, "the ladies 'affected shame'" (265). Pygmalion is delighted that his beloved puts no restrictions when he wants to contemplate her private parts like the rest of ladies usually do. "He wondered that she blushed not when his eye/ Saluted those same parts of secrecy" (61-62). Therefore, Marston is highlighting another "advantage" of having an inanimate lover rather than a real one.

All in all, this analysis of the poem has shown that Marston has given priority to the male voice and the male eye, in opposition to a senseless female muteness, because it is a poem written from a man's point of view and addressed to a male audience. Marston's idealization of a man's perfect beloved shows attributes such as muteness and submission. For this reason, Pygmalion's lover is always an absent presence, as if she could not break free of the stone to which she is confined, since even when she becomes a real woman she remains speechless. This fact can also be appreciated at the end of the poem when the narrator, instead of reporting the reaction of the animated woman, asks the audience (presumably the members of the Inns of Court) to imagine her side of the metamorphosis. "Let him conceit but what he himself would do" (199); "Ye gaping ears that swallow up my lines" (224). These lines reaffirm again the ability of men as creators and the simple function of women as poetic images.

4.6. *Pornography and Morality*

Sexual desire is an issue to which Marston has given a lot of prominence in his work. As we can appreciate, throughout the poem the author is dealing with topics such as the persistence and perseverance of the protagonist to get his beloved's favours and the pursuit of the consummation as one of his final purposes. As Finkelpearl says, "the poet asserts that the consummation to which Pygmalion proceeds is the normal and proper sequel which anyone in his position would have pursued" (342). Therefore, for Marston, the fact of demanding sex is a common

action in everyday life and the achievement of the sexual act is a fundamental goal that everyone seeks. "And now methinks some wanton itching ear / With lustful thoughts and ill attention / Lists to my Muse, expecting for to hear/ The amorous description of that action / Which Venus seek, and ever doth require/ When fitness grants a place to please desire" (Braden, *MPI*: 191–198)

Nevertheless, Pygmalion has not always thought that way: he has undergone an attitudinal change with respect to the way of regarding the importance of lovemaking. After his withdrawal into the world of art, he learnt that nothing can be as satisfying as the gratifications of the senses, and for this reason he decided to abandon his work as sculptor and to devote himself to the pursuit of his beloved so that his senses would be pleased. Notwithstanding, once Venus has granted Pygmalion by turning the female statue into a real woman, the narrator shows limitations of decorum when reporting the meeting between the two lovers already in their human shapes. Marston makes clear the difference between what is merely "wanton" and what "obscene" (Braden, *MPI*: 226). According to him, it is acceptable to describe the events of a fetishist's encounter with an ivory statue, but not with a real woman. Therefore, once the statue undergoes its metamorphosis and becomes a corporeal figure, these encounters are no longer "fit reporting" ,since this series of descriptions would be considered pornographic.

In order to distance himself from the poem's action, at the end of the text Marston uses several sexual jokes to claim that any obscenity in the poem lies not in the author's pen but in the reader's ear. In this way, the poet is accusing the readers of obscenity to release himself from that indictment (Enterline 136):

> Who knows not what ensues? O pardon me
>
> Yee gaping ears that swallow up my lines.
>
> Expect no more. Peace idle Poesy,
>
> Be not obscene though wanton in thy rhymes.
>
> And chaster thoughts, pardon if I do trip,
>
> Or if some loose lines from my pen do slip. (Braden, *MPI*: 223–228)

As this excerpt shows, Marston uses his satirical strategies to suggest that any lewdness in the poem comes from the audience and not from its author.

Marston's way of dealing with the moral of erotic issues shows a lot of inconsistencies. On the one hand, in the majority of his satires and plays he damns lust, "the strongest argument that speaks against the soules eternity", as Gross says (4), and he condemns sexual over-indulgence as a repugnant act. On the other hand, he rejects the polite fictions of courtly love, as well as the Platonic conception of love without sex. Instead of that, the narrator considers that "love demands more than viewing, touching, kissing" (Braden, *MPI*: 117). For this reason, he addresses women to tell them that men would not be completely satisfied nor able to equalise affection until they fulfil all their sexual wishes: "And therefore, ladies, think that they ne'er love you/ Who do not unto more than kissing move you." (Braden, *MPI*: 119–20)

Behind all this pornographic background, Marston still insists on the ironic sense of his poem, as Keach says,

> *Pigmalions Image* is neither a parody of an epyllion nor an indulgent sop to lecherous readers. It is a highly self-conscious and unevenly written exercise in Ovidian narrative poetry in which Marston intensifies both the satirical and the explicitly erotic aspects of the epyllion and avoids any serious interest in erotic pathos and any attempt at narrative and thematic complexity through digression or allusion (160)

In short, Marston's puzzling and contradictory performance makes *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* a more complex and ambiguous epyllion that it might seem at first sight. What we can most certainly know are his interests in exploring Ovidian stories of artificial erotic fulfilment that deal with topics such as oppressed sexuality in order to relate them with his satirical conceptions.

5. CONCLUSION: A SATIRIC POEM?

Marston's poem is then an overtly erotic narrative that, at least in the author's declared intentions, turns its own eroticism against itself. Besides, the fact that the poem was printed beside Marston's own satiric verse influences any interpretation of its content and intentions, which are also clearly explained by Marston in the paratexts of the poem. Whether Marston meant what he expresses or whether he tried to avoid criticism and defend his writing against charges of immorality are questions that still remain open. Nevertheless, although Marston makes explicit his will to lash out the immorality of the erotic poetry common in that period, this does not detract his poem from having a clearly erotic and pornographic approach. The author may want to be pornographic simply to show a comic and trivial vision of the poem's sexuality, or he may want to adopt intentionally a moralistic perspective while he displays in the poem a variety of views about sexuality in a less deliberate way. Most critics agree that Marston's intentions are satiric, although they do not reach an agreement about the real object of his satire. On the one hand, the author may be satiric against Petrarchan conventions when he defends erotic fulfilment in poetry in contraposition with more Platonic notions of love, but in some other cases he supports moralistic views when he mocks the eroticism and sexuality of the period. For this reason, it is difficult to assert which kind of satire prevails over the other, since most of the time the poem drifts between the two visions. Notwithstanding, in both cases Marston's masculinist attitudes and misogynist or scornful views of women emerge.

All in all, Marston's way of fiddling with the ambiguous parameters between epyllion and satire in the late sixteenth century is what has made of this poem such a controversial piece. This contradictory and baffling way of writing seems to cause the author's entrapment in his own pornographic enjoyment, which in turn hampers any conclusive interpretation

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