

Poems about Pygmalion and Galatea

Instructions:

The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea has been interpreted by authors in many genres; Shaw's play *Pygmalion* is one of many such interpretations. Read the five twentieth-century poems below that interpret the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Be prepared to actively participate in a class discussion comparing these various interpretations of the myth.

from "The New Pygmalion or the Statue's Choice"

O maiden, in mine image made!
O grace that shouldst endure!
While temples fall, and empires fade,
Immaculately pure:
Exchange this endless life of art
For beauty that must die,
And blossom with a beating heart
Into mortality!
Change, golden tresses of her hair,
To gold that turns to gray;
Change, silent lips, forever fair,
To lips that have their day!
Oh, perfect arms, grow soft with life,
Wax warm, ere cold ye wane;
Wake, woman's heart, from peace to strife,
To love, to joy, to pain!

Andrew Lang (1911)

Pygmalion

"MISTRESS of gods and men! I have been thine
From boy to man, and many a myrtle rod
Have I made grow upon thy sacred sod,
Nor ever have I pass'd thy white shafts nine
Without some votive offering for the shrine,
Carv'd beryl or chas'd bloodstone;—aid me now,
And I will live to fashion for thy brow
Heart-breaking priceless things: oh, make her mine."

Venus inclin'd her ear, and through the Stone
Forthwith slid warmth like spring through sapling-stems,
And lo, the eyelid stirr'd, beneath had grown
The tremulous light of life, and all the hems
Of her zon'd peplos shook. Upon his breast
She sank, by two dread gifts at once oppress'd.

William Bell Scott (1923)

Pygmalion

Pygmalion thought that women were a great abomination.
What little charm they had, he thought, was always on vacation.
He swore he'd never say "I do" before the bridal altar
And said he'd rather hammer stones than wear a husband's halter.

He took a block of ivory and many months he sculpted,
And what he had when he got done impressed him so he gulped.
For Pyg had carved a woman, an extremely lovely creature,
And doggone realistic, every hillock, curve, and feature.

The figure was his masterpiece. He kissed it and caressed it
And gave it pearls and emeralds, but first of course, he dressed it.
He spoke of her as "Mrs." and he played the good provider.
He tucked her into bed at night and hopped right in beside her.

The folks at Venus' Festival heard young Pygmalion urgin'
The Goddess to create a woman like his ivory virgin.
He rated high with Venus, so she simply up and took
Her wand and mumbled something, and said, "Go right home and look.

But why go any further? I would be undignified,
For Venus blessed the nuptials, and the family multiplied.
Now this is pretty fiction, but don't let your Mrs. catch you
In the parlor after midnight making sheep's-eyes at a statue.

Albert G. Miller (1945)

Galatea Again

Let me be marble, marble once again:
Go from me slowly, like an ebbing pain,
Great mortal feuds of moving flesh and blood:
This mouth so bruised, serene again,--and set
In its old passive changelessness, the rude
Wild crying face, the frantic eyes--forget
The little human shuddering interlude.

And if you follow and confront me there,
O Sons of Men, though you cry out and groan
And plead with me to take you for my own
And clutch my dress as a child, I shall not care,

But only turn on you a marble stare
And stun you with the quiet gaze of stone.

Genevieve Taggard (1929)

Galatea Before the Mirror

my perfection isn't mine
you invented it

I am only the mirror
in which you preen yourself
and for that very reason
I despise you.

Claribel Alegria (1993)