Writing Assignment #3

In Carol Ann Duffy’s poem “Pygmalion’s Bride”, Duffy is able to flip the script on Ovid’s classic “Pygmalion”, and tell the story from the sculpture’s point of view. By doing this, the poem promotes the view that women are more than objects: Pygmalion’s ivory bride is given autonomy and is empowered to make her own decisions, rather than simply submitting to her male creator.

In Ovid’s “Pygmalion”, the ivory statue is a passive character, created by a man, as Pygmalion’s “ideal” woman. “he sculpted with marvelous skill a figure in ivory, giving it a beauty no woman could be born with, and he fell in love with what he had made.” (Ovid, Bk 10, lines 269-72). The sculpture has no choice in whether or not to be with him, she is given to him, as an object. “Our Paphian hero poured out thanksgiving to the goddess Venus, and pressed his lips onto real lips at last.” (Ovid, Bk 10, lines 323-25) Venus makes the sculpture real, and by doing so binds them to be married. The thoughts of the bride of given no thought, it goes without saying that she will submit to Pygmalion’s wishes. By contrast, in Duffy’s poem, the bride is given her own thoughts and emotions, and she is very much against being paired with Pygmalion. “I thought He will not touch me...” (Duffy, Line 2). The bride makes up her mind to rid herself of Pygmalion, and tries a variety of tactics to drive him away. Eventually, by faking real emotion, she succeeds in driving him away for good. “…all an act. And haven’t seen him since. Simple as that.” (Duffy, lines 49-51). “Pygmalion’s Bride” explores the idea that men should not get whatever they want without the consent of women concerning matters of the heart. Ovid gives the female character no say in the matter: Pygmalion loves his bride, therefore he shall have her, whereas Duffy provides the counterpunch: The bride is not an object, and if she does not wish to be with Pygmalion, he will not have her.