“Pygmalion’s Bride” Essay

“The heart wants what it wants.” This quote by author, Emily Dickinson, demonstrates the facet of love. Some dream of falling in love, or being loved while others unexpectedly gets love thrown at them. The story of Pygmalion tells the tale of unexpected love. A man falls hopelessly in love with an ivory statue of his creation but longs for her to love him back. Ovid emphasizes forbidden love often in his, *Metamorphoses*, but this tale pertains a certain twist. Instead of negative divine intervention, the goddess Venus shows an act of compassion for the boy, Pygmalion.

Lines 313-315 of Ovid’s tales describe the act Venus granted Pygmalion, “The ivory was growing soft to the touch, and as it lost its stiff hardness it yielded to his fingers.” Just as Pygmalion had once wished, his ivory statue came to life. While this tale essentially brings a happy end for Pygmalion, Carol Ann Duffy took a new stance on this story.

Duffy chose to write a poem from the perspective of the ivory statue and her feelings towards Pygmalion. The statue talk about the gifts Pygmalion always presents to her and his sexual words. The love from the statue does not seem as reciprocal as in Ovid’s tale. “He spoke blunt endearment, what he’d do and how. His words were terrible.” This passage from Duffy’s poem changes the perspective of the tale. In Ovid’s story, the question of the statue’s desire for Pygmalion is never questioned, just assumed is mutual.

The twist in Duffy’s poem is the not so happy ever after. At the end of the poem, the statue does turn into a real life woman and pursues Pygmalion but after she is left alone.

The man, who adored her, abandoned her after fulfilling his desire. Duffy’s poem can be seen as a response to Ovid’s original tale but with a revision containing a realistic ending. Happily ever after is not guaranteed, especially when the gods are always watching.