

The Reception of Ancient Cyprus in Western Culture

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Balance and Excess in Ovid's Pygmalion Story

Abstract: The chapter takes its starting point from the aspect of beauty in the Pygmalion story. It argues that symmetry and balance play a key role, for example in the structure of the episode or in the change of focalization between Orpheus and Pygmalion. Since balance is also, at least in part, a fundamentally physical and bodily experience, it seems to be of particular importance in the creation of a living statue. In a manner typical of Ovid, the destabilizing and the suspending of balance, including the potential even to turn into forms of excess, are also evoked at the same time.

1 Introduction

This paper takes its starting point from aspects of aesthetics in Ovid's Pygmalion story (*Met.* 10.243–297), set on Cyprus. It argues that aspects of balance play a key role, for example in the symmetrical structure of the episode or in the distribution of focalization between the figures Orpheus and Pygmalion. Since balance is also, at least in part, a fundamentally physical and bodily experience, it seems of immediate relevance to the description of a statue, whose bringing to life is narrated. Aesthetics is used here in the meaning of 'taste or sense of beauty', following the tradition of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*. Relating to a (literary) text, this use of the term aesthetics presupposes that the description of an aesthetic object itself works with structures that make the properties of the described object aesthetically effective. Applied to Ovid's story, it will be demonstrated that the beauty of the statue as Pygmalion perceives it finds a reflection in the symmetrically structured text itself.¹ In a manner typical of

¹ "Theorie der schönen sinnlichen Wahrnehmung" (Baumgarten 2007, § 14 of *Aesthetica*). See also Wolf 2013, 5: "Die Semantik eines literarischen Werkes ist daher nicht abtrennbar von der formalen Selbstrepräsentation des Werkes, seine Bedeutsamkeit entfaltet sich erst im Zusammenspiel mit der ästhetischen Wahrnehmung der sinnlichen Formkonstituenten des Werkes, der Reflexion auf die Wahrnehmung der dichterischen Wahrnehmung von Welt". For the role of the reader in the constitution of meaning between the text and the reader see Iser 1979, who speaks of "Appellstrukturen".

Ovid, the destabilizing and the suspending inscribed in the concept of balance are also evoked at the same time.

That balance is of relevance not only in the story of Pygmalion, but also in the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, has already been emphasized in Ovidian scholarship. A recent example is offered by Alison Sharrock's observation: "The overall effect is that all the elements of a proper epic poem can be identified within the *Metamorphoses*, but that the balance of parts [...] constantly threatens to undermine the reader's perception of the epic whole".² The occurrence of balance phenomena in the Pygmalion episode hardly comes as a surprise. Pygmalion's perception of the statue is centrally concerned with an aesthetics of beauty (*Met.* 10.266 *formosa videtur*). And the close association of beauty and balance in ancient discourses on beauty is pointed out, among others, by David Konstan: "Beauty is achieved by the balance among parts, in language as in the visual arts and the human form or even the entire cosmos, which contribute collectively to the integrity of the whole".³ Ovid's story of Pygmalion's love affair with the statue has provoked a wealth of interpretations. This is in part due to its central position within the Orpheus song in the tenth book — especially remarkable because of its striking deviation from Orpheus' announced theme to sing of *pueros dilectos superis* and *puellas libidine meruisse poenas* (*Met.* 10.152b–154) — but also in its inherent metapoetic potential. It has often been noted that Ovid's version of the story can be read as offering a reflection of the poet's own writing process. Along this line of interpretation, Philip Hardie has characterized the episode as "an *aition* of illusionist art".⁴ This metapoetic understanding of the artist Pygmalion can, at the same time, also be extended to other artist figures of the *Metamorphoses* like Orpheus, Arachne, or Daedalus.⁵ There are several other themes that are relevant to our understanding of the story and that are related to the theme of balance in one way or another, such as

² Sharrock 2019, 275.

³ Konstan 2014, 159; see also 1: "When ascribed to a work of art, the term (i.e. *beauty*) may signify balance or proportion, or some other quality that we think of as aesthetic".

⁴ Hardie 2002, 190; also Segal 1972, 491: "Ovid provides a metaphorical reflection of the creative and restorative power of his own art"; Solodow 1988, 219: "The story of Pygmalion is crucial to the *Metamorphoses*, for here by a double argument the poet demonstrates most vividly the power of the artist and his art"; Segal 1998, 17.

⁵ Sharrock 1991, 39: "Many commentators on the *Metamorphoses* have noted the foregrounding of the 'artist as hero'. Since [...] a reference to a practitioner in one artistic medium can reflect on any other type of artist, all artists in the *Metamorphoses* reflect to some extent on the one artist — the poet himself. Pygmalion is clearly a fertile ground for this kind of study". See also Kailbach-Mehl 2020 on 'Reflexionsfiguren' in the Augustan age.

the intratextual position of the story within the framework of the tenth and the neighbouring books, the gendered gaze of Pygmalion and the (limited) agency of the female statue that has “no autonomy or identity beyond that of Pygmalion” (Hershkowitz), the relation to material sculptures in the fine arts, the problem of realism and Pygmalion as “viewer-lover” (Elsner), the shifting of focalization, and aspects of beauty with regard both to the content of the story and to the presentation of the story.⁶

In the following, these aspects will be addressed and brought into connection with the concept of balance.

2 The concept of balance in cultural studies

Recent research on the concept of balance has revealed that its historical and contemporary semantics can be found almost ubiquitously in all areas of life and across cultures.⁷ They can be traced, for example, in the ancient Egyptian concept of equilibrium and harmony (*ma'at*), in ancient Greek philosophical reflections such as those by Aristotle on the golden mean (μεσότης / *mesotes*), in economic and political theories including ideas such as *balance of power* and *checks and balances*, in recent debates on endangered balances in our global ecosystems, or in sociological considerations on human society.⁸ For the latter, Norbert Elias's study *Die höfische Gesellschaft* can be taken as an example. In it Elias predicts that future societies will tend to move away from binary oppositions such as 'freedom' and 'determination' and instead turn more to questions

⁶ Quotations from Hershkowitz 1999, 189 and Elsner 1991, 155. See also Fantham 2004, 59: “Women readers may feel less enthusiasm for this story of the perfect wife and its implied guarantee that she will never show discontent or independence”. A survey on recent studies on the Pygmalion episode is provided by Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 68–69 and Kailbach-Mehl 2020, 165–166; see also Liveley 1999, Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 68–75, Feldherr 2010, 257–276. For intratextual links to more distant parts of the *Metamorphoses* like the Narcissus story in the fourth book see Sharrock 1991, 36 and Hardie 2002, 189.

⁷ For an even broader understanding of balance see Arnheim 1974, 36: “Going a step further, we realize that man strives for equilibrium in all phases of his physical and mental existence, and that this same tendency can be observed not only in all organic life, but also in physical systems”; cf. Johnson 1987, 74–100 and Kaye 2014, 1–19.

⁸ An overview is presented by Goebel and Zumbusch 2020b. *Ma'at*: Assmann 2006, 163; balance in Aristotle: Grund 2020, in politics and economics: Strohmeier 2007, Kaufman et al. 2007, Tieben 2012.

of balance.⁹ On the whole, balance, regardless of the respective theoretical fields, remains a concept that is difficult to define.¹⁰ Of particular importance for the phenomenon seems to be the bodily experience, as it can be felt, for example, in the case of vertigo, which may be partly responsible for balance being rather difficult to specify. This nexus between balance and body is pointed out in Mark Johnson's study *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (1987):

It is crucially important to see that balancing is an *activity we learn with our bodies* and not by grasping a set of rules or concepts. First and foremost, balancing is something we *do*. The baby stands, wobbles, and drops to the floor. It tries again, and again, and again, until a new world opens up — the world of the balanced erect posture [...] Balancing is a pre-conceptual bodily activity that cannot be described propositionally by rules.¹¹

Similarly, Joel Kaye, in his 2014 study *History of Balance 1250–1375*, stresses the role of the body:

But balance, I want to suggest, is different. Even in our common understanding today, balance is tied to a generalized and mostly unconscious sense — our physical awareness of our bodies and selves within our environment(s). It finds expression as an unworded feeling for how objects and spaces are or ought to be arranged; as an apprehension of how things properly fit together and work together in the world.¹²

This physiological sense of balance forms together with the physical and the hydraulic dimensions of balance — the (human) inner ear, the beam balance (*bilancia*), and the flow equilibrium — the fundamental sources for our metaphorical speaking of balance in ethical, religious, philosophical, aesthetic, medical, economic, political, and ecological contexts.¹³ Finally, a further definition

⁹ Elias 1969, 220.

¹⁰ Kaye 2014, 2, Kister 2020, 15; Grüny and Nanni 2014, 9: “[ein Begriff], der es bis heute nicht zu terminologischer Schärfe gebracht hat und der [...] eher allgemein bestimmt wird”.

¹¹ Johnson 1987, 74; Schönhammer 2009b, 11.

¹² Kaye 2014, 2. See also Goebel and Zumbusch 2020b, 15–16 and Kister 2020, 15, who describes balance, in the context of Thomas Mann's writings, as a “präreflexives, körperliches und daher schwer verbalisierbares Gefühl”.

¹³ Johnson 1987, 87: “the metaphorical projections move from the bodily sense (with its emergent schema) to the mental, epistemic, or logical domains. On this hypothesis, we should be able to see how it is that our experience of bodily balance, and of the perception of balance, is connected to our understanding of balanced personalities, balanced views, balanced systems, balanced equations, the balance of power, the balance of justice, and so on”. See also Goebel and Zumbusch 2020b, 11, with reference to Schönhammer 2009b, 11; Mast and Grabherr 2009. In contrast, Allesch 2009, 244 emphasizes the autonomy of speaking about balance in the

Kaye makes is of importance. In this, he differentiates between a passive and an active use of balance, depending on whether the balance has already been achieved or is in the process of being achieved (“the model of equality” versus “the model of equalization”).¹⁴

3 Balance and symmetry in the Pygmalion story

In aesthetics, one fundamental aspect of balance lies in symmetry. Symmetry in this sense represents an “aesthetic analogy” to philosophical *mesotes*- or medical *eukrasia*-concepts.¹⁵ We find such a relationship between balance and symmetry, for example, in the field of music and sculpture theory, the latter especially with reference to the representation of the human body in the fine arts:

Just as the Pythagoreans sought to express the perfect harmonies in music by ratios of numbers, so Polycletus described the perfect human body by ratios of measures. Moreover, his theory of symmetry also transferred the doctrine of the balance of opposites, important in Greek medicine, to the visual arts. Just as the Pythagorean Alcmaion and, following him, the Hippocratic School defined the state of health as a balance of elementary physical forces, so the perfect human sculpture, exemplified in his Doryphoros, should embody a balance of rest and movement, tension and relaxation, elevation and depression, etc., which was later subsumed under the term *contrapposto*. Both together, the perfect measure-number ratios of the body and the proper measure between opposites, formed the first aesthetic theory of symmetry.¹⁶

Also in the context of symmetry, Johnson emphasizes the importance of a physical experience of balance:

As we saw earlier, balance involves symmetry. We experience symmetry not only in our perception of symmetrical objects but also in our experience of bodily balance. Symmetry in our perception is understood relative to an axis, such that we can rotate what is on one side of the axis over onto the other side with a good fit. In an object that we perceive as

realm of aesthetics: “Ein Gebäude, das aus dem Gleichgewicht geraten ist, löst keinen Schwindel aus, sondern allenfalls ein ästhetisches Missbehagen”, and “die Redeweise vom Verlust der Balance gibt also eher ein rationales Urteil als eine tatsächliche Wahrnehmung wieder”.

¹⁴ Kaye 2014, 4. See also Tieben 2012, 2: “Traditionally, equilibrium is seen as a balance of forces, but it can also be understood as a state of rest or as a tendency towards such a state”.

¹⁵ Goebel and Zumbusch 2020b, 10.

¹⁶ Schummer 2006, 60–61, transl. by Robert Kirstein. See also Seyler 2009 and Konstan 2014, 102: “It is clear that for Hermogenes beauty is closely connected with symmetry and balance, features that apply naturally to visible objects”; cf. Buchheim 2010, Jedan 2010.

symmetrical, all the sizes, shapes, locations, and relations on, say, the left side, map point-for-point onto those on the right side. With respect to our experience of bodily balance, we also experience a symmetry of weight and forces relative to our own vertical axis.¹⁷

The connection between balance, symmetry, beauty, and bodily experience, on the one hand, and the theme of the ‘living’ statue in Ovid’s *Pygmalion*, on the other, provokes the question whether general balance theories can contribute to our understanding of the Ovidian text. The relevance of balance for the interpretation of the passage is already apparent against the background of its macrostructural disposition. In a 1962 study, Douglas Bauer investigates the extent to which symmetry as a composition principle is of significance for this part of the *Metamorphoses*. Looking at “poetic imagery and symmetry as well as mathematical proportion” Bauer comes to the conclusion that both the tenth book as a whole and the Pygmalion story in particular follow significantly symmetrical design principles.¹⁸ In particular, Bauer attempts to demonstrate that the Pygmalion story stands in the logical centre of the book, surrounded by three frames. The first outer frame consists of Orpheus and Venus as the main male and female representatives of love. The second frame comprises the three stories about the *pueri dilecti superis* — Cyparissus, Ganymede, and Hyacinthus — in the first half and the Atalanta story in the second half of the book. The third inner frame that immediately surrounds the Pygmalion story in the middle consists of the narratives about the prostitution of the Propoetides and about the incest of Myrrha.¹⁹

Complementing this analysis of the macrostructure of the tenth book, Bauer observes a two-part construction scheme *within* the Pygmalion episode itself.²⁰ The episode as a whole can be summarized and analyzed as consisting of six subordinated parts: beginning of story — creation of the statue — events following the creation of the statue — gaze of the statue by Pygmalion / the reader — prayer to Venus — end of story. What Bauer’s analysis is able to uncover is the remarkable fact that the goddess Venus and her cult come to stand exactly in the middle of this particular story (line 270) and thus in the intellectual centre of the entire highly semanticized tenth book, additionally highlighted by their repetition at the end of the story (line 297):

17 Johnson 1987, 96.

18 Bauer 1962, 1.

19 Structural schemes are offered by Bauer 1962, 12 and Wheeler 1999, 209.

20 Bauer 1962, 12–13.

- 243 *Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis / viderat ...*
27 lines in between
- 270 *... Festa dies Veneris tota celeberrima Cypro / venerat ...*
27 lines in between
- 297 *... illa Paphon genuit, de qua tenet insula nomen.*²¹

Bauer's approach derives from the same context as other studies of the period that deal with principles of composition in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, among them the analyses of Walter Ludwig and Brooks Otis.²² Otis, in particular, makes a large-scale attempt to analyze the *Metamorphoses* according to structural principles such as symmetry, contrast, and balance. Above all, he sees the Pygmalion story in a balanced correspondence with the preceding Iphis story (*Met.* 9.666–797) on the one hand and with the following Midas story (11.83–193) on the other, supposing a contrasting correspondence in the case of the latter.²³ As Otis states himself, however, symmetries and related principles alone do not constitute a sufficient explanatory model for understanding the textual dynamics of the *Metamorphoses*: “But there is much more than counterpoint or symmetry. Ovid's *carmen perpetuum* is also proceeding on its evolutionary way”.²⁴ Therefore, Solodow has focused in his analysis more on recurring themes to move away from the structuralist approach of his predecessors.²⁵ Nevertheless, he too identifies similar correspondences between the individual stories as Otis does, for example between the Iphis and Pygmalion story.²⁶ In his chapter on structure he comes to a ‘balanced’ assessment of structural approaches, by

21 Bernbeck 1967, 63–64 draws attention to the fact that one of Ovid's narrative techniques in the *Metamorphoses* is to mark cuts by mentioning of religious festivals: “Pygmalion ist in sein Bildwerk verliebt. Dann kommt das Venusfest (27Off.). Der Leser kann erraten: jetzt wird Venus mit Pygmalion Verbindung aufnehmen”. Tarrant 2005, 75 characterizes Pygmalion's prayer to Venus, which immediately follows, as “clearly the focal point of the story”. Hardie 2002, 190 poses the question whether, when a few lines later it is said that the ‘golden Venus’ (*Met.* 10.277 *Venus aurea*) is present at her feast, one should think of the goddess herself in epiphany or rather of a golden cult statue; cf. Jenkyns and Thorsen in this volume.

22 Ludwig 1964, Otis 1970.

23 Otis 1970, 189 and 166–230, *The Pathos of Love I*. Other examples of a symmetrical analysis include the Aeacus-Cephalus-sequence in *Met.* 8.404–868 (Otis 1970, 181).

24 Otis 1970, 171.

25 Solodow 1988, 14–15: “Structural analyses like those of Ludwig and Otis, which rely of course on abstraction, run aground on the uncapturable exuberance and variety of the poem. Several more concrete, recurring features give greater promise of indicating where the poem's unity lies and are more likely to point us towards the book's central concerns”. See already Fraenkel 1953, 97.

26 Solodow 1988, 215.

arguing that the text of the *Metamorphoses* does indeed feature various structural features, but in such a way that it cannot be reduced to *one* overarching principle: “The poem at the same time invites and repels attempts to interpret it through its structure”.²⁷ For this paper, a conclusion as to the degree to which symmetries in the structure of the text play a role in the *Metamorphoses* and whether they affect the work as a whole or only individual parts is not of essential importance. The general observation seems sufficient that symmetries, together with other principles, make part of its dynamic and multilayered structure.²⁸

If balance, symmetry, and beauty can be interrelated in a given aesthetic context, as suggested above, one can conclude that beauty is a central theme of the story. The description of the object of the statue displays a structure that makes the properties of the statue itself aesthetically effective. Beauty is then present in the Pygmalion episode both with regard to the content of the story (*the beauty of the female statue*) and the balanced and symmetrical presentation of the story (*the beauty of the text*).²⁹

4 Balance and focalization in the Pygmalion story

Above, it has been argued that the composition of the text displays a balanced symmetry, with two parts of equal length and the mention of the Paphian Venus in their middle (v. 270). Balance, however, also plays a role in another aspect of the narrative, focalization. The technique of focalization appears to be of particular interest for an analysis of the Pygmalion story because the hero combines the functions of creator and viewer in the course of the narrative. Therefore, it has already been observed that, in addition to the creation of the statue, aspects of vision and sensory perception are central to our understanding of the story.³⁰ This overlaps, at the same time, with approaches that shift the emphasis from

²⁷ Solodow 1988, 13. See also Martindale 1990, 258.

²⁸ On the artist figure Arachne in the *Metamorphoses* Feeney 1991, 193 notes that when she is changed to a spider “the celebrator of beautiful disorder is doomed to the spider’s weaving of utter symmetry”.

²⁹ For observations on symmetry in other stories of the *Metamorphoses* see e.g. Gildenhard and Zissos 1999, 166–167 (Procne story).

³⁰ Elsner 1991, 155; Liveley 1999; Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 72–73: “[...] Pygmalion takes the role of both the artist and the viewer [...]”.

the process of creation to the process of reception of art.³¹ Due to the complicated narrative with 'Ovid' as primary and Orpheus as embedded narrator, the distribution of focalization is complex. For this is then, in turn, passed on from Orpheus as narrator to 'his' character Pygmalion.³²

At the beginning of the episode, the focalization is with Orpheus, when he tells how Pygmalion creates a female statue out of ivory after deciding to live alone and without a wife, deterred by the sinful life of the Propoetides (*Met.* 10.244–245 *sine coniuge caelebs / vivebat thalamicque diu consorte carebat*). Shortly thereafter, however, Pygmalion himself becomes the focalizing figure when he is described admiring, even devouring, his work and touching it with his hands. This change in (embedded) focalization is indicated by a series of linguistic markers involving both visual and bodily perception (*miratur, haurit pectore, manus admovet*, 252–253; cf. *mira arte*, 247, and *stupet*, 287).³³ At the end of the story, Orpheus is once again the focalizing subject. It is noteworthy that the vocabulary is chosen in such a way that descriptive, 'objective' words are used for the framing focalization on Orpheus' side (the material, *ebur*, in line 248 and *simulacra*, 280); *simulacra*, especially, presupposes the distanced perspective of the narrator, who knows about the unreality, unlike Pygmalion, who is caught in the aesthetic illusion.

In contrast, when Orpheus presents Pygmalion's focalization, the statue is described as a living object with feminine and erotically charged adjectives (e.g., *nuda*, 266; *sociam*, 268) and with metaphorical, 'subjective' or 'evaluative' words (and its moving effect on the viewer, *simulati corporis ignes*, 253). A further level of complication is created by the fact that the reader is also brought into the narrative as a further instance of (hypothetical) focalization (*quam vivere credas*, 250). This technique generally proves to be typical of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as Hardie emphasizes: "The reader's view is frequently focalized and guided through the astonished gaze of spectators within the text, so inviting our presence at the visual feast of the poem".³⁴ In the case of the Pygmalion

31 Elsner 1991; Feldherr 2010; Kailbach-Mehl 2020, 165.

32 Liveley 1999, 205: "[...] the focalization of this episode is so complex [...]".

33 The description of the bodily perception is intensified when the statue comes to life: *rursus amans rursusque manu sua vota retractat. / corpus erat! salient temptatae pollice venae* (*Met.* 10.287–288). Bal 2017, 143: "Verbs like 'see' and 'hear', in short all verbs that communicate perception can function as explicit attributive signs"; de Jong 2014, 51: "When verbs of seeing and so on are lacking [...] we must look for other signs, such as evaluative words, interactional particles, moods, or deictics that reveal a character's focalization".

34 Hardie 2002, 173, with reference to Rosati 1983, who stresses the importance of modes of viewing and of the spectacular in the *Metamorphoses*. On apostrophes in the *Metamorphoses* in

story, Elsner, by analogy with the “viewer-lover”, therefore speaks pointedly of the “reader-lover”.³⁵ With the symmetrical structure of the story, the balanced distribution of the focalization Orpheus-Pygmalion-Orpheus is striking. The reader’s immersion further lends this structure a touch which complicates and undoes simple symmetries:

247–248	<i>Interea niveum mira feliciter arte / sculpsit ebur^(Or) formamque dedit</i>
250	<i>credas^(Read)</i>
252–253	<i>miratur et haurit^(Py) / pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes. / saepe manus operi temptantes admovet^(Py)</i>
⋮	
280–281	<i>ut rediit, simulacra^(Or) suae petit ille puellae / incumbensque toro dedit oscula</i>

That focalization can be a narrative device that adds balance to texts has been demonstrated by Manfred Jahn using the example of Patrick White’s novel *The Solid Mandala* (1966). The novel tells the story of two brothers, Waldo and Arthur Brown. The two are closely related to each other, and the story presents the point of view of both brothers, who have entirely different characters.

By this time, the reader [...] has long suspected that Arthur is not the idiot Waldo takes him to be, and Chapter 3, now focalized entirely through Arthur, gives us an opportunity to see what he is really like. Arthur’s mind now serves as the balancing filter through which the episodes earlier remembered by Waldo are revisited, and this produces the juxtaposition of contrary apperceptions characteristic of multiple focalization.³⁶

The foregoing thumbnail sketch of *The Solid Mandala* illustrates how strategic choices in focalization determine this novel’s structure (especially in its counterbalancing or rather

general see Wheeler 1999, 151–161. Often it remains open to some degree to what extent the second-person-conjunctive means an apostrophe to the reader and thus a real metalepsis or just indicates the presence of an “anonymous focalizer” (de Jong 2014, 69). While some see this as an illusion-producing technique (Allan et al. 2017, 36–37), others emphasize those effects that interrupt the illusion (Fondermann 2008, 91). On hypothetical focalization see further Herman 1994 and Jahn 1996.

35 Elsner 1991, 164, see also 160 on *credas*, and 166: “If Ovid’s Pygmalion as artist can be taken for a symbol of the writer, then the beholder-lover in Pygmalion may be read as a myth of the reader”, with Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 15: “Elsner’s juxtaposition of viewer and reader, which extends in much of this study to internal and external viewers, is compelling. Elsner shows that Pygmalion’s supremacy as an artist has to do with his preponderance as viewer — he is actually the only one who ever sees his statue”.

36 Jahn 2007, 104.

contrapuntal chapters), characterization (opening up several viewpoints on the characters), and its surprise outcome.³⁷

It appears not unattractive to apply Jahn's observations on the interrelation between focalization and balance based on the macrostructure of *The Solid Mandala* to microstructures like Ovid's Pygmalion episode. While White's novel is about the antagonistic character of the two brothers, in Ovid the emphasis is on the difference in distance and closeness to the object of the statue between Orpheus and Pygmalion. The reader is then put in the role of observing and evaluating this balance of viewpoints between Orpheus and Pygmalion.

An analysis of focalization also exposes the masculine, gendered gaze in which the story is narrated. Liveley points to the associated one-sided and in some ways extreme potential of the Pygmalion story that leaves the woman's side without agency: "However, while readers of the *Metamorphoses* [...] might consider the sympathies and prejudices of the author to be focalized through the figures of Orpheus and Pygmalion, the resisting reader might seek an alternative perspective. Thus, the misogynist perspective displayed by both Orpheus and Pygmalion [...] may be regarded as an extreme point of view that the external narrator invites his readers to resist".³⁸

5 Endangered balance: Excess

The observations on the masculine predominance and the corresponding lack of agency on the side of the female statue already allow a hint at the destabilizing element that is inscribed in the concept of balance. From the beginning endangerment, loss and utopian recovery are essential parts of our thinking and speaking about balance.³⁹ Moreover, concepts of balance are regularly formulated in the face of provocations by forms of imbalance or even excess. The same seems to apply to reflections on beauty that entail its own questioning: "We see here the germ of Roger Scruton's affirmation that 'beauty is not just an

³⁷ Jahn 2007, 105.

³⁸ Liveley 1999, 202; Segal 1998, 17–18; Sharrock 1991, 36. See also notes 6 above and 43 below.

³⁹ Goebel and Zumbusch 2020b, 20: "*Balance* erweist sich insgesamt als eine [...] Daseinsmetapher im Sinne Hans Blumenbergs, die im kulturellen Selbstverständigungsprozess kompensierend eintreten muss, wenn das dem Schwindel ausgesetzte Denken an seine Grenzen und das Subjekt dergestalt aus dem Gleichgewicht gerät".

invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it”.⁴⁰ That an excess of balance can also lead to a turning point that proves negative for the aesthetic sense, is pointed out by the sculptor and art theorist Axel Seyler:

It is true that our eyes are always looking for order — and symmetry is the easiest to find. But our striving for an equilibrium is condemned to inactivity by exact symmetry [...] If an artist makes symmetry visible, then it becomes bearable only by refraction or by built-in variety.⁴¹

The property of balance, to carry a sense of *imbalance*, already shows up in the analysis of the structure of the Pygmalion story. Because, next to the symmetry of two parts with the goddess Venus in its centre, shown above, an asymmetrical structural feature appears at the same time: a rather short description of the actual creation of the statue (*Met.* 10.247–249a) is followed by a much longer part of around fifty lines. In this part, the events after the creation are described with much greater detail: the reactions of Pygmalion — his immediate falling in love (*operisque sui concepit amorem*, 249b), his and the reader’s viewing of the statue, his admiration and his actions towards it —, the prayer to Venus, and the coming to life of the statue (249b–297).⁴² This imbalance on the level of the text can then be read as a reflection of the mental imbalance of Pygmalion.

This mental imbalance displays properties even of *excess* when Pygmalion desires the statue to the extent that it comes to life.⁴³ Pygmalion’s excessive

⁴⁰ Konstan 2014, 186, with reference to Scruton 2009.

⁴¹ Seyler 2009, 217, transl. by Robert Kirstein. For Ovid as a poet of excess and moderation, see Gibson 2006 and Gibson 2007.

⁴² Elsner 1991, 155 (see also 159): “Ovid in fact gives only two and a half lines to describing Pygmalion’s creation [...] The rest of the story (some fifty lines) dwells in exquisite detail on the *viewing* which sees the ivory statue as a real woman, on Pygmalion’s desire and its fulfilment”.

⁴³ Sharrock 1991, 36 compares the Narcissus and the Pygmalion stories as taking the lover to extremes. On transgressions in the Pygmalion story with regard to the boundaries of fiction see Pavel 1986, 60: “[...] when sufficient energy is channeled into mimetic acts, these may leave the fictional mode and cross the threshold of actuality. The myth of Pygmalion narrates this transformation”. Interestingly, the related Atalanta story also talks about excessive love: *dixerat [Hippomenes] ac nimios iuvenum damnarat amores* (*Met.* 10.577). See also Enterlein 2010, 124: “On such an understanding of linguistic subjectivity, and of the difference between fetishism and poetic language, I would suggest that these seemingly fetishized female figures be read as signs pointing to the cultural conditions legislated for becoming a ‘speaking-subject’. They are assigned a peculiar place: these idols become signs of what the culturally fashioned male subject of poetic language must renounce if ‘he’ is to accede to symbolic form. Diana, Eurydice, Pygmalion’s maiden, Medusa, Laura: over and over in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Rime*

behaviour breaks the balance and the status of equality is abandoned. In a process of *equalization* (Kaye), however, this balance is regained, though not on the level of the figures, objects, and events represented, but on the level of representation, by capturing the Pygmalion episode in a well-balanced textual macrostructure. If one understands the story metapoetically and Pygmalion as a symbol of the poet, the excessive character of Ovidian poetry is brought here to mind, which is why Sharrock refers to Quintilian's judgment *nimum amator ingenii sui* (*Inst.* 10.1.88).⁴⁴ Balance — implemented by narrative devices such as compositional (a)symmetries and the distribution of focalization — seems to be the aesthetic principle in Ovid's Pygmalion story, against the background of which the endangerment of balance and the possibility of turning into excess is made explicit.

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Sparse, female forms become signifiers for what is in excess of the voice, in excess of signification, and in excess of the culturally imposed order of sexual difference”.

⁴⁴ Sharrock 1991, 49. Enterlein 2010, 8: “Because of Ovid's frequent metapoetic, metalinguistic, and metarhetorical turns, however, he has often been condemned as an author marred by rhetorical excess, insincerity, and misplaced ingenuity”.

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