Pygmalion, A Lyrical Scene

The stage represents a sculptor's studio. Along the sides are blocks of marble together with rough outlines of single statues and groups of figures. At the back is another statue hidden beneath a tent of light colorful material decorated with garlands and fringes.

Pygmalion, seated with his elbows resting on his knees, dreams with the air of a man who is uneasy and dejected. Suddenly he rises and takes up his tools from a table. He taps a blow from time to time on one or another of the unfinished pieces, stepping back to look at them with an air of dissatisfaction and discouragement.

Pygmalion

There is neither soul or life here; it is stone and nothing more. I shall never make anything of all this.

Oh my genius, where are you? What has become of my talent? My fire is extinguished, my imagination frozen, the marble cold when it leaves my hands.

Make no more Gods, Pygmalion, for you are only a common artist...and you, ignoble instruments, no longer those of my glory, dishonor not these hands.

He throws away his tools with disdain, and paces up and down for a while, his arms folded.

What have I become? What terrible change has taken place in me?...

Oh Tyre, proud, opulent city, the monumental arts which are your glory hold no more charms for me, the taste I once had for admiring them is gone; the company of artists and philosophers seems insipid; the conversation of painters and poets does not interest me; fame and adulation no longer lift my soul, even the praise of those whom future generations will acclaim touches me no more; friendship itself has lost its charm.

And you, young objects, masterpieces of the nature my art once dared to imitate, upon whose footsteps endless pleasures drew me on, you, my lovely models, who with one breath kindled within me the fires of both love and genius, since I have surpassed you, I am indifferent to you all.

He sits and gazes all around him.
Bound within this studio by a charm I cannot comprehend, I can neither work nor tear myself away. I wander from group to group, from figure to figure. My weak uncertain chisel no longer know its guide: these vulgar works, left in their first timid sketch, for no more the hand which would once have made them live...

He rises impetuously.

All over, it is all over; I have lost my genius...
Still so young, and I have outlived my talent.
But what then is this inner burning that devours me? What thing is this within me that seems to set me all afire? Can it be possible that in the languor of a genius gone dead, one is still stirred by these emotions? Is one still subject to these sudden bursts of passion, this insurmountable anxiety, this secret agitation by which I am tormented and for which I cannot find a cause?
I fear that admiration of my own creation may be the cause of this disquiet which distracts me from my work. I have hidden it behind this veil...my profane hands dared to cover up this monument of their glory. But, since I can no longer see it, I am even sadder and no more attentive than before.

How dear, how precious to me will be this immortal work! When my worn out spirit produces nothing more that is either great or beautiful or worthy of myself, I shall show my Galathea and say: Here is my work. Oh my Galathea, when everything else is lost to me, I shall still have you, and I shall be consoled.

He approaches the tent and then withdraws, continuing to go backwards and forwards, stopping to look at it occasionally and sigh.

But why hide it? What good does it do me? Since I am incapable of working anyhow, why deprive myself of the pleasure of gazing on the loveliest of all my creations?...Perhaps there is still a defect I have overlooked; some little touch that might be added to her dress; no grace imaginable should be missing to an object of such charm...Perhaps it will kindle new life in my languishing imagination. I must see it again, examine it once more. What am I saying? I have never yet really looked at it; all I have done is admire it till now.

He starts to lift the veil then lets it fall again as if afraid.

I do not know what emotion comes over me when I touch this veil; I am seized by an unknown fear, as though I touched the sanctuary of
some Divinity...Pygmalion, it is only a stone; it is your own work! What difference does that make? We worship Gods within our temples which are made of no other stuff and by no other hand.

Trembling, he lifts the veil and falls on his knees. One sees the statue of Galathea. The pedestal it rests on is very small, but raised by a series of semi-circular marble steps leading up to it.

Oh, Galathea, receive my homage! Yes, I was mistaken; I wanted to make a nymph, and I have made a Goddess: Venus, herself, is less beautiful than you.

Vanity, human frailty! I can never tire of admiring my work; I am drunk with self love; I worship myself in that which I have made... No, nothing so beautiful was ever found in nature; I have surpassed the very Gods...

What, was so much beauty created by my hands? My hands therefore have touched it? My mouth therefore could...Pygmalion, I see a defect! This robe hides too much of her body; I must cut it lower; the charms it covers ought to be revealed.

He takes up his chisel and mallet and advances slowly. Hesitantly, he mounts the steps leading to the statue which he appears afraid to touch. Finally, his chisel already raised, he halts.

What trembling, what anxiety besets me! I hold the chisel with an unsteady hand... I cannot... I dare not... I shall spoil everything.

Picking up his courage, he finally places his chisel and gives a single blow. He starts back in terror and lets it fall from his hand with a cry.

Gods on high, I feel the palpitating flesh resist my chisel!

He redescends, trembling and confused.

...Senseless terror, foolish blindness!... No I will not touch a thing. The Gods are warning me. They have doubtless already raised her to their rank.

He studies it again.

What do you want to change? Look, what new charm could you
give her? Ah, Perfection itself is her fault!...Divine Galathéa, were you less perfect, you would be complete.

Tenderly.

But you lack a soul: your form cannot forego one.

With even greater tenderness.

How beautiful must be the soul made to give life to such a body!

He remains stationary for a long time, then returns to his seat. He speaks slowly, his voice charged with emotion.

What wild desires are these? What have I dared wish? What mad thing stirs within me?...Ah Heaven, the veil of illusion drops and I dare not look into my heart. I would be too shocked by what I found there.

He is silent for a long while and in profound dejection.

...This then is the noble passion that has brought me to such a pass. Because of this inanimate object I dare not leave this place... a block of marble, a stone, a hard and formless mass, fashioned by a piece of steel!...Madman, come back to your senses; weep for what you have become, see your error...see your insanity...

...But no...

Impetuously.

No, I have not lost my mind; I am not raving; I have no cause for self reproach. It is not this lifeless marble of which I am enamored, it is a living being which resembles it; it is the form that I perceive. Wherever that beloved form may be, whatever the body that carries it, whatever the hand that fashioned it, it will have the whole devotion of my heart. My only madness lies in seeing beauty, my crime, in feeling it. There is nothing there to make me blush.

Less vehemently, but still with passion.

It seems as though fiery shafts were emanating from that object in order to enflame my senses, then to return, bearing my soul back with them to their source. Alas, it remains cold and immobile while my heart, enflamed by its charms, wants to leave its own body that
it might warm the stone. In my delirium I believe that I can escape outside myself, I think that I can give her my life, and animate her with my soul. Ah, that Pygmalion would die so that he might live in Galathea!...Heavens, what am I saying. If I were she I would no longer see her, I would not be the one who loved her! No, I would that my Galathea lived and that I were not she. Ah, let me always be another that I may forever desire to be she, that I may see her, that I may love her, that I may be loved by her...

With frenzy.

Torment, impotence, rage, desire, fearful and most fatal love ..., all Inferno is in my agitated heart! You mighty Gods, beneficent Gods, Gods of the people who once knew the passions of men; you who have worked so many miracles for insignificant causes; behold that object, behold my heart, be just and earn the altars we have built you!

With increased pathos.

And you, sublime essence, who hide yourself from our senses and speak directly to the heart, soul of the universe and principle of all existence;—you who through love give harmony to the elements, life to matter, feeling to entities and form to all beings; sacred fire, celestial Venus through whom all things are conceived and ceaselessly reproduced; ah, where is your fair distribution? where is your expansive force? where is nature's law in this torment I feel, where is your life-giving warmth in the futility of my vain desires? All your fire is concentrated in my heart while the coldness of death still clings to this marble; I am perishing because of an excess of that life which it lacks. Alas, I expect no miracle; it is, it should cease to be; order is disturbed, Nature is outraged, restore its laws to their rightful sovereignty, reestablish its beneficial course, and distribute your divine influence again in equal measure. Yes, two beings are missing from the full measure of things. Let them both share that devouring fire which consumes the one without warming the other. It was you who through my hand gave form to these charming features which await only the spark of life. Give her half of mine, give her all if need be, I am satisfied to live in her. Oh you who deign to smile upon the homage of mortals, you must know that whatever does not feel cannot honor you! Extend your glory with your works. Goddess of Beauty, do not insult nature by permitting such a perfect model to be the reflection of what is not.

He becomes calmer by degrees and speaks with a gesture of assurance and joy.
I am coming back to my senses; an unexpected calm, an unhoped for courage restores me to myself! A deadly fever burned within my blood: a balm of hope and confidence is now flowing through my veins. I feel as though I were being reborn.

So it is that the awareness of our dependence sometimes serves to bring us consolation. However unhappy we mortals may be, we become more tranquil when we have invoked the Gods...

But that false confidence deceives those who make unreasonable requests...In my state, alas, one invokes everything, and nothing listens. The hope which leads us on is more unreasonable than the desire itself.

I am so ashamed of all these aberrations that I no longer even dare to contemplate their cause. When I lift my eyes to look at that fatal object, a new uneasiness comes over me, my heart beats so I cannot breathe and a secret terror holds me back...

With a bitter irony.

...Look at it, unhappy man! Pick up your courage! Do you not dare to gaze upon a statue?

He sees it move and turns away in terror, his heart gripped with sorrow.

What did I see? Great Gods, what did I think I saw? The flesh was tinted...the eyes had fire...it even moved...Was it not enough for me to wish for a miracle? Now, to put a final touch upon my misery, I have seen...

In a frenzy of despair.

Ah, unhappy wretch, so it has finally come to pass!...Your delirium has reached its climax and you have lost your sanity together with your reason!...Shed no tears for it, Pygmalion, for its loss will cover your disgrace...

With fierce indignation.

A man enamored of a stone should consider himself fortunate when he starts seeing visions.

He turns again and sees the statue descend the same steps by which he had mounted to the pedestal. He throws himself on his knees and raises his hands toward heaven.
Immortal Gods! Venus! Galathea! Ah, miraculous fulfillment of my wildest desire!

Galathea (she touches herself and says)

I.

Pygmalion (beside himself with joy)

I!

Galathea (touching herself again)

This is I.

Pygmalion

Enchanting illusion reaching even to my ears, ah, never, never abandon my senses!

Galathea (she takes a few steps and touches a piece of marble)

This is not I.

Pygmalion is in a state both of agitation and joy which he can hardly contain. He follows her every movement, listening to her and observing her with such avid attention that he can hardly breathe.

Galathea approaches and looks at him.

He rises hurriedly, stretching out his arms towards her and gazing at her ecstatically. She places a hand on him; he trembles, seizes the hand, presses it against his heart then covers it with passionate kisses.

Galathea (with a sigh)

Ah, this too is I!

Pygmalion

Yes, lovely and beloved object: yes, worthy masterpiece of my hands, my heart and the Gods...It is you, you alone: I have given you my whole being; from now on I shall only live through you.