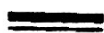
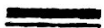


OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



OVID

Metamorphoses



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With an Introduction and Notes by
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

She would reject alike both them and those
 Whose brows twin horns made hideous, whence their name,
 Cerastæ. Once an altar stood before
 Their doors to Jove, the God of Hospitality.
 A newcomer who did not know their guilt,
 Seeing that altar stained with blood, would think
 That suckling calves or lambs of Amathus
 Were offered there. It was the blood of guests!
 Kind Venus, outraged by these wicked rites,
 Prepared to leave her cities and the land
 Of Cyprus. "Yet", she said, "these towns of mine,
 These charming places, what have they done wrong?
 Rather this impious race shall pay the price
 By death or exile or some means half-way
 Between the two, and that, what can it be*
 Except to change their shape to something new?"
 What change to choose, she wondered; then, her eyes
 Lighting upon their horns, she realized
 Those could be left to them, and she transformed
 Their bulky bodies into savage bulls.

Even so the obscene Propoetides had dared
 Deny Venus' divinity. For that
 The goddess' rage, it's said, made them the first*
 Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms.
 As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard,
 They turned with little change to stones of flint.

PYGMALION

Pygmalion had seen these women spend
 Their days in wickedness, and horrified
 At all the countless vices nature gives
 To womankind lived celibate and long
 Lacked the companionship of married love.
 Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
 With marvellous triumphant artistry
 And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
 Than ever woman born. His masterwork
 Fired him with love. It seemed to be alive,
 Its face to be a real girl's, a girl

Who wished to move—but modesty forbade.
Such art his art concealed.* In admiration
His heart desired the body he had formed.
With many a touch he tries it—is it flesh
Or ivory? Not ivory still, he's sure!
Kisses he gives and thinks they are returned;
He speaks to it, caresses it, believes
The firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields,
And fears the limbs may darken with a bruise.
And now fond words he whispers, now brings gifts
That girls delight in—shells and polished stones,
And little birds and flowers of every hue,
Lilies and coloured balls and beads of amber,
The tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun.*
He decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers
Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck,
Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast;
Lovely she looked, yet unadorned she seemed
In nakedness no whit less beautiful.
He laid her on a couch of purple silk,
Called her his darling, cushioning her head,
As if she relished it, on softest down.

Venus' day came, the holiest festival
All Cyprus celebrates; incense rose high
And heifers, with their wide horns gilded, fell
Beneath the blade that struck their snowy necks.
Pygmalion, his offering given, prayed
Before the altar, half afraid, "Vouchsafe,
O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride
Shall be"—he dared not say my ivory girl—
"The living likeness of my ivory girl."
And golden Venus (for her presence graced
Her feast) knew well the purpose of his prayer;
And, as an omen of her favouring power,
Thrice did the flame burn bright and leap up high.
And he went home, home to his heart's delight,
And kissed her as she lay, and she seemed warm;
Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing,

And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
 Wax of Hymettus softens and is shaped
 By practised fingers into many forms,
 And usefulness acquires by being used.
 His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving,
 Delight and terror that it was not true!
 Again and yet again he tried his hopes—
 She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!
 And then indeed in words that overflowed
 He poured his thanks to Venus, and at last
 His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
 Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
 Her eyes to his and saw the world and him.
 The goddess graced the union she had made,
 And when nine times the crescent moon had filled
 Her silver orb, an infant girl was born,
 Paphos, from whom the island takes its name.

MYRRHA

Her son was Cinyras, who might have been
 Numbered among the fortunate, had he
 Been childless. Terrible my tale will be!
 Away, daughters!* Away, parents! Away!
 Or, if my singing charms you, hold this tale
 In disbelief; suppose the deed not done;
 Or, with belief, believe the punishment.
 If nature does allow such crimes at least
 How happy are our countrymen, this land
 Of Thrace,* this world of ours, to be so far
 From realms that rear such sin. Panchaia* may
 Enjoy her wealth of mace and cinnamon,
 Her oozing incense and her balsam's balm,
 And all her spicy blooms, so long as she
 Grows myrrh as well! That new tree cost too much!
 Cupid himself denies his arrows hurt
 Myrrha and clears his torch of that offence.
 One of the three dread Sisters* blasted her
 With viper's venom and firebrands of Hell.
 To hate one's father is a crime; this love