

**Michael Longley, “Ivory and Water” after Ovid
Metamorphoses 10.243 - 97**

Included in M. Hofmann and J. Lasdun, edd., *After Ovid: new metamorphoses* (London, 1994): 240.

Cited in M. Beard and J. Henderson, *Classical Art: from Greece to Rome*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford UP, 2001): 130.

If as a lonely bachelor who disapproves of women
You carve the perfect specimen out of snow-white ivory
And fall in love with your masterpiece and make love to her
(Or try to), stroking, fondling, whispering, kissing, nervous
In case you bruise ivory like flesh with prodding fingers,
And bring sea-shells, shiny pebbles, song-birds, colourful wild
Flowers, amber-beads, orchids, beach-balls as her presents,
And put real women’s clothes, wedding rings, ear-rings, long
Necklaces, a bassiere on the statue, then undress her
And lay her on your bed, her head on the feathery pillows
As if to sleep like a girlfriend, your dream may come true
And she warms and softens and you are kissing actual lips
And she blushes as she takes you in, the light of her eyes,
And her veins pulse under your thumb to the end of the dream
When she breaks out in a cold sweat that trickles into pools
And drips from her hair dissolving it and her fingers and toes,
Watering down her wrists, shoulders, rib-cage, breasts until
There is nothing left of her for anyone to hug or hold.