PERVERSIONS ANCIENT AND MODERN: I. AGALMATOPHILIA, THE STATUE SYNDROME

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Agalmatophilia is the pathological condition in which some people establish exclusive sexual relationships with statues. The condition is neither to be confused with pygmalionism nor with fetishism, although confusion sometimes arises about these three different manifestations of immature sexuality (*e.g.*, Havelock Ellis, 1950 ed., Vol. 2, p. 188). The myth of Pygmalion can apply only to those who actually bring statues to life, and not to those who use statues for their own sexual purposes without bringing them to life (*cf.* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 10, 243 ff.). Pygmalion shunned marriage with real women because of their supposed viciousness; he fashioned an ideal woman for himself out of ivory and successfully appealed to Venus to animate the statue. As far as fetishism is concerned, the description applies only to those who achieve sexual excitement by substituting either some object, or a part of the body with which they have previously associated heterosexuality, for the series of objects and several parts of the entire human body that others normally involve in conventional heterosexual intercourse (*cf.* Mayer-Gross, 1960, p. 183; Ellis and Arbanel, 1961, p. 435; Kolb, 1973, p. 505). An agalmatophiliac, however, establishes a personal relationship with a complete statue as a statue. He does not bring the statue alive in his fantasy as would a pygmalionist, and he does not use just a part of a statue as a symbolic substitute for an entire female as would a fetishist.

Agalmatophilia is so rare a condition as to gain no mention in today's standard works of erotomania and psychiatry (*cf.* Kinsey, 1948, 1953; Ellis and Arbanel, *op. cit.;* Enoch *et al.*, 1967; Freedman and Kaplan, 1967; Mayer-Gross *et al.*, *op. cit.*; Kolb, *op. cit.*). The condition is unknown to the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University (private communication), and it cannot be traced in *Index Medicus* and *Psychological Abstracts*. A brief mention was made of the condition recently in a report from London (*Sunday Herald*, Auckland, April 8, 1973), but its writer has not been traced, and our letters of inquiry about its apparent resurgence to the *Lancet* and *British Medical Journal* remain unanswered. That brief mention apart, it would appear that agalmatophilia is no longer prevalent, but it could be that it might merely have changed its form because the burgeoning plastics industry has rendered obsolete the pathological focus on stone statues *per se*. Yet, in the absence of data about the production, distribution and sale of substitute human beings or "sailors' friends" from the modern sex shops, the matter must rest. Tentatively, it could be argued that over a few thousand years mankind has dropped at least one pathological condition, agalmatophilia, from its repertoire of pathologies.

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In any event the history of the condition is worth documenting fully. There are eighteen references altogether to the condition: twelve were from ancient times and six of more recent origin. Eleven occurred in Ancient Greece, one in Italy, one in Russia, one in France and another in London. Three were featured in modern literature. All but four cases referred to the effect of female statues on men. Of the remainder, one concerned the effect of a male statue on a female, one the effect of the statue of a boy on an adult male, another the effect of the statue of an adolescent male on an adult male, and the sex of the remaining figure was not specified.

Historical References*

The early Greek civilization provided an abundance of sculptured human figures with which people could identify, and many of those sculptures were copied by the Romans (*cf.* Richter, 1930). The sculptures were representational in appearance, colouring and size, unlike those of most other civilizations. The statues were placed on street level rather than up high on pedestals. Hence the statues were life-size, life-like and so conveniently accessible as to enable the populace to form personal relationships with them. In those circumstances it was not perhaps surprising that agalmatophilia developed and was acknowledged as a literary, dramatic and cultural expression of behaviour. The classical scholar, Otis, (1966 ed., p. 389) mentioned and defined the phenomenon as the "pathological love for a statue"—although in so doing he used a wrong example of a painter with a strong desire to possess the picture of a woman whom he had painted, to illustrate the phenomenon (*cf.* letter by Aristaenetus, Book 2, Ch. 10). However it has been possible to trace and collect the following explicit references to provide the first collective record of agalmatophilia.

1. The first and earliest literary reference to agalmatophilia was provided by the last of the great Athenian tragedians, Euripides, whose interest in sexual abnormalitites is well known from his dramas. In *Alcestis*, Admetus said to his wife, Alcestis, as she was about to surrender her life to save his:

> I shall find a clever sculptor to carve your likeness and it shall be hid on our bed, I shall kneel beside it and throw my arms around it and say your name, 'Alcestis, Alcestis!' and think that I hold my dear wife in my arms, snatching at cold comfort to ease the weight from my heart!" [lines 348 ff., trans. Vellacott, 1953].

Dale (1954, p. 79) considers that the same theme can be detected in the fragments of another of Euripides' plays entitled *Protesilaos.*

2. The essentials of the story of Protesilaos were preserved by Ovid (*Heroides*, Book 13, 151 ff.) when he depicted Laodomia soliloquizing as follows about her absent husband, Protesilaos:

> While you will be bearing arms in a different part of the world, I have a wax image to remind me of your features. It receives my caressing words and hears the words that are yours by right, and it received my embraces. Believe me, there is more to the statue than meets the eye. It only needs a voice to become Protesilaos. I gaze upon it and clasp it to my breast in place of my real husband and complain to it as though it could speak back.

3. Most tales of agalmatophilia were associated with Praxiteles' naked statue of Aphrodite that was exhibited at an open shrine on the island of Knidos

*Unless otherwise stated, the quotations from Greek and Latin authors are taken from the standard *Loeb Classical Library* series.

and it apparently deranged many visitors (*cf.* Richter, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-260). The disturbing effect of that particular statue came to be regarded as a tribute both to the goddess in whose image it was fashioned and to the sculptor who made it, since: "from the pagan point of view . . . an image of Aphrodite was no good unless it inspired the passion of which she was the source" (Fraenkel, 1956, p. 219 n 63). That Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite "inspired passion" was testified to by the following authors:

(a) Pliny the Elder, 36, 4, 21: "There is a story that a man once fell in love with it and hiding by night embraced it and that a stain betrays his lustful act."

(b) Valerius Maximus, 8, 11, 4: "Because of the beauty of the work it did not escape from the lustful advances of a certain man."(author's trans.).

(c) Pseudo-Lucian in *Amores*, 13-16, provided the most detailed version of a sexual assault on the statue and concludes with an appropriate note of retribution because such an assault on the statue of a deity was regarded as an act of gross impiety:

> 13. . . . we entered the temple. In the midst thereof sits the goddess—a most beautiful statue of Parian marble—arrogantly smiling a little as a grin parts her lips. Draped by no garment, all her beauty is uncovered and revealed, except in so far as she unobtrusively uses one hand to hide her private parts. So great was the power of the craftsman's art that the hard unyielding marble did justice to every limb . . .
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> 15. When we could admire no more, we noticed a mark on one thigh like a stain on a dress . . . But the attendant woman who was standing near told us a strange incredible story. For she said that a young man of a not undistinguished family . . . who often visited the precinct, was so ill-starred as to fall in love with the goddess. He would spend all day in the temple and at first gave the impression of pious awe. . . . All day long he would sit facing the goddess with his eyes fixed uninterruptedly upon her, whispering indistinctly and carrying on a lover's complaints in secret conversation.
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> 16. But when he wished to give himself some little comfort from his suffering, after first addressing the goddess, he would count out on the table four knuckle-bones of a Libyan gazelle and take a gamble on his expectations. If he made a successful throw and particularly if ever he was blessed with the throw named after the goddess herself, and no dice showed the same face, he would prostrate himself before the goddess, thinking he would gain his desire. But if, as usually happens, he made an indifferent throw on to his table, and the dice revealed an unpropitious result, he would curse all Cnidus and show utter dejection as if at an irremediable disaster . . . presently, as his passion grew more inflamed, every wall came to be inscribed with his messages and the bark of every tender tree told of fair Aphrodite . . . In the end the violent tension of his desires turned to desperation and he found in audacity a procurer for his lusts. For, when the sun was now sinking to its setting, quietly and unnoticed by those present, he slipped in behind the door and standing invisible in the innermost part of the chamber, he kept still, hardly even breathing. When the attendants closed the door from the outside in the normal way, this new Anchises was locked in. But why do I chatter on and tell you in every detail the reckless deed of that unmentionable night? These marks of his amorous embraces were seen after day came and the goddess had that blemish to prove what she'd suffered. The youth concerned is said, according to the popular story told, to have hurled himself over a a cliff or down into the waves of the sea and to have vanished utterly.

Lucian, *Essays on Portraiture*, 4, refers to the same story.

(d) Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Book 6, Chapter 40, related the same incident as in the previous paragraph, but he revised it to illustrate the powers of the Pythagorean sage who saved the lover from hubris and suicide by reforming him before his passion reached ungovernable proportions:

> There was a certain man reputed amorous of the naked image of Aphrodite which is venerated at Cnidus; he would make offerings to it, and promise yet more if his matrimonial desires should be realised. Apollonius thought the case queer enough in itself, but Cnidus made no objections—indeed, they expected more visible manifestations of the goddess would take place in response to the man's amorous advances. So he resolved to purge the holy place of this madness. . . . Summoning the fond gallant, he asked him, did he believe in the gods? The youth replied that he believed in them so devotedly as to be in love with them; and then mentioned the nuptials which he expected to celebrate. Apollonius then said to him, You are flown with poetical fancies of an Anchises or a Peleus wedded to goddesses. . . . Thus was his impudent infatuation quenched and the self-styled amorist departed with a propitiatory sacrifice for forgiveness. [trans. Phillimore, 1912].

4. Philostratus, in his *Lives of the Sophists*, 18, cited the following extracts from a speech by Onomarchus of Samos, entitled, "The man who fell in love with a statue":

> O living loveliness in a lifeless body, what deity fashioned you? Was some goddess of Persuasion, or a Grace, or Eros himself the parent of your loveliness? For truly nothing is lacking in you, the expression of the face, the bloom on the skin, the sting in the glance, the charming smile, the blush on the cheeks, signs that you can hear me. Moreover, you have a voice which is always on the point of giving utterance. And one day it may be that you will even speak, but I shall be far away. Unloving and unkind! Faithless to your faithful lover! To me you have granted not one word. Therefore I will put on you that curse at which all beautiful people always shudder most. I pray you may grow old.

5. Pliny the Elder, 36, 4, 21, recorded that the statue of Cupid at Parium sculpted by Praxiteles was favoured by the attentions of Alcetas, a Rhodian who "fell in love with it and left upon it a . . . mark of his passion."

6. In the same passage, Pliny said that a Roman knight, Junius Pisciculus, "fell in love with one [of the statues of the Muses of Helicon by the temple of Prosperity] according to Varro."

7. Athenaeus, 13, 605f-606b, gave us an unusually frank account about a certain

> Cleisophus of Selymbria who fell in love with the statue in Parian marble at Samos, locked himself up in the temple, thinking he should be able to have intercourse with it; and since he found that impossible on account of the frigidity and resistance of the stone, he then and there desisted from that desire, and placing before him a small piece of flesh he satisfied his desire with that.

8. *Ibid.:*

> Another case of a like sort occurred, they say, in Samos. A man conceived a passion for a stone maiden, and locked himself up in the temple. And Philemon mentioning the same, says: "Why, once upon a time, in Samos, a man fell in love with the stone image; thereupon he locked himself in the temple."

9. *Ibid.:*

> Polemon . . . says that at Delphi, in the treasury of the Spinatae, are two lads carved in stone; for one of these, the Delphians say, a pilgrim to the shrine once conceived a passion and locked himself up with it, leaving behind him a wreath as the price of the intercourse.

10. Aelian, *Varia Historia*, Book 14, Ch. 39, mentioned that

> A young Athenian aristocrat burned with love for a statue of Good Fortune which stood by the Prytaneum. He often embraced and kissed it. When his passion reached an uncontrollable pitch he went to the Assembly and urged that he be permitted to buy the statue for a large sum of money. When his request was rejected he loaded the statue with garlands, adorned it with head bands, and decked it out with expensive clothing, and amidst floods of tears killed himself [own trans.].

11. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 54, mentioned a man for whom the Athenians arranged a "holy marriage" with the goddess Athena. The man found the arrangement unsatisfactory because he was unable to embrace the statue, "but took with him to the Acropolis the courtesan Lamia, and polluted the bedchamber of Athena, exhibiting to the old virgin [*i.e.*, the statue of Athena] the postures of the young courtesan."

12. The only case from antiquity of women attempting sexual intercourse with a statue occurred, appropriately enough, in an anonymous collection of jocular Latin poems entitled *Priapeia* (ed., Cazzaniga, 1959). In poem 26 the personified statue of Priapus calls for help against women who are taking advantage of him:

> Help me Romans! Either cut off my penis which for whole nights on end is exhausted by neighbouring nymphomaniacs who are more lustful than sparrows in the spring, or else I'll become impotent and you'll have no god of fertility [own trans.].

Such an appeal would seem in no way to be connected with the alleged custom of the early Romans whereby "brides seat themselves on the god's [*i.e.*, Tutinus'] genital member in order to make the first offering of their virginity to the god" [Lactantius, 1, 20, 36, cited by Kiefer, 1956, p. 109].

Modern References

Only six cases of agalmatophilia have been documented in the last two centuries. Three of the cases were of clinical and three of literary origins. Havelock Ellis (*op. cit.* p. 188) cited two of the clinical cases very briefly by saying that one occurred in Leningrad, and the other in Paris. The third clinical case was cited by Rose (1927, p. 58) who mentioned a Hungarian who wanted to marry a beautiful Jewess: "Her parents refused so he had a wax effigy of her made and for some time kept it in his flat and talked to it, until finally he was persuaded to take it with him into a mental home."

The following three literary examples were taken from the novels of well known writers of this century:

4. James Joyce had Molly Bloom say, in her famous soliloquy:

> Why arent all men like that thered be some consolation for a woman like that lovely little statue he bought I could look at him all day long curly head and his shoulders his finger up for you to listen. . . . I often felt I wanted to kiss him all over also his lovely young cock there so simply I wouldnt mind taking him in my mouth if nobody was looking as if it was asking you to suck it so clean and white [1937, p. 375].

5. Gunter Grass provided the most detailed and extensive literary account of agalmatophilia to date (1965, pp. 178-191). In an episode that dealt with Niobe, a Florentine galleon's figurehead which had found its way into the Maritime Museum at Danzig, he described the figurehead as:

> A luxuriant wooden woman, green and naked, arms upraised and hands indolently clasped in such a way as to reveal every single one of her fingers; sunken amber eyes gazing out over resolute, forward-looking breasts. This woman, this figurehead, was a bringer of disaster. A museum attendant fell in love with the figurehead and fatal consequences ensued. The emergency squad which came rushing in . . . had difficulty in getting Herbert away from Niobe. In a frenzy of lust he had torn a double-edged ship's axe from its safety chain; one edge he had driven into Niobe and the other, in the course of his frantic assault, into himself. Up top, then, they were perfectly united but down below, alas, he had found no ground for his anchor and his member still emerged, stiff and perplexed, from his open trousers [p. 190].

6. Durrell (1952, p. 34) seems to have had the products of modern sex shops in mind when writing of his character, Capodistria:

> All my ancestors went wrong here in the head. My father also. He was a great womaniser. When he was very old he had a model of the perfect woman built in rubber—life-size. She could be filled with hot water in the winter. She was strikingly beautiful. He called her Sabina after his mother, and took her everywhere.

Summary

Reference was made to the pathological condition known properly as "agalmatophilia," or love of a statue, and it was differentiated from pygmalionism and fetishism. From a study of eighteen examples drawn from classical, clinical and modern literary sources, it was concluded that the condition was once not too uncommon. It was suggested either that idealistically the perversion might have dropped from the behavioural repertoire of modern man, or else that it might have been more conveniently satisfied by developments in the plastics industry. Whatever the conclusion, the condition was found to be rare and interesting, but it has yet to receive a detailed clinical and statistical examination.

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