

Ovid (whose full name was Publius Ovidius Naso) was one of the smartest, most prolific, and most consistently entertaining of the Roman poets. During his long and productive career, he wrote funny, perceptive poems about sex and relationships in contemporary Rome, as well as vivid retellings of ancient myths. His way of telling stories remains extraordinary for its subtlety and its depth of psychological understanding. His work had a massive influence on the poets and artists of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and beyond, and it is one of our most important and accessible sources for the rich mythology of ancient Greece and Rome.

LIFE AND TIMES

Ovid was born into an aristocratic ("equestrian") family, in the provincial Roman town of Sulmo, east of Rome. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, and therefore had him trained in rhetoric. Ovid's writing shows the influence of rhetorical technique, in its polished, witty style. But Ovid had no real interest in the law. He was a natural poet, and at the age of twenty, to his father's disappointment and disapproval, he quit his legal training. He held various minor governmental posts, but eventually became a full-time poet, with the financial aid of a rich patron called Messalla. Ovid became part of the literary circles of Rome: he knew the poets Propertius and Horace, and met Virgil, who was some twenty-seven years older.

Ovid married three times; he had been divorced twice before the age of

thirty. His third wife seems to have had a daughter by a previous husband, but Ovid had no children of his own. Beyond that, we know little of Ovid's personal life. He wrote a great deal about extramarital sex, but emphasized that his poetic persona should not be taken as autobiography, declaring, "My Muse is slutty, but my life is chaste."

Ovid's work included various collections of poems on mythological topics, such as the *Fasti* (never finished), on the Roman calendar, and a set of poetic letters, the *Heroides*, from mythical heroines like Helen of Troy to their boyfriends. But most notorious, in his own time and later, were his two books about sex and relationships: the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria*. These used the tradition of Roman love elegy, which had begun with Catullus and had been developed by Ovid's friend Propertius, who evoked the desperate, abject longing of a man for a beloved and unreliable girlfriend. Ovid's love poetry focuses less on feelings than on behavior, and less on love than on sex, which he treats in a light, knowing tone. He gives, for example, a titillating account of some hot afternoon sex; tells anecdotes about his girlfriend's bad experiences with hair dye and about her attempted abortion; and offers advice about the best places to go and best lines to use for picking up a date.

All this was guaranteed to irritate the more conservative members of Roman society, who included—unfortunately for Ovid—the emperor, Augustus. Having seized power after winning the battle of Actium (in 31

B.C.E.), at the end of a long civil war. Augustus was eager to impose order on the fragmented society of Rome. A key element in his domestic strategy was to reform the morals and increase the population of the Roman elite, by promoting marriage and traditional family structures. New laws were imposed in 19–18 B.C.E. to encourage married couples to have children, and to punish adultery with exile. In this context, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* seems deliberately calculated to enrage the emperor. The poem points up the hypocrisy of Roman sexual mores and suggests that, in fact, having lots of extramarital sex is far more traditional than Augustan family values, since the Romans have been doing it ever since the foundation of the city: it was through the rape of the Sabine women that the male inhabitants of the new city acquired wives and were able to supply Rome with future citizens.

Ovid seems to have gotten himself into even worse trouble by what he calls a mistake. We do not know exactly what happened; Ovid suggests that he saw something he should not have seen, perhaps involving the emperor's daughter, Julia, who was having an adulterous affair. Combined with the *Ars Amatoria* and Ovid's generally provocative stance toward Augustus, this mistake was the last straw; in 8 C.E., the emperor—acting, unusually, on his own initiative, without input from the Senate—condemned Ovid to permanent exile from Rome to Tomis, a remote town on the Black Sea, in modern Romania. He lived out the remaining eight years of his life in grim isolation, far from family and friends, in a cold, bleak place where, he claims, nobody even spoke Latin. Ovid wrote a series of poems from exile, mostly letters bemoaning his sufferings and pleading—to friends, family, acquaintances, the general public,

and to the emperor himself—to be forgiven and to be allowed back home. All were unsuccessful; Ovid died in Tomis, alone and unforgiven.

METAMORPHOSES

At the time of his exile in 8 C.E., Ovid was finishing his greatest work, the *Metamorphoses* (Greek for “changes”). It is less obviously provocative than Ovid's love poetry, but it, too, provides a radical challenge both to Augustan moral and political values and to traditional poetic norms. Virgil had written what Augustus wanted to be the official epic of the new order. For all its innovations, the *Aeneid* focused on the deeds of a single hero, and it treated its culture's dominant values (such as duty, imperial power, and military honor) with respect. The *Metamorphoses* is recognizably epic; it is the only poem Ovid wrote in the epic meter, dactylic hexameter. But it can be seen as a critical response to Virgil, even an anti-*Aeneid*. Ovid produced a series of miniature stories strung together into a long narrative of fifteen books. The transitions between them, and the connections drawn by the narrator, are often transparently contrived—perhaps in mockery of the idea of narrative unity. There is no single hero, and no moral values are presented without irony. There is, however, an element common to these stories: change; and despite its leisurely and roundabout course, the narrative has a discernible direction—as Ovid says in his introduction, “from the world's beginning to the present day.” Starting with the creation of the world, the transformation of matter into living bodies (the first great metamorphosis), Ovid tells of human beings changed into animals, flowers, and trees. He proceeds through Greek myth to stories of early Rome and so to his own time, culminating in the ascension of the murdered Julius Caesar to

the heavens in the form of a star and the divine promise that Augustus too, far in the future, will become a god; it is tempting to speculate that Ovid hoped—vainly—to improve his relationship with the emperor by means of these few lines. The last change of all is that of Ovid himself, who will, he declares, be transformed from a mortal man into his own immortal poem.

Change underlies both the narrative style and the vision of the world the poem projects. Virgil also told of a transformation, the new (Roman) order arising from the ruins of the old (Troy). But once the transformation was completed by the Augustan order, there was to be stability, permanence. Ovid tells of a world ceaselessly coming to be in a process that never ends. Augustan Rome is not the culminating point of history here, as it was in the *Aeneid*; indeed, the whole idea of a historical end or goal seems, in the *Metamorphoses*, impossible and absurd. Ovid's epic without a hero presents shifting perspectives and offers the reader no single point of view from which to judge his complex narratives. Against the forced imposition of political and moral unity he sets change itself.

Change is also central to the narrative manner of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid constantly shifts his point of view, telling a story first from one character's perspective, and then from another's. One story is embedded in another, so that one narrative voice is piled on top of another, as when Venus tells Adonis the story of Atalanta. This story is set within the tale of Venus's love for Adonis and of his death, which is one of a series of stories sung by Orpheus in the poem's main narrative. In such cases, the immediate and the larger contexts give the same story different shades of meaning. And there are thematic connections between stories, so that motifs and images also change their meaning from one story

to another, or over the course of a single story. Daphne and Syrinx are turned into plants (the laurel and the reed) that are henceforth attributes of the gods who tried to rape them, a form of appropriation that substitutes for sexual violence.

A common element of many stories in books I and II is the lust of male gods for female humans. On one level, the gods' desire is presented as ridiculous: when Jupiter turns himself into a bull, the narrator comments, "Majestic power and erotic love / do not get on together very well." But these stories are also focused on rape, and, at least some of the time, the narrator shows the terror and suffering of the human victim. These stories of rape may have political implications, for rape is the ultimate imposition of control. When powerful gods force themselves on defenseless women, the reader is invited to remember how easily authority can be abused.

But male gods are not the only sexual agents in the poem: women and goddesses, too, can be overwhelmed by desire, and can themselves become sexual predators. The stories selected here from later in the *Metamorphoses* bring out the complexity of Ovid's presentation of gender and sexuality. The story of Iphis and Ianthe suggests that social gender roles for women and men are more or less arbitrary: girls usually look different from boys, but their feelings may be exactly the same. That story has a happy ending, but the tales from book X show various ways in which desire causes pain, distorts our perceptions, and ends in disaster. The tale of Pygmalion may seem an exception, but we should remember that it begins with the artist's hatred of women for their loose morals, and that the story as a whole, whatever it may say about the power of art, can also be read as a fable of man's fabrication of woman—her person and her functions—according to

his desires. These stories are narrated by Orpheus, the archetypal poet, after his failure to bring Eurydice back from the underworld. The pathology of desire is fundamental to Ovid's poem, since the lover hopes to stop time, to achieve permanent possession of the beloved; but all these stories show us how impossible such a dream is. The girl is always running from the god; the

boy is always running from the goddess; Orpheus's wife cannot be brought back from the land of the dead. Reaching for the body of another, the lover's own body is transformed. The closest any of these characters can get to permanence is to be transformed into a growing (living, changing) plant that will always represent their unfulfilled longings.

From *Metamorphoses*¹

FROM BOOK I

[*Proem*]

My mind leads me to speak now of forms changed
into new bodies: O gods above, inspire
this undertaking (which you've changed as well)
and guide my poem in its epic sweep
from the world's beginning to the present day.

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[*The Creation*]

Before the seas and lands had been created,
before the sky that covers everything,
Nature displayed a single aspect only
throughout the cosmos; Chaos was its name,
a shapeless, unwrought mass of inert bulk
and nothing more, with the discordant seeds
of disconnected elements all heaped
together in anarchic disarray.

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The sun as yet did not light up the earth,
nor did the crescent moon renew her horns,
nor was the earth suspended in midair,
balanced by her own weight, nor did the ocean
extend her arms to the margins of the land.

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Although the land and sea and air were present,
land was unstable, the sea unfit for swimming,
and air lacked light; shapes shifted constantly,
and all things were at odds with one another,
for in a single mass cold strove with warm,
wet was opposed to dry and soft to hard,
and weightlessness to matter having weight.

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Some god (or kinder nature) settled this
dispute by separating earth from heaven,
and then by separating sea from earth

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1. Translated by Charles Martin.

and fluid aether² from the denser air;
and after these were separated out
and liberated from the primal heap,
he bound the disentangled elements
each in its place and all in harmony.

The fiery and weightless aether leapt
to heaven's vault and claimed its citadel;
the next in lightness to be placed was air;
the denser earth drew down gross elements
and was compressed by its own gravity;
encircling water lastly found its place,
encompassing the solid earth entire.³

Now when that god (whichever one it was)
had given Chaos form, dividing it
in parts which he arranged, he molded earth
into the shape of an enormous globe,
so that it should be uniform throughout.

And afterward he sent the waters streaming
in all directions, ordered waves to swell
under the sweeping winds, and sent the flood
to form new shores on the surrounded earth;
he added springs, great standing swamps and lakes,
as well as sloping rivers fixed between
their narrow banks, whose plunging waters (all
in varied places, each in its own channel)
are partly taken back into the earth
and in part flow until they reach the sea,
when they—received into the larger field
of a freer flood—beat against shores, not banks.
He ordered open plains to spread themselves,
valleys to sink, the stony peaks to rise,
and forests to put on their coats of green.

And as the vault of heaven is divided
by two zones on the right and two on the left,
with a central zone, much hotter, in between,
so, by the care of this creator god,
the mass that was enclosed now by the sky
was zoned in the same way, with the same lines
inscribed upon the surface of the earth.
Heat makes the middle zone unlivable,
and the two outer zones are deep in snow;
between these two extremes, he placed two others
of temperate climate, blending cold and warmth.⁴

2. A region of refined air, fiery in nature, believed to be above the "denser air" that was closer to the earth and composed the breathable atmosphere.

3. From Homer on, the ancients conceived of Ocean as a stream that surrounded the earth.

4. The sky, that is, is divided into five horizontal zones, and therefore so is the earth beneath

it. On either side of the earth's uninhabitable torrid region, over which the sun passes, lies a temperate zone, and the northern one contains the inhabited, civilized lands on earth (ancient writers were vague about what the southern temperate zone contained). The two outermost zones, farthest from the sun, were too cold to live in.

from the goddess;
be brought back
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Air was suspended over all of this,
 proportionately heavier than aether,
 as earth is heavier than water is.
 He ordered mists and clouds into position,
 and thunder, to make test of our resolve,⁵
 and winds creating thunderbolts and lightning.

Nor did that world-creating god permit
 the winds to roam ungoverned through the air;
 for even now, with each of them in charge
 of his own kingdom, and their blasts controlled,
 they scarcely can be kept from shattering
 the world, such is the discord between brothers.

Eurus⁶ went eastward, to the lands of Dawn,
 the kingdoms of Arabia and Persia,
 and to the mountain peaks that lie below
 the morning's rays; and Zephyr took his place
 on the western shores warmed by the setting sun.
 The frozen north and Scythia were seized
 by bristling Boreas; the lands opposite,
 continually drenched by fog and rain,
 are where the south wind, known as Auster, dwells.
 Above these winds, he set the weightless aether,
 a liquid free of every earthly toxin.

No sooner had he separated all
 within defining limits, when the stars,
 which formerly had been concealed in darkness,
 began to blaze up all throughout the heavens;
 and so that every region of the world
 should have its own distinctive forms of life,
 the constellations and the shapes of gods
 occupied the lower part of heaven;
 the seas gave shelter to the shining fishes,
 earth received beasts, and flighty air, the birds.

An animal more like the gods than these,
 more intellectually capable
 and able to control the other beasts,
 had not as yet appeared: now man was born,
 either because the framer of all things,
 the fabricator of this better world,
 created man out of his own divine
 substance—or else because Prometheus⁷
 took up a clod (so lately broken off
 from lofty aether that it still contained
 some elements in common with its kin),
 and mixing it with water, molded it
 into the shape of gods, who govern all.
 And even though all other animals

5. Thunder was considered an omen.

6. The east wind. Zephyr, Boreas, and Auster were the west, north, and south winds, respectively.

7. A god best known for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mortals. In some stories he also created humans out of clay.

lean forward and look down toward the ground,
 he gave to man a face that is uplifted,
 and ordered him to stand erect and look
 directly up into the vaulted heavens
 and turn his countenance to meet the stars;
 the earth, that was so lately rude and formless,
 was changed by taking on the shapes of men.

* * *

[Apollo and Daphne]

Daphne,⁸ the daughter of the river god
 Peneus, was the first love of Apollo;
 this happened not by chance, but by the cruel
 outrage of Cupid; Phoebus, in the triumph
 of his great victory against the Python,⁹
 observed him bending back his bow and said,

"What are *you* doing with such manly arms,
 lascivious boy? That bow befits *our* brawn,¹
 wherewith we deal out wounds to savage beasts
 and other mortal foes, unerringly:

just now with our innumerable arrows
 we managed to lay low the mighty Python,
 whose pestilential belly covered acres!
 Content yourself with kindling love affairs
 with your wee torch—and don't claim *our* glory!"

The son of Venus² answered him with this:
 "Your arrow, Phoebus, may strike everything:
 mine will strike you: as animals to gods,
 your glory is so much the less than mine!"

He spoke, and soaring upward through the air
 on wings that thundered, in no time at all
 had landed on Parnassus³ shaded height;
 and from his quiver drew two arrows out
 which operated at cross-purposes,
 for one engendered flight, the other, love;
 the latter has a polished tip of gold,
 the former has a tip of dull, blunt lead;
 with this one, Cupid struck Peneus' daughter,
 while the other pierced Apollo to his marrow.

One is in love now, and the other one
 won't hear of it, for Daphne calls it joy
 to roam within the forest's deep seclusion,
 where she, in emulation of the chaste
 goddess Phoebe,⁴ devotes herself to hunting;

8. Literally, "Laurel" (Greek).

9. The enormous snake that Apollo (Phoebus) had to kill in order to found his oracle at Delphi. "Cupid": god of sexual desire.

1. The bow was one of Apollo's attributes.

2. Goddess of love (Aphrodite in Greek).

3. Mountain in central Greece, near Delphi.

4. Diana (Artemis in Greek), Apollo's sister, virgin goddess of the hunt.

one ribbon only bound her straying tresses.

Many men sought her, but she spurned her suitors,
loath to have anything to do with men,
and rambled through the wild and trackless groves
untroubled by a thought for love or marriage.

Often her father said, "You owe it to me,
child, to provide me with a son-in-law
and grandchildren!"

"Let me remain a virgin,
father most dear," she said, "as once before
Diana's father, Jove, gave her that gift."

Although Peneus yielded to you, Daphne,
your beauty kept your wish from coming true,
your comeliness conflicting with your vow:
at first sight, Phoebus loves her and desires
to sleep with her; desire turns to hope,
and his own prophecy deceives the god.

Now just as in a field the harvest stubble
is all burned off, or as hedges are set ablaze
when, if by chance, some careless traveler
should brush one with his torch or toss away
the still-smoldering brand at break of day—
just so the smitten god went up in flames
until his heart was utterly afire,
and hope sustained his unrequited passion.

He gazes on her hair without adornment:
"What if it were done up a bit?" he asks,
and gazes on her eyes, as bright as stars,
and on that darling little mouth of hers,
though sight is not enough to satisfy;
he praises everything that he can see—
her fingers, hands, and arms, bare to her shoulders—
and what is hidden prizes even more.

She flees more swiftly than the lightest breeze,
nor will she halt when he calls out to her:
"Daughter of Peneus, I pray, hold still,
hold still! I'm not a foe in grim pursuit!
Thus lamb flees wolf, thus dove from eagle flies
on trembling wings, thus deer from lioness,
thus any creature flees its enemy,
but I am stalking you because of love!

"Wretch that I am: I'm fearful that you'll fall,
brambles will tear your flesh because of me!
The ground you're racing over's very rocky,
slow down, I beg you, restrain yourself in flight,
and I will follow at a lesser speed.

"Just ask yourself who finds you so attractive!
I'm not a caveman, not some shepherd boy,
no shaggy guardian of flocks and herds—
you've no idea, rash girl, you've no idea
whom you are fleeing, that is why you flee!

"Delphi, Claros, Tenedos are all mine,
I'm worshiped in the city of Patara!⁵
Jove is my father, I alone reveal
what was, what is, and what will come to be!
The plucked strings answer my demand with song!

"Although my aim is sure, another's arrow
proved even more so, and my careless heart
was badly wounded—the art of medicine
is my invention, by the way, the source
of my worldwide fame as a practitioner
of healing through the natural strength of herbs.

"Alas, there is no herbal remedy
for the love that I must suffer, and the arts
that heal all others cannot heal their lord—"

He had much more to say to her, but Daphne
pursued her fearful course and left him speechless,
though no less lovely fleeing him; indeed,
disheveled by the wind that bared her limbs
and pressed the blown robes to her straining body
even as it whipped up her hair behind her,
the maiden was more beautiful in flight!

But the young god had no further interest
in wasting his fine words on her; admonished
by his own passion, he accelerates,
and runs as swiftly as a Gallic hound⁶
chasing a rabbit through an open field;
the one seeks shelter and the other, prey—
he clings to her, is just about to spring,
with his long muzzle straining at her heels,
while she, not knowing whether she's been caught,
in one swift burst, eludes those snapping jaws,
no longer the anticipated feast;
so he in hope and she in terror race.

But her pursuer, driven by his passion,
outspeeds the girl, giving her no pause,
one step behind her, breathing down her neck;
her strength is gone; she blanches at the thought
of the effort of her swift flight overcome,
but at the sight of Peneus, she cries,
"Help me, dear father! If your waters hold
divinity, transform me and destroy
that beauty by which I have too well pleased!"

Her prayer was scarcely finished when she feels
a torpor take possession of her limbs—
her supple trunk is girdled with a thin
layer of fine bark over her smooth skin;
her hair turns into foliage, her arms
grow into branches, sluggish roots adhere
to feet that were so recently so swift,

5. All centers of Apollo's cult.

6. A hunting breed famous for speed.

her head becomes the summit of a tree;
all that remains of her is a warm glow.

Loving her still, the god puts his right hand
against the trunk, and even now can feel
her heart as it beats under the new bark;
he hugs her limbs as if they were still human,
and then he puts his lips against the wood,
which, even now, is adverse to his kiss.

"Although you cannot be my bride," he says,
"you will assuredly be my own tree,
O Laurel, and will always find yourself
girding my locks, my lyre, and my quiver too—
you will adorn great Roman generals
when every voice cries out in joyful triumph
along the route up to the Capitol;
you will protect the portals of Augustus,
guarding, on either side, his crown of oak;⁷
and as I am—perpetually youthful,
my flowing locks unknown to the barber's shears—
so you will be an evergreen forever
bearing your brilliant foliage with glory!"
Phoebus concluded. Laurel shook her branches
and seemed to nod her summit in assent.

[*Jove and Io*]

There is a grove in Thessaly,⁸ enclosed
on every side by high and wooded hills:
they call it Tempe. The river Peneus,
which rises deep within the Pindus range,
pours its turbulent waters through this gorge
and over a cataract that deafens all
its neighbors far and near, creating clouds
that drive a fine, cool mist along, until
it drips down through the summits of the trees.

Here is the house, the seat, the inner chambers
of the great river; here Peneus holds court
in his rocky cavern and lays down the law
to water nymphs and tributary streams.

First to assemble were the native rivers,
uncertain whether to congratulate,
or to commiserate with Daphne's father:
the Sperchios, whose banks are lined with poplars,
the ancient Apidanus and the mild
Aeas and Amprysus; others came later—
rivers who, by whatever course they take,

7. The laurel tree, sacred to Apollo, was the symbol of victory not only in athletic contests but also in war; victorious Roman generals honored with a triumphal procession through

the city to the Capitol wore a laurel wreath. The oak was sacred to Jupiter.
8. A region of central Greece.

eventually bring their flowing streams,
weary of their meandering, to sea.

Inachus⁹ was the only river absent,
concealed in the recesses of his cave:
he added to his volume with the tears
he grimly wept for his lost daughter Io,
not knowing whether she still lived or not;
but since he couldn't find her anywhere,
assumed that she was nowhere to be found—
and in his heart, he feared a fate far worse.

For Jupiter had seen the girl returning
from her father's banks and had accosted her:
"O maiden worthy of almighty Jove
and destined to delight some lucky fellow
(I know not whom) upon your wedding night,
come find some shade," he said, "in these deep woods—"
(showing her where the woods were *very* shady)
"while the sun blazes high above the earth!"

"But if you're worried about entering
the haunts of savage beasts all by yourself,
why, under the protection of a god
you will be safe within the deepest woods—
and no plebeian god, for I am he
who bears the celestial scepter in his hand,
I am he who hurls the roaming thunderbolt—
don't run from me!"

But run she did, through Lerna
and Lyrcea,¹ until the god concealed
the land entirely beneath a dense
dark mist and seized her and dishonored her.

Juno,² however, happened to look down
on Argos, where she noticed something odd:
swift-flying clouds had turned day into night
long before nighttime. She realized
that neither falling mist nor rising fog
could be the cause of this phenomenon,
and looked about at once to find her husband,
as one too well aware of the connivings
of a mate so often taken in the act.

When he could not be found above, she said,
"Either I'm mad—or I am being had."
She glided down to earth from heaven's summit
immediately and dispersed the clouds.

Having intuited his wife's approach,
Jove had already metamorphosed Io
into a gleaming heifer—a beauty still,
even as a cow. Despite herself,

9. A river near Argos in the northeast Peloponnesus.

1. A mountain on the border between Argos

and Arcadia to the west. "Lerna": a marsh in the territory of Argos, near the coast.

2. Wife of Jupiter (Hera in Greek).

Juno gave this illusion her approval,
 and feigning ignorance, asked him whose herd
 this heifer had come out of, and where from;
 Jove, lying to forestall all inquiries
 as to her origin and pedigree,
 replied that she was born out of the earth.
 Then Juno asked him for her as a gift.

What could he do? Here is his beloved:
 to hand her over is unnatural,
 but not to do so would arouse suspicion;
 shame urged him onward while love held him back.
 Love surely would have triumphed over shame,
 except that to deny so slight a gift
 to one who was his wife and sister both
 would make it seem that this was no mere cow!

Her rival given up to her at last,
 Juno feared Jove had more such tricks in mind,
 and couldn't feel entirely secure
 until she'd placed this heifer in the care
 of Argus, the watchman with a hundred eyes:
 in strict rotation, his eyes slept in pairs,
 while those that were not sleeping stayed on guard.
 No matter where he stood, he looked at Io,
 even when he had turned his back on her.

He let her graze in daylight; when the sun
 set far beneath the earth, he penned her in
 and placed a collar on her indignant neck.
 She fed on leaves from trees and bitter grasses,
 and had no bed to sleep on, the poor thing,
 but lay upon the ground, not always grassy,
 and drank the muddy waters from the streams.

Having no arms, she could not stretch them out
 in supplication to her warden, Argus;
 and when she tried to utter a complaint
 she only mooed—a sound which terrified her,
 fearful as she now was of her own voice.

Io at last came to the riverbank
 where she had often played; when she beheld
 her own slack jaws and newly sprouted horns
 in the clear water, she fled, terrified!

Neither her naiad sisters³ nor her father
 knew who this heifer was who followed them
 and let herself be petted and admired.
 Inachus fed her grasses from his hand;
 she licked it and pressed kisses on his palm,
 unable to restrain her flowing tears.

If words would just have come, she would have spoken,
 telling them who she was, how this had happened,
 and begging their assistance in her case;

but with her hoof, she drew lines in the dust,
and letters of the words she could not speak
told the sad story of her transformation.

"Oh, wretched me," cried Io's father, clinging
to the lowing calf's horns and snowy neck.
"Oh, wretched me!" he groaned. "Are you the child
for whom I searched the earth in every part?
Lost, you were less a grief than you are, found!"

"You make no answer, unable to respond
to our speech in language of your own,
but from your breast come resonant deep sighs
and—all that you can manage now—you *moo*!"

"But I—all unaware of this—was busy
arranging marriage for you, in the hopes
of having a son-in-law and grandchildren.
Now I must pick your husband from my herd,
and now must find your offspring there as well!"

"Nor can I end this suffering by death;
it is a hurtful thing to be a god,
for the gates of death are firmly closed against me,
and our sorrows must go on forever."

And while the father mourned his daughter's loss,
Argus of the hundred eyes removed her
to pastures farther off and placed himself
high on a mountain peak, a vantage point
from which he could keep watch in all directions.

The ruler of the heavens cannot bear
the sufferings of Io any longer,
and calls his son, born of the Pleiades,⁴
and orders him to do away with Argus.

Without delay, he takes his winged sandals,
his magic, sleep-inducing wand, and cap;
and so equipped, the son of father Jove
glides down from heaven's summit to the earth,
where he removes and leaves behind his cap
and winged sandals, but retains the wand;
and sets out as a shepherd, wandering
far from the beaten path, driving before him
a flock of goats he rounds up as he goes,
while playing tunes upon his pipe of reeds.

The guardian of Juno is quite taken
by this new sound: "Whoever you might be,
why not come sit with me upon this rock,"
said Argus, "for that flock of yours will find
the grass is nowhere greener, and you see
that there is shade here suitable for shepherds."

The grandson of great Atlas takes his seat

4. Mercury (Hermes in Greek) was the son of
Maia, one of the Pleiades or daughters of Atlas.
They were changed into stars when the hunter

Orion was pursuing them along with their
mother Pleione, whom he wanted to rape.

and whiles away the hours, chattering
of this and that—and playing on his pipes,
he tries to overcome the watchfulness
of Argus, struggling to stay awake;
even though Slumber closes down some eyes,
others stay vigilant. Argus inquired
how the reed pipes, so recently invented,
had come to be, and Mercury responded:

"On the idyllic mountains of Arcadia,⁵
among the hamadryads⁶ of Nonacris,
one was renowned, and Syrinx⁷ was her name.
Often she fled—successfully—from Satyrs,⁸
and deities of every kind as well,
those of the shady wood and fruited plain.

"In her pursuits and in virginity
Diana was her model, and she wore
her robe hitched up and girt above the knees
just as her goddess did; and if her bow
had been made out of gold, instead of horn,
anyone seeing her might well have thought
she was the goddess—as, indeed, some did.

"Wearing his crown of sharp pine needles, Pan⁹
saw her returning once from Mount Lycaeus,¹
and began to say. . . ."

There remained to tell
of how the maiden, having spurned his pleas,
fled through the trackless wilds until she came
to where the gently flowing Ladon stopped
her in her flight; how she begged the water nymphs
to change her shape, and how the god, assuming
that he had captured Syrinx, grasped instead
a handful of marsh reeds! And while he sighed,
the reeds in his hands, stirred by his own breath,
gave forth a similar, low-pitched complaint!

The god, much taken by the sweet new voice
of an unprecedented instrument,
said this to her: "At least we may converse
with one another—I can have that much."

That pipe of reeds, unequal in their lengths,
and joined together one-on-one with wax,
took the girl's name, and bears it to this day.

Now Mercury was ready to continue
until he saw that Argus had succumbed,
for all his eyes had been closed down by sleep.
He silences himself and waves his wand

5. The rustic central region of the Peloponnese. Nonacris was a town in its northern part.

6. Tree nymphs.

7. The name means "shepherd's pipe," a musical instrument made of reeds.

8. Woodland creatures—half man, half goat,

bald, bearded, and highly sexed.

9. A god of the wild mountain pastures and woods, with goat's feet and horns. He was particularly associated with Arcadia.

1. A high mountain in Arcadia.

above those languid orbs to fix the spell.
 Without delay he grasps the nodding head
 and where it joins the neck, he severs it
 with his curved blade and flings it bleeding down
 the steep rock face, staining it with gore.
 O Argus, you are fallen, and the light
 in all your lamps is utterly put out:
 one hundred eyes, one darkness all the same!

But Saturn's daughter² rescued them and set
 those eyes upon the feathers of her bird,³
 filling his tail with constellated gems.

Her rage demanded satisfaction, now:
 the goddess set a horrifying Fury
 before the eyes and the imagination
 of her Grecian rival; and in her heart
 she fixed a prod that goaded Io on,
 driving her in terror through the world
 until at last, O Nile, you let her rest
 from endless labor; having reached your banks,
 she went down awkwardly upon her knees,
 and with her neck bent backward, raised her face
 as only she could do it, to the stars;
 and with her groans and tears and mournful mooing,
 entreated Jove, it seemed, to put an end
 to her great suffering.

Jove threw his arms
 around the neck of Juno in embrace,
 imploring her to end this punishment:
 "In future," he said, "put your fears aside:
 never again will you have cause to worry—
 about *this* one." And swore upon the Styx.⁴

The goddess was now pacified, and Io
 at once began regaining her lost looks,
 till she became what she had been before;
 her body lost all of its bristling hair,
 her horns shrank down, her eyes grew narrower,
 her jaws contracted, arms and hands returned,
 and hooves divided themselves into nails;
 nothing remained of her bovine nature,
 unless it was the whiteness of her body.
 She had some trouble getting her legs back,
 and for a time feared speaking, lest she moo,
 and so quite timidly regained her speech.

She is a celebrated goddess now,
 and worshiped by the linen-clad Egyptians.⁵
 Her son, Epaphus, is believed to be
 sprung from the potent seed of mighty Jove,

2. Juno.

3. The peacock.

4. One of the rivers of the underworld; the

gods swore solemn oaths by it.

5. Io was identified with Isis, at least by the
 Greeks and Romans.

and temples may be found in every city
wherein the boy is honored with his parent.

* * *

FROM BOOK II
[*Jove and Europa*]

When Mercury had punished her for these
impieties of thought and word,⁶ he left
Athena's city, and on beating wings
returned to heaven where his father Jove
took him aside and (without telling him
that his new passion was the reason) said:

"Dear son, who does my bidding faithfully,
do not delay, but with your usual
swiftness fly down to earth and find the land
that looks up to your mother⁷ on the left,
called Sidon⁸ by the natives; there you will see
a herd of royal cattle some way off
upon a mountain; drive them down to shore."

He spoke and it was done as he had ordered:
the cattle were immediately driven
down to a certain place along the shore
where the daughter of a great king used to play,
accompanied by maidens all of Tyre.⁹

Majestic power and erotic love
do not get on together very well,
nor do they linger long in the same place:
the father and the ruler of all gods,
who holds the lightning bolt in his right hand
and shakes the world when he but nods his head,
now relinquishes authority and power,
assuming the appearance of a bull
to mingle with the other cattle, lowing
as gorgeously he strolls in the new grass.

He is as white as the untrampled snow
before the south wind turns it into slush.
The muscles stand out bulging on his neck,
and the dewlap¹ dangles on his ample chest;
his horns are crooked, but appear handmade,
and flawless as a pair of matching gems.
His brow is quite unthreatening, his eye

6. Mercury has been in Athens, where he tried to have a love affair with Herse, daughter of King Cecrops; promised help and then betrayed by her sister Aglauros, he took his revenge on Aglauros by turning her into a statue.

7. Maia, Mercury's mother, had been transformed into a star among the Pleiades in the

constellation Taurus.

8. One of the principal cities of Phoenicia (in modern Lebanon).

9. Another city of Phoenicia, but here used of Phoenicia itself.

1. A fold of loose skin hanging from the neck.

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excites no terror, and his countenance
is calm.

The daughter of King Agenor²
admires him, astonished by the presence
of peacefulness and beauty in the beast;
yet even though he seems a gentle creature,
at first she fears to get too close to him,
but soon approaching, reaches out her hand
and pushes flowers into his white mouth.

The lover, quite beside himself, rejoices,
and as a preview of delights to come,
kisses her fingers, getting so excited
that he can scarcely keep from doing it!

Now he disports himself upon the grass,
and lays his whiteness on the yellow sands;
and as she slowly overcomes her fear
he offers up his breast for her caresses
and lets her decorate his horns with flowers;
the princess dares to sit upon his back
not knowing who it is that she has mounted,
and he begins to set out from dry land,
a few steps on false feet into the shallows,
then further out and further to the middle
of the great sea he carries off his booty;
she trembles as she sees the shore receding
and holds the creature's horn in her right hand
and with the other clings to his broad back,
her garments streaming in the wind behind her.

FROM BOOK V

[*Ceres and Proserpina*]

As the Muse spoke,³ Minerva could hear wings
beating on air, and cries of greeting came
from high in the trees. She peered into the foliage,
attempting to discover where those sounds,
the speech of human beings to be sure,
were emanating from: why, from some birds!
Bewailing their sad fate, a flock of nine
magpies (which mimic anyone they wish to)
had settled in the branches overhead.

Minerva having shown astonishment,
the Muse gave her a little goddess-chat:
"This lot has only recently been added
to the throngs of birds. Why? They lost a contest!

2. Europa. Agenor was the Phoenician king.
3. Minerva (Athena in Greek) has come to
Mount Helicon in central Greece, the home
of the nine Muses (daughters of Zeus and

Memory, they are patronesses of poetry and
the other arts). One of the Muses has told her
of an attempt recently made to trap and rape
them by the wicked Pyreneus.

Their father was Pierus, lord of Pella,⁴
 their mother was Evippe of Paonia;
 nine times she called upon Lucina's⁵ aid
 and nine times she delivered. Swollen up
 with foolish pride because they were so many,
 that crowd of simpleminded sisters went
 through all Haemonia and through Achaia⁶ too,
 arriving here to challenge us in song:

"We'll show you girls just what real class is⁷
 Give up tryin' to deceive the masses
 Your rhymes are fake: accept our wager
 Learn which of us is minor and which is major
 There's nine of us here and there's nine of you
 And you'll be nowhere long before we're through
 Nothin's gonna save you 'cuz your songs are lame
 And the way you sing 'em is really a shame
 So stop with, "Well I *never*!" and "This *can't* be real!"
 We're the newest New Thing and here is our deal
 If we beat you, obsolete you, then you just get gone
 From these classy haunts on Mount Helicon
 We give you Macedonia—if we lose
 An' that's an offer you just can't refuse
 So take the wings off, sisters, get down and jam
 And let the nymphs be the judges of our poetry slam!"
 "Shameful it was to strive against such creatures;
 more shameful not to. Nymphs were picked as judges,
 sworn into service on their river banks,
 and took their seats on benches made of tufa.

"And then—not even drawing lots!—the one
 who claimed to be their champion commenced;
 she sang of war between the gods and Giants,
 giving the latter credit more than due
 and deprecating all that the great gods did;
 how Typhoeus,⁸ from earth's lowest depths,
 struck fear in every celestial heart,
 so that they all turned tail and fled, until,
 exhausted, they found refuge down in Egypt,
 where the Nile flows from seven distinct mouths;
 she sang of how earthborn Typhoeus
 pursued them even here and forced the gods
 to hide themselves by taking fictive shapes:⁹

"In Libya the Giants told the gods to scram

4. City of Macedonia, in northern Greece. The Paeonians were a tribe living north of Macedonia.

5. Goddess of childbirth.

6. Regions of central Greece (*Haemonia* is another name for Thessaly). The sisters are traveling south toward Helicon.

7. Although there is no basis for it in the Latin text, the translator uses dialect and rhyme in

the speeches and song of Pierus's daughter to show how they challenge, and partially disprove, the "high-culture" assumptions and language of the Muses.

8. Monstrous son of Earth. Like the other born Giants, he challenged Jupiter and the Olympian gods and was defeated.

9. An "explanation" of the Egyptian animal forms.

The boss god they worship there has horns like a ram¹
 'Cuz Jupiter laid low as the leader of a flock
 And Delius² his homey really got a shock

When the Giants left him with no place to go:
 "Fuggedabout Apollo—*make me a crow!*"

And if you believe that Phoebus was a wuss
 His sister Phoebe turned into a puss

Bacchus takes refuge in the skin of a goat
 And Juno as a cow with a snow-white coat

Venus the queen of the downtown scene, yuh know what her wish is?
 "Gimme a body just like a fish's"

Mercury takes on an ibis's shape

And that's how the mighty (cheep cheep) gods escape'

"And then her song, accompanied on the lute,
 came to an end, and it was our turn—
 but possibly you haven't got the time
 to listen to our song?"

"Oh, don't think that,"

Minerva said. "I want it word for word:
 sing it for me just as you sang it then."

The Muse replied: "We turned the contest over
 to one of us, Calliope,³ who rose,
 and after binding up her hair in ivy
 and lightly strumming a few plaintive chords,
 she vigorously launched into her song:

"Ceres⁴ was first to break up the soil with a curved plowshare,
 the first to give us the earth's fruits and to nourish us gently,
 and the first to give laws: every gift comes from Ceres.

The goddess must now be my subject. Would that I *could* sing
 a hymn that is worthy of her, for she surely deserves it.

"Vigorous Sicily sprawled across the gigantic body
 of one who had dared aspire to rule in the heavens;
 the island's weight held Typhoeus firmly beneath it.

Often exerting himself, he strives yet again to rise up,
 but there in the north, his right hand is held down by Pelorus,
 his left hand by you, Pachynus; off in the west, Lilybaeum⁵
 weighs on his legs, while Mount Etna⁶ presses his head, as
 under it, raging Typhoeus coughs ashes and vomits up fire.
 Often he struggles, attempting to shake off the earth's weight
 and roll its cities and mountains away from his body.

"This causes tremors and panics the Lord of the Silent,⁷
 who fears that the earth's crust will crack and break open,
 and daylight, let in, will frighten the trembling phantoms;

1. Ammon, the chief Egyptian god, identified by the Greeks and Romans with Zeus/Jupiter. He had an important oracular cult in the Libyan desert (west of the Nile valley and part of Egypt under Roman rule).

2. Apollo, who was born on the island of Delos.

3. "Lovely Voice," the Muse of epic poetry.

4. Goddess of grain (Demeter).

5. Mountains on the northeast, southeast, and western promontories of Sicily, respectively

6. The large (and still active) volcano near center of the east coast of Sicily.

7. Pluto or Hades, king of the dead.

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dreading disaster, the tyrant left his tenebrous kingdom;
borne in his chariot drawn by its team of black horses,
he crisscrossed Sicily, checking the island's foundation.

"After his explorations had left him persuaded
that none of its parts were in imminent danger of falling,
his fears were forgotten, and Venus, there on Mount Eryx,⁸
observed him relaxing, and said, as she drew Cupid near her,
"My son, my sword, my strong right arm and source of my power,
take up that weapon by which all your victims are vanquished
and send your swift arrows into the breast of the deity
to whom the last part of the threefold realm⁹ was allotted.

"You govern the gods and their ruler; you rule the defeated
gods of the ocean and govern the one who rules them, too;
why give up on the dead, when we can extend our empire
into their realm? A third part of the world is involved here!
And yet the celestial gods spurn our forbearance,
and the prestige of Love is diminished, even as mine is.
Do you not see how Athena and huntress Diana
have both taken leave of me?¹ The virgin daughter of Ceres
desires to do likewise—and will, if we let her!
But if you take pride in our alliance, advance it
by joining her to her uncle!"²

"Venus ceased speaking and Cupid
loosened his quiver, and, just as his mother had ordered,
selected, from thousands of missiles, the one that was sharpest
and surest and paid his bow the closest attention,
and using one knee to bend its horn back almost double,
he pierces the heart of Dis with his barb-tipped arrow.

"Near Henna's³ walls stands a deep pool of water, called Pergus:
not even the river Cayster,⁴ flowing serenely,
hears more songs from its swans; this pool is completely surrounded
by a ring of tall trees, whose foliage, just like an awning,
keeps out the sun and preserves the water's refreshing coolness;
the moist ground is covered with flowers of Tyrian purple;
here it is springtime forever. And here Proserpina
was playfully picking its white lilies and violets,
and, while competing to gather up more than her playmates,
filling her basket and stuffing the rest in her bosom,
Dis saw her, was smitten, seized her and carried her off;
his love was that hasty. The terrified goddess cried out
for her mother, her playmates—but for her mother most often,
since she had torn the uppermost seam of her garment,
and the gathered flowers rained down from her negligent tunic;
because of her tender years and her childish simplicity,
even this loss could move her to maidenly sorrow.

8. Mountain in western Sicily with an important cult of Venus.

9. The underworld, ruled by Pluto. The other parts of the "threefold realm" are the sea (ruled by Neptune) and the sky or Mount Olympus (Jupiter).

1. Both were perpetual virgins.

2. Pluto (also called Dis) was the brother of Jupiter, the father by Ceres of Proserpina.

3. A city in central Sicily.

4. River in Lydia in Asia Minor, famous for its many swans.

"Her abductor rushed off in his chariot, urging his horses,
calling each one by its name and flicking the somber,
rust-colored reins over their backs as they galloped
through the deep lakes and the sulphurous pools of Palike
that boil up through the ruptured earth, and where the Bacchiadae,
a race sprung from Corinth, that city between the two seas,
had raised their own walls between two unequal harbors.⁵

"There is a bay that is landlocked almost completely
between the two pools of Cyane and Pisaeon Arethusa,
the residence of the most famous nymph in all Sicily,
Cyane, who gave her very own name to the fountain.
She showed herself now, emerged from her pool at waist level,
and recognizing the goddess, told Dis, "Go no further!
You cannot become the son-in-law of great Ceres
against her will: you should have asked and not taken!
If it is right for me to compare lesser with greater,
I accepted Anapis⁶ when he desired to have me,
yielding to pleas and not—as in *this* case—to terror."
She spoke, and stretching her arms out in either direction,
kept him from passing. That son of Saturn could scarcely
hold back his anger; he urged on his frightening horses,
and then, with his strong right arm, he hurled his scepter
directly into the very base of the fountain;
the stricken earth opened a path to the underworld
and took in the chariot rushing down into its crater.

"Cyane, lamenting not just the goddess abducted,
but also the disrespect shown for *her* rights as a fountain,
tacitly nursed in her heart an inconsolable sorrow;
and she who had once been its presiding spirit,
reduced to tears, dissolved right into its substance.
You would have seen her members beginning to soften,
her bones and her fingertips starting to lose their old firmness;
her slenderest parts were the first to be turned into fluid;
her feet, her legs, her sea-dark tresses, her fingers
(for the parts with least flesh turn into liquid most quickly);
and after these, her shoulders and back and her bosom
and flanks completely vanished in trickling liquid;
and lastly the living blood in her veins is replaced by
springwater, and nothing remains that you could have seized on.

"Meanwhile, the terrified mother was pointlessly seeking
her daughter all over the earth and deep in the ocean.
Neither Aurora, appearing with dew-dampened tresses,
nor Hesperus⁷ knew her to quit; igniting two torches
of pine from the fires of Etna, the care-ridden goddess
used them to illumine the wintry shadows of nighttime;
and when the dear day had once more dimmed out the bright stars,
she searched again for her daughter from sunrise to sunset.

5. Syracuse, on the southeastern coast of Sicily, founded by Corinthian colonists in the 8th century B.C.E. The Bacchiadae were a leading family who then ruled Corinth.

6. A river that empties into the sea near Syracuse.

7. The evening star. "Aurora": goddess of the dawn.

"Worn out by her labors and suffering thirst, with no fountain to wet her lips at, she happened upon a thatched hovel and knocked at its humble door, from which there came forth a crone who looked at the goddess, and, when asked for water, gave her a sweet drink, sprinkled with toasted barley.

And, as she drank it, a boy with a sharp face and bold manner stood right before her and mocked her and said she was greedy. Angered by what he was saying, the goddess drenched him with all she had not yet drunk of the barley mixture.

The boy's face thirstily drank up the spots as his arms were turned into legs, and a tail was joined to his changed limbs; so that he should now be harmless, the boy was diminished, and he was transformed into a very small lizard.

Astonished, the old woman wept and reached out to touch him, but the marvelous creature fled her, seeking a hideout.

He now has a name appropriate to his complexion, *Stellio*, from the constellations spotting his body.

"To speak of the lands and seas the goddess mistakenly searched would take far too long; the earth exhausted her seeking; she came back to Sicily; and, as she once more traversed it, arrived at Cyane, who would have told her the story had she not herself been changed; but, though willing in spirit, her mouth, tongue, and vocal apparatus were absent; nevertheless, she gave proof that was clear to the mother: Persephone's girdle (which happened by chance to have fallen into the fountain) now lay exposed on its surface.

"Once recognizing it, the goddess knew that her daughter had been taken, and tore her hair into utter disorder, and repeatedly struck her breasts with the palms of both hands. With her daughter's location a mystery still, she reproaches the whole earth as ungrateful, unworthy her gift of grain crops, and Sicily more than the others, where she has discovered the proof of her loss; and so it was here that her fierce hand shattered the earth-turning plows, here that the farmers and cattle perished alike, and here that she bade the plowed fields default on their trust by blighting the seeds in their keeping. Sicilian fertility, which had been everywhere famous, was given the lie when the crops died as they sprouted, now ruined by too much heat, and now by too heavy a rainfall; stars and winds harmed them, and the greedy birds devoured the seed as it was sown; the harvest of wheat was defeated by thorns and darnels and unappeasable grasses.

"Then Arethusa⁸ lifted her head from the Elean waters and swept her dripping hair back away from her forehead, saying, "O Mother of Grain—and mother, too, of that virgin sought through the whole world—here end your incessant labors, lest your great anger should injure the earth you once trusted, and which, unwillingly pillaged, has done nothing ignoble;

8. A spring in Syracuse. Its waters are "Elean" because they were believed to originate in the district of Pisa in Elis, a region of the western Peloponnesus in mainland Greece.

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nor do I plead for my nation, since I am a guest here:
 my nation is Pisa, I am descended from Elis,
 and live as a stranger in Sicily—this land that delights me
 more than all others on earth; here Arethusa
 dwells with her household gods. Spare it, merciful goddess,
 and when your cares and countenance both have been lightened,
 there will come an opportune time to tell you the reason
 why I was taken from home and borne off to Ortygia⁹
 over a waste of waters. The earth gave me access,
 showed me a path, and, swept on through underground caverns,
 I raised my head here to an unfamiliar night sky.
 But while gliding under the earth on a Stygian river,
 I saw with my very own eyes your dear Proserpina;
 grief and terror were still to be seen in her features,
 yet she was nonetheless queen of that shadowy kingdom,
 the all-powerful consort of the underworld's ruler."

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"The mother was petrified by the speech of the fountain,
 and stood for a very long time as though she were senseless,
 until her madness had been driven off by her outrage,
 and then she set out in her chariot for the ethereal regions;
 once there, with her face clouded over and hair all disheveled,
 she planted herself before Jove and fiercely addressed him:
 "Jupiter, I have come here as a suppliant, speaking
 for my child—and yours: if you have no regard for her mother,
 relent as her father—don't hold her unworthy, I beg you,
 simply because *I* am the child's other parent!

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The daughter I sought for so long is at last recovered,
 if to recover means only to lose much more surely,
 or if to recover means just to learn her location!

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Her theft could be borne—if only he would return her!
 Then let him do it, for surely *Jove's* daughter is worthy
 of a mate who's no brigand, even if *my* daughter isn't."

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"Jupiter answered her, "She is indeed *our* daughter,
 the pledge of our love and our common concern,
 but if you will kindly agree to give things their right names,
 this is not an injury requiring my retribution,
 but an act of love by a son-in-law who won't shame you,
 goddess, if you give approval; though much were lacking,
 how much it is to be *Jove's* brother! But he lacks nothing,
 and only yields to me that which the Fates have allotted.
 Still, if you're so keen on parting them, your Proserpina
 may come back to heaven—but only on one condition:
 that she has not touched food, for so the Fates have required."

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"He spoke and Ceres was sure she would get back her daughter,
 though the Fates were not, for the girl had already placated
 her hunger while guilelessly roaming death's formal gardens,
 where, from a low-hanging branch, she had plucked without thinking

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9. The island on which Syracuse was originally built and on which the Arethusan spring was located.

in a dense cloud of fine mist:⁷ the river god, clueless,
 circled around me, hidden in darkness, searching;
 twice he unknowingly passed by the place where the goddess
 had hidden me, and twice he called, "Yo! Arethusa!"
 How wretched was I? Why, even as the lamb is,
 at hearing the howling of wolves around the sheepfold,
 or as the rabbit in the briar patch who glimpses
 the dog's fierce muzzle and feels too frightened to tremble.
 "Alpheus remained there, for as he noticed no footprints
 heading away from the cloud, he continued to watch it.
 An icy sweat thoroughly drenched the limbs that he looked for,
 and the dark drops poured from every part of my body;
 wherever my foot had been, there was a puddle,
 and my hair shed moisture. More swiftly than I can tell it,
 I turned into liquid—even so, he recognized me,
 his darling there in the water, and promptly discarded
 the human form he had assumed for the occasion,
 reverting to river, so that our fluids might mingle.
 Diana shattered the earth's crust; I sank down,
 and was swept on through sightless caverns, off to Ortygia,
 so pleasing to me because it's the goddess's birthplace;⁸
 and here I first rose up into the air as a fountain."

"Here Arethusa concluded. The fruitful goddess summoned
 her team of dragons and yoked them onto her chariot;
 and guiding their heads with the reins, she was transported
 up through the middle air that lies between earth and heaven
 until she arrived in Athens, and, giving her carriage
 to Triptolemus,⁹ ordered him to go off and scatter
 grain on the earth—some on land that had never been broken,
 and some on land that had been a long time fallow.
 "The young man was carried high up over Europe and Asia
 until at last he came to the kingdom of Scythia.
 Lyncus was king here; he brought him into his palace,
 and asked him his name, his homeland, the cause of his journey,
 and how he had come there.

"My well-known homeland," he answered,
 "is Athens; I am Triptolemus; neither by ship upon water
 nor foot upon land have I come here; the air itself parted
 to make me a path on which I coursed through the heavens.
 I bear you the gifts of Ceres, which, sown in your broad fields,
 will yield a bountiful harvest of nourishing produce."
 "This the barbarian heard with great envy, and wishing
 that he himself might be perceived as the donor,
 took him in as a guest, and while the young man was sleeping,
 approached with a sword, and as he attempted to stab him,

7. Conventional means in ancient epic of making someone invisible.

8. The Ortygia where Arethusa ended up was in Syracuse, but Delos, the Aegean island where

Diana was born, was also called Ortygia.
 9. Son of the king of Eleusis, the great cult center of Demeter (Ceres).

Ceres changed Lyncus to lynx, and ordered Triptolemus
to drive her sacred team through the air back to Athens.

"When our eldest sister had concluded
her superb performance, with one voice
the nymphs awarded victory to . . . the Muses!
"And when the others, in defeat, reviled us,
I answered them: 'Since you display such nerve
in challenging the Muses, you deserve
chastisement—even more so since you've added
insult to outrage: our wise forbearance
is not without its limits, as you'll learn
when we get to the penalties, and vent
our righteous anger on your worthless selves.'

"Then the Pierides¹ mock our threats,
and as they try to answer us by shouting
vulgarity and giving us the finger,
their fingers take on feathers and their arms
turn into pinions! Each one sees a beak
replace a sister's face, as a new bird
is added to the species of the forest;
and as they try to beat upon their breasts,
bemoaning their new situation, they
all hang suspended, flapping in the air,
the forest's scandal—the P-Airides!²

"And even though they are all feathered now,
their speech remains as fluent as it was,
and they are famous for their noisiness
as well as for their love of argument."

FROM BOOK IX

[*Iphis and Isis*]

Rumor might very well have spread the news
of this unprecedented transformation³
throughout the hundred towns of Crete, if they
had not just had a wonder of their own
to talk about—the change that came to Iphis.

For, once upon a time, there lived in Phaestus,
not far from the royal capital at Cnossus,
a freeborn plebeian named Ligdus, who
was otherwise unknown and undistinguished,
with no more property than fame or status,
and yet devout, and blameless in his life.

His wife was pregnant. When her time had come,
he gave her his instructions with these words:
"There are two things I pray to heaven for
on your account: an easy birth and a son.

1. The daughters of Pierus.

2. The translator's pun on the name Pierides.

3. The transformation of Byblis, who loved
her brother Caunus, into a fountain.

The other fate is much too burdensome,
for daughters need what Fortune has denied us:
a dowry.

"Therefore—and may God prevent
this happening, but if, by chance, it does
and you should be delivered of a girl,
unwillingly I order this, and beg
pardon for my impiety—*But let it die!*"

He spoke, and tears profusely bathed the cheeks
of the instructor and instructed both.

Telethusa continued to implore
her husband, praying him not to confine
their hopes so narrowly—to no avail,
for he would not be moved from his decision.

Now scarcely able to endure the weight
of her womb's burden, as she lay in bed
at midnight, a dream-vision came to her:
the goddess Io⁴ stood (or seemed to stand)
before her troubled bed, accompanied
with solemn pomp by all her mysteries.

She wore her crescent horns upon her brow
and a garland made of gleaming sheaves of wheat,
and a queenly diadem; behind her stood
the dog-faced god Anubis, and divine
Bubastis (who defends the lives of cats),
and Apis as a bull clothed in a hide
of varied colors, with Harpocrates,
the god whose fingers, pressed against his lips,
command our silence; and one often sought
by his devoted worshipers—Osiris;⁵
and the asp, so rich in sleep-inducing drops.
She seemed to wake, and saw them all quite clearly.

These were the words the goddess spoke to her:
"O Telethusa, faithful devotee,
put off your heavy cares! Disobey your spouse,
and do not hesitate, when Lucina
has lightened the burden of your labor,
to raise this child, whatever it will be.
I am that goddess who, when asked, delivers,
and you will have no reason to complain
that honors you have paid me were in vain."
After instructing her, the goddess left.

The Cretan woman rose up joyfully,
lifted her hands up to the stars, and prayed
that her dream-vision would be ratified.

Then going into labor, she brought forth
a daughter—though her husband did not know it.

4. Identified with the Egyptian Isis, goddess of fertility, marriage, and maternity, whose cult was widespread in the Roman world.

5. Husband of Isis, killed by his brother Set and restored to life by Isis; he is thus a figure of rebirth.

The mother (with intention to deceive)
told them *to feed the boy*. Deception prospered,
since no one knew the truth except the nurse.

The father thanked the gods and named the child
for its grandfather, Iphis; since this name
was given men and women both, his mother
was pleased, for she could use it honestly.

So from her pious lie, deception grew.
She dressed it as a boy—its face was such
that whether boy or girl, it was a beauty.

Meanwhile, the years went by, thirteen of them:
your father, Iphis, has arranged for you
a marriage to the golden-haired lanthe,
the daughter of a Cretan named Telestes,
the maid most praised in Phaestus⁶ for her beauty.

The two were similar in age and looks,
and had been taught together from the first.
First love came unexpected to both hearts
and wounded them both equally—and yet
their expectations were quite different:

lanthe can look forward to a time
of wedding torches and of wedding vows,
and trusts that one whom she believes a man
will be *her* man. Iphis, however, loves
with hopeless desperation, which increases
in strict proportion to its hopelessness,
and burns—a maiden—for another maid!

And scarcely holding back her tears, she cries,
“Oh, what will be the end reserved for Iphis,
gripped by a strange and monstrous passion known
to no one else? If the gods had wished to spare me,
they should have; if they wanted to destroy me,
they should have given me a natural affliction.

“Cows do not burn for cows, nor mares for mares;
the ram will have his sheep, the stag his does,
and birds will do the same when they assemble;
there are no animals whose females lust
for other females! I wish that I were dead!

“That Crete might bring forth monsters of all kinds.
Queen Pasiphaë⁷ was taken by a bull,
yet even *that* was male-and-female passion!
My love is much less rational than hers,
to tell the truth. At least she had the hope
of satisfaction, taking in the bull
through guile, and in the image of a cow,
thereby deceiving the adulterer!

“If every form of ingenuity
were gathered here from all around the world,

6. A city in Crete.

7. Wife of King Minos of Crete, and mother by a bull of the Minotaur.

if Daedalus⁸ flew back on waxen wings,
 what could he do? Could all his learned arts
 transform me from a girl into a boy?
 Or could you change into a boy, Ianthe?

"But really, Iphis, pull yourself together,
 be firm, cast off this stultifying passion:
 accept your birth—unless you would deceive
 yourself as well as others—look for love
 where it is proper to, as a woman should!
 Hope both creates and nourishes such love;
 reality deprives you of all hope.

"No watchman keeps you from her dear embrace,
 no husband's ever-vigilant concern,
 no father's fierceness, nor does she herself
 deny the gifts that you would have from her.
 And yet you are denied all happiness,
 nor could it have been otherwise if all
 the gods and men had labored in your cause.

"But the gods have not denied me anything;
 agreeably, they've given what they could;
 my father wishes for me what I wish,
 she and her father both would have it be;
 but Nature, much more powerful than they are,
 wishes it not—sole source of all my woe!

"But look—the sun has risen and the day
 of our longed-for nuptials dawns at last!
 Ianthe will be mine—and yet not mine:
 we die of thirst here at the fountainside.

"Why do you, Juno, guardian of brides,
 and you, O Hymen, god of marriage, come
 to these rites, which cannot be rites at all,
 for no one takes the bride, and both are veiled?"

She said no more. Nor did her chosen burn
 less fiercely as she prayed you swiftly come,
 O god of marriage.

Fearing what you sought,
 Telethusa postponed the marriage day
 with one concocted pretext and another,
 a fictive illness or an evil omen.
 But now she had no more excuses left,
 and the wedding day was only one day off.

She tears the hair bands from her daughter's head
 and from her own, and thus unbound, she prayed
 while desperately clinging to the altar:
 "O holy Isis, who art pleased to dwell
 and be worshiped at Paraetonium,
 at Pharos, in the Mareotic fields,

8. Fabled craftsman who devised the heifer disguise that enabled Pasiphaë to seduce the bull and, later, built the labyrinth for the

Minotaur. Forced to flee Crete, he made wings of feathers held together by wax, for himself and his son, Icarus.

and where the Nile splits into seven branches;
deliver us, I pray you, from our fear!

"For I once saw thee and thy sacred emblems,
O goddess, and I recognized them all
and listened to the sound of brazen rattles"
and kept your orders in my memory.

"And that my daughter still looks on the light,
and that I have not suffered punishment,
why, this is all your counsel and your gift;
now spare us both and offer us your aid."

Warm tears were in attendance on her words.
The altar of the goddess seemed to move—
it *did* move, and the temple doors were shaken,
and the horns (her lunar emblem) glowed with light,
and the bronze rattles sounded.

Not yet secure,
but nonetheless delighted by this omen,
the mother left with Iphis following,
as was her wont, but now with longer strides,
darker complexion, and with greater force,
a keener countenance, and with her hair
shorter than usual and unadorned,
and with more vigor than a woman has.

And you who were so recently a girl
are now a boy! Bring gifts to the goddess!
Now boldly celebrate your faith in her!
They bring the goddess gifts and add to them
a votive tablet with these lines inscribed:

GIFTS IPHIS PROMISED WHEN SHE WAS A MAID
TRANSFORMED INTO A BOY HE GLADLY PAID

The next day's sun revealed the great wide world
with Venus, Juno, and Hymen all together
gathered beneath the smoking nuptial torches,
and Iphis in possession of Ianthe.

FROM BOOK X¹

[*Pygmalion*]

"Pygmalion observed how these women² lived lives of sordid
indecentcy, and, dismayed by the numerous defects
of character Nature had given the feminine spirit,
stayed as a bachelor, having no female companion.

9. Sistra, sacred rattles used in Isis's cult.

1. This selection of stories is part of the song
sung by Orpheus, the legendary singer, after he
has failed to redeem his wife, Eurydice, from
the underworld. His theme, announced in the
prologue of his song, is "young boys whom the

gods have desired, / and . . . girls seized by for-
bidden and blameworthy passions."

2. Orpheus has just told of the Propoetides of
Cyprus, who, as punishment for having denied
Venus's divinity, became the first women to
prostitute themselves.

"During that time he created an ivory statue,
a work of most marvelous art, and gave it a figure
better than any living woman could boast of,
and promptly conceived a passion for his own creation.
You would have thought it alive, so like a real maiden
that only its natural modesty kept it from moving:
art concealed artfulness. Pygmalion gazed in amazement,
burning with love for what was in likeness a body.

"Often he stretched forth a hand to touch his creation,
attempting to settle the issue: *was it a body,*
or was it—this he would not yet concede—a mere statue?
He gives it kisses, and they are returned, he imagines;
now he addresses and now he caresses it, feeling
his fingers sink into its warm, pliant flesh, and
fears he will leave blue bruises all over its body;
he seeks to win its affections with words and with presents
pleasing to girls, such as seashells and pebbles, tame birds,
armloads of flowers in thousands of different colors,
lilies, bright painted balls, curious insects in amber;
he dresses it up and puts diamond rings on its fingers,
gives it a necklace, a lacy brassiere and pearl earrings,
and even though all such adornments truly become her,
she does not seem to be any less beautiful naked.
He lays her down on a bed with a bright purple cover
and calls her his bedmate and slips a few soft, downy pillows
under her head as though she were able to feel them.

"The holiday honoring Venus has come, and all Cyprus³
turns out to celebrate; heifers with gilded horns buckle
under the deathblow⁴ and incense soars up in thick clouds;
having already brought his own gift to the altar,
Pygmalion stood by and offered this fainthearted prayer:
'If you in heaven are able to give us whatever
we ask for, then I would like as my wife—' and not daring
to say, '—my ivory maiden,' said, '—one like my statue!'
Since golden Venus was present there at her altar,
she knew what he wanted to ask for, and as a good omen,
three times the flames soared and leapt right up to the heavens.
"Once home, he went straight to the replica of his sweetheart,
threw himself down on the couch and repeatedly kissed her;
she seemed to grow warm and so he repeated the action,
kissing her lips and exciting her breasts with both hands.
Aroused, the ivory softened and, losing its stiffness,
yielded, submitting to his caress as wax softens
when it is warmed by the sun, and handled by fingers,
takes on many forms, and by being used, becomes useful.
Amazed, he rejoices, then doubts, then fears he's mistaken,
while again and again he touches on what he has prayed for.
She is alive! And her veins leap under his fingers!

3. Island in the eastern Mediterranean sacred to Venus.
4. I.e., as they are sacrificed.

320 "You can believe that Pygmalion offered the goddess
 his thanks in a torrent of speech, once again kissing
 those lips that were not untrue; that she felt his kisses,
 and timidly blushing, she opened her eyes to the sunlight,
 and at the same time, first looked on her lover and heaven!
 The goddess attended the wedding since she had arranged it,
 and before the ninth moon had come to its crescent, a daughter
 was born to them—Paphos,⁵ who gave her own name to the island.

325 "She had a son named Cinyras, who would be regarded
 as one of the blessed, if he had only been childless.
 I sing of dire events: depart from me, daughters,
 depart from me, fathers; or, if you find my poems charming,
 330 believe that I lie, believe these events never happened;
 or, if you believe that they did, then believe they were punished.

"If Nature allows us to witness such impious misdeeds,
 then I give my solemn thanks that the Thracian people
 and the land itself are far away from those regions⁶
 where evil like that was begotten: let fabled Panchaea⁷
 335 be rich in balsam and cinnamon, costum and frankincense,
 the sweat that drips down from the trees; let it bear incense
 and flowers of every description: it also bears myrrh, and
 too great a price was paid for that new creation.

340 "Cupid himself denies that his darts ever harmed you,
 Myrrha, and swears that his torches likewise are guiltless;
 one of the three sisters,⁸ bearing a venomous hydra
 and waving a Stygian firebrand, must have inspired your passion.
 Hating a parent is wicked, but even more wicked
 345 than hatred is this kind of love. Princes elected
 from far and wide desire you, Myrrha; all Asia
 sends its young men to compete for your hand in marriage:
 choose from so many just one of these men for your husband,
 so long as a certain one is not the one chosen.

350 "She understood and struggled against her perversion,
 asking herself, 'What have I begun? Where will it take me?
 May heaven and piety and the sacred rights of fathers
 restrain these unspeakable thoughts and repel my misfortune,
 if this indeed is misfortune; yet piety chooses
 not to condemn this love outright: without distinctions
 5 animals copulate; it is no crime for the heifer
 to bear the weight of her father upon her own back;
 daughters are suitable wives in the kingdom of horses;
 the billy goats enter the flocks that they themselves sire,
 and birds are inseminated by those who conceive them:
 blessed, the ones for whom such love is permitted!

"Human morality gives us such stifling precepts,

5. One of the cities of Cyprus, whose name is often used for the island as a whole.

6. A reminder that Orpheus is singing in Thrace (the region stretching along the north

coast of the Aegean Sea).

7. An imaginary island near Arabia, rich in spices.

8. The Furies.

and makes indecent what Nature freely allows us!
 But people say there are nations where sons and their mothers,
 where fathers and daughters, may marry each other, increasing
 the bonds of piety by their redoubled affections.
 Wretched am I, who hadn't the luck to be born there,
 injured by nothing more than mischance of location!

"Why do I obsess? Begone, forbidden desires;
 of course he is worthy of love—but love for a father!
 So, then, if I were not the daughter of great Cinyras,
 I would be able to have intercourse with Cinyras:
 though he is mine, he is not mine, and our nearness
 ruins me: I would be better off as a stranger.

"It would be good for me to go far away from my country,
 as long as I could escape from my wicked desires,
 for what holds me here is the passion that I have to see him,
 to touch and speak to Cinyras and give him my kisses—
 if nothing more is permitted. You impious maiden,
 what more can you imagine will ever be granted?
 Are you aware how you confuse all rights and relations?
 Would you be your mother's rival? The whore of your father?
 Would you be called your son's sister? Your brother's own mother?
 Do you not shudder to think of the serpent-coiffed sisters⁹
 thrusting their bloodthirsty torches into the faces
 of the guilty wretches that those three appear to and torture?

"But you, while your body is undefiled, keep your mind chaste,
 and do not break Nature's law with incestuous pairing.
 Think what you ask for: the very act is forbidden,
 and he is devout and mindful of moral behavior—
 ah, how I wish that he had a similar madness!"

"She spoke and Cinyras, whom an abundance of worthy
 suitors had left undecided, consulted his daughter,
 ran their names by her and asked whom she wished for a husband;
 silent at first, she kept her eyes locked on her father,
 seething until the hot tears spilled over her eyelids:
 Cinyras, attributing this to the fears of a virgin,
 bade her cease weeping, wiped off her cheeks, and kissed her;
 Myrrha rejoiced overmuch at his gesture and answered
 that she would marry a man 'just like you.' Misunderstanding
 the words of his daughter, Cinyras approved them, replying,
 'May you be this pious always.' Hearing that last word,
 the virgin lowers her head, self-convicted of evil.

"Midnight: now sleep dissolves all the cares of the body;
 Cinyras' daughter, however, lies tossing, consumed by
 the fires of passion, repeating her prayers in a frenzy;
 now she despairs, now she'll attempt it; now she is shamefaced,
 now eager: uncertain: *What should she do now?* She wavers,
 just like a tree that the axe blade has girdled completely,
 when only the last blow remains to be struck, and the woodsman
 cannot predict the direction it's going to fall in,

9. Again, the Furies.

she, after so many blows to her spirit, now totters,
 now leaning in one, and now in the other, direction,
 nor is she able to find any rest from her passion
 save but in death. Death pleases her, and she gets up,
 determined to hang herself from a beam with her girdle;
 'Farewell, dear Cinyras: may you understand why I do this!'

she said, as she fitted the noose around her pale neck.
 "They say that, hearing her murmuring, her faithful old nurse
 in the next chamber arose and entered her bedroom:
 at sight of the grim preparations, she screams out, and striking
 her breasts and tearing her garments, removes the noose from
 around the girl's neck, and then, only then she collapses,
 and weeping, embraces her, asking her why she would do it.

"Myrrha remained silent, expressionless, with her eyes downcast,
 sorrowing only because her attempt was detected.
 But the woman persists, baring her flat breasts and white hair,
 and by the milk given when she was a babe in the cradle
 beseeches her to entrust her old nurse with the cause of her sorrow.
 The girl turns away with a groan; the nurse is determined
 to learn her secret, and promises not just to keep it:

"Speak and allow me to aid you,' she says, 'for in my old age,
 I am not utterly useless: if you are dying of passion,
 my charms and herbs will restore you; if someone wishes you evil,
 my rites will break whatever spell you are under;
 is some god wrathful? A sacrifice placates his anger.

What else could it be? I can't think of anything—Fortune
 favors your family, everything's going quite smoothly,
 both of your parents are living, your mother, your father—'
 Myrrha sighed deeply, hearing her father referred to,
 but not even then did the nurse grasp the terrible evil
 in the girl's heart, although she felt that her darling
 suffered a passion of some kind for some kind of lover.

"Nurse was unyielding and begged her to make known her secret,
 whatever it was, pressing the tearful girl to her bosom;
 and clasping her in an embrace that old age had enfeebled,
 she said, 'You're in love—I am certain! I will be zealous
 in aiding your cause, never you fear—and your father
 will be none the wiser!'

"Myrrha in frenzy leapt up
 and threw herself onto the bed, pressing her face in the pillows:
 'Leave me, I beg you,' she said. 'Avoid my wretched dishonor;
 leave me or cease to ask me the cause of my sorrow:
 what you attempt to uncover is sinful and wicked!'

"The old woman shuddered: extending the hands that now trembled
 with fear and old age, she fell at the feet of her darling,
 a suppliant, coaxing her now, and now attempting to scare her;
 threatening now to disclose her attempted self-murder,
 but pledging to aid her if she confesses her passion.

"She lifted her head with her eyes full of tears spilling over
 onto the breast of her nurse and repeatedly tried to
 speak out, but repeatedly stopped herself short of confession,

hiding her shame-colored face in the folds of her garments,
 until she finally yielded, blurting her secret:
 'O mother,' she cried, 'so fortunate you with your husband!'
 and said no more but groaned.

"The nurse, who now understood it,
 felt a chill run through her veins, and her bones shook with tremor,
 and her white hair stood up in stiff bristles. She said whatever
 she could to dissuade the girl from her horrible passion,
 and even though Myrrha knew the truth of her warning,
 she had decided to die if she could not possess him.
 'Live, then,' the other replied, 'and possess your—' Not daring
 to use the word 'father,' she left her sentence unfinished,
 but called upon heaven to stand by her earlier promise.

"Now it was time for the annual feast days of Ceres;
 the pious, and married women clad in white vestments,
 thronged to the celebration, offering garlands
 of wheat as firstfruits of the season; now for nine nights
 the intimate touch of their men is considered forbidden.
 Among these matrons was Cenchreïs, wife of Cinyras,
 for her attendance during these rites was required.
 And so, while the queen's place in his bed was left vacant,
 the overly diligent nurse came to Cinyras,
 finding him drunk, and spoke to him of a maiden
 whose passion for him was real (although her name wasn't)
 and praising her beauty; when asked the age of this virgin,
 she said, 'the same age as Myrrha.' Commanded to fetch her,
 nurse hastened home, and entering, cried to her darling,
 'Rejoice, my dear, we have won!' The unlucky maiden
 could not feel joy in her heart, but only grim sorrow,
 yet still she rejoiced, so distorted were her emotions.

"Now it is midnight, when all of creation is silent;
 high in the heavens, between the two Bears, Boötes¹
 had turned his wagon so that its shaft pointed downward;
 Myrrha approaches her crime, which is fled by chaste Luna,²
 while under black clouds the stars hide their scandalized faces;
 Night lacks its usual fires; you, Icarus,³ covered
 your face and were followed at once by Erigone,
 whose pious love of her father merited heaven.
 "Thrice Myrrha stumbles and stops each time at the omen,
 and thrice the funereal owl sings her his poem of endings;
 nevertheless she continues, her shame lessened by shadows.
 She holds the left hand of her nurse, and gropes with the other
 blindly in darkness: now at the bedchamber's threshold,
 and now she opens the door: and now she is led within,
 where her knees fail her; she falters, nearly collapsing,

1. The Ox-herder, a constellation that was imagined as driving Ursa Major, the Great Bear.
2. The Moon, often associated with Diana, one of whose attributes was chastity.
3. More properly Icarius, a mythic Athenian.

He received Dionysus into the city, and the god rewarded him with wine, which he shared with his countrymen. Feeling its effect, they thought they had been poisoned and killed him. His daughter Erigone hanged herself in grief, and both were changed into stars.

her color, her blood, her spirit all flee together.

"As she approaches the crime, her horror increases; regretting her boldness, she wishes to turn back, unnoticed, but even as she holds back, the old woman leads her by the hand to the high bed, where she delivers her, saying, 'Take her, Cinyras—she's yours,' and unites the doomed couple. The father accepts his own offspring in his indecent bed and attempts to dispel the girl's apprehensions, encouraging her not to be frightened of him, and addressing her, as it happened, with a name befitting her years: he called her 'daughter' while she called him 'father,' so the right names were attached to their impious actions.

"Filled with the seed of her father, she left his bedchamber, having already conceived, in a crime against nature which she repeated the following night and thereafter, until Cinyras, impatient to see his new lover after so many encounters, brought a light in, and in the same moment discovered his crime and his daughter; grief left him speechless; he tore out his sword from the scabbard; Myrrha sped off, and, thanks to night's shadowy darkness, escaped from her death. She wandered the wide-open spaces, leaving Arabia, so rich in palms, and Panchaea, and after nine months, she came at last to Sabaea,⁴ where she found rest from the weariness that she suffered, for she could scarcely carry her womb's heavy burden.

"Uncertain of what she should wish for, tired of living but frightened of dying, she summed up her state in this prayer: 'O gods, if there should be any who hear my confession, I do not turn away from the terrible sentence that my misbehavior deserves; but lest I should outrage the living by my survival, or the dead by my dying, drive me from both of these kingdoms, transform me wholly, so that both life and death are denied me.'

"Some god *did* hear her confession, and heaven answered her final prayer, for, even as she was still speaking, the earth rose up over her legs, and from her toes burst roots that spread widely to hold the tall trunk in position; her bones put forth wood, and even though they were still hollow, they now ran with sap and not blood; her arms became branches, and those were now twigs that used to be called her fingers, while her skin turned to hard bark. The tree kept on growing, over her swollen belly, wrapping it tightly, and growing over her breast and up to her neck; she could bear no further delay, and, as the wood rose, plunged her face down into the bark and was swallowed.

"Loss of her body has meant the loss of all feeling; and yet she weeps, and the warm drops spill from her tree trunk; those tears bring her honor: the distillate myrrh preserves and will keep the name of its mistress down through the ages.

4. Arabia Felix, the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.