

OVID'S METAMORPHOSES

II

Behold the princely palace of the sun,
Built high with burnished gold, to everyone
A marvel, fine and shining ivory
Framing its roof, while light shone radiantly
From two-door silver leaves. Its art surpassed
Its fabric: Vulcan had carved out the vast
Oceans that ring the earth, the solid ground,
The sky itself extending all around,
The dark blue sea housing dulcet Triton,
The shifting Proteus and Aegaeon 10
With his two whales, and Doris who is seen
Amidst her daughters dying their sea-green
Tresses or swimming or meandering
On fishes' backs, not one resembling
Another or unlike her, as should be
The case with sisters. All humanity
Existed on the earth, cities as well;
Woods, beasts, nymphs, streams and country gods would dwell
There, too, while in the sky that shone so bright
Six zodiac signs were seen upon the right- 20
Hand door, six on the left. The progeny
Of Clymene, so hankering to see
His putative father, climbed the lofty track;
Once there, however, he kept himself back
A little, for the light he could not bear,
It was so strong. Upon his emerald chair,
In purple robed, sat Phoebus. All around,
To both the left and right, Phaethon found
The day, the month, the year, the century
And all the hours laid out equally - 30
Spring stood there with a flowery coronet,
Summer wore ears of corn, Autumn was wet,
Speckled with grape juice, snow-white, bristling hair
Decked icy Winter's head. Phoebus was there,
Eyeing the boy, who feared the oddity
Of all he saw. Phoebus, with eyes that see
All things, said, "What has made you scale so high.
My son (a name no father need deny)?
Why have you sought these heights?" His progeny
Said, "O great light to all humanity, 40
Father (if you will let me use that name,
If Clymene, to save herself from shame,
Has not deceived me) give me proof that I
Am your true progeny!" Phoebus put by

His crown and urged him nearer, and then he
 Embraced him and said to him, "Certainly
 You're worthy to be mine: you know it's true
 That you are so – your mother told it you.
 So banish any doubts; ask me to do
 You any favour and I'll grant it you, 50
 And by the waters of the Styx, unseen
 By me, the waters that have ever been
 Sworn by among the gods, this vow I swear
 Is honest, and to Phoebus then and there
 He begged to be his father's charioteer
 For just one day. His father grieved to hear
 These words. Three or four times he shook his head:
 "How rash was I to make this vow!" he said.
 Would that I'd never said it, or that I
 Could just this single favour nullify! 60
 I must dissuade you, for what you implore
 Is dangerous – yes, what you're asking for
 Is of great worth, beyond a young man's state,
 And you are subject to a mortal's fate,
 So what's not mortal you may not attain,
 And therefore your entreaties are in vain.
 The gods may please themselves, but only I
 My drive my fiery chariot through the sky.
 Not even Zeus, Olympus' mighty king,
 Who launches down his bolts of lightning, 70
 May do so, and who's mightier than he?
 At dawn even my steeds with difficulty,
 Though fresh, climb up the first part of the hill,
 Which is so high that even I can still
 Look down with fear upon the sea and land.
 The last part of the track, though, needs demand
 Sure mastery, for it is very steep;
 And Tethys, in case I should headlong sweep
 Down from the heights, is full of fear till she
 Receives me in her waves. Incessantly 80
 The sky is turning and the massive throng
 Of distant stars are sent whirling along.
 I move the other way, and yet its thrust
 Does not prevail upon us as it must
 Upon all other things as on I zoom
 But in reverse direction. Now assume
 You have a chariot – what will you do?
 Control your wheels lest they might carry you
 Away? Perhaps you think that where you go
 There are groves and rich temples? Ah, not so! 90
 There are wild beasts, and you may be waylaid,
 And, if you do not find yourself betrayed
 Through wandering from your path, nevertheless

You have to pass in all that wilderness
 The threatening horns of Taurus and Chiron
 And Leo's dread face and the Scorpion,
 Who bends his cruel claws expansively,
 And Cancer, who bends his claws differently;
 And you don't have the special skill to tame
 My lusty steeds, who snort out darts of flame: 100
 They scarce indulge *me* when, with fiery speed,
 They fight against the reins. My boy, take heed:
 Amend your plea while it's allowed! Maybe
 You think because of consanguinity
 You need a certain sign. Surely my fear
 For your security makes very clear
 Proof that I am your father. Cast your eyes
 Upon my face! Would you could recognize
 The cares I feel for you! Look all around
 At all the riches that you see abound 100
 Upon the land and sea and in the sky
 And ask me what you will! - you'll see that I
 Will grudge you nought. This one thing, though, relent,
 For truly it is more a punishment
 Than honour! Do not hang so fawningly
 About my neck! I will decidedly
 Grant anything you will (you heard the vow
 I made by Styx), but be more prudent now!
 But all his admonitions were in vain,
 For Phaethon ignored them and again 120
 Yearned for the chariot. Reluctantly
 Phoebus escorted Phaethon to see
 That gift of Vulcan – it was very wide
 With a golden beam and axles on each side:
 The massive wheel was gold, the spokes were bright
 With silver, diamonds and chrysolite
 Shone from the spangled yoke, exhibiting
 Phoebus's light. Phaethon stood marvelling
 At this great workmanship; Dawn opened wide
 Her glowing doors as in the east she eyed 130
 The morning in her rosy courts. Then fled
 The stars, and Lucifer as usual led
 Them off then left his vigil finally.
 And now, when Phoebus had begun to see
 A glowing blush appear in every land,
 The moon withdrawing, he gave his command -
 "Couple the steeds!" to the fleet Hours," he said,
 And they obeyed at once and swiftly led
 Them out, ambrosia-fed and discharging
 Flames from their nostrils. After exiting 140
 Their spacious stalls, the Hours fixed in place
 Their bits. Phoebus then touched the stripling's face

With a sacred drug so that the flames would spare
 The boy, and then he wrought around his hair
 The sun-rays. Then, foreboding how distressed
 He might become, out of his anxious breast
 He sighed and said, "If you at least consent
 To what your father tells you, be content
 To spare the whip and use your bravery
 To rein them in, for independently 150
 They dash, for it is hard to regulate
 Their eagerness. And do not travel straight
 Through all five circles, for the track is wide
 And curved and bound upon the farthest side
 Of three zones and it doesn't go to where
 The South Pole rests and it avoids the Bear
 That roams about the northern hemisphere.
 The traces of the wheel are very clear.
 Take care to see that both the earth and air
 Receive an equal warmth; and take care 160
 Not to drive down too low or up too high -
 Thus you will scorch the earth or else the sky.
 The middle way is best. Avoid the right,
 For thus upon the twisted Snake you'll light.
 The altar on the left is equally
 Unsafe, so close to earth: thus prudently
 Select the middle way. It is my prayer
 That you'll be succoured by Fortune, whose care
 You seem to shun. But now the dewy night
 To Hesperus' far shore has taken flight 170
 And Dawn is shining brightly. No delay
 Must be allowed, for we are called away.
 Take up the reins! But if you change your mind,
 Don't take my horses, while you still can find
 Yourself on solid ground, and let my rays
 Light up the world beneath your wondering gaze!
 His son leapt on the chariot with joy
 And thanked his father, who was for the boy
 Uneasy, with the reins clutched in his hand.
 At once Eous, Aethon, Pyrois and 180
 Phlegon, his steeds, with flame-like snorting neighed
 Out loud and with their shining hooves they made
 The barriers ring. But Tethys, unaware
 Of what her grandson might be forced to bear,
 Let back those bars, and thus the universe
 Was open for the chariot to traverse.
 They swiftly took the road and drove straight through
 The clouds and spread their wings as on they flew
 And passed the eastern winds. The weight that they
 And those who bore them felt as on their way 190
 They went was lighter now. As curved ships toss

About and heave due to their ballast's loss,
 The chariot, lacking its accustomed weight,
 Made one unsteady leap, conducted straight
 Into the air just like an empty shell.
 On seeing this, the steeds dashed off pell-mell
 And left the beaten path impulsively.
 The lad was now full of anxiety,
 Nor with the reins did he know how to steer
 The steeds, nor did he know, so full of fear 200
 Was he, the way that he was meant to go ,
 And, if he did, he didn't even know
 How to control their flight. And now in vain
 The cold oxen, who pulled their heavenly wain,
 Attempt to dip themselves in the wide sea,
 For now they're warm, as never previously;
 The Serpent, heretofore not frightening
 But chill and sluggish, now is smouldering
 With furious heat. They say Boötes fled,
 Being slow and by the Plough prohibited. 210
 As Phaethon sadly from the utmost height
 Looked on the earth receding from his sight,
 He paled, his knees now trembling with fright,
 His eyes deprived of shade by excess light.
 Now he regrets what he has sought, brought low
 With grief that he'd been so agog to know
 His pedigree. "I'm Merops' son, " he thought.
 "That's all I need." Just as a ship is caught
 By Boreas, the pilot forfeiting
 The helm, resigned now to soliciting 220
 The gods, he's borne along. Much of the sky
 Is at his back, but more confronts his eye.
 Each way is measured in his anxious breast,
 His gaze at first fixed firmly on the west,
 Which he will never reach, as Fate has said,
 But after this he turned his gaze instead
 Behind him; dazed, there's nothing he dares do -
 He won't tighten the reins, he won't unscrew
 The bits. Alarmed, he looks up to the air
 At wondrous creatures. There's a region where 230
 The Scorpion bends his pincers, on each side
 His tail and curving arms stretched open wide
 Above two signs, and when he saw its black
 And venomous poison aiming to attack,
 He dropped the reins in horror and dismay.
 The steeds now felt the reins as they both lay
 Upon their backs and veered off unimpeded
 And through the heaven's unknown regions speeded,
 Striking against the stars and hurrying
 The chariot along, now clambering 240

Above the clouds, now sweeping close to land
 Below them all. The moon can't understand,
 Seeing her brother's steeds so far below
 Her own; the clouds are boiling, all aglow;
 The earth catches on fire gradually,
 Beginning at the highest, finally
 Making vast apertures, becoming bare
 And dry, the fields and pastures everywhere
 Now pale; the foliage has left the trees;
 The corn is parched and thus destroyed. But these 250
 Are trivial things that I lament about:
 Great cities with their ramparts were wiped out
 And flames reduced to ashes many a nation,
 Woodlands and hills destroyed by conflagration,
 Athos on fire, Cilician Taurus,
 Aflame, as well as Oeta and Tmolus,
 And Ida, once abounding everywhere
 With fountains, now was wholly dry and bare,
 And Helicon, the Muses' haunt, Haemus,
 Not yet named for its king, Oeagrius. 260
 Mt. Etna, too, blazed twice as furiously
 As heretofore; Parnassus, Rhodope
 Who soon would lose her snows of yesteryear,
 And Dindyma, a mountain very dear
 To Cybele, Caucasus, Mycale,
 Cithaeron, where Pentheus was cruelly
 Butchered, and Mimas; now Scythia's chill
 Cannot support her; Ossa and Pindus fill
 With flames, as does Olympus, while on high
 The Alps and Apennines smoke up the sky. 270
 The earth's in flames, and Phaethon can't bear
 The violent heat as he breathes in the air;
 He feels the chariot is glowing white
 And cannot stand the sparks and ash that light
 On him, hemmed in by hot, dense smoke, not knowing
 Where he might be or where he might be going,
 Slave to the horses' will. It is believed
 That that's how Ethiopians received
 Their dusky colour, for their blood, it's said,
 Flowed to their bodies' surface. Libya's bed 280
 Became a desert. With dishevelled hair
 The nymphs bewailed the springs and lakes now bare;
 Boeotia's heard to chant a threnody
 For Dirce's streams and for Amymone
 Argos laments and Corinth searches for
 Pirene's recent-thriving fountains. Nor
 Are rivers safe because their banks are wide:
 The Don mid-way becomes a steaming tide;
 Peneus, Caïcus, rapid Ismenus,

Xanthus, Acadian Erymanthus, 290
 Lycormas and Maeander and Malas,
 Euphrates, Laconian Eurotas
 Are all ablaze; Phasis and Orontes,
 Swift-flowing Thermodon and the Ganges
 And Alpheus boil, the banks of Spercheus
 Afire; the gold that flows in the Tagus
 Is molten, and Maeonia's swans, whose fame
 In singing is well-known, are black with flame;
 The river Nile flees, flowing far away
 In dread, and hides his head, which to this day 300
 Cannot be seen, his seven mouths all dry
 And filled with dust: his seven channels lie
 Without a stream; the waterways of Thrace,
 The Hebrus and the Strymon, also face
 This drought, the western rivers, too, the Po,
 The Rhine, the Rhone, the Tiber, even though
 Vowed universal power. The ground as well
 Breaks up, light penetrates the halls of Hell,
 Scaring Lord Pluto and his queen. The sea
 Compresses and what was just previously 310
 A wide space is a parched expanse of sand;
 And through the shrinking waters mountains stand
 To mingle with the scattered Cyclades;
 The fish dive to the bottom of the seas,
 And now the dolphins do not even dare
 To rise above the waves into the air.
 Dead seals, face upwards, now float on the deep;
 Nereus and Doris with her girls would sweep,
 They say, through warm caves. Three times Neptune tried
 To lift his face and arms above the tide. 320
 Three times he could not bear the burning air.
 Yet the kind earth, surrounded everywhere
 By sea, amid the waters of the tide
 And fountains, who now hid themselves inside
 Their mother's womb, brought up her face, her hand
 Upon her brow, and fiercely shook the land,
 Then sank back lower than she used to be
 And in a raspy voice murmured, "Tell me,
 O Zeus, where are your lightning bolts? If I
 Must be destroyed by fire, let me die 330
 By *yours* – less painfully! It's burdensome
 To speak (this heat will render me quite mum!).
 My hair is scorched and ash is in my eyes
 And on my face – and so is this the prize
 You've given me for all my fruitfulness?
 Is this how you reward my plenteousness,
 With ploughs and rakes forever scarring me,
 My being cultivated constantly,

My feeding cattle and all of mankind,
With frankincense for you? But never mind 340
Myself – what of the waves? What did they do
To merit this? What of your brother, too?
Why does the sea decrease, the sea that he
Received by lot, almost an absentee?
But if for both of us you have no care,
What of the sky? Look round you everywhere -
Both poles are smoking: if they're felled, then you
Will have to see your palace topple, too.
Atlas is faint and scarcely can endure
The glowing heavens, and you may be sure, 350
If this is sea's, earth's and the heavens' conclusion,
We'll be cast into our erstwhile confusion.
Save what is left to save! Preserve us all!
She spoke no more because she was in thrall
To all the vapour. Then she placed her head
Within her bosom and to Hades fled.
Now Zeus, protesting that the gods and he
Who lent his chariot to his child would be
Destroyed if he did not lend them his might,
Climbed high up in the air to Heaven's height, 360
Where he would spread the clouds above the land
And hurl the lightning quivering in his hand.
But now he had no clouds, no rain to cast
Down to the earth. But with a thunderblast
He flung at Phaethon a lightning-bolt
That overthrew the stripling with a jolt,
And fire met fire. The steeds were filled with fear,
Since in a trice they'd lost their charioteer,
And dashed the other way and shook away
The yoke and harness. Round about there lay 370
The reins, wheels, axle, from its pole wrenched free,
The other remnants in disorderly
Fashion strewn all about. His yellow hair
Still blazing, Phaethon shot into the air
As stars from a bright sky occasionally
Appear to cascade down, though actually
They don't. Eridanus received him there,
Far from his native land, and with great care
Washed clean his foaming face. The naiads came
To inter his body, black with three-forked flame: 380
THE SON OF PHOEBUS, PHAETHON LIES HERE,
WHO ACTED AS HIS FATHER'S CHARIOTEER,
AND THOUGH HE DID NOT MANAGE THUS TO FLY
SUCCESSFULLY, HE HAD A MGHTY TRY
Was what they wrote upon the gravestone there.
But Phoebus hid his face, weighed down with care
And sorrow, and, almost beyond belief,

The sun did not appear, due to his grief,
 For one whole day. The flames, though, brought some light,
 And so there was some gain in all that blight. 390
 But Clymene, once she had spoken out
 The things which chiefly should be said about
 Such ills, in sadness wandered, mystified,
 As she made weals upon her breast, and tried
 To find Phaethon's limbs and bones, which she
 Found on a foreign bank. She instantly
 Lay down and wept upon the name she read
 Upon the marble stone, and as she shed
 Her tears, she warmed his bones against her breast.
 The Heliades were equally distressed, 400
 Lamenting him, and, as their breasts they beat,
 Both night and day would constantly repeat
 The woes he'd never hear, and there had been
 Four days before they ended their routine
 Of lamentation. Phaethusa, she
 Who was the eldest of the company,
 When she desired to lie upon the ground,
 Complained that she could not, because she'd found
 Her feet were stiff; when fair Lampetie tried
 To walk to her, she saw her feet were tied 410
 To a fast-growing root; a third, when she
 Began to tear her hair, amazingly
 Was tearing leaves; another wept to learn
 Her legs were made of wood, while, in her turn,
 Another finds her arms are boughs. Surprise
 Abounds when bark encompasses their thighs,
 Breasts, bellies, shoulders, hands, their mouths alone
 Able to function, as they start to moan
 And call upon their mother Clymene,
 Who scurries here and there distractedly 420
 And tries to kiss them, however she may.
 But it's no good – she tries to pull away
 The bark as from a wound. Each maid cries, “O
 Mother, spare me! - I'm now a wounded tree,
 And so farewell for all eternity!”
 At this the bark took over everything.
 Then tears would flow and amber, trickling
 Down from the new-formed boughs, solidified
 In the sunlight along the riverside; 430
 The river takes it so that it may be
 Worn by the married dames of Italy.
 Cynus was there, akin to Phaethon
 Upon his mother's side: he now had gone
 From where he reigned, a kingdom with command
 Over the people of the Ligurian land,
 And mourns along the verdant banks of Po

And all the trees that just a while ago
 Had been the sisters; now his voice is shrill,
 Grey feathers screen his hair and there's a bill 440
 Protruding from a lengthy neck which grows
 Out of his breast, and he has reddening toes
 Joined by a membrane; feathers, too, now wind
 About him – he's become a new-formed kind
 Of bird. But he will not fly through the sky,
 Too conscious of the ill-sent flames on high.
 Instead he seeks the pools and lakes. Meanwhile
 Phoebus, without his usual bright smile,
 As if he's in eclipse, hates night and day
 And gives his mind to sorrow and dismay, 450
 Refusing service to the earth. "That's it.
 Enough", he says, "I've never had respite,
 Unhonoured. Let someone who wants to steer
 My chariot do so! If there's no-one here
 Who will and all the deities avow
 They can't, let Jupiter be the driver now:
 At least then, for a while, he'll lay aside
 The lightning-bolts committing patricide.
 Knowing my horses' strength, he soon will learn
 That even his incompetence does not earn 460
 His death." The gods stand round the Sun, as he
 Is speaking, and then ask him suppliantly
 Not to spread darkness over all the world.
 He makes excuses for the fire he hurled
 And adds some threats to their entreaties. Then
 Phoebus calls for his strings of steeds again,
 And while they still with fear are trembling,
 He beats them with his whipstock, censuring
 Them for his son's demise. Jove now surveys
 The mighty walls of Heaven so that no blaze 470
 May cause destruction anywhere. Now he
 Has taken care of all security,
 And yet his own Arcadia is still
 His chief concern, and so he starts each rill
 And fountain that has for some time ago
 Been too full of anxiety to flow,
 Paints the wide earth with fields, gives every tree
 Its foliage and clothes with greenery
 The injured woods, and as he wanders he
 Observes Callisto and immediately 480
 Is warmed with flames of love. She's not the kind
 Of maid to spin soft wool or yet to bind
 Her hair in various fashions – not at all:
 A clasp secured her tunic, while her fall
 Of locks was held back by a snow-white band:
 Sometimes she held a javelin in her hand,

Sometime a bow: in Phoebe's military
 She served, and in the whole of Arcady
 Diana loved none more. No favour, though,
 Lasts long. The sun was high when Callisto 490
 Entered a grove, pristine from long ago;
 She put her quiver down, unbent her bow
 And lay upon the verdant grass, and then
 She placed her neck upon the quiver. When
 Jove saw that she was weary and without
 A guardian, he thought, "There is no doubt
 Juno won't know of this, and yet if she
 Does hear of it, it will not worry me."
 And then, adopting Queen Diana's guise,
 He woke her and, when she opened her eyes, 500
 He gently said, "Maiden, who have a share
 In my own entourage, inform me where
 You hunted in this mountain-range!" "Good -day,
 Goddess," she said, "greater than Jove, I say,
 And I would say it even if he heard
 My words himself." To hear himself preferred
 To his own self, he smiled and lavishly
 Rained kisses on her, such as shouldn't be
 Given by a virgin. Clutched in his embrace,
 When she was about to say where in the chase 510
 She'd been, it was with violence he betrayed
 Himself. Then she, as much as any maid
 Could do, fought back (Juno, would you had seen
 What thus occurred, for then you would have been
 More sensitive!). She could not possibly
 Subdue him (for who could gain mastery
 Over Lord Jove?). Jove sought the upper air,
 While she could hardly wait to flee from there.
 When she set off, she almost left behind
 Her weapons that had clearly slipped her mind. 520
 Diana from the heights of Menalon,
 Where she'd been hunting beasts, waited upon
 By all her nymphs, came by and called to her.
 However, fearing she was Jupiter
 Still in disguise, she made a short retreat,
 But when she saw the nymphs, she knew deceit
 Was absent and approached them face-to-face.
 And yet how hard it was to hide disgrace!
 She hung her head and did not, as indeed
 Before, walk by Diana's side or lead 530
 The train, remaining mute but showing shame
 That lay upon her reddened cheeks. This blame
 Diana would have noticed easily
 Without her maidenhead. Her company
 Were well aware of that, they say. Nine days

Had passed when, grown faint by Phoebus's rays,
 Diana found a cool grove, whence there rolled
 A bubbling, murmuring stream on sands of gold.
 She liked the place and lightly dipped a toe
 Into the swirling waters, saying, "Oh, 540
 No prying eyes are near. So let's undress
 And bathe!" Callisto in shamefacedness
 Reddened. All stripped, yet she sought to delay,
 But when she took her clothes off finally,
 They saw the cause of her timidity.
 She tried to hide her belly in her fright,
 But then Diana cried, "Leave! Do not blight
 Our fountains!" Thus she left the company.
 Although Juno had had suspicions, she 550
 Delayed the punishment she'd planned until
 A more convenient time. Delaying still,
 However, was now pointless, for Juno
 Was filled with wretchedness, for Callisto
 Gave birth to Arcas. Juno then paid heed
 To her in anger. "Hah, that's all we need,"
 She shouted at her, "- your fertility,
 Adulteress, an open sore to me,
 And Jupiter's disgraceful conduct, too,
 Which should be openly declared! And you 560
 Will pay for this – your shape your vanity
 Makes much of, with which you seductively
 Bewitched my husband, I will take away,
 You filthy minx." That's what she had to say.
 She grabbed her hair and threw her to the ground,
 Who raised her hands for mercy but then found
 That on her arms black hair began to grow,
 Her hands distorted claws, her mouth, once so
 Admired by Jove, a yawning hole, and lest
 She uttered prayers, she was no longer blessed 570
 With power of speech – an angry, threatening sound,
 Replete with fearfulness, would now resound
 From her hoarse throat. Perception still was there,
 However, although she was now a bear,
 Her lamentations now communicated
 Through groan on groan. Her hands she elevated
 (Such as they were) to Heaven; while she thought
 Jove thankless, her belief could not be brought
 Out of her mouth. Alas, how frequently
 She dared not languish in the greenery, 580
 But near her house, in the fields that she once knew
 As hers she roamed about. How often, too,
 She was propelled across the crags in dread
 Of barking hounds. A huntress, she yet fled
 From hunters! Often she would hide away

From savage beasts, forgetting in dismay
 Her present self. Although she was a bear,
 She feared the bears she spotted everywhere
 Upon the crags; the wolves, too, caused her fear,
 Though Lycaon was there. His fifteenth year 590
 Arcas had reached and still he did not know
 His parentage. Hunting wild beasts he'd go,
 Choosing the proper woods in Arcady
 With nets. One day he met his mother: she
 Knew who he was and therefore held her ground,
 But he, in ignorance, began to bound
 Away, but when he saw her constantly
 Staring into his face, eager to be
 Closer to him, he would have pierced her breast
 With his spear, but his wish Jupiter repressed 600
 And bore them rapidly into the sky
 And made them constellations way up high.
 Seeing Callisto shining fulgently,
 Juno in anger flew down to the sea
 To speak to Tethys and Oceanus,
 To whom even the gods were courteous,
 And when they asked why she was there, she said,
 "You ask why I have left my royal bed?
 I've been replaced in Heaven. I would lie
 If you did not see in the darkened sky 610
 A constellation that but recently
 Has been established to dishonour me,
 In the remotest orbit that is seen
 By Heaven. Who would not discredit Queen
 Juno and quiver at my enmity
 When he but profits from the injury
 That I inflict on him? For I forbade
 Her human shape - instead, though, I have made
 A goddess of her. Thus do I impose
 Chastisement (I possess such strength!) on those 620
 Who have offended me. Let him remove
 Her beastly shape so that once more she'll prove
 A human maid, as he did once before
 For Argive Io! Why not, furthermore,
 Wed her, divorcing me, and on my bed
 Place her and thus take Lycaon instead
 To be his father-in-law?" The gods agreed
 To her request, and she was sent with speed
 Upon a handsome chariot that was led
 By painted peacocks, whose eyes from the head
 Of butchered Argos had been plucked away. 630
 Loquacious raven, in a similar way
 Your wings that had been snow-white formerly
 Became an inky-black hue suddenly.

This bird wore lovely feathers long ago -
 So fair were they and white as driven snow
 And rivalled flawless doves and could compare
 With geese, that made the Capitol beware,
 Or swans. His downfall was his tongue, for it
 Turned his white colour to its opposite. 640
 Coronis was, in all of Thessaly,
 The fairest maid. Phoebus Apollo, she
 Was your delight as long as she had nought
 To hide. But it was Phoebus' bird who caught
 Her out, discovering her adultery,
 And to his master flew immediately
 To tell him of this crime. The garrulous crow
 Followed with flapping wings, wanting to know
 His mission. Learning it, he said, "Your flight
 Will harm you. Don't belittle my insight! 650
 See what I am and what I formerly
 Have been and ask how it affected me!
 My loyalty brought me down. Some time ago,
 Pallas placed Erichthonius, who had no
 Mother, within a basket: secretly
 She gave it to three virgins, progeny
 Of two-shaped Cecrops, and insisting they
 Tell no-one. In light foliage I lay
 To watch. Two kept their promise faithfully:
 The third, however, called them cowardly 660
 And then untied the knots. They found inside
 The infant and a snake laid side-by-side.
 I told the goddess this and her decree
 Was that for this lapse I should never be
 Minerva's guardian anymore, and so
 In seniority I'm ranked below
 The owl. All birds should know it's dangerous,
 On learning my deserts, to babble thus.
 And yet *she* sought *me* out – I did not pray
 For favour. Ask her! She will not gainsay 670
 The fact, though angry. I'm the progeny
 Of Coroneus, Well-known celebrity
 From Phocis: I was frequently pursued
 By wealthy suitors, but my pulchritude
 Was my downfall, for, dawdling by the sea,
 As was my custom, Neptune spotted me
 And wooed me. Finding that I'd not give way
 To empty words, he threatened me. Away
 I ran, but I was running fruitlessly
 Upon the shifting sands. Accordingly, 680
 I supplicated deities and men,
 Yet not a single mortal heard. But then
 A virgin helped *this* virgin: and as I

In pleading held my arms up to the sky
 Minerva placed black wings on either side
 Of me, and when the clothes I wore I tried
 To shake off, feathers then began to grow
 Deep in my flesh and when I in my woe
 Was moved to beat my breast, I found
 That I possessed no hands with which to pound 690
 My vanished breast. I ran. The sandy shore
 No longer stayed me as it had before,
 And I above the earth was lifted high
 And soon I was transported through the sky,
 Minerva's life-companion, free of blame.
 What good was that, though, since Nyctimene came
 As my esteemed successor? I shall tell
 A tale, in Lesbos known extremely well,
 Though not by you – she shamed her father's bed
 By lying with him, and therefore she fled 700
 And clothed herself in night. Now she's eschewed
 By other birds, indignantly pursued
 Out of the sky.” To this the raven said,
 “May curses rain upon your tattling head!
 I spurn your warnings.” He set off once more
 And told his master that some time before
 He'd seen Coronis lying flagrantly
 With a Haemonian youth. Immediately
 His laurel dropped, his plectrum he let go
 And on his face was seen an angry glow. 710
 He took his trusted arms and bent his bow
 And pierced the bosom, which was white as snow,
 Of her whom he had pressed against his own
 So many times. Coronis gave a moan
 And as she disengaged the arrow, she
 Was bathed in blood. “Phoebus, your penalty,”
 She said, “is mine. My time was almost done
 To birth our child. Now two must die as one.”
 With that she died. A coldness then possessed
 Her frame. Too late, her lover was distressed, 720
 Repenting his revenge, and castigated
 Himself for being so infuriated
 And listening to the bird: being forced to know
 Her misdeed and the reason for his woe,
 He hates it, as he hates his bow, his hand,
 The string, the dart. Now, in a last-ditch stand,
 Using his healing expertise, he tried
 To save her life – in vain! When he espied
 The pyre where she'd be soon entrenched in flame,
 Such mighty sounds of lamentation came 730
 From deep within him (gods may not expose
 Their tears). His groans were just the same as those

Delivered by a cow when, with one blow,
 Her suckling calf is butchered. Phoebus, though,
 When he had poured the perfumes on her breast,
 Embracing her before her final rest
 With hastened obsequies, could not agree
 To let that happen to their progeny
 But plucked it from its mother as it lay
 Within her womb, and carried it away 740
 To two-formed Chiron's cave. Chiron's decree
 Was that the raven, who wished hopefully
 To be rewarded for a truthful tale,
 Be barred forever with white birds to sail
 The skies. He was delighted with the lad,
 A god-born foster-child, and he was glad
 To have the fame he'd gained. Ocyroe,
 His lovely daughter(whose nativity
 Was near a rapid stream), her yellow hair
 In cascades floating down her back, was there. 750
 She learned her father's healing expertise
 But, not content with that, the mysteries
 Of the Fates she sang. With her clear-sightedness,
 She turned her gaze on Aesculapius,
 The child, prophetic frenzy in her breast,
 And to the infant spoke with this behest:
 "Grow, child, a global healer! People will
 Throughout the world be grateful for your skill
 In medicine. Life itself you will restore;
 And you will have the courage, furthermore, 760
 One day to flout the gods, thereby vetoed
 By Jupiter's thunderbolt to tread the road
 Of healing anymore. And then you'll be
 Made incorporeal, subsequently
 A god again, and thereby you'll renew
 Your destiny. Dear father Chiron, you,
 Destined to be immortal, will yet thirst
 For death when with a serpent's bite you're cursed:
 The gods will take your immortality
 Away from you: to die will be your plea, 770
 A plea the Fates will heed." Then she began
 To deeply sigh while down her cheeks there ran
 Sad tears. "However, it's forbidden me
 To further speak due to the Fates' decree,"
 She said. "The power I once had is gone,
 And though it was of little force, upon
 My head the gods' wrath has been poured. Oh, why
 Was I granted the skill to prophesy?
 My human form has vanished. Now I feed
 On grass, and through the plains I long to speed. 780
 For I am, in close similarity

To Chiron, now a mare. Why totally,
 However? For my father is two-fold
 In form, both man and horse." And as she told
 Him this, she was harder to comprehend,
 With just an equine whinny at the end.
 Her arms now reached the ground; her fingers, too,
 Were joined, creating hooves, and then she grew
 In face and neck; the large part of her gown
 Became a tail, her long hair, hanging down, 790
 Became a mane; her voice and shape became
 Quite different and quite another name
 Was given her. Her father prayed in vain
 For aid from Phoebus but could not restrain
 Jove's will, and even if he could, he trod
 Elis and Messania's fields, far from the god.
 He roamed, in his left hand a wooden crook,
 In shepherd garb, while in his right he took
 His shepherd's pipe and sweetly played thereon,
 Thinking of love; his herd thither and yon, 800
 Unguarded, strayed, or so it's commonly
 Reported, into Pylos. Mercury
 Drove them into the woods and hid them there,
 And they could not be spotted anywhere
 Except by one old person called Battus,
 Who served a wealthy man called Neleus,
 Guarding his pedigree mares. But Mercury
 Distrusted him and so clandestinely
 With coaxing hand he drew the man aside:
 "Stranger," he said, "if asked if you have spied 810
 This herd, deny you have, and, lest you may
 Go unrewarded, you shall take away
 A splendid cow," then gave it him. The man
 Accepted it and said to him, "You can
 Breathe easily, for if I am untrue,
 This stone shall indicate that fact to you."
 And here he showed the stone. But Mercury
 Feigned leaving, then he came back presently,
 His voice and features changed. "Peasant," said he,
 "If any cattle you should chance to see 820
 Passing upon this road, please let me know
 Of it, and if you do so, you shall go
 Away possessing both a bull and cow."
 The prize proposed having been doubled now,
 He said, "Beneath those mountains they will be,"
 And so in truth they were. Then Mercury
 Guffawed and said, "You treacherous man! Betray
 Me to myself, would you?" Then straightaway
 He turned his breast to stone upon whose face
 Was written 'Spy of Pylos', a disgrace 830

It had not earned. In Heaven see the bright
 Staff-bearer, who, on balanced wings, in flight
 Soared high above the earth, and as he flew
 He saw the fruitful groves, so pleasing to
 Minerva in Munychia. There he caught
 Sight of the lovely virgins as they brought
 Their offerings. He chose no direct flight
 But flew in circles like a rapid kite
 That sweeps around the entrails, shuddering
 To see the priestly number gathering, 840
 And dares not venture down from his great height
 And hovers greedily above the rite.
 Just so above the hill spry Mercury
 Was flying in the same trajectory.
 As Lucifer's the brightest star we know
 And Phoebe outshines Lucifer, just so
 Was Herse lovelier than all the rest
 Of maids who served Minerva, quite the best
 In dignity and grace. Astonished by
 Her beauty, Mercury hung in the sky, 850
 Burning as when a Balearic sling
 Flings out a shot that flames, discovering
 Heat in the clouds above that was not there
 Before. He altered course and through the air
 Headed for earth. Though his identity
 He didn't change, sure in his looks, yet he
 Enhanced the way he looked, for now his hair
 He smoothed; his flowing garment he took care
 To fix so that the gold would show; his hand
 Waved his smooth wand, with which by his command 860
 Came sleep or wakefulness. He looked with pride
 Upon his twinkling feet; his wings he eyed –
 They sparkled. In part of that mighty shrine,
 Secluded and devout to the divine
 Rites of Minerva, there were chambers - three
 Of them – with tortoise-shell and ivory
 And precious woods inlaid and beautified.
 Three sisters, all well-known, were there inside,
 And in the right-hand one was Pandrosos,
 And in the left-hand one was Aglauros, 870
 And in the middle one there was Herse.
 She in the left-hand one was first to see
 The god. She asked to know his name and why
 He'd come to them, and he said in reply,
 "I bear great Jove's mandates throughout the skies.
 And he's my father. I will not disguise
 Why I am here: I want your loyalty
 To Hesse and your willingness to be
 Aunt to my children – for it is my aim

To marry her, and that is why I came. 880
 Aglauros looked at him rapaciously,
 The very way that she had recently
 Looked to Minerva's treasures stacked away,
 And said a weight of gold he had to pay:
 Meanwhile, tough, he must leave. Minerva sighed
 From deep within her heart as then she eyed
 Aglauros sternly, and the shield that she
 Was wearing rattled. In her memory
 Aglauros sinfully had brought to light
 Her secret when the motherless little mite, 890
 The son of Vulcan, she had seen, and so
 She realized that she could now bestow
 On both the maiden and on Mercury,
 In equal quantity, a courtesy:
 The maiden would be for her greediness
 Enriched. She went to Envy, hideous
 With her black gore, her cave lacking all light,
 Windless and dismal, with the stinging bite
 Of cold benumbed, replete both night and day
 With darkness. To this cave she made her way 900
 But at the entrance balked (because she thought
 That entrance there was barred); then she who'd wrought
 Death on her foes struck at the blackened door
 With her sharp spear and shook it to its core
 It opened wide, and Envy now she viewed
 As she was eating vipers' flesh, the food
 Of her own vices. When Minerva met
 Her gaze, she turned her eyes away, and yet
 She sluggishly arose, abandoning
 Her meal, but half-consumed, now dawdling 910
 Towards the goddess. Looking at her face,
 However, and her armour and the grace
 That she presented, she let out a wail
 And sighed a heavy sigh. Her face was pale,
 Her body long and lean; she looked askance,
 Her shifting eyes agog with many a glance
 To left and right, her teeth, unevenly
 Aligned, with black rust blemished totally,
 Her breasts made green with gall; her smiles were rare,
 Kept but for seeing grief; with watchful care 920
 She ever stayed awake; she grieved to see
 The fortunate and pined away when she
 Looked on success, and though she wrought distress,
 She was distressed herself. Though the goddess
 Loathed her, she briefly said to her, "Infect
 A daughter of Cecrops, for this effect
 Can be achieved. Aglauros it must be!"
 Then, after she had given her decree

And beat upon the ground beneath her feet
With her sharp spear, she made a quick retreat. 930
The squinting Envy watched her as she fled,
Regretting the success that lay ahead
For Queen Minerva. Then she took in hand
Her staff that had been bound with many a strand
Of briar and set out, veiled constantly
With misty clouds wherever she would be.
She blasted through the verdant meadows bright
With flowers, breathing everywhere a blight.
When she saw Athens, full of peacefulness
And wealth and art, she scarcely could repress 940
Her tears. Then she found where Aglauros lay
Asleep upon her couch, keen to obey
Her orders, and she touched the maiden's bust
With a hand that still was stained with filthy rust,
And with sharp thorns her breast she then impaled,
And an obnoxious venom she exhaled
Upon her face, distilling to her core
Black poison. Lest it should spread even more,
She caused her sister's image to be seen,
Happily wed and with a celestial sheen 950
Aglow, larger than life. The progeny
Of Cecrops now was gnawed with agony,
Groaning both day and night and dwindling
Like melting ice, with cool clouds scattering
Across the sky. When Herse's happiness
She contemplates, she blazes with no less
A force than embers caught by flames, and she
Faces her sister's joy with misery
And often longs to perish or profess
What she herself believes is sinfulness 960
To her strict father. But eventually
She sat before her house that she might see
The god and stop him; when he came, he tried
With soothing words to see her pacified,
But she told him, "Desist! For here I'll stay
Till you depart from me and go away!"
"Let us to our agreement still adhere!"
Was what the Cyllenian god replied, and here
With his compelling wand he opened wide
The doors. But when the maid Aglauros tried 970
To rise, she found her thighs she could not feel,
Rigid and numb – she couldn't even kneel.
Her nails turned pale and cold, her veins were grey,
Her blood congealed; as cancer makes its way
Throughout the frame, a deadly chill was laid
Upon the heart by slow degrees and stayed
Her breathing and the paths of life; although

She did not try to speak, had she done so
Her voice would have been blocked; her neck was seen
As stone, for she possessed a rigid mien; 980
A bloodless state, but not marble-white,
Was she, because her mind had stained her quite.
And so the god departed, having wrought
Upon the maid revenge that he had sought;
On waving wings he flew when to his side
His father summoned him, anxious to hide
His passion. "Son," said he, "who ever heed
My orders, go your usual way with speed
Down to the region of that eastern land
In which your mother's star, on the left hand, 990
Is seen (it's called Sidonis, it is said,
By those who live there), and there, straight ahead,
Is the sea-shore, where the king's herd you'll see
Feeding upon the mountain greenery."
And all at once down from the mountainside
The herd was driven to the ocean's tide,
As Jove desired, for it was on this strand
The princess often went to play, a band
Of maids attending her. There's ill accord
Between grandeur and love, which can't afford 1000
To live together. Jove accordingly
Now cast aside his glorious dignity,
Despite the fact this three-flame-holding god
Can agitate the world with just a nod,
And now became a bull, commingling
Among the bullocks who were wandering
In groves, his hue like virgin snow, untrodden
And not yet turned to water by the sodden
Wind from the south. He'd dewlaps hanging low
Beneath a neck that swelled with muscles; though 1010
His horns were tiny, you might well declare
They were man-made – they dazzled with a flare
Brighter than any gem. There was no threat
That on his forehead could be shown, nor yet
Wrath in his eyes, for in him all was peace.
Seeing all this, Agauros could not cease
To be astounded: yet she would not place
A hoof upon him – no, she left a space
Between them both, but once she's shed the fear
That she had felt before, she ventures near 1020
And offers him sweet flowers. In his elation
He kisses her in great anticipation
Of further joy. He scarcely can defer
That joy. But now he begins to play with here
And skip upon the grass; and now he lays
His side upon the sand, while she allays

Her panic by degrees. Occasionally
He lets her pat his breast, and sometimes he
Allows her to wreath garlands on each horn
Upon his head. The virgin, royally-born, 1030
Even sat upon his back, not knowing, though,
Whose back it was. Then he began to go,
Though slowly, from the sea-shore and the land;
He placed his hooves upon the watery sand
And in a twinkling carried her away
Across the sea as she, in her dismay,
Looked back and grasped his horn with her right hand
As she was carried far beyond the strand,
Her left upon his back as on they wing,
Her garments in the breezes fluttering.