

OVID METAMORPHOSES III

The god confessed himself and threw away
The image of the bull and made his way
To Crete. Europa's father, not aware
Of this, ordered Cadmus, his son, to spare
No pains in seeking her, adding that he
For failure would receive the penalty
Of exile, being thereby both cold-hearted
And fatherly. And so his son departed
And scoured the world (for who can understand
The wiles of Jupiter?), leaving his land, 10
Fleeing his father's wrath. He went to see
The Delphic seer to learn where she might be.
"A cow will cross your path," Apollo said,
"In faraway fields, who never placed her head
Beneath the yoke. Follow her! On the ground
Where she will lie at leisure, you must find
A city. You must call the country there
Boeotia." Very soon he was aware
Of an unguarded cow, which moved about
Sluggishly with her body quite without 20
The scars of servitude. He carefully
Kept pace with her, adoring silently
His mentor Phoebus. Cephissus he'd passed
And Panope's fields when Europa stood fast
And loudly lowed, then in the grass she lay;
Turning her gaze around, she made survey
Of him who followed. Cadmus gratefully
Now kissed the foreign soil and cordially
Greeted the hills and meadows, then began
The sacrifice to Jove. To every man 30
He gave instructions to seek out a spring,
Providing water for the offering.
There was a thicket with some ancient trees
Which never had endured the injuries
Caused by an axe, and in the middle stood
A cavern, thick with twigs and osier-wood,
Making a low arch with boulders around.
Beneath, a fecund river now he found,
And deep within the gloomy cave concealed
Was Mars's sacred dragon, which revealed 40
Gold scales, his body with venom distended
And from his jaws there were three tongues extended,
His sharp teeth standing in a triple tier.
Then, Cadmus and his men arriving here,
They entered and there was a ringing sound
When they cast down that urn: it turned around
And from the cavern poked its azure head

And loudly hissed. They dropped their urns in dread,
Left bloodless, and a sudden trembling
Took hold of them, the beast enveloping 50
Its scales in giant folds, with just one bound,
Encompassed in great orbs, twisting around
And rising high, then looking down, a beast
That seemed to be as towering, at least,
As that which parts the Twin Bears. Terrified,
The followers, whether they'd been supplied
With arms or were in fear about to flee
Or stiff with dread, it seized them suddenly
And with its venomous teeth bit them to death
Or blasted them with poison of its breath 60
Or crushed them in its folds; up in the sky
The sun shone bright, and Cadmus wondered why
His men were slow to come to him and so,
Clad in a lion's skin, prepared to go
To seek them, with his javelin and spear
Of glittering steel and pluck that had no peer.
When he arrived, he looked upon the dead
And their victorious enemy that fed
Upon their wounds with tongue besmirched with gore,
He said, "My friends, I'll even up the score 70
Or die." He took a massive millstone and,
Having balanced it in his right hand,
Hurled it upon the beast with such a blow
As would the mightiest ramparts have laid low;
The beast, protected by its hard, black skin,
Remained unwounded, while the javelin
Was not thus hampered, for it pierced straight through
Its spine: the beast turned round its head to view
Its back and tried to twist the shaft away,
But it remained, determined yet to stay 80
Fixed in the bone. His rage through these new pains
Increased, his throat enlarged with swollen veins;
There was a white froth gathering around
His jaws: the earth re-echoed with the sound
Of rasping scales, the air contaminated
With Stygian steam; one moment it gyrated
In massive spires, another it stretched out;
Again, at other times, it seemed to spout
Like driving rain, destroying every tree
Obstructing it. Cadmus to some degree 90
Gave way and with his lion-skin could he
Resist its onset; then his enemy
He countered, thrusting his sharp sword betwixt
Its teeth. Wild in its anger then, it fixed
Those teeth upon the point. Its mouth then bled
And over the grass its spray began to spread.

Since it recoiled in time, the wound was slight -
 It kept its throat from Cadmus' weapon's bite.
 But Cadmus thrust his spear-point deeper still
 Into the serpent's throat and dogged him till 100
 An oak-tree barred his way, and thereto he
 Impaled its neck: the trunk bent heavily
 Beneath its weight; the beast's tail lashed around
 At which the trunk gave out a groaning sound.
 The valiant victor gazed upon the bulk
 Of that enormous, and now vanquished, hulk.
 Then suddenly a voice from who knows where
 He heard: "O Cadmus, why stand gazing there?
 You'll be a serpent, too." His colour fled,
 As did his self-control, while on his head 110
 His hair stood up in fright. Then through the air
 His patroness Minerva landed there.
 She ordered him to sow beneath the earth
 The serpent's teeth so that they could give birth
 To a new race of men, and he complied
 And sowed the teeth so that they could provide
 New people. Then (astonishing to hear!)
 The clods began to move! First to appear
 Was a spear-point, then nodding helmets, then
 Shoulders and chests and arms of fighting men. 120
 Thus, when a theatre's curtain's drawn to show
 The actors, first of all we get to know
 Their faces, then the rest by slow degrees.
 Now, Cadmus, terrified to look at these,
 Prepared to arm, but one said, "Keep away
 From our internal wars, and straightaway
 He slew one of his own, who was nearby,
 Though by another spear fated to die,
 Whose killer, too, soon breathed his last, and then
 The earth was filled with troops of maddened men, 130
 Slaying each other. After a short spell
 Of life, upon their mother earth they fell.
 But there were five who still could look upon
 The light of day, and one was Echion,
 Who threw away his arms, surrendering
 To Queen Minerva's words, petitioning
 For peace. Cadmus had these five men to aid
 Him in his task, and therefore he obeyed
 Apollo, founding Thebes. And thus content
 Cadmus discovered in his banishment. 140
 A son-in-law through Mars' and Venus' race,
 He took a noble wife in his embrace,
 Producing then a wealth of progeny,
 Who reached the age of their maturity,
 And grandchildren as well. But everyone

Must wait until their final day is done
 And no-one should be thought content till he's
 Interred and had his final obsequies.
 Cadmus's grandson was the first to be
 The cause of his grandfather's misery 150
 Among such wealth, strange horns upon his head,
 His hounds upon the blood of their master fed.
 Look carefully, though, and you are sure to see
 That it was chance and not iniquity.
 What crime could error ever bring about?
 He stood upon a mountain crowded out
 With slaughtered creatures; it was now mid-day,
 With little shade, the hot sun poised midway.
 He and his comrades through this wilderness
 Were wandering when he with kindness 160
 Said to them, "Friends, our traps are now replete
 With game – our day of hunting is complete.
 Tomorrow morning we'll resume our quest,
 For we must go and seek our needed rest.
 The sun is in the middle of the sky
 And cleaves the fields with vapour from on high.
 Take down the nets!" His order they obeyed.
 Dense with its cypresses' and pine-trees' shade,
 A valley in Gargaphia stands, and there
 Is seen a cavern in a grove, quite bare 170
 Of art (for Nature has ingeniously
 Imitated art), an archway, naturally
 Of porous tufa and pumice created.
 And this whole valley had been dedicated
 To Queen Diana. On the right, a spring
 Of bright, clear water murmured, widening
 Into a pool, grass banks on either side.
 And, weary from the hunt, here she would glide
 Into the pool and bathe her limbs, once she
 Had given to one of her company 180
 Her javelin, her quiver and her bow.
 She passed her mantle to another, though,
 Then took her sandals off; then Crocale,
 Ismenus' child, who had more artistry
 Than all the rest, gathered her locks and bound
 Them tightly, though her own fluttered around.
 And then the goddess ordered Nephale,
 Rhanis, Psecas, Hyale, Phyle
 To fetch large urns of water to her, so
 That they might pour them over her. But lo! 190
 Actaeon came, his hunting for the day
 Now over, wandering in a random way,
 Into the grove. As soon as he was where
 The springs welled up, the nymphs became aware

Of him and beat their breasts while bellowing
 And, to conceal Diana, gathering
 Round her, but she was taller by a head
 Than all of them. As clouds tend to turn red
 On sunny days, or like the purple-hued
 Aurora, she in all her pulchritude 200
 Appeared, unclothed. Although the maiden pack
 Pressed close, she turned sideways and swivelled back
 Her face, wishing her arrows were close by,
 And so took up some water and let fly
 Into his face and hair, and then she said,
 Presaging all the woes that lay ahead
 For him, “ Now say, should you be able to,
 You've seen me naked!” With no more ado,
 She added horns upon the head that she
 Had sprinkled, adding some extremity 210
 To his neck, made his ears pointed, modified
 His hands and feet and arms, then placed a hide
 About his frame; his courage changed to fright,
 He left, amazed at his own rapid flight.
 When on the water's face he saw that he
 Had horns upon his head, “ Ah misery!”
 He tried to utter – no words could he say,
 However; then he groaned, the only way
 That he could speak. A flood of tears now now stained
 His cheeks, and yet his intellect remained. 220
 What should he do? Should he go home or stay
 Within the woods and hide himself away?
 He shamed to do the former, tremulous
 To do the latter. As he wavered thus,
 He saw the hounds. Melampus barked the sign,
 And then Ichnobates, whose nose was fine
 For tracking down his prey, then Pamphagus
 Was seen, then Dorceus and Oribatus,
 All three of them brought up in Arcady,
 And then the rest, all running rapidly, 230
 First Theron, Pterelas and Agre, who
 Could track down anything, Hylaeus, too,
 Late-wounded by a vicious boar, Nape,
 Wolf-bred, and Poemenis, who recently
 Had tended cattle, and Harpyia, who
 Had her two whelps with her, slim Ladon, too,
 Leucon, who sported snow-white hair, Stricte
 And Tigris and Alce and Canace,
 Strong Lacon, swift Aëllō, Asbalus,
 Thus called for his dark colouring, Thous 240
 And, with her Cyprian brother, Lycisce,
 And Harpalus, marked out distinctively
 With a white forehead, Melanus, whose hue

Was dusky (hence hie name) and Lachne, who
 Possessed a shaggy body, and Labrus,
 Who was well-known for his tempestuousness,
 And Argiodus, both the progeny
 Of a father who was a native of Dicte
 But of a mother from the Spartan shore...
 It would be dull to mention any more. 250
 This pack of hounds was eager for its prey,
 Although they found it hard to make their way
 Across the rocks. Actaeon scampered through
 Those well-known haunts, although this time he flew
 From his own men. He hankered so to shout,
 "It's I, your lord!" but he was quite without
 The aptitude to speak. All through the air
 The howls of hounds re-echoed everywhere.
 First, Melanchaetes fastened on his back
 And then the second of the hunter's pack, 260
 Orestrophus, bit his shoulder: they'd been slow
 But found a short-cut through which they might go,
 Arriving first, beginning then to tear
 His flesh until there were no places where
 They might wound him. He made a frightful sound
 That made the mountains with his groans resound,
 A noise a man can't utter, nor indeed
 A stag! On bended knees, he seemed to plead,
 Turning his wordless head from side to side,
 As if he were stretching his arms out wide. 270
 His friends, unknowingly, urged on the crowd
 Of hounds while crying, "Actaeon!" out loud.
 At this he turned his head, as they complained
 That he was missing being entertained,
 As they were, by this sport. How keen was he,
 However, to be absent and not be
 Thus ravaged! Circling him on every side,
 They sank their jaws into their master's hide,
 Though now he was a stag. It has been said
 Diana's fury was not wholly dead 280
 Until *he* was. His end in various ways
 Was contemplated, for some people praise
 Dianas chastity, but others thought
 Her wrong, but many reasons have been brought
 To bear on this. Juno alone remained
 Silent. Whenever misadventure rained
 On Cadmus' house, she revelled secretly,
 Raging at all Europa's family.
 Now came a new cause for her misery:
 For Jove had impregnated Semele. 290
 She raved in anger, uttering, "Away
 With words! Whatever is there I can say?

Let me attack the slut! Am I not she
 Who rules in Heaven in all majesty,
 Sister and wife of Jupiter? She's keen
 To give birth to a god, a joy that's been
 Almost denied *me*. In her loveliness
 She has such confidence: nevertheless
 I'll prove it false. So you may surely know
 That I'm not Saturn's child should she not go 300
 Beneath the Styx!" She left her throne and, veiled
 Inside a cloud of fiery hue, she sailed
 Down through the sky to root out Semele,
 Having disguised herself as Beroe,
 Semele's nurse, making her own hair grey,
 With trembling limbs and wrinkled skin. Once they
 Had chatted at length, they came eventually
 To Jove, and then she sighed, "I hope it's he,
 But there is much of which I am afraid,
 For many have seduced a virgin maid, 310
 Feigning to be a god. So have him show
 Some pledge of his affection and bestow
 Kisses on you, if it is surely he:
 Implore him to assume his majesty
 Just as he does with Juno." Thus she played
 Upon the mind of the incautious maid.
 She begged of Jove a boon she did not name:
 He said, "I'll not deny you, and I claim
 Great Pluto will bear witness. Semele,
 Happy and too proud of her victory 320
 That would cause her demise, said to him, "Show
 Yourself to me as you do to Juno
 When lying with her." How he wished he could
 Take back what he'd said to her! For he would
 Have done were it allowed. Unhappily
 He climbed the lofty skies, and with him he
 Brought the attendant clouds while mingling
 With added rain thunder and lightning.
 As much as he was able, now he tried
 To mitigate his strength, now not supplied 330
 With flames that he had used to overthrow
 Typhoeus, his one-hundred-headed foe,
 In which there was too much ferocity.
 Another thunder, though, happened to be
 Less strong, forged by the Cyclops, so this flame
 He now assumed, and in this form he came
 To Agenor's house. But mortal Semele
 Could not endure the shock it gave and she
 Was burned to ashes. But out of her womb
 An unformed babe was rescued from its doom 340
 And nurtured in the thigh of Jove until

The time had come for Nature to fulfil
 Her natal role. Ino, his aunt, at first
 Took the boy in and saw that he was nursed.
 Then the Nyseian nymphs took him away,
 Hid him in caves and fed him milk. While they
 Were doing this, Bacchus (for it was he!)
 Was lying in his cradle comfortably;
 It's said that Jove with drinking gratified
 Himself too much: his cares then laid aside, 350
 He said to Juno, " Obviously a man
 Gets less delight from sexual congress than
 A woman." She demurred, so they agreed
 To ask Teiresias, for he indeed
 Had been both sexes, for, while wandering
 In a green wood, he saw the coupling
 Of two snakes, so he struck them violently
 Until they broke and fled. Remarkably
 He turned into a woman and would last
 In female form till seven years had passed. 360
 And then he saw them once again, and so
 He said to them, "If seven years ago,
 When I struck you, you changed my form, why, then
 You'll change me back if I strike you again."
 He did so, and his manhood was indeed
 Restored by those two snakes. As both agreed
 To choose him umpire of their rivalry,
 He told them that he was in harmony
 With Jupiter, but Juno was frustrated
 Beyond all reason, as it has been stated, 370
 And sealed his eyes for all eternity.
 Though it had been agreed a god's decree
 No other god could ever overturn,
 Jove made it that Teiresias would earn
 Atonement for his loss of sight. For he
 Endowed him with the gift of prophecy.
 Teiresias' fame of prophecy would spread
 Throughout Aonia, for what he said
 In answers was unerring: Leroiope,
 The lovely nymph, received his prophecy 380
 Before all others, and to him she went
 With her dear son who fifteen years had spent
 Upon this earth, so that it well might seem
 He was a man or boy. Cephissus' stream
 Was his birthplace – the river-god, she said,
 Had fathered him. She with the prophet pled
 To say if fair Narcissus (for the boy
 She thus had named) would go on to enjoy
 A ripe old age, and this was his reply:
 "If he should fail to know himself, he'll die 390

An old man." Empty words, one might surmise,
 And yet the manner of the lad's demise,
 Caused by his frenzied self-love, proved that he
 Was right. Narcissus reached maturity
 At twenty and was frequently pursued
 By youths and maidens, but his pride, his mood,
 His will foiled their attempts. Once he was spied
 By noisy Echo, who could never bide
 Her tongue but could not be the first to say
 Her piece, when he was following his prey 400
 Of stags with nets: for many years ago
 She wasn't just an empty word – oh no,
 She was a nymph, though merely babbling:
 For Juno, tired of all her prattling
 That held her there so that the nymphs could flee
 Jove's bed, said, "Nymph, the tongue you liberally
 Have used against me will prove useless now."
 Then by her action she confirmed her vow.
 Now others' speech we hear her "echo"ing.
 One day she saw Narcissus wandering 410
 Through pathless woods and so clandestinely
 She trailed him, gripped with the intensity
 Of love, and,, while she walked, her passion grew,
 As flames upon a torch's sulphur do.
 How often did she long to make him know
 Her passion, plead in accents soft and low
 And gain his love! But all this was denied
 By her new nature – she was forced to bide
 Her time until he spoke. Eventually,
 By chance abandoned by by his company 420
 Of his true friends, "Who's here?" he shouted out.
 "Here", Echo answered. Stunned, he looked about
 And called, "Come here!" more loudly than before.
 She answered him, who looked around once more,
 Seeing no-one."Why are you shunning me?"
 He said, and she, as though in mockery,
 Spoke the last word he'd said. "Oh, let us meet!"
 He tried once more. No sound had been so sweet
 As she echoed the words that he had said
 And ran to clasp him to her, but he fled, 430
 Saying, "Don't touch me! I would rather die.
 She said, "Caress me!" then went off to lie
 Screened by the woodland foliage, thus spurned,
 Concealing her red features as they burned
 With shame, then live a lonely life of woe
 In hilly caverns. But her love would grow
 Despite rejection and, deprived of sleep,
 She dwindled as she felt a leanness creep
 About her flesh. Her juices through the air

Vanished, her voice and bones alone still there. 440
 Her voice continues still, although her bones,
 It has been said, received the form of stones.
 She's hidden in the woods and never seen
 Upon the mountains, but she's ever been
 Heard in them all: her voice is living still
 And that is how Narcissus wrought her ill
 By his rejection and so many more
 Naiads and oreads, and quite a score
 Of youths. Then one who was his enemy
 Prayed to the heavenly gods, saying, "May he 450
 Be spurned by one he loves!" His just request
 Was heard by Nemesis, who acquiesced.
 There was a silver fountain, bright and clear,
 To which she-goats and shepherds never came near
 Nor any cattle's mouth had ever broached -
 Its waters were unsullied, unapproached
 By birds, beasts, falling branches. All around
 Sweet grasses nourished by a stream were found.
 Trees screened it from the sun's heat with the air
 Made balmy by the waters. It was there 460
 That, weary from the sun's heat and the chase,
 Enticed by the seduction of the place,
 He lay and quenched his thirst, but instantly
 Another thirst increased – while drinking, he
 Looked on his face and fell in love, a face
 Without a body. Such a hopeless case!
 Just like a marble statue he lay there,
 As he, astonished, continued to stare
 On eyes like stars, although he didn't know
 They were his own, and fingers that were so 470
 Like those of Bacchus and the flowing hair
 So like Apollo's and his cheeks so fair
 And smooth, his ivory neck, the comeliness
 Of his own mouth, the blushing loveliness
 Mingled with snowy whiteness. All he spied
 He fell in love with – he sighed while *it* sighed.
 Witless, he fell for his own pulchritude;
 Thus while pursuing he was yet pursued,
 Rousing and burning simultaneously,
 While to the guileful spring he frequently 480
 Gave empty kisses, trying hard to gain
 The mirrored neck he saw, but all in vain.
 He did not know what he could see, although
 He was in love, for it inflamed him so.
 Why seek that fleeting image, foolish boy?
 Shun it and you'll avoid your empty joy!
 It's but an image that you see – it's here,
 But if you leave, it, too, will disappear.

Nor food nor rest could draw the lad away,
 But on the overshadowed grass he lay, 490
 Gazing upon himself, unsatisfied.
 He raised himself a while, arms open wide,
 And said, "Was anyone so fatally
 In love, you woods? Such things you certainly
 Have seen before – a helper you have been
 To many lovers, acting as a screen,
 But whom do you recall since long ago
 Through all those weary years that languished so?
 Him whom I am in love with I can't find
 My arms about – himself I cannot find. 500
 It grieves me, too, that we are not denied
 By pathways, mountains, walls or ocean's tide
 But drops of water only. Clearly he
 Desires me, for just as frequently
 As I reach out to him, he reaches out
 To me. He craves contact, I have no doubt.
 It's but a little thing that bars the way.
 Ah, peerless boy, don't cause me such dismay!
 Come out of there, whoever you may be!
 My looks or age can't be your quandary, 510
 For I am loved by nymphs. Your looks imply
 That I may have some hope, because when I
 Hold out my arms to you, you do likewise:
 When I smile, you smile, and I in your eyes
 See tears when I am weeping. You return
 My nods, and silent words I long to learn
 Hover on your sweet lips. Ah, finally
 Your image will no longer baffle me -
 I love myself! What should I do? Implore?
 Or wait to be implored? What, furthermore, 520
 Should I entreat? My wants are satisfied,
 But wealth has made me poor. To cast aside
 My mortal form I yearn – a wish that's rare
 In a lover. Would my love were anywhere
 But here! And now my strength is dwindling
 Through grief, the sands of life are vanishing
 And in my youth I die. My passing, though,
 Is welcome for it takes away my woe.
 Would he could live on! But it can't be done,
 For we of one like mind must die as one." 530
 He spoke and, crazed with love, returned to view
 That face, and as he grieved his weeping grew,
 His tears vexing the stream which, rippling,
 Obscured it. When he saw it vanishing,
 He said, "Where are you flying? Cruel boy,
 I beg you, stay! Allow me to enjoy
 Your beauty! Though I may not touch, at least

Allow me the prerogative to feast
 My eyes on you and ease this pain!" He ripped
 His tunic from the upper edge: thus stripped, 540
 He beat his breast with hands of marble-white,
 And at the blow his breast received the slight
 Redness an apple shows that has the hue
 Of red *and* white, or like a grape not due
 To ripen yet but with a purple glow
 One sees upon the clusters as they grow.
 But when the waters cleared, the pain he felt
 Was at its highest, and, as wax will melt
 Beneath the sun, he pined away as he,
 Consumed by love, was wasted gradually 550
 By hidden flame, his strength and colour gone,
 As were the looks pleasant to gaze upon
 But lately. What Echo not long ago
 Had loved had disappeared, and she, although
 Angry at his past scorn, now grieved when she
 Saw him. When he cried out his misery
 She imitated him, and when he beat
 His breast, the very sounds she would repeat.
 His last words to that image were "In vain,
 Boy, were you loved" and, again and again, 560
 She mimicked them, and "Farewell" finally
 Was uttered and repeated, and then he
 Lay wearily upon the grass until
 Death closed those eyes that loved to take their fill
 Of their own master's form. Once he had gone
 Down to the halls of Hades, he looked on
 His visage in the river Styx below.
 The naiads cut their tresses in their woe
 And laid them on his corpse. The dryads, too,
 Did so, and while their cries of sorrow grew, 570
 Echo lamented, too. And just as they
 Prepared to celebrate his funeral day
 With torches round the bier and burial mound,
 They saw the corpse was nowhere to be found.
 Instead of it, a yellow flower grew,
 Enclosed with petals of a snow-white hue.
 This tale, once well-known, spread the prophet's fame
 Through all Achaea, broadening his name.
 Pentheus alone, by whom the gods were hated,
 Scoffed at its praises and depreciated 580
 The seer, deriding his sad loss of sight.
 Shaking his temples that were snowy white
 With age, the prophet said to him, "Should you
 Be blind as I am, unable to view
 The Bacchic rites, you would rejoice. For I
 Predict that it will happen by and by

That that new god, Semele's progeny,
 Will hither come, and if you do not see
 That he is honoured with a temple, you
 Will be torn into pieces, scattered, too, 590
 In many places. You'll contaminate
 The forests with the rivers' bloody spate.
 Your mother and her sisters you will stain.
 This will occur because you shall disdain
 To honour Bacchus. I have, you will say,
 Seen too much." Pentheus drove the seer away.
 The prophets' forecasts, though, were brought about:
 The fields rang out with many a joyful shout
 At Bacchus's appearance there, for when
 He came, a mob of matrons, mixed with men 600
 And brides, both rich and poor, rushed there as well
 To celebrate. Then Pentheus, with a yell,
 Cried out, "You dragon-born, the progeny
 Of Mars, you are possessed with lunacy!
 Can sounds of brass and pipes and horns hold sway?
 Can drunkenness and magic win the day?
 These yelling women, these obscenities,
 These drums appal you, though hostilities
 Of war don't daunt you. How can I admire
 You elders who abandoned your own Tyre 610
 And settled here but now are led away.
 Display the vigour I possess! Cast off
 Your ivy sceptres! Put on armour! Doff
 Those wreaths! Be mindful of your ancestry!
 Be animated by the energy
 That dragon manifested in the past
 And slew so many without aid, at last
 Meeting its end to save its lake and spring.
 May you have such renown in conquering! 620
 Though he sent brave men to their deaths, you should
 Drive off the cowards for your country's good.
 If Thebes must perish soon, it's my desire
 that she should be brought down by sword and fire.
 And thus we would be miserable, though
 We would lament, and not conceal, our woe,
 Nor would we be ashamed. An unarmed boy
 Will conquer Thebes, though he will not employ
 War, arms or neighing steeds. His hair he'll drown
 In reeking myrrh, he'll have a fancy gown, 630
 Woven with gold and purple. Stand aside
 And let me speak. For I will now provide
 Proof of his "father"'s fake paternity
 And bogus rites. Acrisius previously
 Fastened the Argive gates against the face
 Of that vain god he hated – in that case,

Why should all Thebes and I be terrified
 To oust him from our gates? Be quick," he cried
 To his attendants. "Drag him here to me
 And waste no time respecting my decree!" 640
 Cadmus and Athamas and all the rest
 Of his devoted friends fruitlessly pressed
 Him to de cease, and yet the more that they
 Admonished him, the more by this delay
 Was he outraged, just like a stream that flows
 Unhindered until logs and rocks oppose
 His progress, when it bubbles violently
 Against any obstruction. Presently
 His men returned, bloodstained, and he said, "Why
 Is Bacchus not with you?" They made reply: 650
 "We haven't seen him, but we got to seize
 A boy who served in his solemnities."
 Then they delivered an Etrurian lad,
 His hands secured behind his back, who had
 Served Bacchus. Pentheus looked at him with eyes
 Of fire – scarcely could he temporize
 His punishment. "You're fated for destruction,"
 He said, "and this will serve as an instruction
 To others. What's your name, your parents', too?
 And what's your native country? Why did you 660
 Attend on Bacchus' rites? Not terrified
 At all, "I am Acoetes," he replied.
 "I'm from Maeonia, my family
 So humble that my father left to me
 No fruitful fields tilled by a lusty ox,
 No lowing cattle nor no fleecy flocks
 Of sheep. He was a fisherman, whose trade
 Was all that he possessed, and when he made
 It over to his son, he said, 'Receive
 What I possess! Be heir to all I leave!' 670
 But when he passed away, my legacy
 Was just the streams. But later, lest I be
 Forever bound to haunt the rocky strand,
 I learned to guide the keel with dextrous hand
 And know the guiding stars, the Pleiades,
 The houses of the winds, the Hyades,
 The watery Olenia and the Bear,
 While knowing, too, all harbours that are fair.
 By chance I sought out Delos, near the shore
 Of Chios, plying on my starboard oar. 680
 I nimbly leapt upon the soggy shore,
 And once the night was past and dawn once more
 Appeared, I rose and showed my men the way
 To the stream and gave them orders to convey
 To me fresh water. Then up to a height

I climbed a mound in order that I might
 Check out the wind, then called out to the men
 That we might go back to the ship again.
 Opheltes, my dear friend, said, 'Look at us!'

As he led on a boy most beauteous
 690
 With features like a maiden, for he thought
 That in that desert wilderness he'd caught
 A prize. The lad was staggering around,
 Heavy with wine and sleep, and when I found
 What clothes he wore and what a heavenly grace
 He showed, I knew it was no mortal race
 To which the lad belonged. So, being well-
 Assured of this, I said, 'I cannot tell
 What god resides in him, but certainly
 It is a god. Whoever you may be,
 700
 Smile on us! Ease our toil! Forgive those men
 For how they've treated you!' But Dictys then,
 The quickest climber of the yards to loose
 The ropes, said, 'Begging him is of no use!'

They all agreed – Libys, Melanthus, too,
 The blond pilot, Alcimedon, and he who
 Was oar-master, Epapeus, all indeed!
 For all of them for booty had such greed.
 'In this good ship I have the greatest share,'
 I then rejoined, and this to you I swear -
 710
 You'll not destroy it!' I stood firm as they
 Began approaching me. Then straightaway
 The most audacious of that impious crew,
 Lycabas, began to rage, a felon who
 For murder was exiled from Tuscany
 Somewhere. We grappled: he took hold of me
 Around the throat as if he meant to throw
 Me overboard, but I held on, although
 Half-stunned, to a rope. The crew all happily
 Applauded. Then Bacchus (yes, it was he!),
 720
 As though his lethargy had been disrupted,
 His power now regained, he interrupted
 And said, What's all this noise? Why am I here?
 Where are you taking me?' 'Let go your fear,'
 Said Proreus. 'for whatever port you care
 To reach, we'll take you there.' 'Naxos! For there
 Is where I live,' said he, 'a friendly land
 To you.' The treacherous man at this demand
 Swore by the sea and every deity
 That they would do it and directed me.
 730
 Naxos was on our right, and yet when they
 Saw I was setting sail to go that way,
 Each shouted, 'Fool!' Most with a nodding head
 Or whispers hinted what they would have said

Aloud. 'Somebody else can be our guide,'
 I said, amazed, and swiftly set aside
 My dealings with them. Cries against me grew
 And I was vilified by the whole crew.
 Aethalion said, 'Do you believe that we
 Through you alone enjoy security?' 740
 And took command to seek new shores elsewhere.
 Then Bacchus, as if he had then and there
 Found out their crooked ways, mocked them as he
 Feigned tears while he addressed the company
 And said, 'Sailors, these aren't the lands that you
 Had promised me! Whatever did I do
 To earn this wrong? What honour can there be
 If strong men taunt a lonely boy like me?'
 I wept at this myself, but they just jeered
 To see our tears, since they were clearly cheered 750
 To see our sorrow, then at once they flayed
 The billows with their quickening oars and made
 Away. But, by this potent god, to you
 I swear that all that I shall say is true,
 Though begging belief. As if dry-docked,
 The ship stood still, a miracle that shocked
 The crew, who spread the sails while labouring
 To progress with their oars, redoubling
 Their toil. The oars, though, were by ivy caught,
 Which gave the indication that it sought 760
 To weigh them down. Bacchus was standing there
 Among them all with grape-leaves in his hair,
 Shaking a lance of leafy vines. Around
 Him tigers, lynxes and panthers could be found.
 The sailors leapt out, fearful or deranged,
 And Medon was the first whose colour changed
 To black, his body bent. 'What prodigy
 Is this,' said Lycabas, 'that now I see?'
 And even as he spoke, his jaw grew wide,
 His nose was bent, his skin became a hide 770
 With scales upon it. Lybis, at the oar,
 Could see his hands turn into fins. One more,
 Trying to grasp the ropes, found, as he tried
 To lift his arms, that they had both been tied
 To each side of his frame. Into the sea
 He plunged with crooked back, and just as he
 Swam off, he showed a tail resembling
 A crescent moon. Dolphins were gambolling
 In all directions, drenched with spray, and then
 They came up from the depths, plunging again, 780
 And from their nostrils shot a briny spray.
 Of twenty sailors I alone was still
 Aboard, and through my limbs I felt a chill.

That gracious god allayed my wretched fear
 With difficulty, telling me to steer
 To Naxos. Once there, I immediately
 Performed with them the Bacchic ceremony.
 'A likely tale,' said Pentheus in reply.
 'We heard it out in hopes our rage would die 790
 Before it ended. Take the man away
 And punish him with torture, then convey
 Him to the Underworld!' And they obeyed
 At once and locked him in a dungeon's shade.
 But while the instruments of violence
 Were being organized to send him thence,
 The doors flew open automatically,
 As we have been informed. The progeny
 Of Echion persisted, going, instead 800
 Of others, to Cithaeron, where were said
 The sacred rites. Just as the war-horse neighs,
 Hearing the trumpet's signal, and displays
 His lust for battle, so the skies rang out
 With many a clamour, many a dreadful shout
 From Pentheus in his rage. The mountainside
 Was in a desert, where his mother eyed
 Him first as he with great impiety
 Looked on the rites. Possessed with ecstasy,
 She maimed him with her thyrsus. With a roar,
 She said, 'Come, sisters! Look, here is a boar 810
 That strayed here! I will wound him!' As he fled,
 The mob pursued him, causing him more dread.
 Now he was cornered by the multitude,
 And he was in a less atrocious mood,
 Confessing his misdeeds. Once wounded, he
 Said, 'Give me aid, my aunt, Autonoë!
 You must recall the ghost of Actaeon!'

Yet in her fit she did not know her son,
 Ripping Pentheus's right arm; then Ino
 Ripped off the other one. Disabled so, 820
 He could not stretch his arms out. Instead he
 Said to Agave, 'Mother, look at me!'

.She looked at him again, and when she found
 His bleeding, torn limbs scattered on the ground,
 She howled and tossed her head and shook her hair
 That streamed and fluttered in the breeze-filled air.
 When from his mangled corpse she wrenched his head,
 With bloody hands she touched it, then she said,
 'Behold, companions! It's our victory!'

Just as a wind strips from a lofty tree 830
 Its leaves, which can but loosely keep their hold
 Due to the onset of the autumn cold,
 They all the same don't fall more rapidly

Than Pentheus' limbs torn by that company.
Thus warned, the Theban dames bring frankincense
To Bacchus. Treating him with reverence.