

OVID METAMORPHOSES IV

King Minyas's child, Alcithoe,
Denied Bacchus's sacred ancestry
And spurned his orgies: joining in that crime
Were her two sisters. Now it was the time
For Bacchus' festal day when drudgery
Was banned by matrons and their coterie
Of maids: the skins of fawns they draped about
Their breasts, and their long hair they would let out
And shake their thyrsi, as the priest decreed,
And Bacchus' wrath was powerful indeed 10
If they refused. The priest they would obey -
Mothers and youthful brides – for they would lay
All of their baskets and their webs aside
To offer Bacchus incense, as they cried
Aloud his many names - The Twice-Born One,
Begot of Fire, the Sole Two-Mothered Son,
Bacchus, Nyseus, the unshorn Thyoneus,
The planter of the grape, Nyctelius,
Elalius, Iacchus, Euhon, many more
Well-known for many years in Grecian lore. 20
“You're not Time's victim, youthful boy,” they cry,
“The fairest one of all the gods on high.
Without your horns you have a virgin's face,
The victor of each oriental race:
Dark India, where the waves of Ganges run,
Was overcome by you. Respected one,
You punished Pentheus and Lycurgus, too,
The wielder of the axe. Tuscans you threw
Into the sea. Two yoked lynxes you ride,
Around whom is a harness beautified 30
With lovely colours, and you are pursued
By Bacchanals and satyrs and a crude,
Drunken old man, whose limbs are propped up by
A staff, and surely doesn't even try
To hold on to his mule. Wherever you
May go young men shout out, and women, too.
The flute, the cymbals and the tambourine
Ring out, while Theban womenfolk are seen
To crave your kindness and serenity,
And they perform your holy ceremony.” 40
The daughters of the king, though, carried on,
Carding the wool, twisting their thumbs upon
The yarn, urging their handmaids with the work.
One of them said, “While other people shirk
And hold these bogus rites, why do not we,
Checked by Pallas, a better deity,
Lighten our useful toil and, one by one,

Tell tales, so that the hours will quickly run?"
 This pleased her sisters and they said, "Then tell
 Your favourite tale." Then she explored her well- 50
 Stored mind, but she felt forced to hesitate,
 For she was doubtful that she should narrate
 The tale of Derceto who, as they say
 In Palestine, is living yet today,
 A fish in stagnant pools, or thought she might
 Tell of her daughter, who, among the white
 Dovecotes lived as a dove, where she would spend
 Her latter years until she reached life's end,
 Or how a naiad with an incantation
 Too potent once performed a transformation 60
 Of all her lovers into fish till she
 Herself met that sad fate, or of that tree
 Once bearing white fruit but which now is stained
 With dark blood from its roots. So, entertained
 By this suggestion, she began to tell
 Of Pyramus and Thisbe. Ah, how well
 Their work progressed thereby! "When Pyramus
 And Thisbe, both thought the most glamorous
 Of all, were neighbours in that town of fame
 Built by Queen Semiramis, they became 70
 Enamoured, and they hankered to be wed.
 But that could never be, their fathers said.
 And yet their passion could not be repressed
 By either man. No others, though, had guessed
 Their secret love, for they communicated
 By signs, and thus their love proliferated
 Through gathering heat, and so the more they tried
 To smother it, the more it amplified.
 A wall between their houses had been left
 By careless builders with a little cleft. 80
 No-one had seen this ages-old defect,
 But what is there that lovers can't detect?
 They saw it first, and so the cleft became
 The mouthpiece through which they could then proclaim
 Their love in safety. They stood many a day
 On each side of the obstacle, where they
 Would catch each other's warm breath and complain,
 'You envious wall, why do you thus restrain
 Two lovers? How could you be harmed if you
 Should countenance our tender rendezvous? 90
 But if we ask too much, allow us this
 At least: open but once and let us kiss!
 We're not ungrateful, for your charity
 Allows us loving talk.' So fruitlessly
 They whispered to each other as night fell
 Upon them and they kissed a fond farewell.

At dawn the bright sun dried the grass, and then,
 To plight their troth, the lovers met again,
 Complaining of their fate: in murmurs they
 Resolved, while it was night, to slip away 100
 And leave their city and their homes. In dread
 To roam in pathless fields, they chose instead
 The tomb of Ninus, where they planned to meet,
 Where they might then be able to secrete
 Themselves beneath a mulberry tree supplied
 With a multitude of snow-white fruit beside
 A spring. All was arranged, when the daylight
 Sank slowly through the waves and tardy night
 Arose. Then Thisbe very cleverly
 Deceived her parents, then clandestinely 110
 Opened the door and left the house, her face
 Concealed from others, coming to the place
 That they'd agreed upon. Beneath the shade
 Of the mulberry tree she sat, for love had made
 Her bold. A lioness came to the spring
 To quench her thirst, whose jaws were dribbling
 With oxen's blood. Because the moon was bright,
 Thisbe with trembling footsteps fled in fright
 And found a cave; but she happened to drop
 Her veil as on she ran but dared not stop 120
 To save it. Then the beast, refreshed, turned round
 To seek her forest lair. The veil she found
 And tore it in her anger as she stained
 It with her bloody jaws. Thisbe remained
 Unseen. Then, coming later, Pyramus
 Saw paw-prints in the dust, then, colourless
 At once, he found the bloody veil. 'One night
 Will doom two souls, one of whom had the right
 To live long,' he proclaimed. 'I am to blame,
 For it was through my urging that you came 130
 Hither without me. Whatever beast is there
 Beneath the rock my guilty flesh should tear.
 And yet not so, for it is cowardly
 To wish for death.' He went up to the tree,
 Holding the veil, which he, with many a sigh,
 Kissed, drenching it with tears. 'No, let me die!'
 Said he, and with the sword he always wore
 He pierced his entrails, spilling out his gore.
 His spurting blood shot upwards to the sky,
 Like hissing water gushing way up high 140
 From some decaying pipe. Thisbe returned,
 Still trembling with terror, as she yearned
 To see her lover, and she longed to tell
 Of her escape. She knew the tree so well,
 But now its fruit was darker. Horrified

With doubt, the wounded Pyramus she spied.
 She started backward and her features grew
 Ashen; she trembled, just as sea-waves do
 When ruffled by the breeze. She temporized
 A little but suddenly realized 150
 It was her lover. Then she beat her breast,
 Tearing her hair, and tenderly caressed
 The body that she cherished, whimpering
 And with his unquenched blood commingling
 Her grief. She kissed his face with stark dismay
 And wailed, 'What fate has taken you away,
 My love ? Ah, Pyramus, awake! Awake!
 It is your dearest Thisbe! For my sake
 Lift up your head!' At Thisbe's name, he did,
 But with one look his eyes in gloom were hid. 160
 And then she saw her veil, and near it lay
 His ivory sheath, but she wailed in dismay
 When she saw that it lacked its sword. She cried,
 'By your great passion and your hand you died.
 Now I will be as bold – this love shall speed
 Me also to perform the fatal deed,
 But I'll be with you in eternity,
 Though doubtless charged with culpability.
 Though only death can part us, love will still
 Be ours. May our poor parents by this ill 170
 Be softened and may they no more deny
 The everlasting love that you and I
 Will share forevermore, and may we be
 Interred together in one tomb. O tree,
 Who with your many-branching boughs now spread
 Dark shadows on my lover, newly dead,
 Soon to accept another, make lament!
 Darken your berries! Be our monument!
 And then she fixed the bloody sword below
 Her breast and fell upon it, and, although 180
 Her act had been improper, nonetheless
 It turned the gods above to gentleness,
 Moving their parents, too: the fruit that grew
 Upon the tree attained a darker hue.
 When ripened, and the parents, in their turn,
 Gathered their ashes in a single urn."
 She ended thus. At once Leuconoe
 Took up the story-teller's thread. When she
 Began to tell her story, everyone
 Withheld her tongue. She said,"Even the Sun 190
 Was once in love: his tale I shall recite.
 With wakeful eye, they say, the Lord of Light
 Was first to see the love affair between
 Venus and Mars and, grieved at what he'd seen,

He summoned Vulcan to him and he said
 That Mars had brought shame to his marriage-bed.
 The shattered Vulcan dropped the work that he
 Was holding, but began immediately
 To file thin links of bronze to make a net
 That would deceive the eye. There never yet 200
 Had been more slender threads that spiders weave,
 For he designed it so that it would cleave
 To any tiny movement. Cunningly
 He drew it round where they were sure to be -
 His bed! Then soon his wife lay down beside
 Her lover, and at once they both were tied
 Immutably, locked in a strict embrace.
 And then, so that the two would have to face
 Others, the Lemnian cuckold opened wide
 The ivory doors and called the gods inside. 210
 And there the couple lay in great disgrace.
 One of them wished to be in Mars's place -
 A frivolous one! But laughter soon progressed
 About the room. The gods spoke of this jest
 For many years. Venus thought of the Sun
 And his betrayal of her carnal fun
 And punished him with passion's agonies
 In retribution for her miseries.
 Sun, what's the use now of your radiant rays?
 You've burned so many lands, but now you blaze 220
 With something new! Though you see everything,
 You see Leucothoe while smouldering
 With passion. At one time you radiate
 Too early in the east, but then you're late
 In setting in the waves. You're constantly
 Fixing your eyes upon Leucothoe,
 Stretching midwinter. Sometimes mortals find,
 Because you have been troubled in your mind,
 You darken in eclipse. Sometimes you're pale,
 Though not because the moon begins to sail 230
 Closer to earth – no, it's Leucothoe!
 It's she who modulates the quality
 Of your aspect. For you love only her.
 Not Rhodos or Clymene do you prefer,
 Nor Circe's mother, Persa. Clytie,
 Who yearns for your attention in dismay,
 Can't charm you anymore. Leucothoe
 Makes you forget all other women, she
 Who fair Eurynome bore among those who
 Produce sweet-smelling incense. As she grew, 240
 In beauty she became eventually
 The one maid who outshone Eurynome,
 Who had surpassed all others in her day.

Her father Orchamas back then held sway
 In Persia, seventh king since the demise
 Of Belus. Veiled below the western skies,
 The Sun's steeds on ambrosia fed, for they
 Were nourished thus after a weary day.
 One night the god came to the maid, though he
 Was in the likeness of Eurynome. 250
 Leucothoe with her twelve maids he found
 By the lamplight as the fine threads she wound
 Around the spindle. As a mother might,
 He kissed her. To the servants, 'Leave my sight,'
 Said he.' Allow a mother to impart
 Unto her child something dear to her heart.'
 They left, and then he said, 'Now look at me -
 I measure out the year; all things I see,
 As, through me, does the universe. I'm thrilled
 With ecstasy to look at you.' But, filled 260
 With dread, she dropped her work. Yet her dismay
 Enhanced her looks, so he brooked no delay,
 Resuming his true form. Although her fright
 Grew greater at this unexpected sight,
 She yielded to his splendour. Clytie
 Was green with envy when she saw the way
 That Phoebus showed his love and angrily
 She broadcast widely this adultery,
 Betraying her to her father, who was wild
 With fierce resentment and interred his child 270
 Deep in the earth. Her hands stretched to the light
 Of Phoebus, she cried out, 'It was his might
 That overcame me!' Then her father laid
 A heavy pile of sand on her. Poor maid,
 Though Phoebus scattered light upon that place
 So that she might display her buried face,
 Crushed by that weight she could not raise her head.
 The god of wingèd steeds, it has been said,
 Was never grieved so much since Phaethon
 Suffered Jove's thunderbolt inflicted on 280
 His body. He attempts with his warm rays
 To bring her back to life, but ill luck stays
 His hopes. Upon her grave and body he
 Sprinkles sweet nectar; in his misery
 He says, 'You will reach Heaven nonetheless!'
 At once her body starts to deliquesce,
 Steeped in that nectar Through the soil a shred
 Of frankincense begins to show its head
 Above the tomb. Phoebus no longer went
 To visit Clytie, his fancy spent, 290
 Though love might have excused his misery,
 Her misery her betrayal. And then she

Wasted away, hating the nymphs, insane,
 Both night and day upon the open plain,
 Naked, unkempt. For nine whole days she fed
 On dew and on the tears she often shed,
 But nothing else, and she would never raise
 Up from the ground but kept her constant gaze
 On Phoebus everywhere he went. They say
 That she took root there, fastened in the clay. 300
 Part of her face turned white, part red, her face
 Veiled by a violet hue. Held in her place
 In earth by a root, she then became the one
 Flower that always turns towards the sun.
 Thus changed, she loves unchanged.' Leuconoe
 Thus told her tale, and all the company
 Were charmed by it, though some of them denied
 That it could have occurred, but some replied
 That true gods can accomplish anything -
 Not Bacchus, though. The sisters, settling 310
 In silence, turned now to Alcothoe.
 Running her shuttle through the fibres, she
 Said, "I don't wish to tell you that well-known
 Story of Daphnis, who was turned to stone
 By a jealous nymph, so dreadful is the hell
 That lovers suffer. Neither will I tell
 How Nature's laws turned Scythos, once a male,
 Into a female. And I'll skip the tale
 Of Celmus, who was turned to steel – yes, he
 Who nurtured great Jove to maturity, 320
 And likewise the Curetes, whom the rain
 Was able to engender. I'll refrain
 From telling of Smilax and of Crocus, too,
 Changed to small flowers. Instead, I'll tell you
 A sweet and novel tale. Of Salmacis,
 The spring, I'll speak, and you'll discover this:
 Those who bathe in it find their limbs grow weak.
 We don't know how, however much we seek
 The cause, though its effect is generally
 Well-known. A boy-child of the deity, 330
 Hermes, and Aphrodite had been reared
 In Ida's caves by naiads. He appeared
 To have both parents' marks: accordingly
 Hermaphroditus was he named. Once he
 Had turned fifteen, he wandered far away,
 Happy to see new countries and to stray
 Beside new rivers. To the Carian land
 He went and there a deep, clear pool he scanned.
 No reeds, no sedge, no rushes could he see,
 And fresh turf grew at its periphery. 340
 A nymph dwelt there, no skilful hinter, slow

Of foot, unable, too, to use the bow,
 Unknown to chaste Diana. Frequently
 Her sisters pled, 'Acquire the mastery
 Of spearing, Salmacis! Enjoy the chase!'

But at their words she pulled a scornful face.
 Instead, she'd wash her shapely body there
 And with a boxwood comb smooth out her hair,
 Checking the pool to look at the effect.

Sometimes in gauzy raiments she bedecked 350
 Herself, on grassy couches idling,
 And sometimes she would take to gathering
 Posies. One day she chanced to see the boy,
 And in her heart she felt a hopeful joy.
 Anxious to speak to him, she nonetheless
 Took time to amplify her loveliness,
 Check out her garments and compose her face
 So she could show to him her every grace.

When this was done, she started finally:
 'Youth, worthiest to be a deity, 360
 If you should *be* a god, you must be blind
 Cupid, but if you should be of mankind
 Your parents, sisters, brothers must be blessed,
 Even the nurse who held you to her breast.
 But far more blessed is she (*if there's a she*),
 Promised to you, whom you believe to be
 Worthy to wed you. If she should exist,
 Then let my pleasure be enclosed in mist,
 But if she doesn't, let us then be wed.'

Awaiting his reply to what she had said, 370
 She stood in silence. But he did not know
 Of all the pleasure love can bring, and so
 He blushed like a ruddy apple on a tree
 Or like the hue of painted ivory,
 Or the round moon in splendour reddening
 When all the brass cymbals fruitlessly ring.
 Long she implored kisses but sisterly,
 Throwing her arms about his ivory
 Shoulders. 'Stop this! Or I will leave!' he said.

But Salmacis at this was full of dread: 380
 'I leave this place to you,' said she. Although
 She made as if she was about to go,
 She looked back at him as among the trees
 She hid herself by crouching on her knees.
 The boy, believing he was now unseen,
 Began to ramble all around the green,
 Dipping his feet into the bubbling spring.
 With no delay, since he was relishing
 Its pleasing temperature, he stripped away

His fleecy garments so that he could play 390

In it. Inflamed now by his naked grace,
Salmacis' eyes seemed like the sun's bright face.
She could not linger nor contain her joy
As she so longed to hold the lovely boy.
Arms to his sides, he leapt in, then he gleamed
Across the sparkling water. How he seemed
Sheathed in an ivory statue or, maybe,
A lily in a lake of glass! Then she
Cried out, "I've won – he's mine!" and then undressed
And dove into the pool, seized and caressed 400
The lad, touching his chest. He fruitlessly
Tried to escape, and yet the more that he
Struggled within her grasp, the more she wound
Herself about him, as a snake is found
To do as that royal bird, the eagle, takes
It in his talons – but that serpent snakes
Around its feet, its head, around its wings,
As to a sturdy oak the ivy clings,
Or as the polypus beneath the spray
Of waves will with its suckers grasp its prey. 410
The lad, though, stood his ground. Continuing
To press her suit, 'There's no point struggling,'
Said she. 'Gods, hear me! Let me never be
Released from him nor he released from me!'
Propitious deities answered her prayer,
Commingling the bodies of the pair,
Making them one, as one may see combined
Two boughs united in a single rind:
In single form they could be thought as either
A female or a male or, maybe, neither. 420
He felt the change wrought on him by the spring
And now he found his limbs were softening,
And with a far-from-male tonality,
His hands stretched out, he said, 'Attend my plea,
Mother and father! Listen to your son!
Please promise me this boon: should anyone
Who's male enter this spring, he'll go away
But half a man.' They could not say him nay,
Tainting the pool with obscure drugs. Although
Their tales were done, the maids still meant to go 430
On working, owing to their enmity
Of Bacchus and his festal ceremony.
Then suddenly they hear the tambourine,
The pipe, the horn, the tinkling brass, unseen;
Saffron and myrrh they smell; incredibly
The webs begin to look like greenery,
Putting forth ivy leaves, or else become
Verdant grape-vines, and then they see the thrum
Turn into tendrils. Out of the warp there went

Vine-shoots and to the grape the purple lent 440
 Its splendour. Day was passing into night,
 When one could scarce distinguish dark from light.
 The house began to shake, the lamps to flare,
 And there were fires glowing everywhere.
 Beast phantoms howled. The sisters, full of fright,
 Hid in the smoking halls and took to flight
 Wherever they required security,
 And, where they did, a membrane gradually
 Stretched over every limb, and wings would grow
 Upon their slender arms. They did not know 450
 How they had lost their former shape, for they
 Were cast in darkness. Not on an array
 Of feathers but on gauzy wings they flew.
 They spoke in various tones according to
 Their size, but squeakily. They hate the light,
 Frequenting attics in the black of night,
 And hence the name by which they're called. All through
 The land of Thebes the power of Bacchus grew.
 His wondrous actions his aunt Ino made
 Well-known: she was the one sister who stayed 460
 Ungrieving but for what her sisters bore.
 Juno became annoyed with Ino for
 The motherhood she vaunted and her life
 With kingly Athamas as his dear wife
 And fostering Bacchus. She said musingly,
 'How is it that a harlot's progeny
 Can change Maeonian mariners and hurl
 Them overboard, and then be such a churl
 As gives a mother her own son to be
 Mangled to pieces, and to give the three 470
 Daughters of Minyas wings? All that Juno
 Can do is wail this unrequited woe.
 Is this the end of all my power? What he
 Has done instructs the way – propriety
 Heeds even foes. What madness can attain
 Is shown by Pentheus' death. Let her feel pain
 Through torment like her sisters!' One may find
 A downward path with gloomy yew-trees lined
 Which leads to Hades, where the languid stream,
 The river Styx, exhales its vaporous steam, 480
 Where shades of those who have but lately died
 Will dwell eternally; there, far and wide,
 Horror and Cold exist. The ghosts, when they
 First each the region, do not know the way
 To Pluto's Stygia, an ample place
 Which has a thousand pathways in its space,
 And as the sea receives all rivers, so
 The place enfolds all of the souls who go

Thither, for it will never be too small
 For anybody – it receives them all. 490
 The shades, bloodless, boneless and bodiless,
 In droves into the place of judgment press
 Or haunt Pluto's abode; some ply the trade
 That they pursued in life, others are made
 Victims of punishment. Thither the queen
 Of Heaven went, brimming with hate and spleen.
 The threshold groaned; three-headed Cerberus
 Barked at her; she summoned her pitiless
 Sisters, the night-bred Furies, sitting there
 Before the gates, combing their viper-hair. 500
 They knew her and arose. Ah, gloomy place
 Of evil, spanning a nine-acres' space,
 Where Tityos is mangled, Tantalus
 Denied all water while the pendulous
 Branches forbid him fruit, and bootlessly
 Sisyphus rolls that rock and endlessly
 Ixion thrusts his wheel which then he flees;
 And this is where the cruel Belides,
 For plotting their cousins' deaths, must ever spill
 The water. Juno with a look of ill 510
 Beheld them, Ixion especially,
 And then on Sisyphus looked questioningly,
 Inquiring then, 'Why did he suffer so,
 Alone of all his other kin, although
 King Athamas in a gorgeous palace reigns
 And, with his haughty wife, myself disdains?'
 Her anger and her hatred she expressed
 So boldly that she finally professed
 That the house of Cadmus should no longer be,
 Urging the Furies in their devilry 520
 To crush King Athamas. She into one
 Mixed orders, vows and prayers. Once she had done,
 Tisiphone tossed her unruly hair
 So that the snakes were tumbled here and there
 And said, 'No need for words for your decree
 Consider done! This hateful region flee
 And seek a sweeter air!' Quite satisfied,
 Juno returned, by Iris purified
 At Heaven's gate with dew. Tisiphone,
 Revengeful, took a torch immediately. 530
 Dressed in a blood-stained robe with snakes about
 Her frame, from her abode she started out
 With twitching Madness, Terror and Dismay.
 When she arrived, the door-posts shrank away
 From her, the doors turned grey and the sun fled,
 Amazed. Ino and Athamas in their dread
 Look at the, then that Fury blocks the way,

And there she stands before them, arms, arms asplay,
 The vipers from her head meandering
 About her while the hissing serpents cling 540
 Upon her back and round her temples glide,
 Vomiting filth, maws open, gaping wide,
 Showing their fangs. Two of these snakes she drew
 From all the rest and villainously threw
 At them. They, though they felt no injury,
 Were furious, provoked to savagery.
 With foam that she acquired from Cerberus
 She brought, too, from Echidna venomous
 Liquids which cause delusions of the mind,
 With evil, tears and anger, all combined 550
 With lust to murder. She had sizzled them,
 Mixed with fresh blood, and stirred them with a stem
 Of green hemlock, and as they trembled she
 Thus scorched their guts - her torch repeatedly
 She waved – and so she added flame to flame.
 Her orders executed, she then came
 With speed to Pluto's realm and cast away
 The serpents. Athamas at once cried, "Hey!"
 In rage."Comrades, spread out your nets, for there
 Is a fierce lioness, with her a pair 560
 Of whelps, lurking within the wood." For he
 Had been misled by his insanity
 And thought his wife a beast, so, thus beguiled,
 He dogs her, snatching up the smiling child,
 Learchus, whirling him just like sling
 Two times and more, then finally shattering
 Him on the rocks. The mother frenziedly
 (Made mad by poison or by misery)
 Yells out, her hair in knots, and bears away
 Her little Melicerta."Euhoe, 570
 Bacche!" she shouts. Queen Juno heard and made
 A mockery of her and said, "May such aid
 Come from your foster-son!" A promontory
 Juts out, corroded by the angry sea,
 Protecting it from rain: it stretched far out -
 Ino climbed it (her madness had, no doubt,
 Given her strength) and leapt into the sea,
 Still holding on to her young progeny.
 Venus took pity on her poor grand-daughter
 And said,"O Neptune, ruler of the water, 580
 Less mighty but than Jove, have sympathy
 For my descendants, whom you now may see -
 They are your deities, you must recall,
 As well as mine, for it is known to all
 I was born of the foam, and thus I came
 To be remembered by my Grecian name."

Neptune took from them their mortality
 And clothed them in its stead with majesty.
 Their names and bodies he transformed, and so
 The boy became Palaemon, and Ino 590
 Leucothoe, now known as deities.
 And after the Sidonian orderlies
 Looked for fresh footprints on the rock, they found
 No further sign of them and thus were bound
 To deem her dead. They tore their clothes, their hair,
 And wailed the House of Cadmus in despair
 And cursed Juno for that poor maid's distress.
 Unable to withstand this, the goddess
 Said, "My revenge shall last eternally!
 Her words she then confirmed immediately. 600
 Her staunchest friend said, "I will follow her,"
 But as she tried to leap, she could not stir,
 Fixed to the cliff, and, while she tried to pound
 Her breast repeatedly, another found
 Her arms grew stiff; another maid, as she
 Tried to tear out her hair, felt suddenly
 Her fingers hardened. Each of them stayed there
 In those positions. But there were elsewhere
 Cadmean maids who had been altered, too,
 But they changed into birds who ever flew 610
 Across the waves. Now Cadmus did not know
 His children now were deities, and woe
 And countless sorrows and calamities
 Oppressed him, and, as though fatalities
 In Thebes distressed him much more grievously
 Than did the fate of his own family,
 He fled, and to Illyria he went
 In exile with his wife. With discontent
 And age weighed down, they started to recall
 The first time that mishap began to fall 620
 Upon their house. Said Cadmus, "Did I slay
 A sacred dragon while upon my way
 From Sidon's gate I planted in the earth
 Those dragon-teeth and brought them all to birth?
 If that is why the gods had been so keen
 To unleash their revenge with certain spleen,
 May I be lengthened like a snake!" Then he
 Saw that his length increased immediately,
 Coiled like snake, and scales appeared around
 His hardening skin and green patches were found 630
 Upon his tar-black body, and, as he
 Fell down, his legs were joined and gradually
 Became a serpent's tail. His arms remained
 Some time while stretching forth, as teardrops stained
 His human face, and he said, "My poor wife!

While there is something of mu human life
 Remaining, take my hand, which is the same
 As yet, for soon this form will shroud my frame!"
 He would have spoken more, but suddenly
 His tongue became twin-forked. Whenever he 640
 Tried to speak words, a hiss escaped – no more!
 His wife cried out and smote her breast, full sore
 With grief: "You helpless man, I beg you – shed
 That monstrous shape! Your manly form," she said,
 "Feet, shoulders, hands and hue are gone. Yes, all
 Has been transformed. You gods, on you I call
 To change me to serpent, too." And thus
 Her prayer came to an end. And then Cadmus
 Tenderly kissed her, gliding to her breast,
 As if he knew his wife, and then caressed 650
 Her on the neck. All of their retinue
 Were filled with trepidation, for they, too,
 Had seen what had occurred. But after she
 Caressed his gleaming neck, then suddenly
 Two snakes were there in twisting coils till they
 Slid to the nearest glade to hide away.
 These gentle serpents never shun mankind
 Or harm us for they always have in mind
 Their past. But they received much consolation
 From Bacchus, their grandson, whose adoration 660
 Was known in conquered India's distant land
 And for whom many Grecian temples stand.
 Acrisius, though, he of the Theban race,
 Remained behind to see there was no trace
 Of him in Argos through hostility,
 Denying that he was the progeny
 Of Jove, denying, too, what we've been told -
 That Jove became a mass of showering gold,
 Begetting him of Danae, though he,
 When he was faced with clear veracity, 670
 Regretted his refusal to concede
 His grandson, for now one of them indeed
 Dwells in the sky, the other one up high
 Being a viperous monster seen to fly
 Above the Libyan sands victoriously,
 Dropping great clots of blood, which soon will be
 Unnumbered deadly serpents. Driven from there
 By various winds, he's carried through the air
 Like a rain-cloud and, high above, he's hurled
 So far away, encompassing the world. 680
 The Crab and frozen Bears three times he passed,
 Shifting from west to east, not holding fast
 To just one course. At length he feared the night
 As day declined, and in the west his flight

He ended, where he sought repose until
 The time when Lucifer began to fill
 The skies with Dawn's new fires. There dwelt the vast
 Atlas who in his magnitude surpassed
 Mankind, the son of Iapetus, whose sway
 Stretched far: the weary chariot of the day 690
 He bathed and ruled the waves and steeds that run,
 Panting, before that chariot of the Sun.
 A thousand flocks and herds would ever roam
 Across his meadows, and no neighbouring loam
 Was richer. Leaves were bright, the produce, too.
 Proteus said, "If high birth impresses you,
 I'm born of Jove. If you perhaps delight
 In deeds of valour, my own exploits might
 Affect you. Let me rest here!" Atlas, though,
 Recalled what Themis said some time ago: 700
 "A son of Jove will strip each golden tree
 And thus will garner immortality."
 In fear of this, Atlas built all around
 His orchard solid walls, and then he bound
 A big dragon to keep perpetual guard,
 And thus all strangers from his land were barred.
 "Begone!" he said. "You lie! May Jove fail you!"
 And then he added further impact to
 His threats by pushing him, as he delayed
 And menaced him with brazen words or prayed 710
 For his reprieve. He could not match his might
 But said to him, "My love you value light!
 Take this, then!" Turning round, he showed the head
 Of foul Medusa on the left. Instead,
 Atlas became a mountain, huge as he
 Had been, his hair and beard now formed to be
 Trees, shoulders and hands now ridges. What had been
 His head before this change was clearly seen
 To be its crest. His bones had now been changed
 To rocks. On every side his largeness ranged 720
 By Heaven's decree, and now upon that crest
 The sky's unnumbered stars were now to rest.
 Aeolus, of Hippotas' family,
 Confined the winds for all eternity,
 And Dawn, who in our labour drives us on,
 In the expanse of eastern heaven shone
 Brightest of all. Perseus put on his feet
 His wingèd sandals, then, with sword complete,
 He sped across the liquid air. He passed
 A wealth of kingdoms till he came at last 730
 To Ethiopia, where impiously
 Andromeda had to pay the penalty
 For Cassiopeia's boast. When Perseus caught

Sight of her pinned to the rock, he might have thought
 She was a statue, but her hair was swept
 By a light breeze and human tears she wept.
 Stunned by her pulchritude unwittingly,
 He barely moved his rapid wings. Once he
 Alighted, he said, "Fair maid, you're confined
 Unworthily - these chains should rather bind 740
 Lovers together. Tell me your country's name
 And yours! Why are you chained?" She paused, with shame
 Oppressed. Unfettered, she would surely hide
 Her blushing head – instead of that, she cried.
 She thought that by such plea she'd seem to be
 By silence owning some iniquity,
 So acquiesced and told to them how vain
 Her mother was about her looks. The main
 Resounded as she spoke, and fast appeared
 A dreaded monster, head held high, which peered 750
 Above the waves. Her parents gave no aid,
 Poor wretches, but they wept full sore and made
 Much lamentation as they, mystified,
 Clung to her. He said, "Although time and tide
 May wait for tears, our case needs urgency.
 If I should as Perseus, the progeny
 Of Jupiter and her whom he embraced
 In showers of gold and left her so disgraced
 And pregnant in her cell – yes, I who slew
 The Gorgon wreathed in serpents' hair, I who 760
 Dared to fly through the air – if I, then, were
 To ask her hand in marriage, she'd prefer
 Me far above all others. Furthermore,
 Not satisfied with deeds I'm famous for,
 I strive to gain more merit, and if I
 Should with my valour save her life, thereby
 I'll win her love." Her parents both agreed
 That he should marry her. Indeed what need
 To hesitate? And then the parents swore
 That they'd endow to him a kingdom for 770
 A dowry. As a ship with steady prow,
 Forced on by sweating young men as they plough
 The deep, the monster swam on, travelling
 Across the waves. A Balearic sling
 Could scarce encompass all the space that lay
 Between the rock and it when straightaway
 The hero flew up high. And when he spied
 His shade upon the sea, the monster tried
 To kill it. But as Jupiter's bird will take
 With eager talons the neck of a snake 780
 That's basking in the sun so that it might

Not twist away, so in his rapid flight,
 Perseus attacked its back and, as it roared,
 Into the right side of its neck his sword
 He buried. Badly hurt, it rears up high
 Or plunges or as, when hounds in full cry
 Surround a boar, it wheels around to face
 Its foes, Perseus, now flying fast through space, 790
 Avoids its jaws and strikes wherever he
 Can pierce its shell and wound it equally
 On both sides, and the tail it twists about
 He wounds as well. Oh, see the monster spout
 Blood-gouts upon the hero's wings, so he
 May now not trust in their efficacy.
 He spies a rock that clearly can be seen
 Above the water when the sea's serene,
 Now covered by the waves. So, resting there,
 He takes his sword and, aiming it with care, 800
 Thrusts through the monster's guts repeatedly.
 The shores and heavens ring resoundingly
 With shouts of praise. The parents were elated,
 Saluting Perseus, for they clearly stated
 That he had saved the house. Then finally
 The maid for whom he'd laboured was set free.
 With sea-water the hero washed his hands
 And lest Medusa's head should by the sands
 Be blemished, he at first prepared a bed
 Of springy leaves and into it he shed 810
 Seaweed: on them he laid Medusa's face
 And then the weeds would take in their embrace
 Its poison, and they set unwontedly.
 The sea-nymphs, too, performed that prodigy
 On other weeds and thus cast on the spray
 Of waves the plants' new seeds. Even today
 Coral retains that nature: thus a plant,
 When taken from the sea, turns adamant.
 He built three altars out of turf to you,
 Mercury, on the left, Minerva, too, 820
 Upon the right and in the centre one
 To Jupiter. Then, once this had been done,
 He vowed a cow to the goddess-warrior,
 A calf to Mercury, to Jupiter
 A bull. Then, dowryless, Andromeda he
 Received, the guerdon of his victory.
 Both Love and Hymen waved the torch ahead
 Of them, and in the flaring flames he shed
 Abundant scents; the homes are decked around 830
 With wreaths of flowers, and they all resound
 With pipes and flutes and songs to make each heart
 Fill up with joy. The doors then fly apart

To show the halls in all their majesty,
 Where Cepheus' nobles dined. Subsequently,
 While Bacchus warmed them all with delectation,
 Perseus began to ask about the nation
 And all its customs. One of the guests then said,
 How did you carry off that snake-filled head,
 Perseus?" The hero said in his reply,
 "There are two sisters with one single eye 840
 Beneath cold Atlas, both the progeny
 Of Phorcys, and in this locality
 A solid bulwark stands to fortify
 The region. But I stole that single eye
 By cleverness when one of them essayed
 To give it to the other, for I laid
 My hand between them. Then I went away
 Through pathless crags, across wild hills that stray
 Through massive, bristling woods, arriving where
 Medusa dwelt. And while I wandered there 850
 In fields and by the roads on every side
 Both men and beasts, because they'd merely eyed
 Her stare, had turned to stone. Yet on my shield
 I saw that dreadful gaze which was revealed
 Reflected there. But when her serpent-hair
 And she were bound in sleep, I, then and there,
 Sheered off her head, and from the blood the steed
 Called Pegasus, which flies with urgent speed,
 Was born, her rapid twin as well." And thus
 He told the perils of his arduous 860
 Journey, of seas and distant lands that he
 Had seen, of stars he'd touched. Then suddenly
 He ended, and no further word he said.
 Then someone asked why in the locks of dread
 Medusa only are there snakes, and he
 Replied, "Since you would learn of this from me,
 Accept the reason now. She had been blessed
 With pulchritude beyond all of the rest
 With many envious suitors. None would fare
 Well trying to describe her glorious hair, 870
 Her charm. Indeed a friend declared to me
 He'd seen her thus. The sovereign of the sea
 In chaste Minerva's temple, so they say,
 Raped her. Minerva turned her eyes away
 Behind her aegis, and that splendid hair
 She turned to snakes. Now, striking with despair
 Her foes, the goddess wears upon her breast
 Those creatures of her furious unrest.

