

OID METAMORPHOSES V

While Perseus, at the banquet hemmed about
By Cepheus' lords, narrated this, a shout
Of an angry multitude was heard within
The royal courts. It was no festal din
But threatened war, like to a tranquil sea
That's churned by angry tempests suddenly.
Phineus, the rash ringleader of those men,
Rattled his ash-spear tipped with bronze and then
Shouted, "I will avenge my ravished bride!
Your wings wouldn't help you even if they tried, 10
Nor Jove in showers of gold!" Thus did he show
His bluster. Cepheus yelled at him, "No! No!
Hold off! What madness prompted this rash plan?
Are these the thanks of a heroic man,
A true requital for a loved one? You
Were not betrayed by Perseus, for it's true
That it was Neptune, sovereign of the sea,
Or Ammon or that sea-monstrosity
That glutted itself upon my flesh. But when
You lost her, she was dying. Ah, but then 20
You cruelly sought her death, in our despair
Rejoicing. Oh yes, you were standing there,
Not trying to release her bonds, although
You were betrothed. Will you reveal your woe
That she was saved by someone else and thus
Steal his reward? It may seem glorious
Had you assisted her and set her free.
Let him who did that deed deservedly
Take for his words and deeds the merit due.
But know that he was not preferred to you 30
Except to save her life." With no reply,
Phineus stood there and, glancing eye to eye
Between them both, as though he felt some doubt
About at which of them he should lash out,
He hesitated briefly. Then his spear
He hurled at Perseus angrily and near
Struck him, but it just missed him, quivering
In a couch. Perseus, riled beyond anything,
Leapt up and threw it back: his enemy
He would have pierced had he not shamefully 40
Cowered behind the altars. Nonetheless
The javelin was not without success,
Striking Rhoetus's face, and as he tore
It from the very bone, upon the floor
He kicked his heels, and spouting blood defiled
The table. Then the vulgar crowd turned wild
And cast their weapons. There are some who say

That Cepheus should have died that very day
 With Proteus. But the former now had gone
 Outside the palace, having called upon 50
 Justice, the gods of hospitality
 And faith to witness the iniquity
 That had occurred. Athena, too, revealed
 Herself to screen her brother with her shield
 And lend him courage. To the feast there came
 A guest from India's distant shores whose name
 Was Athis. Asian Ganges' progeny,
 Limnaea, bore him – so his history
 Tells us – in glassy caverns. Now sixteen,
 This handsome youth in rich robes could be seen. 60
 He wore a Tyrian mantle that was bound
 With gold and had a golden collar round
 His neck, a crown atop his myrrh-drenched hair,
 Skilled in projecting javelins anywhere,
 However distant, expert equally
 In bowmanship. No sooner, though, had he
 Taken it from the nearby altar's core,
 Perseus picked up a log of wood and tore
 His face apart. When an Assyrian
 Called Lycabas, his dear friend and a man 70
 He truly loved, observed his handsome friend
 Covered with blood and coming to life's end,
 He snatched Athis's bow and said, "Let's fight
 In single combat! You will not delight
 For long in this youth's fate – yours was a deed
 Most shameless. In an instant with great speed
 He sent a piercing arrow from the bow
 Which did not reach its purposed mark, although
 It struck his cloak. Then with the trusty blade
 That caused Medusa's death, the hero made 80
 A deep trench in his chest. His foe looked round
 With failing eyes for Athis, whom he found.
 Leaning against him, he heaved his last breath -
 Sad consolation of a twofold death.
 And Phorbas, of the race of Methion,
 And his friend, Libyan Amphimedon,
 Slipped on the blood, anxious to join the fray,
 And fell together in a heap: as they
 Got up, that sword pierced Phorbas' throat and through
 His friend Amphimedon's ribs was driven, too. 90
 But Perseus didn't challenge Erytus,
 Who swung a battle-axe so ponderous
 That he took a huge bowl, wrought cleverly
 With large design, and stunned his enemy
 With it, and crimson blood he vomited,
 Meeting the hard floor with his dying head.

Next. Abaris and Polydaemon he
 Slew, then Lycetus, Sperchius' progeny:
 The long-haired Elyces and Clytus, too,
 And Phlegias – all these the hero slew 100
 And trampled on the dying men. In fear
 Of open contest, Phineus hurled his spear,
 And yet by some mischance his aim was bad,
 Because he wounded Idas, he who had
 Supported neither side, hoping to flee.
 He raged at Phineus with futility
 And said, "Now I am forced to be your foe,
 So you must recompense me blow for blow."
 The spear that had struck him he was about
 To hurl back at him, having pulled it out. 110
 Faint from the loss of blood, he couldn't throw
 It at his enemy but sank down low
 Upon his knees and died. Here Odytes
 Lies, too, the noblest of the Cepheneas
 Save Cepheus, who was slain by Clymenus,
 Prothoenor, who was killed by Hypseus,
 And Hypseus himself beside that warrior fell,
 Slaughtered by Lyncidas. And there as well
 Aged Emathion stood, a man revered
 By his contemporaries, one who feared 120
 The gods, an upright man. By then denied
 The strength for fighting battles, he now vied
 With others with an execrating tongue,
 For he cursed all their weapons as he clung,
 Trembling, to the altar. Then his head
 Chronis cut off immediately, then fed
 It to the shrine: his soul would soon expire,
 Yet still he cursed atop the altar's fire.
 Twins Boreas and Ammon, brothers who
 Were champions at boxing, Phineus slew - 130
 For how could skill in boxing ever be
 Considered equal to the mastery
 Of swordsmanship? And Phineus also slew
 The priest of Ceres, Ampycus, he who
 Had temples wreathed in white, Iapetides,
 Though, was not there at these festivities
 For this – he'd been solicited to play
 The harp and sing to bless the wedding-day.
 The plectrum in his hand, he stood aside
 In peace while Pettalus, mockingly snide, 140
 Said, "Sing to Hades!" piercing with his spear
 His left temple. He fell and it was here
 He tried to pluck the lyre's strings, but he
 Could only play a plaintive threnody,
 In anger then Lycomas, to repay

This deed, went to the door and tore away
 A huge bar from the door-post on the right
 And crushed his neck. He fell, as a bullock might
 When slaughtered. But then from the other side
 One from Cinyphia called Penates tried 150
 To wrench a plank, but the spear of Marmarus
 Pinioned his hand to the post. He, frozen thus,
 Struggled. Abas then pierced his side and he,
 Not falling to the floor, was cruelly
 Left hanging by his hand there. Perseus' friend
 Was also slaughtered there, meeting his end,
 And Dorylas, a rich man who possessed
 Much Nasamonian land – none was assessed
 As wealthier in corn. The spear was cast 160
 Into his groin, and there it fastened fast.
 The man who hurled it, Halcyoneus,
 The Bactrian, beheld his victim thus
 As he lay on the ground, gasping for breath,
 And rolled his eyes as he approached his death
 And yelled to him, "The land you lie on here
 Is all you now possess!" and left. His spear
 Perseus ripped from the gaping wound while it
 Was still warm, hurled it back at him and hit
 Him in the nose: straight through his neck it went,
 Projecting front and back. While he'd been sent 170
 Some luck, Clanis and Clytius he slew -
 Though they were of one mother born, those two
 Had different wounds. His spear through Clytius' thighs
 Both left and right he drove: in different wise
 Clanis received it in his mouth and thus
 Was slain. Caledon was killed, and Atreus,
 A Syrian with unknown paternity,
 And Aethion, once skilled in prophecy
 But now deceived by his foreseeing eyes.
 And then Thoactes was the next to die, 180
 The armour-bearer of the king: as well
 Agyrtes, who had killed his father, fell.
 More yet remained, though he was nearly spent,
 For now the multitude with one assent
 Resolved to kill him, for a raging tide
 Of men opposed the cause from every side.
 The pious father and his bride in vain,
 Together with her mother, raised a strain
 Of lamentation, but their cries were stilled
 By dying groans and clamour that now filled 190
 The air. War drenched the gods with streams of gore,
 Polluted by these deeds, and tried once more
 To spur the strife. Against that raging throng
 Alone, Perseus now found himself among

A host of men by Phineus led, who cast
 Their flying darts, as thick as a winter's blast,
 On every side, which grazed his ears and eyes.
 He found a pillar of a massive size
 And set his back against it so that he
 Was shielded, facing then a panoply 200
 Of men, and turned the tide of war. Now he
 Was pressured by a man from Nabathe
 Called Ethemon, while on the other side
 A man called Molpeus, a Chaonian, tried
 To slaughter him. As when a tiger heeds,
 While suffering the pain of hunger's needs,
 Two herds in separate fields and cannot make
 His mind up as to which of them to take,
 Though craving both, he lingered still to see
 Which way his foe might run away, then he 210
 Wounded him in the leg and let him go.
 But he was pressured by his other foe
 Who struck him in the neck, but recklessly
 He struck the pillar and his weapon he
 Thus shattered by his action, and the blade
 Now split away, flew through the air and made
 A hole in his own throat. He was not slain
 But, quivering, he stretched his arms in vain.
 Then Perseus took his life: observing, though,
 That he had been outnumbered by the foe, 220
 He said, "Since you are done for, I'll essay
 To seek help from the foe. Friends, look away
 If you are here!" Then the Medusa's head
 He raised. And Thescelus, replying, said,
 "Find other suckers who may be concerned
 With wonders such as these!" But, as he yearned
 To cast his spear, he, statue-like, stood still.
 Ampyx, close by, in eagerness to kill,
 Made a great lunge to pierce Lyncides through
 The breast but, as he did, his right arm grew 230
 Rigid, and so he could not move his blade
 Forward or back, while Nileus, who had made
 The false claim that he was the progeny
 Of seven-fold Nile (and thus alternatively
 His shield bore seven streams of silver and gold)
 Cried out, "Perseus, my genesis behold!
 You'll be consoled in Hades once you die
 That you were slain by such a one as I!"
 But as he boasted, the last words he tried
 To speak were silenced. His mouth opened wide 240
 But uttered nothing. Eryx chided, "Fear
 Has numbed you, not the Gorgon's drugs. Come here
 And fling the young magician to the ground!"

He set off with a rush, but then he found
 His feet stuck fast like stone. The penalty
 Was earned by all but one of them, for he
 Was turned to stone, seeing the Gorgon's head.
 Astyages, not knowing he was dead,
 His weapon giving out a high-pitched tone,
 Then struck him as he, too, was turned to stone, 250
 A wondering look upon his marble face.
 I should not take the endless time to trace
 The names of those who have survived the fight,
 Two hundred turned to stone at the mere sight
 Of the Medusa's face. Phineus at last
 Regrets the fight, for each man's captured fast
 In various attitudes. He calls each one
 By name and asks for help. What can be done?
 He touches some of them and finds that they
 Are marble. Then he turns his gaze away, 260
 And then to Perseus he in supplication,
 While stretching out his hands in confirmation,
 Confessing all his evil actions, said,
 "Remove, I pray, that dreadful Gorgon's head,
 Victorious one! It was not out of hate
 We clashed nor any wish to appropriate
 A throne, but for a woman's sake. Your claim
 Was just, although mine was not quite the same,
 Though time supported it. To you I cede
 Myself, but, bravest warrior, hear me plead - 270
 Grant me my life! The rest be yours!" He said
 All this while never lifting up his head
 To meet his eyes. Brave Perseus then replied,
 "Cowardly Phineus, you I will provide
 With a special gift that's suitable for you,
 A fearful man. No sword will run you through.
 You'll be a monument eternally:
 The palace of my father-in-law will see
 You evermore: my wife will find relief
 Thereby, enabled to reduce her grief, 280
 Seeing her husband's image." To that place
 Where Phineus had levelled his trembling face
 He moved Medusa. When his gaze he tried
 To avert, his tears at once solidified:
 His neck grew stiff, his timid face now laid
 In stone; his features and his hands then stayed
 As guilty as in life. His native land
 He sought, taking his new bride by the hand,
 And punished Proetus, whom upon the field
 Of battle forced his own brother to yield 290
 His stronghold. Proetus, though, either by fight
 Nor seizing power could not endure the sight

Of that fierce monster's gaze. Still you, o king
 Of tiny Seriphos, not softening
 At Perseus' virtue, that by all was seen,
 Nor at his pain, felt unrelenting spleen.
 You mocked his praises and you argued, too,
 That the Medusa's dying was not true.
 "Well, this is evidence it is," replied
 Perseus. "Friends, shield your eyes!" He calcified 300
 His face with that Medusa's fearful head.
 Throughout their deeds Pallas Minerva fed
 Aid to her gold-born brother happily,
 But now, hemmed by a cloudy vapour, she
 Vanished, heading for Thebes, leaving behind
 Cythnus and Gyarus on the right, to find
 Mt. Helicon, where all the Muses dwelt,
 Crossing the sea in what manner she felt
 Was quickest. There she stayed her journey high
 Above, and to the sisters she said, "I 310
 Know of a spring, a gift of that swift steed
 Pegasus, of Medusa born. I need
 To see this wondrous spring, for Pegasus
 I saw born of Medusa's blood." And thus
 Urania said, "Whyever you are here,
 Goddess, it gives us all the greatest cheer,
 And now, that I might tell the truth to you,
 That steed produced the spring indeed! Quite true!"
 And then she took her there. Then, after she
 Had long looked at the streams admiringly, 320
 She turned around to view the ancient trees,
 The flowery meadows and the cavities
 Dug in the earth – a fair locality,
 She thought, and fitting as a sanctuary
 For those nine sisters. But one of them thus
 Addressed her, "You who are so valorous
 Could have joined us, for what you say is true,
 Art's joys and the retreat approved by you,
 But wickedness admits of no restraint
 And everything is liable to taint 330
 Our virgin minds. Pyrenaeus everywhere
 Haunts us, and even now we scarce can bear
 The initial shock. He seized the Daulian land
 And Phocis where he held supreme command.
 As we to Parnassus's temples went
 He saw us; feigning to be reverent
 To those we worship, he said, 'Muses, stay!
 Choose now the shelter of my roof, I pray,
 And shun the heavy stars that teem with rain,
 For often humble people entertain
 The glorious gods.' Moved by the imminent

Downpour and by his words, we gave assent.
 And soon it stopped, the black clouds taking flight
 And all the heavens once more shining bright.
 We started to leave, but Pyrenaeus shut
 The doors, preparing to assail us. But
 We spread our wings and left. But as we fled,
 He stood upon a lofty tower and said,
 'I can pursue you,' and then with a bound
 He leapt down from the tower, hitting the ground 350
 Head-first – the man was clearly quite insane.
 His bones were pulverized, a crimson stain
 Of blood left on the earth. And now the sound
 Of wings and voices could be heard around
 The lofty trees. Minerva wondered where
 These sounds came from and looked up to the air,
 Thinking them human, but there in a tree
 Perched nine magpies, who made a parody
 Of every sound, now grieving their sad fate.
 Minerva then began to contemplate 360
 This curious scene. Urania then replied,
 'These foolish sisters, so puffed up with pride
 That they in number added up to nine,
 Though losing the dispute (their family line
 Was Pierus, their father, opulent
 In Pella, and Evippe, too, who went
 Full nine times into labour), travelling
 To many Grecian cities, challenging
 Us to a singing match.' 'Cease your sweet songs,'
 They said, 'contrived to dupe the vulgar throngs. 370
 If you are confident, contend with us -
 We're nine as well. We'll be victorious.
 Losing, grant us the Heliconian spring
 And Aganippe, while our offering
 Will be Paeonia. The nymphs will be
 Our judges.' To indulge in rivalry
 Was shameful, but to yield was even more
 Shameful. The nymphs then by their waters swore
 To be impartial. Then in judgment they
 Sat on their rocky thrones, and straightaway, 380
 No lots yet drawn, the leading sister chanted
 Of wars with gods, and bogus praise she granted
 To the giants, slighting what the gods created.
 'Out of the deepest realms of earth,' she grated,
 'Typhoeus came and filled the gods with dread,
 Who therefore turned their backs on him and fled
 To Egypt, where the great Nile lengthens out
 Its seven straits, who took the weary rout.
 Thither Typhoeus followed hastily:
 The heavenly gods, however, craftily 390

Assumed deceptive shapes. Jove, then, became
 A ram (as Ammon's crooked horns proclaim),
 Bacchus became a goat, Phoebus a crow,
 Diana a cat, Venus a fish, Juno
 A snow-white cow, Cyllenian Mercury
 The winged ibis.' On her lute thus she
 Played while she sang, then summoned us. 'Maybe
 You have no leisure now and are not free
 To hear our songs.' Said Pallas, 'Oh, please do
 Perform your melodies for us, as you 400
 Arranged them, and at that she sat among
 The grove's light shadows, then the Muses' song
 Began again. 'We'll let Calliope,
 Our best performer, sing the melody.'
 Calliope arose, her loose hair bound
 With ivy, and tried out a plaintive sound
 Upon her lute and sang: 'With her ploughshare
 Ceres first broke the earth, first gave us fare,
 First gave us laws – all things from Ceres came.
 Oh, would that I could celebrate her fame 410
 In verse! Typhoeus, since he coveted
 Heaven, is pressed down, giant limbs all spread
 Beneath Tanacris, Oh, how frequently
 He strains and strives to rise from there. But he
 Is held by Pachynus who'd grabbed his hand;
 His legs were pressed by Lilybaeus and
 Etna holds down his head. There must he lie,
 Flat on his back, and spew the seeds on high,
 Vomiting flames. He often strove to shed
 The towns and mountains, piled above his head, 420
 That shake the lands. The king who holds command
 Of these dark shadows in that murky land -
 Yes, even he! - is fearful that the ground
 Will cleave, let in the daylight and confound
 The trembling ghosts, and therefore he in dread
 Departed from that city of the dead,
 Pulled by his coal-black steeds. He carefully
 Observed the vast extent of Sicily.
 Eventually his fears he laid aside
 (For he'd explored it well, quite satisfied). 430
 He roamed about, where Venus saw him. She
 Embraced Cupid, her wingèd progeny,
 And said, 'My child, my arm, my strength, my hand,
 Take up your arrows, which possess command
 Over us all, and pierce that deity's heart,
 Who of the triple realm the final part
 Received, and use your keenest arrow, too!
 The gods in Heaven all are ruled by you,
 Including Jove and all the deities

That swim the deep and he who rules the seas. 440
 Why should Pluto escape our mastery?
 And yet, as is quite evident to me,
 I'm scorned in Heaven. So you see the way
 Pallas Athena has renounced my sway
 Diana, too? Proserpina, if we
 Permit it, may well choose virginity.
 Marry her to her uncle! Venus' son
 With her assistance picked the keenest one
 Of all his darts. His knee against the bow
 He placed and then he let the arrow go 450
 Straight into Pluto's breast. Not far away
 From Enna's ramparts, called for many a day
 Pergus, there is a deep lake, where the sound
 Of swan-songs may be heard more than is found
 In the Caystros. There's a fringe of trees
 Around it, through whose boughs a gentle breeze
 Is blown. The ground is spread with purpling
 Flowers, and in that place eternal spring
 Exists. Proserpina once in that glade
 Would pluck lilies and violets as she played, 460
 Determined to outdo her friends in this,
 Filling her basket and her gown, when Dis
 Saw her and took her in a moment. She
 Called to her mother in anxiety,
 And all her friends. Her garment then was ripped,
 And thereby all her gathered flowers slipped
 Down to the ground. This mishap, for her years
 So fitting, added to her virgin tears.
 Dis shook upon his horses' necks and manes,
 While calling each by name, his rusted reins. 470
 Throughout the deep lakes they ran speedily
 And galloped through the pools of Palici,
 Which boiled with the stench of sulphur. And they bore
 Him to where Bacchus' sons had long before,
 Though born of Corinth, built a city which lay
 Between unequal ports. There is a bay
 Twixt Arethusa and Cyane – there
 Dwells Cyane, the best-known anywhere
 Of Sicily's nymphs. There as far as her thighs 480
 She shows herself and to that rapist cries,
 'Stay there! Not one step further! Not by might,
 Pluto, shall you ever obtain the right
 To be Ceres's son-in-law! Implore
 Aid from her who once gave her birth before
 Dragging her off! Anapis loved me, too
 (Comparing great with small), though keen to woo
 Me tenderly, but you have terrified
 The girl. At this she stretched her arms out wide

To bar his way. Pluto, now harshly stung
 With anger, urged his steeds again and flung 490
 His sceptre deep into the pool. The ground
 Made way for him, because a gap he found
 To let the chariot in. But Cyane
 Now mourned the rape and loss of sanctity
 Towards the fountain, and within her breast
 The wound still rankled, and she deliquesced
 In floods of tears, and she wasted away.
 Her bones, her nails grew soft, her azure hair,
 Her fingers, legs and feet, for everywhere 500
 Each slender part was melting; rapidly
 Her tender limbs turned to liquidity;
 Her back and shoulders, sides and breast diffused
 And vanished into water, which then oozed
 Into her veins, and nothing had been left
 A hand could hold. Her mother now, bereft,
 Searched everywhere in vain – she'd never rest.
 When Dawn appeared each day with reddened crest
 Or Hesperus, they seemed not to suppose
 That she had anywhere sought some repose. 510
 She lit two pines from Etna; in each hand
 She held one, restlessly combing the land
 Both day and night. Thirstily wandering,
 She never wet her lips at any spring.
 She saw a straw-roofed hut and, having found
 The door, she knocked on it, and at the sound
 A crone emerged and looked at the goddess,
 Who asked for water, and in kindness
 Gave her some sweet wine mixed with barley. She
 Began to drink it down when, tauntingly, 520
 A rash and foul-mouthed stripling called out, 'You
 Are greedy!' But at this the goddess threw
 What still was in her goblet in his face,
 Which started to grow spots, and then in place
 Of arms were added legs; a tail he grew,
 And so that he'd not have great strength to do
 Much harm, he was diminished, measuring
 Less than a tiny lizard. Wondering,
 The crone wept as she strove for one caress,
 The reptile fleeing, seeking some recess. 530
 His very name describes him to a T,
 Because he's starred with a variety
 Of hues. It would be tedious to cite
 The places Ceres went through in her plight,
 And yet her quest still failed. To Sicily
 She then returned and came to Cyane,
 Who would have told her everything she knew
 Had she not changed – now this she could not do.

And yet by certain signs she made it clear
 What she desired to say, for it was here 540
 Proserpina's girdle which all folk knew well
 She showed, for she had dropped it and it fell
 Into the sacred pool. Thus finally
 The mother was convinced her progeny
 Had been abducted. She her streaming hair
 Tore from its roots and laid her bosom bare
 And struck it. In her anger she, although
 Her daughter's whereabouts she did not know,
 Cried out against all lands' ungratefulness:
 The world did not deserve her own largesse 550
 Of corn, she said, but fundamentally
 She placed most censure upon Sicily,
 For that was where she had discerned a trace
 Of where she'd borne her loss. So in that place
 She broke the ploughs and churned up all the soil,
 Annihilating all the farmers' toil,
 And all the cattle's, too, and she decreed
 That land would prove deceptive to the seed
 And plants would die. Thus from fertility 560
 The well-loved isle spawns nothing but debris.
 The corn rots early, and excessive heat,
 Rain, winds and constellations all compete
 To do the greatest harm. Birds eat the seeds;
 The wheat is choked by thistles, tares and weeds.
 Arethusa raised her head above the sea
 And pushed her dripping tresses back so she
 Could speak: 'You've sought throughout the globe, Ceres.
 The mother of nutritious fruits. Let these
 Tremendous labours have an end! Allay
 Your wrath, because the earth revered your sway, 570
 Lacking all blame – it was unwillingly
 She opened up. I do not make my plea
 For where I come from. Pisa is my land,
 Though it was Elis, you must understand,
 That gave me birth. I am a stranger here,
 And yet this isle affords me wondrous cheer.
 This is the land where I desire to stay -
 Preserve it for me, gentle one, I pray.
 A fitting time will come for me to tell
 You why I left my native land to dwell 580
 Here in Ortygia, when you are free
 And happier. The fissured earth showed me
 Deep caverns where I looked above to spy
 The unfamiliar stars. And so, while I
 Slipped through the underground, your progeny
 I saw; though she reflected misery,
 She was a queen, the greatest one to dwell

Among the shades, spouse of the king of Hell.'
 As if by thunder struck, or petrified, 590
 Was Ceres until she had modified
 Her shock to fury. Then she to the high
 Heavens arose, her whole face clouded by
 Her hate. Her hair dishevelled, she then cried
 To Jupiter, 'Lord Jove, be on my side!
 Succour my child – and yours! Her mother may
 Not move you to compassion, but I pray
 My child will do so. Do not have less care
 For her because I birthed her! Be aware
 I searched so long for her and found her, though
 You may call it undoubted loss or know 600
 The place where she is now. But I will bear
 Her fate if she's brought back into my care.
 If she's my daughter, she should not be wed
 To someone who's a bandit-chief, ' she said.
 Said Jupiter, 'This daughter is a care
 For both of us, a sacred pledge we share.
 But if we will acknowledge what is true,
 This was an act of love and cannot do
 Her harm. We'll incur no ignominy
 From him – how great a thing it is to be 610
 Jove's brother if all else is lacking! What
 If *nothing's* lacking but that he by lot
 Yielded to me? But if you truly burn
 To have her back, our daughter may return
 To Heaven but on one condition – she
 Must not have tasted food, a firm decree
 Of Fate.' Ceres was still resolved to lead
 Her daughter back to her, and yet indeed
 The Fates did not concur because the maid
 Had in the Stygian fields thoughtlessly strayed 620
 And broken fast. She'd plucked, while underground,
 Seven grains of pomegranates which she'd found
 Upon a tree. Ascalaphus, the son
 Of famed Orphne, had been the only one
 To see this (she with Acheron once lay
 And birthed him in a cavern many a day
 Before) and so he cruelly denied
 Proserpina's return. She deeply sighed
 And changed him to an evil bird, and on
 His head she sprinkled lymph of Phlegethon, 630
 Turning it to a beak, wide-open eyes
 And feathers while his head increased in size
 And wings grew from it, and his nails were curved
 Inward and lengthened, and the wings that served
 As arms were sluggish and could barely move,
 And the most wicked bird he came to prove,

A messenger of grief, a lazy owl -
Indeed to all mankind this wretched fowl
Was a bad omen. His penance was fair.
Sirens, skilled singers, why do you still bear 640
Features of humans, though feathers and claws
Of birds you now possess? Is it because

You were her friends upon that day when she
Was gathering flowers? You sought fruitlessly
The maid throughout the world, wishing that you
Had wings that you might fly above the blue
And earn its sympathy. Soon you would find
Your limbs grew feathers, for the gods were kind.
But since you charmed all with your melodies
And all the words you spoke could surely please, 650
Your face and voice remained. But Jove decided
Upon a resolution and divided
The year in two, and, as a deity,
The maid would hold an equal sovereignty
Over two realms, six months with him that she
Had wed, six with her mother. Rapidly
She changed in every way – she whom Pluto
Had thought so sad had now dismissed her woe,
As when the sun that once was masked with cloud
And watery mist will soon defeat that shroud 660
And brightly shine. Now genial Ceres,
Her child redeemed, said, 'Arethusa, please,
Why did you wander? Why did you become
A sacred stream? 'Although the stream was mum,
The maiden raised her head, and when she'd dried
Her fair and verdant tresses, she replied
And told of those who'd loved that stream which flows
Through Elis. She said, 'I was one of those
Nymphs of old Greece, and none more eagerly
Sped through the tangled pathways. Carefully 670
I fixed the hunting-nets. I did not care
To hear my beauty praised, yet I was fair
Despite my strong appearance. Trifling
Is how I felt about their flattering -
A country lass, I blushed at what had brought
Delight to other maidens, for I thought
Such praise a crime. Returning wearily
From the Stymphalian woods, with drudgery

Made hotter than with any sunny beam,
 It happened that I chanced upon a stream 680
 That flowed without a ripple or a sound;
 The water was so limpid that one found
 That one could count the pebbles on its bed,
 While willows and tall poplar trees all spread
 Their shade upon the banks on either side
 While being by the waters fortified.
 I dipped my feet, and then I further went
 Deeper down to my knees, but, not content
 With this, I doffed my fleecy robes and laid
 Them on a bending willow tree and made 690
 A plunge into the stream, quite nude. While I
 Was splashing here and there and stretching high
 To shake the water off, I thought I caught
 A murmuring noise close by. Panicked, I sought
 The nearest bank. Alpheus from below
 Said in a hoarse voice, 'Where is it you go
 In haste?' He said it twice. At once I fled
 Just as I was, because the clothes I'd shed
 Were lying still upon the other side.
 The fact that I was naked simplified 700
 His wish as he pursued me, for indeed
 It tempted him, increasing his great speed.
 So from a hawk a dove flies, trembling,
 And so the hawk behind the dove will wing
 In fast pursuit. I fled to Maenalus,
 Psephis, Cyllene and Erymanthus.
 Though not as swift as I, he was much stronger,
 For I could undergo the strain no longer
 At last. Through fields and woods and rocks I raced,
 Through tangled wilds and crags; as in my haste 710
 I fled the setting sun, I in my dread
 Observed a lengthy shadow straight ahead.
 Did I imagine what I saw? Maybe,
 And yet the sound of feet was certainly
 A fearful sound, his breath upon my hair
 As well. At last, worn out and in despair,
 I cried, 'Help me, Diana, I who bore
 Your weapons for you many times before!'
 The goddess gathered up a dense-packed cloud
 And wrapped it round my body like a shroud. 720
 The baffled river circled all about,
 Trying to find me. Twice he shouted out,
 'Hey, Arethusa!' How did this move me?
 What were my feelings? Was my bravery
 Greater than that of lambs who hear the sound
 That's made by howling wolves who pace around
 The fold? Or when the hare that's quite aware

Of snarling hounds and, lurking in some lair,
Won't dare to move? He would not move from there,
For he could find no footprints anywhere. 730

He looked around. Cold sweat poured out of me,
And when I moved a foot, a pool there'd be,
And from my hair moisture began to fall.
More rapidly than I could tell you all,
I turned to water. Alpheus, though, knew
The waves and changed his human features to
His proper streams so that we two could blend.
Diana opened up the ground to send
Me plunging to Ortygia all through
The gloomy caves. O may the gods bless you, 740
Ortygia! You have the ancient name
Of Delos, whence my dear Diana came
And thus is Delia called, and this is where
I first arose amid the upper air.'

"And that was how Arethusa finally
Ended her speech. The goddess presently
Hitched up two dragons, which conveyed her on
Between the earth and Heaven to Lake Triton;
There to Triptolemus she gave commands
That he should scatter seeds in wasted lands. 750

And after dereliction the ploughshare
Was used once more. He'd travelled everywhere
Through Europe and through Asia to the strand
Of Scythia where Lycus held command,
Who said, 'Stranger, will you not tell to me
The name you go by and your ancestry?
'Famed Athens is my home,' he said, 'and I
Am called Triptolemus. Across the sky
I came, not in a ship or on dry land.

I bring you Ceres' gifts at her command, 760
A large, nutritious harvest.' Jealousy
Assailed the king – that might seem to be
Gracious, he smiled and took them, but that king,
When Triptolemus was deeply slumbering,
Attacked him with a sword, but, as he tried
To run him through, Ceres then modified
Him to a lynx, and with her sacred pair
Of dragons sent the youth back through the air.

The greatest of our number ended thus.
The chosen nymphs with their harmonious 770
Voices adjudged that none had sung as well-loved
As those nine Muse who on Helicon dwell.
The vanquished nine began to vilify
The judges, but the goddess answered, 'I
Think your deserved defeat is trifling
And yet, to heighten your offence, you fling

Unmerited abuse, and, since you test
Our patience, we'll attempt to do our best
To show our wrath with a fitting penalty.'
The sisters, though, broke out in mockery, 780
But as they tried to answer, clamouring,
And with their shameless hands made threatening
Gestures, upon their nails began to sprout
Stiff quills, and, just as they were stretching out
Their arms, plumes grew on them, and they would see
Beaks forming on each mouth. Accordingly,
New birds were added to the forest. While
They made complaint, they started to defile
Our groves, high in the air. Their oratory
Remains, as does their hoarse garrulity.

