

## OVID METAMORPHOSES VIII

Now Lucifer unveiled the bright daylight,  
Dispelling every aspect of the night.  
The east wind dropped, the moist clouds rose, and then  
The South Wind welcomed Aeacus and his men  
And Cephalus. They had arrived ashore,  
Reaching the harbour's shelter but before  
They were expected. Meanwhile, Minos, king  
Of Crete, in Megara was ravaging  
The coast. His mighty force he'd gathered round  
The city walls, where King Nisus, renowned 10  
In battle, reigned, who sported in his shock  
Of greying tresses a bright purple lock  
Of hair, ensuring the security  
Of Megara. There continued to be  
Uncertainty about the war, though they  
Had battled for six months, for day by day  
On doubtful wings Victory was hovering  
Above them all. A tower of the king  
Stood there with walls of singing masonry,  
Where Phoebus had some time in history 20  
Laid down his harp – the stones are throbbing still.  
King Nisus' daughter used to feel a thrill  
In climbing up the walls that she might cast  
Some pebbles at the stone. Once peace had passed  
And war began, she often watched the sight  
Of dreadful carnage from that dizzy height,  
And while the foe remained she came to be  
Acquainted with their names, their armoury,  
Steeds, quivers, ways, chiefs, mostly, though, the face  
Of Minos occupied a lasting place 30  
Inside her mind; she deemed him glorious,  
Whose helmet sported plumes so decorous,  
And with the golden shield held in his hand,  
She thought no other man had looked so grand,  
And when he poised his javelin, she praised  
His skill and strength and when his bow he raised,  
She pictured him as Phoebus with his flight  
Prepared, but after she had caught a sight  
Of his face as he rode on his snow-white steed,  
So finely caparisoned, as its speed 40  
He checked and doffed his helmet and thereby  
Revealed his features - she could barely try  
To keep composed: a frenzy moved her much.  
She deemed his javelin happy at his touch,  
The reins as well. Though she was but a girl,  
She longed to run through Minos' ranks or hurl  
Herself down from the tower. She had a thirst

To have the enemy soldiers do their worst  
 By opening the brass-bound gates to let  
 Minos do what he would. She now had set 50  
 Herself near the white tents. 'Should I rejoice  
 Or grieve to see the war? Ah, what a choice!  
 I grieve that Minos is the enemy  
 And yet he'd never have been known to me  
 Before this war.. But should he take me for  
 A hostage, it could well conclude the war  
 And I will go with him, a guarantee  
 Of peace. Most handsome of all the kings, should she  
 Who bore you be as fair, how justified  
 Was Jove in loving her! Would I could ride 60  
 The air and fly to Minos and declare  
 My love for him, imploring then and there  
 What dowry he'd want. I'd let him do whatever  
 He might demand, although, of course, I'd never  
 Betray our city. Perish everything  
 I've hoped for if I should let down our king,  
 My father! Yet a conqueror may be  
 A blessing to the conquered. Certainly,  
 Minos's waging war should give us pause  
 Because he has been strengthened in his cause 70  
 Due to his slain son, and undoubtedly  
 We will be conquered. If this destiny  
 Awaits us, why should he prevail by force  
 Instead of by my love? The better course  
 Would be to cease bloodshed without delay.  
 Ah, Minos, I can't think of my dismay  
 Should you be slaughtered by a cruel spear  
 Carelessly thrown! This course gives me much cheer,  
 For I'll be yours, and Megara will be  
 My dowry, guaranteeing harmony. 80  
 But there's a guardian watching at the gate,  
 Whose key my father holds. I fear my fate.  
 O would that I'd no father! We possess  
 Our fortune, do we not? Nevertheless  
 Our fortune still rejects our idle prayers.  
 Another maid, crazed with these feverish cares  
 That now inflame me, would not hesitate  
 But vehemently would annihilate  
 Whatever checked her passion. Who is there  
 Who has a love to equal mine? I'd dare 90  
 To go through sword and flame; but sword and flame  
 I do not need now. Would that I could claim  
 A lock of Father's hair, a precious thing,  
 More so than gold! It has the power to bring  
 Me all I crave.' That powerful healer, Night,  
 Came on, and she grew bolder with the light

Now disappearing, and the time of rest  
 Approached and slumber occupied the breast.  
 Then Scylla, while her father soundly slept,  
 Into his room with silent footsteps crept 100  
 And cut a fatal lock of hair. She placed  
 It in her bosom, having so disgraced  
 Herself, and went out through the gate (for they  
 All thought her innocent) and made her way  
 To the astonished Minos and then said,  
 "It's but by love that by this deed I'm led.  
 My name is Scylla, daughter of our king.  
 I'll give you Megara, petitioning  
 Only for you. Take, then, this purple hair,  
 An indication of the love I bear 110  
 For you. Do not depreciate this act  
 Of mine because it represents, in fact,  
 My father's life." And then she held it out,  
 But he refused it, resolute to flout  
 Her gift. 'Foul thing!' said he. 'May you be hurled  
 By all the gods in Heaven from this world!  
 May you be banned from earth and from the sea!  
 A monster of such great profanity  
 Shall not be countenanced to bring disgrace  
 To my own Crete, Lord Jupiter's birthplace.' 120  
 He took the city, helped by Scylla's deed,  
 And, as a just and mighty king, decreed  
 Conditions. Then the great fleet sailed away  
 At his command, the oars in neat array  
 In motion set. Scylla, her wickedness  
 Rebuffed, held out her hands and, in excess  
 Of anger, long hair streaming, raved and cried,  
 'Why have you left? Why have you cast aside  
 Your helper? I gave you my native land,  
 Betraying Nisus. It was by my hand 130  
 You gained my city! Why do you disdain  
 My gift, the love I offer? You contain  
 All of my hopes! So whither should I go?  
 Back home? My land is crushed! Should I do so,  
 Consider what what would happen if I stayed -  
 All folks would hate me since I have betrayed  
 My country. Should I seek my father's face  
 Now he's defeated by his child's disgrace?  
 Now lost, I hoped that Crete would welcome me,  
 Yet you deny me Crete ungratefully. 140  
 Europa did not bear you. No! Confess!  
 Was it Syrtis or some fearsome tigress?  
 And was it by Charybdis that you were  
 Begotten? Sure, it was not Jupiter!  
 Nor was your mother misled by the sight

Of a white bull! No! That was an outright  
 Untruth! A bull begot you certainly -  
 A fierce one, though, and not one fervently  
 Loving a heifer. Father, turn on me  
 Your vengeance, and at all my misery 150  
 Let Megara rejoice! I ruined you  
 And for me, therefore, punishment is due.  
 But you have conquered through my crime, so why  
 Should you abandon me? The treason I  
 Committed aided you. Pasiphaë  
 Is such a worthy mate for you, since she  
 With that wood frame the savage bull beguiled  
 And carried in her womb a hybrid child.  
 Do you hear? Or are my words blown away  
 By those same winds that drive your ships? Dismay 160  
 Surrounds me now, for he takes such delight  
 In leaving me. Lest you should leave my sight,  
 You will forget my kindness in vain,  
 For I will follow you across the main  
 While clinging to your stern." Into the sea  
 She leapt after the fleet, her ardency  
 Giving her strength, and after she had neared  
 Minos's vessel, to it she adhered.  
 Meanwhile, her father Nisus had been changed  
 Into a bird, which through the air now ranged. 170  
 Seeing her now, he would have with his beak  
 Torn her, so through the air he flew to seek  
 His child. She let go, but the gentle air  
 Kept her from falling and she, then and there,  
 Became a bird and has acquired the name  
 Of 'Ciris', which immortalized her shame  
 Of cutting off her father's lock of hair.  
 When back in Crete, King Minos offered there  
 A hundred bulls to Jove. His spoils he placed  
 Upon the palace walls. Yet, still disgraced, 180  
 His scandal grew, and so he planned to hide  
 The beast. For Daedalus, known far and wide  
 As a skilled architect, was hired to work  
 Upon a maze, an architectural quirk.  
 It's like Meander, which with streamlets plays,  
 'Meandering' in most circuitous ways,  
 Meeting itself, now flowing towards its source,  
 Now to the open sea making its course.  
 The windings were so intricate that he,  
 The architect himself, could hardly see 190  
 His way back. And in this the Minotaur  
 Was kept, and men were sent as fodder for  
 The beast. At last through Theseus it lay dead.  
 He found his path, through Ariadne's thread,

Back out. Theseus immediately fled  
 To Crete with Ariadne, whom he led  
 To Dia, where he left her cruelly.  
 Then she, forlorn and weeping bitterly,  
 Was helped by Bacchus, for he took the crown  
 She wore upon her head and set it down 200  
 Among the eternal stars, and through the air  
 It soared, its jewels changed to fire, and there  
 It took their place, and now it can be seen,  
 Like Ariadne's diadem, between  
 Lord Hercules and Aesculapius,  
 The serpent-holder. Meanwhile, Daedalus,  
 Hating his exile on Crete's sea-girt shore,  
 Found that his love of Athens made him more  
 Keen to return. 'Though Minos blocks my flight  
 By sea and land,' he said, 'yet still I might 210  
 Escape by air. Though Minos may be lord  
 Of all the world, yet still his sceptred sword  
 Can't rule the skies.' At this, he dedicated  
 Himself to unknown techniques and mutated  
 Nature. He fashioned feathers skilfully  
 That you might think that they grew slantingly.  
 And thus the rustic pipes long in the past  
 Were made with lengthening reeds. He bound them fast  
 With thread in the middle and bees'-wax at the base,  
 And when each element was put in place, 220  
 He gently bent each one of them that thus  
 They seemed like real birds' wings. Then Icarus,  
 His son, who stood beside him, unaware  
 Of danger, caught the down that through the air  
 Was wafted, softening the wax and thus  
 Foiling the marvellous work of Daedalus,  
 Who, when the final touches all had been  
 Concluded, placed his body in between  
 The wings, as through the air he lightly flew  
 With bird-like ease, and for Icarus, too, 230  
 He'd fashioned wings. 'Before you should assay  
 Your flight,' said Daedalus, 'the middle way  
 Is safest. For if you should fly too low,  
 Moisture may drag you down, but if you go  
 Too high, the sun may scorch you. In the air  
 Don't aim for Helice or the Great Bear,  
 Bootes or Orion!' On his son  
 He fitted wings while many tears would run  
 Down his old cheeks, his hands a-trembling.  
 He gave his son a kiss, then, shepherding 240  
 The boy, he glided off, as birds will guide  
 Their young into the air, at last outside  
 The nest. He then urged Icarus to start

To follow, teaching him his risky art,  
 And then he looked back at his progeny.  
 Below, there was an angler, maybe,  
 Perhaps a shepherd leaning on his crook,  
 Or else a busy ploughman, who would look  
 At them and be amazed, thinking that they  
 Were gods. Upon the left, they passed the bay 250  
 Of Samos, Juno's isle, and then they flew  
 Past and beyond Delos and Paros, too;  
 Then on the right they flew past Lebinthus  
 And honeyed Calymne. But Icarus,  
 Proud of the flight he'd made, forsook his guide  
 And vauntingly began to upward glide.  
 The sun melted the wax, heat burgeoning -  
 Now Icarus perforce was fluttering  
 His arms instead of wings, and then his flight  
 No longer was sustained, and he in fright 260  
 Called to his father, but his father's name  
 Was covered by the sea, which gained its fame  
 As the 'Icarian Sea'. The father (though  
 A father now no more) called to him, 'Ho!  
 Where are you, Icarus?' Again did he  
 Yell out, then saw the wings upon the sea  
 And cursed his schemes. His son he then interred  
 Upon the isle that bears the single word  
 'Icaria'. While he was labouring  
 On this, he heard a perky partridge sing. 270  
 He turned and saw it perched in an oak-tree.  
 It was unique and only recently  
 Became a bird. His sister, Perdix, brought  
 Her son to Daedalus, whom then he taught,  
 Some time before. But soon the youth became  
 A rival in the arts that had brought fame  
 To Daedalus. Out of a fish's spine  
 He made a saw by fashioning a line  
 Of jagged teeth. He fashioned, furthermore,  
 Two iron arms, smooth-moulded at their core - 280  
 One formed a pivot, while the other turned  
 To make a circle. Daedalus now burned  
 With envy and vexation, hankering  
 To slay him by sending him tumbling  
 Down from Minerva's tower, then have sent  
 A rumour that it was an accident.  
 But Pallas, goddess of ingenious men,  
 Changed the young man into a bird, and then  
 He flew away, his cognitive prowess  
 Kept in his wings and feet. Nevertheless 290  
 The name 'Perdix' remained. The partridge stays  
 Close to the ground and clandestinely lays

Its eggs, still mindful of its history.  
 Now Daedalus, worn out, reached Sicily,  
 Where Cocalus was king, whom he implored  
 For kind protection from his foe. A horde  
 Of troops he massed. After Theseus' defeat  
 Of the horrendous Minotaur in Crete,  
 Athens sent no more victims for the thing.  
 Temples were crowned, the people honouring 300  
 A plethora of deities. Now through  
 The land reports of Theseus' actions flew,  
 And all the Grecian people from that day,  
 When jeopardy was imminent, would pray  
 To him for aid. Now Calydon, although  
 Meleager dwelt there, for another foe  
 Implored his aid, desiring him to slay  
 A boar that threatened folk from day to day.  
 Diana in her wrath had sent a boar  
 In vengeance on the town: the reason for 310  
 This act was that Oeneus, Calydon's king,  
 Had sent its first fruits as an offering  
 To Ceres, Bacchus and Minerva. So  
 All of the gods were worshipped, high and low,  
 Except Diana. Even gods may be  
 Angry. She cried, 'Beware the penalty  
 I will inflict on you!' Then to the land  
 Of Calydon she sent a boar as grand  
 As the bulls of Epirus are said to be  
 And larger than the bulls of Sicily. 320  
 Its flashing eyes were burning and bloodshot,  
 His rough neck stiff with many a muscular knot,  
 His hair like shafts of spears, and one could see  
 Foam on its back, its tusks like ivory,  
 Its roars reverberating, while there came  
 Out of its horrid throat a lightning flame,  
 Scorching the verdant meadows, trampling  
 Upon the corn and thereby sentencing  
 The farmer to lament. Quite fruitlessly  
 The threshing-floor was readied; pointlessly 330  
 The barns looked for their promised revenue.  
 The grapes were scattered, the vine-branches, too;  
 The fruit and branches of the olive-tree  
 That ought to fructify eternally  
 Lay on the ground. It also ravaged sheep  
 Which both the dogs and shepherds could not keep  
 Watch on, and herds of cows were lacking shelter.  
 The people fled the meadows helter-skelter  
 To seek the city whose security  
 They needed. Everywhere anxiety 340  
 Prevailed. There seemed no answer in the land

Till Meleager gathered up a band  
 Of youths keen to acquire illustriousness.  
 The famous twins were there, one whose prowess  
 Lay in his horsemanship, the other one  
 A boxer. Also there was Aeson's son,  
 Jason, the *Argo's* builder, and Theseus,  
 Perithous, Plexippus and Toxeus  
 And Lynceus with his brother Idas, who  
 Was fleet of foot, and there was Caeneus, too, 350  
 Who once was female but later became  
 A man, Acastus, who achieved great fame  
 In archery, and Dryas, fond of war,  
 Leucippus, who was celebrated for  
 His bravery, and Phoenix, who could see,  
 Though later going blind, the progeny  
 Of King Amyntor, Actor's sons, Phyleus,  
 From Elis sent, and Telamon, Peleus,  
 Achilles' father, Admetus, the son  
 Of Pheres, Boeotian Eurytion 360  
 And Iolaus, Echion, who ran  
 Speedily, and Lelex, a Narycian,  
 A youthful Nestor and Panopeus  
 And Hippasus, as well as Hyleus,  
 Four from Amyclae sent, the progeny  
 Of Hippocöon, of Queen Penelope  
 The father-in-law, Ancaeus, and the wise  
 Mopsus, who was well-known to prophesize,  
 And Oeclus' prophet-son, who was betrayed  
 By his own wife, and Atalanta, maid 370  
 Of groves and Tegea: around her dress  
 A clasp was fastened, with her lustrous tress  
 Tied in a knot, her weapons rattling  
 Within an ivory quiver, which she'd swing  
 From her left shoulder, while she held a bow  
 In her left hand, her face seeming to show  
 Both male and female marks. As soon as he  
 Saw her, Meleager loved her passionately.  
 'Happy the man,' said he, 'whom she'd adore!' 380  
 But he was not allowed to utter more  
 Through time and modesty because he sought  
 To give up all his energy and thought  
 To slay the boar. A forest thick with trees  
 Starts from the plain and shadows the wide leas,  
 And this is where those heroes went to be  
 The ones to slay the dreaded enemy.  
 Some spread the nets, some loosed the dogs, its trail  
 Was followed by yet others. There's a vale  
 Where water gathers, holding willow-trees,  
 Sedges, marsh grasses and, as well as these, 390



Bullrushes, osiers, all spread about.  
 The reeds: from there the boar was roused out.  
 Like lightning from the clouds, its enemies  
 It charged and noisily into the trees  
 It barged. With a great yell, all of the men  
 Brandished their spears in their strong hands, but then  
 The boar rushed onward, scattering to and fro  
 The yelping dogs with many a sidelong blow.  
 Echion was the first man to propel  
 His spear, but it was hardly handled well - 400  
 It merely glanced upon a maple-tree.  
 Then Jason threw his spear too forcefully  
 At the boar's back, but much too far it flew,  
 And after that the son of Ampyx threw  
 His spear and begged Apollo, 'Heed my plea  
 For I have worshipped you consistently  
 And always have adored you! Let my spear  
 Have deadly aim!' The god was quick to hear  
 And took control of it but as it sped  
 Along, Diana struck the iron head 410  
 From off the shaft. The monster's savage ire  
 Was roused, its red eyes flashing bright as fire,  
 His breathing hot. Just as a stone is cast  
 At walls replete with soldiers, running fast,  
 It stormed the men and landed very hard  
 On Telamon and Eupetamon, whose guard  
 Was on the right. Their comrades took away  
 Their bodies from the field, while, in the fray,  
 Enaesimus was slain – trying to fly  
 From it, he hurt the sinew of his thigh, 420  
 For it was cut and therefore could not bear  
 His weight. And Nestor might have perished there,  
 Never to fight at Troy, but cleverly  
 He vaulted on his lance into a tree  
 And looked upon his foe. The monstrous boar  
 Whetted his tusks upon an oak-tree for  
 A further onslaught. Then he gored the thigh  
 Of Hippasus. The twins were mounted high  
 Upon their snow-white steeds, up in the air  
 Their lances poised, determined now to tear 430  
 The boar to pieces. They were thwarted, though,  
 For it hid in a thicket, lying low,  
 Secure from steed or lance. But Telamon  
 Went on, undaunted. But he tripped up on  
 Some tangled roots and fell headlong. As he  
 Was rescued by Peleus, immediately  
 Atalanta took her bow, from whose tight string  
 She shot a dart, which landed, quivering,  
 Beneath the monster's ear, whence red blood stained

Its bristles. She was happy to have gained 440  
 Success. But Meleager felt delight  
 Yet more, for it was he who first caught sight  
 Of bloodstains. 'Honour this maid's bravery!'

He cried out to the men. Most loath to be  
 Thought lesser than a maid, they, clamouring,  
 Threw recklessly and by this jostling  
 Their aim was spoiled. Then with a fatal blow  
 Ancaeus took his axe and shouted, 'O  
 You warriors, men's weapons all outdo  
 A woman's. See what my keen axe can do! 450  
 Let her protect the brute! And yet despite  
 Her utmost efforts I will with my right  
 Hand slaughter him.' And with this great bombast  
 He raised his two-edged axe, ready to cast  
 It at the beast, seeming so confident,  
 Standing erect. The beast, however, rent  
 His groin, a fatal blow: his blood was spattered  
 Upon the ground where his entrails were scattered.  
 Ixion's valiant son was scrambling  
 Against the monstrous beast while brandishing 460  
 His spear. Theseus, from some distance away,  
 Called out, 'Beware! Beware, my friend, I pray!  
 Be bold afar, or otherwise you'll be  
 Doomed to endure Ancaeus' destiny!'

He cast his heavy spear of cherry wood  
 With its bronze blade. His focussing was good,  
 But an oak-tree's branch sheltered the horrid thing.  
 Jason let loose his weapon, skewering  
 By chance a poor dog to the bloodstained ground.  
 A better fortune Meleager found - 470  
 His first spear missed but then he hurled one more  
 Which was more accurate and pierced the boar  
 Right in its back. The beast whirled round and round  
 In rage as Meleager with a bound  
 Reached him and piqued his anger even more  
 As froth dripped from his its jaws and purple gore  
 Poured from its wound, and then without delay  
 He pierced its shoulder. With a loud 'Hurray!'

His comrades shouted out and gathered round  
 To clasp his hand. As it lay on the ground 480  
 They gazed on it with wonder, fearing yet  
 To touch the beast, though making their spears wet  
 With its blood. Meleager trod upon its head  
 And to the girl, 'Nonacrian maiden,' said,  
 'Accept the prize, though it is mine by right,  
 And let the glory I've attained delight  
 Us both!' He gave the spoils of that great hunt  
 To her, the bristly hide, the head whose front

Sported red tusks. She felt that she was blessed  
 With both the giver and the gift. The rest, 490  
 However, envious, were murmuring;  
 The sons of Thestius were levelling  
 Their spears at her. They shouted, 'Do not share  
 The prize! Don't let your beauty be a snare  
 For you! A woman should not intercede  
 In hunts that manifest a manly deed,  
 In case your love-sick lover proves to be  
 No help to you!' So they accordingly  
 Took them from her and robbed him of the right  
 To give it her. Then, bursting with the bite 500  
 Of anger, he yelled out, 'Have you the gall  
 To steal our honour? Well, you'll learn that all  
 Brave deeds excel foul threatening words!' Then he  
 Pierced rash Plexippus unexpectedly  
 Straight through the breast, whose brother, struck with fright,  
 Measured the options of revenge and flight.  
 Meleager plunged his sword through him as well,  
 And so the two of them were sent to Hell.  
 Before, the mother of that hero, Queen  
 Althaea, sister of those who had been 510  
 Slaughtered, to laud the gods was hastening,  
 But when she saw the mourners carrying  
 Her brothers' corpses, she could not repress  
 Her wild lament throughout the town. Her dress  
 Of festal robes she hated, so instead  
 She donned black garments. But when someone said  
 Her son had been the cause, all lamentation  
 She ceased, now thirsting for retaliation.  
 When she was giving birth, a piece of wood  
 Was by the Fates who round the child-bed stood 520  
 Placed in the fire, and as they spun and drew  
 The threads, they softly chanted, 'Unto you,  
 You new-born child, we give a lifetime span  
 That is no longer and no shorter than  
 This log's.' They left, and then Thestius' daughter  
 Snatched up that log and onto it flung water.  
 It lay in inner rooms that he might yet  
 Live on for years, a sort of amulet.  
 But now she fetched a torch and a great heap  
 Of tinder. Watching sparks of fire leap 530  
 Upwards, four times she made to cast the piece  
 Of wood into their midst, four times she'd cease  
 To do it. Long did she linger between  
 A mother's love and thirst to vent her spleen  
 In retribution. Now she pales with fright,  
 Now in her eyes there burns a vicious light.  
 Now cruel threatening contorts her face,

Now pity and compassion take its place.  
 The heat of anger dries her eyes, but then  
 Her passion's conflict causes tears again. 540  
 Just as a ship, vexed by the driving sea  
 And an opposing wind, uncertainly  
 Obeys the two of them, so was she swayed  
 Two ways, her wrath alternately allayed  
 And roused. And yet she ever wished to ease  
 Her fallen kin, maternal tendencies  
 Apart. She took the log, and at the fire  
 She stood and said, 'Be this my funeral pyre!'  
 And as before the flames relentlessly  
 She held the object of the destiny 550  
 Of her dear son, in all her wretchedness  
 She moaned, 'Furies, in your relentlessness  
 Attend! Look on these rites! Retaliation  
 Is sinful, yet there must be compensation  
 Of death with death, felony with felony.  
 Let all these woes destroy this family!  
 Shall Oeneus live in happiness to know  
 The great fame of his son while, steeped in woe,  
 My father moans with no revenge? The two  
 Of them should mourn! See what I've done for you, 560  
 My brothers! Ah, dear brothers, pardon me -  
 Your cold shades wander yet disconsolately.  
 I cannot do the deed, yet you must die,  
 Not rule in Calydon! Ah, how can I  
 Endure the thought! Wherever did it go,  
 The mother-love that I sustained, although!  
 Ten months went by ere your delivery!  
 Would that you'd perished in your infancy!  
 Your life was in my power! There you lie  
 Because you did a wicked deed, while I 570  
 Revenged! Brothers, your victory will be  
 Wicked, but it will be a victory.'  
 She spoke, then turned her face away, then flung  
 The log upon the fire, and as a tongue  
 Of flame consumed the thing, a grotesque groan  
 Was heard from it. But it had been unknown  
 To Meleager that something would be  
 To blame for ruining his victory  
 Until, though far away, he felt the pain  
 The flames inflicted. Though he would restrain 580  
 The agonies he felt, nevertheless  
 He called Ancaeus blessed with happiness  
 To die of wounds. He started then to call  
 On father, siblings, wife and, last of all,  
 His mother. With the heat his agony  
 Increased but then diminished finally

When little wood remained; then through the air  
 His spirit slowly rose, and everywhere  
 The realm of Calydon was echoing  
 With wails, both young and old folks sorrowing. 590  
 The women tore their hair; despondently  
 His father crumpled on the ground, then he  
 Threw ashes on his face and his grey hair,  
 Mourning his years, while with a mother's care  
 And grief, Althaea transfixed her own breast  
 In punishment. Even if I possessed  
 A hundred mouths, a harp and any amount  
 Of eloquence, I could could recount  
 His sisters' pain. Regardless of their shame,  
 They beat upon their breasts before the flame 600  
 Consumed him, kissing him as there he lay,  
 And when his shrinking form had passed away  
 They held the ashes, gathered from the flame,  
 And, prostrate on the tomb, kissed his dear name  
 Cut in the stone. Latona's daughter, who  
 Was glutted with these sorrows, gave to two  
 Sisters wide-spreading wings. But Hercules'  
 Spouse and Gorge were different from these -  
 They were unchanged. With wings and beaks he sent  
 Them winging though the air. Now Theseus went, 610  
 Meanwhile, to Athens, having had a share  
 In the united quest. While he was there  
 Its river swelled with rain, blocking his way.  
 The river Achelous said, 'I pray,  
 Come to my home, Theseus, that you might shun  
 My floods, where massive tree-trunks tend to run  
 As well as giant boulders. I have seen  
 Whole sheep-folds from the bankside which have been  
 Swept off. No cattle's strength nor horses' speed  
 Have been of any use. Strong men, indeed, 620  
 Have been lost in the eddies when the flow  
 Has been let loose, replete with mountain-snow.  
 You will be safe while all my waters glide  
 Within their usual limits and the tide  
 Is minimal." Theseus said gratefully,  
 "I'll be advised of that you've said to me.'  
 At once he went into a building made  
 Of pumice and rough stone, the moist floor laid  
 With moss, the ceiling arched with rows of shell  
 And murex. Now Hyperion was well 630  
 Into the dawn that heralded the day.  
 And now with his companions Theseus lay  
 Upon a couch. Pirithous was there  
 Upon his right, Lelex with greying hair  
 Upon his left, while others were there, too,

Whom Achelous deemed had earned their due  
 To be a guest. The nymphs were there as well -  
 They brought rich food, and everybody fell  
 To eating. And when they were satisfied  
 With what they'd eaten, the nymphs set aside 640  
 The dishes, then served wine in bowls impressed  
 With gems. Theseus arose then and expressed  
 His wish to know the island's name, although  
 He thought that there were several of them. "Know  
 That you're correct" was Achelous' reply.  
 'There were five different bits of land that lie  
 Together, though deceptive in the way  
 One sees them. So, in order that you may  
 Know of Diana's actions, I tell you  
 They once were nymphs, and ten bullocks they slew 650  
 As sacrifice, and every god but me  
 They welcomed to the feast. Indignity  
 Burned through me, so a mighty flood I sent  
 Whose massive billows, by winds driven, rent  
 Forests and fields and cast into the sea  
 The nymphs themselves who then eventually  
 Remembered their neglect. Soon, coalesced  
 With the ocean's tide, my own waters progressed,  
 Parting the solid soil, fashioning thus  
 Five islands out of one, now known to us 660  
 As Echinades. One is far from here,  
 But it is very beautiful and dear  
 To me, by sailors called Perimele.  
 I loved her, stealing her virginity.  
 Her father could not bear it, so he threw  
 Her from the sea-girt cliffs, determined to  
 Destroy her, but I caught her, on the tide  
 Supporting her. To Lord Neptune I cried,  
 'O mighty Neptune, master of the sea,  
 Inferior only to the deity 670  
 Who rules us all, the maiden I aver  
 I injured, but I also rescued her,  
 But had her father not been impious  
 He certainly would have forgiven us  
 And pitied her. Grant her a sheltered place  
 Or, maybe, let the maid whom I embrace  
 Become a place of safety! Instantly  
 He moved his mighty head, and the whole sea  
 Shook in response. The nymph was still afraid  
 And, as she swam, I touched the quivering maid 680  
 Upon her breast, and at that moment I  
 Felt her whole frame start to solidify  
 And earth encased her limbs – thus she mutated  
 And thereby a new island was created.'

At this, he said no more, and everyone  
 Was stunned. But Ixion's disdainful son  
 Mocked their naïveté. 'You lie,' said he,  
 "Assigning gods too much authority!  
 You think the gods can give and take away  
 Created forms?' At this, no-one could say 690  
 A word, astonished that he could so doubt  
 A well-known truth. Wise Lelex shouted out,  
 'The gods can't be diminished! They can't be  
 Confined! For whatsoever they decree  
 Is done! I have observed two sacred trees  
 In Phrygia, one oak, one lime, and these  
 Were interlaced, so closely had they grown.  
 Around them was a low wall made of stone.  
 Pittheus sent me into that country where  
 His father Pelops once had reigned. Near there 700  
 There is a swamp: in past days it had been  
 Quite habitable but there now were seen  
 Just coots and cormorants, who love to play  
 In fens and marshes. Jupiter one day  
 Went there in mortal guise with Mercury,  
 Also disguised. As though in penury,  
 They roamed as mendicants. All doors that they  
 Approached were bolted, and no-one would say  
 One kind word to them. But at last they found  
 A house whose humble roof was thatched and bound 710  
 With reeds and straw. This was the cottage where  
 Baucis and Philemon were wed, and there  
 They lived for years, and of their poverty  
 They made light by assuming it to be  
 Normal, for in that hut there were but two  
 And so no servants who lived there to do  
 Their bidding. When the gods of Heaven met  
 The household gods, the old man went to get  
 A bench so that they might take some respite,  
 And Baucis threw a coarse cloth over it. 720  
 She raked the ashes in the hearth and brought  
 The fire to life again, and then she sought  
 Leaves and dried bark so that the flames might stay  
 Alive by being breathed on. Straightaway  
 She pulled down from the cottage roof a store  
 Of twigs and, having split them somewhat more,  
 Placed a small kettle over them. This done,  
 She stripped some cabbage leaves which Philemon  
 Prepared. A side of bacon from aloft 730  
 He pulled away and, slicing it, made soft  
 The portion with hot water. All the while  
 They tried with cheerful chit-chat to beguile  
 Their guests and pass the time. A trough of beech

They had, that swung upon a peg, which each  
 Of them would use for washing, and they placed  
 Upon a willow couch a cushion laced  
 With springy sedge on which they neatly spread  
 A cloth well-worn since first they had been wed,  
 Used but on rare occasions, yet, though it  
 Was coarse and very old, still not unfit 740  
 To match a willow couch. Meanwhile, with care,  
 Her skirts tucked up, Baucis moved here and there  
 On tottering, aged legs that she might bring  
 A well-scrubbed table. It was wobbling  
 With one short leg, and so she firmly stuffed  
 A potsherd under it and cleanly buffed  
 It with fresh mint, while Jove and Mercury  
 Reclined there at the table. And then she  
 Set on the table for the deities  
 Bi-coloured grapes, radishes, endives, cheese, 750  
 Fall cherries doused in wine, eggs that had been  
 But delicately roasted, quite unseen  
 By ashes, all in earthen dishes. They  
 Were followed by sweet wine, served up in clay  
 And cups of beechwood smoothed with yellow wax.  
 And now they had a short time to relax  
 Before the heated course. Then wine once more,  
 Though not a vintage wine, went round before  
 Starting the second course, in which they dined  
 On nuts, figs, wrinkled dates and plums combined 760  
 With apples in baskets, grapes and, at their core,  
 A gleaming honeycomb, and, furthermore,  
 There were well-meaning looks, vivaciousness  
 Of spirit and no lack of willingness.  
 Meanwhile, the aged couple saw that, when  
 The bowl was empty, it filled up again.  
 In fear at this, they murmured timidly  
 A prayer in hope of heavenly clemency  
 For some neglect about the dinner. They  
 Possessed a goose whose role it was to play 770  
 Their guardian and keep bad folk away,  
 But it was their intention now to slay  
 The bird as a holy sacrifice. They tried  
 To catch it, but at last it went to hide  
 Behind the gods, who told them not to kill  
 The goose. 'We're gods,' they said, 'and for the ill  
 That it has done this neighbourhood will pay,  
 But it is our decree that you both may  
 Be spared the price. Leave home and come with us  
 Up that steep mountainside!' They, duteous, 780  
 Went with them, leaning on their sticks to aid  
 Their aged limbs. When they had almost made



The summit – only one bowshot away -  
 And turned around to look behind them, they  
 Observed that the whole neighbourhood had been  
 Sucked by a swamp, the one thing to be seen  
 Being their cottage, and while they both wept  
 About the fate of many friends, they kept  
 On wondering, and when they looked once more  
 At their own dwelling with its meagre store, 790  
 It was a temple – all the thatch was gone  
 And now a roof appeared which brightly shone,  
 The stakes now pillars, and the doors they found  
 Were richly carved and, covering the ground,  
 A marble pavement lay. Jove placidly  
 Said, 'O you models of integrity,  
 Ask what you want to have.' Then, when those two  
 Had spoken briefly, they said, 'We ask you  
 To make us priests of yours. In harmony  
 We've lived so long together, so may we 800  
 Decease together so that neither one  
 Inters the other!' And so was it done.  
 As long as they would live, they would be known  
 As Jupiter's keepers, and when they had grown  
 In years, before the steps they stood ; as they  
 Discoursed, each saw the other one display  
 Green laves, and as the tree-tops grew upon  
 Their faces, with their talk they carried on  
 As long as they could speak. 'My own,' each said,  
 'Farewell!' as leaves and branches once more spread 810  
 And covered both at once. All this was I  
 Told by old men who had no cause to lie.  
 The trees remain. I've seen garlands that lay  
 Upon the twofold tree's boughs, saying, 'May  
 Those whom the gods care for be gods also!  
 May those who honoured him be honoured so!'  
 He ceased, and this miraculous event  
 And he who told it caused astonishment,  
 Theseus especially, who said, 'Provide  
 Me with more tales like this!' He then replied, 820  
 Leaning on one elbow, "Some have remained  
 The same, once changed, but others have attained  
 A wealth of shapes, like Proteus, in the sea  
 A dweller – for one moment, he may be  
 A young man, then a lion, then a boar  
 And then a fearful serpent, maybe for  
 A while a bull, often a stone, a tree,  
 And sometimes he is a facsimile  
 Of water or of fire. Mestra, too,  
 Had no less power; Erysichthon, who 830

Had sired her, scorned all the deities,  
 Defiling once the thicket of Ceres  
 With an axe, or so it had been told to me,  
 Slashing the trees with steel. There was a tree  
 Long-standing there, so widely having grown  
 That it seemed like a forest on its own.  
 With votive tablets it was decorated  
 And strands of wool and garlands dedicated  
 To Ceres. Dryads danced there frequently  
 While linking hands in their festivity. 840  
 It measured fully forty-five feet around:  
 The other trees rose higher than the ground  
 As it exceeded them. But heedlessly  
 Erysichthon told his slaves to fell the tree,  
 But when he saw his minions dithering  
 He snatched an axe from one of them, saying,  
 'Should this tree be Ceres herself and not  
 Just what she loves, yet all the same I plot  
 To level to the ground its leafy head.'  
 And once those boasting words the man had said, 850  
 He raised the axe to strike a slanting blow.  
 The oak-tree moaned and shuddered. And then lo!  
 Its leaves turned pale, its acorns lost their green,  
 Its branches drooped, and where the axe had been  
 Blood poured, as from a bull, an offering  
 Before the altar, blood comes cascading.  
 All stood astonished, and one of them tried  
 To stop him but he told him, as he eyed  
 Him glaringly, 'Then for your piety  
 Accept your prize!' He turned round from the tree 860  
 And hacked his head off, then began once more  
 To chop the oak, when from its very core  
 Was heard 'I am a nymph, and long have I  
 Dwelt in this oak-tree and, before I die,  
 I've been allowed to have a prophecy  
 And die contented. There's a penalty  
 Awaiting you for all your wickedness  
 Right here.' Erysichthon, nevertheless,  
 Pursued his evil course, and finally,  
 Weakened with blows and dragged by ropes, the tree 870  
 Fell down. The dryads, dressed in mourning black,  
 Were horrified to see the forest's lack,  
 Their own as well, and so they went and prayed  
 That she should punish him. Then Ceres made  
 A movement with her head and thus agreed  
 That she'd avenge his sacrilegious deed.  
 She shook the fruitful fields, for she had planned  
 A punishment most likely to demand  
 Pity for any other man, for she

Was ready to inflict the agony 880  
 Of Hunger on him. But since Ceres may  
 Not meet with her, she called from far away  
 An oread and said to her, 'Out there  
 There is a wasteland, desolate and bare  
 In Scythia, where Fear and Trepidation  
 And bitter Iciness and stark Starvation  
 Exist. Go, tell Hunger that she must hide  
 Inside that wretch that Plenty may provide  
 No food for him, and since it's long way  
 That you must travel, do not fret! You may 890  
 Borrow my dragon-car.' And then she passed  
 The reins to her, and, travelling very fast,  
 To Scythia she went. At Caucasus' tip  
 The reins that held the dragon she let slip,  
 And Hunger she discovered scrabbling  
 At meagre herbs. Her hair was tumbling  
 About her and her eyes displayed a scowl  
 Upon her ghastly face; her lips were foul,  
 Her throat rough, as she clawed with teeth and nails  
 About the field, and all of her entrails 900  
 Were visible; dry bones stuck out below  
 Her hollow loins, her belly being so  
 Unlike a belly, and her flabby breast  
 Was flat against her spine, while all the rest  
 Of her was so lean that her limbs appeared  
 Massive. The nymph caught sight of her but feared  
 To draw too near. She yelled out the decree,  
 And though she'd been there only fleetingly  
 And was not near the creature, all the same  
 She drove away from there until she came 910  
 To Thessaly. Hunger rushed to obey,  
 Although Ceres and she in every way  
 Were opposites, and hastened through the air  
 To Erysichthon's home. When she got there,  
 Slumber was on the wretch, and, as he slept,  
 While Erysichthon in her wings she kept,  
 She breathed her pestilential poison through  
 His mouth and throat and chest and placed into  
 Her veins appalling hunger, and then she  
 Abandoned the world of fertility 920  
 And sought her usual caves. Her work being done,  
 Sweet slumber took hold of Erysichthon:  
 He dreamt of feasts, closing his mouth on air,  
 And ground his teeth on insubstantial fare.  
 When he awoke, his hunger scorched his frame  
 And burned within his entrails like a flame,  
 Prevailing on his jaws, and therefore he  
 Demanded foods of earth and air and sea.

While banqueting, he searched out even more  
 Banquets, ever demanding store on store. 930  
 What feeds a city or a nation may  
 Not fill him, for the more he put away  
 The more he craved, just as the seas consume  
 Outlying rivers yet believe there's room  
 For more, as ravenous flames unendingly  
 Burn timber after timber, constantly  
 Looking for more; the more piles that are fed,  
 The greedier they get; so he was led  
 To want it all. To him all nourishment  
 Was cause for even more. Thus Hunger went 940  
 Through all his wealth and not one whit decreased -  
 In fact his endless gluttony increased.  
 And then his daughter Mestra, left behind,  
 A maiden worthy of a fate more kind,  
 He sold. Descendant of a noble race,  
 She sought the ocean at a hurried pace  
 And called upon Lord Neptune mournfully:  
 'You who robbed me of my virginity,  
 Release me from my buyer's power!' Although  
 That man but saw her one moment ago 950  
 And followed her, Neptune immediately  
 Changed her into a fisherman as she  
 Stood there. Her buyer noticed her and cried,  
 'Hey, angler, while your tiny bait you hide  
 Inside that hook, may you have a calm sea  
 And may the fishes' gullibility  
 Cause them to shun the danger until they  
 Have snapped the hook! But answer me, I pray! -  
 Where is the girl that I am looking for?  
 Her tresses all were rumpled and she wore 960  
 A tattered coat. I saw her standing here,  
 I'm sure, though no prints of her feet appear.'  
 She, pleased with her disguise, amused to be  
 Questioned about herself, said, 'Pardon me,  
 Whoever you are, I've been so occupied  
 With fishing that I've rarely turned aside  
 From my pursuit. Be well assured that I  
 But tell the truth – Neptune will testify  
 That I have seen no man upon this shore,  
 Myself alone excepted – furthermore, 970  
 No woman, ether.' He believed her, and,  
 Deceived, he went away along the strand.  
 Once he was gone, a woman she became  
 Once more. But once her father knew her frame  
 Could change and change again, he frequently  
 Would sell her, gaining cash dishonestly,  
 As she became a bird, a hind, a hare,

A heifer for her father's sake. When there  
Was nothing left, and his unending need  
For food persisted, in his constant greed 980  
He tore and gnawed his limbs as he now fell  
To self-consumption. Ah, why do I dwell  
On others' wondrous deeds? I, too, can change  
Myself to other shapes, although my range  
Is limited. One moment I can make  
Myself appear to be a coiled-up snake  
And then a bull with two strong horns, though now,  
As you may notice, one side of my brow  
Has lost its wonted weapon.' And thereby  
The words he spoke were followed with a sigh.