

## OVID METAMORPHOSES X

Veiled in a saffron mantle, Hymen spanned  
The air and came down in Ciconian land.  
He'd come to Orpheus' wedding fruitlessly,  
Offering no joy at the festivity  
To Orpheus and Eurydice, his bride.  
His torch but sputtered and none could abide  
Its smoke. Despite his shaking it about  
It would not blaze. The marriage, too, turned out  
Much worse than any omen. While the bride  
Walked on the grass, her naiads at her side, 10  
She died, bitten by a serpent sheltering  
Nearby. Orpheus, while greatly sorrowing,  
Went down to Styx and there he wandered through  
Pale ghosts and those who had received their due  
Obsequies till he reached Persephone  
And Pluto, he whose principality  
Was those dark shadows underneath the ground.  
Then he began to make a tuneful sound  
By singing to his lute: "You gods below,  
You underworld, where everyone must go 20  
If it is lawful, if you suffer me  
To speak the truth, forbidding falsity,  
I am not here to see this shadowy land  
Or strangle the Medusa. Here I stand  
Because a viper bit my darling wife  
And poisoned her, thus cutting off her life.  
I wish I could endure it and, indeed,  
I can't deny that I've tried to succeed,  
But Love has conquered me, a god we know  
Extremely well above the ground, although 30  
Maybe not here, and yet it could be so,  
For if that chronicle of long ago  
Is true, Love wedded you as well. Therefore  
I beg, by Tartarus, that you restore  
Eurydice. All things eventually  
You will obtain, and we will rapidly  
Or slowly end up here. The human race  
Is yours forever. After a fair space  
Of years, she's yours. I beg you, hear my plea,  
But if the Fates hold back their charity, 40  
I'll not return and you may take delight  
In two more shades. While he with all his might  
Sang to his lute the ghosts themselves shed tears,  
And anxious Tantalus, despite his fears,  
Stopped clutching at the water as it swirled  
And Ixion's twisting wheel no longer whirled  
But stood in wonder. Tityus' liver, too,

Escaped the vultures for a while, and you,  
 You Belides, daughters of Danaus,  
 Laid down your water-jars; and Sisyphus 50  
 Sat idly on his rock. Thus was it said  
 That for the only time sad tears were shed  
 By the Eumenides. Persephone  
 Herself could not deny Orpheus's plea,  
 Eurydice, now still a recent shade  
 Among the other spirits there, obeyed  
 The rulers' call and walked with halting pace,  
 Still limping from her wound, and face to face  
 Met Orpheus, whom Lord Pluto told he might  
 Go with Eurydice back to the light, 60  
 But if he turned to look at her, why then  
 She would be sent back to Hades again.  
 They climbed the shadowy pathway silently,  
 And they were almost there when anxiously  
 Orpheus looked back to make sure she was there,  
 And instantly she vanished. In despair,  
 He stretched his arms up that he might regain  
 His wife and rescue her, but all in vain!  
 She could not criticize him, even though  
 She'd died a second time – how could she so? 90  
 She loved him! Then she spoke her last farewell  
 And turned back to where she was doomed to dwell,  
 But he could barely hear the words she said.  
 Stunned by this double loss, he felt such dread  
 As he who saw three-headed Cerberus  
 Chained at its middle neck – so tremulous  
 Was he that he to stone was petrified -  
 Or like Olenus who showed too much pride  
 About his wife's good looks, accordingly  
 Turned into stone as well, and so was she 80  
 For boasting of her beauty. They are set,  
 Two stone-made figures on Mt. Ida, wet  
 With springs. Orpheus implored Charon in vain  
 To let him cross the River Styx again.  
 Seven days he sat upon the river's side  
 In squalid misery, all food denied  
 To him, nourished by sorrow, misery  
 And tears, complaining that all sympathy  
 Was lacking in the nether gods. At last  
 He wandered back, whipped by the North Wind's blast, 90  
 And then to Haemus and high Rhodope.  
 Three times the sun had passed to watery  
 Pisces, and all that time Orpheus denied  
 Himself all women, for he still relied  
 Upon the pledge about Eurydice,  
 Although so many women grieved that he

Ignored them. With the men of Thrace he still  
 Maintained a friendship. Once there was a hill  
 Above the plain, both beautiful and green,  
 Although there was no shade that could be seen 100  
 Upon its summit. There the singer lay,  
 Despised by Heaven, and music he'd play.  
 In gratitude for Orpheus' harmonies  
 Came Jupiter's oak-tree and the Heliades,  
 The lofty beech, the brittle hazel-tree,  
 The laurel and the ash that grows to be  
 A spear, fir, ilex bent with acorns, too,  
 The plane, the maple, sporting many a hue,  
 Lotus, green willow and the evergreen  
 Box-tree, tamarisk, rich myrtle, always seen 110  
 With double green, the bay of berried hue,  
 The vines, the elms, the ash, strawberry, too,  
 Palm-trees, pine-trees sacred to Cybele,  
 Since Attis changed his human form to be  
 A tree, the cypress, looking like the place  
 That marks the turning-point in a horse-race,  
 Once a boy, by Phoebus loved, but now mutated.  
 There was a stag, whose large antlers created  
 Great shadows as they loomed around his head  
 In the Carthaeian land, where nymphs would tread 120  
 And worship him. They shone with gold, and round  
 His polished neck a jewelled collar was bound.  
 A silver charm, with straps of leather tied,  
 Shook on his forehead, and on either side  
 Of this stag's head bronze pearls gleamed. He would go  
 To people's houses and then bend down low  
 For them to stroke him. But especially  
 Cyparissus, fairest of the community  
 Of Ceans, loved him. Cyparissus led  
 The stag to fresh, green pastures to be fed 130  
 And clear springs, and around his horns he set  
 Flowers and then up on his back he'd get  
 And with a purple muzzle he'd delight  
 At tugging his soft mouth. It was a bright,  
 Hot noon when, tired out, the stag had laid  
 His body down to revel in the shade  
 The woodland offered. Accidentally  
 The boy transfixed him with his spear. When he  
 Saw he lay dead, he wished his own demise  
 As well and begged the gods with many sighs 140  
 That he might ever mourn. So what was there  
 That Phoebus did not say for his despair? -  
 A moderate grief to match the cause he said  
 Was needed only. While sad tears he shed  
 His blood poured out, his limbs turning to green;

His hair which but a second or so had been  
 Across his face became a coronet  
 That bristled, and he delicately set  
 And stiffened as he gazed up at the sky.  
 Phoebus was sad and murmured with a sigh, 150  
 "I'll grieve for you and, with a mournful sound,  
 You'll grieve for others." They all gathered round .  
 Convinced his lyre had all its harmonies,  
 Although attuned to various melodies,  
 Orpheus began to sing: "Inspire my air,  
 Loved mother Muse, for all things everywhere  
 Concede to Jupiter! How frequently  
 I've sung of his great might, additionally  
 Of giants and victorious thunder flung 160  
 Upon Phlegræan plains! Now of the young  
 I need to sing – of boys who have been blessed  
 By gods, and even maids who have transgressed  
 And paid the price." Lord Jupiter once yearned  
 For Ganymede of Phrygia – he burned  
 For one more fair than he was. He became  
 An eagle since his thunderbolts' fierce flame  
 It could sustain, and then he flew away  
 With Ganymede who, even to this day,  
 Mingles the nectar in the cups despite  
 The will of Juno, fostered by the might 170  
 Of his protector. Hyacinthus, you  
 Would have been set high in the heavens, too,  
 Were Phoebus given time by Destiny  
 To do it, and yet immortality  
 Is definitely yours, for when the spring  
 Drives winter off with Aries following  
 Watery Pisces, you also arise  
 And flourish. In my father Phoebus' eyes  
 You're loved above all others, and Delphi  
 For a while lost its presiding deity 180  
 Who went to Sparta, never fortified  
 With walls, for he was too preoccupied  
 With thoughts not of his lyre and his bow,  
 For now with nets and dogs on leash he'll go  
 With Hyacinthus, and, because his head  
 Was filled with different things, his passion spread..  
 And now, when Titan was displaying light  
 Between the banished and the coming night,  
 Apollo and the youth held a contest  
 So that they might find out who was the best 190  
 At discus-throwing: stripped and shimmering  
 With olive oil, each one in turn would fling  
 The object. Phoebus mightily sent it  
 Whirling across the air until it split

The clouds. At once the youth, ardent for fame,  
 Rushed heedlessly to partake in the game.  
 He picked it up, but it came hurtling  
 Back from the solid earth and bludgeoning  
 Him in the face. Apollo turned as wan  
 As Hyacinthus was and fell upon 200  
 The youth to cradle him. He tried to bring  
 Him back to life and staunch the frightening  
 And gaping wound, applying herbs, but he  
 Found that his arts had no ability  
 To cure him. As a man by accident  
 Breaks flowers and they droop, suddenly bent  
 Towards the earth, the youth with failing strength  
 Within his neck fell to the ground full-length.  
 "You've fallen in your prime," moaned Phoebus. "I,  
 When looking at your wound, cannot deny 210  
 My fault. Yes, I alone caused your demise:  
 The charge of your destruction solely lies  
 In me. What was that fault? What did I do?  
 Is it a fault to play a game with you?  
 Would I could give my life for yours! Or die  
 With you! Yes, since our fates cannot deny  
 We can't be parted, you are meant to be  
 Adhering to my lips eternally.  
 My lyre and my songs will solemnize  
 Your life, and as a flower you'll arise 220  
 And by your markings you will show my woe.  
 Another will appear, remembered so  
 As well, a hero." Then, at this refrain,  
 Hyacinthus' blood gushed and began to stain  
 The grass, and then a flower in that space,  
 As beautiful as Tyrian dye, its place  
 Took up, quite as a lily looks despite  
 Its purple hue, for lilies all are white.  
 Phoebus, however, was not satisfied  
 With this alone, so he identified 230  
 His grief on it; AI AI accordingly  
 He wrote there. Sparta, too, would never be  
 Ashamed to flaunt the youth, for to this day  
 They at the Hyacinthia display  
 His flower.

Should you ask of Amathus,  
 A mine-rich town on the island of Cyprus,  
 To tell of the Propoetides, why then  
 It would repudiate them and the men  
 Marred with two horns on their foreheads, therefore  
 Called the Cerastae. Once, a shrine before 240  
 The gates would stand to honour Jupiter  
 The Cordial. And if a stranger were

To see it stained with the blood, he could maybe  
 Have well believed calves had been ritually  
 Killed there. But no! They killed their guests in fact  
 Kind-hearted Venus, outraged at this act,  
 Planned to desert her cities and the land  
 With snakes infested. 'I don't understand,'  
 Said she. They're innocent. *These folks* must pay  
 The penalty by being sent away 250  
 In exile or by death or transformation -.  
 The middle ground '. She paused in hesitation,  
 Thinking of how she should transmogrify  
 The people. Then by chance she cast her eye  
 Upon their horns, deciding they would stay  
 After the change, and then without delay  
 She changed them into bulls. But even so  
 The foul Propoetides would then still go  
 Against Venus (that's why they first became  
 Harlots through Venus' anger, to their shame). 260  
 They could not blush, now turned to flint. Now they  
 Were by Pygmalion seen, who saw the way  
 They lived their wretched lives and so remained  
 A bachelor because their life-style stained  
 The female heart. He carved out skillfully  
 A statue made of snow-white ivory,  
 A maid for whom he burned. She was so true-  
 To-life in every part of her that you  
 Would think that she could move, though modesty  
 Retrained all of her motions. Therefore he 270  
 Concealed his art. And so Pygmalion gazed  
 Upon the form he had produced and praised  
 Her beauty. He raised up his hands to feel  
 The work and wondered if it might be real,  
 And he would kiss it, too, imagining  
 His kisses were returned, while cradling  
 And speaking to her, thinking that he might  
 Be bruising her by holding her too tight.  
 Now would he flatter her, now would he take  
 To her such presents as are sure to make 280  
 A sweet girl happy – pebbles, smooth and round,  
 Shells, birds and fragrant flowers that abound  
 In countless hues, lilies and painted balls  
 And many an amber Heliad tear that falls  
 From trees. He drapes her in rich clothes and places  
 Rings on her fingers and lovingly laces  
 Rich pendants round her neck and pearl ones in  
 Her ears, and golden ornaments he'd pin  
 To decorate her breast. Without a doubt  
 All these were beautiful, and yet without 290  
 Clothing she was as fair. Upon a bed

With cloths of Tyrian purple colour spread  
 He laid her, lying with her as though she  
 Were his consort. The anniversary  
 Of Cyprian Venus was now due, where came  
 Thousands of folk to celebrate her fame.  
 Heifers whose spreading horns were gold-tipped fell  
 Slaughtered before the shrines, and one could smell  
 The frankincense. Pygmalion stood there  
 And made an offering and said said a prayer: 300  
 "You gods, if you can grant all things, I pray  
 That I might wed her." But he dared not say  
 She was not real - "...my ivory -", he said,  
 But golden Venus knew immediately  
 What he had meant and with her flames made plain  
 That she would favour him. Once back again,  
 He sought the statue and twice kissed her lips  
 (She felt so warm!), then with his fingertips  
 He touched her breast and found the ivory  
 Softened like wax of the Hymettan bee. 310  
 He was amazed, joyful and yet afraid  
 That there was some mistake about the maid.  
 The veins throbbed underneath the careful test  
 That he had carried out, his fingers pressed  
 Upon her flesh. Then in astonishment  
 He thanked the goddess just before he went  
 To kiss the maiden, who now finally  
 Was conscious of his kisses. Prettily  
 She blushed and lifted up her timid eyes  
 That she might look upon the clear-blue skies 320  
 And then Pygmalion, who leaned beside  
 The maid. At once the goddess sanctified  
 The marriage. The once-statue, now a wife,  
 After nine months gave birth, thus giving life  
 To Paphos, now the island's name, and she  
 Gave birth to Cinyras – if only he  
 Were childless, he'd have been content. I tell  
 Of dreadful things! I'm warning you, keep well  
 Away, fathers and daughters! But if you  
 Should like my tale, do not believe it's true! 330  
 But if you should believe it, clearly see  
 How punishment rewards iniquity!  
 Such crimes exist, and so I'm glad to say  
 That all the land of Thrace is far away  
 From where this sin was born. Let Araby  
 Be rich in balsam and continually  
 Produce incense that is distilled from trees,  
 Cinnamon and costum and great quantities  
 Of flowers. All of this wealth cannot redress  
 This land for this one dreadful wickedness - 340

The myrrh's too great a price. Cupid asserts  
 That he was innocent of any hurts  
 Myrrha received. It was a Fury who  
 With fire-brand and vipers poisoned you,  
 Myrrha! Hating a parent's villainous,  
 But love like this is more iniquitous.  
 The princes and young men in every land  
 Throughout the East are keen to win your hand  
 In marriage. Therefore choose one! But resist  
 The urge to add your father to the list! 350  
 She knows her fault and struggles bitterly  
 Against it: 'What is happening to me?  
 Help me, you gods! For natural love I pray.  
 May piety keep this vile love away!  
 But is it criminal? Does piety  
 Condemn such love? For indiscriminately  
 Animals mate – a bull might copulate  
 With his own issue, and a stallion's mate  
 May be his seed, and it's the very same  
 With goats and birds to act thus without shame 360  
 Malignant men make spiteful laws indeed,  
 So what is right to Nature is decreed  
 As wrong. However, there are tribes today  
 Where mothers marry sons, or so they say,  
 And daughters take their fathers in the act  
 Of marriage, fashioning a double pact.  
 O would I had been one of them! But no!  
 I must abide here, filled with wretched woe.  
 Why dwell upon these hopes that bring me shame?  
 Let me forget to think of lawless flame! 370  
 My father's worthy of my love indeed  
 But as a father. Were I not the seed  
 Of mighty Cinyras, we might have wed,  
 But, as it stands, I'll never gain his bed.  
 He's mine, but not mine, near but far from me.  
 All would be fine were we not family.  
 I would be glad to leave my native land,  
 Fleeing a passion that is surely banned,  
 But I'm held here where I am free to see  
 And touch and talk to him and tenderly 380  
 Kiss him – but nothing else is tolerated!  
 Think of the things you've discombobulated!  
 Too many close connections you have thrown  
 Into confusion! Will you, then, be known  
 As Cinyras's mistress? Would you be  
 The sister of whatever progeny  
 You have as well as mother? Don't you dread  
 The Furies, each one with a snaky head  
 Of hair, who brandish flames before the eyes



Of guilty creatures? Though you realize                    390  
 Your body has not sinned, at least not yet,  
 Don't violate great Nature's law! Don't let  
 Sin creep into your heart! Reality  
 Forbids it – he's a man of honesty,  
 But how I long for him!' Her father, though,  
 Great Cinyras, facing a lengthy row  
 Of suitors, asked her whom she wished to wed.  
 She gazed upon him with eyes that were red  
 With tears. 'This signifies a maiden's fears,'  
 He thought and tried to wipe away her tears                    400  
 And kissed her, which caused her such great delight  
 That when he asked again which man she might  
 Prefer, she said, 'One just like you!' But he,  
 Misunderstanding her great ardency,  
 Replied, 'A loving answer, I would say!'  
 Too conscious of her guilt, she looked away.  
 It was midnight, and sleep dissolved the care  
 Of mortals, but she, sleepless with despair,  
 Burned with her passion, yet sometimes intent  
 On trying one more time, though then being sent 410  
 Back to her shame. As a great tree will sway  
 Until the final axe-blow, in that way  
 Her fragile mind wavered unsteadily,  
 Seeking no rest but the extremity  
 Of life. She longed for death. So, fastening  
 A cord upon a beam and circling  
 Its noose about her throat, she said, "Goodbye,  
 Dear Cinyras! Know why I had to die!"  
 The nurse heard her despairing words, they say,  
 And opened up the door. In her dismay                    420  
 She screamed and beat her breast and snatched the rope  
 From Myrrha's neck, the maiden's wretched hope,  
 Then she embraced the girl and asked why she  
 Had done this, but she looked down silently  
 Upon the ground, sad that her first essay  
 At death had failed. The nurse would have her way -  
 Baring her withered breasts with her grey hair,  
 She asked the reason for her stark despair,  
 Invoking memories of days gone by  
 And asking once again the reason why                    430  
 She grieved. The girl just sighed and turned aside.  
 The nurse, still keen to know why she had tried  
 To kill herself, vowed her fidelity  
 And aid. She said to her, 'My girl, tell me  
 The truth! I'm not too old to give relief  
 And offer you a remedy for your grief.  
 For I have charms and herbs, or, if a spell  
 Was worked on you, I still can make you well.

But if the gods are outraged, then you should  
Offer a sacrifice. But what else could 440  
Have prompted this? Your kin are prosperous:  
Your parents live and both are vigorous,  
As is your mother.' When the maiden heard  
'Father', she gave a great sigh at the word.  
The nurse, however, even by that time,  
Could not conceive that there was any crime  
In Myrrha's heart, yet she felt it must be  
A love affair, and so she doggedly  
Pursued the cause. She held against her breast  
The weeping girl and said, 'I've surely guessed 450  
That you're in love, sweet girl. In this affair  
I'm wholly yours, and you must be aware  
Your father shall not hear of it from me'  
At this Myrrha sprang up immediately.  
Her face deep-buried in a couch, she wept,  
'Leave or don't irk me, for you must be kept  
From asking questions. Mine's a shameful thing!'  
The nurse then held her hands out, trembling  
With fear, and down before her feet she fell,  
Coaxing then scaring her. She said she'd tell 460  
About the noose and her planned suicide,  
But, even so she said that she'd abide  
By her promise to help. And then the maid  
Just lifted up her face and, weeping, laid  
It on the nurse's bosom. Frequently  
She tried confessing, but as often she  
Would stop and hide her face. At last she said,  
'How happy, mother, are you that you wed  
Your husband!' Horror filled the nurse's heart,  
For now she knew it all, and, with a start, 470  
Her white hairs stood on end and carefully  
She strove to speak and act appropriately  
To oust her passion. Though the girl well knew  
That this was sound advice she listened to,  
She still resolved to die if destiny  
Refused her wish. The nurse, said, 'Live and be  
Happy. Possess your -' But she could not now  
Say 'father', and yet she confirmed her vow  
To Heaven. It was the time time to celebrate  
The festival of Ceres – on that date 480  
The matrons dressed in white; garlands of wheat  
They'd bring, and for nine days they would retreat  
From sex. Cinyras's consort always made  
Quite certain every year that she obeyed  
The rites. Now, Cinyras, one of these nights,  
While she was duly heedful of these rites,

Was drunk, and so the nurse ingeniously  
Spoke to him of a maiden passionately  
In love with him. Then, when he asked how old  
The lovely maiden was, she boldly told 490  
The king, 'As old as Myrrha.' He said, 'Go  
And fetch her.' When she found her, she said, 'Oh,  
My dear, I've fixed it.' Myrrha, with a start,  
Could feel no jubilation in her heart,  
Yet she felt happiness mingled with shame  
In her confusion. Now the dark hours came,  
Her sin at hand. The moon fled from the sky,  
The night was pitch, the hiding stars screened by  
Black clouds. Three times warned by an augury,  
She tripped, three times the screech-owl equally 500  
Gave out an omen, and yet on she went.  
She thought the night eased her embarrassment.  
She held fast to her nurse and groped around  
Until her father's room they finally found.  
They entered. Myrrha's knees were trembling,  
Her drawn face pale, her courage vanishing.  
She wished to turn and run, unrecognized.  
The nurse, though, as the maiden temporized,  
Still held her hand and led her to the bed  
And then, as she delivered her, she said, 510  
'Now, Cinyras, she's yours' and left the pair  
To their doomed and incestuous affair.  
He tried to calm her fears and chanced to call  
Her 'daughter', quite appropriate after all  
For her young age, and, that it might complete  
Their guilt, she called him 'father'. Then on feet  
That staggered she went from her father's room,  
The product of their sin within her womb.  
The coupling would go on for many a night  
Until the wary king produced a light, 520  
Discovering the crime. In shame he drew  
His bright sword from its scabbard, but she flew.  
Through fields she groped her random, pathless way  
And left the land of palms, only to stray  
Through the Panchaeian lands. She aimlessly  
Wandered for nine months until finally  
She rested in Sabaea, for the weight  
Within her womb she could not tolerate  
For long. Weary of the life that she now led  
And frightened of the thought of being dead, 530  
Not knowing what she should pray for, a plea  
She made: 'If any gods listen to me,  
I do not beg forgiveness, but lest I  
Offend the living or, if I should die,  
The dead, arrange it that I may not be

In either situation and change me!  
Some god paid heed to her abnormal prayer,  
For even as she pleaded, then and there  
The earth closed over both her legs; roots grew  
Over her nails, applying structure to 540  
Her growing trunk; her bones grew hard and strong;  
As her outstretching arms would change to long  
Branches, her fingers turned to twigs, though she  
Retained her marrow, and her blood would be  
Tree-sap forever, and her skin she found  
Had turned to bark; the tree had closely bound  
Her heavy womb and covered her soft breast,  
Spreading up quickly. She was over-stressed  
And sank down, her face hidden. But, although  
All sense of human life was gone as so 550  
She lost her mortal form, she'd still maintain  
Her tears as from the tree warm drops would rain.  
The myrrh distilling from the trunk became  
A valued product and has kept her name,  
Which will in future days not be forgotten.  
And while the wood yet grew, the guilt-begotten  
Myrrha grew also, and she tried to find  
A way of safe birth, while the trunk would wind  
And swell about her. She could not express  
The torture she was feeling nor address 570  
Lucina, but, just like someone in pain,  
The tree fell down, its tears falling like rain,  
And groaned. Lucina stood in sympathy,  
Touching the moaning branches of the tree,  
And uttered charms. The bark itself was rent  
Asunder and a baby boy was sent  
Into the world. The naiads, while it cried,  
Laid it on soft grass, then sanctified  
It with its mother's tears. Even Envy thought  
It lovely, like the naked Cupid wrought 580  
In paintings, although he was quiverless -  
Had he a quiver, nobody would guess  
Which one was Cupid. Time runs rapidly,  
And now the child, once hidden in a tree,  
Is a young handsome man, acquiring  
The love of Venus, thereby repaying  
His mother's lust. The goddess' son, while he  
Was kissing her, happened unwittingly  
To graze her breast with his projecting dart.  
She pushed the sweet boy from her with a start. 590  
The wound was deeper than she'd thought, so she  
Was duped at first with sensuality.  
Delighted with his beauty, she no more  
Became concerned with her Cytherian shore

Or Paphos, Cnidos or of Amathus,  
 Which is for precious ores illustrious.  
 She loved Adonis more than Heaven, and so  
 She followed him wherever he would go,  
 And she forgot to rest in noon-day shade,  
 Neglecting her own beauty, while she strayed 590  
 Through woods, mountains, thorny cliff-sides and leas,  
 Her skirt, Diana-wise, above her knees.  
 While cheering on the hounds, she chased the hares,  
 The stags, the hinds, avoiding, though, the bears,  
 The boars, the ravening wolves, the lions who  
 Slaughtered the cattle. And she warned you, too,  
 Adonis., so beware of them. But he,  
 Alas, did not! 'Oh, show your bravery',  
 She said, 'against those timid beasts that fly  
 From you. But don't be rash, dear boy, and try 600  
 To hunt the savage creatures to your cost  
 And mine, for you may very well be lost  
 To me forever. Youth, a lovely face  
 And everything I cherish have no place  
 In hunting savage beasts. For boars possess  
 A lightning-bolt's intense effectiveness  
 And lions' anger's ever unconfined.  
 I fear them and I hate all of their kind.'  
 He asked her why, and she said, 'You will be  
 Surprised to learn of an iniquity 610  
 Of long ago. But I am tired out  
 From unaccustomed toil. But look about!  
 Here is a poplar, such a welcome shield  
 Against the sun, and this lush grass will yield  
 A bed for us. Let's rest!' She leaned her head  
 Upon his breast and, kissing him, she said,  
 'You may perhaps know the authentic tale  
 About a girl who never ceased to fail  
 To win against male runners. Were her speed  
 Or looks more worthy of high praise? Indeed, 620  
 One could not tell. She wished to be a bride,  
 But when she asked the god, the god replied,  
 'A husband will but harm you. Keep away  
 From thoughts of marriage! But I have to say  
 That you won't be yourself.' Therefore, afraid  
 Of what she heard, she lived in the dark shade  
 Of woods, unwed, and from the congregation  
 Of suitors fled, setting this stipulation:  
 'I'll not be won until a man should beat  
 Me in a running race. Therefore, compete 630  
 With me! If you should win, your prize will be  
 Myself, but if you finish after me,  
 You die!' She certainly was pitiless.

However, such was her beauteousness.  
 Hippomenes had come to watch them run,  
 Condemning for their passion every one  
 Of those who came to race the maid. He said,  
 'Who'd undertake such danger to be wed?'  
 But when he saw her face and naked frame  
 (Like mine, Adonis, or, if you became        640  
 A maid, like yours), he was benumbed. Then he  
 Stretched out his hands and said, 'Pray pardon me,  
 Brave gentlemen, for now I see the prize  
 That you will strive for – now I realize  
 Its value. His heart leapt with an ardent thirst  
 For the fair maid. 'I wish to finish first,'  
 Said he, though in alarm through jealousy.  
 'But why am I untried? Divinity  
 Assists the brave.' But while the hero weighed  
 These notions in his mind, he saw the maid        650  
 Set off as though her feet had wings. Although  
 She sped just like an arrow from a bow,  
 Her beauty he admired more, her speed  
 Appearing very beautiful indeed.  
 Her sandals' feathers were by breezes blown  
 And from her ivory back her hair was thrown;  
 Her ribbons fluttered at her knees; a blush spread  
 Over her whiteness, just as when a red  
 Awning stains a white courtyard with its shade.  
 As he was watching, this, the lovely maid        660  
 Crossed the line first and for her victory  
 Received the festive crown, the penalty  
 Paid by the men, according to the pact.  
 Now calmly taking in that fatal act,  
 He boldly fixed his eyes on her. Said he,  
 'What fame is in an easy victory  
 Over weak men? Race me! For what shame can  
 You have if you're defeated by a man?  
 Megareus of Onchestus fathered me,  
 My grandfather was Neptune, god of the sea ,        670  
 And I may add this, too – I have a name  
 For daring that has not disgraced the fame  
 Of my descent. If you're victorious,  
 Your name will always be illustrious -  
 You'll be the only one who bested me!'

Her gaze grew softer: in uncertainty  
 She didn't know whether to win or lose  
 Was her intent and to herself said, 'Who's  
 The god who envies youth so much that he  
 Would wish to place this one in jeopardy.        680  
 I am not worth the price, I think. He would  
 Not touch me with his beauty – though I could

Be moved by it. No, he is but a boy  
 And it's his youth that brings me so much joy.  
 He's brave, of high descent. He loves me so  
 That he would risk his life. O strange lad, go!  
 A match with me is fatal. There will be  
 Others who long to wed you; happily  
 A wiser girl will want you. Why should I  
 Think of those other men who had to die? 690  
 Ah, let him perish, since he's not aware  
 Of all those suitors' deaths and does not care  
 To live. But he *should*! Were I not denied  
 A spouse, it's him that I would lie beside,  
 And no-one else!' Atalanta did not know  
 The power of love when she said that, and so  
 She loved unwittingly. Those of that land  
 And Atalanta's father made demand  
 For the accustomed race. The youth, meanwhile,  
 Anxiously prayed to Venus, saying, 'Smile 700  
 Upon the love that you have instigated,  
 Venus! Aid me!' The breezes penetrated  
 The clouds and reached me, and I must confess  
 He touched me greatly with his tenderness.  
 I had but little time. On Cyprus there  
 Exists a field which people everywhere  
 Call Tamasus – it's rich, and men of old  
 Made it my sacred province, and they told  
 Their slaves to add it to my shrines. A tree  
 Stands gleaming in the middle of that lea, 710  
 Rustling with leaves and crackling with bright gold.  
 It was from where I came. I chanced to hold  
 Three golden apples, new-plucked, in my hand,  
 And it was with these apples that I planned  
 To aid Hippomenes. Though quite unseen  
 By everyone but him, yet I have been  
 Able to teach him how he might apply  
 Them to his benefit. The race was nigh.  
 The trumpet sounded and away they ran  
 Across the sandy race-track, maid and man. 720  
 You'd think that they would graze the very sea  
 With feet unwet by brine and rapidly  
 Skim the cornfields. The youth was heartened by  
 Those who had come to watch – with many a cry  
 They shouted, 'Use your strength! You're sure to be  
 The winner!' It was doubtful whether he  
 Or she rejoiced more at these words. Indeed  
 While passing him she often checked her speed,  
 Then gazed upon him and reluctantly  
 Passed him again. She panted wearily, 730  
 The goal still far away. Then Neptune's son

Threw one of those gold apples. This being done,  
 Atalanta saw it, eager to possess  
 The shining fruit, and in her heedlessness  
 Turned from the course and snatched it up. A shout  
 Of acclamation echoed all about.  
 Increasing speed, she left the youth behind,  
 Once more ahead of him, only to find  
 Another apple. She tailed him once more,  
 The race near over. He cried, 'I implore,                   740  
 Venus, let me use your last gift!' He threw  
 It to the side so that she might pursue  
 It with delay. She seemed to temporize,  
 In doubt to follow after the third prize.  
 I made her look for it and let her feel  
 An extra weight, and, that I might reveal  
 A story shorter than the race, the day  
 Hippomenes won and took the prize away.  
 Did I, then, not deserve his thanks? Did he  
 Not owe me incense? Well, ungratefully                   750  
 He gave me neither, careless of the aid  
 That I had given him. His conduct made  
 Me very angry – fretting at the slight,  
 I told myself that it was only right  
 To make a just example of them. They  
 Were near a temple hidden far away  
 Within the forest which to Cybele  
 Echion once built as an indemnity,  
 Thus holding to his vow. Both, tired out  
 With travel, rested there, so then about                   760  
 His heart I placed a passion he could not  
 Control. Quite near the temple was a grot  
 Covered with pumice, a most hallowed place  
 Where there were images of many a face  
 Of ancient gods set by a priest. There they  
 Made love. The ancient deities turned away,  
 Appalled, and Mother Cybele was intent  
 On throwing them in the Styx, a punishment  
 Too light, it seemed. So on their shoulders she  
 Placed tawny lions' manes immediately                   770  
 And made their fingers claws – a dreadful fate!  
 Their arms became forelegs and all their weight  
 Was in the breasts and they gained tails. A roar  
 Replaced their speech, each visage fierce, and for  
 A rutting-bed they sought the woods. Despite  
 The fear they caused in others, they would bite  
 Cybele's bit. Avoid these two, my dear,  
 And of all other savage beasts steer clear.  
 Don't challenge them for they don't turn in flight,  
 in case your courage kills us both outright.                   780



Behind her swans she flew off with great speed,  
But he impulsively refused to heed  
Her words. Out of its lair his hounds had chased  
A wild boar, and, as from the wood he raced,  
Adonis pierced it glancingly. The spear  
The boar dislodged and dogged the youth, whose fear  
Caused him to sprint. It sank its teeth into  
His groin and to the yellow sand he threw  
The dying youth. Venus, high in the air,  
Had not yet reached the island, yet from there 790  
She heard his dying moans, and so she turned  
The swans towards the isle, where she discerned  
His lifeless body. Beating her breasts, she leapt,  
Tearing her clothes and tresses as she wept,  
Complaining to the Fates. 'You don't have all  
The power,' she said. 'Remembering your downfall,  
Adonis, every year an imitation  
Of your own death shall show my desolation.  
Your blood will be a flower eternally.  
Were you not authorized, Persephone, 800  
To change Menthe into a mint? And so,  
May I not metamorphose my hero?  
She sprinkled nectar on Adonis' blood,  
Which swelled as bubbles rose in yellow mud  
As soon as it was poured, and then a flower,  
That had the hue of blood, in less than an hour  
Was fashioned such as pomegranates bear,  
Hiding their seeds within a rind. But there  
Is a short-lived delight in them. For they,  
Once clinging lightly, soon are blown away 810  
By but the lightest wind, and that's why we  
Now call the flower 'the anemone'.