

# OVID METAMORPHOSES XV

The search was now for one to bear the weight  
 Of kingship and succeed a king so great,  
 And now illustrious Numa gained the name  
 Of monarch, destined by veracious fame.  
 By Sabine rites alone unsatisfied,  
 With greater views his mind he amplified,  
 Examining the cause of everything.  
 This interest now led the new-made king  
 To far Crotona, which long, long ago  
 Accepted Hercules – he wished to know 10  
 Who it had been who built in Italy  
 This Grecian city. Of the citizenry  
 One who well knew the past said, “Hercules  
 With his rich Spanish cattle from the seas  
 With favouring winds reached the Licinian strand,  
 And while his cattle strayed about the land  
 He entered mighty Croton's house where he  
 Was welcomed with great hospitality,  
 Or so they say, and as he left he said,  
 “All your descendants in the days ahead 20  
 Will have a city here.” And it proved true -  
 One Myscelus, the dearest mortal to  
 The gods, marked out its walls. And Hercules  
 At dawn addressed him as he took his ease  
 In sleep: “Leave here and go immediately  
 To distant Aesar's pebbly stream,” and he  
 Intimidated him lest he complied,  
 Then left. At once Myscelus opened wide  
 His eyes and thought about the dream yet saw  
 A quandary because he knew the law 30  
 Forbade his leaving, threatening death. The sun  
 Had sunk his head and Night had now begun,  
 Showing her starry face, and Hercules  
 Seemed to be there, repeating his decrees  
 With yet more threats. The man was terrified  
 For accusations came from every side  
 That he despised the law. The case was moved  
 Against him and was evidently proved  
 Without one witness. He faced Heaven, dressed  
 Just like a suppliant, and then professed, 40  
 “O mighty Hercules, for whom alone  
 Twelve labours have allowed you to have known  
 A home in Heaven, give me a helping hand,  
 For I have sinned because of you!” That land  
 Possessed an ancient custom which involved  
 Voting with pebbles - the white one absolved,  
 The black condemned, a man. So on that day

The pebbles all were black! And yet when they  
 Upturned the urn, the hues were totally  
 Changed into white, and by this remedy 50  
 Of Hercules he happily became  
 An innocent man, exempted from all blame  
 Concerning that land's law. To Hercules  
 He breathed his thanks and set off on the seas  
 With favouring breezes, passing Serenum  
 And Sybaris and Spartan Tarentum,  
 Iapygia, Crinisa and the bay  
 Of Siris, and thereafter made his way  
 To Aesar's mouth. Nearby, a funeral mound  
 Containing Croton's hallowed corpse he found, 60  
 And there he built his city with the name  
 Crotona, thereby broadening the fame  
 Of Croton." To this place a man had fled  
 From Samos and its ruling class, which fed  
 His hate for tyranny, and his forte  
 Was speaking with the gods so far away  
 Within his mind, and anything denied  
 To human sight in his own head he eyed.  
 He studied everything with concentrated  
 Reflection then to crowds communicated 70  
 His thoughts, and people marvelled, listening  
 To how the world created everything,  
 How Nature is and what's a deity,  
 What causes lightning-bolts and how are we  
 Subject to snow, did Jupiter create  
 The bolts of thunder that reverberate  
 Or was it stormy winds, and what decrees  
 Control the stars, all hidden entities.  
 He was the first to bid man not to eat  
 The flesh of any animal as meat. 80  
 Though not believed in, I was first to say  
 Wisely, "O mortal beings, stay away  
 From flesh, for there is splendid fruit and grain  
 That you from weighty branches may obtain,  
 And grapes upon the vines and herbs, some flavoured  
 And some that can be warmed and thereby savoured.  
 You've milk and honey, and the earth supplies  
 You with her wealth whereby no creature dies.  
 Flesh satisfies a wild beast's daily needs,  
 And yet not all, for cattle, sheep and steeds 90  
 Survive on grass. But every tiger, bear,  
 Lion and wolf eats flesh which they will tear  
 From off another beast.. A monstrous thing  
 For flesh to feed on flesh! Such savouring  
 Of other creatures' vitals! So, although  
 The earth creates such riches, even so,

Like Cyclops, you fulfil your appetite  
 With cruel teeth while snuffing out the light  
 Of another creature's life. But long ago  
 (Those golden days, for we then deemed them so) 100  
 We took our sustenance from bounteous trees  
 And from the earth herbs in great quantities,  
 Touching no flesh. The birds flew on their way  
 In safety through the air, and hares would stray  
 In meadows unafraid; unwittingly  
 No fish were hooked; all creatures then were free  
 From wiles. But later on, somebody (who  
 It was is unimportant) looked into  
 A lion's ways with envy, and so he  
 Stuffed flesh into his belly greedily 110  
 And showed the path to wickedness. It may  
 Be that in slaughtering the beasts of prey  
 Our steel first felt warm blood, and I agree  
 That savage beasts should justifiably  
 Be slaughtered but not eaten. Then a spread  
 Of wickedness began and it was said  
 That pigs would merit slaughtering since they  
 Root up the seeds, engendering dismay.  
 The ravenous goat that gnawed the sprouting vine  
 Was led off to be slaughtered at the shrine 120  
 Of Bacchus. But why is this destiny  
 Imposed on sheep, which treat us harmlessly  
 With milk and wool? For it is obvious  
 That while they live they're of more use to us  
 Than dead. And why are oxen used this way?  
 Do they deserve a cruel death? For they  
 Are harmless, guileless, born to undergo  
 Hard toil. How could their masters treat them so  
 Hard-heartedly? Unworthy of the corn  
 They've gleaned, they execute their labour-worn 130  
 Workers. They even think the gods delight  
 In such misdeeds. The oxen are a sight  
 Of splendid beauty without one defect  
 (And, sure enough, perfection will effect  
 Destruction). For this animal is led  
 Before the shrine with garlands on his head.  
 He hears a prayer, although unwittingly:  
 There is some grain between his horns, then he  
 Is felled, staining the knife with his own gore,  
 Which he had possibly observed before 140  
 Reflected in the water. Instantly  
 They scan the lungs, ripped from the cavity  
 Of his still-breathing chest, to learn the need  
 Of Heaven. On this creature then you feed,  
 You humans! (for your hunger is so great

For this forbidden food). Now concentrate  
 On what I say to you! When you partake  
 Of butchered animals, make no mistake  
 That it's a fellow-creature on which you  
 Are feeding. I shall speak, as is my due, 150  
 The words of god, and to you I'll disclose  
 His oracles, delineating those  
 Most wondrous things that not once in the past  
 Were studied by the wise but ever cast  
 In darkness. I delight to float among  
 The stars and take my stand upon the strong  
 Shoulders of Atlas, where humanity  
 I may observe wandering aimlessly,  
 Afraid of life and yet afraid to die  
 An unknown death as well. And then do I 160  
 Reveal what is ordained by Destiny.  
 Sad mortals, why do you so fearfully  
 Shudder at death and live in constant dread  
 Of empty names and shadows of the dead,  
 The tales that poets write, phantoms that flit  
 About the nether world? Do not submit  
 Yourselves to thought about your own decease,  
 Because your soul will ever be at peace  
 Once you've been laid upon the funeral pyre,  
 Your flesh devoured by its raging fire, 170  
 Or old age withers you. Your soul will dwell  
 Elsewhere at rest. For I remember well  
 That I was once Euphorbus, in whose chest  
 The spear of Menelaus once was pressed  
 At Troy. I recognized the shield I bore  
 Upon my left arm in the Trojan War  
 In Juno's Argive temple recently.  
 All things are changed and live eternally.  
 The soul may wander as a beast but then  
 Take on a human shape then once again 180  
 Become a beast, and it will never die,  
 As wax adopts new forms, it by and by  
 Will change. So, as a seer, let me declare  
 That you must honour kindred souls and spare  
 Their lives. Since on the sea I'm travelling  
 With sails that billow, there is not a thing  
 That stays unchanged. Time glides on constantly  
 In endless motion, no more differently  
 Than does a river, nor can it be barred  
 By time or river. Wave continues hard  
 Upon the last; what happened recently 190  
 Is left behind; each moment endlessly  
 Is new. You see that day replaces night  
 And in the evening dims its brilliant light

As night returns. The sky's a different hue  
 When humans slumber, as all creatures do  
 At night, than when bright Lucifer on his steed  
 Appears. It is a glorious change indeed  
 When loved Aurora ushers in the day  
 And touches up the world with bright array. 200  
 Even the sun is of a ruddy hue  
 At dawn and when it's hidden from our view.  
 It's white when highest, for the atmosphere  
 Is purer there and it is nowhere near  
 Contagion, while Diana's shape at night  
 Is not the same – she shows a lesser light  
 While waxing, greater when she wanes. Do you  
 Not notice how the year keeps moving through  
 The seasons, imitating life; in spring  
 It has a nursling's ways, resembling 210  
 Infancy, for the shoots are immature  
 And delicate but seeking to ensure  
 The farmer's hopes. Finally everything  
 Blossoms, the kindly land now burgeoning  
 With flowers; but the leaves are still not strong.  
 However, as the season moves along  
 The years grow stronger, and it seems to us  
 That summer's days are the most vigorous  
 With glowing warmth. And then autumn comes on,  
 And then we find the vim of life has gone, 220  
 And on the forehead is a scattering  
 Of grey, then winter enters, trembling  
 With faltering steps, his hair quite white. So we  
 Find out our bodies change unceasingly  
 As well. Will what we have been yesterday  
 Be what we are tomorrow? We can't say!  
 Once we were seeds within our mother's womb,  
 But that we might in such a narrow room  
 Not linger, Nature changed us skilfully -  
 Beneath our mother's entrails finally 230  
 We were released. At first the infant lies  
 Helpless, but finally he starts to rise  
 On all fours as he feels his way along,  
 Like a wild cub, and then at last he's strong  
 Enough to stand upright, though trembling  
 While propped up in support by anything  
 That happens to be near. And then the days  
 Of youth he swiftly passes through; that phase  
 Completed, middle age appears then he  
 Slides down the steep path to senility. 240  
 This weakens him, and when old Milton sees  
 His arms, once like the arms of Hercules,  
 Now slack, he weeps, and Helen weeps as well

To look into her glass that dares to tell  
 Her of her wrinkled face and wonders why  
 There was a time when she was worshipped by  
 Two heroes. Time, who ruins everything,  
 And Age, you slowly grind us down and bring  
 Us to a lingering death. Yes, even those  
 Things we call elements I will disclose 250  
 To you don't last and I'll delineate  
 The ways they change. The universal state  
 Has four elemental parts and two of these  
 Are earth and water, heavy entities;  
 The other two are air and fire – they  
 Are weightless and, if not constrained, will stray  
 Up high. The earth dissolves in water; thinned  
 Yet more, water becomes both air and wind,  
 And then the air, while losing further weight  
 Is turned to fire. Then they all mutate. 260  
 Nothing retains its shape: continually  
 Nature renews all things. Take heed of me -  
 Not one thing ever dies Nothing, I'm told,  
 Remains the same for long – just like how gold  
 Will change to iron; places change as well:  
 For I myself have known firm land to swell,  
 Becoming sea, and earth, contrarily,  
 From water comes. Sea-shells, far from the sea,  
 An anchor on a mountaintop, are found.  
 The downward rush of waters, too, has drowned 270  
 A plain that's now a valley. Similarly  
 Hills through a deluge end up in the sea.  
 A marsh becomes sand and in places where  
 There was severest drought, completely bare  
 Of water, there are pools. Earthquakes attack  
 Rivers, which disappear because of lack  
 Of depth. The Lycus by a pit  
 Within the earth was swallowed, and then it  
 Appeared elsewhere, born of a different source.  
 The Eridanus took a hidden course 280  
 And reached Argos. The Mysus, wearying  
 Of both its former banks and former spring,  
 Moves elsewhere, too, becoming Caïcus.  
 Sometimes in Sicily the Amenanus  
 Will flow, but sometimes it is dessicated  
 Because its very springs get terminated.  
 The Anigrus, once drinkable, is now  
 Tainted because, unless we disavow  
 The poets, centaurs washed their wounds in there,  
 Struck by the bow of Hercules. I swear 290  
 There's salt in the Hypanis, which was sprung  
 In Scythian mountains and, when it was young,

Had a sweet taste. Antissa and Pharos  
 And Tyre were islands, for you'd have to cross  
 The sea to reach them, but not now, for they  
 Aren't islands anymore. Back in the day  
 Leucas was a peninsular, if we  
 Can put our faith in the authority  
 Of older folks, but now the waters flow  
 Around it all. Zancle we used to know 300  
 As part of Italy until the sea  
 Cut off the land. Should you seek Helice  
 And Buris, two Achaean cities, they  
 Are underneath the waves. Even today  
 Sailors will point them out. In Troezen there  
 Is seen a mound that's steep and wholly bare  
 Of trees, where Pittheus used to be the king,  
 Which once had been the very flattest thing  
 Upon the plain. For raging winds long pent  
 In dark caves tried to find a proper vent 310  
 And reach the sky (so dreadful to relate!);  
 They forcefully began to elevate  
 The earth, for with their mighty breath they blew  
 In the same way that one may blow into  
 A bladder or a goatskin. There it stays,  
 A swelling crystallized by countless days.  
 Of many things I've known I will relate.  
 A few more. Why does water not mutate?  
 Egyptian waves are frigid at mid-day,  
 But always at sunrise and sunset they 320  
 Are warm. I hear the Athanasians light  
 Their wood with water near the end of night,  
 The waning moon becoming less and less.  
 The people of Ciconia possess  
 A stream that turns one's vitals into stone  
 When it is drunk, but not just that alone -  
 It changes things to marble. The Crathis  
 And, here in our own land, the Sybaris  
 Make hair like gold or amber. What is still  
 More wonderful is that some waters will 330  
 Change minds as well as bodies. Tell me, who  
 Does not know what the Salmacis can do  
 With its notorious waves? Who does not know  
 Of Ethiopia's lakes, whose drinkers go  
 Insane or fall asleep? He will abhor  
 All wine who at the fountain of Clitor  
 Will drink, whether that spring can counteract  
 The heat of wine. Or maybe it's a fact,  
 As natives of that place explained to us,  
 That when Amythaon's son, famed Melampus 340  
 Cured Proetus' daughters of their lunacy

With spices and enchanting wizardry,  
 He threw the remnants of what cures the mind  
 Into the spring and what was left behind  
 Made folks averse to wine who from that spring  
 Would drink. But the exactly opposite thing  
 Occurs in the Lyncestius, for he  
 Who takes a drink from it but moderately  
 Becomes blind drunk. Arcadia has a spot  
 Called Phineus that is spurned because of what 350  
 Its waters do – beware of them at night,  
 For then they're harmful, but by day you might  
 Drink from them. Lakes and rivers must, therefore,  
 Possess some power or other. Long before  
 Our time Ortygia floated on the sea,  
 Though now it's fixed. The *Argo's* company  
 Feared the Symplegades and all the spray  
 About them, but they're motionless today,  
 Blocking the winds. Etna was not always  
 Possessed of sulphur, not ever ablaze. 360  
 If Earth can let out fire here and there,  
 She'll change those passages that breathe the air  
 And close or open them. If winds are penned  
 Inside the deepest caverns and then send  
 Great stones against the rock, the entities  
 Within the rock that have the properties  
 Of flame are given life, then once again  
 Turn cool when they are calmed. When bitumen  
 Or sulphur burn but little, when the ground  
 No longer feeds the flame, it must be found 370  
 They'll die. The Hyperboreans, so they say,  
 ,Cover their bodies with light plumes, then they  
 Bathe nine times in Minerva's pool, although  
 I scarce believe the following is so -  
 That Scythian women do a similar thing  
 And use the self-same arts by sprinkling  
 Themselves with poison. If we can rely  
 Upon ur own experience, then I  
 Believe, whenever corpses rot away  
 Through time r heat, that it is safe to say 380  
 They bring forth tiny creatures, and if you  
 Should bury chosen bullocks, slaughtered due  
 To sacrifice, bees from the petrified  
 Entrails wil fly. These creatures, too, reside  
 In fields, as did their parent bodies: they  
 Are diligent and toil so that they may  
 Reap their reward of honey. A war-horse  
 That's buried in the earth becomes a source  
 Of hornets from its innards. And if you  
 Remove a land-crab's claws then put into 390



The soil the rest of it, a scorpion  
 Appears. The worms that weave cocoons upon  
 Wild leaves (a thing observed by husbandmen)  
 Are changed to butterflies. And, then again,  
 Mud holds in place the seeds that then beget  
 All frogs, which in their infancy have yet  
 No legs, but they receive them soon so they  
 May start to swim and also that they may  
 Be splendid leapers; their forelegs, they find,  
 Are shorter than the ones they have behind. 400

The mother bear births what is not a bear  
 When it is born, for it would be quite fair  
 To call it a limp mass of flesh. But she  
 Will lick it into shape that finally  
 It has a form like hers. All bees' offspring  
 As they receive their mother's fostering  
 In their six-sided cell, do not possess  
 A single limb but finally progress  
 To feet and wings. Could anyone suppose,  
 Unless it was something everyone knows, 410

The peacock, eagle, dove, well, every bird  
 Emerge from eggs? Indeed, some say, I've heard,  
 That when within a tomb a human lies,  
 His marrow turns, once the marrow putrefies,  
 Into a serpent. All these creatures, though,  
 Start life from others. There's a bird we know  
 Which can renew itself -the Assyrians call  
 It phoenix, which does not survive at all  
 On seeds and herbs but drops of incense and  
 The sap of cardomum. Once it has spanned 420

Five centuries, it builds in a palm tree  
 A nest upon its very apogee.  
 With cassia bark and nard and cinnamon  
 And myrrh it lines the nest and settles on  
 Its top and ends its life there. Seemingly  
 The father's body spawns its progeny,  
 They say, which lives as long as he, and when  
 It can lift up its father's body, then  
 He lifts the nest up from the lofty tree  
 And takes away his cradle piously, 430

His father's tomb as well, and through the air  
 Flies to Hyperion, the city where  
 Before Hyperion's temple he will lay  
 His burden. If at these strange things we may  
 Marvel, we'll be even more amazed when we  
 Learn that hyenas change their sex – a she  
 Becomes a he - and the chameleon  
 That feeds on wind and air will take upon  
 Itself the colour of whatever thing

It touches. Bacchus of the clustering 440  
 Grape-vines acquired lynxes in the land  
 Of India. We're made to understand  
 Their urine becomes stone, solidified  
 On contact with the air. On the seaside  
 The coral that was soft when in the sea  
 Changes, becoming hard immediately  
 When it has been exposed to air. The day  
 Will end before all that I have to say  
 On this is finished. Times will change, we see,  
 Some nations coming to ascendancy. 450  
 And some declining. For the opulence  
 Of men in Troy allowed her to dispense  
 With countless warriors in a decade  
 Of war, but she's now humbled, having paid  
 The price in blood and she can merely show  
 Ancestral tombs and ruins. Long ago  
 Sparta and great Mycenae were renowned,  
 And Thebes and Athens, but now barren ground  
 Is all that Sparta left, Mycenae fell  
 And nought remains of Cecrops' citadel 460  
 Except its name and nought but Oedipus  
 Is known of Thebes. Now news has come to us  
 That Rome is rising higher, and beside  
 The river Tiber, whose well-springs reside  
 High in the Apennines, her deep foundations  
 Is laying. Here again there are mutations  
 And she will rule the universe one day,  
 For that is what the prophets have to say.  
 If I remember rightly, Helenus  
 Said to Aeneas, who was dubious 470  
 About the fate of Troy, said, "Progeny  
 Of a goddess, attend my prophecy!  
 Troy won't fall utterly while you're alive,  
 Because through fire and sword you will survive  
 And bear away our Pergamum to where  
 You'll find a kinder realm in which you'll fare  
 Much better. I can see a splendid place  
 Destined for people of the Phrygian race.  
 Our chiefs will make that city vigorous  
 Through centuries, but one, Ascanius, 480  
 Will make her the world's mistress. After he  
 Has lived upon this earth and thoroughly  
 Enjoyed his life, in Heaven he'll reside."  
 Those were the words with which he prophesied.  
 Aeneas left, and I am glad to see  
 That Trojan walls are rising finally  
 Once more, and though the Greeks have conquered Troy,  
 A Trojan's gain has brought to me much joy.

Now, lest too far off course I chance to stray,  
 My steeds forgetting how to make their way,        490  
 The heavens and all things that are below  
 And earth are changed in form. Ourselves, also,  
 Will change, for we are wingèd souls as well  
 As merely flesh and may be doomed to dwell  
 In beasts. Should we not keep these souls secure  
 And honoured rather than feel the allure  
 Of juicy meat? For they may chance to be  
 Those spirits once part of our family.  
 Who kills a calf and coldly hears its cries  
 Is impious because he sheds likewise        500  
 A human's blood; who's bent on slaughtering  
 A kid as it makes a noise resembling  
 That of a darling child and he who feeds  
 Upon a bird he's fed are vile. Such deeds  
 Are murderous. What will that lead to now  
 In future days? So let the oxen plough  
 Or die of old age, and allow the sheep  
 To furnish us with wool that we may keep  
 Ourselves from northern blasts. She-goats as well  
 Must offer us their udders. And to Hell        510  
 With nets and guileful traps! Do not deceive  
 The birds with twigs that have been limed! And leave  
 The deer alone and do not terrify  
 Those beasts with feathered ropes! I pray, put by  
 Your treacherous baited hooks! By all means kill  
 A wild beast should it harm you, but don't fill  
 Your belly with its meat! Numa, they say,  
 With these and other precepts made his way  
 Back home and, at the Latians' request,  
 Ruled there and, with a nymph as consort blessed 520  
 And with the Muses' aid, his folk he trained  
 In sacrificial rituals as he reigned  
 And taught the arts of peace to those who'd known  
 But war, and when in death he left the throne,  
 An old man, the whole race showed its dismay.  
 His wife, Egeria, had gone away,  
 Screened by the thick groves of Aricia's vale,  
 And there it was that she would weep and wail,  
 Disturbing Cynthia's rituals that had been  
 Established by Orestes. What a scene!        530  
 How often did the nymphs of groves and lake  
 Attempt with their consoling words to make  
 Her cease! And Theseus' son would frequently  
 Say to her, "Please control your misery!  
 Consider others' griefs, for you are not  
 The only one to suffer a sad lot!  
 Let that assure you! You'll find some relief

If you will just give ear to all my grief.  
 If you've heard anything of Hippolytus,  
 Of how, because Theseus was credulous, 540  
 And through his vile stepmother's trickery,  
 He met his death, you will be thoroughly  
 Amazed. With difficulty I will try  
 To tell the tale. Hippolytus was I!  
 Long past, the daughter of Pasiphaë  
 Attempted to seduce her stepson – me!  
 Although she failed to do so, she then lied,  
 Through spite or through a hankering to hide  
 The truth, and ensured me of the offence  
 That I was guiltless of. My father thence 550  
 With curses banished me. So then I fled,  
 Aghast, to Troezen and, as on I sped,  
 Near Corinth an enormous quantity  
 Of waves rose high and lifted up the sea,  
 Which bellowed loudly as it split in two  
 Right at its crest. A horned bull straight through  
 The waves emerged, up to his breast as he  
 Snorted and spewed a massive quantity  
 Of water. All my friends were troubled, but  
 My mind remained calm, for within my gut 560  
 I thought of my exile. My steeds, each ear  
 Pricked up, were trembling, disturbed by fear,  
 Dashing along the rocks. I tried in vain  
 To use the reins, now flecked with a foaming stain.  
 Their panic would not have exhausted me  
 Had not a wheel snapped off and hit a tree.  
 I was thrown off the chariot, entangled  
 About the reins, and my entrails were mangled,  
 My legs as well. My spirit fled away,  
 And I was one crushed wound. How dare you say, 570  
 Therefore, that you have borne as much as I  
 Have borne, o nymph? Erebus by and by  
 I saw, deprived of light. In Phlegethon,  
 Tortured, I bathed. My life would have been gone  
 Forever had not Aesculapius brought  
 Me back with remedies that he had wrought,  
 And when, in spite of Pluto's indignation,  
 The power of herbs procured my restoration  
 To life, the Moon placed a dense mist round me  
 That I might not engender jealousy. 580  
 She made me older also so that I  
 Might be secure, and thought she might supply  
 Me with a place to live – Delos, maybe,  
 Or Crete - but she decided finally  
 To bring me here, and, since Hippolytus  
 Would bring to mind my horses, Vibius

Became my name. And here I still remain,  
 A minor deity, part of her train.  
 Others' grief could not ease Egeria's woe,  
 And so, dissolved in tears, she lay below 590  
 The mountain till the Moon in sympathy  
 Changed her into a spring continually  
 Providing water. At this marvellous  
 Event the nymphs were struck. Hippolytus  
 Was struck as well, as when men at the plough  
 In Etruria saw a clod of earth somehow  
 Move on its own and speak of destinies.  
 The people in that land call him Tages,  
 The first to teach Etrurians to tell  
 About the future. Romulus as well 600  
 Was struck, seeing the spear that once had grown  
 High on the Palatine and on its own  
 Put out new leaves and roots; now certainly  
 A spear no more, it was a willow-tree  
 That offers shade. Cippus the praetor, too,  
 When in a stream his horns came into view,  
 Touched his forehead, expecting not to see  
 It was returned though it was clear that he  
 Could trust his eyes, he looked up to the sky  
 And, like a conquering general, said, "Now I 610  
 Am happy. If it should mean good for me,  
 Let it be an auspicious prodigy,  
 You gods, for Rome! But if it's threatening,  
 It would be me you should be punishing."  
 He made a green-turfed shrine and mitigated  
 The gods with incense and then dedicated  
 Wine to them. Offered sheep's entrails he scanned  
 That he might know of what the Fates had planned.  
 When they were seen by an Etruscan seer  
 He prophesied an outcome of great cheer. 620  
 He looked up from the entrails: noticing  
 Cippus's horns, he cried out, "Hail, o king!  
 This land will honour you, but put aside  
 Delay! Enter the gates, now opened wide!  
 You'll be our king – this is your destiny.  
 You'll reign a lengthy time and happily."  
 Cippus drew back and turned his eyes away  
 And said, "Remove these omens, gods, I pray,  
 From me! It would be better should I spend  
 My life in exile rather than ascend 630  
 The throne." He summoned everyone, although  
 He veiled the horns he wore with wreaths to show  
 He came in peace. Upon a hillock made  
 By valiant soldiers to the gods he prayed  
 In ancient fashion: "Here there is someone

Who'll be your monarch if you do not shun  
 And exile him. He wears horns on his head,  
 Though I'll not give his name. The augur said  
 That if he enters here the laws that he  
 Gives you will lead you all to slavery. 640  
 I blocked his entry, though there is no-one  
 Closer to him than I. Citizens, shun  
 The man and keep him out! Enchain him, too,  
 If you think he deserves it, or else you  
 Must kill him, ending fears." As murmurs go  
 Among the groves of pine-trees, row on row,  
 Within them the fierce east wind whistling,  
 Or as the sound of salt-waves trembling  
 We hear from far away, such was the sound  
 The people made, and as it buzzed around 650  
 These words could be distinguished: 'Which is he?'  
 They looked at foreheads so that they might see  
 The horns they sought. "The man you want is here,"  
 Said Cippus, and then he, devoid of fear,  
 Threw back the wreath so that conspicuously  
 The horns upon his head they all could see  
 Then everybody there lowered his eyes  
 And groaned at this incredible surprise,  
 Reluctant to look at him, then replaced  
 The wreath so that he would not be disgraced 660  
 Longer. Banned for the city's confines, he  
 Had given to him as much property  
 As oxen with his ploughshare could surround  
 From daybreak to sunset. And then around  
 The gateposts they carved horns to hold his name  
 In honour and perpetuate his fame.  
 Muses, you guardians of poetry,  
 Say what you've known from far antiquity.  
 Reveal to us why Aesculapius  
 Came to an island where famed Romulus 670  
 Founded our city, where a dreadful blight  
 Deformed men's bodies, parching them. In fright  
 At countless deaths, they found physicians' skill  
 Was of no use to remedy this ill  
 So turned to prayer. To Delphi, too, they sent  
 Envoys that in this strange predicament  
 They begged Phoebus's aid. And while the ground,  
 The laurels and the quivers all around  
 Were shaking, Phoebus' tripod then replied,  
 Deep in the altar, and electrified 680  
 Them all: 'For what you're seeking here you should  
 Look nearer to you. It's for your own good  
 You need my son – he'll lessen your distress.  
 Go, seek him out! In its perceptiveness.

The Senate diligently tried to know  
 Where Aesculapius might live, and so  
 They sent envoys to Epidaurus, where  
 They went in haste to see the elders there  
 And prayed that Rome might have the deity  
 Whose presence would drive out the malady. . 690  
 The counsellors, however, were dismayed,  
 For some believed that they should offer aid,  
 But most of them believed it wise to say  
 That they should keep him and not give away  
 Our guardian deity. Then, as twilight  
 Was coming on, the darkness of the night  
 Mantled the world. Then Aesculapius seemed  
 To stand before their beds as Romans dreamed,  
 A staff in his left hand while with his right  
 He stroked his lengthy beard. 'Dismiss your fright!' 700  
 He calmly said. 'I'll come and leave behind  
 My statue. See this snake and watch it wind  
 In knots about my staff and concentrate  
 Until you know it! For I will mutate  
 Into its shape, but larger, as would be  
 Appropriate for any deity.'  
 The god departed and sleep flew away,  
 As did the stars, then dawned another day.  
 Unsure, the leaders gathered at the shrine  
 And begged the god to show them a divine 710  
 Token of where he wished to dwell. As they  
 Had scarcely ceased their prayer, in gold array  
 The god appeared before them as a snake,  
 Which started upright and began to make  
 A hissing sound. The doors and roof he rocked,  
 The statue and the floor. They all were shocked  
 As with his flashing eyes he looked about.  
 The priest, though, knew him well and so cried out,  
 His sacred locks tied up in a white band,  
 'Behold! It is the god! Be silent and 720  
 Think holy thoughts! O god most beautiful,  
 Re-echo the priest's words and bring to us  
 Your aid!' Then all adored the deity,  
 Repeating what he'd uttered piously.  
 In giving their report. He shook his crest  
 And nodded to agree with their request,  
 Hissing three times, his forked tongue flickering,  
 And glided down the steps, abandoning  
 The shrine, then looking back at it, and he  
 Saluted his old home and sanctuary. 730  
 Beset with flowers strewn for him, he wound  
 In labyrinthine course along the ground.  
 He reached the harbour, and it seemed that he

Dismissed his true and faithful coterie.  
He calmly boarded, and the vessel showed  
That it was carrying a holy load.  
With joy they sacrificed a bull beside  
The harbour and around the ship they tied  
Garlands of flowers and then from the strand  
Let loose the ropes and set sail from the land. 740  
And as the ship was urged by a soft breeze,  
Within the stern the deity took his ease,  
Coils rising high, and gazed down at the sea,  
And in six days the shores of Italy  
He reached. And after that the vessel bore  
Its precious load beyond Lacinia's shore.  
Where Juno's noble temple stands. Then he  
Passed by Scylaceum and presently  
Iapygia and on the larboard side  
The vessel managed to go far and wide 750  
Past Amphisia and Cocinthia, since they  
Were rocky. Past Romethium his way  
He made, and Caulon and Narycia, too.  
Pelorus' narrow strait he travelled through  
And past Aeolus' principality  
And then the copper mines of Temese,  
Leucosia and gentle Paestum, where  
Rose-gardens were in bloom. And then from there  
To Capreae, around Minerva's cape,  
And then Surrentum, famous for the grape, 760  
And Herculaneum and Stabiae,  
Parthenope, where people go to lie  
In idleness, and then to Cumae, where  
Stands Sibyl's temple. After leaving there  
They passed Baiae, Litternum's lentisk trees  
And the Volturnus, dragging quantities  
Of sand, then Simoessa, where you'll find  
White doves, and then Minturnae, so unkind  
To people's health, and Caieta, the name  
Of Aeneas's nurse, for there he came 770  
To bury her, and then Antiphates' land,  
Then marshy Trachas and Aeaea and  
Antium's rocky shore. The storm-tossed sea  
Compelled the ship, her sails spread totally,  
To sail into the port. The god unwound  
His coils and glided out along the ground.  
He entered Apollo's temple near the shore  
And, when the sea was quietened once more,  
Having enjoyed his father's company,  
He left, dragging his body sinuously. 800  
He climbed up to the sternpost where he laid  
His head to take his rest, and there he stayed



Until the vessel passed by Castrum and  
 Lavinium's sacred homes upon the strand,  
 Where the river Tiber flows into the sea.  
 The Romans all came running hurriedly -  
 Mothers and fathers, even those who care  
 For Vesta's fire. Glad cries through the air  
 Were heard, and as the ship was travelling  
 Upstream, there came the sound of crackling 810  
 As incense burned on both banks. Everywhere  
 The fumes of sacred perfume filled the air.  
 The victims bled hot blood; the deity  
 Entered the world's new capital; then he,  
 Lifting his head up high, looked far and near  
 In hopes that some fit dwelling would appear.  
 The river splits in two and flows around  
 The Island, flowing past the middle ground.  
 He left the vessel, taking on again  
 His holy likeness, bringing to all men 820  
 An end to grief, and made them vigorous.  
 Though as a stranger Aesculapius  
 Came hither, Caesar is a deity  
 In his own city. In tranquillity  
 And war outstanding, he became a star,  
 His deeds no more ennobling than are  
 His son's. Was he more glorious when he  
 Subdued the Britons, by their sheltering sea  
 Guarded; or conquered Egypt when his fleet  
 He led along the Nile, beneath our feet 830  
 Treading Numidia, Juba and Pontus  
 Of Mithridates' fame, victorious,  
 Deserving greater fame, than when his son  
 Became the sovereign of everyone  
 On earth? In order that no mortal seed  
 Produced our emperor, there was a need  
 For Caesar to be deified. And when  
 Aeneas' mother Venus saw this, then  
 Saw that there was an armed conspiracy  
 Against her high priest, she immediately 840  
 Turned pale and said to every god, 'Behold  
 The treachery that's destined to unfold  
 Before us! Look at all that's left to me  
 Of Trojan Iulus! Will I always be  
 The only one to suffer? I was first  
 Wounded by Diomedes and then cursed  
 With Troy's defeat, and now my son I see  
 Has been compelled to wander endlessly,  
 Storm-tossed and visiting the land below  
 And waging war on Turnus (or Juno, 850  
 As I should say) Whyever should I face

In memory the ill luck of my race?  
 I may not look behind me at the past  
 Due to the present fear. I am aghast  
 At all the wicked swords prepared to kill  
 Caesar. I pray you now, forbid this ill!  
 She spoke out with such anxious words as these,  
 Praying to all the other deities -  
 In vain! Though moved, the gods could not gainsay  
 The ancient sisters' iron laws, so they 860  
 Gave portents of approaching woe instead.  
 Resounding arms were heard, it has been said,  
 From jet-black clouds and clarions across  
 The sky to warn them of the tragic loss.  
 The sun's sad face gave out a livid light  
 Upon the whole world shuddering with fright,  
 And torches seemed ignited in the sky  
 And often drops of blood fell from on high.  
 The morning star with rust-black spots was spattered  
 And the moon's chariot with blood was splattered. 870  
 The Stygian owl hooted lugubriously  
 Hither and yon; statues of ivory  
 Began to weep; many a warning word  
 Throughout the sacred thickets could be heard.  
 No single sacrifice was promising,  
 The fibres showing bad times threatening,  
 The livers cut. From the Forum, so they say,  
 And homes and temples could be heard the bay  
 \Of dogs all through the night. The silent dead  
 Wandered abroad and earthquakes caused much dread, 880  
 Shaking the city. The conspiracy,  
 However, could not by a prophecy  
 Be stopped. Into a temple swords were brought,  
 Because the Senate House, it had been thought,  
 Alone was fit for such a crime. Her breast  
 Venus now beat, aiming to do her best  
 To keep concealed within a cloud the last  
 Of great Aeneas' line, as in the past  
 From cruel Menelaus she secreted  
 Paris and, lest Aeneas be defeated 890  
 By Diomedes' sword, concealed him, too.  
 But Jove, her father, said to her, 'Do you  
 Alone attempt to change the fixed decrees  
 Of Fate, my daughter? You may, if you please,  
 See the three sisters' home and witness there  
 A list of how posterity will fare -  
 Iron and brass, produced laboriously,  
 They are unchanged through all eternity.  
 No thunder-shocks will weaken them, and they  
 Are free from all destruction: they display 900

The destinies of those who'll follow you,  
 Engraved in deathless adamant It's true -  
 I've read them and paid heed to them with care.  
 I will repeat them so that we may share  
 The contents. He for whom you care has seen  
 The life that here upon this earth has been  
 His destiny. You, with his son, as heir  
 To his estate, are destined now to bear  
 The burden and make him a deity.  
 Meanwhile, Augustus, Caesar's progeny, 910  
 Will take revenge on all of those who slew  
 His father and have our assistance, too,  
 In all his battles. Mutina, which he  
 Is to besiege and overcome, will be  
 Compelled to sue for peace. Pharsalia's plain  
 Will dread him and Philippi he will drain  
 Of blood once more, and Pompey, known as 'Great',  
 Off the Sicilian coast will meet the fate  
 Of his defeat, and, trusting fruitlessly  
 In being wed to Roman Antony, 920  
 The Egyptian queen will fall and Canopus  
 Will yield. Why mention all the barbarous  
 Nations that are on either ocean's strand?  
 Wherever there is habitable land,  
 It will be his. He'll even own the sea!  
 And when we languish in tranquillity,  
 He'll turn his mind to lay administration  
 And focus on impartial legislation.  
 By his example he will regulate  
 His people's conduct. At a later date 930  
 He'll give command to those whom he begot  
 To govern Rome, assuming thus the lot  
 That he had borne. He'll not make his ascent  
 To have his home amid the firmament  
 Until he reaches Nestor's years. Now take  
 Great Caesar's spirit from his corpse and make  
 A star of it that, as a god, he might  
 Look down from Heaven and enjoy the sight  
 Of Capitol and Forum!' Instantly  
 Kind Venus, though impossible to see, 940  
 Stood in the Senate-House and deftly caught  
 His spirit in her hands before it sought  
 The empty air. She saw his spirit turn  
 A blazing hue and as she felt it burn  
 She set it free and watched it as it fled  
 To Heaven, leaving trails of fiery red  
 Beyond the moon. There Julius confessed  
 The younger Caesar's exploits were the best  
 Of all, exceeding his. The young man, though,

Refused to let the world think this was so. 950  
Fame, free of man's decrees, though, disagreed.  
By this same token Atreus had to cede  
To Agamemnon, Aegeus to Theseus,  
Achilles overshadowing Peleus,  
Jove Saturn, for the former in the sky  
Controls the three-formed world from up on high:  
Meanwhile, Augustus rules the earth below.  
Gods, who rescued Aeneas long ago,  
When fire and sword gave way on every side  
To him, you heroes who've been deified 960  
In Italy, and Mars and Romulus  
And Vesta and Diana and Phoebus,  
Jove and all other gods, to whom I pray,  
As poets should, I beg you that the day  
When great Augustus leaves the earth that he  
Now rules and mounts to Heaven's heights may be  
Postponed. My mighty work is now complete,  
Which Jupiter's vexation can't unseat,  
Nor fire nor sword nor time can sweep away.  
Whenever it is fated, let that day  
Arrive and take me – the best part of me  
Will then be borne to immortality. 970  
In lands which Roman rule has civilized  
On people's lips will be eulogized.  
If we can trust a poet's prophecy,  
I'm sure that I will live eternally.