
Metamorphoses Book 1, translated by Brookes More

INVOCATION

[1] My soul is wrought to sing of forms transformed to bodies new and strange! Immortal Gods inspire my heart, for ye have changed yourselves and all things you have changed! Oh lead my song in smooth and measured strains, from olden days when earth began to this completed time!

CREATION OF THE COSMOS

[5] Before the ocean and the earth appeared—before the skies had overspread them all—the face of Nature in a vast expanse was naught but Chaos uniformly waste. It was a rude and undeveloped mass, that nothing made except a ponderous weight; and all discordant elements confused, were there congested in a shapeless heap. As yet the sun afforded earth no light, nor did the moon renew her crescent horns; the earth was not suspended in the air exactly balanced by her heavy weight. Not far along the margin of the shores had Amphitrite stretched her lengthened arms,—for all the land was mixed with sea and air. The land was soft, the sea unfit to sail, the atmosphere opaque, to naught was given a proper form, in everything was strife, and all was mingled in a seething mass—with hot the cold parts strove, and wet with dry and soft with hard, and weight with empty void.

[21] But God, or kindly Nature, ended strife—he cut the land from skies, the sea from land, the heavens ethereal from material air; and when were all evolved from that dark mass he bound the fractious parts in tranquil peace. The fiery element of convex heaven leaped from the mass devoid of dragging weight, and chose the summit arch to which the air as next in quality was next in place. The earth more dense attracted grosser parts and moved by gravity sank underneath; and last of all the wide surrounding waves in deeper channels rolled around the globe.

[32] And when this God—which one is yet unknown—had carved asunder that discordant mass, had thus reduced it to its elements, that every part should equally combine, when time began He rounded out the earth and moulded it to form a mighty globe. Then poured He forth the deeps and gave command that they should billow in the rapid winds, that they should compass every shore of earth. he also added fountains, pools and lakes, and bound with shelving banks the slanting streams, which partly are absorbed and partly join the boundless ocean. Thus received amid the wide expanse of uncontrolled waves, they beat the shores instead of crooked banks. At His command the boundless plains extend, the valleys are depressed, the woods are clothed in green, the stony mountains rise. And as the heavens are intersected on the right by two broad

zones, by two that cut the left, and by a fifth consumed with ardent heat, with such a number did the careful God mark off the compassed weight, and thus the earth received as many climes.— Such heat consumes the middle zone that none may dwell therein; and two extremes are covered with deep snow; and two are placed betwixt the hot and cold, which mixed together give a temperate clime; and over all the atmosphere suspends with weight proportioned to the fiery sky, exactly as the weight of earth compares with weight of water.

[52] And He ordered mist to gather in the air and spread the clouds. He fixed the thunders that disturb our souls, and brought the lightning on destructive winds that also waft the cold. Nor did the great Artificer permit these mighty winds to blow unbounded in the pathless skies, but each discordant brother fixed in space, although His power can scarce restrain their rage to rend the universe. At His command to far Aurora, Eurus took his way, to Nabath, Persia, and that mountain range first gilded by the dawn; and Zephyr's flight was towards the evening star and peaceful shores, warm with the setting sun; and Boreas invaded Scythia and the northern snows; and Auster wafted to the distant south where clouds and rain encompass his abode.—and over these He fixed the liquid sky, devoid of weight and free from earthly dross.

[69] And scarcely had He separated these and fixed their certain bounds, when all the stars, which long were pressed and hidden in the mass, began to gleam out from the plains of heaven, and traversed, with the Gods, bright ether fields: and lest some part might be bereft of life the gleaming waves were filled with twinkling fish; the earth was covered with wild animals; the agitated air was filled with birds.

[76] But one more perfect and more sanctified, a being capable of lofty thought, intelligent to rule, was wanting still man was created! Did the Unknown God designing then a better world make man of seed divine? or did Prometheus take the new soil of earth (that still contained some godly element of Heaven's Life) and use it to create the race of man; first mingling it with water of new streams; so that his new creation, upright man, was made in image of commanding Gods? On earth the brute creation bends its gaze, but man was given a lofty countenance and was commanded to behold the skies; and with an upright face may view the stars:—and so it was that shapeless clay put on the form of man till then unknown to earth.

THE FOUR AGES OF MAN

[89] First was the Golden Age. Then rectitude spontaneous in the heart prevailed, and faith. Avengers were not seen, for laws unframed were all unknown and needless. Punishment and fear of penalties existed not. No harsh decrees were fixed on brazen plates. No suppliant multitude the countenance of Justice feared, averting, for they dwelt without a judge in peace. Descended not the steep, shorn from its height, the lofty pine, cleaving the trackless waves of alien shores, nor distant realms were known to wandering men. The towns were not entrenched for time of war;

they had no brazen trumpets, straight, nor horns of curving brass, nor helmets, shields nor swords. There was no thought of martial pomp—secure a happy multitude enjoyed repose. Then of her own accord the earth produced a store of every fruit. The harrow touched her not, nor did the plowshare wound her fields. And man content with given food, and none compelling, gathered arbuter fruits and wild strawberries on the mountain sides, and ripe blackberries clinging to the bush, and corns and sweet acorns on the ground, down fallen from the spreading tree of Jove. Eternal Spring! Soft breathing zephyrs soothed and warmly cherished buds and blooms, produced without a seed. The valleys though unplowed gave many fruits; the fields though not renewed white glistened with the heavy bearded wheat: rivers flowed milk and nectar, and the trees, the very oak trees, then gave honey of themselves.

[113] When Saturn had been banished into night and all the world was ruled by Jove supreme, the Silver Age, though not so good as gold but still surpassing yellow brass, prevailed. Jove first reduced to years the Primal Spring, by him divided into periods four, unequal,—summer, autumn, winter, spring.—then glowed with tawny heat the parched air, or pendent icicles in winter froze and man stopped crouching in crude caverns, while he built his homes of tree rods, bark entwined. Then were the cereals planted in long rows, and bullocks groaned beneath the heavy yoke.

[125] The third Age followed, called The Age of Bronze, when cruel people were inclined to arms but not to impious crimes. And last of all the ruthless and hard Age of Iron prevailed, from which malignant vein great evil sprung; and modesty and faith and truth took flight, and in their stead deceits and snares and frauds and violence and wicked love of gain, succeeded.—Then the sailor spread his sails to winds unknown, and keels that long had stood on lofty mountains pierced uncharted waves. Surveyors anxious marked with metes and bounds the lands, created free as light and air: nor need the rich ground furnish only crops, and give due nourishment by right required,—they penetrated to the bowels of earth and dug up wealth, bad cause of all our ills,—rich ores which long ago the earth had hid and deep removed to gloomy Stygian caves: and soon destructive iron and harmful gold were brought to light; and War, which uses both, came forth and shook with sanguinary grip his clashing arms. Rapacity broke forth—the guest was not protected from his host, the father in law from his own son in law; even brothers seldom could abide in peace. The husband threatened to destroy his wife, and she her husband: horrid step dames mixed the deadly henbane: eager sons inquired their fathers, ages. Piety was slain: and last of all the virgin deity, Astraea vanished from the blood-stained earth.

THE GIANTS

[151] And lest ethereal heights should long remain less troubled than the earth, the throne of Heaven was threatened by the Giants; and they piled mountain on mountain to the lofty stars. But Jove, omnipotent, shot thunderbolts through Mount Olympus, and he overturned from Ossa huge,

enormous Pelion. And while these dreadful bodies lay overwhelmed in their tremendous bulk, (so fame reports) the Earth was reeking with the copious blood of her gigantic sons; and thus replete with moisture she infused the steaming gore with life renewed. So that a monument of such ferocious stock should be retained, she made that offspring in the shape of man; but this new race alike despised the Gods, and by the greed of savage slaughter proved a sanguinary birth.

LYCAON TRANSFORMED INTO A WOLF

[163] When, from his throne supreme, the Son of Saturn viewed their deeds, he deeply groaned: and calling to his mind the loathsome feast Lycaon had prepared, a recent deed not common to report, his soul conceived great anger—worthy Jove—and he convened a council. No delay detained the chosen Gods.

[168] When skies are clear a path is well defined on high, which men, because so white, have named the Milky Way. It makes a passage for the deities and leads to mansions of the Thunder God, to Jove's imperial home. On either side of its wide way the noble Gods are seen, inferior Gods in other parts abide, but there the potent and renowned of Heaven have fixed their homes.—It is a glorious place, our most audacious verse might designate the “Palace of High Heaven.”

[177] When the Gods were seated, therefore, in its marble halls the King of all above the throng sat high, and leaning on his ivory scepter, thrice, and once again he shook his awful locks, wherewith he moved the earth, and seas and stars,— and thus indignantly began to speak: “The time when serpent footed giants strove to fix their hundred arms on captive Heaven, not more than this event could cause alarm for my dominion of the universe. Although it was a savage enemy, yet warred we with a single source derived of one. Now must I utterly destroy this mortal race wherever Nereus roars around the world. Yea, by the Infernal Streams that glide through Stygian groves beneath the world, I swear it. Every method has been tried. The knife must cut immedicable wounds, lest maladies infect untainted parts. Beneath my sway are demi gods and fauns, nymphs, rustic deities, sylvans of the hills, satyrs;—all these, unworthy Heaven's abodes, we should at least permit to dwell on earth which we to them bequeathed. What think ye, Gods, is safety theirs when I, your sovereign lord, the Thunder-bolt Controller, am ensnared by fierce Lycaon?”

[199] Ardent in their wrath, the astonished Gods demand revenge overtake this miscreant; he who dared commit such crimes. 'Twas even thus when raged that impious band to blot the Roman name in sacred blood of Caesar, sudden apprehensive fears of ruin absolute astonished man, and all the world convulsed. Nor is the love thy people bear to thee, Augustus, less than these displayed to Jupiter whose voice and gesture all the murmuring host restrained: and as indignant clamour ceased, suppressed by regnant majesty, Jove once again broke the deep silence with imperial words: “Dismiss your cares; he paid the penalty however all the crime and punishment

now learn from this:—An infamous report of this unholy age had reached my ears, and wishing it were false, I sloped my course from high Olympus, and—although a God—disguised in human form I viewed the world. It would delay us to recount the crimes unnumbered, for reports were less than truth.

[216] "I traversed Maenalus where fearful dens abound, over Lycaeus, wintry slopes of pine tree groves, across Cyllene steep; and as the twilight warned of night's approach, I stopped in that Arcadian tyrant's realms and entered his inhospitable home:—and when I showed his people that a God had come, the lowly prayed and worshiped me, but this Lycaon mocked their pious vows and scoffing said; 'A fair experiment will prove the truth if this be god or man.' and he prepared to slay me in the night,—to end my slumbers in the sleep of death. So made he merry with his impious proof; but not content with this he cut the throat of a Molossian hostage sent to him, and partly softened his still quivering limbs in boiling water, partly roasted them on fires that burned beneath. And when this flesh was served to me on tables, I destroyed his dwelling and his worthless Household Gods, with thunder bolts avenging. Terror struck he took to flight, and on the silent plains is howling in his vain attempts to speak; he raves and rages and his greedy jaws, desiring their accustomed slaughter, turn against the sheep – still eager for their blood. His vesture separates in shaggy hair, his arms are changed to legs; and as a wolf he has the same grey locks, the same hard face, the same bright eyes, the same ferocious look.

THE GREAT DELUGE

[240] "Thus fell one house, but not one house alone deserved to perish; over all the earth ferocious deeds prevail,—all men conspire in evil. Let them therefore feel the weight of dreadful penalties so justly earned, for such hath my unchanging will ordained."

[244] With exclamations some approved the words of Jove and added fuel to his wrath, while others gave assent: but all deplored and questioned the estate of earth deprived of mortals. Who could offer frankincense upon the altars? Would he suffer earth to be despoiled by hungry beasts of prey? Such idle questions of the state of man the King of Gods forbade, but granted soon to people earth with race miraculous, unlike the first.

[253] And now his thunder bolts would Jove wide scatter, but he feared the flames, unnumbered, sacred ether might ignite and burn the axle of the universe: and he remembered in the scroll of fate, there is a time appointed when the sea and earth and Heavens shall melt, and fire destroy the universe of mighty labour wrought. Such weapons by the skill of Cyclops forged, for different punishment he laid aside—for straightway he preferred to overwhelm the mortal race beneath deep waves and storms from every raining sky.

[262] And instantly he shut the Northwind in Aeolian caves, and every other wind that might dispel the gathering clouds. He bade the Southwind blow:—the Southwind flies abroad with dripping wings, concealing in the gloom his awful face: the drenching rain descends from his wet beard and hoary locks; dark clouds are on his brows and from his wings and garments drip the dews: his great hands press the overhanging clouds; loudly the thunders roll; the torrents pour; Iris, the messenger of Juno, clad in many coloured raiment, upward draws the steaming moisture to renew the clouds. The standing grain is beaten to the ground, the rustic's crops are scattered in the mire, and he bewails the long year's fruitless toil.

[274] The wrath of Jove was not content with powers that emanate from Heaven; he brought to aid his azure brother, lord of flowing waves, who called upon the Rivers and the Streams: and when they entered his impearled abode, Neptune, their ancient ruler, thus began; “A long appeal is needless; pour ye forth in rage of power; open up your fountains; rush over obstacles; let every stream pour forth in boundless floods.” Thus he commands, and none dissenting all the River Gods return, and opening up their fountains roll tumultuous to the deep unfruitful sea.

[283] And Neptune with his trident smote the Earth, which trembling with unwonted throes heaved up the sources of her waters bare; and through her open plains the rapid rivers rushed resistless, onward bearing the waving grain, the budding groves, the houses, sheep and men,—and holy temples, and their sacred urns. The mansions that remained, resisting vast and total ruin, deepening waves concealed and whelmed their tottering turrets in the flood and whirling gulf. And now one vast expanse, the land and sea were mingled in the waste of endless waves—a sea without a shore.

[293] One desperate man seized on the nearest hill; another sitting in his curved boat, plied the long oar where he was wont to plow; another sailed above his grain, above his hidden dwelling; and another hooked a fish that sported in a leafy elm. Perchance an anchor dropped in verdant fields, or curving keels were pushed through tangled vines; and where the gracile goat enjoyed the green, unsightly seals reposed. Beneath the waves were wondering Nereids, viewing cities, groves and houses. Dolphins darting mid the trees, meshed in the twisted branches, beat against the shaken oak trees. There the sheep, affrayed, swim with the frightened wolf, the surging waves float tigers and lions: availeth naught his lightning shock the wild boar, nor avails the stag's fleet footed speed. The wandering bird, seeking umbrageous groves and hidden vales, with wearied pinion droops into the sea. The waves increasing surge above the hills, and rising waters dash on mountain tops. Myriads by the waves are swept away, and those the waters spare, for lack of food, starvation slowly overcomes at last.

[313] A fruitful land and fair but now submerged beneath a wilderness of rising waves, 'Twixt Oeta and Aonia, Phocis lies, where through the clouds Parnassus' summits twain point upward to the

stars, unmeasured height, save which the rolling billows covered all: there in a small and fragile boat, arrived, Deucalion and the consort of his couch, prepared to worship the Corycian Nymphs, the mountain deities, and Themis kind, who in that age revealed in oracles the voice of fate. As he no other lived so good and just, as she no other feared the Gods.

[324] When Jupiter beheld the globe in ruin covered, swept with wasting waves, and when he saw one man of myriads left, one helpless woman left of myriads lone, both innocent and worshiping the Gods, he scattered all the clouds; he blew away the great storms by the cold northwind. Once more the earth appeared to heaven and the skies appeared to earth. The fury of the main abated, for the Ocean ruler laid his trident down and pacified the waves, and called on azure Triton.—Triton arose above the waving seas, his shoulders mailed in purple shells.—He bade the Triton blow, blow in his sounding shell, the wandering streams and rivers to recall with signal known: a hollow wreathed trumpet, tapering wide and slender stemmed, the Triton took amain and wound the pearly shell at midmost sea. Betwixt the rising and the setting suns the wildered notes resounded shore to shore, and as it touched his lips, wet with the brine beneath his dripping beard, sounded retreat: and all the waters of the land and sea obeyed. Their fountains heard and ceased to flow; their waves subsided; hidden hills uprose; emerged the shores of ocean; channels filled with flowing streams; the soil appeared; the land increased its surface as the waves decreased: and after length of days the trees put forth, with ooze on bending boughs, their naked tops.

[348] And all the wasted globe was now restored, but as he viewed the vast and silent world Deucalion wept and thus to Pyrrha spoke; “O sister! wife! alone of woman left! My kindred in descent and origin! Dearest companion of my marriage bed, doubly endeared by deepening dangers borne,—of all the dawn and eve behold of earth, but you and I are left—for the deep sea has kept the rest! And what prevents the tide from overwhelming us? Remaining clouds affright us. How could you endure your fears if you alone were rescued by this fate, and who would then console your bitter grief? Oh be assured, if you were buried in the waves, that I would follow you and be with you! Oh would that by my father's art I might restore the people, and inspire this clay to take the form of man. Alas, the Gods decreed and only we are living!”, Thus Deucalion's plaint to Pyrrha;—and they wept. And after he had spoken, they resolved to ask the aid of sacred oracles,—and so they hastened to Cephissian waves which rolled a turbid flood in channels known. Thence when their robes and brows were sprinkled well, they turned their footsteps to the goddess' fane: its gables were befouled with reeking moss and on its altars every fire was cold. But when the twain had reached the temple steps they fell upon the earth, inspired with awe, and kissed the cold stone with their trembling lips, and said; “If righteous prayers appease the Gods, and if the wrath of high celestial powers may thus be turned, declare, O Themis! whence and what the art may raise humanity? O gentle goddess help the dying world!”

[381] Moved by their supplications, she replied; “Depart from me and veil your brows; ungird your robes, and cast behind you as you go, the bones of your great mother.” Long they stood in dumb amazement: Pyrrha, first of voice, refused the mandate and with trembling lips implored the goddess to forgive—she feared to violate her mother's bones and vex her sacred spirit. Often pondered they the words involved in such obscurity, repeating oft: and thus Deucalion to Epimetheus' daughter uttered speech of soothing import; “ Oracles are just and urge not evil deeds, or naught avails the skill of thought. Our mother is the Earth, and I may judge the stones of earth are bones that we should cast behind us as we go.”

[395] And although Pyrrha by his words was moved she hesitated to comply; and both amazed doubted the purpose of the oracle, but deemed no harm to come of trial. They, descending from the temple, veiled their heads and loosed their robes and threw some stones behind them. It is much beyond belief, were not receding ages witness, hard and rigid stones assumed a softer form, enlarging as their brittle nature changed to milder substance,—till the shape of man appeared, imperfect, faintly outlined first, as marble statue chiseled in the rough. The soft moist parts were changed to softer flesh, the hard and brittle substance into bones, the veins retained their ancient name. And now the Gods supreme ordained that every stone Deucalion threw should take the form of man, and those by Pyrrha cast should woman's form assume: so are we hardy to endure and prove by toil and deeds from what we sprung.

THE FIRST PYTHIAN GAMES

[416] And after this the Earth spontaneous produced the world of animals, when all remaining moistures of the mirey fens fermented in the sun, and fruitful seeds in soils nutritious grew to shapes ordained. So when the seven streamed Nile from oozy fields returneth duly to her ancient bed, the sun's ethereal rays impregn the slime, that haply as the peasants turn the soil they find strange animals unknown before: some in the moment of their birth, and some deprived of limbs, imperfect; often part alive and part of slime inanimate are fashioned in one body. Heat combined with moisture so conceives and life results from these two things. For though the flames may be the foes of water, everything that lives begins in humid vapour, and it seems discordant concord is the means of life. When Earth, spread over with diluvian ooze, felt heat ethereal from the glowing sun, unnumbered species to the light she gave, and gave to being many an ancient form, or monster new created.

[438] Unwilling she created thus enormous Python.—Thou unheard of serpent spread so far athwart the side of a vast mountain, didst fill with fear the race of new created man. The God that bears the bow (a weapon used till then only to hunt the deer and agile goat) destroyed the monster with a myriad darts, and almost emptied all his quiver, till envenomed gore oozed forth from livid wounds. Lest in a dark oblivion time should hide the fame of this achievement, sacred sports he instituted, from the Python called “The Pythian Games.” In these the happy youth who

proved victorious in the chariot race, running and boxing, with an honoured crown of oak leaves was enwreathed. The laurel then was not created, wherefore Phoebus, bright and godlike, beauteous with his flowing hair, was wont to wreath his brows with various leaves.

DAPHNE AND PHOEBUS

[452] Daphne, the daughter of a River God was first beloved by Phoebus, the great God of glorious light. 'Twas not a cause of chance but out of Cupid's vengeful spite that she was fated to torment the lord of light. For Phoebus, proud of Python's death, beheld that impish god of Love upon a time when he was bending his diminished bow, and voicing his contempt in anger said; "What, wanton boy, are mighty arms to thee, great weapons suited to the needs of war? The bow is only for the use of those large deities of heaven whose strength may deal wounds, mortal, to the savage beasts of prey; and who courageous overcome their foes.—it is a proper weapon to the use of such as slew with arrows Python, huge, whose pestilential carcase vast extent covered. Content thee with the flames thy torch enkindles (fires too subtle for my thought) and leave to me the glory that is mine." To him, undaunted, Venus, son replied; "O Phoebus, thou canst conquer all the world with thy strong bow and arrows, but with this small arrow I shall pierce thy vaunting breast! And by the measure that thy might exceeds the broken powers of thy defeated foes, so is thy glory less than mine."

[466] No more he said, but with his wings expanded thence flew lightly to Parnassus, lofty peak. There, from his quiver he plucked arrows twain, most curiously wrought of different art; one love exciting, one repelling love. The dart of love was glittering, gold and sharp, the other had a blunted tip of lead; and with that dull lead dart he shot the Nymph, but with the keen point of the golden dart he pierced the bone and marrow of the God. Immediately the one with love was filled, the other, scouting at the thought of love, rejoiced in the deep shadow of the woods, and as the virgin Phoebe (who denies the joys of love and loves the joys of chase) a maiden's fillet bound her flowing hair,—and her pure mind denied the love of man. Beloved and wooed she wandered silent paths, for never could her modesty endure the glance of man or listen to his love. Her grieving father spoke to her, "Alas, my daughter, I have wished a son in law, and now you owe a grandchild to the joy of my old age." But Daphne only hung her head to hide her shame. The nuptial torch seemed criminal to her. She even clung, caressing, with her arms around his neck, and pled, "My dearest father let me live a virgin always, for remember Jove did grant it to Diana at her birth."

[488] But though her father promised her desire, her loveliness prevailed against their will; for, Phoebus when he saw her waxed distraught, and filled with wonder his sick fancy raised delusive hopes, and his own oracles deceived him.—As the stubble in the field flares up, or as the stacked wheat is consumed by flames, enkindled from a spark or torch the chance pedestrian may neglect at dawn; so was the bosom of the god consumed, and so desire flamed in his stricken heart. He

saw her bright hair waving on her neck;—"How beautiful if properly arranged!" He saw her eyes like stars of sparkling fire, her lips for kissing sweetest, and her hands and fingers and her arms; her shoulders white as ivory;—and whatever was not seen more beautiful must be.

[502] Swift as the wind from his pursuing feet the virgin fled, and neither stopped nor heeded as he called; "O Nymph! O Daphne! I entreat thee stay, it is no enemy that follows thee—why, so the lamb leaps from the raging wolf, and from the lion runs the timid faun, and from the eagle flies the trembling dove, all hasten from their natural enemy but I alone pursue for my dear love. Alas, if thou shouldst fall and mar thy face, or tear upon the bramble thy soft thighs, or should I prove unwilling cause of pain! The wilderness is rough and dangerous, and I beseech thee be more careful—I will follow slowly.—Ask of whom thou wilt, and thou shalt learn that I am not a churl—I am no mountain dweller of rude caves, nor clown compelled to watch the sheep and goats; and neither canst thou know from whom thy feet fly fearful, or thou wouldst not leave me thus. The Delphic Land, the Pataraean Realm, Claros and Tenedos revere my name, and my immortal sire is Jupiter. The present, past and future are through me in sacred oracles revealed to man, and from my harp the harmonies of sound are borrowed by their bards to praise the Gods. My bow is certain, but a flaming shaft surpassing mine has pierced my heart—untouched before. The art of medicine is my invention, and the power of herbs; but though the world declare my useful works there is no herb to medicate my wound, and all the arts that save have failed their lord."

[525] But even as he made his plaint, the Nymph with timid footsteps fled from his approach, and left him to his murmurs and his pain. Lovely the virgin seemed as the soft wind exposed her limbs, and as the zephyrs fond fluttered amid her garments, and the breeze fanned lightly in her flowing hair. She seemed most lovely to his fancy in her flight; and mad with love he followed in her steps, and silent hastened his increasing speed. As when the greyhound sees the frightened hare flit over the plain:—With eager nose outstretched, impetuous, he rushes on his prey, and gains upon her till he treads her feet, and almost fastens in her side his fangs; but she, whilst dreading that her end is near, is suddenly delivered from her fright; so was it with the god and virgin: one with hope pursued, the other fled in fear; and he who followed, borne on wings of love, permitted her no rest and gained on her, until his warm breath mingled in her hair. Her strength spent, pale and faint, with pleading eyes she gazed upon her father's waves and prayed, "Help me my father, if thy flowing streams have virtue! Cover me, O mother Earth! Destroy the beauty that has injured me, or change the body that destroys my life." Before her prayer was ended, torpor seized on all her body, and a thin bark closed around her gentle bosom, and her hair became as moving leaves; her arms were changed to waving branches, and her active feet as clinging roots were fastened to the ground—her face was hidden with encircling leaves.—

[553] Phoebus admired and loved the graceful tree, (For still, though changed, her slender form remained) and with his right hand lingering on the trunk he felt her bosom throbbing in the bark.

He clung to trunk and branch as though to twine. His form with hers, and fondly kissed the wood that shrank from every kiss. And thus the God; "Although thou canst not be my bride, thou shalt be called my chosen tree, and thy green leaves, O Laurel! shall forever crown my brows, be wreathed around my quiver and my lyre; the Roman heroes shall be crowned with thee, as long processions climb the Capitol and chanting throngs proclaim their victories; and as a faithful warden thou shalt guard the civic crown of oak leaves fixed between thy branches, and before Augustan gates. And as my youthful head is never shorn, so, also, shalt thou ever bear thy leaves unchanging to thy glory." Here the God, Phoebus Apollo, ended his lament, and unto him the Laurel bent her boughs, so lately fashioned; and it seemed to him her graceful nod gave answer to his love.

IO AND JUPITER

[567] There is a grove in Thessaly, enclosed on every side with crags, precipitous,—on which a forest grows—and this is called the Vale of Tempe—through this valley flows the River Peneus, white with foaming waves, that issue from the foot of Pindus, whence with sudden fall up gather steamy clouds that sprinkle mist upon the circling trees, and far away with mighty roar resound. It is the abode, the solitary home, that mighty River loves, where deep in gloom of rocky cavern, he resides and rules the flowing waters and the water nymphs abiding there. All rivers of that land now hasten thither, doubtful to console or flatter Daphne's parent: poplar crowned Sperchios, swift Enipeus and the wild Amphrysos, old Apidanus and Aneas, with all their kindred streams that wandering maze and wearied seek the ocean. Inachus alone is absent, hidden in his cave obscure, deepening his waters with his tears—most wretchedly bewailing, for he deems his daughter lost. If she may live or roam a spirit in the nether shades he dares not even guess but dreads.

[588] For Jove not long before had seen her while returning from her father's stream, and said; "O virgin, worthy of immortal Jove, although some happy mortal's chosen bride,—behold these shades of overhanging trees, and seek their cool recesses while the sun is glowing in the height of middle skies—" and as he spoke he pointed out the groves—"But should the dens of wild beasts frighten you, with safety you may enter the deep woods, conducted by a God—not with a God of small repute, but in the care of him who holds the heavenly scepter in his hand and fulminates the trackless thunder bolts.—forsake me not!" For while he spoke she fled, and swiftly left behind the pasture fields of Lerna, and Lyrcea's arbours, where the trees are planted thickly. But the God called forth a heavy shadow which involved the wide extended earth, and stopped her flight and ravished in that cloud her chastity.

[601] Meanwhile, the goddess Juno gazing down on earth's expanse, with wonder saw the clouds as dark as night enfold those middle fields while day was bright above. She was convinced the clouds were none composed of river mist nor raised from marshy fens. Suspicious now, from oft

detected amours of her spouse, she glanced around to find her absent lord, and quite convinced that he was far from heaven, she thus exclaimed; "This cloud deceives my mind, or Jove has wronged me." From the dome of heaven she glided down and stood upon the earth, and bade the clouds recede. But Jove had known the coming of his queen. He had transformed the lovely Io, so that she appeared a milk white heifer—formed so beautiful and fair that envious Juno gazed on her. She queried: "Whose? what herd? what pasture fields?" As if she guessed no knowledge of the truth. And Jupiter, false hearted, said the cow was earth begotten, for he feared his queen might make inquiry of the owner's name. Juno implored the heifer as a gift.—what then was left the Father of the Gods? 'Twould be a cruel thing to sacrifice his own beloved to a rival's wrath. Although refusal must imply his guilt the shame and love of her almost prevailed; but if a present of such little worth were now denied the sharer of his couch, the partner of his birth, 'twould prove indeed the earth born heifer other than she seemed—and so he gave his mistress up to her.

[622] Juno regardful of Jove's cunning art, lest he might change her to her human form, gave the unhappy heifer to the charge of Argus, Aristorides, whose head was circled with a hundred glowing eyes; of which but two did slumber in their turn whilst all the others kept on watch and guard. Whichever way he stood his gaze was fixed on Io—even if he turned away his watchful eyes on Io still remained. He let her feed by day; but when the sun was under the deep world he shut her up, and tied a rope around her tender neck. She fed upon green leaves and bitter herbs and on the cold ground slept—too often bare, she could not rest upon a cushioned couch. She drank the troubled waters. Hoping aid she tried to stretch imploring arms to Argus, but all in vain for now no arms remained; the sound of bellowing was all she heard, and she was frightened with her proper voice. Where former days she loved to roam and sport, she wandered by the banks of Inachus: there imaged in the stream she saw her horns and, startled, turned and fled. And Inachus and all her sister Naiads knew her not, although she followed them, they knew her not, although she suffered them to touch her sides and praise her. When the ancient Inachus gathered sweet herbs and offered them to her, she licked his hands, kissing her father's palms, nor could she more restrain her falling tears. If only words as well as tears would flow, she might implore his aid and tell her name and all her sad misfortune; but, instead, she traced in dust the letters of her name with cloven hoof; and thus her sad estate was known.

[650] "Ah wretched me! " her father cried; and as he clung around her horns and neck repeated while she groaned, "Ah wretched me! Art thou my daughter sought in every clime? When lost I could not grieve for thee as now that thou art found; thy sighs instead of words heave up from thy deep breast, thy longings give me answer. I prepared the nuptial torch and bridal chamber, in my ignorance, since my first hope was for a son in law; and then I dreamed of children from the match: but now the herd may furnish thee a mate, and all thy issue of the herd must be. Oh that a righteous death would end my grief!—it is a dreadful thing to be a God! Behold the lethal gate of death is shut against me, and my growing grief must last throughout eternity." While thus he

moaned came starry Argus there, and Io bore from her lamenting father. Thence he led his charge to other pastures; and removed from her, upon a lofty mountain sat, whence he could always watch her, undisturbed.

[668] The sovereign god no longer could endure to witness Io's woes. He called his son, whom Maia brightest of the Pleiades brought forth, and bade him slay the star eyed guard, Argus. He seized his sleep compelling wand and fastened waving wings on his swift feet, and deftly fixed his brimmed hat on his head:—Io, Mercury, the favoured son of Jove, descending to the earth from heaven's plains, put off his cap and wings,—though still retained his wand with which he drove through pathless wilds some stray she goats, and as a shepherd fared, piping on oaten reeds melodious tunes. Argus, delighted with the charming sound of this new art began; “Whoever thou art, sit with me on this stone beneath the trees in cooling shade, whilst browse the tended flock abundant herbs; for thou canst see the shade is fit for shepherds.”

[682] Wherefore, Mercury sat down beside the keeper and conversed of various things—passing the laggard hours.—then soothly piped he on the joined reeds to lull those ever watchful eyes asleep; but Argus strove his languor to subdue, and though some drowsy eyes might slumber, still were some that vigil kept. Again he spoke, (for the pipes were yet a recent art) “I pray thee tell what chance discovered these.”

[689] To him the God, “A famous Naiad dwelt among the Hamadryads, on the cold Arcadian summit Nonacris, whose name was Syrinx. Often she escaped the Gods, that wandered in the groves of sylvan shades, and often fled from Satyrs that pursued. Vowing virginity, in all pursuits she strove to emulate Diana's ways: and as that graceful goddess wears her robe, so Syrinx girded hers that one might well believe Diana there. Even though her bow were made of horn, Diana's wrought of gold, yet might she well deceive. “Now chanced it Pan. Whose head was girt with prickly pines, espied the Nymph returning from the Lycian Hill, and these words uttered he”—But Mercury refrained from further speech, and Pan's appeal remains untold. If he had told it all, the tale of Syrinx would have followed thus:—but she despised the prayers of Pan, and fled through pathless wilds until she had arrived the placid Ladon's sandy stream, whose waves prevented her escape. There she implored her sister Nymphs to change her form: and Pan, believing he had caught her, held instead some marsh reeds for the body of the Nymph; and while he sighed the moving winds began to utter plaintive music in the reeds, so sweet and voice like that poor Pan exclaimed; “Forever this discovery shall remain a sweet communion binding thee to me.”—and this explains why reeds of different length, when joined together by cementing wax, derive the name of Syrinx from the maid.

[712] Such words the bright god Mercury would say; but now perceiving Argus' eyes were dimmed in languorous doze, he hushed his voice and touched the drooping eyelids with his magic wand,

compelling slumber. Then without delay he struck the sleeper with his crescent sword, where neck and head unite, and hurled his head, blood dripping, down the rocks and rugged cliff. Low lies Argus: dark is the light of all his hundred eyes, his many orb'd lights extinguished in the universal gloom that night surrounds; but Saturn's daughter spread their glister on the feathers of her bird, emblazoning its tail with starry gems.

[724] Juno made haste, inflamed with towering rage, to vent her wrath on Io; and she raised in thought and vision of the Grecian girl a dreadful Fury. Stings invisible, and pitiless, she planted in her breast, and drove her wandering throughout the globe. The utmost limit of her laboured way, O Nile, thou didst remain. Which, having reached, and placed her tired knees on that river's edge, she laid her there, and as she raised her neck looked upward to the stars, and groaned and wept and mournfully bellowed: trying thus to plead, by all the means she had, that Jupiter might end her miseries. Repentant Jove embraced his consort, and entreated her to end the punishment: "Fear not," he said, "For she shall trouble thee no more." He spoke, and called on bitter Styx to hear his oath.

[738] And now imperial Juno, pacified, permitted Io to resume her form,—at once the hair fell from her snowy sides; the horns absorbed, her dilate orbs decreased; the opening of her jaws contracted; hands appeared and shoulders; and each transformed hoof became five nails. And every mark or form that gave the semblance of a heifer changed, except her fair white skin; and the glad Nymph was raised erect and stood upon her feet. But long the very thought of speech, that she might bellow as a heifer, filled her mind with terror, till the words so long forgot for some sufficient cause were tried once more.

[747] And since that time, the linen wearing throng of Egypt have adored her as a God; for they believe the seed of Jove prevailed; and when her time was due she bore to him a son called Epaphus; who also dwells in temples with his mother in that land. Now Phaethon, whose father was the Sun, was equal to his rival, Epaphus, in mind and years; and he was glad to boast of wonders, nor would yield to Epaphus for pride of Phoebus, his reputed sire. Unable to endure it, Io's son thus mocked him; "Poor, demented fellow, what will you not credit if your mother speaks, you are so puffed up with the fond conceit of your imagined sire, the Lord of Day."

[755] Shame crimsoned in his cheeks, but Phaethon withholding rage, reported all the taunts of Epaphus to Clymene his mother: "'Twill grieve you, mother, I, the bold and free, was silent; and it shames me to report this dark reproach remains unchallenged. Oh, if I am born of race divine, give proof of that illustrious descent and claim my right to Heaven." Around his mother's neck he drew his arms, and by the head of Merops, and by his own, and by the nuptial torch of his beloved sisters, he implored for some true token of his origin.

[765] Or moved by Phaethon's importuned words, or by the grievous charge, who might declare? She raised her arms to Heaven, and gazing full upon the broad sun said; "I swear to you by yonder orb, so radiant and bright, which both beholds and hears us while we speak, that you are his begotten son.—You are the child of that great light which sways the world: and if I have not spoken what is true, let not mine eyes behold his countenance, and let this fatal moment be the last that I shall look upon the light of day! Nor will it weary you, my son, to reach your father's dwelling; for the very place where he appears at dawn is near our land. Go, if it please you, and the very truth learn from your father." Instantly sprang forth exultant Phaethon. Overjoyed with words so welcome, he imagined he could leap and touch the skies. And so he passed his land of Ethiopia, and the Indies, hot beneath the tawny sun, and there he turned his footsteps to his father's Land of Dawn.

[READ MORE...](#)

Last modified on Monday, 04 September 2023 16:51