ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

[1] Veiled in a saffron mantle, through the air unmeasured, after the strange wedding, Hymen departed swiftly for Ciconian land; regardless and not listening to the voice of tuneful Orpheus. Truly Hymen there was present during the festivities of Orpheus and Eurydice, but gave no happy omen, neither hallowed words nor joyful glances; and the torch he held would only sputter, fill the eyes with smoke, and cause no blaze while waving. The result of that sad wedding, proved more terrible than such foreboding fates. While through the grass delighted Naiads wandered with the bride, a serpent struck its venomed tooth in her soft ankle—and she died.—

[11] After the bard of Rhodope had mourned, and filled the highs of heaven with the moans of his lament, determined also the dark underworld should recognize the misery of death, he dared descend by the Taenarian gate down to the gloomy Styx. And there passed through pale-glimmering phantoms, and the ghosts escaped from sepulchres, until he found Persephone and Pluto, master-king of shadow realms below: and then began to strike his tuneful lyre, to which he sang:—"O deities of this dark world beneath the earth! this shadowy underworld, to which all mortals must descend! If it can be called lawful, and if you will suffer speech of strict truth (all the winding ways of Falsity forbidden) I come not down here because of curiosity to see the glooms of Tartarus and have no thought to bind or strangle the three necks of the Medusan Monster, vile with snakes. But I have come, because my darling wife stepped on a viper that sent through her veins death-poison, cutting off her coming years. If able, I would bear it, I do not deny my effort—but the god of Love has conquered me—a god so kindly known in all the upper world. We are not sure he can be known so well in this deep world, but have good reason to conjecture he is not unknown here, and if old report almost forgotten, that you stole your wife is not a fiction, Love united you the same as others. By this Place of Fear this huge void and these vast and silent realms, renew the life-thread of Eurydice. All things are due to you, and though on earth it happens we may tarry a short while, slowly or swiftly we must go to one abode; and it will be our final home. Long and tenaciously you will possess unquestioned mastery of the human race. She also shall be yours to rule, when full of age she shall have lived the days of her allotted years. So I ask of you possession of her few days as a boon. But if the fates deny to me this prayer for my true wife, my constant mind must hold me always so that I can not return -- and you may triumph in the death of two!"
While he sang all his heart said to the sound of his sweet lyre, the bloodless ghosts themselves were weeping, and the anxious Tantalus stopped clutching at return-flow of the wave, Ixion's twisting wheel stood wonder-bound; and Tityus' liver for a while escaped the vultures, and the listening Belides forgot their sieve-like bowls and even you, O Sisyphus! sat idly on your rock! Then Fame declared that conquered by the song of Orpheus, for the first and only time the hard cheeks of the fierce Eumenides were wet with tears: nor could the royal queen, nor he who rules the lower world deny the prayer of Orpheus; so they called to them Eurydice, who still was held among the new-arriving shades, and she obeyed the call by walking to them with slow steps, yet halting from her wound. So Orpheus then received his wife; and Pluto told him he might now ascend from these Avernian vales up to the light, with his Eurydice; but, if he turned his eyes to look at her, the gift of her delivery would be lost. They picked their way in silence up a steep and gloomy path of darkness. There remained but little more to climb till they would touch earth's surface, when in fear he might again lose her, and anxious for another look at her, he turned his eyes so he could gaze upon her. Instantly she slipped away. He stretched out to her his despairing arms, eager to rescue her, or feel her form, but could hold nothing save the yielding air. Dying the second time, she could not say a word of censure of her husband's fault; what had she to complain of—his great love? Her last word spoken was, “Farewell!” which he could barely hear, and with no further sound she fell from him again to Hades.—

Struck quite senseless by this double death of his dear wife, he was as fixed from motion as the frightened one who saw the triple necks of Cerberus, that dog whose middle neck was chained. The sight filled him with terror he had no escape from, until petrified to stone; or like Olenos, changed to stone, because he fastened on himself the guilt of his wife. O unfortunate Lethaea! Too boastful of your beauty, you and he, united once in love, are now two stones upon the mountain Ida, moist with springs. Orpheus implored in vain the ferryman to help him cross the River Styx again, but was denied the very hope of death. Seven days he sat upon Death’s river bank, in squalid misery and without all food—nourished by grief, anxiety, and tears—complaining that the Gods of Erebus were pitiless, at last he wandered back, until he came to lofty Rhodope and Haemus, beaten by the strong north wind.

Three times the Sun completed his full course to watery Pisces, and in all that time, shunning all women, Orpheus still believed his love-pledge was forever. So he kept away from women, though so many grieved, because he took no notice of their love. The only friendship he enjoyed was given to the young men of Thrace.

ATTIS

There was a hill which rose up to a level plateau, high and beautiful with green grass; and there was not any shade for comfort on the top and there on that luxuriant grass the bard, while heaven-inspired reclined, and struck such harmonies on his sweet lyre that shade most grateful to the hill was spread around. Strong trees came up there—the Chaonian oak.
the Heliads’ poplar, and the lofty-branched deep mast-tree, the soft linden and the beech, the brittle hazel, and the virgin laurel-tree, the ash for strong spears, the smooth silver-fir, the flex bent with acorns and the plane, the various tinted maple and with those, the lotus and green willows from their streams, evergreen box and slender tamarisks, rich myrtles of two colors and the tine, bending with green-blue berries: and you, too, the pliant-footed ivy, came along with tendril-branching grape-vines, and the elm all covered with twist-vines, the mountain-ash, pitch-trees and arbute-trees of blushing fruit, the bending-palm prized after victories, the bare-trunk pine of tufted foliage, bristled upon the top, a pleasant sight delightful to the Mother of the Gods; since Attis dear to Cybele, exchanged his human form which hardened in that tree.

**CYPARISSUS**

[106] In all the throng the cone-shaped cypress came; a tree now, it was changed from a dear youth loved by the god who strings the lyre and bow. For there was at one time, a mighty stag held sacred by those nymphs who haunt the fields Carthaean. His great antlers spread so wide, they gave an ample shade to his own head. Those antlers shone with gold: from his smooth throat a necklace, studded with a wealth of gems, hung down to his strong shoulders—beautiful. A silver boss, fastened with little thongs, played on his forehead, worn there from his birth; and pendants from both ears, of gleaming pearls, adorned his hollow temples. Free of fear, and now no longer shy, frequenting homes of men he knew, he offered his soft neck even to strangers for their petting hands. But more than by all others, he was loved by you, O Cyparissus, fairest youth of all the lads of Cea. It was you who led the pet stag to fresh pasturage, and to the waters of the clearest spring. Sometimes you wove bright garlands for his horns, and sometimes, like a horseman on his back, now here now there, you guided his soft mouth with purple reins.

[126] It was upon a summer day, at high noon when the Crab, of spreading claws, loving the sea-shore, almost burnt beneath the sun’s hot burning rays; and the pet stag was then reclining on the grassy earth and, wearied of all action, found relief under the cool shade of the forest trees; that as he lay there Cyparissus pierced him with a javelin: and although it was quite accidental, when the shocked youth saw his loved stag dying from the cruel wound he could not bear it, and resolved on death. What did not Phoebus say to comfort him? He cautioned him to hold his grief in check, consistent with the cause. But still the lad lamented, and with groans implored the Gods that he might mourn forever. His life force exhausted by long weeping, now his limbs began to take a green tint, and his hair, which overhung his snow-white brow, turned up into a bristling crest; and he became a stiff tree with a slender top and pointed up to the starry heavens. And the God, groaning with sorrow, said; “You shall be mourned sincerely by me, surely as you mourn for others, and forever you shall stand in grief, where others grieve.”

[143] Such was the grove by Orpheus drawn together; and he sat surrounded by assembled animals, and many strange Birds. When he tried the chords by touching with his thumb, and was convinced the notes were all in harmony, although attuned to various melody, he raised his
were all in harmony, although attuned to various melody, he raised his voice and sang: “Oh my loved mother, Muse, from Jove inspire my song—for all things yield, to the unequalled sway of Jove—oh, I have sung so often Jupiter's great power before this day, and in a wilder strain, I've sung the giants and victorious bolts hurled on Phlegraean plains. But now I need the gentler touch; for I would sing of boys, the favorites of Gods, and even of maids who had to pay the penalty of wrong.”

GANYMED

[155] The king of all the Gods once burned with love for Ganymede of Phrygia. He found a shape more pleasing even than his own. Jove would not take the form of any bird, except the eagle’s, able to sustain the weight of his own thunderbolts. Without delay, Jove on fictitious eagle wings, stole and flew off with that loved Trojan boy: who even to this day, against the will of Juno, mingles nectar in the cups of his protector, mighty Jupiter.

HYACINTHUS

[162] You also, Hyacinthus, would have been set in the sky! if Phoebus had been given time which the cruel fates denied for you. But in a way you are immortal too. Though you have died. Always when warm spring drives winter out, and Aries (the Ram) succeeds to Pisces (watery Fish), you rise and blossom on the green turf. And the love my father had for you was deeper than he felt for others. Delphi center of the world, had no presiding guardian, while the God frequented the Eurotas and the land of Sparta, never fortified with walls. His zither and his bow no longer fill his eager mind and now without a thought of dignity, he carried nets and held the dogs in leash, and did not hesitate to go with Hyacinthus on the rough, steep mountain ridges; and by all of such associations, his love was increased. Now Titan was about midway, betwixt the coming and the banished night, and stood at equal distance from those two extremes. Then, when the youth and Phoebus were well stripped, and gleaming with rich olive oil, they tried a friendly contest with the discus. First Phoebus, well-poised, sent it awhirl through air, and cleft the clouds beyond with its broad weight; from which at length it fell down to the earth, a certain evidence of strength and skill. Heedless of danger Hyacinthus rushed for eager glory of the game, resolved to get the discus. But it bounded back from off the hard earth, and struck full against your face, O Hyacinthus! Deadly pale the God's face went—as pallid as the boy's. With care he lifted the sad huddled form.

[185] The kind god tries to warm you back to life, and next endeavors to attend your wound, and stay your parting soul with healing herbs. His skill is no advantage, for the wound is past all art of cure. As if someone, when in a garden, breaks off violets, poppies, or lilies hung from golden stems, then drooping they must hang their withered heads, and gaze down towards the earth beneath them; so, the dying boy's face droops, and his bent neck, a burden to itself, falls back upon his shoulder: “You are fallen in your prime defrauded of your youth, O Hyacinthus!” Moaned Apollo. “I can see in your sad wound my own guilt, and you are my cause of grief and self-reproach. My own hand gave you death unmerited—I only can be charged with your destruction.—What have I done wrong? Can it be called care-filled lips. The lyre struck by my hand, and my true songs will always
a fault to play with you? Should loving you be called a fault? And oh, that I
might now give up my life for you! Or die with you! But since our destinies
prevent us you shall always be with me, and you shall dwell upon my care-
filled lips. The lyre struck by my hand, and my true songs will always
celebrate you. A new flower you shall arise, with markings on your petals,
close imitation of my constant moans: and there shall come another to be
linked with this new flower, a valiant hero shall be known by the same
marks upon its petals."

[209] And while Phoebus, Apollo, sang these words with his truth-telling
lips, behold the blood of Hyacinthus, which had poured out on the ground
beside him and there stained the grass, was changed from blood; and in
its place a flower, more beautiful than Tyrian dye, sprang up. It almost
seemed a lily, were it not that one was purple and the other white. But
Phoebus was not satisfied with this. For it was he who worked the miracle
of his sad words inscribed on flower leaves. These letters Al, Al, are
inscribed on them. And Sparta certainly is proud to honor Hyacinthus as
her son; and his loved fame endures; and every year they celebrate his
solemn festival.

THE CERASTAE AND PROPOETIDES

[220] If you should ask Amathus, which is rich in metals, how can she
rejoice and take a pride in deeds of her Propoetides; she would disclaim it
and repudiate them all, as well as those of transformed men, whose
foreheads were deformed by two rough horns, from which their name
Cerastae. By their gates an altar unto Jove stood. If by chance a stranger,
not informed of their dark crimes, had seen the horrid altar smeared with
blood, he would suppose that suckling calves and sheep of Amathus,
were sacrificed thereon—it was in fact the blood of slaughtered guests!
Kind-hearted Venus, outraged by such deeds of sacrifice, was ready to
desert her cities and her snake-infested plains; “But how,” said she, “have
their delightful lands together with my well built cities sinned? What crime
have they done? —Those inhabitants should pay the penalty of their own
crimes by exile or by death; or it may be a middle course, between exile
and death; and what can that be, but the punishment of a changed form?”
And while she hesitates, in various thoughts of what form they should
take, her eyes by chance, observed their horns, and that decided her;
such horns could well be on them after any change occurred, and she
transformed their big and brutal bodies to savage bulls.

[238] But even after that, the obscene Propoetides dared to deny divinity
of Venus, for which fault, (and it is common fame) they were the first to
criminate their bodies, through the wrath of Venus; and so blushing shame
was lost, white blood, in their bad faces grew so fast, so hard, it was no
wonder they were turned with small change into hard and lifeless stones.

PYGMALION AND THE STATUE

[243] Pygmalion saw these women waste their lives in wretched shame,
and critical of faults which nature had so deeply planted through their
female hearts, he lived in preference, for many years unmarried.—But
while he was single, with consummate skill, he carved a statue out of
snow-white ivory, and gave it to it exquisite beauty, which no woman of the world has ever equalled: she was so beautiful, he fell in love with his creation. It appeared in truth a perfect virgin with the grace of life, but in the expression of such modesty all motion was restrained—and so his art concealed his art. Pygmalion gazed, inflamed with love and admiration for the form, in semblance of a woman, he had carved. He lifts up both his hands to feel the work, and wonders if it can be ivory, because it seems to him more truly flesh.—his mind refusing to conceive of it as ivory, he kisses it and feels his kisses are returned. And speaking love, caresses it with loving hands that seem to make an impress, on the parts they touch, so real that he then may bruise her by his eager pressing. Softest tones are used each time he speaks to her. He brings to her such presents as are surely prized by sweet girls; such as smooth round pebbles, shells, and birds, and fragrant flowers of thousand tints, lilies, and painted balls, and amber tears of Heliads, which distill from far off trees.—he drapes her in rich clothing and in gems: rings on her fingers, a rich necklace round her neck, pearl pendants on her graceful ears; and golden ornaments adorn her breast. All these are beautiful—and she appears most lovable, if carefully attired,—or perfect as a statue, unadorned. He lays her on a bed luxurious, spread with coverlets of Tyrian purple dye, and naming her the consort of his couch, lays her reclining head on the most soft and downy pillows, trusting she could feel.

[270] The festal day of Venus, known throughout all Cyprus, now had come, and throngs were there to celebrate. Heifers with spreading horns, all gold-tipped, fell when given the stroke of death upon their snow-white necks; and frankincense was smoking on the altars. There, intent, Pygmalion stood before an altar, when his offering had been made; and although he feared the result, he prayed: "If it is true, O Gods, that you can give all things, I pray to have as my wife—" but, he did not dare to add "my ivory statue-maid," and said, "One like my ivory—." Golden Venus heard, for she was present at her festival, and she knew clearly what the prayer had meant. She gave a sign that her Divinity favored his plea: three times the flame leaped high and brightly in the air. When he returned, he went directly to his image-maid, bent over her, and kissed her many times, while she was on her couch; and as he kissed, she seemed to gather some warmth from his lips Again he kissed her; and he felt her breast; the ivory seemed to soften at the touch, and its firm texture yielded to his hand, as honey-wax of Mount Hymettus turns to many shapes when handled in the sun, and surely softens from each gentle touch. He is amazed; but stands rejoicing in his doubt; while fearful there is some mistake, again and yet again, gives trial to his hopes by touching with his hand. It must be flesh! The veins pulsate beneath the careful test of his directed finger. Then, indeed, the astonished hero poured out lavish thanks to Venus; pressing with his raptured lips his statue’s lips. Now real, true to life—the maiden felt the kisses given to her, and blushing, lifted up her timid eyes, so that she saw the light and sky above, as well as her rapt lover while he leaned gazing beside her—and all this at once—the goddess graced the marriage she had willed, and when nine times a crescent moon had changed, increasing to the full, the statue-bride gave birth to her dear daughter Paphos. From which famed event the island takes its name.
MYRRHA TRANSFORMED TO A TREE

[298] The royal Cinyras was sprung from her; and if he had been father of no child, might well have been accounted fortunate—but I must sing of horrible events—avoid it daughters! Parents! shun this tale! But if my verse has charmed your thought, do not give me such credit in this part; convince yourself it cannot be true life; or, if against my wish you hear and must believe it, then be sure to notice how such wickedness gets certain punishment. And yet, if Nature could permit such crimes as this to happen, I congratulate Ismario people and all Thrace as well, and I congratulate this nation, which we know is far away from the land where this vile abomination did occur. The land we call Panchaia may be rich in balsam, cinnamon, and costum sweet for ointment, frankincense distilled from trees, with many flowers besides. All this large wealth combined could never compensate the land for this detestable, one crime: even though the new Myrrh-Tree advanced on that rich soil. Cupid declares his weapons never caused an injury to Myrrha, and denies his torches ever could have urged her crime.—one of the three bad sisters kindled this, with fire brand from the Styx, and poisoned you with swollen vipers.—It is criminal to hate a parent, but love such as hers is certainly more criminal than hate. The chosen princes of all lands desire you now in marriage, and young men throughout the Orient are vying for your hand. Choose, Myrrha one from all of these for your good husband; but exclude from such a thought your father only.

[319] She indeed is quite aware, and struggles bitterly against her vile desires, and argues in her heart:—“What am I tending to? O listening Gods I pray for aid, I pray to Natural Love! Ah, may the sacred rights of parents keep this vile desire from me, defend me from a crime so great—if it indeed is crime. I am not sure it is—I have not heard that any god or written law condemns the union of a parent and his child. All animals will mate as they desire—a heifer may endure her sire, and who condemns it? And the happy stud is not refused by his mare-daughters: the he-goat consorts unthought-of with the flock of which he is the father; and the birds conceive of those from whom they were themselves begot. Happy are they who have such privilege! Malignant men have given spiteful laws; and what is right to Nature is decreed unnatural, by jealous laws of men. But it is said there are some tribes today, in which the mother marries her own son; the daughter takes her father; and by this, the love kind Nature gives them is increased into a double bond.—Ah wretched me! Why was it not my fortune to be born in that love-blessed land? I must abide, depressed by my misfortunes, in this place. Why do I dwell on these forbidden hopes? Let me forget to think of lawless flame. My father is most worthy of my love, but only as a father.—If I were not born the daughter of great Cinyras, I might be joined to him; but, as it stands, because he is mine he is never mine; because near to me he is far from me. It would be better for me, if we were but strangers to each other; for I then, could wish to go, and leave my native land, and so escape temptation to this crime: but my unhappy passion holds me here, that I may see Cinyras face to face, and touch him, talk with him and even kiss him—the best, if nothing else can be allowed. But what more could be asked for, by the most depraved? Think of the many sacred ties and loved names, you are dragging to the mire: the rival of your mother, will you be the mistress of your father, and be named the sister of your son, and make yourself the mother of your brother? And will you not dread the sisters with black snakes for hair. Whom guilty creatures, such as you, can see brandish relentless flames before their eyes and faces? While your body has not sinned you must not let sin creep into your heart, and violate great Nature’s law with your unlawful rovings. If you had the right to long for his endearment, it could not be possible. He is a virtuous man and is regardful of the moral law—oh how I wish my passion could be his!”

[356] And so she argued and declared her love: but Cinyras, her father, who was urged by such a throng of suitors for her hand, that he could make no choice, at last inquired of her, so she might make her heart’s wish known. And as he named them over, asked her which she fixed her gaze upon her father’s face, in doubtful agony what she could say, while hot tears filled her eyes. Her father, sure it all was of a virginal alarm, as he is telling her she need not weep dries her wet cheeks and kisses her sweet lips. Too much delighted with his gentle words and kind endearments, Myrrha, when he asked again, which one might be her husband, said, “The one just like
yourself.”, And he replied not understanding what her heart would say, “You answer as a loving-daughter should.” When she heard “loving-daughter” said, the girl too conscious of her guilt, looked on the ground.

It was now midnight, peaceful sleep dissolved the world-care of all mortals, but of her who, sleepless through the night, burnt in the flame of her misplaced affection. First despair compels her to abandon every hope, and then she changes and resolves to try; and so she wavers from desire to shame, for she could not adhere to any plan. As a great tree, cut by the swinging axe is chopped until the last blow has been struck, then sways and threatens danger to all sides; so does her weak mind, cut with many blows, waver unsteadily—this way and that—and turning back and forth it finds no rest from passion, save the rest that lies in death. The thought of death gave comfort to her heart. Resolved to hang herself, she sat upright; then, as she tied her girdle to a beam, she said, “Farewell, beloved Cinyras, and may you know the cause of my sad death.” And while she spoke those words, her fingers fixed the noosed rope close around her death-pale neck.

They say the murmur of despairing words was heard by her attentive nurse who watched outside the room. And, faithful as of old, she opened the shut door. But, when she saw the frightful preparations made for death, the odd nurse screamed and beat and tore her breast, then seized and snatched the rope from Myrrha’s neck; and after she had torn the noose apart, at last she had the time to weep and time, while she embraced the girl, to ask her why the halter had been fastened round her neck. The girl in stubborn silence only fixed her eyes upon the ground—sad that her first attempt at death, because too slow, was foiled. The old nurse-woman urged and urged, and showed her gray hair and her withered breasts, and begged her by the memory of her cradle days, and baby nourishment, to hide no more from her long-trusted nurse what caused her grief. The girl turned from her questions with a sigh. The nurse, still more determined to know all, promised fidelity and her best aid—“Tell me,” she said, “and let me give you help; my old age offers means for your relief: if it be frantic passion, I have charms and healing herbs; or, if an evil spell was worked on you by someone, you shall be cured to your perfect self by magic rites; or, if your actions have enraged the Gods, a sacrifice will satisfy their wrath. What else could be the cause? Your family and you are prosperous—your mother dear, and your loved father are alive and well.”

And, when she heard her say the name of father, a sigh heaved up from her distracted heart.

But even after that the nurse could not conceive such evil in the girl’s sick heart; and yet she had a feeling it must be only a love affair could cause the crime: and with persistent purpose begged the cause. She pressed the weeping girl against her breast; and as she held her in her feeble arms, she said, “Sweet heart, I know you are in love: in this affair I am entirely yours for your good service, you must have no fear, your father cannot learn of it from me.” Just like a mad girl, Myrrha sprang away, and with her face deep-buried in a couch, sobbed out, “Go from me or stop asking me my cause of grief—it is a crime of shame—I cannot tell it!” Horrified the nurse stretched forth her trembling hands, palsied with age and fear. She fell down at the feet of her loved foster-child, and coaxing her and frightening her, she threatened to disclose her knowledge of the halter and of what she knew of her attempted suicide; and after all was said, she gave her word to help the girl, when she had given to her a true confession of her sad heart-love. The girl just lifted up her face, and laid it, weeping, on the bosom of her nurse. She tried so often to confess, and just as often checked her words, her shamed face hid deep in her garment: “Oh”, at last she groans, “O mother blessed in your husband—oh!” Only that much she said and groaned. The nurse felt a cold horror stealing through her heart and frame, for she now understood it all. And her white hair stood bristling on her head, while with the utmost care of love and art she strove to use appropriate words and deeds, to banish the mad passion of the girl. Though Myrrha knew that she was truly warned, she was resolved to die, unless she could obtain the object of her wicked love. The nurse gave way at last as in defeat, and said, “Live and enjoy—” but did not dare to say, “your father”, did not finish, though, she promised and confirmed it with an oath.

It was the time when matrons celebrate the annual festival of Ceres. Then, all robed in decent garments of snow-white, they bring garlands of precious wheat, which are first fruits of worship; and for nine nights they must count forbidden every act of love, and shun the touch of man. And in that throng, Cenchreis, the king’s wife, with constant care attended every secret rite: and so while the king’s bed was lacking his true wife, one of those nights,—King Cinyras was drunk with too much wine,—the scheming nurse informed him of a girl most beautiful, whose love for him was passionate; in a false tale she pictured a true passion.—When he asked the maiden’s
age, she answered, “Just the same as Myrrha’s.” Bidden by the king to go and fetch her, the officious old nurse, when she found the girl, cried out: “Rejoice, my dear, we have contrived it!” The unhappy girl could not feel genuine joy in her amazed and startled body. Her dazed mind was filled with strange forebodings; but she did believe her heart was joyful.—Great excitement filled her wrecked heart with such inconsistencies.

[446] Now was the time when nature is at rest; between the Bears, Boötes turned his wain down to the west, and the guilty Myrrha turns to her enormity. The golden moon flies from the heaven, and black clouds cover the hiding stars and Night has lost her fires. The first to hide were stars of Icarus and of Erigone, in hallowed love devoted to her father. Myrrha thrice was warned by omen of her stumbling foot; the funeral screech-owl also warned her thrice, with dismal cry; yet Myrrha onward goes. It seems to her the black night lessens shame. She holds fast to her nurse with her left hand, and with the other hand gropes through the dark And now they go until she finds the door. Now at the threshold of her father’s room, she softly pushes back the door, her nurse takes her within. The girl’s knees trembling sink beneath her. Her drawn bloodless face has lost its color, and while she moves to the crime, bad courage goes from her until afraid of her bold effort, she would gladly turn unrecognized. But as she hesitates, the aged crone still holds her by the hand; and leading her up to the high bed there delivering Myrrha, says, “Now Cinyras, you take her, she is yours;” and leaves the pair doomed in their crime—the father to pollute his own flesh in his own bed; where he tries first to encourage her from maiden fears, by gently talking to the timid girl. He chanced to call her “daughter,” as a name best suited to her age; and she in turn, endearing, called him “father”, so no names might be omitted to complete their guilt.

[469] She staggered from his chamber with the crime of her own father hidden in her womb, and their guilt was repeated many nights; till Cinyras—determined he must know his mistress, after many meetings, brought a light and knew his crime had harmed his daughter. Speechless in shame he drew forth his bright sword out from the scabbard where it hung near by.—but frightened Myrrha fled, and so escaped death in the shadows of dark night. Groping her pathless way at random through the fields, she left Arabia, famed for spreading palms, and wandered through Panchaean lands. Until after nine months of aimless wandering days, she rested in Sabaea, for she could not hold the burden she had borne so long. Not knowing what to pray for, moved alike by fear of death and weariness of life, her wishes were expressed in prayer: “O Gods, if you will listen to my prayer, I do not shun a dreadful punishment deserved; but now because my life offends the living, and dying I offend the dead, drive me from both conditions; change me, and refuse my flesh both life and death!”

[488] Some god did listen to her unnatural prayer; her last petition had answering gods. For even as she prayed, the earth closed over her legs; roots grew out and, stretching forth obliquely from her nails, gave strong support to her up-growing trunk; her bones got harder, and her marrow still unchanged, kept to the center, as her blood was changed to sap, as her outstretching arms became long branches and her fingers twigs and as her soft skin hardened into bark: and the fast-growing tree had closely bound her womb, still heavy, and had covered her soft bosom; and was spreading quickly up to her neck.—She can not endure the strain, and sinking down into the rising wood, her whole face soon was hidden in the bark. Although all sense of human life was gone, as quickly as she lost her human form, her weeping was continued, and warm drops distilled from her (the tree) cease not to fall. There is a virtue even in her tears—the valued myrrh distilling from the trunk, keeps to her name, by which she still is known, and cannot be forgot of aging time.

[503] The guilt-begotten child had growth while wood was growing, and endeavored now to find a way of safe birth. The tree-trunk was swelling and tightened against Myrrha, who, unable to express her torture, could not call upon Lucina in the usual words of travail. But then just like a woman in great pain, the tree bends down and, while it groans, bedews itself with falling tears. Lucina stood in pity near the groaning branches, laid her hands on them, and uttered charms to aid the hindered birth. The tree cracked open then, the bark was rent asunder, and it gave forth its living weight, a wailing baby-boy. The Naiads laid him on soft leaves, and they anointed him with his own mother’s tears. Even Envy would not fail to praise the child, as beautiful as naked cupids seen in chosen paintings. Only give to him a polished quiver, or take theirs from them, and no keen eye could choose him from their midst.

[519] Time gliding by without our knowledge cheats us, and nothing can be swifter than the years. That son of sister and grandfather, who was lately hidden in his parent tree, just lately born, a lovely baby-boy is now a youth,
sister and grandfather, who was lately hidden in his parent tree, just lately born, a lovely baby-boy is now a youth,
now man more beautiful than during growth. He wins the love of Venus and so avenges his own mother’s
passion. For while the goddess’ son with quiver held on shoulder, once was kissing his loved mother, it chanced
unwittingly he grazed her breast with a projecting arrow. Instantly the wounded goddess pushed her son away;
but the scratch had pierced her deeper than she thought and even Venus was at first deceived. Delighted with
the beauty of the youth, she does not think of her Cytherian shores and does not care for Paphos, which is girt by
the deep sea, nor Cnidos, haunts of fish, nor Amathus far-famed for precious ores. Venus, neglecting heaven,
prefers Adonis to heaven, and so she holds close to his ways as his companion, and forgets to rest at noon-day
in the shade, neglecting care of her sweet beauty. She goes through the woods and over mountain ridges and
wild fields, rocky and thorn-set, bare to her white knees after Diana’s manner. And she cheers the hounds, intent
to hunt for harmless prey, such as the leaping hare, or the wild stag, high-crowned with branching antlers, or the
doe.—she keeps away from fierce wild boars, away from ravenous wolves; and she avoids the bears of frightful
claws, and lions glutted with the blood of slaughtered cattle.

[543] She warns you, Adonis, to beware and fear them. If her fears for you were only heeded! “Oh be brave,” she
says, “against those timid animals which fly from you; but courage is not safe against the bold. Dear boy, do not
be rash, do not attack the wild beasts which are armed by nature, lest your glory may cost me great sorrow.
Neither youth nor beauty nor the deeds which have moved Venus have effect on lions, bristling boars, and on the
eyes and tempers of wild beasts. Boars have the force of lightning in their curved tusks, and the rage of tawny
lions is unlimited. I fear and hate them all.” When he inquires the reason, she says: “I will tell it; you will be
surprised to learn the bad result caused by an ancient crime.—But I am weary with unaccustomed toil; and see! a
poplar convenient, offers a delightful shade and this lawn gives a good couch. Let us rest ourselves here on the
grass.” So saying, she reclined upon the turf and, pillowing her head against his breast and mingling kisses with
her words, she told him the following tale:

ATALANTA

[560] “Perhaps you may have heard of a swift maid, who ran much faster than swift-footed men contesting in the
race. What they have told is not an idle tale.—She did excel them all—and you could not have said whether her
swift speed or her beauty was more worthy of your praise. When this maid once consulted with an oracle, of her
fate after marriage, the god answered her: ‘You, Atalanta, never will have need of husband, who will only be your
harm. For your best good you should avoid the tie; but surely you will not avoid your harm; and while yet living
you will lose yourself.’ She was so frightened by the oracle, she lived unwedded in far shaded woods; and with
harsh terms repulsed insistent throngs of suitors. ‘I will not be won,’ she said, ‘Till I am conquered first in speed.
Contest the race with me. A wife and couch shall both be given to reward the swift, but death must recompense
the one who lags behind. This must be the condition of a race.’ Indeed she was that pitiless, but such the power
of beauty, a rash multitude agreed to her harsh terms.

[575] “Hippomenes had come, a stranger, to the cruel race, with condemnation in his heart against the racing
young men for their headstrong love; and said, ‘Why seek a wife at such a risk?’ But when he saw her face, and
perfect form disrobed for perfect running, such a form as mine, Adonis, or as yours—if you were woman—he was
so astonished he raised up his hands and said, “Oh pardon me brave men whom I was blaming, I could not then
realize the value of the prize you strove for.” And as he is praising her, his own heart leaping with love’s fire, he
hopes no young man may outstrip her in the race; and, full of envy, fears for the result. ‘But why,’ he cries, “is my
chance in the race untried? Divinity helps those who dare.’ But while the hero weighed it in his mind the virgin
flew as if her feet had wings. Although she seemed to him in flight as swift as any Scythian arrow, he admired her
beauty more; and her swift speed appeared in her most beautiful. The breeze bore back the streamers on her
flying ankles, while her hair was tossed back over her white shoulders; the bright trimmed ribbons at her knees
were fluttering, and over her white girlish body came a pink flush, just as when a purple awning across a marble
hall gives it a wealth of borrowed hues. And while Hippomenes in wonder gazed at her, the goal was reached;
and Atalanta crowned victorious with festal wreath.—But all the vanquished youths paid the death-penalty with
sighs and groans, according to the stipulated bond.
[600] "Not frightened by the fate of those young men, he stood up boldly in the midst of all; and fixing his strong eyes upon the maiden, said: 'Where is the glory in an easy victory over such weaklings? Try your fate with me! If fortune fail to favor you, how could it shame you to be conquered by a man? Megareus of Onchestus is my father, his grandsire, Neptune, god of all the seas. I am descendant of the King of Waves: and add to this, my name for manly worth has not disgraced the fame of my descent. If you should prove victorious against this combination, you will have achieved a great enduring name—the only one who ever bested great Hippomenes.'

[609] "While he was speaking, Atalanta’s gaze grew softer, in her vacillating hopes to conquer and be conquered; till at last, her heart, unbalanced, argued in this way: "It must be some god envious of youth, wishing to spoil this one prompts him to seek wedlock with me and risk his own dear life. I am not worth the price, if I may judge. His beauty does not touch me—but I could be moved by it—I must consider he is but a boy. It is not he himself who moves me, but his youth. Sufficient cause for thought are his great courage and his soul fearless of death. What of his high descent;—great grandson of the King of all the seas? What of his love for me that has such great importance, he would perish if his fate denied my marriage to him? O strange boy, go from me while you can; abandon hope of this alliance stained with blood—A match with me is fatal. Other maids will not refuse to wed you, and a wiser girl will gladly seek your love. —But what concern is it of mine, when I but think of those who have already perished! Let him look to it himself; and let him die. Since he is not warned by his knowledge of the fate of many other suitors, he declares quite plainly, he is weary of his life. —Shall he then die, because it must be his one hope to live with me? And suffer death though undeserved, for me because he loves? My victory will not ward off the hate, the odium of the deed! But it is not a fault of mine.—Oh fond, fond man, I would that you had never seen me! But you are so madly set upon it, I could wish you may prove much the swifter! Oh how dear how lovable is his young girlish face! — ah, doomed Hippomenes, I only wish mischance had never let you see me! You are truly worthy of a life on earth. If I had been more fortunate, and not denied a happy marriage day; I would not share my bed with any man but you.' All this the virgin Atalanta said; and knowing nothing of the power of love, she is so ignorant of what she does, she loves and does not know she is in love.

[638] "Meanwhile her father and the people, all loudly demanded the accustomed race. A suppliant, the young Hippomenes invoked me with his anxious voice, 'I pray to you, O Venus, Queen of Love, be near and help my daring —smile upon the love you have inspired!' The breeze, not envious, wafted this prayer to me; and I confess, it was so tender it did move my heart— I had but little time to give him aid. There is a field there which the natives call the Field Tamasus—the most prized of all the fertile lands of Cyprus. This rich field, in ancient days, was set apart for me, by chosen elders who decreed it should enrich my temples yearly. In this field there grows a tree, with gleaming golden leaves, and all its branches crackle with bright gold. Since I was coming from there, by some chance, I had three golden apples in my hand, which I had plucked. With them I planned to aid Hippomenes. While quite invisible to all but him, I taught him how to use those golden apples for his benefit.

[652] "The trumpet soon gave signal for the race and both of them crouching flashed quickly forth and skimmed the surface of the sandy course with flying feet. You might even think those two could graze the sea with unwet feet and pass over the ripened heads of standing grain. Shouts of applause gave courage to the youth: the cheering multitude cried out to him:— 'Now is the time to use your strength. Go on! Hippomenes! Bend to the work! You're sure to win!' It must be doubted who was most rejoiced by those brave words, Megareus' son, or Schoeneus' daughter. Oh, how often, when she could have passed him, she delayed her speed; and after gazing long upon his face reluctantly again would pass him! Now dry panting breath came from his weary throat—the goal still far away.—Then Neptune's scion threw one of three gold apples. Atalanta with wonder saw it—eager to possess the shining fruit, she turned out of her course, picked up the rolling gold. Hippomenes passed by her, while spectators roared applause. Increasing speed, she overcame delay, made up for time lost, and again she left the youth behind. She was delayed again because he tossed another golden apple. She followed him, and passed him in the race. The last part of the course remained. He cried 'Be near me, goddess, while I use your gift.' With youthful might he threw the shining gold, in an oblique direction to the side, so that pursuit would mean a slow return. The virgin seemed to hesitate, in doubt whether to follow after this third prize. I forced her to turn for it; take it up; and, adding weight to the gold fruit, she held, impeded her with weight and loss of time. For fear my narrative may stretch beyond the race itself,—the maiden was outstripped; Hippomenes then led his prize away.
"Adonis, did I not deserve his thanks with tribute of sweet incense? But he was ungrateful, and, forgetful of my help, he gave me neither frankincense nor thanks. Such conduct threw me into sudden wrath, and, fretting at the slight, I felt I must not be despised at any future time. I told myself 'twas only right to make a just example of them. They were near a temple, hidden in the forest, which glorious Echion in remembered time had built to Rhea, Mother of the gods, in payment of a vow. So, wearied from the distance traveled, they were glad to have a needed rest. Hippomenes while there, was seized with love his heart could not control. —a passion caused by my divinity. Quite near the temple was a cave-like place, covered with pumice. It was hallowed by religious veneration of the past. Within the shadows of that place, a priest had stationed many wooden images of olden gods. The lovers entered there and desecrated it. The images were scandalized, and turned their eyes away. The tower-crowned Mother, Cybele, at first prepared to plunge the guilty pair beneath the waves of Styx, but such a punishment seemed light. And so their necks, that had been smooth. Were covered instantly with tawny manes; their fingers bent to claws; their arms were changed to fore-legs; and their bosoms held their weight; and with their tails they swept the sandy ground. Their casual glance is anger, and instead of words they utter growls. They haunt the woods, a bridal-room to their ferocious taste. And now fierce lions they are terrible to all of life; except to Cybele; whose harness has subdued their champing jaws.

ADONIS TRANSFORMED

"My dear Adonis keep away from all such savage animals; avoid all those which do not turn their fearful backs in flight but offer their bold breasts to your attack, lest courage should be fatal to us both." Indeed she warned him.—Harnessing her swans, she traveled swiftly through the yielding air; but his rash courage would not heed advice. By chance his dogs, which followed a sure track, aroused a wild boar from his hiding place; and, as he rushed out from his forest lair, Adonis pierced him with a glancing stroke. Infuriate, the fierce boar’s curved snout first struck the spear-shaft from his bleeding side; and, while the trembling youth was seeking where to find a safe retreat, the savage beast raced after him, until at last he sank his deadly tusk deep in Adonis’ groin; and stretched him dying on the yellow sand.

And now sweet Aphrodite, borne through air in her light chariot, had not yet arrived at Cyprus, on the wings of her white swans. Afar she recognized his dying groans, and turned her white birds towards the sound. And when down looking from the lofty sky, she saw him nearly dead, his body bathed in blood, she leaped down—tore her garment—tore her hair—and beat her bosom with distracted hands. And blaming Fate said, “But not everything is at the mercy of your cruel power. My sorrow for Adonis will remain, enduring as a lasting monument. Each passing year the memory of his death shall cause an imitation of my grief. Your blood, Adonis, will become a flower perennial. Was it not allowed to you Persephone, to transform Menthe’s limbs into sweet fragrant mint? And can this change of my loved hero be denied to me?” Her grief declared, she sprinkled his blood with sweet-smelling nectar, and his blood as soon as touched by it began to effervesce, just as transparent bubbles always rise in rainy weather. Nor was there a pause more than an hour, when from Adonis, blood, exactly of its color, a loved flower sprang up, such as pomegranates give to us, small trees which later hide their seeds beneath a tough rind. But the joy it gives to man is short-lived, for the winds which give the flower its name, Anemone, shake it right down, because its slender hold, always so weak, lets it fall to the ground from its frail stem.