

or speak at all before another did.

Until this time, Echo had a body;
though voluble, she wasn't just a voice,
as she is now—although she used her voice
no oftener than she does now, repeating
just the last words of any speech she heard.

Juno had done this to her, for whenever
Saturn's daughter was poised to apprehend
Jove in his dalliance with a mountain nymph,
Echo, who knew full well what she was doing,
detained the goddess with a long recital
of idle chatter while the nymphs escaped.

But Juno figured out what she was up to:
“Once too often has your tongue beguiled me;
from now on you'll have little use for it!”
And that is why Echo skips now to the end
of any speech she hears and then repeats it.

One day Narcissus happened to be roaming
the countryside when Echo happened by,
and at the very sight of him grew hot;
she secretly pursued him through the woods,
her heat increasing as she overtook him,
as torches smeared with highly flammable
sulfur ignite themselves, brought near a flame.

Often she wanted to come on to him,
accost him with endearments, tender prayers—
but her nature won't permit such forwardness:
advances are denied her, though she may
repeat, in her own voice, a sound she hears.

That day he was cut off from his companions,
and called out, “Anyone here?”

“*Here!*” answered Echo.

Narcissus searches all around, astounded:
cries out more loudly,

SMITH: *Narcissus and Echo*

Narcissus at sixteen seemed to be both
boy and man, and many boys and women
desired him; but in his yielding beauty
was such inflexibility and pride
that no young man or woman ever moved him.

Once, as he drove the trembling deer to his nets,
resounding Echo sighted him, a nymph
unable to keep still when someone spoke,

“Come!” His cry returns;
 he turns around, but there’s no one approaching:
 “Why do you run away from me?” he asks,
 and the very same words are given back to him.

He halts, astounded by that other voice:
 “Here let us come together,” he cries out,
 and Echo gave her heart with her reply,
 “*Come! Together!*” And leapt out of the woods, 500
 eager to give her words a little help
 by swiftly embracing the desired neck;
 he flees, and fleeing, cries, “Hands off! No hugs!
 I’ll die before you’ll have your way with me!”
 “*You’ll have your way with me,*” Echo replied.

Spumed, shamefaced, she slipped into the woods
 and hid herself, living alone in caves
 from that time on. And yet her love endured,
 increased even, by feeding on her sorrow:
 unsleeping grief wasted her sad body, 510
 reducing her to dried out skin and bones,
 then voice and bones only; her skeleton
 turned, they say, into stone. Now, only voice
 is left of her, on wooded mountainsides,
 unseen by any, although heard by all;
 for only the sound that lived in her lives on.

SMITH: Narcissus

He’d trifled with her and so many others,
 water nymphs, nymphs of the wooded mountains,
 as well as a host of male admirers.
 One of those spurned raised his hands to heaven: 520
 “May he himself love as I have loved him,”
 he said, “without obtaining his beloved,”
 and Nemesis assented to his prayer.

There was a clear pool of reflecting water
 unfrequented by shepherds with their flocks

or grazing mountain goats; no bird or beast,
 not even a fallen twig stirred its surface;
 its presence nourished greenery around it,
 and the surrounding trees would keep it cool.

Worn out and overheated from the chase, 530
 here comes the boy, attracted to this pool
 as to its setting, and reclines beside it.
 And as he strives to satisfy one thirst,
 another is born; drinking, he’s overcome
 by the beauty of the image that he sees;
 he falls in love with an immaterial hope,
 a shadow that he wrongly takes for substance.

Transfixed, suspended like a figure carved
 from marble, he looks down at his own face;
 stretched out on the ground, stares into his own eyes 540
 and sees a pair of stars worthy of Bacchus,
 a head of hair that might adorn Apollo;
 those beardless cheeks, that neck of ivory,
 the decorative beauty of his face,
 and the blushing snow of his complexion;
 he admires all that he’s admired for,
 for it is he that he himself desires,
 all unaware; he praises and is praised,
 seeks and is the one that he is seeking;
 kindles the flame and is consumed by it. 550

How many times, in vain, he leans to kiss
 the pool’s deceptive surface or to plunge
 his arms into the water, keen to clasp
 the neck he glimpses but cannot embrace;
 and ignorant of what it is he looks at,
 he burns for what he sees there all the same,
 aroused by the illusion that deceives him.

Why even try to stay this passing fancy?
 Child, what you seek is nowhere to be found,

your beloved is lost when you avert your eyes:
 that image of an image, without substance,
 arrives with you and with you it remains,
 and it will leave when you leave—if you can!

For neither his hunger nor his need for rest
 can draw him off; prone on the shaded grass,
 his insatiate stare fixed on that false shape,
 he perishes by his own eyes.

Lifting himself,
 he spreads his arms out toward the nearby woods:
 “O woods,” he cries, “tell me if any other
 has ever suffered any more than I have,
 for surely you would know, you who have been
 a likely lurking place for so many lovers—
 was there ever one, in all the ages past
 that you recall, who was consumed like me?
 I like what I look at, but what I look at and like
 I can’t locate—”

(So great is the confusion
 in which this lover wanders, lost!)

“My pain
 is even greater, for no ocean lies
 between us, nor some highway without end,
 nor mountain range to cross, nor gates to scale:
 only this shallow pool! He *would* be held,
 for every time I lean down to the surface
 and offer him my willing mouth to kiss,
 he, on his back, lifts up his lips toward mine—
 you’d think he could be touched!

“So very small
 a thing it is that keeps us from our loving!
 Come out and show yourself! Why do you mock me,
 singular boy? Where do you take yourself?
 Surely I’m young and sufficiently attractive

560

570

580

to stay your flight! Why, even nymphs have loved me!

“I’ve no idea what hopes you mean to raise
 with that come-hither look of yours, but when
 I’ve reached down toward you, you’ve reached up again,
 and when I laughed, why, you laughed too, and often
 I have seen tears on *your* cheeks when I wept;
 you second all my motions, and the movement
 of your bow-shaped lips suggests that you respond
 with words to mine—although I never hear them!

“But *now* I get it! I am that other one!
 I’ve finally seen through my own image!
 I burn with love for—*me*! The spark I kindle
 is the torch I carry: whatever can I do?
 Am I the favor-seeker, or the favor sought?

“Why seek at all, when all that I desire
 is mine already? Riches in such abundance
 that I’ve been left completely without means!

“Oh, would that I were able to secede
 from my own body, depart from what I love!
 (Now *that’s* an odd request from any lover.)
 My grief is draining me, my end is near;
 soon I will be extinguished in my prime.
 This death is no grave matter, for it brings
 an end to sorrow. Of course, I would have been
 delighted if my beloved could have lived on,
 but now in death we two will merge as one.”

Maddened by grief, he spoke and then turned back
 to his image in the water, which his tears
 had troubled; when he saw it darkly wavering,
 he cried out, “Stay! Where are you going? O cruel,
 to desert your lover! Touch may be forbidden,
 but looking isn’t: then let me look at you
 and feed my wretched frenzy on your image.”

And while he mourned, he lifted up his tunic

590

600

610

620

and with hard palms, he beat on his bare breast
 until his skin took on a rosy color,
 as parti-colored apples blanch and blush,
 or clustered grapes, that sometimes will assume
 a tinge of purple in their unripened state;
 the water clears; he sees what he has done
 and can bear no more; just as the golden wax
 melts when it's warmed, or as the morning's frost
 retreats before the early sun's scant heat,
 so he dissolves, wasted by his passion,
 slowly consumed by fires deep within.

630

Now is no more the blushing white complexion,
 the manly strength and all that pleased the eye,
 the figure that was once quite dear to Echo.

And seeing this, she mourned, although still mindful
 of her angry pain; as often as the wretched
 boy cried, "Alas!" she answered with "*Alas!*"
 And when he struck his torso with his fists,
 Echo responded with the same tattoo.

His last words were directed to the pool:
 "Alas, dear boy, whom I have vainly cherished!"
 Those words returned to him again, and when
 he cried "Farewell!" "*Farewell!*" cried Echo back.

His weary head sank to the grass; death closed
 those eyes transfixed once by their master's beauty,
 but on the ferry ride across the Styx,
 his gaze into its current did not waver.

650

The water nymphs, his sisters, cut their locks
 in mourning for him, and the wood nymphs, too,
 and Echo echoed all their lamentations;
 but after they'd arranged his funeral,
 gotten the logs, the bier, the brandished torches,
 the boy's remains were nowhere to be found;

instead, a flower, whose white petals fit
 closely around a saffron-colored center.

TAYLOR: The rape of Proserpina

“Vigorous Sicily sprawled across the gigantic body
of one who had dared aspire to rule in the heavens;
the island’s weight held Typhoeus firmly beneath it.
Often exerting himself, he strives yet again to rise up,
but there in the north, his right hand is held down by Pelorus,
his left hand by you, Pachynus; off in the west, Lilybaeum
weighs on his legs, while Mount Etna presses his head, as
under it, raging Typhoeus coughs ashes and vomits up fire. Often
he struggles, attempting to shake off the earth’s weight and roll its
cities and mountains away from his body. 520

“This causes tremors and panics the Lord of the Silent,
who fears that the earth’s crust will crack and break open,
and daylight, let in, will frighten the trembling phantoms;
dreading disaster, the tyrant left his tenebrous kingdom;
borne in his chariot drawn by its team of black horses,
he crisscrossed Sicily, checking the island’s foundation.

“After his explorations had left him persuaded
that none of its parts were in imminent danger of falling,
his fears were forgotten, and Venus, there on Mount Eryx, 530
observed him relaxing, and said, as she drew Cupid near her,
“My son, my sword, my strong right arm and source of my power,

take up that weapon by which all your victims are vanquished
and send your swift arrows into the breast of the deity
to whom the last part of the threefold realm was allotted.

““You govern the gods and their ruler; you rule the defeated
gods of the ocean and govern the one who rules them, too;
why give up on the dead, when we can extend our empire
into their realm? A third part of the world is involved here!
And yet the celestial gods spurn our forbearance, 540
and the prestige of Love is diminished, even as mine is.
Do you not see how Athena and huntress Diana
have both taken leave of me? The virgin daughter of Ceres
desires to do likewise—and will, if we let her!
But if you take pride in our alliance, advance it
by joining her to her uncle!”

“Venus ceased speaking and Cupid
loosened his quiver, and, just as his mother had ordered,
selected, from thousands of missiles, the one that was sharpest
and surest and paid his bow the closest attention,
and using one knee to bend its horn back almost double, 550
he pierces the heart of Dis with his barb-tipped arrow.

“Near Henna’s walls stands a deep pool of water, called Pergus:
not even the river Cayster, flowing serenely,
hears more songs from its swans; this pool is completely surrounded
by a ring of tall trees, whose foliage, just like an awning,
keeps out the sun and preserves the water’s refreshing coolness;
the moist ground is covered with flowers of Tyrian purple;
here it is springtime forever. And here Proserpina
was playfully picking its white lilies and violets,
and, while competing to gather up more than her playmates, 560
filling her basket and stuffing the rest in her bosom,
Dis saw her, was smitten, seized her and carried her off;
his love was that hasty. The terrified goddess cried out
for her mother, her playmates—but for her mother most often,
since she had torn the uppermost seam of her garment,

and the gathered flowers rained down from her negligent tunic;
because of her tender years and her childish simplicity,
even this loss could move her to maidenly sorrow.

“Her abductor rushed off in his chariot, urging his horses,
calling each one by its name and flicking the somber, 570
rust-colored reins over their backs as they galloped
through the deep lakes and the sulphurous pools of Palike
that boil up through the ruptured earth, and where the Bacchiadae,
a race sprung from Corinth, that city between the two seas,
had raised their own walls between two unequal harbors.

“There is a bay that is landlocked almost completely
between the two pools of Cyane and Pisaeon Arethusa,
the residence of the most famous nymph in all Sicily,
Cyane, who gave her very own name to the fountain.
She showed herself now, emerged from her pool at waist level, 580
and recognizing the goddess, told Dis, “Go no further!
You cannot become the son-in-law of great Ceres
against her will: you should have asked and not taken!
If it is right for me to compare lesser with greater,
I accepted Anapis when he desired to have me,
yielding to pleas and not—as in *this* case—to terror.”

She spoke, and stretching her arms out in either direction,
kept him from passing. That son of Saturn could scarcely
hold back his anger; he urged on his frightening horses,
and then, with his strong right arm, he hurled his scepter 590
directly into the very base of the fountain;
the stricken earth opened a path to the underworld
and took in the chariot rushing down into its crater.

“Cyane, lamenting not just the goddess abducted,
but also the disrespect shown for *her* rights as a fountain,
tacitly nursed in her heart an inconsolable sorrow;
and she who had once been its presiding spirit,
reduced to tears, dissolved right into its substance.
You would have seen her members beginning to soften,

her bones and her fingertips starting to lose their old firmness; 600
her slenderest parts were the first to be turned into fluid:
her feet, her legs, her sea-dark tresses, her fingers
(for the parts with least flesh turn into liquid most quickly);
and after these, her shoulders and back and her bosom
and flanks completely vanished in trickling liquid;
and lastly the living blood in her veins is replaced by
springwater, and nothing remains that you could have seized on.

“Meanwhile, the terrified mother was pointlessly seeking
her daughter all over the earth and deep in the ocean.
Neither Aurora, appearing with dew-dampened tresses, 610
nor Hesperus knew her to quit; igniting two torches
of pine from the fires of Etna, the care-ridden goddess
used them to illumine the wintry shadows of nighttime;
and when the dear day had once more dimmed out the bright stars,
she searched again for her daughter from sunrise to sunset.

TAYLOR: *Stellio*

“Worn out by her labors and suffering thirst, with no fountain
to wet her lips at, she happened upon a thatched hovel
and knocked at its humble door, from which there came forth
a crone who looked at the goddess, and, when asked for water,
gave her a sweet drink, sprinkled with toasted barley. 620
And, as she drank it, a boy with a sharp face and bold manner
stood right before her and mocked her and said she was greedy.
Angered by what he was saying, the goddess drenched him
with all she had not yet drunk of the barley mixture.
The boy’s face thirstily drank up the spots as his arms were
turned into legs, and a tail was joined to his changed limbs;
so that he should now be harmless, the boy was diminished,
and he was transformed into a very small lizard.
Astonished, the old woman wept and reached out to touch him,
but the marvelous creature fled her, seeking a hideout. 630
He now has a name appropriate to his complexion,
Stellio, from the constellations spotting his body.

“To speak of the lands and seas the goddess mistakenly searched would take far too long; the earth exhausted her seeking; she came back to Sicily; and, as she once more traversed it, arrived at Cyane, who would have told her the story had she not herself been changed; but, though willing in spirit, her mouth, tongue, and vocal apparatus were absent; nevertheless, she gave proof that was clear to the mother: Persephone’s girdle (which happened by chance to have fallen into the fountain) now lay exposed on its surface.

“Once recognizing it, the goddess knew that her daughter had been taken, and tore her hair into utter disorder, and repeatedly struck her breasts with the palms of both hands. With her daughter’s location a mystery still, she reproaches the whole earth as ungrateful, unworthy her gift of grain crops, and Sicily more than the others, where she has discovered the proof of her loss; and so it was here that her fierce hand shattered the earth-turning plows, here that the farmers and cattle perished alike, and here that she bade the plowed fields default on their trust by blighting the seeds in their keeping. Sicilian fertility, which had been everywhere famous, was given the lie when the crops died as they sprouted, now ruined by too much heat, and now by too heavy a rainfall; stars and winds harmed them, and the greedy birds devoured the seed as it was sown; the harvest of wheat was defeated by thorns and darnels and unappeasable grasses.

“Then Arethusa lifted her head from the Elean waters and swept her dripping hair back away from her forehead, saying, “O Mother of Grain—and mother, too, of that virgin sought through the whole world—here end your incessant labors, lest your great anger should injure the earth you once trusted, and which, unwillingly pillaged, has done nothing ignoble; nor do I plead for my nation, since I am a guest here: my nation is Pisa, I am descended from Elis, and live as a stranger in Sicily—this land that delights me

more than all others on earth; here Arethusa dwells with her household gods. Spare it, merciful goddess, and when your cares and countenance both have been lightened, there will come an opportune time to tell you the reason why I was taken from home and borne off to Ortygia over a waste of waters. The earth gave me access, showed me a path, and, swept on through underground caverns, I raised my head here to an unfamiliar night sky. But while gliding under the earth on a Stygian river, I saw with my very own eyes your dear Proserpina; grief and terror were still to be seen in her features, yet she was nonetheless queen of that shadowy kingdom, the all-powerful consort of the underworld’s ruler.”

“The mother was petrified by the speech of the fountain, and stood for a very long time as though she were senseless, until her madness had been driven off by her outrage, and then she set out in her chariot for the ethereal regions; once there, with her face clouded over and hair all disheveled, she planted herself before Jove and fiercely addressed him: “Jupiter, I have come here as a suppliant, speaking for my child—and yours: if you have no regard for her mother, relent as her father—don’t hold her unworthy, I beg you, simply because *I* am the child’s other parent! The daughter I sought for so long is at last recovered, if to recover means only to lose much more surely, or if to recover means just to learn her location! Her theft could be borne—if only he would return her! Then let him do it, for surely *Jove’s* daughter is worthy of a mate who’s no brigand, even if *my* daughter isn’t.”

“Jupiter answered her, “She is indeed *our* daughter, the pledge of our love and our common concern, but if you will kindly agree to give things their right names, this is not an injury requiring my retribution, but an act of love by a son-in-law who won’t shame you,

680

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660

700

goddess, if you give approval; though much were lacking,
 how much it is to be Jove's brother! But he lacks nothing,
 and only yields to me that which the Fates have allotted.
 Still, if you're so keen on parting them, your Proserpina
 may come back to heaven—but only on one condition:
 that she has not touched food, for so the Fates have required."

TAYLOR: Ascalaphus

"He spoke and Ceres was sure she would get back her daughter,
 though the Fates were not, for the girl had already placated
 her hunger while guilelessly roaming death's formal gardens, where,
 from a low-hanging branch, she had plucked without
 thinking

710

a pomegranate, and peeling its pale bark off, devoured
 seven of its seeds. No one saw her but Ascalaphus
 (whom it is said that Orphne, a not undistinguished
 nymph among those of Avernus, pregnant by Acheron,
 gave birth to there in the underworld's dark-shadowed forest);
 he saw, and by his disclosure, kept her from returning.

"Raging, the Queen of the Underworld turned that informer
 into a bird of ill omen: sprinkling the waters
 of Phlegethon into the face of Ascalaphus,
 she gave him a beak and plumage and eyes quite enormous.
 Lost to himself, he is clad now in yellow-brown pinions,
 his head increases in size and his nails turn to talons,
 but the feathers that spring from his motionless arms scarcely flutter;
 a filthy bird he's become, the grim announcer of mourning,
 a slothful portent of evil to mortals—the owl.

720

TAYLOR: The daughters of Achelouïs

"That one, because of his tattling tongue, seems quite worthy
 of punishment,—but you, daughters of Achelouïs,
 why do you have the plumage of birds and the faces of virgins?
 Is it because while Proserpina gathered her flowers,
 you, artful Sirens, were numbered among her companions?
 No sooner had you scoured the whole earth in vain for her

730

than you desired the vast seas to feel your devotion,
 and prayed to the gods, whom you found willing to help you,
 that you might skim over the flood upon oars that were pinions,
 then saw your limbs turn suddenly golden with plumage.
 And so that your tunefulness, which the ear finds so pleasing,
 should not be lost, nor your gifts of vocal expression,
 your maidenly faces remain, along with your voices.

TAYLOR: Proserpina transformed

"But poised between his sorrowing sister and brother,
 great Jove divided the year into two equal portions,
 so now in two realms the shared goddess holds sway,
 and as many months spent with her mother are spent with her husband.
 She changed her mind then, and changed her expression to match it,
 and now her fair face, which even Dis found depressing,
 beams as the sun does, when, after having been hidden
 before in dark clouds, at last it emerges in triumph.

740

TAYLOR: Arethusa's tale

"Her daughter safely restored to her, kindhearted Ceres
 wishes to hear *your* story now, Arethusa—
 what did you flee from and what changed you into a fountain?
 The splashing waters are stilled: the goddess raises
 her head from their depths and wrings dry her virid tresses,
 then tells the old tale of the river Alpheus' passion.

750

" "Once I was one of the nymphs who dwell in Achaea,"
 she said, "and none had more zeal than I for traversing
 the mountain pastures or setting out snares for small game.
 But even though I did not seek to find fame as a beauty,
 men called me that, my courage and strength notwithstanding;
 nor was I pleased that my beauty was lauded so often,
 and for my corporeal nature (which most other maidens
 are wont to take pleasure in) I blushed like a rustic,
 thinking it wrong to please men.

" "Exhausted from hunting,
 I was on my way back from the Stymphalian forest,

and the fierce heat of the day was doubled by my exertions.
By chance I came on a stream, gently and silently flowing,
clear to the bottom, where you could count every pebble,
water so still you would scarcely believe it was moving.
Silvery willows and poplars, which the stream nourished,
artlessly shaded its banks as they sloped to the water.

“ “At once I approach and wiggle my toes in its wetness,
then wade in up to my knees—not satisfied wholly,
I strip off my garments and hang them up on a willow,
and, naked, merge with the waters. I strike and stroke them,
gliding below and thrashing about on the surface,
then hear a strange murmur that seems to come from the bottom,
which sends me scampering onto the near bank in terror:
‘Why the great rush?’ Alpheus cries from his waters,
then hoarsely repeating, ‘Why the great rush, Arethusa?’
Just as I am, I flee without clothing (my garments
were on the bank opposite); aroused, Alpheus pursues me,
my nakedness making me seem more ripe for the taking.

770

780

“ “Thus did I run, and thus did that fierce one press after,
as doves on trembling pinions flee from the kestrel,
as kestrels pursue the trembling doves and assault them.
To Orchomenus and past, to Psophis, Cyllene,
the folds of Maenalia, Erymanthus, and Elis,
I continued to run, nor was he faster than I was;
but since Alpheus was so much stronger, I couldn’t
outrun him for long, given his greater endurance.

790

“ “Nonetheless, I still managed to keep on running
across the wide fields, up wooded mountains,
on bare rocks, steep cliffs, in wastes wild and trackless;
with the sun at my back, I could see his shadow before me,
stretched out on the ground, unless my panic deceived me;
but surely I *did* hear those frightening footsteps behind me,
and felt his hot breath lifting the hair from my shoulders.

“ “Worn with exertion, I cried out, ‘Help! Or I’m taken!

Aid your armorer, Diana—to whom you have often
entrusted your bow, along with your quiver of arrows!’
The goddess was moved by my plea and at once I was hidden
in a dense cloud of fine mist: the river god, clueless,
circled around me, hidden in darkness, searching;
twice he unknowingly passed by the place where the goddess
had hidden me, and twice he called, ‘Yo! Arethusa!’
How wretched was I? Why, even as the lamb is,
at hearing the howling of wolves around the sheepfold,
or as the rabbit in the briar patch who glimpses
the dog’s fierce muzzle and feels too frightened to tremble.

800

“ “Alpheus remained there, for as he noticed no footprints
heading away from the cloud, he continued to watch it.
An icy sweat thoroughly drenched the limbs that he looked for,
and the dark drops poured from every part of my body;
wherever my foot had been, there was a puddle,
and my hair shed moisture. More swiftly than I can tell it,
I turned into liquid—even so, he recognized me,
his darling there in the water, and promptly discarded
the human form he had assumed for the occasion,
reverting to river, so that our fluids might mingle.
Diana shattered the earth’s crust; I sank down,
and was swept on through sightless caverns, off to Ortygia,
so pleasing to me because it’s the goddess’s birthplace;
and here I first rose up into the air as a fountain.”

810

820

TAYLOR: *Triptolemus and Lyncus*

“ ‘Here Arethusa concluded. The fruitful goddess summoned
her team of dragons and yoked them onto her chariot;
and guiding their heads with the reins, she was transported
up through the middle air that lies between earth and heaven
until she arrived in Athens, and, giving her carriage
to Triptolemus, ordered him to go off and scatter
grain on the earth—some on land that had never been broken,
and some on land that had been a long time fallow.

“The young man was carried high up over Europe and Asia
until at last he came to the kingdom of Scythia. 830

Lyncus was king here; he brought him into his palace,
and asked him his name, his homeland, the cause of his journey,
and how he had come there.

““My well-known homeland,” he answered,
“is Athens; I am Triptolemus; neither by ship upon water
nor foot upon land have I come here; the air itself parted
to make me a path on which I coursed through the heavens.
I bear you the gifts of Ceres, which, sown in your broad fields,
will yield a bountiful harvest of nourishing produce.”

“This the barbarian heard with great envy, and wishing
that he himself might be perceived as the donor,
took him in as a guest, and while the young man was sleeping,
approached with a sword, and as he attempted to stab him,
Ceres changed *Lyncus* to *lynx*, and ordered Triptolemus
to drive her sacred team through the air back to Athens.’

GROSS: Daedalus and Icarus

Meanwhile, detesting Crete and his long exile,
and longing to return to his own nation,
Daedalus found that an escape by sea
was closed to him:

“Though he may bar the earth
and seas,” he said, “without a doubt, the sky
above is open; that is how we’ll go:
Minos rules everything except the air.”

He spoke and turned his mind to arts unknown,
and changed the face of nature, for he placed
a row of feathers in ascending order,
smallest to largest, so you would have thought
that they had all grown that way on a slope;
thus antic panpipes with unequal reeds
will rise above each other; these were bound

together in the middle with flaxen thread
and then joined at the quills with molded wax;
and finally, he bent them just a bit,
so they resembled bird’s wings.

Icarus,
his boy, was standing close by, unaware
of any danger in the things he handled;
he smiled as he snatched at wisps of feathers blown
from his father’s workbench by a passing breeze,
or left a thumbprint in the golden wax
and playfully got in his father’s way.

The wondrous work continued nonetheless,
and when he’d put the final touches to it,
the artisan himself hung poised between
the wings upon his shoulders in midair,
and offered these instructions to his son:

“Listen to me: keep to the middle course,
dear Icarus, for if you fly too low,
the waves will weight your wings down with their moisture;
and if you fly too high, flames will consume them;
stay in the middle and don’t set your course
by gazing at the stars: ignore Boötes,
the Dipper, and Orion’s unsheathed sword;
keep to my path and follow where I lead you.”
And while he was instructing him in flight,
he fit the untried wings to the boy’s shoulders.

And as he works and as he warns the boy,
the old man’s cheeks are dampened by his tears;
the father’s hands are trembling as he gives
his son a not-to-be-repeated kiss,
and lifts off on his wings into the air;
he flies ahead, afraid for his companion,
just like a bird who leads her young in flight
from their high nest, and as he flies along,

exhorts the boy to follow in his path,
 instructing him in their transgressive art, 300
 as he employs his wings in flight and watches
 his fledgling Icarus attempt his own.

Some fisherman whose line jerks with his catch,
 some idle shepherd leaning on his crook,
 some plowman at his plow, looks up and sees
 something astonishing, and thinks them gods,
 who have the power to pass through the air.

Now on their left, they had already passed
 the Isle of Samos, Juno's favorite,
 Delos and Paros too; and on their right, 310
 Lebinthos and Calymne, honey-rich,
 when the boy audaciously began to play
 and driven by desire for the sky,
 deserts his leader and seeks altitude.

The sun's consuming rays, much nearer now,
 soften the fragrant wax that bound his wings
 until it melts.

He agitates his arms,
 but without wings, they cannot grip the air,
 and with his father's name on them, his lips
 are taken under by the deep blue sea 320
 that bears his name, even to the present.

And his unlucky father, now no more
 a father, cries out, "Icarus, where are you,
 where, in what region, shall I look for you?"

And then he saw the feathers on the waves
 and cursed his arts; he built his son a tomb
 in the land that takes its name from Icarus.

GROSS: *Daedalus and Perdix*

As he entombs his child's pathetic corpse,
 he is observed, from where a rank ditch drips,
 by a chatty partridge, who chirps cheerfully 330
 and makes his wing tips flutter in applause:

a novel and unprecedented bird,
 and one who'd only lately been transformed,
 O Daedalus, because of a misdeed
 that, for a long time, will be held against you.

For, as it happened, the inventor's sister,
 quite unaware of what the Fates intended,
 entrusted her own son to his instruction,
 a likely lad of twelve, who had a mind 340
 with the capacity for principles and precepts;
 and from his observation of the spines
 of fishes, which he'd taken as his model,
 incised a row of teeth in an iron strip
 and thereby managed to invent the saw.
 Likewise, he was the first to bind two arms
 of iron at a joint, so one is fixed
 and the other, as it moves, inscribes a circle.

Daedalus envied him, and headlong hurled
 this lad of precepts from a precipice,
 the steep acropolis Minerva loves, 350
 and lying, said the lad had slipped and fallen.

But Athena, who takes care of clever people,
 snatched him from harm, changed him to a bird,
 and covered him with feathers in midair.
 His former brilliance, like his former name,
 he kept, although the former was transformed
 into the swiftness of his wings and feet.

Although a bird, she does not soar aloft,
 and does not build her nest high up in trees
 or on lofty peaks; she flies close to the ground 360
 and lays her eggs in hedges; remembering
 that fall of long ago, she fears the heights.
 [*Perdix* is the word Greeks had for "partridge."]

CAL: Orpheus and Eurydice

From there, dressed in his saffron mantle, Hymen
 went on his way, traversed the boundless heavens
 until he came to Thrace, where he'd been summoned
 by the voice of Orpheus—to no avail,
 for though the god appeared, he did not bring
 the words that customary use has sanctioned,
 nor countenances radiating joy,
 nor omens of good fortune for the couple;
 even the torch he carried merely sputtered,
 emitting only tear-producing smoke,
 not catching fire when he whirled it round.

10

And the aftermath was even more unpleasant,
 for as the bride was strolling through the grass,
 attended by the naiads, she dropped dead,
 bitten on her ankle by a snake.

When Orpheus had mourned sufficiently
 in the upper air, he bravely went below
 lest he should leave the underworld untried;
 he made his way there by the Spartan Gates,
 and passing through the superficial forms
 of those who had been buried up above,
 he came to Proserpina and her spouse,
 the ruler of this unattractive kingdom,
 and master of the shades.

20

The Thracian bard
 plucked at his lyre and began to sing:
 “Great god and goddess, appointed to govern in Hades,
 into which every living creature relapses,
 if it is rightful for me, if I am permitted
 to shun all evasions, speaking the truth to you plainly, know
 that I have not come down here to your kingdom just for
 the view, or to chain up the three-headed Cerberus, that
 monstrous child of Medusa, bristling with serpents;

30

my wife is the cause of my journey: she stepped on an adder
 whose venom cut her life short as it spread through her body.
 I won't deny that I wished to—and tried to—endure it,
 but Love overcame me. Above, this god is quite famous;
 whether he has the same status down here, I'm not certain,
 but even so, I would think him to be as well known,
 for unless that tale of long-ago rape was invented,
 the selfsame deity joined the pair of you, also!
 If that's the case, then I, by all of these frightening places,
 by mighty Chaos and by this realm of the silent, I beg you
 to weave once again Eurydice's fate, done too swiftly.

“We are all owed to you wholly, and though we may linger,
 later or sooner all hasten to this single dwelling.
 Everyone heads for this place, the home that is final.
 Your rule is the longest that any human encounters;
 she will be yours by right and dwell down here also,
 when her years are accomplished: I ask for her life as a favor,
 but if the Fates should deny me the gift I am seeking
 on behalf of my wife, be sure that I will remain here,
 and you may take pleasure then in a double destruction.”

These words, accompanied on the plucked strings,
 so moved the bloodless spirits that they wept;
 Tantalus did not seek the receding water,
 and on his wheel lay Ixion, astounded;
 the birds let go the liver, and the daughters
 of Danaüs were resting by their urns,
 while you, O Sisyphus, sat on your stone.

Then, for the first time ever, overcome
 by the effects of song, the Furies wept,
 nor could Persephone reject his prayer,
 nor he who rules the underworld deny him;
 Eurydice was called up from her place
 among the newly dead, and awkwardly
 came forward, limping from her recent wound.

The Thracian bard accepted her, together
 with the condition set for her release:
 that he may not look back at all, until
 he'd exited the valley of Avernus,
 on pain of revocation of this gift.

He started out upon the soundless path
 that rises steeply through dense fog and darkness
 until they had come almost to the border
 of the upper earth; here Orpheus, afraid
 that she would fail him, and desiring
 a glimpse of his beloved, turned to look:
 at once she slipped back to the underworld,
 and he, because he wanted to embrace her,
 or *be* embraced by her, stretched out his arms—
 but seized on nothing, that unlucky man,
 unless it was the abnegating air.

And she now, who must die a second death,
 did not find fault with him, for what indeed
 could he be faulted for, but his constancy?
 “Farewell,” she cried out to him one last time,
 and he had scarcely heard her cry before
 she took her place again among the dead.

The second time his wife died, Orpheus
 collapsed into no different a stupor
 than that which came upon that timid fellow
 who looked upon the triple-headed dog,
 his middle throat encircled with thick chains;
 that fellow's trembling did not cease until
 his former nature did, as stoniness
 arose and spread throughout his human frame;
 or as Olenos, who, though innocent,
 took on a fault wishing to seem guilty;
 and you, luckless Lethaea, once so proud
 of your great beauty, and once joined to him:

two hearts that beat as one are now transformed
into a pair of stones on humid Ida.

Orpheus prayed, desiring in vain
to cross the river Styx a second time,
but was prevented by the border guard;
for seven days he sat by the river's banks,
unkempt, unshaven, and unfed, with naught
but care and sorrow for his nourishment;
complaining that the gods below were cruel,
he sought out lofty Rhodope and Haemus.

110

Three times the Sun had finished out the year
in Pisces of the waters. Orpheus
had fled completely from the love of women,
either because it hadn't worked for him
or else because the pledge that he had given
to his Eurydice was permanent;
no matter: women burned to have the bard,
and many suffered greatly from rejection.
Among the Thracians, he originated
the practice of transferring the affections
to youthful males, plucking the first flower
in the brief springtime of their early manhood.

120

CAL: The death of Orpheus

Meanwhile, as Orpheus compelled the trees
 and beasts to follow him with suchlike songs,
 and made the very stones skip in his wake,
 behold: a raving mob of Thracian women
 with the pelts of wild beasts draped across their breasts
 observed him from the summit of a hill
 setting the words to music on his lyre.

One of them tossed her hair in the light breeze:
 "Look over there!" she cried. "The one who scorns us!"
 And with no more ado, she cast her lance
 at the vocalizing mouth of Apollo's seer;
 it struck without wounding, being wreathed in leaves.

10

Another's weapon was the stone she cast,
 that even in midflight was overwhelmed
 by words and music joined in harmony,
 and, as though begging pardon for its mad daring,
 fell at the poet's feet.

Nevertheless,
 the level of their mindless rage increased
 and measure fled: mad fury was in charge,
 but even so, their weapons would have been
 made mild by the enchantment of his song,
 had not the shrill clamor of Phrygian flutes,
 the breaking tones of horns, the frenzied drums,
 and the Bacchantes' applause and ululations
 together overwhelmed his lyre's music;
 when Orpheus no longer could be heard,
 the stones were reddened with a poet's blood.

20

Up until now, his voice had held in thrall
 the countless birds, the snakes, the surging beasts
 that were the indication of his triumph:
 all these the Maenads savagely drove off,
 then turned their bloody hands against the poet

30

and swarmed upon him as the birds will do,
 when in the daylight they discern an owl
 among them, dazed; or as when, in the arena,
 on the morning of the games, the fated stag
 is torn by dogs, and bleeds into the sand;
 just so the Maenads search the poet out
 and throw at him their wands wrapped in green leaves,
 not meant for such a use.

Then some hurl clods,
 and others, branches broken from the trees,
 while others are still busy throwing rocks;
 and, lest their madness lack for proper weapons
 there happened to be oxen yoked nearby,
 tilling the soil—and not too far from them,
 some brawny peasants, breaking the hard ground,
 sweating at their labors.

But when these men saw
 the Maenads surging toward them, they took off,
 abandoning their work and implements;
 scattered throughout the vacant fields now lay
 their hoes and rakes and mattocks, which the Maenads
 captured, and having torn apart the oxen
 whose horns had threatened them, they hastened back
 to finish off the seer, who, with raised hands,
 spoke words unheeded for the first time ever,
 his voice not moving them the slightest bit;
 the sacrilegious women struck him down,
 and past those lips—ah, Jupiter!—to which
 the stones would listen and the beasts respond,
 his exhaled ghost receded on the winds.

For you now, Orpheus, the grieving birds,
 the thronging beasts, the sharp, unyielding rocks,
 the trees that often gathered for your songs,
 and which, like men who tear their hair in grief,

have shed their leaves for you—all these now wept,
 and it is said that rivers were increased
 by their own tears, and water nymphs galore
 distressed their tresses and dressed all in grey.

His limbs lay scattered all about; his head
 and lyre, as they glide on down your stream,
 O Hebrus, now (miraculously!) mourn;
 the plaintive lyre makes some kind of moan,
 the lifeless tongue moans on along with it,
 the moaning riverbanks respond in turn.

Now head and lyre are borne down to the sea
 beyond their native stream, until they reach
 the coast of Lesbos, near Methymna's walls:
 here, as it lay at risk on foreign sands,
 that head (its locks still dripping with salt spray)
 was set upon by a ferocious snake;
 just as the serpent spread its jaws to strike,
 Phoebus at last appeared and drove it off,
 then turned the serpent's open jaws to stone,
 just as they were—and will forever be.

The shade of Orpheus now fled below,
 and recognized all he had seen before;
 and as he searched through the Elysian Fields,
 he came upon his lost Eurydice,
 and passionately threw his arms about her;
 here now they walk together, side by side,
 or now he follows as she goes before,
 or he precedes, and she goes after him;
 and now there is no longer any danger
 when Orpheus looks on Eurydice.

Nor does this placate Bacchus, still so mad
 that he removes himself from these same fields,
 and, with a better crowd, sets out to find
 the vineyards of Mount Timolus and the banks
 of the river Pactolus, which, in those days,
 was water, not a stream of flowing gold,
 nor envied for the value of its sands.

The usual throng of Satyrs and Bacchantes
 accompanied the god—save for Silenus:
 staggering from age and inebriation,
 he had been taken captive in Phrygia,
 and led in chains of chaplets to King Midas,
 who, with the Athenian king Eumolpus,

120

130

had once been taught the Bacchic mysteries
 by Orpheus himself.

On recognizing
 his comrade and companion in the rites,
 King Midas joyfully proclaimed a feast,
 which lasted for ten days and nights together,
 to celebrate his guest's arrival.

Now,
 when Lucifer, on the eleventh day,
 had driven off the ranks of stars above,
 King Midas joyfully came to the fields
 of Lydia, returning old Silenus
 to Bacchus, who had been his foster child.

140

The god, rejoicing in his safe return,
 offered the king whatever he might choose,
 a gratifying, although useless gift;
 and destined to make evil use of it,
 King Midas answered with, "Grant that whatever
 my body touches will turn into gold!"
 Bacchus assented to this harmful gift,
 and granted him his wish—although he grieved
 that Midas had not asked for something better.

150

The Phrygian king took leave of him, rejoicing
 in his misfortune—and as he went, essayed
 the efficacy of his gift by touching
 one thing and another: even he
 could scarcely credit it, but when he snapped
 a green twig from the low branch of an oak,
 the twig immediately turned to gold;
 he picked a stone up, and it did the same;
 he touched a clod, and at his potent touch,
 the piece of earth became a lump of ore;
 ripe wheat-heads plucked produced a golden harvest,
 and when he took an apple from a tree,

160

you would have thought that the Hesperides
had given it to him. His fingertips
brushed lofty columns, and they seemed to glow;
and when he washed his hands in water, why
the water would have gotten past Danaë:
All turns to gold! He scarcely could imagine!

As he rejoiced, his servants set a table
with heaps of roasted meats and fresh-baked breads,
the gifts of Ceres; when he touched a loaf,
it hardened, and when Midas greedily
prepared to sink his teeth into his meat,
the teeth encountered golden dinnerware;
he mixed his Bacchic beverage with water,
and you could see him swallow liquid gold!

Astounded by this strange catastrophe
of wretchedness in wealth, he longs to flee
its trappings—now despising what he'd prayed for.
Abundance was unable to relieve
his empty stomach or his burning throat;
so justly tortured by the hateful gold,
he raised his hands and gleaming arms to heaven:
"O Father Bacchus," he cried, "show your favor!
Though I have sinned, I beg you, grant me mercy,
save me from this ruinous extravagance!"

The gods are gentle: when the king confessed
to having sinned, Bacchus repaired his case,
released him from the gift that he had given
to keep his pledge, and said, "Lest you remain
surrounded by the gold you wrongly wished for,
go to the stream that flows past mighty Sardis
as swiftly as you can, and climb upstream
until you come upon the river's source,
then plunge your head and body both at once
beneath the fountain that it burbles from,

and in that moment you will purge your crime."

The king went where the god had ordered him;
the stream was colored by the force of gold
as it exchanged his body for the river;
and even now, the seed of that old vein
is taken up by the surrounding fields
whose soil, in hardness and in golden color,
still shows the influence of Midas' touch.

Detesting wealth, he dwelled in woods and fields,
and worshiped Pan, who haunts the mountain caves;
but he remained not altogether bright,
and as it happened once, now once again
his foolishness would do him injury.

For Mount Timolus, looking out to sea
from his high peak, stands loftily between
the town of Sardis and little Hypaepa;
and there, while Pan was boasting to the gentle
nymphs of his skill at fingering the pipes
and playing melodies on waxen reeds,
he dared speak poorly of Apollo's gift
compared to his own—a boast which brought about
the uneven contest which Timolus judged.

The aged judge was seated on his mountain,
and shook his ears free of the greenery;
a wreath of oak leaves bound up his dark hair,
and acorns dangled from his bulging temples.
At sight of Pan, the shepherd-god, he said,
"Court is in session: on with the proceedings."

Pan made a noise on his outlandish reeds,
and that barbaric song charmed Midas (who
just happened to be present for the singing);
when Pan had finished, Mount Timolus turned
his face to Phoebus—and his forest followed.

Apollo's golden locks were crowned with laurel

from Mount Parnassus, and his mantle, trimmed
 with Tyrian purple, swept along the ground;
 in his left hand, the god held up his lyre,
 inlaid with precious gems and ivory,
 and in his other hand he held the plectrum:
 an artist, in his bearing and his manner.
 And when his skillful thumb aroused the strings,
 the judge, so taken by that sweetness, ruled
 that Pan's reeds must be humbled by the lyre.

The judgment that the sacred mountain gave
 on the contestants was approved by all
 but one man, Midas, who alone opposed it,
 calling it unjust. Apollo could not bear
 that ears so dull should keep their human shape,
 and so he drew them out to greater length,
 and stuffed them full of gray and shaggy hair,
 and made them wobbly where they joined his head
 and capable of moving back and forth;
 the rest stayed human: just in that one part
 was Midas punished, whom the god compelled
 to wear the ears of a lackadaisical ass.

250

Now Midas, eager to alleviate
 the shame upon his temples, tried to hide it
 beneath a purple turban, but the slave
 who barbered him took note of his disgrace,
 and he, because he did not dare expose
 the shameful sight, yet wished to speak of it,
 and was unable *not* to bring it up,
 went off a ways and dug himself a hole,
 and in that hole he whispered quietly
 what he had noticed about his master's ears,
 and then concealed the vocal evidence
 by shoveling the dirt back in the hole,
 and, having filled it, silently slipped off.

260

And on that spot, there started to spring up
 a thickly planted grove of whispering reeds,
 which, at year's end, when they had reached their growth,
 betrayed their secret—stirred by the south wind,
 they breathed the hidden words, and so revealed
 the secret story of the master's ears.

whom you can brush off without any fear
of consequence; but I, although the daughter
of two immortals, Nereus and Doris,
and although guarded by a throng of sisters,
could not escape from the undesired
attentions of the Cyclops without grief." 1080

A flood of tears kept her from saying more.

The other smoothly scrubbed away the tears
from Galatea's eyes and soothed her, saying,
"Tell me the reason for your sorrow, dear,
do not conceal it—I'm a faithful friend!"

And Galatea answered Scylla so:

"Acis, the son of Faunus and a nymph,
gave pleasure to his parents, but gave me,
a pleasure even greater, to be sure:

we were inseparable. At sixteen, 1090

he was a gorgeous boy, whose tender cheeks
displayed the faintest down: I felt for him
exactly what the Cyclops felt for me:
incessant longing. Nor, if you had asked,
would I have been capable of telling you
whether my detestation of the Cyclops
meant more to me than did my love of Acis:
for they were equal!

"O Venus most benign,
how powerful a governance is thine!

"For see where that wild creature which the woods 1100
are terrified to look upon, the host
no stranger ever safely sees, the one
who disregards Olympus and its gods,
now realizes what love's all about,
and as he burns with powerful desire,
entirely ignores his rocks and flocks;
you give attention now to your appearance,
Polyphemus, and now you take a rake

HEATH: Polyphemus, Galatea, and Acis

"Without a doubt, O virgin, you attract
men of refinement, those of a better class,

against your matted locks, and are well pleased
to trim your shaggy beard with a great scythe, 1110
observing your hirsuteness in a pool
and practicing an ardent swain's expressions.

"Your love of slaughter and bloodthirstiness
now disappears, and ships can come and go
in perfect safety.

"Meanwhile, Telemus,
son of Eurymus, an unerring seer,
had landed here on Sicily, near Etna.

"He said to terrible Polyphemus,
'That eye of yours, the only one you've got,
and which you wear in the middle of your head, 1120
is going to be taken—by Ulysses!'

"The Cyclops laughed and said, 'O foolish seer,
you are entirely mistaken here:
another has already taken it!'

"So he dismissed the one who tried in vain
to warn him, and set out with heavy heart,
walking with leaden steps along the shore
or turning back, exhausted, to his cave.

"A sloping, wedge-shaped cliff juts out to sea,
washed evenly on both sides by the waves: 1130
the brutal Cyclops scrambled to its top
and sat down in the middle of the rock,
soon followed by his sheep, now leaderless.

"And after placing by his feet the pine
he used as walking stick—though others might
employ it as the yardarm of a ship—
he took his pipes made from a hundred reeds,
and piped away: the mountains felt it keenly,
and the waters, too; a rock concealing me,
I lay in the lap of my darling Acis, 1140
whence I could hear, so very far away,

words of the song the Cyclops sang to me,
and kept them afterward within my mind:

"O Galatea, whiter than the snowy white
flowers that decorate the privet hedge,
richer in blossoms than the meadow is,
taller, more slender than an alder tree,
brighter than crystal, more skittish than a kid,
smoother than a seashell on the shore
worn by the ceaseless motion of the waves, 1150
more pleasing than the shade in summertime
or sun in winter, swifter than the deer,
and even more remarkable to see,
far more conspicuous than the tall plane tree;
clearer than ice, sweeter than ripe grapes,
softer than swans' down or the curdled milk,
and, if you would not always flee from me,
more beautiful than an irrigated garden.

"Yet you, the very selfsame Galatea,
are fiercer than an untamed heifer is, 1160
harder than oak, more feigning than the sea,
tougher than willow wands or bryony,
less movable than the rock I'm sitting on,
rougher than rapids, prouder than a peacock,
fiercer than fire, bitterer than thistles,
grumpier than a nursing mother-bear,
more unresponsive even than the ocean,
less apt to pity than a stepped-on snake,
and, finally, the worst of all your faults,
the one that I most wish to rid you of: 1170
not only swifter than the deer pursued
by the baying pack, but even swifter than
the winds and the swiftest breezes in the air!

"If only you would get to know me well,
you would regret your giving me the rush,

condemn yourself for holding out against me,
 and do your best to keep a catch like me:
 a large part of this mountain is my own;
 I have my caves, cut from the living rock,
 protected from excessive summer heat 1180
 and winter's chill; my apples strain their branches,
 and yellow grapes are hung upon their vines
 like lumps of gold, and purple ones as well:
 to serve you, maiden, there will be both kinds;
 and in the summer, you yourself will gather
 delicious strawberries in wooded shade,
 in autumn, cherries, and the sweet black plums,
 and not just those, but the big yellow ones,
 which have the color of fresh new wax.

“Nor will you lack, with me as your mate, 1190
 chestnuts and fruit of the arbutus tree,
 and orchards will be placed at your disposal.

“This flock is mine entirely, and many
 others are out there grazing in the valley,
 many I have in the woods, and many more
 are penned in stables deep within my caves;
 and if you were to ask, I could not say
 how many sheep are mine, for only paupers
 can tally up the number of their flocks;
 but don't trust me when I sing my own praises: 1200
 just look around you here and trust your eyes,
 see how these sheep can scarcely get around,
 with their teats hanging down between their shanks.

“The little lambs are kept warm in their folds,
 as are an equal number of small goats.
 The milk I get from them is snowy white,
 and part of it is kept for drinking fresh,
 and the rest of it is made into my cheeses.

“You'll get no ordinary gifts from me,

and nothing that is easily obtained, 1210
 like deer, and hares, and goats, and pairs of doves,
 or a bird's nest lifted off a treetop:
 on a mountainside, I found a pair of twins,
 too like for you to tell one from the other—
 playmates for you! Cubs of the shaggy bear!
 I cried out, when I found them, “For my mistress!”

“Come on now, Galatea, now's the time
 to lift your pretty head above the waves!
 Come on now, don't despise my offerings!
 I have a good opinion of myself: 1220

lately I saw my image in the water,
 and my appearance pleased enormously.

“Just look how big I am! Not even Jove—
 this Jupiter that you go on about,
 who you say governs heaven—is as big!
 Abundant hair hangs over my fierce face
 and shoulders, shading me, just like a grove;
 but don't think me unsightly just because
 I am completely covered in dense bristles:
 unsightly is the tree that has no leaves, 1230
 the horse without a mane; birds have their plumage
 and sheep are most attractive in their wool,
 so facial hair and a full body beard
 are really most becoming in a man.

“In the middle of my forehead is one eye,
 as large in its appearance as a shield:
 what of it, then? Does not the mighty Sun
 see everything that happens here on earth?
 And as for eyes, he too has only one!

“And furthermore, my father Neptune rules 1240
 your waters; I present him as a gift
 to be your father-in-law—if you will only
 have pity on my prayers and supplications!

“For only you do I bow down before,
 despising Jupiter and heaven too,
 and his all-penetrating thunderbolt!
 I fear you, Galatea, and your wrath,
 far more ferocious than Jove’s armaments!

“But I could bear your scorn more patiently
 if you fled everyone—though you do not:
 how can you spurn the Cyclops, but love Acis,
 preferring his embraces to my own?
 Well, he may please himself for all of that,
 but what I don’t like is, he pleases *you*,
 Galatea—just let me at the guy,
 he’ll learn that I’m as strong as I am big!
 I’ll tear his living gut out and I’ll scatter
 his body parts in fields and in your waters,
 so you can mingle with his mangled limbs!

“I burn indeed, and your offense against me
 blazes within more fiercely than a fire:
 I feel as though Mount Etna in eruption
 has been transported into my own breast,
 and none of this makes any difference
 to how you feel about me, Galatea!”

“And after uttering these vain complaints,
 he stood erect (for I saw everything),
 and as a bull whose cow is snatched away,
 unable to stand still, goes wandering
 through forests and familiar fields, until
 that wild one catches sight of me with Acis,
 and we both unaware and fearless too:

“I see!’ he cried out, ‘and I will see to it
 that this fond coupling will be your last!’
 And these words spoken in a frightening voice,
 such as an angry Cyclops ought to have,
 that left Mount Etna shaken to its core.

“In fear, I dove into the nearby waters,
 while my Sicilian hero turned and fled,
 crying out, ‘Galatea! Help me! Please!’
 and ‘Help me, parents! Admit into your kingdom
 the son who otherwise will be soon dead!’

“The Cyclops followed, pausing just to fling
 a portion that he’d broken off the mountain,
 and even though the barest corner struck him,
 it nonetheless crushed Acis altogether.
 I (who could do but as the Fates permitted)
 caused Acis to assume ancestral powers.

“Bright purple blood streamed from beneath the rock,
 and in a little while the redness faded
 until it turned the color of a stream
 swollen from the first rainstorms of spring,
 then shortly afterward completely cleared.

“The boulder that the Cyclops threw cracked open,
 and from within, there sprang a living reed
 of noble size; and from the hollow rock
 there came the sound of waters leaping up,
 and marvelous! there suddenly emerged,
 from the middle of that womb, a tender youth
 whose fresh new horns were wreathed in streaming rushes,
 and who, though larger than he used to be,
 and with a face now of immortal blue,
 was Acis, changed into a river god,
 whose waters kept the name he had before.”

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METAMORPHOSES



TRANSLATED AND WITH NOTES BY

CHARLES MARTIN



INTRODUCTION BY

BERNARD KNOX



W.W.NORTON & COMPANY NEW YORK LONDON

2004