

## DAPHNE

Apollo's first love was Daphne, the child of the river  
 Penëus.  
 Blind chance was not to be blamed but Cupid's spiteful  
 resentment.  
 Phoebus, still in the flush of his victory over the  
 serpent,  
 had noticed the love-god bending his bow and drawing  
 the string  
 to his shoulder, and asked him: 'What are you doing  
 with grown-up weapons,  
 you mischievous boy? That bow would better be  
 carried by me.  
 When I fire my shafts at my foes or beasts, they're  
 unflinching wounded.  
 My numberless arrows have just destroyed the  
 venomous Python,  
 which filled whole acres of mountainside with its  
 belly's infections.  
 You be content with your torch and use it to kindle  
 some passion  
 or other; but don't usurp any honours belonging to  
 me!'

The son of Venus replied: 'Your arrows, Apollo, can  
 shoot  
 whatever you choose, but I'll shoot you. As mortal  
 creatures  
 must yield to a god, your glory will likewise prove to  
 be subject

to mine.' Then he beat his wings and cut a path  
 through the atmosphere,  
 nimbly alighting upon the heights of shady Parnassus.  
 Once there he drew from his quiver two arrows of  
 contrary purpose:  
 one is for rousing passion, the other is meant to repel it.

The former is made of gold, and its head has a sharp, bright  
 point,  
 while the latter is blunt and weighted with lead one side of  
 the reed shaft.

That was the arrow which Cupid implanted in Daphne's  
 bosom;  
 the other was aimed at Apollo and smote to the core of his  
 being.

Phoebus at once was filled with desire, but Daphne fled  
 from the very thought of a lover. She joyed in the forest  
 lairs  
 and in spoils of captive beasts, like the virgin goddess  
 Diana,  
 binding her carelessly flowing locks in a simple headband.  
 Courted by suitors in droves, Penëus' daughter rejected  
 them.

Stubbornly single, she'd roam through the woodland  
 thickets, without  
 concern for the meaning of marriage or love or physical  
 union.

Often her father remarked, 'You owe me a son, my  
 daughter,'  
 or else he would say, 'Now when, my child, will you give  
 me a grandson?'

Marriage torches to Daphne were nothing less than  
 anathema.

Blushes of shame would spread all over her beautiful  
 cheeks,  
 she would lovingly cling to her father's neck in a coaxing  
 appeal

and say to him, 'Darling Father, I want to remain a virgin  
 for ever. Please let me. Diana's father allowed her that.'  
 Penëus granted her wish; but Daphne's peculiar beauty  
 and personal charm were powerful bars to her prayer's  
 fulfilment.

Phoebus caught sight of her, fell in love and longed to  
 possess her.

Wishes were hopes, for even his powers of prophecy  
failed him.

Think of the flimsy stubble which burns in a harvested  
cornfield,  
and think of a blazing hedgerow fired by a torch which a  
traveller  
has carelessly brought too close or dropped behind him  
at daybreak.

495 So was the god as his heart caught fire and the flames  
spread through  
to the depths of his soul, and passion was fuelled with  
empty hope.

He eyes the hair hanging loosely over her neck, and  
murmurs,

'What if that hair were neatly arranged?' He looks at  
her bright eyes

burning and twinkling like stars; he studies her lips, so  
teasingly

500 tempting; he fondly admires her hands with their  
delicate fingers;

he dotes on the shapely arms, so nearly bare to the  
shoulder;

what's hidden he thinks must be even better. But swift  
as the light breeze,

Daphne is gone, with never a pause as he calls out after  
her:

'Stop, dear Daphne, I beg you to stop! This isn't an  
enemy

505 chasing you. Stop! You would think I'm a wolf  
pursuing a lamb,

a lion hunting a deer or an eagle pouncing on fluttering  
doves in mid-air, but I'm not! It is love that impels me  
to follow you.

Have pity! How frightened I am that you'll fall and  
scratch those innocent  
legs in the brambles. You mustn't be hurt on account  
of me!

The ground where you're rushing away is so rough. Slow  
down, my beloved,

I beg you. Don't run so fast and I promise to slow down  
too.

Now ask who it is that desires you. I'm not a wild  
mountain-dweller;

this isn't an uncouth shepherd, minding the flocks and the  
herds

round here. Impetuous girl, you have no idea who you're  
running from.

That's why you're running so fast. Listen! I am the master  
of Delphi,

515 Claros and Tenedos, Pátrara's temple too. My father  
is Jupiter. I can reveal the past, the present and future  
to all who seek them. I am the lord of the lyre and song.

My arrows are deadly, but one is even more deadly than  
they are,

the shaft which has smitten a heart that has never been  
wounded before.

520 Healing is my invention, the world invokes me as Helper,  
and I am the one who dispenses the herbs with the power to  
cure.

Alas! No herbs have the power to cure the disease of my  
love.

Those arts which comfort the whole of mankind cannot  
comfort their master!

Apollo wanted to say much more, but the terrified  
Daphne

525 ran all the faster; she left him behind with his speech  
unfinished.

Her beauty was visible still, as her limbs were exposed by  
the wind;

the breezes which blew in her face managed also to flutter  
her dress;

and the currents of air succeeded in blowing her tresses  
behind her.

530 Flight made her all the more lovely; but now the god in his  
youthful

ardour was ready no longer to squander his breath on  
wheedling  
pleas. Spurred on by desire, he followed the trail with  
new vigour.

Imagine a greyhound, imagine a hare it has sighted in  
open  
country: one running to capture his prey, the other for  
safety.

535 The hound is about to close in with his jaws; he believes  
he is almost  
there; he is grazing the back of her heels with the tip of  
his muzzle.

The hare isn't sure if her hunter has caught her, but  
leaps into freedom,  
clear of the menacing jaws and the mouth which keeps  
brushing against her.

540 So with Apollo and Daphne, the one of them racing in  
hope  
and the other in fear. But the god had the pinions of  
love to encourage him.

Faster than she, he allowed her no rest; his hands were  
now close  
to the fugitive's shoulders; his breath was ruffling the  
hair on her neck.

Her strength exhausted, the girl grew pale; then  
overcome  
by the effort of running, she saw Peneus' waters before  
her:

545 'Help me, Father!' she pleaded. 'If rivers have power  
over nature,  
mar the beauty which made me admired too well, by  
changing

my form!' She had hardly ended her prayer when a  
heavy numbness  
came over her body; her soft white bosom was ringed  
in a layer  
of bark, her hair was turned into foliage, her arms into  
branches.

550

The feet that had run so nimbly were sunk into sluggish  
roots;

her head was confined in a treetop; and all that remained  
was her beauty.

Tree though she was, Apollo still loved her. Caressing the  
trunk  
with his hand, he could feel the heart still fluttering under  
the new bark.

555 Seizing the branches, as though they were limbs, in his arms'  
embrace,  
he pressed his lips to the wood; but the wood still shrank  
from his kisses.

Phoebus then said to her: 'Since you cannot be mine in  
wedlock,  
you must at least be Apollo's tree. It is you who will always  
be twined in my hair, on my tuneful lyre and my quiver of  
arrows.

The generals of Rome shall be wreathed with you, when the  
jubilant paean  
of triumph is raised and the long procession ascends the  
Capitol.

On either side of Augustus' gates your trees shall stand  
sentry,  
faithfully guarding the crown of oak-leaves\* hanging  
between them.

As I, with my hair that is never cut, am eternally youthful,  
so you with your evergreen leaves are for glory and praise  
everlasting.'

565 Apollo the Healer had done. With a wave of her  
new-formed branches  
the laurel agreed, and seemed to be nodding her head in the  
treetop.

at festival time. The embroidered figures slowly and smoothly

ascend, their faces first and then the rest of their bodies, till all is revealed and their feet stand firm on the base of the curtain.

115 Another foe to be feared! When Cadmus made ready to seize

his weapons, 'Leave those arms!' cried one of the troop of earth-sprung

warriors. 'This is a family feud. You stand aside!'

As he spoke he engaged in combat with one of his soil-born brethren

and felled him down with his sword. Then he himself was struck

120 by a javelin hurled from a distance. His killer survived no longer

and soon had breathed the last of the breath he had just been given.

So madness got hold of them all. Their death was as quick as their birth,

from the wounds they dealt and received in their own unnatural warfare.

Those youths, allotted so brief a span of life, were already

125 beating the breast of their mother earth, till it bled with their fresh warm

blood. Five soldiers only remained, and one was Echion.\*

He, at Minerva's prompting, threw his arms to the ground

and sued for peace with his brothers, promising peace in return.

These were the men whom Cadmus of Sidon took as his aides

130 when he founded his city as Phoebus Apollo's oracle bade him.

### ACTAEON

Thebes had her walls, and Cadmus' exile might have been thought

to have brought him nothing but luck. He had married

Harmónia, daughter

of Mars and Venus, a most prestigious match which had

yielded

a brood of numerous sons and daughters and much-loved

grandsons,

grown into fine young men. But never forget the ancient

saying: 'Wait for the final day. Call no man happy

until he is dead and his body is laid to rest in the grave.'

Prosperous in so much, great Cadmus was struck by

disaster.

First, Actaeon, his grandson, had antlers sprout from his

brow

and his dogs were allowed to slake their thirst in their

master's blood.

If you look at the facts, however, you'll find that chance

was the culprit.

No crime was committed. Why punish a man for a pure

mistake?\*

Picture a mountain stained with the carnage of hounded

beasts.

It was now midday, the hour when the shadows draw to

their shortest;

the sun god's chariot was halfway over from east to west.

A band of huntmen was strolling along through the

pathless glades,

when their leader, the young Actaeon, calmly made an

announcement:

'Comrades, our nets are soaked, our spears are drenched in

our quarry's

blood. Our luck is enough for today. When the goddess

Aurora

appears tomorrow and shows the gleam of her rosy wheels,

150 let us all return to the chase. Now Phoebus is halfway over

from east to west and cutting the fields with his burning rays.

Leave off what you're doing and stow your knotted nets for the moment.<sup>2</sup>

The men did just as he told them and took a break from their hunting.

155 Now picture a valley, dense with pine and tapering cypress,

called Gargaphië, sacred haunt of the huntress Diana; there, in a secret corner, a cave surrounded by

woodland,

owing nothing to human artifice. Nature had used her talent to imitate art: she had moulded the living

rock

160 of porous tufa to form the shape of a rugged arch. To the right, a babbling spring with a thin translucent rivulet

widening into a pool ringed round by a grassy clearing. Here the goddess who guards the woods, when weary

with hunting, would come to bathe her virginal limbs in the clear, clean water.

165 On this occasion she made her entrance and handed her javelin,

quiver and slackened bow to the chosen nymph who carried

her weapons. Another put out her arms to receive her dress

as she stripped it off. Two more were removing her boots, while Cröcale,

more of an expert, gathered the locks that were billowing over

170 her mistress' neck in a knot, though her own stayed floating and free.

Nephele, Hyale, Rhamnis, Psecas and Phiale charged their capacious urns with water and stood all ready to

pour it.

And while the virgin goddess was taking her bath in her usual

pool, as fate would have it, Actaeon, Cadmus' grandson, wandered into the glade. His hunting could wait, he

175 thought,

as he sauntered aimlessly through the unfamiliar woodland. Imagine the scene as he entered: the grotto, the splashing

fountains, the group of nymphs in the nude. At once, at the sight of a

man, they struck their bosoms in horror, their sudden screams

re-echoing through the encircling woods. They clustered around

180 Diana

to form a screen with their bodies, but sadly the goddess was taller;

her neck and shoulders were visible over the heads of her maidens.

Think of the crimson glow on the clouds when struck by the rays

of the setting sun; or think of the rosy-fingered dawn; such was the blush on the face of Diana observed quite

185 naked. Although her companion nymphs had formed a barrier round her,

she stood with her front turned sideways and looked at the rash intruder

over her shoulder. She wished that her arrows were ready to hand,

but used what she could, caught up some water and threw it into

190 the face of the man. As she splashed his hair with revengeful drops,

she spoke the spine-chilling words which warned of impending disaster:

'Now you may tell the story of seeing Diana naked –  
If story-telling is in your power!' No more was needed.  
The head she had sprinkled sprouted the horns of a lussy

stags;  
the neck expanded, the ears were narrowed to pointed  
tips;

195 she changed his hands into hooves and his arms into  
long and slender

forelegs; she covered his frame in a pelt of dappled  
buckskin;

last, she injected panic. The son of Autónoë\* bolted,  
surprising himself with his speed as he bounded away  
from the clearing.

200 But when he came to a pool and set eyes on his head  
and antlers,

'Oh, dear god! he was going to say; but no words  
followed.

All the sound he produced was a moan, as the tears  
streamed over

his strange new face. It was only his feelings that  
stayed unchanged.

What could he do? Make tracks for his home in the  
royal palace?

205 Or hide in the woodlands? Each was precluded by  
shame or fear.

He wavered in fearful doubt. And then his dogs  
caught sight of him.

First to sound on the trail were Blackfoot and  
sharp-nosed Tracker\* –

Tracker of Cretan breed and Blackfoot a Spartan  
pointer.

Others came bounding behind them, fast as the gusts  
of the storm wind:

210 Ravenous, Mountain-Ranger, Gazelle, his Arcadian  
deerhounds;

powerful Fawnkiller, Hunter the fierce, and violent  
Hurricane;

Wingdog, fleetest of foot, and Chaser, the keenest-scented;  
savage Sylvan, lately gashed by the tusks of a wild boar;

Glen who was dropped from a wolf at birth, and the bitch  
who gathers

the flocks in, Shepherdess; Harpy, flanked by her two young  
puppies;

215 River, the dog from Sicyon, sides all taut and contracted;  
Racer and Gnasher; Spot, with Tigress and muscular

Valour;  
Sheen with a snow-white coat and murky Soot with a  
pitch-black;

Spartan, wiry and tough; then Whirlwind, powerful  
pursuer;

Swift, and Wolfcub racing along with her Cypriot  
brother;

220 Grabber, who sported an ivory patch midway on his ebony  
forehead; Sable, and Shag with a coat like a tangled thicket;

two mongrel hounds from a Cretan sire and Laconian dam,  
Rumpus and Whitefang; Yelper, whose howls could

damage the eardrums –  
and others too many to mention. Spoiling all for their

225 quarry,  
over crag, over cliff, over rocks which appeared to allow no

approach,  
where access was hard and where there was none, the

whole pack followed.  
Actaeon fled where so many times he had been the

230 pursuer.

He fled from the dogs who had served him so faithfully,  
longing to shout to them,

'Stop! It is I, Actaeon, your master. Do you not know me?'  
230 But the words would not come. The air was filled with

relentless baying.  
Blacklock first inserted his teeth to tear at his back;

Beast-killer next; then Mountain-Boy latched on to his  
shoulder.

These had started out later but stolen a march by taking

104 a short cut over the ridge. As they pinned their master  
235 down,

the rest of the pack rushed round and buried their  
fangs in his body,

until it was covered with crimson wounds. Actaeon  
groaned

in a sound that was scarcely human but one no stag  
could ever

have made, as he filled the familiar hills with his cries  
of anguish.

240 Then bending his legs like a cringing beggar, he gazed  
all round

with his silently pleading eyes, as if they were  
outstretched arms.

What of his friends? In ignorant zeal they  
encouraged the wild pack

on with the usual halloos. They scanned the woods for  
their leader,

shouting, 'Actaeon! Actaeon!', as if he were far away,  
though he moved his head in response to his name.

245 'Why aren't you here,

you indolent man, to enjoy the sight of this heaven-sent  
prize?'

If only he'd not been there! But he was. He would  
dearly have loved

to watch, instead of enduring, his own dogs' vicious  
performance.

Crowding around him, they buried their noses inside  
his flesh

250 and mangled to pieces the counterfeiter stag who  
embodied their master.

Only after his life was destroyed in a welter of wounds  
is Diana, the goddess of hunting, said to have cooled  
her anger.

## SEMELLE

Comments varied: some felt that the goddess had overdone  
her violent revenge, while others commended it – worthy,  
they said

of her strict virginity. All were prepared to defend their  
opinion.

255 Juno alone was less concerned to publish her judgment,  
whether in praise or blame, but quietly gloated over  
the blow to Agenor's house. Her hatred for princess

Europa,  
the whore of Tyre, was now transferred to her kinsfolk.

Suddenly,  
further cause for resentment: Semele, Cadmus' daughter,

260 was pregnant by mighty Jove! Queen Juno's tongue was  
already

sharpened, when 'What has my scolding ever achieved?' she  
thought.

I must target the woman herself and destroy her, if I am to  
merit

the title of mighty Juno; if I may properly wield  
my jewelled sceptre as Queen of the Gods; if I am Jupiter's

265 sister and consort – at least his sister! She might, I suppose,  
be content with a secret liaison; the insult to *me* may be  
shortlived.

But no, she has got herself pregnant! Her guilt is betrayed  
by her bulging

belly. So sure of her beauty, she means to become a mother  
by none but Jupiter. How many times have I been allowed

270 to bear him a child? \* I'll make quite sure that he plays her  
false.

Her Jove will drown her in the Styx, or I'm not Saturn's  
daughter!

The rose from her throne, then, veiling herself in a  
yellowish cloud,

## TERESIAS

While these events, in accordance with fate, were  
occurring on earth

and the infant Bacchus, now twice-born, was cradled in  
safety,

the story goes that Jupiter once, well-flushed with  
nectar,

320 laid his worries aside and, as Juno was none too busy,  
he casually cracked a joke. 'Now listen,' he said, 'I bet  
you women enjoy more pleasure in bed than ever we  
men do.'

When Juno disputed the point, they agreed to ask the  
opinion

of wise Teiresias, since he'd experienced love from  
both angles.

How so? When a pair of enormous snakes in the leafy  
forest  
were coupling together, a blow from his staff disrupted  
their congress.

325 Teiresias then was somewhat amazingly changed from  
a man  
to a woman for seven years. In the eighth, however, he  
saw

the very same snakes again and said, 'If cudgelling you  
has the power to alter the sex of the person who deals  
you the wallop,

330 here is a second one for you! With that, he struck at  
the snakes  
and promptly recovered the figure and bodily parts he  
was born with.

That was why he was chosen to settle this playful  
argument.

Jupiter won his bet, but Juno unfairly resented  
Teiresias' verdict. They say that in disproportionate  
fury,

she sentenced her judge and condemned his eyes to perpetual  
blindness.

335 What of almighty Jove? As the gods are never allowed  
to undo each other's work, for the loss of Teiresias' sight  
he awarded the gift of clairvoyance and high prestige to  
console him.

## NARCISSUS AND ECHO

Soon the prophet's fame was rumoured throughout

Boeotia.

Folk consulted, and none could fault, his oracular powers. 340

The first to put his trusted authority under test  
was sea-green Liriope, \* whom once Cephisus the river-god  
caught in the folds of his sinuous stream and then

proceeded

to rape. The nymph's womb swelled and, now at her very

loveliest,

Liriope gave birth to a child, already adorable,

345 called Narcissus. In course of time she consulted the seer;

'Tell me,' she asked, 'will my baby live to a ripe old age?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'so long as he never knows himself' \* — to  
empty words, as they long appeared, but the prophet was  
proved right.

In the event, Narcissus died of a curious passion. 350

Sixteen years went by and already the son of Cephisus  
was changing each day from beautiful youth to comely  
manhood.

Legions of lusty men and beavies of girls desired him;  
but the heart was so hard and proud in that soft and slender  
body,

that none of the lusty men or languishing girls could

approach him.

355 One day he was sighted, blithely chasing the scampering

roebuck

into the huntsman's nets, by a nymph whose babbling voice

would always answer a call but never speak first. It was  
Echo.

Echo still was a body, not a mere voice, but her  
chattering

360 tongue could only do what it does today, that is  
to parrot the last few words of the many spoken by  
others.

Juno had done this to her. The goddess would be all

ready

to catch her husband Jupiter making love to some

nymph

in a mountain dell, when crafty Echo would keep her  
engaged

365 in a long conversation, until the nymph could scurry to  
safety.

When Saturn's daughter perceived what Echo was  
doing, she said to her,

'I've been cheated enough by your prattling tongue.

From now on

your words will be short and sweet!' Her curse took  
effect at once.

Echo could only repeat the words she heard at the end  
of a sentence and never reply for herself. So when

370 she saw Narcissus wandering over the country fields,  
she burned with desire and stealthily followed along  
his tracks.

The closer she followed, the flames of her passion grew  
nearer and nearer,

as sulphur smeared on the tip of a pine-torch quickly

catches

fire when another flame is brought into close

proximity.

Oh, how often she longed, poor creature, to say sweet

nothings

375 and beg him softly to stay! But her nature imposed a  
block

and would not allow her to make a start. She was

merely permitted

and ready to wait for the sounds which her voice could  
return to the speaker.

Narcissus once took a different path from his trusty  
companions.

'Is anyone there?' he said. '... one there?' came Echo's

answer.

380

Startled, he searched with his eyes all round the glade and  
loudly

shouted, 'Come here!' 'Come here!' the voice threw back to  
the caller.

He looks behind him and, once again, when no one emerges,

'Why are you running away?' he cries. His words come

ringing

back. His body freezes. Deceived by his voice's reflection,

385

the youth calls out yet again, 'This way! We must come

together.'

Echo with rapturous joy responds, 'We must come

together!'

To prove her words, she burst in excitement out of the

forest,

arms outstretched to fling them around the shoulders she

yearned for.

Shrinking in horror, he yelled, 'Hands off! May I die

before

390

you enjoy my body?' Her only reply was '... enjoy my

body.'

Scorned and rejected, with burning cheeks, she fled to the

forest

to hide her shame and live thenceforward in lonely caves.

But her love persisted and steadily grew with the pain of

rejection.

Wretched and sleepless with anguish, she started to waste

away.

395

Her skin grew dry and shrivelled, the lovely bloom of her

flesh

lost all its moisture; nothing remained but voice and bones;

then only voice, for her bones (so they say) were

transformed to stone.

Buried away in the forest, seen no more on the  
 mountains,  
 400 heard all over the world, she survives in the sound of  
 the echo.

Not only Echo, the other nymphs of the waves and  
 mountains  
 incurred Narcissus' mockery; so did his male  
 companions.

405 Finally one of his scorned admirers lifted his hands  
 to the heavens: 'I pray Narcissus may fall in love and  
 never  
 obtain his desire!' His prayer was just and Nemesis  
 heard it.

Picture a clear, unclouded pool of silvery,  
 shimmering  
 water. The shepherds have not been near it; the  
 mountain-goats  
 and cattle have not come down to drink there; its  
 surface has never  
 been ruffled by bird or beast or branch from a rotting  
 410 cypress.

Imagine a ring of grass, well-watered and lush, and a  
 circle  
 of trees for cooling shade in the burning summer  
 sunshine.

Here Narcissus arrived, all hot and exhausted from  
 hunting,  
 and sank to the ground. The place looked pleasant,  
 and here was a spring!  
 Thirsty for water, he started to drink, but soon grew  
 415 thirsty

for something else. His being was suddenly  
 overwhelmed  
 by a vision of beauty. He fell in love with an empty  
 hope,  
 a shadow mistaken for substance. He gazed at himself  
 in amazement,

limbs and expression as still as a statue of Párian marble.  
 Stretched on the grass, he saw twin stars, his own two  
 eyes,  
 420 rippling curls like the locks of a god, Apollo or Bacchus,

cheeks as smooth as silk, an ivory neck and a glorious  
 face with a mixture of blushing red and a creamy whiteness.  
 All that his lovers adored he worshipped in self-adoration.  
 Blindly rapt with desire for himself, he was votary and  
 idol,

suitors and sweetheart, taper and fire – at one and the same  
 time.

Those beautiful lips would implore a kiss, but as he bent  
 forward  
 the pool would always betray him. He plunges his arms in  
 the water

to clasp that ivory neck and finds himself clutching at no one.  
 He knows not what he is seeing; the sight still fires him with

passion.  
 430 His eyes are deceived, but the strange illusion excites his  
 senses.

Trusting fool, how futile to woo a fleeting phantom!  
 You'll never grasp it. Turn away and your love will have  
 vanished.

The shape now haunting your sight is only a wraith, a  
 reflection  
 consisting of nothing; there with you when you arrived,  
 here now,  
 435 and there with you when you decide to go – if ever you can  
 go!

Nothing could drag him away from the place, not hunger  
 for food

nor need for sleep. As he lay stretched out in the grassy  
 shade,  
 he never could gaze his fill on that fraudulent image of  
 beauty;

and gazing proved his demise. He raised his body a little,  
 then stretching his arms in grief to the witnessing trees all  
 round him,  
 440

'Wise old trees,' he exclaimed, 'has anyone loved more cruelly?

Lovers have often kissed in secret under your branches. Here you have stood for hundreds of years. In all that

time  
has anyone suffered for love like me? Whom can you remember?

I've looked and have longed. But looking and longing is far from enough.

I still have to find! (His lover's delusion was overpowering.)

'My pain is the more since we're not divided by stretches of ocean, unending roads, by mountains or walls with impassable gates.

450 All that keeps us apart is a thin, thin line of water.

He wants to be held in my arms. Whenever I move to kiss

the clear bright surface, his upturned face strains closer to mine.

We all but touch! The paltriest barrier thwarts our pleasure.

Come out to me here, whoever you are! Why keep eluding me,

455 peerless boy? When I seek you, where do you steal away?

It can't be my looks or my age which makes you want to avoid me;

even the nymphs have longed to possess me! . . . Your looks of affection

offer a grain of hope. When my arms reach out to embrace you,

you reach out too. I smile at you, and you smile at me back.

460 I weep and your tears flow fast. You nod when I show my approval.

When I read those exquisite lips, I can watch them gently repeating

my words – but I never can *hear* you repeat them! . . .

I know you now and I know myself. \* Yes, I am the cause of the fire inside me, the fuel that burns and the flame that lights it.

What can I do? Must I woo or be wooed? What else can I plead for?

465

All I desire I have. My wealth has left me a pauper.

Oh, how I wish that I and my body could now be parted, I wish my love were not here! – a curious prayer for a lover.

Now my sorrow is sapping my strength. My life is almost over. Its candle is guttering out in the prime of my manhood.

470

Death will be easy to bear, since dying will cure my heartache.

Better indeed if the one I love could have lived for longer, but now, two soulmates in one, we shall face our ending together.

With that he turned distractedly back to his own reflection:

his tears were troubling the limpid waters and blurring the picture

475

that showed in the ruffled pool. When he saw it fast disappearing,

'Don't hurry away, please stay! You cannot desert me so cruelly.

I love you!' he shouted. 'Please, if I'm not able to touch you, I must be allowed to see you, to feed my unhappy passion!'

480

In wild distress he ripped the top of his tunic aside and bared his breast to the blows he rained with his milk-white hand.

His fist brought up a crimson weal on his naked torso, like apples tinted both white and red, or a multi-coloured cluster of grapes just ripening into a blushing purple.

485

Once the water had cleared again and he saw what his hand

had done, the boy could bear it no longer. As yellow wax melts in a gentle flame, or the frost on a winter morning thaws in the rays of the sunshine, so Narcissus faded

away and melted, slowly consumed by the fire inside  
him.

490 His face had lost that wonderful blend of red and  
whiteness,

gone was the physical vigour and all he had looked at  
and longed for,  
broken the godlike frame which once poor Echo had  
worshipped.

Echo had watched his decline, still filled with angry  
resentment

495 but moved to pity. Whenever the poor unhappy youth  
uttered a pitiful sigh, her own voice uttered a pitiful  
sigh in return. When he beat with his hand on his  
shoulders, she also

mimicked the sound of the blows. His final words, as  
he gazed

500 once more in the pool, rang back from the rocks: 'Oh  
marvellous boy,  
I loved you in vain!' Then he said, 'Farewell!'

'Farewell,' said Echo.

He rested his weary head in the fresh green grass, till  
Death's hand

gently closed his eyes still rapt with their master's  
beauty.

Even then, as he crossed the Stryx to ghostly Hades,  
he gazed at himself in the river. At once his sister

505 naiads

beat their breasts and cut their tresses in mourning  
tribute;

the dryads wailed their lament; and Echo re-echoed  
their wailing.

A pyre was raised, the bier made ready, the funeral  
torches

brandished on high. The body, however, was not to be  
found –

510 only a flower with a trumpet of gold and pale white  
petals.

### PENTHEUS AND BACCHUS (1)

Once this story was bruited abroad, Teiresias' credit  
spread through the townships of Greece, as a prophet of  
high reputation.

One single person, however, was found to reject him –

Pentheus, \*

son of Echion, who treated the gods with contempt and

scoffed at

the seer's forewarnings. 'You blind old fool,' he cruelly

taunted,

'Lost in the dark!' Then, shaking his frost-white locks,

Teiresias

answered the king, 'How lucky you'd be if you were

deprived

like me of your sight and could never set eyes on the

mysteries of Bacchus!

The day will dawn, which I can foretell is not far off,

when a new god comes, the son of your kinswoman

Semele, Liber. \*

520 Unless you pay him his rightful tribute of shrine and temple,

your mangled corpse will be strewn in a thousand places,

polluting

the woods with your blood, polluting your mother and her

two sisters.

So it shall be. You will surely deny that godhead his

worship

and surely complain that my darkened eyes saw only too

well!

525 The words were spoken and Pentheus rudely flung the man  
out.

But the words proved true and Teiresias' prophecies came

to fulfilment.

Bacchus arrived and the countryside rang with ecstatic

cries.

The crowds poured in; there were mothers and wives with

their sons and husbands,

no longer ran to their cheeks but congealed as hard as  
 their natures,  
 it didn't take much of a change to transform them to  
 solid granite.

### ORPHEUS' SONG: PYGMALION

'These women's scandalous way of life was observed by  
 a sculptor,  
 Pygmalion. Sick of the vices with which the female sex  
 has been so richly endowed, he chose for a number of  
 245 years  
 to remain unmarried, without a partner to share his  
 bed.

In the course of time he successfully carved an  
 amazingly skilful  
 statue in ivory, white as snow, an image of perfect  
 feminine beauty – and fell in love with his own  
 creation.

This heavenly woman appeared to be real, you'd surely  
 250 suppose her  
 alive and ready to move, if modesty didn't preclude it;  
 art was concealed by art to a rare degree. Pygmalion's  
 marvelling soul was inflamed with desire for a  
 semblance of body.  
 Again and again his hands moved over his work to  
 explore it.

255 Flesh or ivory? No, it couldn't be ivory now!  
 He kissed it and thought it was kissing him too. He  
 talked to it, held it,  
 imagined his fingers sinking into the limbs he was  
 touching,  
 frightened of bruising those pure white arms as he  
 gripped them tight.  
 He'd whisper sweet nothings or bring his idol the gifts  
 which give pleasure

to girls, such as shells from the shore, smooth pebbles or  
 tiny birds,  
 flowers of a thousand colours, lilies and painted balls,  
 or tears of amber dropped from the trees. He even dressed it  
 in clothes, put rings on the fingers and necklaces round the  
 throat,  
 hung jewels from the ears and girdled the breasts with  
 elegant bands.  
 265 All these looked well – though the naked body was equally  
 lovely.

He laid this down on a couch, well strewn with covers of  
 Tyrian  
 purple, and called it his darling mistress; then lifted the  
 resting  
 head on the soft white pillows, as though it could relish  
 their comfort.

'Venus, festival now had arrived, and the whole of  
 Cyprus  
 was making holiday. Heifers with gold on their spreading  
 horns  
 had fallen, struck by the axe on their snow-white necks, and  
 incense  
 was smoking. His offering laid, Pygmalion stood by the  
 altar  
 and nervously asked: "You gods, all gifts are within your  
 power.  
 Grant me to wed . . ." – not daring to say "my ivory  
 maiden",

275 he used the words "a woman resembling my ivory maiden".  
 Golden Venus was present herself for her own celebration.  
 She understood what Pygmalion meant and she signalled  
 her favour:  
 the fire on her altar, with shooting tongues, flared up three  
 times.  
 As soon as the sculptor returned, he made for his loved  
 one's statue,  
 280 and bending over the couch, he gave her a kiss. Was she  
 warm?

He pressed his lips to hers once again; and then he  
 started  
 to stroke her breasts. The ivory gradually lost its  
 hardness,  
 softening, sinking, yielding beneath his sensitive fingers.  
 Imagine beeswax from Mount Hymétus, softening  
 under  
 the rays of the sun; imagine it moulded by human  
 thumbs  
 into hundreds of different shapes, each touch  
 contributing value.  
 Astonished, in doubtful joy, afraid that he might be  
 deluded,  
 Pymalion fondled that longed-for body again and  
 again.  
 Yes, she was living flesh! He could feel the throb of her  
 veins  
 as he gently stroked and explored. At last the hero of  
 Paphos  
 opened his heart in a paean of thanks to Venus, and  
 pressed  
 his lips to the lips of a woman. She felt his kisses, and  
 blushed;  
 then timidly raised her eyes to the light and saw her  
 lover  
 against the sky. The goddess graced the union she'd  
 granted;  
 and soon, when the horns of the moon had grown nine  
 times to their fullness,  
 a daughter was born called Paphos, who gives her  
 name to the island.

## ORPHEUS' SONG: MYRRHA

Paphos gave birth to a son called Cinyras. If he'd been  
 childless,  
 Cinyras might have been counted among the most blessed of  
 men.  
 It's a shocking story. Daughters and fathers, I strongly  
 advise you  
 to shut your ears! Or, if you cannot resist my poems,  
 at least you mustn't believe this story or take it for fact.  
 If you do believe it, then also believe that the crime was  
 punished.  
 If nature, however, allows such a crime to be perpetrated,  
 I have to congratulate this domain\* on her distance from  
 countries  
 where horrors as foul as this have been witnessed. The land  
 of Panchaëa  
 may boast of her fabulous riches in balsam, cinnamon,  
 spices,  
 frankincense sweated from trees, and her various scented  
 flora,  
 so long as she keeps her myrth to herself. That new-formed  
 tree  
 was a worthless addition. Cupid himself denies that his  
 arrows  
 were Myrrha's downfall and clears his torches of such an  
 indictment.  
 One of the three dread Furies applied a Stygian firebrand  
 or filled her with viper's venom. To hate one's father is  
 wickedly  
 wrong; but incestuous love is even more wicked than  
 hatred.  
 The maiden was courted on every side. From over the  
 East  
 her suitors flocked to compete for her hand. Now, Myrrha,  
 choose one,