

Readings from Ovid's Metamorphoses

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The **LATIN** QUARTER

Feeling the heat (from the story of Phaëthon)

Mother Earth, now scorched by the careering sun, calls upon Jupiter:

‘Si placet hoc meruique, quid o tua fulmina cessant,
summe deum? liceat periturae viribus ignis
igne perire tuo clademque auctore levare.
vix equidem fauces haec ipsa in verba resolvo’
(presserat ora vapor); ‘tostos en aspice crines
inque oculis tantum, tantum super ora favillae.
hosne mihi fructus, hunc fertilitatis honorem
officiiue refers, quod adunci vulnera atratri
rastrorumque fero totoque exerceor anno,
quod pecori frondes alimentaue mitia fruges
humano generi, vobis quoque tura ministro?
sed tamen exitium fac me meruisse: quid undae,
quid meruit frater? cur illi tradita sorte
aequora decrescunt et ab aethere longius absunt?
quod si nec fratris nec te mea gratia tangit,
at caeli miserere tui. circumspice utrumque:
fumat uterque polus. quos si vitiaverit ignis,
atria vestra ruent.’

‘O leader of gods, if this is your choice and I have
deserved it, why are your lightning bolts idle? If I’m to
perish by the violence of fire, may it be *your* fire, and your
being behind it may lighten this catastrophe. I can barely
open my mouth to speak these words’ (smoke forced her
lips to close). ‘Look, see my singed hair, all the ash in my
eyes and all over my face! Is this my reward? Is this a sign
of your respect for my service and fertility? Is this for the
scars I carry from the mattock and hooked plough, put
upon me every single year? Is this why I provide foliage
for the flocks, and gentle nourishment and fruit for
humanity – and incense for you too?’

But grant I have deserved this ruin, what of the
waterways? Why has your brother deserved this? Why are
the oceans shrinking, which he was given by lot, and lie
even further from the sky? If you’re not touched by your
brother or myself, take pity on heaven, which is yours.
Look around on either side: the smoke has reached both
poles. If the fire damages these your domain will fall.’
2.279-96

The story of Pentheus

Ille movens albertia tempora canis
'quam felix esses, si tu quoque luminis huius
orbis' ait 'fieres, ne Bacchica sacra videres.
namque dies aderit, quam non procul auguror esse,
qua novus huc veniat, proles Semeleia, Liber.'

'Si fata vetabant
stare diu Thebas, utinam tormenta virique
moenia diruerent, ferrumque ignisque sonarent;
essemus miseri sine crimine sorsque querenda,
non celandam foret lacrimaeque pudore carerent.
at nunc a puero Thebae capientur inermi,
quem neque bella iuvant nec tela nec usus equorum,
sed madidus murra crinis mollesque coronae
purpuraque et pictis intextum vestibus aurum.'

'Pentheia terrebit cum totis advena Thebis?
ite citi' (famulis hoc imperat) 'ite ducemque
attrahite huc vinctum! iussis mora segnis abesto.'

'Praebuimus longis' Pentheus 'ambagibus aures'
inquit 'ut ira mora vires absumere posset.

Teiresias shook the grey hair on his brows, and said
'How fortunate you'd be, if you too were deprived of this
light, that you might not see the rites of Bacchus. For the
day is approaching, which I foresee is close, when the
new god Liber, child of Semele, will come to this place.'
3.516-20

'If the fates denied Thebes to stand for long, then let men
and siege engines batter her walls, with the clash of steel
and crackling flames. We would be wretched, yes, but
above reproach; we should rail at our lot, sure, but not
conceal it, and there'd be nothing shameful about our
tears. But now Thebes will be captured by an unarmed
boy, who has no time for wars or weapons or the use of
horses. His thing is hair dripping with myrrh, soft
garlands, purple and gold woven into embroidered
clothes!' 3.548-56

'Is the newcomer to scare Pentheus and the whole of
Thebes? Quickly, go!' (this was an order to his
attendants) 'Go and drag here their ringleader in chains!
And be sharp about it!' 3.561-3

'We have lent our ears to this long rambling tale for our
anger to lessen while he plays for time. Take him off

praecipitem, famuli, rapite hunc cruciataque diris
corpora tormentis Stygiae demittite nocti!

Dum crudelia iussae
instrumenta necis ferrumque ignesque parantur,
sponte sua patuisse fores lapsasque lacertis
sponte sua fama est nullo solvente catenas.

Hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanis
prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu,
prima suum misso violavit Penthea thyrsos
mater et 'o geminae' clamavit 'adeste sorores!
ille aper, in nostris errat qui maximus agris,
ille mihi feriendus aper.' ruit omnis in unum
turba furens; cunctae coeunt fremituque sequuntur
iam trepidum, iam verba minus violenta loquentem,
iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem.
saucius ille tamen 'fer opem, matertera!' dixit
'Autonoës moveant animos Actaeonis umbrae.'
illa quis Actaeon nescit dextramque precantis
abstulit; Ino lacerata est altera raptu.
non habet infelix quae matri brachia tendat,
trunca sed ostendens dereptis vulnera membrum
'aspice, mater!' ait; visis ululavit Agave

right now, slaves, and once you've racked his body with
fearful torture cast him down to the Stygian night!
3.692-5

While the cruel instruments of death were being prepared
to order – the iron, the flames – the word is that the doors
flew open by themselves, and just so the chains dropped
from his arms, without anyone loosening them.
3.697-700

Here, as he watched the rites with his profane eyes, the
first to see him, the first to stir herself and make a
demented charge, the first to hurl a thyrsus and wound
her own Pentheus, was his mother. 'Sisters, twins,' she
yells, 'come here! That massive boar that roams in our
fields, that boar will be struck dead by me!' The whole
crazy crowd charge at the one fellow. They all converge
and go after him with a roar. Now he's frightened, now
his tone is less impetuous, now he blames himself, now
he admits his error. Despite his injury he cries 'Help me,
Aunt! Let the ghost of Actaeon stir Autonoe's feelings!' But
she has no idea who Actaeon is, and rips off Pentheus' right
arm just as he pleads with her. Ino then snatches the other
arm and tears that one off. The poor fellow has no arms to
stretch to his mother, so shows the mangled stumps where
the limbs were pulled off: 'Look, Mother!'

Agave howled at the sight. Tossing her head and
letting her hair stream through the air, she tears off his

collaque iactavit movitque per aëra crinem
avulsumque caput digitis complexa cruentis
clamat 'io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!'

head. Clutching it in bloody fingers, she shouts: 'Hey,
comrades! This is what we have to show for our victory!'
3.710-28

Pyramus and Thisbe

Solae Minyeides intus
intempestiva turbantes festa Minerva
aut ducunt lanas aut stamina pollice versant
aut haerent telae famulasque laboribus urgent.

The daughters of Minyas, with their untimely attention to
duties indoors, were the only ones to deform the festive
moment. They draw wool or turn threads with their
thumbs or sit tight to the looms or busy the maidservants
with tasks. 4.32-5

Nutu signisque loquuntur,
quoque magis tegitur, tectus magis aestuat ignis.
fissus erat tenui rima, quam duxerat olim
cum fieret, paries domui communis utriusque.
id vitium nulli per saecula longa notatum
(quid non sentit amor?).

Pyramus and Thisbe spoke with nods and gestures, and
the more they covered it up, the hotter their hidden
passion burned. There was a chink in the joint wall, a
thin crack, which happened long ago when it was built.
All this time no one else had known of this flaw – but
what does love not see? 4.63-68

'Invide' dicebant 'paries, quid amantibus obstas?
quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi?
aut, hoc si nimium est, vel ad oscula danda pateres!
nec sumus ingrati; tibi nos debere fatemur
quod datus est verbis ad amicas transitus aures.'

'You spiteful wall,' they used to say, 'why stand in the
way of lovers? What would it take for you to let us fully
hug each other? Or, if that's too much, to open enough
for us to kiss? But we're not ungrateful. We admit we
owe you for allowing a passage for words to reach our
loving ears.' 4.73-7

‘Una duos’ inquit ‘nox perdet amantes,
e quibus illa fuit longa dignissima vita,
nostra nocens anima est. ego te, miseranda, peremi,
in loca plena metus qui iussi nocte venires
nec prior huc veni. nostrum divellite corpus
et scelerata fero consumite viscera morsu,
o quicumque sub hac habitatis rupe leones!
sed timidi est optare necem.’ velamina Thisbes
tollit et ad pactae secum fert arboris umbram,
utque dedit notae lacrimas, dedit oscula vesti,
‘accipe nunc’ inquit ‘nostri quoque sanguinis haustus.’
quoque erat accinctus, demisit in ilia ferrum;
nec mora, ferventi moriens e vulnere traxit.

Ut iacuit resupinus humo, cruor emicat alte,
non aliter quam cum vitiato fistula plumbo
scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas
eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit.

Arborei fetus aspergine caedis in atram
vertuntur faciem, madefactaque sanguine radix
purpureo tingit pendentia mora colore.

‘One night,’ he says, ‘will be the end of two lovers, of whom she was most deserving of a long life. Mine is the guilty soul. I caused your death, poor girl. I told you to come at night to a place full of horror and failed to get here first. O rip my body to pieces whatever lions dwell beneath this rock, and with fierce bites devour my guilty flesh! But just praying for death is for cowards.’ He picks up Thisbe’s cloak and carries it to the shade of their trysting-tree. Kissing the familiar cloth and weeping tears upon it he cries ‘Now soak up my blood too’, and buries into his side the sword he had with him. Straightaway – as he was dying – he pulled the blade from the warm wound. 4.108-120

As he lay facing up on the ground, his blood spurts high into the air, just as a pipe splits where the lead has fractured and hissing from its small hole sends jets of water bursting into the air. 4.121-4

The tree’s fruit turns dark from the spray of gore, and the roots, soaked in blood, tinge the hanging mulberries with a purplish colour. 4.125-7

Sed postquam remorata suos cognovit amores,
percutit indignos claro plangore lacertos
et laniata comas amplexaque corpus amatum
vulnera supplevit lacrimis fletumque cruori
miscuit et gelidis in vultibus oscula figens
'P̄rame' clamavit, 'quis te mihi casus ademit?
P̄rame, responde! tua te, carissime, Thisbe
nominat; exaudi vultusque attolle iacentes.'
ad nomen Thisbes oculos iam morte gravatos
P̄ramus erexit visaque recondidit illa.
quae postquam vestemque suam cognovit et ense
vidit ebur vacuum, 'tua te manus' inquit 'amorque
perdidit, infelix. est et mihi fortis in unum
hoc manus, est et amor; dabit hic in vulnera vires.
persequar extinctum letique miserrima dicar
causa comesque tui, quique a me morte revelli
heu sola poteris, poteris nec morte revelli.
hoc tamen amborum verbis estote rogati,
o multum miseri meus illiusque parentes,
ut quos certus amor, quos hora novissima iunxit,
componi tumulo non invideatis eodem.'

Dixit et aptato pectus mucrone sub imum
incubuit ferro, quod adhuc a caede tepebat.
vota tamen tetigere deos, tetigere parentes;
nam color in pomo est, ubi permaturuit, ater,

A little while later she recognized the one she adored.
With loud wailing she struck her innocent arms, tore her
hair and hugged the body she loved. She filled his
wounds with tears, which, flowing down, mingled with
his blood. Pressing kisses on his cold face she cried
aloud: 'Pyramus, what misfortune has taken you from
me? Pyramus, answer me! O darling, your Thisbe calls
you. Hear me! Don't just lie there, lift your face!' At the
name of Thisbe, Pyramus opened his eyes, which were
already heavy with death, and on seeing her closed them
again.

After she recognized her robe and saw his ivory
scabbard without its sword, she cried 'Your own hand
and your love is your ruin, poor boy. My hand too is
brave for this one deed, my love also: this will give me
strength for the thrust. I am utterly wretched and will
follow you in death, to be called the cause and
companion of your end. You who could only be torn
from me by dying shall not in death be torn from me. O
parents, so wretched, mine and his, yet be persuaded of
this by the words of us both, that those whom true love
has brought together and joined in their final moment are
not to be begrudged a place of rest in the same tomb.'
4.137-57

She spoke, and aiming its point beneath her breast she
fell forward on to his sword, which was still warm from
his death. However, her prayer did touch the gods, their
parents too. For there is a dark colour to the fruit, when it

quodque rogis superest una requiescit in urna.

has ripened, and the remains of the funeral pyres rest together in a single urn. 4.162-6

Baucis and Philemon

Iuppiter huc specie mortali cumque parente
venit Atlantiades positis caducifer alis.
mille domos adiere locum requiemque petentes,
mille domos clausere serae. tamen una recepit,
parva quidem, stipulis et canna tecta palustri,
sed pia Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon
illa sunt annis iuncti iuvenalibus, illa
consenuere casa paupertatemque fatendo
effecere levem nec iniqua mente ferendo.
nec refert, dominos illic famulosne requiras:
tota domus duo sunt, idem parentque iubentque.

To this part of the country came Jupiter in human disguise and with him his son, Mercury, carrying his messenger's staff, though his wings he had put aside. A thousand homes they approached looking for a place to rest: a thousand homes were barred. However, one took them in, a small one for sure, roofed with stalks and reeds from the marsh. In that cottage, good old Baucis, and Philemon, her equal in age, had been wed as youngsters, and there they had grown old. They were penniless; but by acknowledging and cheerfully putting up with their lot they made light of it. It did not matter whether you sought the owners or the servants. The two were the entire household: they both gave instructions and both carried them out. 8.626-36

Ergo ubi caelicolae parvos tetigere penates
summissoque humiles intrarunt vertice postes,
membra senex posito iussit relevare sedili,
cui superiniecit textum rude sedula Baucis.
inque foco tepidum cinerem dimovit et ignes
suscitat hesternos foliisque et cortice sicco
nutrit et ad flammam anima producit anili,

So when the gods reached this humble homestead and stooped to enter the modest doorway, the old man bid them rest on a bench he put there, over which the busy Baucis spread a rough cloth. She riddled the warm ash in the hearth and stoked the embers of the previous day's fire, feeding it with twigs and dry bark and blowing it into a flame with her old woman's breath. From the rafters she brought down thinly-chopped kindling wood and dry twigs, and broke them into smaller pieces before

multifidasque faces ramaliaque arida tecto
detulit et minuit parvoque admovit aeno,
quodque suus coniunx riguo collegerat horto
truncat holus foliis; furca levat ille bicorni
sordida terga suis nigro pendentia tigno
servatoque diu resecat de tergore partem
exiguam sectamque domat ferventibus undis.

Interea totiens haustum cratera repleri
sponte sua per seque vident succrescere vina;
attoniti novitate pavent manibusque supinis
conciunt Baucisque preces timidusque Philemon
et veniam dapibus nullisque paratibus orant.
unicus anser erat, minimae custodia villae,
quem dis hospitibus domini mactare parabant;
ille celer penna tardos aetate fatigat
eluditque diu tandemque est visus ad ipsos
confugisse deos. superi vetuere necari
'di' que 'sumus, meritasque luet vicinia poenas
impia' dixerunt; 'vobis immunibus huius
esse mali dabitur. modo vestra relinquit tecta
ac nostros comitate gradus et in ardua montis
ite simul.' parent ambo baculisque levati
nituntur longo vestigia ponere clivo.

placing them under a little copper pot. Then she chopped the leaves off a cabbage which her husband had picked from the well-watered garden, while Philemon took a forked stick to lift down a back of smoked bacon hanging from the blackened beam. From this pork, a long-awaited treat, he carved a small piece and placed it in the boiling water to make it tender. 8.637-50

Meanwhile, every time they see the drinking-vessel emptied, it refills itself, and the wine level rises all by itself. They are astonished at this extraordinary thing, and, in fear, with hands outstretched, Baucis and timid Philemon begin to pray, begging indulgence for their modest fare and its lack of elegance.

There was a solitary goose, the guardian of the tiny homestead, which the householders made ready to kill in honour of their divine guests. But this bird, swift of wing, wore them out, for they were slow with age. It evaded them for quite a while, until finally it seemed to take refuge with the gods themselves. They forbade its killing, saying 'We are gods, and your wicked neighbours will receive their due punishment; but you will be granted immunity from this affliction. Now leave your home, accompany us, and together climb to the top of the mountain!' They both obey, and leaning on sticks struggle to make their way up the long slope. 8.679-94

Dumque ea mirantur, dum deflent fata suorum,
illa vetus dominis etiam casa parva duobus
vertitur in templum; furcas subiere columnae,
stramina flavescunt aurataque tecta videntur
caelataeque fores adopertaque marmore tellus.

‘Esse sacerdotes delubraque vestra tueri
poscimus, et quoniam concordēs egimus annos,
auferat hora duos eadem, nec coniugis umquam
busta meae videam neu sim tumulandus ab illa.’
vota fides sequitur; templi tutela fuere,
donec vita data est. annis aevoque soluti
ante gradus sacros cum starent forte locique
narrarent casus, frondere Philemona Baucis,
Baucida conspexit senior frondere Philemon.
iamque super geminos crescente cacumine vultus
mutua, dum licuit, reddebant dicta ‘vale’ que
‘o coniunx’ dixere simul, simul abdita textit
ora frutex.

While they are amazed at this and mourn the fate of their neighbours, that cottage of theirs, small even for two occupiers, was transformed into a temple: columns replace forked props, the straw turns yellow, and the roof seems to be made of gold; the doors were engraved, and the ground was covered with marble. 8.698-702

‘We ask to be priests and to watch over your shrine, and since we have spent our years as one, let the same moment take the two of us, so that I never see my wife’s grave, nor does she have to bury me.’

Their prayers were granted. They guarded the temple for as long as they lived, until one day when they happened to be standing before the sacred steps, bent with age and passing years, and recalling the place’s past, Baucis saw Philemon sprouting leaves, and likewise old Philemon saw Baucis. As the tree-tops were already growing over both their faces, while it was still possible, they each said to the other ‘farewell, dear partner,’ calling in unison; and in the same moment bark covered their disappearing faces. 8.707-19