

Her hanging tresses shorter and her strength*
 Greater than woman's wont. She who had been
 A girl a moment past was now a boy.
 Rejoice, rejoice, with fearless faith! Go, bring
 Your offerings to the holy shrine! They brought
 Their offerings and beside them placed a plaque,
 And on the plaque a couplet was inscribed:

'These offerings, vowed by Iphis as a maid,
 By Iphis, now a man, are gladly paid.'

The morning's radiance revealed the world;
 Venus, Juno and Hymen joined to bless
 The wedding rite; their love was sanctified,
 And Iphis gained Ianthé, groom and bride.

Iphis

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BOOK X

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

THENCE Hymen came, in saffron mantle clad,
 At Orpheus' summons through the boundless sky
 To Thessaly, but vain the summons proved.
 True he was present, but no hallowed words
 He brought nor happy smiles nor lucky sign;
 Even the torch he held sputtered throughout
 With smarting smoke, and caught no living flame
 For all his brandishing. The ill-starred rite
 Led to a grimmer end. The new-wed bride,
 Roaming with her gay Naiads through the grass,
 Fell dying when a serpent struck her heel.
 And when at last the bard of Rhodope
 Had mourned his fill in the wide world above,
 He dared descend through Taenarus* dark gate
 To Hades to make trial* of the shades;
 And through the thronging wraiths and grave-spent ghosts
 He came to pale Persephone and him,
 Lord of the shades,* who rules the unlovely realm,
 And as he struck his lyre's sad chords he said:
 'Ye deities who rule the world below,
 Whither we mortal creatures all return,
 If simple truth, direct and genuine,
 May by your leave be told, I have come down
 Not with intent to see the glooms of Hell, *Aeneas*
 Nor to enchain the triple snake-haired necks *thebes*
 Of Cerberus, but for my dear wife's sake,
 In whom a trodden viper poured his venom
 And stole her budding years. My heart has sought
 Strength to endure; the attempt I'll not deny;
 But *Vicit Amor* *love* has won (a god whose fame is fair
 In the world above; but here I doubt, though here
 Too, I surmise; and if that ancient tale
 Of ravishment is true,* you too were joined
 In love. Now by these regions filled with fear,
 By this huge chaos, these vast silent realms,

* sassy Ovid

Cybele
 Viburnums bearing berries of rich blue.
 Twist-footed ivy came and tendrilled vines,
 And vine-clad elms, pitch-pines and mountain-ash,
 Arbutus laden with its blushing fruit,
 Lithe lofty palms, the prize of victory,
 And pines, high-girdled, in a leafy crest,
 The favourite of Cybele, the gods'
 Great mother, since in this tree Attis doffed
 His human shape* and stiffened in its trunk.

CYPARISSUS

Aspe llo → Amid the throng the cone-shaped cypress stood,
 A tree now, but in days gone by a boy,
 Loved by that god who strings both lyre and bow. *indirect name?*
 Once, sacred to the nymphs who dwell among
 Carthaea's* fields, there was a giant stag,
 Whose spreading antlers shed a screen of shade
 Upon his head. Those antlers gleamed with gold
 And from his silky neck a collar hung
 Over his shoulders, set with precious stones.
 Upon his brow, secured by slender strings,
 A silver medal swayed, given at his birth,
 And round his hollow temples, gleaming bright,
 From either ear a pearly pendant hung.
 Quite fearless, all his natural shyness lost,
 He often visited the homes of men,
 And he'd let even strangers stroke his neck.
 But of them all he was the favourite
 Of Cyparissus, Cea's fairest lad.
 And he it was who used to lead the stag
 To pasture and the waters of the spring.
 Flowers of many colours he would weave
 Around his horns or, mounted on his back,
 A happy cavalier, ride up and down,
 Guiding his tender mouth with crimson reins.
 It was high noon upon a summer's day;
 The sun's bright beams were burning as the Crab,
 That loves the shore-line, spread his curving claws.
 The stag lay down upon the grass to rest

Phoebus
 And breathed the coolness of the spinney's shade.
 There, unaware, with his sharp javelin
 Young Cyparissus pierced him to the heart.
 And as he saw him dying of the wound,
 So cruel, he resolved to die himself.
 What words of comfort did not Phoebus give!
 What warnings not to yield to grief so sore,
 * So ill-proportioned!* Still he groaned and begged
 A last boon from the gods, that he might mourn
 For evermore. And now, with endless sobs,
 With lifeblood drained away, his limbs began
 To take a greenish hue; his hair that curled
 Down from his snowy brow rose in a crest,
 A crest of bristles, and as stiffness spread
 A graceful spire gazed at the starry sky.
 * *my Apollo* Apollo groaned and said in sorrow 'I *deus ignem*
 Shall mourn for you, for others you shall mourn;
 You shall attend when men with grief are torn.'

GANYMEDE

vates
 Such was the grove the bard assembled. There
 He sat amid a company of beasts,
 A flock of birds, and when he'd tried his strings
 And, as he tuned, was satisfied the notes,
 Though different, agreed in harmony,
 He sang this song: 'From Jove,* great Mother Muse, **Carmen*
 Inspire my song: to Jove all creatures bow; *Orphei incipit*
 Jove's might I've often hymned in days gone by.
 I sang the giants* in a graver theme
 And bolts victorious in Phlegra's plains.
 But now I need a lighter strain, to sing
 Of boys beloved of gods and girls bewitched *pueros dilectos*
 By lawless fires who paid the price of lust. *puellas attentas*
 The King of Heaven once was fired with love
 Of Ganymede,* and something was devised
 That Jove would rather be than what he was.
 Yet no bird would he deign to be but one
 That had the power to bear his thunderbolts.
 At once his spurious pinions beat the breeze

And off he swept the Trojan lad; who now,
Mixing the nectar, waits in heaven above
(Though Juno frowns) and hands the cup to Jove.

Apollo

Hyacinth, too, Apollo would have placed *te gogue Angelide...*
In heaven had the drear Fates given time
To place him there. Yet in the form vouchsafed
He is immortal. Year by year, when spring
Drives winter flying and the Ram succeeds *Pices → Aries*
The watery Fish,* he rises from the earth *il. 78*
And in the greensward brings his bloom to birth.

HYACINTH

Apollo

Hyacinth was my father's* favourite,
And Delphi, chosen centre of the world,
Lost its presiding god, who passed his days
Beside Eurotas in the martial land
Of unvalled* Sparta, and no more esteemed *c; thence*
Zither or bow. Forgetting his true self,
He was content to bear the nets, to hold
The hounds in leash and join the daylong chase
Through the rough mountain ridges, nourishing
His heart's desire with long companionship.

One day, near noon, when the high sun midway
Between the night past and the night to come
At equal distance stood from dawn and dusk,
They both stripped off their clothes and oiled their limbs,
So sleek and splendid, and began the game,
Throwing the discus; and Apollo first
Poised, swung and hurled it skywards through the air,
Up, soaring up, to cleave the waiting clouds.
The heavy disk at longest last fell back
To the familiar earth, a proof of skill,
And strength with skill. Then straightway Hyacinth,
Unthinking,* in the excitement of the sport,
Ran out to seize it, but it bounded back
From the hard surface full into his face.
The god turned pale, pale as the boy himself,
And catching up the huddled body, tried
To revive him, tried to staunch the tragic wound

And stay the fading soul with healing herbs.
His skill was vain; the wound was past all cure.
And as, when in a garden violets
Or lilies tawny-tongued or poppies proud
Are bruised and bent, at once they hang their heads
And, drooping, cannot stand erect and bow
Their gaze upon the ground; so dying lies
That face so fair and, all strength ebbd away,
His head, too heavy, on his shoulder sinks.

"My Hyacinth", Apollo cried, "laid low
And cheated of youth's prime! I see your wound,
My condemnation, you my grief and guilt!
I, I have caused your death; on my own hand,
My own, your doom is written. Yet what wrong
Is mine unless to join the game with you
Were wrong or I were wrong to love you well?
Oh, would for you—or with you—I might give
My life! But since the laws of fate forbid,
You shall be with me always; you shall stay
For ever in remembrance on my lips,
And you my lyre and you my song shall hymn. *lyra*
A new flower you shall be with letters marked
To imitate my sobs, and time shall come
When to that flower the bravest hero born*
Shall add his name on the same petals writ."

So with prophetic words Apollo spoke,
And lo! the flowing blood that stained the grass
Was blood no longer; and a flower* rose
Gorgeous as Tyrian dye, in form a lily,
Save that a lily wears a silver hue,
This richest purple. And, not yet content,
Apollo (who had wrought the work of grace)
Inscribed upon the flower his lament,
AI AI, AI AI, and still the petals show
The letters written there in words of woe.
And Sparta's pride in Hyacinth, her son,
Endures undimmed; with pomp and proud display
Each year his feast* returns in the ancient way.

But should you ask ore-laden Amathus* *il. 532*
If her Propoetides have brought her pride,

Venus
↓ Cyprus

She would reject alike both them and those
 Whose brows twin horns made hideous, whence their name,
 Cerastae. Once an altar stood before
 Their doors to Jove, the God of Hospitality.
 A newcomer who did not know their guilt,
 Seeing that altar stained with blood, would think
 That suckling calves or lambs of Amathus
 Were offered there. It was the blood of guests!
 Kind Venus, outraged by these wicked rites,
 Prepared to leave her cities and the land
 Of Cyprus. "Yet", she said, "these towns of mine,
 These charming places, what have they done wrong?
 Rather this impious race shall pay the price
 By death or exile or some means half-way
 Between the two, and that, what can it be*
 Except to change their shape to something new?"
 What change to choose, she wondered; then, her eyes
 Lighting upon their horns, she realized
 Those could be left to them, and she transformed
 Their bulky bodies into savage bulls.

Even so the obscene Propoetides had dared
 Deny Venus' divinity. For that
 The goddess' rage, it's said, made them the first*
 Strumpets to prostitute their bodies' charms.
 As shame retreated and their cheeks grew hard,
 They turned with little change to stones of flint.

PYGMALION

Pygmalion had seen these women spend
 Their days in wickedness, and horrified
 At all the countless vices nature gives
 To womankind lived celibate and long
 Lacked the companionship of married love.
 Meanwhile he carved his snow-white ivory
 With marvellous triumphant artistry
 And gave it perfect shape, more beautiful
 Than ever woman born. His masterwork
 Fired him with love. It seemed to be alive,
 Its face to be a real girl's, a girl

Who wished to move—but modesty forbade.
 Such art his art concealed.* In admiration
 His heart desired the body he had formed.
 With many a touch he tries it—is it flesh
 Or ivory? Not ivory still, he's sure!
 Kisses he gives and thinks they are returned;
 He speaks to it, caresses it, believes
 The firm new flesh beneath his fingers yields,
 And fears the limbs may darken with a bruise.
 And now fond words he whispers, now brings gifts
 That girls delight in—shells and polished stones,
 And little birds and flowers of every hue,
 Lilies and coloured balls and beads of amber,
 The tear-drops of the daughters of the Sun.*
 He decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers
 Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck,
 Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast;
 Lovely she looked, yet unadorned she seemed
 In nakedness no whit less beautiful.
 He laid her on a couch of purple silk,
 Called her his darling, cushioning her head,
 As if she relished it, on softest down.

Venus' day came, the holiest festival
 All Cyprus celebrates; incense rose high
 And heifers, with their wide horns gilded, fell
 Beneath the blade that struck their snowy necks.
 Pygmalion, his offering given, prayed
 Before the altar, half afraid, "Vouchsafe,
 O Gods, if all things you can grant, my bride
 Shall be"—he dared not say my ivory girl—
 "The living likeness of my ivory girl."
 And golden Venus (for her presence graced
 Her feast) knew well the purpose of his prayer;
 And, as an omen of her favouring power,
 Thrice did the flame burn bright and leap up high.
 And he went home, home to his heart's delight,
 And kissed her as she lay, and she seemed warm;
 Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
 Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
 Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing,

And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
 Wax of Hymettus softens and is shaped
 By practised fingers into many forms,
 And usefulness acquires by being used.
 His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving,
 Delight and terror that it was not true!
 Again and yet again he tried his hopes—
 She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins!
 And then indeed in words that overflowed
 He poured his thanks to Venus, and at last
 His lips pressed real lips, and she, his girl,
 Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised
 Her eyes to his and saw the world and him.
 The goddess graced the union she had made,
 And when nine times the crescent moon had filled
 Her silver orb, an infant girl was born,
 Paphos, from whom the island takes its name.

MYRRHA

Her son was Cinyras, who might have been
 Numbered among the fortunate, had he
 Been childless. Terrible my tale will be!
 Away, daughters!* Away, parents! Away!
 Or, if my singing charms you, hold this tale
 In disbelief; suppose the deed not done;
 Or, with belief, believe the punishment.
 If nature does allow such crimes at least
 How happy are our countrymen, this land
 Of Thrace,* this world of ours, to be so far
 From realms that rear such sin. Panchaia* may
 Enjoy her wealth of mace and cinnamon,
 Her oozing incense and her balsam's balm,
 And all her spicy blooms, so long as she
 Grows myrrh as well! That new tree cost too much!
 Cupid himself denies his arrows hurt
 Myrrha and clears his torch of that offence.
 One of the three dread Sisters* blasted her
 With viper's venom and firebrands of Hell.
 To hate one's father is a crime; this love

A greater crime than hate.

From everywhere
 The eager suitors came; the golden youth
 Of all the Orient vied to win her hand.
 Choose, Myrrha, one among that company
 So long as *one* among them shall not be!
 In truth she fought the love she felt was foul.
 "What are these thoughts?" she asked herself; "My aim,
 What is it? May the gods, may duty's bond,
 The sacred rights of parents, stop this crime,
 If it is crime. Yet surely duty's bond
 They say does not condemn such love as this.
 Why, other creatures couple as they choose
 Regardless. If a heifer's mounted by
 Her father, that's no shame; a horse becomes
 His daughter's husband; goats will mate with kids
 They've sired themselves; why, even birds conceive
 From seed that fathered them. How blest are they
 That have such licence! Human nicety
 Makes spiteful laws. What nature will allow,
 Their jealous code forbids. Yet there exist*
 Peoples, it's said, where sons will marry mothers
 And daughters fathers, and their doubled love
 Increases duty's bond. But I, poor me,
 Was not so lucky—I was not born there.
 The chance of birthplace injures me.—Oh, why
 Hark back to things like that? Away, away,
 Forbidden hopes! He's worthy of my love,
 Yes, but as father.—Well then, were I not
 Great Cinyras's daughter, I could lie
 With Cinyras. But now because he's mine,
 He isn't mine! Propinquity itself
 Does damage; I'd do better not so near.
 I'd wish to go away and leave afar
 My native borders, could I flee from crime.
 But evil fires hold my heart here, to keep
 Beloved Cinyras before my eyes,
 To touch him, speak with him, and kiss him too,
 If nothing more's allowed. What more? Can you
 Set more before your eyes, you wicked girl?

Think of the tangled knot of ties and names!
 Will you become your father's concubine,
 Your mother's rival? Shall men label you
 Your brother's mother, sister of your son?
 Surely the snake-haired Sisters frighten you,
 Whom guilty souls see aiming at their eyes
 Their fiendish flaming torches. Come, while yet
 No sin's committed, banish thoughts of sin,
 Nor ever foul great nature's covenant
 By that forbidden act! Wish as you may,
 The facts forbid. He's righteous! Yes, he'll not
 Forget the claim of duty. Oh, to see
 In him the same mad fire that flames in me!"

Now Cinyras, confronted with a crowd
 Of worthy suitors, doubting what to do,
 Asked Myrrha herself, enquiring name by name
 Whom she would have for husband. She at first
 Was silent, gazing in her father's face, her thoughts
 In turmoil, hot tears welling in her eyes.
 And Cinyras, who thought her tears were but
 A girl's misgiving, told her not to cry,
 And dried her cheeks and kissed her on the lips.
 His kisses! Joy too thrilling! Then he asked
 What kind of husband she would like, and she
 Said "One like you". He did not understand
 And praised her: "May you never lose your love
 So dutiful!" At "dutiful" the girl
 Lowered her eyes, too conscious of her guilt.

Midnight had come and sleep relaxed the limbs
 And cares of men, but Myrrha lay awake,
 A prey to ungoverned passion, and resumed
 Her frenzied longings, sometimes in despair,
 Sometimes resolved to try, at once ashamed
 And yearning, vainly groping for some plan.
 And as a huge tree, wounded by an axe,
 Only the last stroke left, will wait in doubt
 Which way to fall and every side's in fear,
 So Myrrha's mind, weakened by wound on wound,
 Wavered uncertainly this way and that,
 Nodding on either side and found no end,

No respite for her love except in death.
 Death it shall be! She rises up resolved
 To hang herself. Tying her girdle to
 A beam, "Goodbye, dear Cinyras!" she moans,
 "Goodbye, and understand why I must die",
 And fits the noose around her death-pale neck.

They say some sound, some whisper of her words
 Came to her nurse's ears, her faithful nurse,*
 Guarding her Myrrha's room. The old nurse rose,
 Opened the door and saw the means of death.
 She shrieked and beat her breast and tore her robe,
 And in the same short moment, seizing the noose,
 Snatched it from Myrrha's neck. Then she had time
 At last for tears, and took her in her arms
 And asked the reason for the rope. The girl
 Was silent, dumb, her gaze fixed on the ground,
 Distaught that her attempt had been found out
 And death too late. The old nurse pressed her hard,
 Baring her white locks and her empty breasts,
 And begged her by her cradle, by the feeds
 Of her first days, to trust her with the cause
 Of her distress. She groaned and turned away.
 Resolved to find the truth, the old nurse pledged
 Not only secrecy. "Tell me", she said,
 "And let me help you. My old age is not
 Inactive. If your mind's unhinged, my herbs
 And spells can cure it; if you've been bewitched,
 You shall be purified with magic rites;
 If it's gods' anger, angry gods may be
 Appeased by sacrifice. What else, I wonder?
 Your fortunes and your home are safe, I'm sure,
 And all goes as it should. Your mother's well,
 Your father too." At "father" Myrrha sighed,
 Sighed from the bottom of her heart. But still
 The nurse imagined nothing villainous,
 But sensed some love affair, and persevered
 And begged the girl, whatever it might be,
 To tell it her; and raised her as she wept
 To her old bosom and, enfolding her
 Thus in her feeble arms, "I know", she said,

"You are in love. Don't be afraid! In this
My diligence may serve you very well.
Your father shall know nothing." With a bound
Myrrha, beside herself, sprang up and sank
Face-down among the pillows. "Go away!"
She pleaded, "Spare my misery and shame!"
And, as the nurse pressed, "Go!" she screamed, "or stop
Asking what tortures me. It is a crime
You work so hard to know." Shocked and aghast,
The good old woman stretched her trembling hands,
Shaking with age and dread, and falling on
Her knees before her darling's feet she tried
Now winning words, now fear to make her share
Her secret, threatening to report the noose
And death-attempt, and promising her best
Service if she'll confide her love to her.
Then Myrrha raised her head; her gushing tears
Rained down her nurse's bosom. Many a time
She attempted to confess and many a time
Bit her words back, and held her dress to hide
Her face of shame. Then "Mother", came the words,
"How happy in your husband!" Nothing more
Except a groan. An icy shudder ran
Through the old woman's frame (she understood)
And every hair upon her snowy head
Stood stiff on end; and many many words
She poured to expel that passion if she could,
So terrible. The girl well knew the truth
Of what she warned; but still her purpose held
To die unless she had her heart's desire.
"Live then", the nurse replied, "and have your—" * not
Daring to utter "father", she stopped short
In silence, then she called the gods of heaven
To ratify the promise she had given.

The time of Ceres' festival had come,
In duty kept by mothers every year,
When, robed in white, they bring their firstfruit gifts
Of wheat in garlands, and for nine nights count
Love and the touch of men forbidden things.
The king's wife Cenchreis was there among

The worshippers and joined the sacred rites.
So while the king's bed lacked a lawful wife,
The old bad-busy nurse found Cinyras
Well-wined and gave him tidings of a girl
Who loved him truly (naming a false name),
And when he asked her age, "The same", she said,
"As Myrrha's". So he bade her bring the girl,
And she, returning home, "My darling child,
Rejoice!" she said, "we've won." The ill-starred girl
Felt no whole-hearted joy. Forebodings filled
Her soul with sadness; even so joy too
Was there—her warring thoughts were so confused.

It was the hour when all the world is silent,
And high between the Bears the Wagoner*
With slanting shaft had turned his starry Wain.
Now to her deed she went. The golden moon
Fled from the sky;* the stars lay hid behind
A canopy of cloud; night's fires were lost.
(The first to hide his face was Icarus,
And with him dutiful Erigone,
Who loved her father and was raised to heaven.)
Three times a boding stumble warned her back,
Three times a screech-owl, bird of doom, declared
The omen with its deadly threnody.
Yet on she went, the darkness of the night
Dwindling her shame. Her left hand held her nurse,
Her right groped the blind passage. Now she's reached
The room, now found the door and opened it,
And now she's led inside. Her shaking knees
Give way, blood fails her cheeks, and as she goes
Her senses reel. The nearer to her crime,
The more her horror. Would she'd never dared!
Would she could steal away unrecognized!
As she hung back, the old nurse took her hand
And led her to the high-raised couch and said
"She's yours,* your Majesty. Take her"; and joined
The pair in doom. In that incestuous bed
The father took his flesh and blood, and calmed
Her girlish fears and cheered her bashfulness.
Maybe, to suit her age, he called her "daughter"

And she him "father"—names to seal the crime.

Filled with her father Myrrha left the room,
His wicked seed within her tragic womb,
The crime conceived. The next night saw the deed
Doubled, and that was not the end. At last,
After so many times, eager to know
Who was the girl who loved him, Cinyras
Brought in a lamp* and saw his crime and her,
His daughter. Dumb in agony, he drew
His flashing sword that hung there. Myrrha fled.
The darkness and the night's blind benison
Saved her from death. Across the countryside
She wandered till she left the palm-fringed lands
Of Araby and rich Panchaia's fields.
Nine times the crescent of the moon returned
And still she roamed, and then she found at last
Rest for her weariness on Saba's* soil;
She scarce could bear the burden of her womb.
And then, not knowing what to wish, afraid
Of death and tired of life, she framed these words
Of prayer: "If Powers of heaven are open to
The cries of penitents, I've well deserved—
I'll not refuse—the pain of punishment,
But lest I outrage, if I'm left alive,
The living, or, if I shall die, the dead,
Expel me from both realms; some nature give
That's different; let me neither die nor live!"*
Some Power is open to a penitent;
For sure her final prayer found gods to hear.*
For, as she spoke, around her legs the earth
Crept up; roots thrusting from her toes
Spread sideways, firm foundations of a trunk;
Her bones gained strength; though marrow still remained,
Blood became sap, her fingers twigs, her arms
Branches, her skin was hardened into bark.
And now the growing tree had tightly swathed
Her swelling womb, had overlapped her breast,
Ready to wrap her neck. She would not wait,
But sinking down to meet the climbing wood,
Buried her face and forehead in the bark.

Though with her body she had forfeited
Her former feelings, still she weeps and down
The tree the warm drops ooze. Those tears in truth
Have honour; from the trunk the weeping myrrh
Keeps on men's lips for aye the name of her.

The child conceived in sin had grown inside
The wood and now was searching for some way
To leave its mother and thrust forth. The trunk
Swelled in the middle with its burdened womb.
The load was straining, but the pains of birth
Could find no words, nor voice in travail call
Lucina. Yet the tree, in labour, stooped
With groan on groan and wet with falling tears.
Then, pitying, Lucina stood beside
The branches in their pain and laid her hands
Upon them and pronounced the words of birth.
The tree split open and the sundered bark
Yielded its living load; a baby boy
Squalled, and the Naiads laid him on soft grass
And bathed him in his mother's flowing tears.
Envy herself would praise his looks; for like
The little naked Loves that pictures show
He lay there, give or take the slender bow.

Adonis

VENUS AND ADONIS

Time glides in secret and his wings deceive;
Nothing is swifter than the years. That son,
Child of his sister and his grandfather,
So lately bark-enswathed, so lately born,
Then a most lovely infant, then a youth,
And now a man more lovely than the boy,
Was Venus' darling (Venus'!) and avenged
His mother's passion. Once, when Venus' son
Was kissing her, his quiver dangling down,
A jutting arrow, unbeknown, had grazed
Her breast. She pushed the boy away.
In fact the wound was deeper than it seemed,
Though unperceived at first. Enraptured by
The beauty of a man, she cared no more

Venus
Atalanta

For her Cythera's shores nor sought again
Her sea-girt Paphos nor her Cnidos, famed
For fish, nor her ore-laden Amathus. *cf. l. 220*
She shunned heaven too: to heaven she preferred
Adonis. Him she clung to, he was her
Constant companion. She who always used
To idle in the shade and take such pains
To enhance her beauty, roamed across the hills,
Through woods and brambly boulders, with her dress
Knee-high like Dian's, urging on the hounds,
Chasing the quarry when the quarry's safe—
Does and low-leaping hares and antlered deer—
But keeping well away from brigand wolves
And battling boars and bears well-armed with claws
And lions soaked in slaughter of the herds.
She warned Adonis too, if warnings could
Have been of any use, to fear those beasts.
"Be brave when backs are turned, but when they're bold,
Boldness is dangerous. Never be rash,
My darling, to my risk; never provoke
Quarry that nature's armed, lest your renown
Should cost me dear. Not youth, not beauty, nor
Charms that move Venus' heart can ever move
Lions or bristly boars or eyes or minds
Of savage beasts. In his curved tusks a boar
Wields lightning; tawny lions launch their charge
In giant anger. Creatures of that kind
I hate." And when Adonis asked her why,
'I'll tell", she said, "a tale to astonish you
Of ancient guilt and magic long ago.
But my unwonted toil has made me tired
And, look, a poplar, happily at hand,
Drops shade for our delight, and greensward gives
A couch. Here I would wish to rest with you"
(She rested) "on the ground", and on the grass
And him she lay, her head upon his breast,
And mingling kisses with her words began.

ATALANTA

"You may perchance have heard how in the races
A girl outran the men who ran to win.
That was no idle tale; she always won.
Nor could one say her gift of glorious speed
Was more surpassing than her loveliness.
An oracle that once she had consulted*
About a husband had declared 'No husband,
Fair Atalanta, is for you; refuse
A husband's kisses; yet you'll not refuse,
And you, while still you live, yourself shall lose.'
The fate foretold appalled her, and she lived
Alone, unwedded in the shady woods,
And angrily repulsed the pressing throng
Of suitors with a challenge: 'No man's wife
Am I', she said, 'unless he wins the race.
Contend with me in speed. For speed the prize
Is wife and wedlock; for the slow the price
Is death: upon that rule the race is run.'
Her heart was pitiless, yet, such the power
Of beauty, on that rule rash lovers thronged.
To watch the unequal race Hippomenes
Sat in his seat and scoffed 'Would any man
At such dire peril wish to win a wife?'
And blamed the young men for their love's excess.
But when he saw her face and, now unrobed,*
Her body's beauty, beauty such as mine,
Adonis, or as yours were you a girl,
He marvelled and, with hands upraised, exclaimed
'Forgive my censuring words; I had not known
The peerless prize you seek.' And with his praise
Love burgeoned and he prayed that none would run
Faster than she, and fear and envy filled
His heart. 'But why', he thought, 'do I not try
Myself my fortune in this rivalry?
The gods help those who dare.' And, while he mused,
On winged feet the glorious girl flew by.
And though her speed seemed like an arrow's flight,
Yet more he marvelled at her glowing grace—

And running gave her grace; the breeze blew back
 The ribbons* from her ankles and her knees
 In fluttering colours; down her ivory back
 Her long hair streamed behind; a rosy flush
 Painted the girlish pallor of her limbs,
 As when a scarlet awning in the sun
 Is drawn above a marble vestibule*
 And dyes, or seems to dye, the coloured shade.
 These things the newcomer Hippomenes
 Marked well; and then the final lap was run
 And Atalanta with the festal wreath
 Of victory was crowned; the losers groaned
 And duly paid the appointed penalty.

But young Hippomenes was undismayed
 By the others' fate and in the midst stood forth
 And fixed his eyes upon the girl, and said
 'Why seek an easy fame defeating sluggards?
 Contend with me. If fortune favours me,
 There'll be no shame to yield the victory.
 My father's Megareus of Onchestus;*
 His grandfather was Neptune; great-grandson
 Of Ocean's king am I, nor does my birth
 Exceed my prowess—or, if I should fail,
 The victor of Hippomenes shall win
 A memorable name, a great renown.'
 And as he spoke King Schoeneus' daughter gazed
 With tender eyes and doubted in her heart
 Whether this time she wished to win or lose.
 'What god', she thought, 'who envies beauty's charms,
 Desires his death and bids him seek a bride
 At hazard of his own dear life? So much
 Is more than I am worth. It's not his beauty
 That touches me (though that could touch me too);
 But he is still a boy; it's not himself
 That moves me but his tender years, his youth.
 Think of his courage, unafraid of death,
 His lineage, fourth from Ocean's mighty lord,
 His love that counts our wedlock worth so much
 That he would die, if fate denied my love.
 Go, stranger, while you may! Blood stains my bed;*

Oh cruel bane were I your bride! But you
 None will refuse; some wiser girl than I
 One happy day will wish to be your bride.—
 But why do I care for you, when other men
 Have died before, so many, for my sake?
 So fend then for yourself! Yes, let him die
 Since by so many deaths he is not warned
 And wearies of his life!—Then shall he perish
 Because he longed to live with me, and pay
 The price of love in death so undeserved?
 My victory will bring more bitterness
 Than I can bear! And yet the fault's not mine!
 Would that your heart might change, or, since your heart
 Is crazed, you might outrun me in the race!
 Oh, how his boy's fair face is like a girl's!
 Oh, poor Hippomenes, that you should ever
 Have looked on me! How you deserved to live!
 Were I not so ill-starred, would fate but yield
 And not deny me marriage, you alone
 I'd choose to be companion of my bed.
 Artless she was, and when at last love came,
 She burned, but never thought it was love's flame.

And now her father and the townspeople
 Called for the usual race, and Neptune's prince,
 Hippomenes, with anxious voice, invoked
 My help and prayed: 'Come, lovely Cytherea,
 Prosper the deed I dare and with thy grace
 Nourish the flame of love that thou hast lit.'
 A kindly breeze wafted his charming prayer;
 It moved me, I admit, and little time
 Was left to succour him. There is a field
 The people call the close of Tamasus,
 The richest part of all the isle of Cyprus,
 Which long ago was hallowed in my name
 And added as endowment to my shrine.
 A tree stands in the close with leaves of gold
 And golden branches* rustling in the breeze.
 On my way thence it chanced that in my hand
 I held three golden apples I had picked
 And I stood by Hippomenes, unseen

Except by him, and taught* the apples' use.

The trumpets sound the start; both crouching low
Flash from their marks and skim the sandy course
With flying feet; it seemed that they could race
Dry-shod across the surface of the sea*
And over the standing heads of harvest corn.
The shouting crowd cheered on the newcomer:
'Run, run, Hippomenes! Now is your chance!
Now! Faster! Faster! Run with all your speed!
You're going to win!' And hard it was to know
Who liked their words the more, Hippomenes
Or Atalanta. Many a time she slowed
When she might pass and gazed into his eyes,
And with a heavy heart left him behind.
And now he flagged, his breath came fast and dry
And there was far to go; so then he threw
One of the three gold apples from the tree.
She was amazed and, eager to secure
The gleaming fruit, swerved sideways from the track
And seized the golden apple as it rolled.
He passed her and the benches roared applause.
She with a burst of speed repaired her waste
Of time and soon again left him behind.
He threw the second apple and again
She stopped, and followed, and again ran past.
And so the last lap came. 'Be with me now,
Goddess', he prayed, 'who gavest me the gift.'
And then with all the strength of youth he threw
The shining gold far out across the field,
The longer to delay the girl; and she
Seemed undecided, but I made her chase
The rolling apple and increased its weight,
And by its weight alike and loss of speed
I hindered her. And, not to make my tale
More lengthy than the race, she lost the day
And he, victorious, led his prize away.

And I, Adonis, did I not deserve
Especial thanks and incense in my honour?
But he forgot; he gave no thanks and burnt
No incense; then to sudden wrath I turned.

Stung by his scorn and lest I be despised
In days to come, I set my heart against
Them both, to warn the world by their example.
A temple stands hidden in shady woods,
Which once Echion* to fulfil a vow
Had raised to the great Mother of the Gods. *Cybele*
There they had journeyed and were glad to rest;
And there ill-timed importunate desire,
Roused by my power, possessed Hippomenes.
Beside the temple was a dim-lit grotto,
A gloomy cavern, roofed with natural rock,
An ancient holy shrine, filled by the priest
With wooden statues* of the gods of old.
He entered here and with forbidden sin
Defiled the sanctuary. The holy statues
Turned their shocked eyes away and Cybele, *Cybele*
The tower-crowned Mother, pondered should she plunge
The guilty pair beneath the waves of Styx.
Such punishment seemed light.* Therefore their necks,
So smooth before, she clothed with tawny manes,
Their fingers curved to claws; their arms were changed
To legs; their chests swelled with new weight; with tails
They swept the sandy ground; and in their eyes
Cruel anger blazed and growls they gave for speech.
Their marriage-bed is now a woodland lair,
And feared by men, but by the goddess tamed,
They champ—two lions—the bits of Cybele. *Cybele*
And you, my darling, for my sake beware
Of lions and of every savage beast
That shows not heels but teeth; avoid them all
Lest by your daring ruin on us fall."

Her warning given, Venus made her way,
Drawn by her silver swans across the sky;
But his bold heart rebuffed her warning words.
It chanced his hounds, hot on a well-marked scent,
Put up a boar, lying hidden in the woods,
And as it broke away Adonis speared it—
A slanting hit—and quick with its curved snout
The savage beast dislodged the bloody point,
And charged Adonis as he ran in fear

For safety, and sank its tusks deep in his groin
 And stretched him dying on the yellow sand.
 Venus was riding in her dainty chariot,
 Winged by her swans, across the middle air
 Making for Cyprus, when she heard afar
 Adonis' dying groans, and thither turned
 Her snowy birds and, when from heaven on high
 She saw him lifeless, writhing in his blood,
 She rent her garments, tore her lovely hair,
 And bitterly beat her breast, and springing down
 Reproached the Fates: "Even so, not everything
 Shall own your sway. Memorials of my sorrow,*
 Adonis, shall endure; each passing year
 Your death repeated in the hearts of men
 Shall re-enact my grief and my lament.
 But now your blood shall change into a flower:
 Persephone of old was given grace
 To change a woman's form to fragrant mint;*
 And shall I then be grudged the right to change
 My prince?" And with these words she sprinkled nectar,
 Sweet-scented, on his blood, which at the touch
 Swelled up, as on a pond* when showers fall
 Clear bubbles form; and ere an hour had passed
 A blood-red flower arose, like the rich bloom
 Of pomegranates* which in a stubborn rind
 Conceal their seeds; yet is its beauty brief,
 So lightly cling its petals, fall so soon,
 When the winds blow that give the flower its name.*

anemone

↑ Venus
 Cyprus

BOOK XI

THE DEATH OF ORPHEUS

WHILE Orpheus sang his minstrel's songs* and charmed
 The rocks and woods and creatures of the wild
 To follow, suddenly, as he swept his strings
 In concord with his song, a frenzied band
 Of Thracian women, wearing skins of beasts,
 From some high ridge of ground caught sight of him.
 'Look!' shouted one of them, tossing her hair
 That floated in the breeze, 'Look, there he is,
 The man who scorns us!*' and she threw her lance
 Full in Apollo's minstrel's face, but, tipped
 With leaves,* it left a bruise but drew no blood.
 Another hurled a stone; that, in mid air,
 Was vanquished by the strains of voice and lyre
 And grovelled at his feet, as if to ask
 Pardon for frenzy's daring. Even so
 The reckless onslaught swelled; their fury knew
 No bounds; stark madness reigned. And still his singing
 Would have charmed every weapon, but the huge
 Clamour, the drums, the curving Phrygian fifes,
 Hand-clapping, Bacchic screaming drowned the lyre.
 And then at last, his song unheard, his blood
 Reddened the stones. The Maenads first pounced on
 The countless birds still spellbound by his song,
 The snakes, the host of creatures of the wild,
 His glory and his triumph. Next they turned
 Their bloody hands on Orpheus, flocking like
 Birds that have seen a midnight owl abroad
 By day, or in the amphitheatre*
 Upon the morning sand a pack of hounds
 Round a doomed stag. They rushed upon the bard,
 Hurling their leaf-dressed lances, never meant
 For work like that; and some slung clods, some flints,
 Some branches torn from trees. And, lest they lack
 Good weapons for their fury, as it chanced,
 Oxen were toiling there to plough the land

*Carmen
 Orphei

Ver. 6. 4. 516

Georgics overturned

And brawny farmhands digging their hard fields
 Not far away, and sweating for their crop.
 Seeing the horde of women, they fled and left
 Their labour's armoury, and all across
 The empty acres lay their heavy rakes,
 Hoes and long-handled mattocks. Seizing these,
 Those frantic women tore apart the oxen*
 That threatened with their horns, and streamed to slay
 The bard. He pleaded then with hands outstretched
 And in that hour for the first time his words
 Were useless and his voice of no avail.

In sacrilege they slew him. Through those lips
 (Great Lord of Heaven!) that held the rocks entranced, *pro Ippiter*
 That wild beasts understood, he breathed his last,
 And forth into the winds his spirit passed.

The sorrowing birds, the creatures of the wild,
 The woods that often followed as he sang,
 The flinty rocks and stones, all wept and mourned
 For Orpheus;* forest trees cast down their leaves,
 Tonsured in grief, and rivers too, men say,
 Were swollen with their tears,* and Naiads wore,
 And Dryads too, their mourning robes of black
 And hair dishevelled. All around his limbs
 Lay scattered. Hebrus* stream received his head
 And lyre, and floating by (so wonderful!)
 His lyre sent sounds of sorrow and his tongue, *lyra*
 Lifeless, still murmured sorrow, and the banks
 Gave sorrowing reply. And then they left
 Their native river, carried out to sea,
 And gained Methymna's shore on Lesbos' isle.
 There, as his head lay on that foreign sand,
 Its tumbled tresses dripping, a fierce snake*
 Threatened, until at last Apollo came
 To thwart it as it struck and froze to stone
 That serpent's open mouth and petrified,
 Just as they were, its jaws that gaped so wide.

The ghost of Orpheus passed to the Underworld,
 And all the places that he'd seen before
 He recognized again and, searching through
 The Elysian fields, he found Eurydice*

*vates**Apollo**Orphic Religion*

And took her in his arms with leaping heart.
 There hand in hand they stroll, the two together;
 Sometimes he follows as she walks in front,
 Sometimes he goes ahead and gazes back—
 No danger now—at his Eurydice.

Bacchus did not permit this crime to pass
 Unpunished, unavenged.* Distressed to lose
 The minstrel of his mysteries, at once *vates*
 He fastened in the woods by twisting roots
 All the women who had seen that wickedness,
 Each at the place of her pursuit, their toes
 Drawn down to points forced deep in the firm soil.
 And as a bird, its foot held in a snare
 Hidden by a clever fowler, feels it's caught
 And flaps its wings and by its flutterings
 Tightens the trap, so each of them was stuck
 Fast in the soil and struggled, terrified,
 In vain, to escape and as she jerked away,
 The lithe root held her shackled. When she asked
 Where were her toes, her nails, her feet, she saw
 The bark creep up her shapely calves. She tried,
 Distraught, to beat her thighs and what she struck
 Was oak, her breast was oak, her shoulders oak;
 Her arms likewise you'd think were changed to long
 Branches and, thinking so, you'd not be wrong. *oak robes*

For Bacchus this was not enough. He left
 Those Thracian fields and with a worthier train
 Made for the slopes and vineyards of his own
 Beloved Tmolus and Pactolus' banks,
 Though at that time the river did not flow
 Golden nor envied for its precious sands.
 Around him thronged his usual company,
 Satyrs and Bacchants, but Silenus then
 Was missing. For the peasants of those parts
 Had caught the old man, tottering along
 Muddled with wine and years, and crowned his head
 With country flowers and brought him to their king,
 Midas, whom Orpheus and Eumolpus* once
 Had taught the Bacchic rites. He recognized
 His old companion of the mysteries,