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Metamorphoses  
*A New Verse Translation*

*Translated by* DAVID RAE BURN  
*with an Introduction by* DENIS FEENEY

PENGUIN BOOKS

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## TEIRESIAS

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,  
 laid his worries aside and, as Juno was none too busy,  
 320 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 Teirésias, 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,  
 here is a second one for you!' With that, he struck at  
 the snakes  
 330 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'\* –  
 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 bebies 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

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

365 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

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

390 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  
 400 mountains,  
 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.  
 Finally one of his scorned admirers lifted his hands  
 to the heavens: 'I pray Narcissus may fall in love and  
 405 never  
 obtain his desire!' His prayer was just and Némesis  
 heard it.

Picture a clear, unmuddied 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,

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

'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  
 445 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,  
 peerless boy? When I seek you, where do you steal  
 455 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.  
 I weep and your tears flow fast. You nod when I show  
 460 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!'  
 In wild distress he ripped the top of his tunic aside 480  
 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  
 490 him.  
 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  
 once more in the pool, rang back from the rocks: 'Oh  
 500 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 Styx 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 –  
 only a flower with a trumpet of gold and pale white  
 510 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 –  
 Péntheus,\*  
 son of Echion, who treated the gods with contempt and  
 scoffed at  
 the seer's forewarnings. 'You blind old fool,' he cruelly  
 taunted,  
 515 '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  
 520 Semele, Liber.\*  
 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,



My sighs shall be imaged in you and scored in the marks  
on a new flower.\*

Later, the time will come when Aias,\* bravest of  
heroes,  
shall link his fate to this flower and his name be read on  
your petals."

210 'And while Apollo was speaking these words with  
prophetic lips,  
the blood which had spilled from the wound to the  
ground and darkened the green grass  
suddenly ceased to be blood; and a flower brighter  
than Tyrian  
purple rose from the earth and took the form of a  
lily –  
except that its colour was deepest red,\* where the lily  
is silver.

That wasn't enough for the god who had wrought this  
miraculous tribute:  
the cries that had welled from his heart were engraved  
215 on the flower, and AIAI,  
those four letters of mourning and grief, could be read  
in the petals.  
Sparta was not ashamed of her son Hyacinthus. His  
honour  
endures to the present time; each year, by ancient  
tradition,  
the people process in the solemn festival called  
Hyacinthia.

### ORPHEUS' SONG: THE CERASTAE AND PROPOETIDES

220 'But if you happened to ask the people of metal-rich  
Amathus  
whether they took any pride in the women they called  
Propoëtides,

"No!" they would answer. They'd say the same of the men  
whose foreheads  
were once disfigured by horns, and hence their name of  
Cerástae.

Before the doors of these people there stood an altar of  
Jupiter,  
guardian of guests. If an innocent stranger observed this  
altar  
225 covered in blood, he might have supposed that the sacrificed  
victims  
were suckling calves or sheep which had grazed in the local  
meadows.

In fact, the victims were human guests. These horrible rites  
affronted Venus, the mother of life and the goddess of  
Cyprus.

She thought of deserting her cities and island. But then she  
questioned: 230

"How have my cities offended? What's wrong with this  
beautiful island?

No, it's the fault of one impious family. *They* should be  
punished

by exile or death, or something between the two. What  
punishment

could this be – but metamorphósis?" And while she  
wondered

what new appearance to give them, she cast her eyes on  
their horns

and had an idea. "Good!" she said. "I can leave them  
those." 235

And so she reshaped their ogre-like frames into fierce young  
bulls.\*

'But the lewd Propoetides went as far as asserting that  
Venus

wasn't a goddess at all. Because of the deity's anger,  
it's said that they were the first to offer their bodies and  
beauty

for sale.\* Then after these harlots had lost all shame, and  
the blood 240

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,  
 Pygmálion. 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, 260  
 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 270  
 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 Hyméttus, softening  
 285      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,  
 Pygmalion fondled that longed-for body again and  
     again.  
 Yes, she was living flesh! He could feel the throb of her  
 290      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  
 295      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 Cínyras. 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 300  
 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 305  
 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 myrrh to herself. That new-formed  
     tree  
 was a worthless addition. Cupid himself denies that his  
     arrows 310  
 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. 315  
 'The maiden was courted on every side. From over the  
     East  
 her suitors flocked to compete for her hand. Now, Myrrha,  
     choose one,

- 245 *when it fought with Achilles*: As narrated in Homer, *Iliad* 21.328 ff.
- 255 *lies hidden*: The source of the Nile was a mystery in the ancient world.
- 258–9 *Padus . . . Tiber*: The first Italian names in the poem.
- 454 *heat of her brother*: Diana, the moon goddess, and Apollo, the sun god, were the twin children of Latona (6.185 ff.).
- 495 *her father Lycaön*: Lycaön was transformed into a wolf (1.232–9) before the Flood, which he and Callisto now appear to have survived. Ovid does not seem worried by such inconsistencies.
- 507 *neighbouring constellations*: Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.
- 517 *farthest point of the axis*: Juno's rhetoric appears to undermine itself by mentioning the *remoteness* of the Bears as well as their height which she finds so insulting.
- 527 *foster-parents*: Ocean and Tethys bore and reared many of the gods.
- 528 *debar those Bears*: See 173a. Another inconsistency. The Great Bear has already existed and been excluded from the waves at the time of Phaëthon's ride.
- 537–8 *watchful geese . . . Capitol*: A reference to the famous occasion about 390 BC when the Gauls made a night attack on Rome and the city was saved when the geese in Juno's temple gave the alarm.
- 553 *born of the soil*: Vulcan, when trying to rape Minerva, discharged his semen on her thigh. The goddess wiped it off on to the ground and so gave rise to Erichthonius, 'Earth-born'.
- 555 *two-formed Cecrops*: A mythical king of Athens with the body of a man and the tail of a snake.
- 564 *the owl*: Traditionally sacred to Minerva/Athena and portrayed on Athenian coins. Her story follows at 591–5.
- 570 *Coroneus*: Nothing to do with Apollo's love, Coronis. Ovid seems, rather confusingly, to have chosen this name as *korone* is Greek for 'crow'.
- 592 *corrupted her father*: Probably the crow's malicious invention. The tradition went that Nyctimene was forced into incest.
- 629 *his son*: Aesculapius, the god of medicine, who comes to Rome in 15.622–5. See also note on 648.
- 630 *Chiron the centaur*: Chiron, half man and half horse, educated many of the famous Greek heroes.
- 638 *Ocyrhoë*: 'Swift-flowing'.
- 648 *two changes*: Aesculapius was given divine powers of healing, but incurred Jupiter's displeasure by bringing Hippolytus back to life (15.534–5). He was therefore blasted by lightning and so a

- 'lifeless body' (647), until Apollo secured his deification and his cult as a god of healing was established.
- 652 *blood of the Hydra*: Chiron was accidentally shot by Hercules with an arrow tipped with the venom of the Hydra of Lerna, a snake with seven heads, which the hero had killed on the second of his famous labours.
- 654 *Sisters Three*: The Greek Moirai or Fates, who allotted each mortal his destiny at birth.
- 675 *Hippe*: 'Mare'.
- 688 *Battus*: 'Chatterer'.
- 707 *touchstone*: The stone used to test base metal pretending to be gold.
- 712 *temple of Pallas*: The Parthenon on the Acropolis. Ovid sets his story at the time of the Great Panathenaea, a festival held at Athens every three years.
- 728 *Balearic sling*: The inhabitants of the Balearic Islands were renowned for their use of the sling or catapult.
- 840 *your mother's star*: Maia was one of the seven Pleiades.
- 845 *Tyrian*: Ovid equates the old Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon (840).
- 873 *frightened prize*: The picture derives from Moschus' *Europa*. See note on 8.

## BOOK 3

- 5 *iniquitous . . . devotion*: The ambivalent description of Agenor's behaviour is reflected at the end of the book (727–8) in the image of Agave's iniquity in displaying her son Pentheus' severed head as an act inspired by her devotion to Bacchus.
- 13 *Boeotia*: The name is derived from the Greek for 'cow'.
- 14 *Castalia's cave*: The recess or 'cave' from which the Delphic oracle spoke was often associated with the Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus some way away.
- 45 *Snake*: The constellation Draco.
- 53 *skin of a lion*: Ovid is here associating Cadmus with Hercules, who was commonly portrayed as wearing the weapon-proof skin of the Nemean Lion, killed on the first of his labours.
- 111 *tapestry frontcloth*: This engaging simile is drawn from the Roman stage, where a curtain with embroidered figures was drawn up from the floor at the end of a play to close off what lay behind.
- 126 *Echion*: 'Viper'. He married Cadmus' daughter Agave and was

- the father of Pentheus, who features in the last story of this book.
- 142 *No crime . . . a pure mistake*: The language is identical with words eventually used by Ovid to describe the offence for which he was exiled to Tomis. Moreover, in *Tristia* 2.103 ff. the poet actually compares himself to Actaeon. It is therefore possible that 141–2 are a later addition; or Ovid may subsequently have been quoting from himself.
- 198 *Autonoë*: Another daughter of Cadmus who, like Agave, is one of the bacchanals in the Pentheus story.
- 207 *Blackfoot . . . Tracker*: Ovid uses made-up Greek names (here given English equivalents) for his catalogue of Actaeon's hounds, which many in his audience would have understood and enjoyed.
- 271 *to bear him a child*: In Greek mythology, Hera (Juno) is credited with the birth of Ares (Mars), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Hebe (goddess of youth) and Ilithyia (Lucina, goddess of childbirth).
- 310 *baby*: He will become the god known in Greek as Dionysus or Bacchus, among other names. His return to Thebes as a 'new god' is predicted at 520.
- 342 *Liriope*: 'Lily-like'. For reasons of euphony and metre, this proper name is stressed on the first and not the second syllable, in breach of the traditional pronunciation convention in English.
- 348 *he never knows himself*: Ovid is playing ironically with the famous Greek religious injunction, 'Know yourself', which was inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The story which follows shows Narcissus coming to know himself in an unexpected way and dying in consequence.
- 463 *I know myself*: See note on 348.
- 513 *Pentheus*: Cadmus' grandson, now the young king of Thebes.
- 520 *Liber*: 'Free', originally the name of an Italian vegetation god, later identified with the Greek god Bacchus. The name reflects the liberating effect of the god of wine and ecstatic joy.
- 539 *to found a new Tyre*: A wild misrepresentation. Cadmus did not come, like the Trojan Aeneas to Rome, bearing his household gods; and the Theban elders owe their ancestry to the rump of the armed men sprung from the dragon's teeth (126–30, 531–2).
- 542 *thyrsus*: The bacchic 'wand', consisting of a staff topped with a bunch of ivy leaves.
- 559 *King Acrisius*: Normally a character in the Perseus story. His opposition to Bacchus only occurs in Ovid and is mentioned again in 4.607–14.
- 568 *as . . . I have seen*: The intrusion of the poet himself in the first person is very rare in epic and would have jarred, particularly in

- an 'epic' simile – but Ovid seems to have enjoyed this kind of naughty incongruity.
- 664 *tangled with ivy*: The ivy, grape clusters (667) and animals mentioned (669) are all associated with Bacchus in his full manifestation.
- 675 *scaly*: A curious detail. Ovid seems to have ignored the fact that dolphins have no scales.
- 720 *Actaeon's ghost*: A poignant link with the Actaeon story, though Pentheus is much to blame where his cousin was not.
- 727 *Displaying it high*: See note on 5.

## BOOK 4

- 11 *different titles*: Gods would be invoked by all their various names, guises, functions, etc., with a saving clause at the end (16) to guard against possible omissions.
- 13a *child of two mothers*: See 3.310–13.
- 13b *Thyone*: Another name for Semele; but the title Thyoneus is derived from the Greek for 'to rave'.
- 15 *Iacchus*: From one of the bacchanals' ecstatic cries, *iacche*.
- 19 *hornless epiphany*: Bacchus could appear as a horned bull, a snake or lion, as well as in the form of an androgynous human male.
- 23b *Lydian sailors*: The story was told in 3.597–686.
- 38 *Minerva*: Here in her role as the goddess who presides over women's indoor activities and so over the sisters' 'untoward housecraft' (33). Although she is over-ridden by Bacchus in the first part of this book, her authority is reasserted at the end.
- 43 *many tales*: Ovid, by a common rhetorical device, shows his learning by mentioning three mini-metamorphoses, only to reject them.
- 47 *Dercetis' daughter*: The queen Semiramis, who built the famous walls (58) of Babylon.
- 88 *Ninus' tomb*: Semiramis was the widow of Ninus, king of Nineveh, where his tomb, a well-known monument in antiquity, was probably sited, rather than in Babylon.
- 122 *a spurt from a waterpipe*: The simile takes us to the streets of Ovid's Rome and can only strike modern readers as bizarre. But Pyramus' blood has somehow to reach the fruit of the mulberry tree!
- 170 *'Loves of the Sun God'*: Here again the Sun of the Phaëthon story. See 245–6.

- finger in his mouth to suggest childhood, though the Greeks and Romans thought this denoted a call to silence.
- 693 *Osiris*: The husband of Isis, who was killed by his brother Seph and torn to pieces, then searched for by Isis until she secured his revival. The 'search for whom is never abandoned' refers to the annual ritual commemorating this myth.
- 694 *snake from Egypt*: Snakes were part of Isis-worship and associated with the life-giving properties of the Nile.
- 736 *Pasiphaë*: Her story was told at 8.131-7.
- 739 *wooden cow*: See note on 8.132.
- 790 *new vigour*: The name Iphis is derived from a Greek word for masculine strength.
- 792 *gifts*: The verbal link between the beginning and end of this book. In asking Achelōis to explain his broken horn in line 1, Theseus is demanding what the river calls 'a dismal gift' (4). Here Telethusa and Iphis are called on to bring their gifts to the temple in joy. The gift motif is also used poignantly with the tunic of Nessus (133, 157, 213).

## BOOK 10

- 13 *Taenaran gateway*: Taenarus, at the tip of the middle peninsula at the south of the Peloponnese, was a conventional entrance to the underworld.
- 21 *three-headed monster*: Cerberus. Orpheus is making it clear that he is not another Hercules, whose removal of the dog from Hades is referred to at 7.410-15 and 9.185.
- 28 *that old abduction*: The story of Proserpina's kidnap by Pluto, told by Orpheus' mother, Calliope, at 5.385-571.
- 41-4 *For a moment . . . boulder*: Activity in the House of the Damned (4.456) is suspended by Ovid to entertaining effect.
- 65 *terrified person*: Otherwise unknown. Ovid is working in a mini-metamorphosis.
- 68 *Lethaea*: Another obscure reference involving a mini-metamorphosis. The images of unity and separation in 70-71 fit the Orpheus story, but Eurydice was not guilty like Lethaea.
- 77 *Rhodope . . . Haemus*: Mountains in Thrace, referred to as metamorphosed lovers at 6.87-9. Haemus is also linked with Orpheus at 2.219-20.
- 78 *Pisces*: The twelfth sign of the zodiac, indicating the end of the winter. Ovid also connects the seasons with the zodiac at 126 and 165.

- 89 *Trees suddenly came on the scene*: Orpheus was renowned for his power to draw trees and rocks behind him with his music.
- 90 *oak of Dodona*: The large Eurasian oak, here associated with Jupiter's famous oracle at Dodona in Epirus. Responses were given through the rustling of the sacred oaks.
- high-leaved durmast*: The Italian oak, the tallest oak species.
- 97 *laurustinus*: An evergreen winter-flowering shrub.
- 104 *Attis*: The young male escort of the Phrygian mother-goddess Cybele, whose worship was fostered at Rome. His self-castration formed part of the ritual associated with the cult. The pine tree also featured, but Attis' actual metamorphosis into a pine seems to be an invention of Ovid's.
- 126 *Cancer the Crab*: This stands for the beginning of summer, though in 127 Ovid imagines the Crab as literally alive on the seashore.
- 142 *always be there . . . loved ones*: The cypress was traditionally the tree of death and funerals.
- 148 *Let Jove be the start*: The grand invocation of Jupiter, and a fresh reference to the Gigantomachy (see 1.152-62, 5.319) on the plains of Phlegraea (150-51), are in mock contrast with Orpheus' subject-matter as projected in 152-4.
- 182 *unthinkingly*: Just like Cyparissus (130).
- 206 *My sighs . . . in the marks of a new flower*: The letters AIAI, a Greek word of lamentation. See 215-16.
- 207 *Aias*: The Greek form of Ajax, whose death and production of a hyacinth from his blood are described at 13.383b-96. Sophocles in his tragedy *Ajax* played on the pun between his hero's name and the Greek word for 'Alas!' (206). The point recurs at 13.396-8.
- 213 *deepest red*: The Roman hyacinth is evidently not the species we should recognize.
- 237 *fierce young bulls*: So now very suitable for sacrifice themselves.
- 240-41 *offer their bodies . . . for sale*: Ovid is making his own intriguing use of the historical fact that temple prostitutes practised their trade in the shrine of Venus at Paphos.
- 251 *if modesty didn't preclude it*: The old idea that nudity is 'art' in stillness, but indecent in motion.
- 305 *congratulate this domain*: Orpheus is speaking and so made, ironically, to ignore the Thracian predilection for sex noted at 6.458-60 and also the practices introduced by himself in 83-5. Since, however, we may well have forgotten about Orpheus, the minstrel's voice in Thrace may here be subtly merged with the voice of Ovid at Rome.

- 448 *golden moon*: A symbol of chastity, which has appropriately fled in horror.
- 450-51 *Icarus . . . Erigone*: An ideal father-daughter pair to contrast with Cinyras and Myrrha. When Icarus (not Daedalus' son and better known as Icarus) was killed, Erigone hanged herself and they both joined the constellations as Boötes (446) and Virgo.
- 480 *Saba*: Myrrha is now back in Arabia.
- 565 *Atalanta*: A different Atalanta from the Arcadian girl admired by Meleäger in Book 8.
- 696 *tower-crowned*: Cybele, the 'Mighty Mother' (704), was commonly represented with a 'battlemented' crown.
- 698 *too light*: The actual punishment of metamorphosis into tamed lions hardly seems more severe than consignment to the underworld.
- 705 *avoid the lions*: Venus' story may have explained why she detests lions (552) but is hardly a forceful warning against the hunting of more dangerous animals. Anyway, Adonis ignores it (709).
- 715 *its tusks*: The Latin echoes the word used for the 'fang' of the viper which bit the foot of Eurydice (10). The book ends as it began with the image of the corpse of a young person whose death has been caused by an animal 'tooth' or 'teeth'.
- 726 *shall be re-enacted*: Adonis' death was ritually commemorated in a summer festival, like the Hyacinthia at Sparta (219), called the Adonia.
- 728 *Proserpina*: This balances the mention of the goddess as the power whom Orpheus first appeals to when he visits the underworld at the beginning of the book (15). There is little other reason for her to appear at this point.
- 736 *pomegranate fruit*: Another reminder of Proserpina. See 5.536-8.
- 738 *anemone - wind-flower*: *Anemos* is the Greek word for 'wind'.

## BOOK 11

- 1 *Thracian minstrel*: Orpheus here returns to the foreground.
- 25-6 *morning fight / in the amphitheatre*: The simile, as at 3.111, is drawn from the contemporary Roman world of popular entertainment. Gladiatorial contests were preceded in the morning by shows of animal hunting.
- 67 *priest of his mysteries*: Orpheus was prominent in the cult of Dionysus. See 92-3.
- 88 *precious sand*: See 142-5.
- 90 *Silenus*: See 4.26-8.

- 93 *Eumolpus*: The founder of the Mysteries at Eleusis near Athens, which historically included a 'descent into Hades' like that of Orpheus.
- 117 *Danaë's virtue*: See note on 4.611.
- 156 *Tmolus as judge*: The mountain here becomes a god in human form, like the river Achelōus (8.549-610 and 9.1-88).
- 181 *tiara*: A kind of turban which fastened under the chin.
- 195-6 *straits of . . . Helle*: The Hellespont or the modern Dardanelles.
- 219 *grandfather*: Jupiter was Peleus' grandfather through Aeacus, the king of Aegina encountered in Book 7.
- 221 *Proteus*: See 8.731-7. Here the old man of the sea is a sort of prophet.
- 268 *Phocus, his half-brother*: The son of the Nereid Psamathe. Peleus and Telamon were supposed to have killed him because he excelled in athletic sports.
- 273 *his brother*: Daedalion, whose story is told at 291-300.
- 400 *Thetis*: Returned now, evidently, to the sea.
- 413 *Claros*: Apollo's oracle here was second only to that of Delphi.
- 578 *Juno's temple*: Juno as the goddess of marriage.
- 584-5 *polluted by unclean / hands*: Until a dead man had been properly buried, his family was regarded as unclean.
- 592 *Cimmerian country*: The Cimmerians were a mythical people who were said to dwell by Ocean in mist and cloud, close to the country of dreams.
- 599 *watchful geese*: See note on 2.538.
- 603 *Lethe*: Here located, by poetic licence, in Cimmerian territory.
- 639 *Icelos . . . Phobator*: 'Like' . . . 'Scarer'.
- 751 *same person*: Ovid is making a joke of his own vagueness regarding the identity of his narrator.
- 776 *fugitive's foot*: Here, near the end of the book, we are inevitably reminded of Eurydice, and so of Orpheus, with whose image the book began.

## BOOK 12

- 1 *Priam*: Aesacus' metamorphosis to the diver at the end of Book 11 leads on at once to his royal father. For the relationship of lines 1-4 with the end of the book, see note on 614.
- 5-6 *prince . . . stolen bride*: The traditional cause of the Trojan War. Paris breached the laws of hospitality by eloping with Helen, the wife of Menelaüs, king of Sparta. The Greek fleet of a thousand ships, raised to rescue Helen and punish the Trojans, was