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BOOK III

The Story of Cadmus

And now the god put off the bull's disguise,
Revealed himself at last. They had reached the shores
Of Crete, when the girl's father, King Agenor,
Unknowing what had happened to his daughter,
Ordered his son, named Cadmus, to go and find her,
Threatening exile as a punishment
For failure, in that single action showing
Devotion toward his daughter, toward his son
Harsh wickedness. And Cadmus roamed the world
In vain—for who is good enough detective
To catch Jove cheating?—and became an exile
Leaving both fatherland and father's anger.
He sought Apollo's oracle, a suppliant
Asking what land to live in, and Apollo
Replied: "In lonely lands there will come to meet you
A heifer, one who has never worn the yoke
Nor drawn the curve of the plough. Follow the creature
Till she lies down to rest, and there establish
The city walls, and call the land Boetia."
Scarcely had Cadmus left the sacred cavern
When he saw the heifer, moving slow, unguarded,
Wearing no mark of servitude. He followed
Slowly, and silently adored Apollo
For showing him the way. And now the heifer
Had passed Cephisus and Panopean acres,
Halted and raised her handsome head, with horns
Wide spread, and lowed, and looked back at those people
Coming behind, and kneeled, and let her side
Sink down in the green meadow-land, and Cadmus
Gave thanks, and kissed that foreign ground, and greeted
The unknown fields and mountains.

For libation
To Jove, he ordered serving-men to go
Find living water for the sacrifice.
An ancient forest stood there, undetouched
By any axe, and in its midst a cave
Thick set with bushes. Tightly-fitted stones
Made a low archway, under which the water
Poured from abundant springs, and there a serpent,
Sacred to Mars, was dwelling. His crest was gold,
His eyes flashed fire, his body swelled with poison;
Three darting tongues he had, three rows of teeth.
The men of Cadmus reached this grove, ill-omened;
Their lowered vessels broke the water's silence,
Answered by hissing, for the long head, thrusting,
Reached out from the long darkness of the cavern.
The urns sank through the water, and the men
Felt blood run cold and limbs turn weak and tremble.
Twisting his scaly coils in writhing loops,
Curving in undulant arcs and semicircles,
The serpent lifts himself erect; he towers,
Half of him anyway, as high, as huge,
As the great serpent of the constellations.
The whole wood lies beneath him, and he strikes,
Coils, or constricts, and all the men are victims.
It makes no difference what they try, to fight,
To run, to stand, too numb for either.

High noon arrived, with shadows at their shortest.
Cadmus began to wonder: what had happened,
Why had they not come back? He went to find them.
For shield, he had a lion's skin, for weapon,
A lance with shining point of steel, a javelin,
And, his best armor, a courageous spirit.
He entered the dark wood, he saw the bodies,
He saw the great victorious serpent, gloating,
Licking the wounds with bloody tongue. He cried:
“I will avenge your death, poor faithful bodies,
Or be your comrade in that death!” So saying,
With all the strength he had, he raised a boulder,
Lifted it shoulder-high, and hurled it from him
With force that would have shattered walls and towers,
But the serpent took no wound at all, protected
By scales of iron and the skin's dark hardness,
Not hard enough, however, for the javelin
Which pierced the middle of the back, the steel
Biting down into the middle of the belly.
He is wild with pain, twists back his head, he sees
The wounds, he bites the spear-shaft, and he loosens
Wood from the iron, but the iron stays there,
Stuck in the spine. His rage is more than doubled,
The throat is swollen, veins stand out, the jaws
Froth with white poison, and the sound of metal
Clangs from the ground as the great scales rasp across it.
The smell of his breath infects the noisome air.
He coils, he writhes, he straightens, like a beam
Or battering-ram, comes on, like a flooding river
Sweeping the trees before it. Cadmus yields
Only a little, holding up against him
The lion's skin, and jabbing with the spear-point.
Maddened, the serpent snaps the steel, and catches
The point between the teeth. The poisonous mouth
Begins to dribble blood, and the green grass
Is sprayed another color, but the wound
Is slight, the monster yielding, going with it,
And Cadmus, following hard, keeps pointing, pressing,
Backing the serpent up against an oak-tree,
Pinning him there, and the oak-tree bends, protesting
Under that weight and all that furious lashing.

And as he stood there, gazing at his victim,
A voice was heard, coming from where, he knew not,
But he could hear it saying: “Why, O Cadmus,
Stare at the serpent slain? You also, some day,
Will be a serpent for mortal men to stare at."
For a long time he stood there, pale and trembling
And cold with apprehension, but a helper,
Minerva, through the air descending, came
And stood beside him, and she gave him orders
To plow the earth, to sow the teeth of the serpent
Which would become the seed of future people.
Cadmus obeyed; he opened the long furrows
And sowed the mortal seed. Could you believe it?
The covered earth broke open, and the clods
Began to stir, and first the points of spears
Rose from the ground, then colored plumes, and helmets,
Shoulders of men, and chests, arms full of weapons,
A very harvest of the shields of warriors,
The opposite of the way a curtain rises,
Showing feet first, then knees, and waists, and bodies
And faces last of all.

    Cadmus was frightened
By this new menace, got his weapons ready,
And heard a cry, one of the earth-born people
Calling out, “Do not arm! Keep out of this,
Our civil warfare.” As he spoke, he struck
One of his brothers, and himself was murdered
By a dart, flung far, whose thrower, too, went down
Dying as soon as living. And that madness
Raged through them all; the sudden brothers perished
By wounds they gave each other, and the earth,
Their mother, felt their short-lived blood upon her,
Warm from their brief existence. Only five

Were left at last, and one of these, Echion,
Let fall his weapons, as Minerva ordered,
Asked peace, and won it, from the other brothers,
And Cadmus found them helpers and companions
In the building of the town Apollo promised.

That was the city Thebes, and now the exile
Might seem a happy man. Venus and Mars
Were parents of his bride, and there were children
Who turned out well, and children of the children,
Grown to maturity. But always, always,
A man must wait the final day, and no man
Should ever be called happy before burial.

    The Story of Actaeon

One of these grandsons was the lad Actaeon,
First cause of Cadmus’ sorrow. On his forehead
Horns sprouted, and his hound-dogs came to drink
The blood of their young master. In the story
You will find Actaeon guiltless; put the blame
On luck, not crime: what crime is there in error?

There was a mountain, on whose slopes had fallen
The blood of many kinds of game: high noon,
Short shadows, and Actaeon, at ease, and friendly
Telling his company: “Our nets and spears
Drip with the blood of our successful hunting.
To-day has brought us luck enough; to-morrow
We try again. The Sun-god, hot and burning,
Is halfway up his course. Give up the labor, 
Bring home the nets.” And they obeyed his orders.

There was a valley there, all dark and shaded
With pine and cypress, sacred to Diana,
Gargaphie, its name was, and it held
Deep in its inner shade a secret grotto
Made by no art, unless you think of Nature
As being an artist. Out of rock and tufo
She had formed an archway, where the shining water
Made slender watery sound, and soon subsided
Into a pool, and grassy banks around it.
The goddess of the woods, when tired from hunting,
Came here to bathe her limbs in the cool crystal.
She gave her armor-bearer spear and quiver
And loosened bow; another's arm received
The robe, laid off; two nymphs unbound her sandals,
And one, Crocale, defter than the others,
Knotted the flowing hair; others brought water,
Psecas, Phyale, Nephele, and Rhanis,
Pouring it out from good-sized urns, as always.
But look! While she was bathing there, all naked,
Actaeon came, with no more thought of hunting
Till the next day, wandering, far from certain,
Through unfamiliar woodland till he entered
Diana's grove, as fate seemed bound to have it.
And when he entered the cool dripping grotto,
The nymphs, all naked, saw him, saw a man,
And beat their breasts and screamed, and all together
Gathered around their goddess, tried to hide her

With their own bodies, but she stood above them,
Taller by head and shoulders. As the clouds
Grow red at sunset, as the daybreak reddens,
Diana blushed at being seen, and turned
Aside a little from her close companions,
Looked quickly for her arrows, found no weapon
Except the water, but scooped up a handful
And flung it in the young man's face, and over
The young man's hair. Those drops had vengeance in them.
She told him so: “Tell people you have seen me,
Diana, naked! Tell them if you can!”
She said no more, but on the sprinkled forehead
Horns of the long-lived stag began to sprout,
The neck stretched out, the ears were long and pointed,
The arms were legs, the hands were feet, the skin
A dappled hide, and the hunter's heart was fearful.
Away in flight he goes, and, going, marvels
At his own speed, and finally sees, reflected,
His features in a quiet pool. “Alas!”
He tries to say, but has no words. He groans,
The only speech he has, and the tears run down
Cheeks that are not his own. There is one thing only
Left him, his former mind. What should he do?
Where should he go—back to the royal palace
Or find some place of refuge in the forest?
Fear argues against one, and shame the other.
And while he hesitates, he sees his hounds,
Blackfoot, Trailchaser, Hungry, Hurricane,
Gazelle and Mountain-Ranger, Spot and Sylvan,
Swift Wingfoot, Glen, wolf-sired, and the bitch Harpy
With her two pups, half-grown, ranging beside her,
Tigress, another bitch, Hunter, and Lanky,
Chop-jaws, and Soot, and Wolf, with the white marking
On his black muzzle, Mountaineer, and Power,
The Killer, Whirlwind, Whitey, Blackskin, Grabber,
And others it would take too long to mention,
Arcadian hounds, and Cretan-bred, and Spartan.
The whole pack, with the lust of blood upon them,
Come baying over cliffs and crags and ledges
Where no trail runs: Actaeon, once pursuer
Over this very ground, is now pursued,
Fleeing his old companions. He would cry
“`I am Actaeon: recognize your master!’"
But the words fail, and nobody could hear him
So full the air of baying. First of all
The Killer fastens on him, then the Grabber,
Then Mountaineer gets hold of him by a shoulder.
These three had started last, but beat the others
By a short-cut through the mountains. So they run him
To stand at bay until the whole pack gathers
And all together nip and slash and fasten
Till there is no more room for wounds. He groans,
Making a sound not human, but a sound
No stag could utter either, and the ridges
Are filled with that heart-breaking kind of moaning.
Actaeon goes to his knees, like a man praying,
Faciess them all in silence, with his eyes
In mute appeal, having no arms to plead with,
To stretch to them for mercy. His companions,
The other hunting lads, urge on the pack
With shouts as they did always, and not knowing
What has become of him, they call Actaeon!
Actaeon! each one louder than the others,
As if they thought him miles away. He answers,
Hearing his name, by turning his head toward them,
And hears them growl and grumble at his absence,
Calling him lazy, missing the good show
Of quarry brought to bay. Absence, for certain,
He would prefer, but he is there; and surely
He would rather see and hear the dogs than feel them.
They circle him, dash in, and nip, and mangle
And lacerate and tear their prey, not master,
No master whom they know, only a deer.
And so he died, and so Diana’s anger
Was satisfied at last.

The Story of Semele

And gossip argued
All up and down the land, and every which way:
Some thought the goddess was too merciless
And others praised her; maidenhood, they claimed,
Deserved just such stern acts of reckoning,
And both sides found good reason for their judgment.
Juno alone said nothing, either blame
Or praise, but she was secretly rejoicing
In the disaster to Agenor’s household.
All of Europa’s relatives were guilty
Because Europa had been Juno's rival,
And now, it seemed, she had another grievance,
Another grudge, for Semele, she knew,
Was pregnant with the seed of Jove. She started
To limber up her tongue for good round cursing,
Then thought, "What good has cursing ever done me?
I must find the girl herself; I must destroy her,
If I am called, with reason, most mighty Juno,
If I am fit to bear the jeweled sceptre,
If I am queen of Heaven, and wife and sister,
Well, sister at least, of Jove. She is satisfied,
This Semele, with hole-and-corner business,
A short-lived outrage to my bed. But still
She has conceived, and that one thing was lacking.
Her belly proves her guilt. She wants to be
Something I have not been so far, a mother
Pregnant by Jove, arrogant in her beauty.
I'll manage that; I am no daughter of Saturn
Unless she finds her way to Hell's black marshes
Sent there by Jove himself."

She left her throne,
And under cover of the yellow cloud
Came to the house of Semele, put off
The cloud concealment, and put on the form
Of an old woman, whitened hair, and wrinkles,
The quavering voice, bent back, and tottering footsteps,
Looking like Beroe, Semele's nursemaid.
They did a lot of gossiping together
Till the talk came round to the name of Jove, and Juno
Sighed, in the way old women often do,
Saying: "It really may be Jove; I hope so,
But, you know, I'm afraid of all such business.
Many have gotten into decent bedrooms
Pretending to be gods. It is not enough
Even if he is Jove; you should make him prove it
If he really is. Let him be the kind of fellow,
Big as he is, when he takes Juno to him.
Let him have you, but first let him come in all his glory!"
So Juno molded Cadmus' innocent daughter,
And she asked Jove for a favor, and did not name it.
And he replied: "Ask and it shall be granted,
I swear by Styx, the god-compelling river."
And Semele, happy in her own ill-fortune,
Too powerful in winning a lover over
And doomed to die on that account, responded:
"Come to me as you come in love to Juno!"
Jove would have made her stop, but she had finished.
He groans in pity: she cannot take back
What she had wished, nor he what he had sworn.
So, very sorrowful, he climbs the Heaven,
Beckons the following mist and clouds and lightning
And winds and thunder and last of all the fire
No man escapes from. Still, he tries to temper
His armament, and leaves the bolts behind him
With which he hurled Typhoeus down from Heaven.
Those weapons are too savage. He has others
Made in the Cyclops' workshop, somewhat lighter,
Less full of rage and fire, second-string weapons
In the slang of the gods. And these he takes and enters
The house of Semele. Her mortal body
Could not endure that rush, and in that mating,
That gift, burned utterly. The child in the womb,
Only half-formed, was taken from her body,
Sewed up (if anybody can believe it)
In the thigh of Jove, to wait for birth, and Ino,
Semele's sister, watched him in his cradle,
And after that the nymphs of Nysa hid him
And brought his milk home to their caverns for him.

The Story of Tiresias

So, while these things were happening on earth,
And Bacchus, Semele's son, was twice delivered,
Safe in his cradle, Jove, they say, was happy
And feeling pretty good (with wine) forgetting
Anxiety and care, and killing time
Joking with Juno. “I maintain,” he told her,
“You females get more pleasure out of loving
Than we poor males do, ever.” She denied it,
So they decided to refer the question
To wise Tiresias' judgment: he should know
What love was like, from either point of view.
Once he had come upon two serpents mating
In the green woods, and struck them from each other,
And thereupon, from man was turned to woman,
And was a woman seven years, and saw
The serpents once again, and once more struck them
Apart, remarking: “If there is such magic
In giving you blows, that man is turned to woman,
It may be woman is turned to man. Worth trying.”
And so he was a man again; as umpire,
He took the side of Jove. And Juno
Was a bad loser, and she said that umpires
Were always blind, and made him so forever.
No god can over-rule another's action,
But the Almighty Father, out of pity,
In compensation, gave Tiresias power
To know the future, so there was some honor
Along with punishment.

The Story of Echo and Narcissus

And so Tiresias,
Famous through all Aonian towns and cities,
Gave irrefutable answers to all comers
Who sought his guidance. One of the first who tested
The truths he told was a naiad of the river,
Liriope, whom the river-god, Cephisus
Embraced and ravished in his watery dwelling.
In time she bore a child, most beautiful
Even as child, gave him the name Narcissus,
And asked Tiresias if the boy would ever
Live to a ripe old age. Tiresias answered:
“Yes, if he never knows himself.” How silly
Those words seemed, for how long! But as it happened,
Time proved them true—the way he died, the strangeness
Of his infatuation.

Now Narcissus
Was sixteen years of age, and could be taken
Either for boy or man; and boys and girls
Both sought his love, but in that slender stripling
Was pride so fierce no boy, no girl, could touch him.
He was out hunting one day, driving deer
Into the nets, when a nymph named Echo saw him,
A nymph whose way of talking was peculiar
In that she could not start a conversation
Nor fail to answer other people talking.
Up to this time Echo still had a body,
She was not merely voice. She liked to chatter,
But had no power of speech except the power
To answer in the words she last had heard.
Juno had done this: when she went out looking
For Jove on top of some nymph among the mountains,
Echo would stall the goddess off by talking
Until the nymphs had fled. Sooner or later
Juno discovered this and said to Echo:
“Tongue that made a fool of me will shortly
Have shorter use, the voice be brief hereafter.”
Those were not idle words; now Echo always
Says the last thing she hears, and nothing further.
She saw Narcissus roaming through the country,
Saw him, and burned, and followed him in secret,
 Burning the more she followed, as when sulphur
Smeared on the rim of torches, catches fire
When other fire comes near it. Oh, how often
She wanted to come near with coaxing speeches,
Make soft entreaties to him! But her nature
Sternly forbids; the one thing not forbidden
Is to make answers. She is more than ready
For words she can give back. By chance Narcissus
Lost track of his companions, started calling
“Is anybody here?” and “Here!” said Echo.
He looked around in wonderment, called louder
“Come to me!” “Come to me!” came back the answer.
He looked behind him, and saw no one coming;
“Why do you run from me?” and heard his question
Repeated in the woods. “Let us get together!”
There was nothing Echo would ever say more gladly,
“Let us get together!” And, to help her words,
Out of the woods she came, with arms all ready
To fling around his neck. But he retreated:
“Keep your hands off,” he cried, “and do not touch me!
I would die before I give you a chance at me.”
“I give you a chance at me,” and that was all
She ever said thereafter, spurned and hiding,
Ashamed, in the leafy forests, in lonely caverns.
But still her love clings to her and increases
And grows on suffering; she cannot sleep,
She frets and pines, becomes all gaunt and haggard,
Her body dries and shrivels till voice only
And bones remain, and then she is voice only
For the bones are turned to stone. She hides in woods
And no one sees her now along the mountains,
But all may hear her, for her voice is living.

She was not the only one on whom Narcissus
Had visited frustration; there were others,
Naiads or Oreads, and young men also
Till finally one rejected youth, in prayer,
Raised up his hands to Heaven: “May Narcissus
Love one day, so, himself, and not win over
The creature whom he loves!” Nemesis heard him,
Goddess of Vengeance, and judged the plea was righteous.
There was a pool, silver with shining water,
To which no shepherds came, no goats, no cattle,
Whose glass no bird, no beast, no falling leaf
Had ever troubled. Grass grew all around it,
Green from the nearby water, and with shadow
No sun burned hotly down on. Here Narcissus,
Worn from the heat of hunting, came to rest
Finding the place delightful, and the spring
Refreshing for the thirsty. As he tried
To quench his thirst, inside him, deep within him,
Another thirst was growing, for he saw
An image in the pool, and fell in love
With that unbodied hope, and found a substance
In what was only shadow. He looks in wonder,
Charmed by himself, spell-bound, and no more moving
Than any marble statue. Lying prone
He sees his eyes, twin stars, and locks as comely
As those of Bacchus or the god Apollo,
Smooth cheeks, and ivory neck, and the bright beauty
Of countenance, and a flush of color rising
In the fair whiteness. Everything attracts him
That makes him so attractive. Foolish boy,
He wants himself; the loved becomes the lover,
The seeker sought, the kindler burns. How often
He tries to kiss the image in the water,
Dips in his arms to embrace the boy he sees there,
And finds the boy, himself, elusive always,
Not knowing what he sees, but burning for it,
The same delusion mocking his eyes and teasing.
Why try to catch an always fleeing image,
Poor credulous youngsters? What you seek is nowhere,
And if you turn away, you will take with you
The boy you love. The vision is only shadow,
Only reflection, lacking any substance.
It comes with you, it stays with you, it goes
Away with you, if you can go away.
No thought of food, no thought of rest, can make him
Forsake the place. Stretched on the grass, in shadow,
He watches, all unsatisfied, that image
Vain and illusive, and he almost drowns
In his own watching eyes. He rises, just a little,
Enough to lift his arms in supplication
To the trees around him, crying to the forest:
“What love, whose love, has ever been more cruel?
You woods should know: you have given many lovers
Places to meet and hide in; has there ever,
Through the long centuries, been anyone
Who has pined away as I do? He is charming,
I see him, but the charm and sight escape me.
I love him and I cannot seem to find him!
To make it worse, no sea, no road, no mountain,
No city-wall, no gate, no barrier, parts us
But a thin film of water. He is eager
For me to hold him. When my lips go down
To kiss the pool, his rise, he reaches toward me.
You would think that I could touch him—almost nothing
Keeps us apart. Come out, whoever you are!
Why do you tease me so? Where do you go
When I am reaching for you? I am surely
Neither so old or ugly as to scare you,
And nymphs have been in love with me. You promise,
I think, some hope with a look of more than friendship.
You reach out arms when I do, and your smile
Follows my smiling; I have seen your tears
When I was tearful; you nod and beckon when I do;
Your lips, it seems, answer when I am talking
Though what you say I cannot hear. I know
The truth at last. He is myself! I feel it,
I know my image now. I burn with love
Of my own self; I start the fire I suffer.
What shall I do? Shall I give or take the asking?
What shall I ask for? What I want is with me,
My riches make me poor. If I could only
Escape from my own body! if I could only—
How curious a prayer from any lover—
Be parted from my love! And now my sorrow
Is taking all my strength away; I know
I have not long to live, I shall die early,
And death is not so terrible, since it takes
My trouble from me; I am sorry only
The boy I love must die: we die together.”

He turned again to the image in the water,
Seeing it blur through tears, and the vision fading.
And as he saw it vanish, he called after:
“Where are you going? Stay: do not desert me,
I love you so. I cannot touch you; let me
Keep looking at you always, and in looking
Nourish my wretched passion!” In his grief
He tore his garment from the upper margin,
Beat his bare breast with hands as pale as marble,
And the breast took on a glow, a rosy color,
As apples are white and red, sometimes, or grapes
Can be both green and purple. The water clears,
He sees it all once more, and cannot bear it.
As yellow wax dissolves with warmth around it,
As the white frost is gone in morning sunshine,
Narcissus, in the hidden fire of passion,
Wanes slowly, with the ruddy color going,
The strength and hardihood and comeliness,
Fading away, and even the very body
Echo had loved. She was sorry for him now,
Though angry still, remembering; you could hear her
Answer “Alas!” in pity, when Narcissus
Cried out “Alas!” You could hear her own hands beating
Her breast when he beat his. “Farewell, dear boy,
Beloved in vain!” were his last words, and Echo
Called the same words to him. His weary head
Sank to the greensward, and death closed the eyes
That once had marveled at their owner’s beauty.
And even in Hell, he found a pool to gaze in,
Watching his image in the Stygian water.
While in the world above, his naiad sisters
Mourned him, and dryads wept for him, and Echo
Mourned as they did, and wept with them, preparing
The funeral pile, the bier, the brandished torches,
But when they sought his body, they found nothing,
Only a flower with a yellow center
Surrounded with white petals.

The Story of Pentheus and Bacchus

As the story
Spread round the world, Tiresias was honored
For his prophetic wisdom. Only Pentheus,
Echion’s son, who laughed at gods, was scornful,
Made fun of the old man’s prophecies, and mocked him
About his inner darkness. But Tiresias
Shook his gray head in warning: “Blindness, Pentheus,
Might be a blessing in your case, to keep you
From ever looking on the rites of Bacchus.
The day is near, I know, when the new god
Shall come, the son of Semele, whose due
Is worship from you; if you scorn his temple,
You will be torn into a thousand pieces,
Your blood pollute the woods, and its defilement
Spatter your mother and your mother’s sisters.
And this will happen: you will never honor
That god, and you will say that even in blindness
I have seen all too well.”

Pentheus flung him

Aside before he even finished speaking,
But what he said came true.

The god had come
And the fields roared with reveling outcry. People
Came thronging from the city, men and women,
The old, the young, patricians and plebeians,
All mixed together, swept along, half frantic
Toward unknown celebrations. Pentheus cried:
“What lunacy is this, oh sons of Mars,
Sons of the serpent’s teeth, that dulls your wits?
Can clash of cymbals, and the crooked hornpipe,
Fraudulent magic, all this female yelling,
Howling of drunkards, dirty mobs, fools’ drumming—
Can all this racket scare you, once such heroes
When trumpets rang, and swords were drawn, and spears
Glittered before your eyes? And you, my elders,
Am I supposed to give you admiration
For sailing long seas over, building here
Your city, bringing home your wandering gods,
And watch them, now, taken without a battle?
Or you, my fine young peers, who used to carry
Spears once, not wands, do you think it decent of you
To stick your heads through garlands, not in helmets?
Think back! What seed begot you? Show the spirit
Of the old serpent, the one who killed the many,
Who died defending his own pool and fountain.
Fight, you, and win for your own glory!
He killed brave men: you have to conquer cowards
To save your ancient honor. If the fates
Doom Thebes to early downfall, I would rather
See heroes and artillery break and shatter
Her walls, and the steel clash, and fire go roaring
Around her; then we might be pitiful, but honor,
At least, unstained; we should bewail our ruin,
Not seek to hide it, and our tears would be
Nothing disgraceful. Now a boy, unarmed,
Will take Thebes over, one whom neither weapons
Nor arts of war nor horses aid, but only
Hair soaked with perfume, soft and flowery garlands,
Purple and gold embroidery. Stand back, you cowards!
I will face him down myself, I will make him tell me
His father’s name is stolen, and his ritual
A monstrous lie. Acrisius had the spirit
To scorn this empty godhead, and shut Argos
Flat in his face: shall Thebes and Pentheus tremble
Before this vagabond?” He told his slaves,
“Go quickly, drag this fellow here in chains,
And hurry up about it!” All in vain
His counsellors plead and reprimand; his purpose
Is whetted by their warnings, and his anger
Rises at their restraint, the way a river
Goes smoothly on its way with gentle murmur
When nothing interferes, but foams and boils
When people try to dam it with stones or timber,
Fiercer against obstruction.

And the slaves
Came back, all bloody, and when Pentheus asked them
Where Bacchus was, they said they had not seen him.
They had caught one fellow, though, a priest of Bacchus
Or one of his companions; they turned him over,
Arms tied behind his back, a worshipper
Out of Etruria. Pentheus stared him down
With eyes made great and terrible with anger,
Had trouble holding back his hand, but managed,
And got some words out: “Listen to me, fellow:
You are going to die: your fate shall be a warning
To other men. Who are you; who’s your father?
Where do you come from?” The other spoke up, bravely:
“I am Acoetes, from the Maeonian country,
My parents lowly people; my good father
Left me no fields, no ploughs, no sheep, no cattle.
He was a fisherman, and made his living
Out of that craft, and that was all he left me.
Dying, he left me nothing but the rivers,
My patrimony, so I choose to call them.
I did not want to fish from these rocks always,
So I learned navigation, studied star
And constellation, and the winds and harbors.
One day, outbound for Delos, I was driven
To the shores of Chios, and we made the landing
With skillful rowing, leaped over, and spent the night
On the wet beach. When dawn began to redden,
I rose, I sent my crew to find fresh water,
Showing them where to look for it; I climbed
A hill, to see which way the wind was blowing,
And called my men, and started back to the vessel.
‘We are coming!’ cried Opheltes, who brought with him
A prize—at least he thought so—a little fellow
As pretty as a girl, who seemed to stagger,
Heavy with sleep and wine, and could hardly follow.
I looked him over, clothes and gait and features,
And nothing I saw seemed to me to be mortal.
My intuition made me tell my comrades:
‘What god is in that body I do not know;
I do know that a god is there. Be gracious,
Whoever you are, and give us happy voyage,
And grant my men forgiveness!’ ‘Oh, quit praying
On our behalf!’ said Dictys, the quickest hand
At shinning up or sliding down a mast.
And Libys said, Amen, and bold Melanthus,
The look-out man, Alcimedes, Epopeus
The boatswain—all of them approved, so greedy,
So blind their lust for booty. But I told them
I would not have my vessel desecrated
I was the captain, and I would not let them
So much as step on board. And then Lycabas,
The wildest of them all, an exile, driven
From Tuscany for murder, sprang at my throat
And would have tossed me overboard; I hardly
Knew what I did; somehow I caught a rope’s end
And managed to hang on, while all those heathens
Roared in approval of the mutinous sailor.
And Bacchus—it was he—awoke from slumber
As if the noise, at last, had made him sober,
And cried: ‘What are you doing? What’s this racket?
How did I get here, sailors? Where am I going?’

Proreus answered: ‘Take it easy; tell us
What port you wish to make, and we will land there.’
‘Then turn your course to Naxos,’ Bacchus answered,
‘There is my home; that land will make you welcome.’
They swore, the rogues, by the sea and all its gods
They would do just that; they even gave me orders,
*Cast off, get under way!* Naxos was lying
Off toward the right, and I was setting sail
In that direction, when Opheltes shouted:
‘What are you doing, fool? What madness holds you?
Bear left!’ He seemed to think he was their spokesman;
They seemed to think so, too, nudged me, and gestured,
And winked, and whispered in my ear, sly rascals.
This was too much for me by far. I told them
I would have no part of it, some other fellow
Could do the steering. And they all yelled at me,
Or muttered, up and down the line. Aethalion
Broke out: ‘So indispensable, captain? Let me tell you,
You are not the only one can handle a schooner.’
He shoved me from the helm, sheered off from Naxos,
When the god, making sport of them, and acting
As if he had only recently discovered
Their treachery, looked out across the ocean
From the curve of the stern, pretended to be weeping.
‘These are not the shores you promised me, you sailors;
This is not the land I asked for. What have I done
That you should treat me so? What glory is there
For many to pick on one, and grown-up men
Deceive a little boy?’ I had been weeping,
Myself, for quite a while; they split their sides
With laughter at me, but the godless devils
Swept the ship onward. By the god himself—
And there is no god, certainly, more near—
I tell the truth, though no one could believe it.
The ship stood motionless as if in dry-dock.
The men pulled oars with more than double effort,
They spread all sail and tried to get her running,
As ivy wound around the oars, and clung there,
And spread above the freeboard, and caught the sails
With heavy, drooping clusters. And the god,
His forehead berry-garlanded, was waving
A wand with ivy tendrils. All around him
Lay tigers, phantom lynxes, spotted panthers,
Nothing but fierce illusions, but the crew,
Leaped overboard, either in fear or madness,
And Medon’s body was the first to blacken,
His back take on a curve. Lycabas started
To yell: ‘What kind of freak are you turning into?’
And his own jaws spread out, his nose hooked over,
His skin was hard and scaly. Libys, trying
To pull the dragging oars, saw his hands dwindle,
Saw they were hands no longer, only flippers.
Somebody else grabbed for a coil of rope,
And found he had no arms, and toppled backward
Into the sea, found he had no legs either,
Nothing but torso, and a tail extending
Like a moon’s horns, between half-moon and crescent.
On every side they leapt, they hurled up spray,
Burst from the water, dove again: they were dancers,
Tumblers: their nostrils sucked or spouted water.
I was the only human left of twenty
The ship once carried, and I stood there trembling
And cold with fear, and heard the god’s voice calling:
‘Keep up your nerve, and hold the course to Naxos!’
We reached there safely, and I found my way
To the rites of Bacchus, and I still continue
To be his devotee.”

“Well, well,” said Pentheus,
“I have listened to this long and rambling story,
Dragged out to dull the impact of my anger.
Hustle him out of here, you slaves; the torture
Is waiting for him, and the Stygian darkness.”
They dragged him out and threw him into prison,
But while they were preparing fire and iron,
The instruments of death, the doors flew open,
The chains fell off Acoetes’ arms. But Pentheus
Was obdurate. There was no use giving orders;
He went in person, to the sacred mountain,
Cithaeron, ringing with the songs and crying
Of the wild worshippers. And Pentheus, strangely,
Found himself shaken, nervous, hot, excited
By the long wailing outcries, as a war-horse
Curvets and snorts when the trumpets sound for battle.

Some halfway up the mountain-side, he stood
In a clearing, in full sight of all. His mother
Was first to see him, with his eyes profaning
The holy orgies, and his mother also
Was first to rush upon him in her madness,
Was first to hurl her wand to strike her son,
Crying: “Come, sisters, hurry, hurry! A wild boar
Is loose here, and a big one. Strike him down,
Follow my lead!” And they rushed upon him,
All in wild frenzy, harried him, and followed
Wherever he went, and Pentheus, now, was frightened,
Frightened, and much less violent in talking,
Cursing himself, admitting all his error.
He was hurt; he recognized his mother’s sister—
“Help me, Autonoe!” he cried, “Remember
What happened to Actaeon!” But the woman
Apparently knew nothing of Actaeon,
Nor cared; she tore his right arm from his shoulder,

And Ino wrenched the left away. He stood there,
With no arms, now, to reach to his mother, pleading,
With only the mangled bleeding stumps. “Look, mother!”
Agave gave him only a howl for answer.
She shook her hair from over her eyes, and wildly
Tore off his head, stroked it with bloody fingers,
Yelled: “See, my comrades, see! This is my work,
My victory!” And all the others, rushing,
Tore Pentheus in pieces, swifter than winds
Whirling off leaves in the first cold of autumn.
The warning was sufficient for the Thebans.
They throng the new god’s altars now, and give him
Incense, and bow their reverent heads before him.
GLOSSARY AND INDEX

The index that appeared in the print version of this title was intentionally removed from the eBook. Please use the search function on your eReading device to search for terms of interest. For your reference, the terms that appear in the print index are listed below.

Since this index is not intended as a complete mythological dictionary, the explanations given here include only important information not readily available in the text itself. Names in parentheses are alternative Latin names, unless they are preceded by the abbreviation Gr.; Gr. indicates the name of the corresponding Greek divinity. The index includes cross-references for all alternative names.

ACHAMENIDES. Former follower of Ulysses, rescued by Aeneas
ACHELOUS. River god; rival of Hercules for the hand of Deianira
ACHILLES. Greek hero of the Trojan War
ACIS. Rival of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, for the hand of Galatea
ACMON. Follower of Diomedes
ACOETES. A faithful devotee of Bacchus
ACTAEON
ADONIS. Son of Myrrha, by her father Cinyras; loved by Venus
AEACUS. King of Aegina; after death he became one of the three judges of the dead in the lower world
AEGEUS. King of Athens; father of Theseus
AENEAS. Trojan warrior; son of Anchises and Venus; sea-faring survivor of the Trojan War, he eventually landed in Latium, helped found Rome
AESACUS. Son of Priam and a nymph
AESCULAPIUS (Gr. Asclepius). God of medicine and healing; son of Apollo
AESON. Father of Jason; made young again by Medea
AGAMEMNON. King of Mycenae; commander-in-chief of the Greek forces in the Trojan War
AGLAUROS
AJAX. Son of Telamon; brave Greek warrior in the Trojan War
ALCMENA. Mother of Hercules
ALCYONE. Wife of Ceyx
ALTHEA. Queen of Calydon; mother and murderer of Meleager
AMMON. A spring in the Oasis of Siwa
ANAXARETE. A princess loved by Iphis, a youth of common birth
ANDROMEDA
ANIIUS. King of Delos; priest of Apollo
APHRODITE. See Venus
APOLLO (Phoebus). God of music, poetry, medicine, and prophecy; also god of the sun
ARACHNE. A girl turned into a spider by Minerva

ARCADY. A pastoral region in the central Peloponnesus, Greece

ARDEA. City of Latium, turned into a heron

ARETHUSA. A woodland nymph changed into a fountain

ARGUS. Hundred-eyed giant ordered by Juno to watch Io

ARETHUSA. A girl turned into a spider by Minerva

ARTEMIS. See Diana

ASCANIUS. See Iulus

ATALANTA. A beautiful, swift-footed, warrior maiden

ATHAMAS

ATHENA. See Minerva

ATLAS

AUGUSTUS. See Caesar

AURORA (Gr. Eos). Goddess of dawn

BACCHUS (Gr. Dionysus). God of wine

BATTUS

BAUCIS. Wife of Philemon; rewarded by Jove for hospitality to him

BOREAS. God of the north wind

BYBLIS

CASSANDRA. Daughter of Priam and Hecuba (she possessed prophetic power which no one would believe)

CAUNUS

CENTAUR. Monster with the head, trunk, and arms of a man, and the body and legs of a horse; offspring of Ixion

CEPHALUS. Husband of Procris, sister of Procne and Philomela. CERES (Gr. Demeter). Goddess of agriculture, mother of Proserpina. CEYX. Son of Lucifer; King of Trachis

CHARYBDIS. Guardian of the whirlpool off the coast of Sicily

CHIONE. Daughter of Daedalion; loved by Apollo and Mercury

CHIRON. Wisest of all Centaurs, trainer of Achilles, Aesculapius, and Hercules

CLAROS. Town in Asia Minor, with an oracle of Apollo

CLYMENE. Mother of Phaethon, son of Apollo

CINTHIA. Daughter of Venus

CINOCHUS. A river in the Crimea

CINYRAS. Father of Adonis by his daughter, Myrrha

CIPUS

CIRCE. Enchantress who turned men into beasts

CLAROS. Town in Asia Minor, with an oracle of Apollo

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Apollo
CRONUS. See Saturn
CUMAE. Ancient city in southwestern Italy
CUPID. Son of Venus; god of love
CYANE. A nymph changed by Pluto into a pool; the pool
CYBELE (Gr. Rhea). Goddess of nature; sometimes considered mother of the gods
CYGNUS. King of the Ligurians who turned into a swan and was placed among the stars. Son of Neptune; Trojan hero
CYLARUS. Handsome young centaur
CYPERISSUS
DAEALION. Brother of Ceyx
DAEALUS. Artist and inventor who built the labyrinth for King Minos in Crete
DAPHNE. A nymph who evaded Apollo's advances by becoming a laurel tree
DEANIRA. Second wife of Hercules, whom she accidentally killed
DELOS. Small island in the Aegean; birthplace of Diana and Apollo
DELPHI. City in Greece, site of the famous oracle of Apollo
DEMETER. See Ceres
DEUCALION. A son of Prometheus, he and his wife Pyrrha were the only survivors of the flood inflicted by Zeus because of man's wickedness
DIANA (Gr. Artemis). Sister of Apollo; goddess of the moon and of hunting; patroness of virgins
DIOMEDES. Greek hero in the Trojan War; founder of the city Arpi
DIONYSUS. See Bacchus
DRYOPE
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METAMORPHOSES

ECHO
EGERIA. Wife of Numa
ENVY
ERYSICHTHON. King who was punished for scorning the gods
EUROPA. Phoenician princess EURYDICE. Wife of Orpheus EURYTUS. A centaur
EVENUS. Flooding river which nearly caused Hercules to lose his wife Deianira
FAUNUS. See Pan
GALAHIS. Alcmena's maid, who was turned into a weasel
GALATEA. A Nereid, loved by Cyclops. Pygmalion's statue, turned into a live woman by Venus
GANYMED. Cupbearer to the gods
GLAUCUS. A sea-god
HECUBA. Wife of Priam; queen of Troy; mother of Hector, Paris, Polyxena, Poly- dorus
HERCULES. Son of Jove and Alcmena, who was known for his great strength
HERMAPHRODITUS
HERMES. See Mercury
HERSILIA. Wife of Romulus
HESPERIA. Daughter of Cebren, a river-god
HESTIA. See Vesta
HIPPODAME. Wife of Pirithous
HIPPOLYTUS. Son of Theseus; name changed to Virbius
HIPPOMENES. Winning suitor of Atalanta
HORA. Name of Hersilia, wife of Romulus, after her deification
HYACINTHUS
HYLONOME. Fairest of the female centaurs

IANTHE
ICARUS. Son of Daedalus
ILIA (Rhea Silvia). Mother of Romulus
INDIGES. Name of Aeneas after deification
INO. Sister of Bacchus' mother
10. Daughter of Inachus; maiden loved by Jove, turned into a heifer to protect her from the jealousy of Juno
IPHGENIA. Daughter of Agamemnon, who offered her as sacrifice to Diana
IPHIS. A girl in Crete. A youth of common birth in love with a princess, Anaxarete
IRIS. Goddess of the rainbow; assistant to Juno
ITYS. Son of Procne and Tereus
IULUS (Ascanius). Son of Aeneas; king of Latium and Alba

JASON. Leader of the Argonauts, who, with the help of Medea, got the Golden Fleece
JOVE (Jupiter; Gr. Zeus). Son of Saturn; chief of the gods, ruler of gods and men
JUNO (Gr. Hera). Wife of Jove; queen of the gods; goddess of marriage
JUPITER. See Jove

LAELAPS. Cephalus' hound, turned to stone during a chase
LAOMEDON. Founder of Troy; father of Priam LATONA (Gr. Leto). Mother of Apollo and Diana LATREUS. Centaur killed by Caeneus
LETO. See Latona
LEUCOTHOE LICHAS
LYCAON. A king of Arcadia, whom Jove turned into a wolf
MACAREUS. Greek warrior who traveled with Ulysses
MAENAD. Female follower of Bacchus
MARS. God of war
MEDEA. Sorceress who helped Jason get the Golden Fleece
MEDUSA
MELEAGER. An Argonaut, son of Althea, queen of Calydon
MEMNON. Trojan warrior; son of Aurora
MERCURY (Gr. Hermes). Messenger of the gods, agent of Jove
MIDAS. King of Phrygia
MINERVA (Gr. Pallas Athena). Goddess of wisdom, technical skill, and invention; patron goddess of Athens
MINOS. King of Crete; son of Zeus by Europa
MORPHEUS. God of dreams; son of the god of sleep
MYRMIDONS. A tribe of Thessalian warriors, transformed from ants into human beings
MYRRHA. In love with her father, Cinyras; mother of Adonis
MYSCELUS. Greek who founded the Italian town of Crotona

NARCISSUS
NEPTUNE (Gr. Poseidon). God of the sea
NESSUS. Centaur, who loved Deianira, wife of Hercules
NESTOR. Wise old counselor, who fought with the Greeks at Troy
NIobe. Mother whose children were slain by Latona and Apollo because of her arrogance; she was turned into a stone by Jove
NUMA. King of Rome following Romulus
NUMICIUS. River-god in Latium, who purified Aeneas

OCYRHOE
ODYSSEUS. See Ulysses
ORITHYIA. Wife of Boreas
ORPHEUS. Musician whose music possessed magic power
OSSA. A mountain in Greece, in Thessaly near Pelion

PAEON. Son of Apollo; possessor of magic healing ability
PALLAS. See Minerva
PAN (Faunus). God of fields, forests, wild animals, flocks, and shepherds, represented with the legs, ears, horns, and beard of a goat
PANCHAIA. Island in the Arabian Sea, famous for perfumes
PARIS. Son of Priam; killer of Achilles; his kidnaping of Helen, wife of Menelaus, caused the Trojan War
PELEUS. Father of Achilles, by the goddess Thetis
PELIAS. King of Thessaly; uncle and guardian of Jason, murdered by Medea
PELION. A mountain in Greece, in Thessaly near Ossa

PENTHEUS
PERDIX. An inventor, turned into a partridge by Minerva to save him from the wrath of Daedalus

PERSEPHONE. See Proserpina

PERSEUS. Son of Zeus and Danae; slayer of Medusa Phaedra. Wife of Theseus; mother of Hippolytus Phaethon. Son of Apollo

PHILEMELA. Daughter of Pandion; transformed into a nightingale

PHOENIX. Legendary Egyptian bird which could renew its life after dying by fire

PICUS. Son of Saturn; father of Faunus; grandfather of Latinus; early king of Latium

PIRIT HOUS. King of the Lapithae

PLUTO. God of the underworld, called Hades or Dis

POLYDORUS. Son of Priam, king of Troy; murdered by Polymestor

POLYMESTOR. King of Thrace during the Trojan War

POLYPHEMUS. A Cyclops, in love with Galatea

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METAMORPHOSES

POLYXENA. Daughter of Priam who was betrothed to Achilles

POMONA. A wood-nymph in Latium

POSEIDON. See Neptune

PRIAM. Last king of Troy, who reigned during the Trojan War; father of Hector and Paris

PROCNE. Daughter of Pandion; wife of Tereus; transformed into a swallow

PROCRIS. Wife of Cephalus; sister of Procne and Philomela Proserpina (Gr. Persephone). Wife of Pluto; daughter of Ceres Pygmalion. King of Cyprus; sculptor; fell in love with a statue

PYRAMUS

PYRENEUS. King of Thrace

PYRRHA. See Deucalion

PYTHAGORAS. Greek philosopher and mathematician, 6th century B.C.

PYTHON. A huge serpent born soon after the flood; killed by Apollo

QUIRINUS. Name of Romulus after his deification

RHEA. See Cybele

RHEA SILVIA. See Illia

ROME

ROMULUS. Legendary founder of Rome

SALMACIS. A fountain whose waters make men weak

SAMOS. Greek island off Asia Minor; birthplace of Pythagoras

SATURN (Gr. Cronus). God of agriculture; son of Uranus and father of Jove
SCYLLA. Daughter of King Nisus; lover of King Minos. Guardian of a dangerous rock in the Straits of Messina
SEMEL. Daughter of Cadmus; mother of Jove's son, Bacchus
SIBYL. A prophetess consulted by Aeneas
SYRINX. Nymph chased by Pan; just as he caught her, she turned into reeds

TEMPE. A lovely valley, sacred to Apollo, located between Mounts Ossa and Olympus, in Thessaly, Greece
TEREUS. Descendant of Mars; husband of Procne
THEBES. Ancient city of Greece in Boeotia. Goddess of law and justice. Hero of Attica; son of Aegaeus
THESSALY. Ancient region in northeastern Greece
THETIS. Mother of Achilles; chief of the Nereids
THISBE
THRACE. Ancient region of the Balkan Peninsula, between Macedonia and the Black Sea
TIMOLUS. Mountain in Lydia, Asia Minor
TIRESIAS. Blind soothsayer of Thebes
TISIPHONE. One of the Furies
TROY. Ancient city in northwestern Asia Minor; scene of the Trojan War

ULYSSES (Gr. Odysseus). One of the Greek chiefs in the Trojan War
URANIA. The Muse of astronomy
VENUS (Gr. Aphrodite). Goddess of love and beauty
VERTUMNUS. Satyr in love with the nymph Pomona
VESTA (Gr. Hestia). Goddess of the hearth and the hearth fire
VIRBIUS. See Hippolytus
VULCAN (Gr. Hephaestus). God of fire and metalworking; husband of Venus

ZEUS. See Jove