

## Culex (The Gnat)

*From the Appendix Vergiliana*

Translated from Latin into English blank verse by Rob Bocchino

This poem tells the story of an encounter between a shepherd and a gnat. It is from the *Appendix Vergiliana*, a collection of Latin poems traditionally associated with Virgil (70 BC–19 BC). Scholars today disagree as to whether this poem is by Virgil or is an imitation of Virgil by another poet.<sup>1</sup> Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599) produced a translation of this poem entitled *Virgils Gnat*.<sup>2</sup>

I've played, Octavius,<sup>3</sup> and Thalia<sup>4</sup>  
Has been my graceful guide. As spiders do,  
I've made a slender start.<sup>5</sup> Yes, I have played;  
So let this song, a song about a gnat,  
Be known, and let the chronicle of play,  
Its entire shape, resound throughout the land,  
In publications, and in leading voices,  
Including those who may be critical.<sup>6</sup>  
Someone who's ready to impugn the muse  
And playfulness is lighter than a gnat;  
My fame will hold up under what he says.  
In future days my muse will speak to you  
In graver tones, at times when I enjoy  
A steady income,<sup>7</sup> and I can refine  
The songs I sing according to your taste.<sup>8</sup>  
The glory and the golden progeny  
Of great Jupiter and Latona,<sup>9</sup> Phoebus,<sup>10</sup>  
Will be the chief and patron of my song,  
Promoting it with praise upon his lyre  
Wherever he may go: to Arna<sup>11</sup> laved  
By Xanthus waters and Chimera's blood,<sup>12</sup>  
Or to Asteria's beauty;<sup>13</sup> to the cliffs  
Of Mount Parnassus,<sup>14</sup> where upon its face

*Lusimus, Octavi, gracili modulante Thalia  
atque ut araneoli tenuem formavimus orsum;  
lusimus: haec propter culici sint carmina docta,  
omnis et historiae per ludum consonet ordo  
notitiaequa ducum voces, licet invidus adsit.  
quisquis erit culpare iocos musamque paratus,  
pondere vel culicis levior famaque feretur.  
posterior graviore sono tibi musa loquetur  
nostra, dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus,  
ut tibi digna tuo poliantur carmina sensu.  
Latona magnique Iovis decus, aurea proles,  
Phoebus erit nostri princeps et carminis auctor  
et recinente lyra fautor, sive educat illum  
Arna Chimaereo Xanthi perfusa liquore  
seu decus Asteriae seu qua Parnasia rupes  
hinc atque hinc patula praepandit cornua fronte*

<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appendix\\_Vergiliana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appendix_Vergiliana).

<sup>2</sup> Spenser's translation is part of an elaborate complaint against the Earl of Leicester. See <https://darkwing.uoregon.edu/%7Erbear/gnat.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The first part of the poem is an address from the narrator (possibly a fictionalized version of Virgil) to Gaius Octavius (63 BC–AD 14). Octavius became Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus>.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek and Roman literature, Thalia is the muse of comedy and idyllic poetry. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thalia\\_\(Muse\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thalia_(Muse)).

<sup>5</sup> The “slender start” refers metaphorically to a spider spinning a strand of web. Just as a spider's web starts with a single thread, the narrator's career will begin with this poem.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “The hostile man is permitted to be present.”

<sup>7</sup> Literally, “when the times will give me secure profits.”

<sup>8</sup> Here the narrator appears to know or foresee that he will become a great poet.

<sup>9</sup> Leto or Latona is the daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe, the sister of Asteria, and the mother of Apollo and Artemis. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leto>.

<sup>10</sup> An epithet for Apollo, from the Greek *phoibos*, or bright.

<sup>11</sup> A city on the river Xanthus. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xanthos>.

<sup>12</sup> The Chimera was a monster slain by Bellerophon near the river Xanthus. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera_(mythology)).

<sup>13</sup> Asteria, a Titan goddess, was associated with Delos.

The gaping horns divide the rocks in two,  
 And where Castalia's wave<sup>14</sup> resounds and falls  
 With gently flowing foot. Go therefore, you  
 Who grace the waters of Pieria,<sup>16</sup>  
 You sister Niades,<sup>17</sup> and celebrate  
 The god with sporting dance. You, holy Pales,<sup>18</sup>  
 To whom the peasant looks to make his flock  
 Bring forth its bounty, you who ever care  
 For woods and airy creatures of the wood  
 Shall likewise lead the cult of flourishing.  
 You, cultivator, brought this wanderer  
 Through mountain pastures to your holy cave.<sup>19</sup>

And you, honorable Octavius:  
 One trusts you to appreciate that words  
 Have merit; attend to this, my early work,  
 O noble youth. It will not sing to you  
 Of warfare grimly waged by Jupiter,  
 Or of the way that Phlegra burned to ash,  
 And how the earth was strewn with giants' blood;<sup>20</sup>  
 Nor does it drive the Lapiths into swords  
 Of Centaurs;<sup>21</sup> nor will fire out of the East  
 Consume the Erichthonian citadels,<sup>22</sup>  
 It doesn't tell of how the chains were cast  
 When Athos was invaded by a great bridge.<sup>23</sup>  
 One looks too late for this in what I wrote.  
 Nor is the Hellespont<sup>24</sup> beaten with hooves  
 Of horses, while the Greeks respond in fear  
 To Persians drawing near from every side.  
 Instead, my gentle songs are pleased to run  
 With slender feet: they turn with all their might  
 To follow Phoebus. This I wish for you,  
 O blessed youth: let fame and lasting glory  
 Be granted you in ages yet to come,

<sup>14</sup> Mount Parnassus was the home of the muses. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_Parnassus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Parnassus).

<sup>15</sup> The nymph Castalia fled Apollo and was transformed into the sacred Castalian Spring at Delphi, near Mount Parnassus. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castalia>.

<sup>16</sup> A region in Thessaly, sacred to the Muses. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieria\\_\(regional\\_unit\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieria_(regional_unit)).

<sup>17</sup> The Niades, or Niads, are water nymphs. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naiad>.

<sup>18</sup> Pales is a Roman god of shepherds, flocks, and livestock. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pales>.

<sup>19</sup> The narrator seems to be saying that Pales has inspired him to write this pastoral poem.

<sup>20</sup> Phlegra is a peninsula of Macedonia. In Greek mythology, giants ruled there until they were overthrown by Zeus. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegra\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegra_(mythology)).

<sup>21</sup> The Lapiths were a mythical people in Thessaly. They fought with the Centaurs during the wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lapiths>.

<sup>22</sup> Pronounced "er-ik-THOH-ni-an." Erichthonius was a legendary ruler of ancient Athens. Thus "Erichthonian" is a poetic way of saying "Athenian." See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erichthonius\\_\(son\\_of\\_Hephaestus\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erichthonius_(son_of_Hephaestus)).

<sup>23</sup> This passage refers to the Persian invasion of Greece in 483 BC. The invader, Xerxes, dug a canal through the isthmus of the peninsula of Mount Athos and constructed pontoon bridges across the Hellespont. The first attempt failed when the bridges were destroyed in a storm. In response, Xerxes struck the waters of the strait with whips and cast fetters into the water. The second attempt was a success. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes_I).

<sup>24</sup> A strait between Asia and Europe. Its modern name is the Dardanelles. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dardanelles>.

*Castaliaeque sonans liquido pede labitur unda.  
 quare, Pierii laticis decus, ite, sorores*

*Naides, et celebrate deum ludente chorea.  
 et tu, sancta Pales, ad quam ventura recurrit  
 agrestum bona fetura, sit cura tenentis  
 aerios nemorum cultus silvasque virentis:*

*te cultrice vagus saltus feror inter en antra.*

*Et tu, cui meritis oritur fiducia chartis,  
 Octavi venerande, meis adlabere coeptis,*

*sancte puer. tibi namque canit non pagina bellum  
 triste Iovis ponitque tumultus, heu quibus arsit  
 Phlegra, Giganteo sparsa est quae sanguine tellus,*

*nec Centaureos Lapithas compellit in ensis;  
 urit Erichthonias Oriens non ignibus arces;*

*non perforessus Athos nec magno vincula ponto*

*iacta meo quaerent iam sera volumine famam,  
 non Hellespontus pedibus pulsatus equorum,  
 Graecia cum timuit venientis undique Persas;*

*mollia sed tenui pede currere carmina, versu  
 viribus apta suis Phoebo duce ludere gaudet.  
 hoc tibi, sancte puer; memorabilis et tibi certet  
 gloria perpetuum lucens mansura per aevum;*

A place remain for you upon the seat  
Of honor. May the life you lead be happy,  
Auspicious, and remembered through the years,  
The luster of it pleasing worthy men.  
But now I must begin the task at hand.<sup>25</sup>

By now the fiery sun has made his way  
Into the vault of heaven, where he sends  
His dazzling rays from out his golden car.  
Aurora<sup>26</sup> with her rosy-colored locks  
Has chased away the shadows of the night.  
A shepherd drives his flock of little goats  
From out their stalls towards abundant food.  
He seeks the topmost ridge of lofty mount,  
Where yellow grass spreads out, all carpeting  
The wide and open spaces of the hills.  
They wander now through thickets and through woods;  
And now they leave the hollow vales behind.  
On every side the swiftly strolling ones  
Are chewing verdant grass with tender teeth.  
In rocky hollows ringed with lonely cliffs  
They pluck strawberries from the pendent trees<sup>27</sup>  
And eagerly seek out the native grapes  
All bunched inside the bushes. This one pulls  
The tops of plants away with plucking teeth,  
Of lazy willow or of alder tree,  
In places where the growth springs forth anew.  
While this one probes at delicate young thorns  
Of bushes, that one stands and overlooks  
Her image in the water of a stream.

O blessed shepherd's life, if one does not  
Disdain the experience of one who's poor,  
According to the way he has been taught,  
Instead approving all that's ignorant  
Of care, which is the cost of affluence,  
Harassing greedy mind and hostile heart;  
If splendid fleece has not been treated twice  
With pigment from Assyria, as one sees  
In Attalus's wealth,<sup>28</sup> if glow of gold  
Does not oppress the avaricious mind  
Beneath the paneled ceiling of a house.  
To know the glory of the pictures there,  
The splendor of the jewels is of no use;  
Likewise it doesn't give a bit of pleasure  
To bring the goblets back from Alconis,<sup>29</sup>  
Or, from Boeotia,<sup>30</sup> graven metalwork.  
Nor is the Indian ocean's oyster's pearl

*et tibi sede pia maneat locus et tibi sospes  
debita felices memoretur vita per annos,  
grata bonis lucens. sed nos ad coepta feramur.*

*Igneus aetherias iam sol penetrarat in arces  
candidaque aurato quatiebat lumina curru,*

*crinibus et roseis tenebras Aurora fugarat:*

*propulit e stabulis ad pabula laeta capellas  
pastor et excelsi montis iuga summa petivit,*

*lurida qua patulos velabant gramina colles.*

*Iam silvis dumisque vagae, iam vallibus abdunt  
corpora iamque omni celeres e parte vagantes  
tondebat tenero viridantia gramina morsu;  
scrupea desertas haerebant ad cava rupes,  
pendula projectis carpuntur et arbuta ramis  
densaque virgultis avide labrusca petuntur.  
haec suspensa rapit carpente cacumina morsu*

*vel salicis lentae vel quae nova nascitur alnus,  
haec teneras fruticum sentes rimatur, at illa  
imminet in rivi praestantis imaginis undam.*

*o bona pastoris, si quis non pauperis usum*

*mente prius docta fastidiat et probet illis  
omnia (luxuria pretiis) incognita curis,*

*quae lacerant avidas inimico pectore mentes:  
si non Assyrio fuerint bis lota colore  
Attalicis opibus data vellera; si nitor auri*

*sub laqueare domus animum non angit avarum*

*picturaeque decus lapidum nec fulgor in ulla  
congitus utilitate manet nec pocula gratum*

*Alconis referent Beothique toreuma nec Indi*

*conchea baca maris pretio est; at pectore puro*

<sup>25</sup> That is, the poet will end the preamble and start telling the story.

<sup>26</sup> The goddess of dawn.

<sup>27</sup> The arbutus, or strawberry tree, bears a fruit that resembles a strawberry.

<sup>28</sup> Attalus III of Pergamon was famous for weaving cloth from gold. See

[https://atlas.perseus.tufts.edu/dictionaries/entry/urn:cite2:scaife-viewer:dictionary-entries.atlas\\_v1:lat.ls.perseus-eng2-n4318/](https://atlas.perseus.tufts.edu/dictionaries/entry/urn:cite2:scaife-viewer:dictionary-entries.atlas_v1:lat.ls.perseus-eng2-n4318/).

<sup>29</sup> Pronounced "AL-coh-nis." Alconis was a Roman settlement on the French Var coast.

<sup>30</sup> Pronounced "bee-OH-shuh." Boeotia was a region of ancient Greece. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeotia>.

Of any worth. Instead, with blameless heart  
 One throws oneself upon the tender grass,  
 The blooming world aglow with radiance  
 Of growth; one truly sees the countryside  
 In all its lush and varicolored hue:  
 The one who does rejoices with the reeds  
 That echo in the marsh; he is at ease,  
 And far removed from spending time on spite,  
 Or practicing deceit so he can have  
 More power for himself. The foliage  
 Of Tmolus,<sup>31</sup> shining with its verdant sprigs  
 Of vine bedecked with shoots, surrounds the scene  
 And covers it as if it were a cloak.  
 The she-goats, full of milk, are dear to him.  
 So is the woodland pasture; so is Pales  
 The bountiful; and here inside the dales  
 Are shady caves with ever-running springs.  
 Who is more likely to be fortunate,  
 To lead the wished-for life, than one who's pure  
 Of spirit, honest, does not recognize  
 The lust for power or the tragic wars  
 That men pursue? He does not live in dread  
 Of deadly fights against a fearsome foe.  
 He does not decorate the sacred temples  
 With any gleaming riches for the god.  
 His lot is not defined by what he has.  
 When facing cruel and savage enemies  
 He gives his head up voluntarily.  
 To him the god is worshipped with the sickle,  
 Not honored with refinement or with art.  
 That one inhabits sacred groves. To him,  
 The incense of Panchaia<sup>32</sup> is right there  
 In all the varied blooms of native plants.  
 To him sweet rest and innocent delight  
 Are there. He's free; he has but simple cares.  
 There he abides; he knows that everything  
 Directs him to this place. He takes to heart  
 This concept: that he shall be satisfied  
 To take his rest according to his wish,  
 To have enough to eat, to give himself,  
 When tired, unto a peaceful pleasant sleep.  
 O flocks! O Pan! O most agreeable  
 Tempe,<sup>33</sup> you of the spring of Hamadryads,<sup>34</sup>  
 Of whom there is no wealthy worship. No,  
 Each shepherd imitates the Ascrean poet:<sup>35</sup>  
 He leads a life secure and free of care,  
 And in his breast there beats a gentle heart.

*saepe super tenero prosternit gramine corpus,  
 florida cum tellus, gemmantis picta per herbas,  
 vere notat dulci distincta coloribus arva;*

*atque illum, calamo laetum recinente palustri  
 otiaque invidia degentem et fraude remota*

*pollentemque sibi viridi cum palmite lucens  
 Tmolia pampineo subter coma velat amictu;*

*illi sunt gratae rorantes lacte capellae  
 et nemus et fecunda Pales el vallibus intus*

*semper opaca nocis manantia fontibus antra.  
 Quis magis optato queat esse beatior aevo  
 qua qui mente procul pura sensuque probando*

*non avidas agnovit opes nec tristia bella?  
 nec funesta timet validae certamina classis.*

*non spoliis dum sancta deum fulgentibus ornet  
 templa nec eventus finem transcendent habendi.*

*adversis saevis ultro caput hostibus offert.*

*illi falce deus colitur non arte politus,*

*ille colit lucos, illi Panchaia tura*

*floribus agrestes herbae variantibus adsunt;  
 illi dulcis adest requies et pura voluptas,  
 libera, simplicibus curis: huc imminet, omnis  
 dirigit huc sensu, haec cura est subdita cordi*

*quolibet ut requie victu contentus abundet*

*iucundoque liget languentia corpora somno.*

*o pecudes, o Panes et o gratissima Tempe  
 fontis Hamadryadum, quarum non divite cultu*

*aemulus Ascraeo pastor sibi quisque poetae  
 securam placido tradicit pectore vitam.*

<sup>31</sup> Pronounced “Molus.” Tmolus was a mountain range in ancient Lydia, in modern Turkey.

<sup>32</sup> Panchaia was a mythical island of spice trees. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchaia\\_\(island\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchaia_(island)).

<sup>33</sup> A river valley in Thessaly. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vale\\_of\\_Tempe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vale_of_Tempe).

<sup>34</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, the Hamadryads are tree nymphs. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamadryad>.

<sup>35</sup> Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesiod>. “Ascrean” is pronounced “uh-SKREE-un.” The line is pronounced as follows: “each SHEP | herd IM | iTATES | the asCREA | an POet.”

In such pursuits, while leaning on his staff,  
 Our shepherd<sup>36</sup> tends his business in the sun;  
 And while he plays a song upon his pipe,  
 A simple song, not one melodious  
 With dense-constructed art, Hyperion's<sup>37</sup> heat,  
 Invincible, sends out its rays of light  
 Throughout the airy realm, marking each part  
 It touches, as it casts its greedy flames  
 Into each of the oceans of the Earth.  
 And now the little goats were wandering  
 To where the shepherd drove them. They returned  
 Into the lowest shallows, where the stream  
 Was murmuring, all blue beneath the green  
 Of moss. And now the sun was carried up  
 Into the middle of his daily course.  
 The shepherd drove his flock into dense shade  
 As far away you, Delian goddess,<sup>38</sup> watched.  
 They lingered in a sacred grove, your grove.  
 (Agave<sup>39</sup> fled there; Cadmus was her father.  
 She knew the madness of Nyctelius.<sup>40</sup>  
 O sullied hands! O wicked, gory slaughter!  
 She suffered, after that, a punishment  
 For murdering her son. She, having raved  
 Upon the icy mountain ridges, went  
 Into a cave, and there she took her rest.)  
 Here Pan was playing too in blooming grass  
 With Satyrs<sup>41</sup> and with Dryads<sup>42</sup> in a group  
 Of dancers, and with Naiads<sup>43</sup> all assembled,  
 Protectors of young women.<sup>44</sup> Not so much  
 Did Orpheus enthrall the river Hebrus  
 Within its banks, or forests with his song,<sup>45</sup>  
 As you, O nimble goddess, linger here,  
 Bestowing joys with cheerful countenance;  
 For you have made this place, nature itself,  
 Into a home, resounding, murmuring  
 With resonance; so too have you refreshed  
 The weary little goats in pleasant shade.  
 For<sup>46</sup> in the place where plane trees<sup>47</sup> first arose  
 And spread their leaves (it was a sloping vale),

<sup>36</sup> That is, the shepherd of this story.

<sup>37</sup> In Greek mythology Hyperion was a Titan associated with the sun. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperion\\_\(Titan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperion_(Titan)).

<sup>38</sup> The goddess of Delos, i.e., Diana. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diana\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diana_(mythology)).

<sup>39</sup> Agave, daughter of Cadmus, offended the god Dionysus, who responded by driving her mad. In her madness, she murdered her son Pentheus. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agave\\_\(daughter\\_of\\_Cadmus\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agave_(daughter_of_Cadmus)).

<sup>40</sup> Dionysus, who was associated with wine and ritual madness. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus>. In Roman mythology, Dionysus became Bacchus, who was referred to as Nyctelius (the Nocturnal One) because his mysteries were celebrated at night. See

<https://www.latinlexicon.org/definition.php?p1=2039236&p2=n>.

<sup>41</sup> A male nature spirit in Greek mythology. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyr>.

<sup>42</sup> A female oak tree spirit in Greek mythology. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dryad>.

<sup>43</sup> A female water spirit in Greek mythology. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naiad>.

<sup>44</sup> Naiads were the protectors of girls. See <https://www.theoi.com/Nymphe/Naiades.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Orpheus was a legendary musician whose music had magical powers. When he was killed and dismembered, his head floated down the river Hebrus, still singing. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus>.

<sup>46</sup> This part of the poem is a mythological history of trees. The poet tells of plane trees, poplar trees, fruit trees, oak trees, pine trees, holly oak

*Talibus in studiis baculo dum nixus apricas  
 pastor agit curas et dum non arte canora  
 compacta solidum modulatur harundine carmen,*

*tendit inevectus radios Hyperionis ardor  
 lucidaque aetherio ponit discrimina mundo  
 qua iacit Oceanum flamas in utrumque rapaces.*

*et iam compellente vagae pastore capellae  
 ima susurrantis repetebant ad vada lymphae,*

*quae subter viridem residebant caerulea muscum;  
 iam medias operum partes evectus erat sol,*

*cum densas pastor pecudes cogebat in umbras.  
 ut procul aspexit luco residere virenti,*

*Delia diva, tuo, quo quondam victa furore  
 venit Nyctelii fugiens Cadmeis Agave.  
 infandas scelerata manus et caede cruenta.  
 posterius poenam nati de morte futuram:*

*quae gelidis bacchata iugis requievit in antro.*

*hic etiam viridi ludentes Panes in herba  
 et Satyri Dryadesque chorus egere puellae  
 Naiadum coetu: tantum non Orpheus Hebrum*

*restantem tenuit ripis silvasque canendo*

*quantum te, pernix, remorantem, diva, chorea  
 multa tuo laetae fundentes gaudia vultu,  
 ipsa loci natura domum resonante susurro*

*quis dabat et dulci fessas refovebat in umbra.*

*nam primum prona surgebant valle patentes*

The lotus grew among the lofty trunks,  
 The wicked lotus, stealer of the men  
 Who traveled with the woeful Ithacan.<sup>48</sup>  
 It was their hostess, and it was too sweet,  
 And so it seized their minds and held them there.<sup>49</sup>  
 The trees that used to be Heliades<sup>50</sup>  
 Saw Phaethon,<sup>51</sup> scorched and blasted from the sky,  
 Careening in his father's famous cart.  
 In grief they pressed young bodies to his arms;  
 Their clothes were shining white; their outstretched limbs  
 Were turned into the branches of the trees.  
 Then Demophon<sup>52</sup> bequeathed eternal fruit  
 Of lamentation and of treachery.  
 You, Phyllis, in the future should condemn  
 The things he did; for now, protect the maidens.<sup>53</sup>  
 The oak trees, too, were there with fateful songs.  
 Those trees arrived before the seeds of life  
 Bestowed by Ceres,<sup>54</sup> seeds Triptolemus<sup>55</sup>  
 Transformed with furrows into ears of corn.  
 Here, too, great glory of the ship called Argo:<sup>56</sup>  
 The towering pine tree of the lofty woods,  
 Adorning them with shaggy limbs. It seeks,  
 From airy mountainsides, to touch the stars.  
 The dark appearance of the holly oak,<sup>57</sup>  
 The cheerful cypress, and the shady beech  
 Are here, the ivy twined around its arms,  
 So that the poplar might not strike a blow  
 Against its brother, while the plant itself  
 Climbs slowly to the tallest tops of trees  
 And paints the golden clusters of the fruit  
 With youthful paleness. Too, the myrtle tree  
 Was present, and it knew its ancient fate.<sup>58</sup>

trees, cypress trees, beech trees, and myrtle trees. The poet connects this history with the trees providing shade to the shepherd's goats.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platanus>.

<sup>48</sup> Odysseus.

<sup>49</sup> In the *Odyssey*, the lotus plant is a powerful narcotic. Anyone who eats it wants to do nothing but keep eating it. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotus-eaters>.

<sup>50</sup> Daughters of Helios and sisters of Phaethon.

<sup>51</sup> Phaethon is the son of Helios. He is destroyed by Zeus when he drives Helios's chariot without permission and is unable to control it. His body falls into the river Eridanus. His sisters, mourning him, are turned into poplar trees. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phaethon>.

<sup>52</sup> A king of Athens. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demophon\\_of\\_Athens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demophon_of_Athens).

<sup>53</sup> When Demophon abandoned his wife Phyllis, she died of grief and was turned into a fruit-bearing tree. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis_(mythology)).

Literally, this passage says, "In the future, you, to whom Demophon left the faithlessness of lamentation and eternal fruit [i.e., Phyllis], condemn many things; condemn Demophon and now protect the maidens." Depending on the vowel length, the Latin word *mala* can mean either "fruit" or "evil things."

<sup>54</sup> The Roman goddess of agriculture. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceres\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceres_(mythology)).

<sup>55</sup> Pronounced "trip-TOL-e-mus." He was the mythical inventor of Greek agriculture. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triptolemus>.

<sup>56</sup> The mythical ship of Jason and the Argonauts. According to Euripides, the oars were made from sacred pine trees from Mount Pelion. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argo>.

<sup>57</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quercus\\_illex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quercus_illex).

<sup>58</sup> There are several Greek myths associated with the myrtle tree. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myrtus>.

*aeriae platanus, inter quas impia lotos,  
 impia, quae socios Ithaci maerentis abegit,  
 hospita dum nimia tenuit dulcedine captos.  
 at quibus insigni curru proiectus equorum  
 ambustus Phaeton luctu mutaverat artus  
 Heliades, teneris amplexae bracchia truncis,  
 candida fundebant tentis velamina ramis;  
 posterius cui Demophoon aeterna reliquit  
 perfidiam lamentandi mala, perfide multis,  
 perfide Demophoon et nunc defende puellis;  
 quam comitabantur, fatalia carmina, quercus,  
 quercus ante datae Cereris quam semina vitae,  
 illas Triptolemi mutavit sulcus aristis;  
 hic magnum Argoae navi decus edita pinus  
 proceras decorat silvas hirsuta per artus:  
 appetit aeris contingere montibus astra;  
 ilicis et nigrae species et laeta cupressus  
 umbrosaeque manent fagus hederaeque ligantes  
 bracchia, fraterno plangat ne populus ictus,  
 ipsaeque excedunt ad summa cacumina lentae  
 pinguntque aureolos viridi pallore corymbos;  
 quis aderat veteris myrtus non nescia fati.*

The winged ones<sup>59</sup> rested on the spreading branches,  
 Producing, by their different kinds of song,  
 A sweet resounding noise. And underneath,  
 The water emanating from a spring  
 Sends forth a quiet, peaceful gurgling sound  
 Of fluid in a brooklet. Where the voice  
 Of birds is present, filling both the ears,  
 So too the creatures make a mournful note  
 That swim below in water and in slime.  
 Their sounding echo complements the birds,  
 And all of them cry out with forceful tone,  
 Cicadas singing sharply over all.  
 And all around the weary little goats  
 Were resting here and there, while high above  
 A breath of whispering wind that gently blows  
 Upon the bushes mixes up their shape.

Then, as the shepherd rested by the spring  
 Where shade was dense, he fully gave himself  
 To gentle slumber soothing to his limbs.  
 Untroubled by the plots of enemies,  
 He dozed upon the grass. He yielded up  
 His worries to a safe and careless sleep.  
 Spread out upon the ground, he took sweet rest  
 With all his heart, till Fortune intervened  
 And caused him to confront an accident.<sup>60</sup>  
 For, writhing at its customary time  
 In that same place, a huge bespeckled snake  
 With variegated body dipped and plunged  
 As if to sink itself into the muck  
 With dreadful force. With blatant shaking tongue  
 (It weighed as much as bronze) it broadly curled  
 In scaly rings. The gleam of its approach  
 Was strange to look upon in every way.  
 Now more and more its body rolling back  
 And turning lifts its chest and flashes bright,  
 And by itself it raises up its head  
 Upon a long and elevated neck  
 From which a shining crest grew out above,  
 All spotted as if with a purple cloak.  
 It sparkled in its aspect with the light  
 Of fierce and savage flames. Then as it took  
 Its measure of the regions all around,  
 The monster saw the leader of the flock  
 There lying opposite. More keenly now  
 It presses forth and strains itself to cast  
 Its light; and savagely, repeatedly  
 It threatens harm because someone has dared  
 Invade its shallows. It prepares the arms  
 Of nature, and it blazes in its mind.  
 It raves with hissing, thunders with its mouth.  
 It winds and turns the circles of its body  
 As blood-red venom<sup>61</sup> runs upon the ground

*at volucres patulis residentes dulcia ramis  
 carmina per varios edunt resonantia cantus.  
 his suberat gelidis manans e fontibus unda,  
 quae levibus placidum rivis sonat acta liquorem;  
 et quaqua geminas avium vox obstrepit aures,  
 hac querulae referunt voces quis nantia limo  
 corpora lympha foveat; sonitus alit aeris echo  
 argutis et cuncta fremunt ardore cicadis.  
 at circa passim fessae cubuere capellae  
 excelsisque super dumis, quos leniter adflans  
 aura susurrantis poscit confundere venti.  
 Pastor ut ad fontem densa requievit in umbra,  
 mitem concepit projectus membra soporem,  
 anxius insidiis nullis, sed latus in herbis  
 securu pressos somno mandaverat artus;  
 stratus humi dulcem capiebat corde quietem,  
 ni Fors incertos iussisset ducere casus.  
 nam solitum volvens ad tempus tractibus isdem  
 immanis vario maculatus corpore serpens,  
 mersus ut in limo magno subsideret aestu,  
 obvia vibranti carpens, gravis aere, lingua  
 squamosos late torquebat moribus orbes:  
 tollebant aurae venientis ad omnia visus.  
 iam magis atque magis corpus revolubile volvens  
 attollit nitidis pectus fulgoribus et se  
 sublimi cervice caput, cui crista superne  
 edita purpureo lucens maculatur amictu  
 aspectuque micat flamarum lumine torvo.  
 metabat sese circum loca, cum videt ingens  
 adversum recubare ducem gregis: acrior instat  
 lumina diffundens intendere et obvia torvo  
 saepius arripiens infringere, quod sua quisquam  
 ad vada venisset, naturae comparat arma:  
 ardet mente, furit stridoribus, intonat ore,  
 flexibus eversis torquentur corporis orbes,  
 manant sanguineae per tractus undique guttae,*

<sup>59</sup> This could refer to birds, or insects, or both.

<sup>60</sup> At this point the poet skillfully shifts from gentle, pastoral description to fierce, dramatic action.

On every side. It opens up its mouth  
 With savagery. As it does all these things,  
 A tiny creature of the marsh,<sup>62</sup> a gnat,  
 Alerts the shepherd, warning him to shun  
 The death he faces from the fangs. For, now,  
 Just where eyelids covering his eyes  
 Were separated, here the master's pupil  
 (He was an older man) was lightly struck.<sup>63</sup>  
 He felt the dart; he jumped up frantically  
 And crushed the gnat, and sent it to its death.  
 Its soul withdrew completely, so it was  
 Devoid of sense. And then the shepherd saw  
 The serpent facing him with savage light,  
 And close at hand. Then suddenly the one  
 Who slept is overcome with energy,  
 And hardly in possession of his mind.  
 He runs away and, using his right hand,  
 He breaks a sturdy branch from off a tree.  
 Perhaps we should not say that these events  
 Occurred with the assistance of the gods,  
 Or that their will was done. In any case,  
 The shepherd was the victor. He prevailed  
 Against the frightful, scaly, rolling body  
 Of the great serpent. With tremendous force  
 And savage blows he beats upon the bones  
 That ring the purple crest. Though he was sluggish,  
 All weariness is gone. The fear he felt  
 Had made him numb of limb, but what occurred  
 Had hardly made him lose his mind with dread.  
 As soon as he observed the serpent slain  
 And saw it lay there lifeless, he sat down.<sup>64</sup>  
 And now, arising out of Erebus,<sup>65</sup>  
 The Night<sup>66</sup> drives forth her double-harnessed steeds,  
 And from the golden Oeta<sup>67</sup> wanders forth  
 The lazy Vesper.<sup>68</sup> Then, the shadows long,  
 The shepherd drives his flock towards home, prepares  
 To rest his weary members. Gentle sleep  
 Came to his body, and his languid limbs  
 Found rest in deeper slumber when he saw  
 The image of a gnat. It came to him,  
 Addressed him, and began reproaching him.  
 It told of what it suffered in its death.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Literally, “blood-red drops.”

<sup>62</sup> Literally, “one nourished by moisture.”

<sup>63</sup> That is, the gnat has flown into the eye of the sleeping shepherd.

<sup>64</sup> The shepherd's combat with the snake seems to be deliberately ironic, in two ways. First, the poet has said that he would not describe warfare, only pastoral scenes. But here we have a vivid battle scene. Second, the shepherd's life is supposed to be free from the threat of warfare and conflict. But here the shepherd has to physically defend his own life.

<sup>65</sup> In Greek mythology, Erebus personifies darkness. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erebus>.

<sup>66</sup> Nyx (Nox in Latin) is the personification of the night. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nyx>.

<sup>67</sup> Mount Oeta is a mountain in central Greece. In Greek mythology, it is the scene of Heracles's death. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_Oeta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Oeta).

<sup>68</sup> Hesperus (Vesper in Latin) is the evening star. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesperus>.

*spiritibus rumpit fauces. cui cuncta paranti  
 parvulus hunc prior umoris conterret alumnus  
 et mortem vitare monet per acumina; namque  
 qua diducta genas pandebant lumina gemmis,  
 hac senioris era naturae pupula telo  
 icta levi, cum prosiluit furibundus et illum  
 obtritum morti misit; cui dissitus omnis  
 spiritus excessit sensus. tum torva tenentem  
 lumina respexit serpentem comminus, inde  
 impiger, exanimis, vix compos mente refugit  
 et validum dextra detraxit ab arbore truncum.  
 qui casus sociarit opem numenve deorum  
 prodere sit dubium; valuit sed vincere talis  
 horrida squamosi volventia membra draconis,  
 atque reluctantis crebris foedeque petentis  
 ictibus ossa ferit, cingunt qua tempora cristam;  
 et quod erat tardus, omni languore remoto.  
 nescius aspiciens timor obcaecaverat artus;  
 hoc minus implicuit dira formidine mentem.  
 quem postquam vidit caesum languescere, sedit.*

*Iam quatit et biugis oriens Erebois equos Nox  
 et piger aurata procedit Vesper ab Oeta,  
 cum grege compulso pastor duplicitibus umbris  
 vadit et in fessos requiem dare comparat artus.  
 cuius ut intravit levior per corpora somnus  
 languidaque effuso requierunt membra sopore,  
 effigies ad eum culicis devenit et illi  
 tristis ab eventu cecinit convicia mortis.*

“Please tell me, what’s the reason,” said the gnat,  
 “Of what am I accused, that I am forced  
 To travel on this harsh and bitter path?  
 I deemed your life to be dearer to me  
 Than life itself; and now I’m borne away  
 By winds through empty spaces. Meanwhile, you,  
 The lazy one, indulge in peaceful sleep,  
 Reviving all your limbs, you who were saved  
 From terrible disaster, while the gods  
 Below compel my spirit, my remains  
 To cross the river Lethe.<sup>70</sup> There I’m driven,  
 The prey of Charon.<sup>71</sup> Here is what I’ve seen:  
 The doorways to forbidden temples blaze  
 With burning torches. Dread Tisiphone,<sup>72</sup>  
 Bedecked with serpents everywhere, inflicts  
 Fierce punishment on me, with flames and blows.  
 And Cerberus<sup>73</sup> is there. His mouths cry out  
 With dreadful barking, and his necks all writhe  
 With serpents bending, twisting here and there.  
 The circles of his eyes emit a gleam  
 Of blood-red light. Alas! How gratitude  
 Has wandered from its duty! Here I am,  
 Upon the very threshold of destruction,  
 I who restored you to the world above.  
 Where are the honors, where are the rewards  
 Befitting those who act with loyalty?  
 They’ve gone away upon an empty path.  
 One’s faith in justice likewise vanishes  
 When they are gone. I saw another’s plight  
 And acted, unconcerned for my own fate.  
 And now I’m facing just the same result.  
 Sometimes the worthy suffer punishment.  
 So let destruction be the penalty,  
 Wherever there is generous intent.  
 Yes, let there be an equal sacrifice.<sup>74</sup>  
 “I’m borne along, grasping at wilderness  
 That’s far away from the Cimmerian<sup>75</sup> groves,  
 While all around a dreadful punishment

<sup>69</sup> The speech of the gnat, which begins here and takes up almost half of the poem, represents a surprising twist. Much of the speech concerns suffering, damnation, and warfare. This is unexpected, given the poet’s earlier statements that he will avoid these topics and stick to pastoral themes. This change in tone seems to be deliberately ironic. Also ironic is the following: while earlier the poet presents the shepherd’s life as an ideal of simplicity and purity, here the gnat rebukes the shepherd, in a sympathetic way, for being naive and out of touch with the grim reality of the afterlife. Thus, the ideal of the carefree shepherd’s life may not be as attractive or attainable as it first appears in the poem: everyone has to die, and therefore everyone has to face what the gnat forces the shepherd to think about here. By retreating to nature, one can avoid worldly cares and human foes, but not the laws of the universe. These include the existence of natural enemies (for example, snakes) and death.

<sup>70</sup> Lethe was a river of the underworld Hades. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leteth>.

<sup>71</sup> Charon was the ferryman of Hades. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charon>.

<sup>72</sup> Pronounced “ti-SI-foh-nee.” Tisiphone was one of the three Furies. She and her sisters punish crimes of murder. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tisiphone>.

<sup>73</sup> Pronounced “SUR-buh-russ” or “KER-buh-russ.” Cerberus is a multi-headed dog who guards the gates of Hades. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerberus>.

<sup>74</sup> In other words, if it is one’s duty to do a good deed, then it is also one’s duty to suffer punishment for doing the good deed.

<sup>75</sup> The Cimmerians were an ancient nomadic people. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cimmerians>. Presumably their groves were pleasant,

“quis,” inquit, “meritis ad quae delatus acerbas  
 cogor adire vices? tua dum mi carior ipsa  
 ita fuit vita, rapior per inania ventis.  
 tu lentus refoves iucunda membra quiete  
 ereptus taetris e cladibus: at mea manes  
 viscera Lethaeas cogunt transnare per undas;  
 praeda Charonis agor; vidi ut flagrantia taedis  
 limina: collucent infestis omnia templis;  
 obvia Tisiphone, serpentibus undique compta,  
 et flamas et saeva quatit mihi verbera poenae;  
 Cerberus et (diris flagrant latratibus ora),  
 angibus hinc atque hinc horrent cui colla reflexis  
 sanguineique micant ardorem luminis orbes.  
 heu quid ab officio digressa est gratia, cum te  
 restitui superis leti iam limine ab ipso.  
 praemia sunt pietatis ubi, pietatis honores?  
 in vanas abiere vices: et iure recessit  
 Iustitiae prior illa fides. instantia vidi  
 alterius; sine respectu mea fata relinquens,  
 ad pariles agor eventus: fit poena merenti.  
 poena sit exitium, modo sit dum grata voluntas,  
 existat par officium. feror avia carpens,  
 avia Cimmerios inter distantia lucos.  
 quem circa tristes densentur in omnia Poenae:

Is packed into each place that I can see:  
 For monstrous Otos, bound with serpents, sits  
 And sadly looks on Ephialtes bound  
 Far off; those two had tried to mount the world.<sup>76</sup>  
 And anxious Tityos, remembering  
 Your rage, Latona, (too relentless rage!)  
 Reclines, providing nourishment for birds.<sup>77</sup>

“I am in dread, in dread of such great ghosts!  
 The one who took the nectar of the gods<sup>78</sup>  
 Can hardly be the last who is recalled  
 To Stygian waters. He stands in the stream,  
 Repeatedly experiencing thirst  
 Unbearable. How much has he despised  
 The gods, the one condemned to roll the rock  
 Upon the painful mountain,<sup>79</sup> and whom grief  
 Has conquered, who is angering the gods  
 By vainly seeking solace for himself?  
 “Go, maidens, go: for you the grim Eriny<sup>80</sup>  
 Has lit the wedding torches. In the way  
 That Hymen said she would,<sup>81</sup> she’s given you  
 A marriage ceremony: it is death.  
 And in another place are other crowds,  
 Packed closely, and arranged into a line.  
 The Colchian mother’s there;<sup>82</sup> she went insane  
 With senseless disregard for piety.  
 She worries while she contemplates the wounds  
 Her children suffered; they are anxious too.  
 Also Pandion’s daughters,<sup>83</sup> who deserve  
 Our pity. They call out repeatedly  
 The name of Itys,<sup>84</sup> whom the Thracian king,<sup>85</sup>  
 A hoopoe<sup>86</sup> now, has lost, for whom he grieves  
 While soaring high upon the fleeting breeze.  
 The warring brothers of Cadmean blood<sup>87</sup>  
 Are here, inflicting savage, gruesome wounds,

unlike the wastes through which the gnat is compelled to travel.

<sup>76</sup> The giants Otos and Ephialtes attempted to storm Mount Olympus. In punishment, they were bound to columns in Hades by snakes. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloadae>.

<sup>77</sup> The giant Tityos attempted to rape Leto. In punishment, he was stretched out in Tartarus, where two vultures fed on his liver, which grew back every night. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tityos>.

<sup>78</sup> Tantalus. He was tempted with food that he could never eat and water that he could never drink. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tantalus>.

<sup>79</sup> Sisyphus. He was forced to roll a huge boulder over and over up a steep hill in Tartarus. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus>.

<sup>80</sup> Pronounced “ih-RIN-iss.” One of the Erinyes or Furies, the goddesses of vengeance. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erinyes>.

<sup>81</sup> Hymen is a god of marriage ceremonies. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hymen\\_\(god\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hymen_(god)). At the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice, Hymen predicted that Eurydice would die. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus\\_and\\_Eurydice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus_and_Eurydice).

<sup>82</sup> Medea of Colchis, who killed her own children. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medea>.

<sup>83</sup> Procne and Philomela, the daughters of King Pandion of Athens. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procne>.

<sup>84</sup> The son of Procne and King Tereus of Thrace. Tereus raped Philomela; in revenge Procne killed Itys. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procne>.

<sup>85</sup> Tereus.

<sup>86</sup> Pronounced “HOO-poo.” A kind of bird. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoopoe>. King Tereus was transformed into a hoopoe. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tereus>.

*nam vinctus sedet immanis serpentibus Otos  
 devinctum maestus procul aspiciens Ephialten,  
 conati quondam cum sint inscendere mundum;  
 et Tityos, Latona, tuas memor anxius iras  
 (implacabilis ira nimis) iacet alitis esca.*

*terreor, a, tantis insistere terreor umbris!  
 ad Stygias revocatus aquas vix ultimus amni  
 exstat nectareas dicum qui prodidit escas,*

*gutturis arenti revolutus in omnia sensu.  
 quid saxum procul adverso qui monte revolvit,  
 contemptisse dolor quem numina vincit acerbans*

*otia quaerentem frustra sibi? ite, puellae,  
 ite, quibus taedas accedit tristis Erinys:  
 sicut Hymen praefata, dedit conubia mortis*

*atque alias alio densas super agmine turmas,*

*impietate fera vaecordem Colchida matrem*

*anxia sollicitis meditantem vulnera natis;*

*iam Pandionias miserandas prole puellas,  
 quarum vox Ityn edit Ityn, quo Bistonius rex*

*orbus epops maeret, volucres evectus in auras.*

*at discordantes Cadmeo semine fratres  
 iam truculenta ferunt infestaque lumina corpus*

Each one upon the body of the other.  
And now each one has turned himself away  
In horror, for his terrible right hand  
Drips with his brother's blood.

“My suffering,  
Alas, will never stop! I’m whisked away  
Through many other places. I can see  
The spirits at a distance; I am sent  
And carried down towards the Elysian stream;<sup>88</sup>  
To pass across it leads to paradise.  
“Persephone<sup>89</sup> is here; she urges on  
The heroines accompanying her  
To hold their torches high in front of them.<sup>90</sup>  
Alcestis,<sup>91</sup> pure of spirit, is absolved  
Of every care, for she has saved her husband,  
Admetus, from the cruel fate he faced.  
She made a Chalcodonian sacrifice.<sup>92</sup>  
Behold the daughter of Icarius,<sup>93</sup>  
Wife of the Ithacan. She ever is  
A paragon of female dignity.  
She waits, and she wards off the savage throng  
Of suitors, young men pierced with arrow shafts.<sup>94</sup>  
“For what did poor Eurydice<sup>95</sup> retreat,  
With so much sadness? And what punishment,  
What retrospection<sup>96</sup> now remains to you,  
O Orpheus? That man<sup>97</sup> was bold indeed  
To think that Cerberus or the will of Dis<sup>98</sup>  
Could ever be appeased by anyone,  
Who was not filled with fear of Phlegethon<sup>99</sup>  
Or of its burning waves, who did not dread

*alter in alterius iamque aversatus uterque,  
impia germani manat quod sanguine dextra.*

*eheu mutandus numquam labor! auferor ultra*

*in diversa magis, distantia numina cerno:  
Elysiam tranandus agor delatus ad undam.*

*obvia Persephone comites heroidas urget*

*adversas preeferre faces. Alcestis ab omni  
inviolata vacat cura, quod saeva mariti  
in Chalcodonis Admeti fata morata est.*

*ecce Ithaci coniunx semper decus Icariotis,  
femineum concepta deus, manet et procul illa*

*turba ferox iuvenum telis confixa procorum.*

*quid misera Eurydice tanto maerore recessit  
poenaque respectus et nunc manet, Orpheus, in te?*

*audax ille quidem, qui Cerberon unquam  
credidit aut ulli Ditis placabile numen,*

*nec timuit Plegethonta, furens, ardentibus undis  
nec maesta obtenta Ditis ferrugine regna*

<sup>87</sup> Eteocles and Polynices. They were two brothers, descended from Cadmus of Thebes, who killed each other. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eteocles>.

<sup>88</sup> Elysium was the final resting place of the virtuous. It was located in the river Oceanus. See <https://www.theoi.com/Kosmos/Elysion.html>.

<sup>89</sup> In Greek mythology, Persephone is the queen of the underworld.

<sup>90</sup> Torches are a symbol associated with Persephone. In particular, Hecate's torches guided her out of the underworld. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persephone>.

<sup>91</sup> Pronounced “al-SEHS-tis.” She made a bargain with the Fates to die in place of her husband, King Admetus. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcestis>.

<sup>92</sup> Chalcodon was an Egyptian prince. He was slain by his wife on his wedding night. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcodon>. The Latin text says *in Chalcodonis*, literally, “in the Chalcodonian things.” I have interpreted this as, “in a way reminiscent of Chalcodon’s death.”

<sup>93</sup> Penelope, the queen of Ithaca and the wife of Odysseus. She was the daughter of the Spartan king Icarius. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penelope>.

<sup>94</sup> Penelope had to wait twenty years for Odysseus’s return from the Trojan War. During this time, she cleverly avoids having to marry any of her 108 suitors. When Odysseus finally returns, he slays the suitors. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penelope>.

<sup>95</sup> Pronounced “yuh-RIH-dih-see.” When Eurydice died, Orpheus went to the underworld to rescue her. Hades and Persephone allowed her to follow him out of the underworld, so long as he did not look back at her until they had reached the surface. He looked back prematurely, and she was lost. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus>.

<sup>96</sup> The Latin word *retrospectus*, which I have translated as “retrospection,” means both “looking back” and “thinking about.” In this interpretation, the poet suggests that a regretful Orpheus is looking back upon his looking back.

<sup>97</sup> Orpheus.

<sup>98</sup> Dis or Pluto was the Roman equivalent of Hades, the Greek god of the underworld. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dis\\_Pater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dis_Pater).

The hidden, sad, rust-colored realms of Dis,  
 The homes in hollows deep in Tartarus,<sup>100</sup>  
 Enshrouded in a dark and bloody night,  
 Who did not fear the empty<sup>101</sup> seats of Dis,  
 Seats where there sits no judge to regulate  
 What happens in the life that follows death.  
 But fortune, smiling on him formerly,  
 Had made him bold. Already rushing streams  
 Had stopped; so had a throng of animals,  
 While following the voice of Orpheus,  
 Been charmed, so that they stood and stayed in place.  
 Already had that voice profoundly moved  
 The deepest roots of green and growing things.  
 The oak trees standing in the earth, the leaves  
 Of sounding woods had listened on their own  
 To songs their bark had hungrily received.  
 His art even pursued the running steeds  
 Of Luna<sup>102</sup> as they slipped in double team  
 Across the stars; and you who mark the months,  
 O maiden, stopped and listened to his lyre,  
 Abandoning the night. This selfsame song  
 Was able to persuade you, wife of Dis,<sup>103</sup>  
 To give Eurydice up willingly  
 To be led back. It wasn't sacred law  
 That brought her back to life; nor was it Mors,<sup>104</sup>  
 Relenting, who decreed she should be saved.  
 "Indeed, that woman,"<sup>105</sup> knowing well that those  
 Inhabiting the underworld are strict,  
 Obeyed the rule, did not turn back her eyes  
 While walking on the path, did not abuse  
 The gift she heard the goddess speak to her.  
 But you, cruel one, too cruel, Orpheus!  
 Seeking sweet kisses, you broke the command  
 The gods had given you. Such love might be  
 Forgiven, if the forces governing  
 The underworld had known that it is right  
 To take into account whether the sin  
 Is welcome when devising punishment.  
 "Here in the dwelling places of the pious,  
 There is a band of heroes unlike you."<sup>106</sup>  
 In fact both sons of Aeacus<sup>107</sup> are here:  
 The worthy Peleus and Telamon.  
 Their father's will rejoices through the ages.  
 Venus<sup>108</sup> and Virtus<sup>109</sup> gave them both success

*nec fossasque domos a Tartara nocte cruenta  
 obsita nec faciles Ditis sine iudice sedes,  
 iudice qui vitae post mortem vindicat acta.  
 sed fortuna valens audacem fecerat ante:  
 iam rapidi steterant amnes et turba ferarum  
 blanda voce sequax regionem insiderat Orphei  
 iamque imam viridi radicem moverat alte  
 quercus humo steterantque comae silvaeque sonorae  
 sponte sua cantus rapiebant cortice avara.  
 labentis biiuges etiam per sidera Lunae  
 pressit equos: et tu currentes, menstrua virgo,  
 auditura lyram tenuisti nocte relicta.  
 haec eadem potuit, Ditis, te vincere, coniunx,  
 Eurydicensque ultro ducendam reddere: non fas,  
 non erat in vitam divae exorable Mortis.  
 illa quidem nimium manes experta severos  
 praeceptum signabat iter nec rettulit intus  
 lumina nec divae corrupti munera lingua;  
 sed tu crudelis, crudelis tu magis, Orpheu;  
 oscula cara petens rupisti iussa deorum.  
 dignus amor venia, gratum si Tartara nossent  
 peccatum meminisse grave est. vos sede piorum,  
 vos manet heroum contra manus. hic et uterque  
 Aeacides, Peleus namque et Telamonia virtus,  
 per saecula patris latantur numina, quorum  
 conubiis Venus et Virtus iniunxit honorem;*

<sup>99</sup> A river of fire in the underworld. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegethon>.

<sup>100</sup> The abyss in the underworld where the wicked are punished. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartarus>.

<sup>101</sup> Literally "easy" or "agreeable," perhaps in the sense of never passing judgment on anyone or anything that does harm.

<sup>102</sup> The Roman goddess of the moon. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luna\\_\(goddess\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luna_(goddess)).

<sup>103</sup> Persephone.

<sup>104</sup> The Roman god of death. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mors\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mors_(mythology)).

<sup>105</sup> Eurydice.

<sup>106</sup> Orpheus.

<sup>107</sup> Pronounced "EE-ah-cus." In Greek mythology, he was a king of the island of Aegimia. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeacus>.

In marriage, for a captive stole the heart  
 Of one of them;<sup>110</sup> a Nereid<sup>111</sup> loved the other.  
 A youth<sup>112</sup> sits by that wife (a glorious fate  
 Binds you<sup>113</sup> to him in loss); he's driving back  
 The Phrygian<sup>114</sup> flames from the Argolic<sup>115</sup> ships  
 With grim, implacable ferocity.  
 O who would not bear witness to the loss,  
 The grief accompanying such a war,  
 And suffered by the men of Greece and Troy,  
 When Teucer's<sup>116</sup> land ran red with warriors' blood,<sup>117</sup>  
 Where flowed the stream of Simois,<sup>118</sup> of Xanthus  
 Beside the banks of Sigeum,<sup>119</sup> and there  
 The savage anger of the champion,  
 Hector of Troy,<sup>120</sup> was striking at the ships  
 Of the Pelasgians<sup>121</sup> with fierce intent,  
 Inflicting wounds and slaughtering its foes  
 With spears and with the flames it had prepared?  
 "For Mount Ida<sup>122</sup> provides ferocious strength  
 Herself to those who wander on her sides;  
 And Mount Ida herself, the nourisher,  
 Provided torches to the ones she nourished,  
 The eager ones, so that the mouth, the shores  
 Of the Rhoetean<sup>123</sup> stream were full of ash,  
 And flames were raining down until the fleet  
 Was scorched, and there was weeping. On this side,  
 The Telamonian hero<sup>124</sup> opposite  
 Was doing battle with his *clipeus*<sup>125</sup>  
 In front of him; and on that side was Hector,  
 The champion of the highest worth in Troy;  
 Each one was fierce. Just as a thunderclap  
 Is violent but is drowned out by the flood,  
 One side, behind defensive coverings,  
 Wields sword and spear as if it now has brought

*hunc rapuit serva, ast illum Nereis amavit:*

*assidet hac iuvenis (sociat te gloria sortis  
 alteri in excessum), referens a navibus ignes  
 Argolicis Phrygios torva feritate repulso.*

*o quis non referat talis divortia belli,*

*quae Troiae videre viri videreque Grai,  
 Teucria cum magno manaret sanguine tellus  
 et Simois Xanthique liquor, Sigeaque praeter  
 litora cum Troas saevi ducis Hectoris ira*

*truderet in classes inimica mente Pelasgas  
 vulnera tela neces ignes inferre paratos?*

*ipsa vagis namque Ida potens feritatis et ipsa*

*Ida faces altrix cupidis praebebat alumnis,  
 innis ut in cineres Rhoetei litoris ora*

*classibus ambustis flamma lacrimante daretur.  
 hinc erat oppositus contra Telamonius heros  
 obiectoque dabat clipeo certamina, et illinc*

*Hector erat, Troiae summum decus, acer uterque.*

*fluminibus veluti fragor editur: intonat ense,*

*tegminibus telisque super stat alter; ut hosti  
 eriperet redditus, alter Vulcania ferro*

<sup>108</sup> The Roman god of love. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeacus>.

<sup>109</sup> The Roman god of bravery and military might. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtus\\_\(deity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtus_(deity)).

<sup>110</sup> Telamon took the maiden Hesione as a war prize and married her. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telamon>. The idea of a captive capturing the heart seems to be deliberately ironic or paradoxical.

<sup>111</sup> Pronounced "NEE-ree-uhd." The Nereids were sea nymphs. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nereids>. One of them, Thetis, was the wife of Peleus and the mother of Achilles. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thetis>.

<sup>112</sup> Achilles, a Greek hero of the Trojan War. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles>.

<sup>113</sup> Orpheus. Orpheus lost Eurydice, and Achilles lost Patroclus. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles\\_and\\_Patroclus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles_and_Patroclus).

<sup>114</sup> In the Trojan War, the Phrygians were close allies of the Trojans. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrygia>.

<sup>115</sup> From Argolis; by extension, Greek. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argolis>.

<sup>116</sup> Teucer was a mythical king who preceded the Trojans. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_Teucer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Teucer).

<sup>117</sup> The Latin *cum magno sanguine* can mean both "with distinguished blood" and "with a lot of blood."

<sup>118</sup> Pronounced "SIM-oh-ihs." A river on the Trojan plain. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simoeis>.

<sup>119</sup> Sigeion (Sigeum in Latin) was an ancient Greek city near Troy. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigeion>.

<sup>120</sup> Hector was Troy's greatest warrior during the Trojan War. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector>.

<sup>121</sup> The Pelasgians were the predecessors of the Greeks. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelasgians>.

<sup>122</sup> A mountain near Troy. It is important in the myth of the Trojan War. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_Ida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Ida).

<sup>123</sup> Pronounced "rhee-TEE-an." Rhoiteon (latin Rhoeteum) was an ancient city near Troy. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhoiteon>. The Rhoetean stream is the Simois.

<sup>124</sup> Ajax son of Telamon. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax\\_the\\_Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax_the_Great).

<sup>125</sup> A large round shield. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clipeus>.

The fight to the invading host, and so  
 Might take the field by force. The other side,  
 Shielded with iron, presses to drive off  
 The wounds of Vulcan<sup>126</sup> threatening the ships.  
 Here one of Aeacus's line<sup>127</sup> was glad  
 Of countenance, and the Dardanians<sup>128</sup>  
 Were honoring their dead; the other one,  
 The victor, spilling blood upon the plain,  
 Traversed the Trojan earth repeatedly  
 With Hector's body.<sup>129</sup> There is bitter rage  
 When Paris<sup>130</sup> fells Achilles, piercing arms  
 Through trickery, just like the Ithacan:  
 He struck at excellence, and it fell down.

“The offspring of Laertes<sup>131</sup> turned away  
 From these events and left; and now the one  
 Who killed the Thracian Rhesus,<sup>132</sup> captured Dolon<sup>133</sup>  
 Rejoices in Athena, triumphing.  
 But then he trembles: first the Cicones<sup>134</sup>  
 And then the dreadful monsters of Laestrygon<sup>135</sup>  
 Cause him to shudder. He is terrified  
 By Scylla,<sup>136</sup> grasping, ravenous, and ringed  
 By her Molossian hounds.<sup>137</sup> He is harassed  
 By the Aetnean Cyclops<sup>138</sup> and attacked  
 By fell Charybdis;<sup>139</sup> and the pallid lake,  
 The stagnant waters down in Tartarus  
 Fill him with fear.

“The son of Atreus,<sup>140</sup>  
 The heir of Tantalus, tends the Argive<sup>141</sup> light,  
 The guiding flame by which the Dorians<sup>142</sup>  
 Have utterly destroyed the citadels  
 Of Erechthonius.<sup>143</sup> Alas, the Greeks

*vulnera protectus depellere navibus instat.*

*hoc erat Aeacides vultu laetus honores  
 Dardaniaeque alter fuso quod sanguine campis*

*Hectoreo victor lustravit corpore Troiam;*

*rursus acerba fremunt, Paris hunc quod letat et huius  
 arma dolis Ithaci virtus quod concidit icta.*

*huic gerit aversos proles Laertia vultus,*

*et iam Strymonii Rhesi victorque Dolonis  
 Pallade iam laetatur ovans rursusque tremescit  
 iam Ciconas iamque horret atrox Laestrygones natos*

*illum Scylla rapax, canibus succincta Molossis,  
 Aetnaeusque Cyclops, illum metuenda Charybdis*

*pallentesque lacus et squalida Tartara torrent.*

*hic et Tantaleae generamen prolis Atrides  
 assidet, Argivum lumen, quo flamma regente  
 Doris Erichtonias prostravit funditus arces.*

*reddidit heu Graius poenas tibi, Troia, furenti.*

<sup>126</sup> Vulcan was the Roman god of fire. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan_(mythology)).

<sup>127</sup> Ajax.

<sup>128</sup> A people associated with Troy; by association, Trojans. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dardanians\\_\(Trojan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dardanians_(Trojan)).

<sup>129</sup> After Achilles killed Hector, he dragged the body around the walls of Troy.

<sup>130</sup> A prince of Troy and a central figure in the myth of the Trojan War. He fatally wounded Achilles by piercing his heel with an arrow. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_(mythology)).

<sup>131</sup> That is, Odysseus. Laertes was his father. Laertes is pronounced “lay-EHR-teez.”

<sup>132</sup> Rhesus, King of Thrace. He was killed by Odysseus and Diomedes. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhesus\\_\(king\\_of\\_Thrace\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhesus_(king_of_Thrace)).

<sup>133</sup> A Trojan spy, captured by Odysseus and Diomedes. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolon\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolon_(mythology)).

<sup>134</sup> Pronounced “SIH-koh-neeze.” A Thracian tribe. In the Odyssey, the Cicones attack Odysseus's men, killing many of them. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicones>.

<sup>135</sup> Pronounced “lay-STRIH-gon.” A tribe of man-eating giants descended from Laestrygon, a son of Poseidon. See

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laestrygonians>.

<sup>136</sup> A legendary man-eating monster, often depicted with dog heads sprouting from her body. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scylla>.

<sup>137</sup> A breed of dog in ancient Greece. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molossian\\_hound](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molossian_hound).

<sup>138</sup> Pronounced “et-NEE-an SEYE-klops.” A one-eyed giant dwelling in Sicily near Mount Etna. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclopes>.

<sup>139</sup> A sea monster in Greek mythology. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charybdis>.

<sup>140</sup> Agamemnon, the commander in chief of the Greek army at Troy. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agamemnon>.

<sup>141</sup> Associated with Argos; by extension, Greek. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argos,\\_Peloponnese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argos,_Peloponnese).

<sup>142</sup> The Dorians were a major ethnic group in ancient Greece. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorians>. Doris was their original homeland. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris\\_\(Greece\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_(Greece)).

Have caused you, Troy, to suffer punishment  
 In chaos. As a man ordained to die,<sup>144</sup>  
 Agamemnon returned upon the waves  
 Of the Hellespont. It has long been known  
 That men, when they achieve prosperity,  
 Do so because of favor of the gods,  
 Through service, not because of anything  
 In their own fates. Agamemnon might have gone  
 Up to the sky and never been defeated.  
 So dignity is shattered every time  
 By jealousy, a weapon close at hand.

“The strength of Argos<sup>145</sup> sailed across the deep,  
 Seeking for home and laden with the loot  
 Of the Erichthonian citadel.<sup>146</sup>  
 A fair wind followed them as they traversed  
 The gentle open waters. A Nereid<sup>147</sup>  
 Was signaling the waves above the work  
 Of curving hulls, when either by the will  
 Of heaven, or because of rising star,  
 The splendor of the sky on every side  
 Was gone, and everything by force of wind,  
 By whirlwinds, made uneasy. Now the wave  
 Upon the sea is fighting with the sky  
 To rise up in revolt and, from above,  
 To snatch and carry off the sun and stars.  
 The world is ominous; a fearsome sound  
 Is rushing through the regions of the air.  
 What was, not long go, abundant joy  
 Is turned to dread. Around them, on all sides,  
 Are baleful destinies. They go to die  
 Upon the waves and on the rocky point  
 Of Caphereus<sup>148</sup> or the craggy reefs  
 Of Euboea,<sup>149</sup> and on the broad shore  
 Of the Aegean Sea, and all the plunder  
 Extracted from the vanquished Phrygia  
 Now wanders here and there. It floats around  
 Upon the water, ruined by the flood.

“Here more of equal quality exist.<sup>150</sup>  
 They’re heroes; they’re all seeking stable homes;

*Hellespontiacis obiturus reddidit undis.*

*illa vices hominum testata est copia quondam,  
 ne quisquam propriae fortunae munere dives*

*iret ineuctus caelum super: omne propinquo  
 frangitur invidiae telo decus. ibat in altum*

*vis Argea petens patriam ditataque praeda  
 arcis Erichtoniae; comes huic erat aura secunda  
 per placidum cursu pelagus; Nereis ad undas*

*signa dabat, pars inflexis super acta carinis:  
 cum seu caelesti fato seu sideris ortu*

*undique mutatur caeli nitor, omnia ventis,  
 omnia turbinibus sunt anxia; iam maris unda  
 sideribus certat consurgere iamque superne*

*corripere et soles et sidera cuncta minantur  
 ac ruere in terras caeli fragor. hic modo laetans*

*copia nunc miseris circumdatur anxia fatis  
 immoriturque super fluctus et saxa Capherei*

*Euboicas aut per cautes Aegaeaque late  
 litora, cum Phrygiae passim vaga praeda peremptae*

*omnis in aequoreo fluitat iam naufraga fluctu.*

*hic alii resident pariles virtutis honore  
 heroes mediisque siti sunt sedibus omnes,*

<sup>143</sup> The Trojan Erichthonius, not to be confused with the Greek one mentioned earlier in the poem. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erichthonius\\_\(son\\_of\\_Dardanus\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erichthonius_(son_of_Dardanus)).

It seems to be a deliberate irony that the poet earlier said he would not describe the destruction of Erichthonian citadels, and now he is describing the destruction of Erichthonian citadels (albeit different ones).

<sup>144</sup> On returning from the Trojan War, Agamemnon struggles in stormy seas. When he reaches his homeland, he is killed by his wife Clytemnestra or (in Homer’s version of the story) by her lover.

<sup>145</sup> The Greek fleet, returning from Troy.

<sup>146</sup> “OF the | ERICH | THONI | an CIT | aDEL.”

<sup>147</sup> “the GEN | tle OP | en WAT | ers. a NER | eID.”

<sup>148</sup> Pronounced “ca-FEHR-ee-us.” A promontory on the southeastern tip of the Greek island of Euboea in the Aegean Sea. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape\\_Caphereus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Caphereus).

This line should be pronounced “OF ca | PHERe | us OR | the CRAG | gy REEFS,” with the stress inverted in the first two metrical feet. The next two lines are similar. The repetition of inverted stress suggests the waves crashing against the rocks.

<sup>149</sup> Pronounced “yoo-BEE-uh.”

And Rome, whose honor shines throughout the world,  
Supports each one of them. The Fabii,<sup>151</sup>  
The Decii<sup>152</sup> are here; so too the virtue  
Of the Horatii,<sup>153</sup> the ancient fame  
Of the Camilli,<sup>154</sup> which will never perish.  
And Curtius,<sup>155</sup> destroyed by an abyss  
That later was a lake; his sacrifice  
Preserved the homes within the city's heart.  
And Mucius<sup>156</sup> the wise, who let himself  
Be burned, from whom the King of Lydia<sup>157</sup>  
Withdrew his power, for he was alarmed.  
Here too is Curius;<sup>158</sup> he's the companion  
Of famous virtue. And Flaminius,<sup>159</sup>  
Who gave devoted bodies to the flames.  
(Therefore by right they occupy a place  
Of honor and distinguished piety.)  
And Scipio's<sup>160</sup> descendants. They are leaders  
Whose rapid triumphs over Libya  
And Carthage are depicted on the walls  
Of sacred places.

“Let those men be strong  
And flourish in their glory. I'm compelled  
To walk among the darkened lakes of Dis,  
Untouched by light of Phoebus, to endure  
The wastes of Phlegethon. This is the way  
That Minos separates the harshest bonds  
Of ignominy from the pious seat.  
Therefore the judge inflicts harsh punishments  
On me with lashes, forcing me to tell  
The reason that I died and that you live.  
You, unaware, cause me to suffer harm,  
Because you aren't there. You hear these things,  
Unmindful, with your trivial concerns;  
And then you'll rush away, so all of it  
Is scattered in the wind. Now I'll depart  
And never will return. You go abide  
In woodlands with green groves and flowing springs,  
Rejoicing in the pasture. What I've said  
Is lost already, blowing in the breeze.”  
Sadly he said these things, and then his voice  
Was silent. He withdrew and disappeared.

*omnes Roma decus magni quos suscipit orbis.  
hic Fabii Deciique, hic est et Horatia virtus,*

*hic et fama vetus numquam moritura Camilli;*

*Curtius et mediis quem quondam sedibus urbis  
devotum bellis consumpsit gurses in unda;*

*Mucius et prudens ardorem corpore passus  
cui cessit Lydi timefacta potentia regis;*

*hic Curius clarae socius virtutis et ille  
Flaminius, devota dedit qui corpora flammarum*

*(iure igitur tales sedes, pietatis honores),*

*Scipiadaeque duces, quorum devota triumphis  
moenia rapidis Libycae Carthaginis horrent.*

*illi laude sua vigeant: ego Ditis opacos  
cogor adire lacus viduos a lumine Phoebi*

*et vastum Phlegethonta pati, quo maxima Minos,  
concelerata pia discernit vincula sede.*

*ergo iam causam mortis, iam dicere vitae  
verberibus saevae cogunt ab iudice poenae,*

*cum mihi tu sis causa mali nec conscius adsis,  
sed tolerabilibus curis haec immemor audis*

*et tamen, ut vades, dimittes omnia ventis.  
digredior numquam redditurus: tu cole fontis*

*et viridis nemorum silvas et pascua laetus,  
et mea diffusas rapiuntur dicta per auras,”*

*dixit et extrema tristis cum voce recessit.*

<sup>150</sup> Here the gnat shifts from discussing Greek myths to discussing Roman history and myth.

<sup>151</sup> A prominent patrician family in ancient Rome. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fabia gens>.

<sup>152</sup> A prominent plebeian family in ancient Rome. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decia gens>.

<sup>153</sup> The Horatii were famous warriors in ancient Rome. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatii\\_and\\_Curiatii](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatii_and_Curiatii).

<sup>154</sup> Camillus was an ancient Roman family name. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus\\_Furius\\_Camillus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Furius_Camillus).

<sup>155</sup> Marcus Curtius, who threw himself into an abyss as a sacrifice to the gods on behalf of the city. The abyss became a pit or pool called the Lacus Curtius. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus\\_Curtius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Curtius).

<sup>156</sup> Gaius Mucius Scaevola, an ancient Roman youth noted for his bravery. When captured by the Etruscans, he intentionally burned his hand in a fire. As a result, the Etruscan king let him go. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaius\\_Mucius\\_Scaevola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaius_Mucius_Scaevola).

<sup>157</sup> The Etruscans were originally from Lydia. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etruscan\\_origins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etruscan_origins).

<sup>158</sup> Manius Curius Dentatus. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manius\\_Curius\\_Dentatus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manius_Curius_Dentatus).

<sup>159</sup> Gaius Flaminius. He was defeated by Hannibal's army in 217 BC. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaius\\_Flaminius\\_\(consul\\_223\\_BC\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaius_Flaminius_(consul_223_BC)).

<sup>160</sup> Scipio Africanus. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scipio\\_Africanus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scipio_Africanus).

The shepherd went back to his idle life,  
 Troubled and sighing heavily inside.  
 He did not overlook, in what he felt,  
 The anguish that he'd heard the gnat express  
 About its death. He used what strength he had,  
 An older man (but one who had just fought  
 A formidable foe and had prevailed),  
 To pick a place beside a hidden stream  
 Of water flowing fresh under a bough  
 Of leafy green, and actively to shape  
 That place, resolving it into a ring.  
 He takes the handle of an iron tool  
 And uses it to dig the grassy earth  
 Out of the fresh and blooming turf. And now  
 His mindfulness has finished for itself  
 The work it started: he has piled high  
 Material collected in a mound,  
 So that a giant heap of earth has grown  
 Inside the ring, around which he has placed  
 A wall of polished stone, which he has shaped  
 With diligent remembrance, and with care.  
 And then he plants the flowers: first acanthus;<sup>161</sup>  
 And next a crimson rose shot through with purple;  
 And every kind of violet;<sup>162</sup> Spartan myrtle  
 And gladiolus,<sup>163</sup> crocus<sup>164</sup> growing high  
 In the Cilician<sup>165</sup> soil; and the laurel,<sup>166</sup>  
 The splendid mark of Phoebus; also here,  
 Rose laurel,<sup>167</sup> lilies;<sup>168</sup> also rosemary,<sup>169</sup>  
 A symbol of remembrance; also savin,<sup>170</sup>  
 Which furnished incense for the ancient ones;  
 And marigolds;<sup>171</sup> and ivy growing bright  
 With clusters of pale berries; amaranth<sup>172</sup>  
 To honor Bocchus, King of Libya;<sup>173</sup>  
 And fresh cow's-udder grapes;<sup>174</sup> and, ever green,  
 The pine tree. The narcissus<sup>175</sup> too was here:  
 The glory of his form was blazing bright  
 With Cupid's fire, kindled when he saw  
 His own reflection.<sup>176</sup> And the shepherd plants  
 The flowers that renew themselves each year.

<sup>161</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acanthus\\_\(plant\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acanthus_(plant)).

<sup>162</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola\\_\(plant\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola_(plant)).

<sup>163</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gladiolus>.

<sup>164</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocus>.

<sup>165</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cilicia>.

<sup>166</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurus\\_nobilis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurus_nobilis).

<sup>167</sup> See <https://poisonousplants.cvmbs.colostate.edu/plant/60>.

<sup>168</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilium>.

<sup>169</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary>.

<sup>170</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juniperus\\_sabina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juniperus_sabina).

<sup>171</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tagetes>.

<sup>172</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amaranth>.

<sup>173</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bocchus\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bocchus_I).

<sup>174</sup> In Latin, *bumastus* refers to a large, swelling grape. The name comes from the Greek for "cow's udder."

<sup>175</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus\\_\(plant\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(plant)).

*Hunc ubi sollicitum dimisit inertia vitae  
 interius graviter regementem, nec tulit ultra  
 sensibus infusum culicis de morte dolorem,  
 quantumcumque sibi vires tribuere seniles  
 (quis tamen infestum pugnans devicerat hostem)  
 rivum praeter aquae viridi sub fronde latentem  
 conformare locum capit impiger. hunc et in orbem  
 destinat ac ferri capulum repetivit in usum,  
 gramineam ut viridi foderet de caespite terram.  
 iam memor incepsum peragens sibi cura labore  
 congestum cumulavit opus atque aggere multo  
 telluris tumulus formatum crevit in orbem.*

*quem circum lapidem levi de marmore formans  
 conserit, assiduae curae memor. hic et acanthos*

*et rosa purpureum crescent rubicunda tenorem  
 et vialae omne genus; hic est et Spartica myrtus  
 atque hyacinthos et hic Cilici crocus editus arvo,  
 laurus item Phoebi decus ingens, hic rhododaphne*

*liliaque et roris non avia cura marini  
 herbaque turis opes priscis imitata Sabina*

*chrysantusque hederaque nitor pallente corymbo  
 et Bocchus Libyae regis memor, hic amaranthus*

*bumastusque virens et semper florida pinus.  
 non illinc narcissus abest, cui gloria formae  
 igne Cupidineo proprios exarsit in artus,*

*et quoscumque novant vernantia tempora flores;*

Above all those the barrow rises up;  
And on its face he sets a eulogy,  
A message strong in words, with silent voice:  
  
O LITTLE GNAT, THE SHEEP'S CUSTODIAN  
REPAYS YOU WITH THIS FUNERARY RITE  
BUT POORLY, FOR THE GIFT OF LIFE YOU GAVE.

*his tumulus super inseritur; tum fronte locatur  
elogium, tacita firmat quod littera voce:*

*PARVE CVLEX, PECVDVM CVSTOS TIBI MALE MERENTI  
FVNERIS OFFICIVM VITAE PRO MVNERE REDDIT.*

### References

<https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/appvergculex.html>

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<sup>176</sup> In Greek mythology, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection and was turned into the narcissus plant. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus\\_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(mythology)).