

9 Greek Mythology

The Greeks, it seems, had a genius for story-telling. What we call Greek “Mythology” still appeals to general readers because the stories are so delightful. They are a great treasury of images illustrating many aspects of human existence, comic as well as tragic, very human even when describing the gods. A similar genius for “stories” underlies the great epics and mythical texts of Scandinavia and Germany as well as India and its related world, reaching as far as Indonesia.

The word myth is one that requires careful definition. Specialists distinguish between different types of myth. Cosmogonical myths explain how heaven and earth came into being. They are often the most important myths of a culture. The beings revealed in the myth, as well as the qualitative mode of creation, becomes a model for all other forms of creation in the culture. Sometimes a creating divinity will create ex nihilo (from out of nothing). In other cases, the ordered cosmos emerges, with or without a shaping agent, from a primordial chaos.

Eschatological myths are the opposite of cosmogonical myths. In eschatological myths, both death and the end of the world are explained and justified. An example can be found in Norse mythology: Ragnarok (Götterdämmerung, the twilight of the Gods). Here, the gods themselves are killed and the cosmos abolished.

Foundation myths Since the beginnings of cities sometime in the 4th and 3rd millennia B.C., some creation myths have recounted the founding of cities. Cities developed out of ceremonial centres, and those centres were seen as extraordinary manifestations of sacred power. This manifestation allowed for the expression of power in a specific place, emphasizing the value of sedentary human life. The myth of Gilgamesh in Babylon and that of Romulus and Remus in Rome are foundation myths. Other such myths tell of the origin of a ruling dynasty or particular tribe or nation; the stories of Tangun and of Park Hyok-Kose in Korea are example.

Theogenic myths tell how the gods came into existence. They are closely connected to cosmogenic myths. In Greek mythology, after the earth (Gaia) emerged from Chaos; she gave birth to the sea (Pontus) and the sky (Uranus). She and Uranus gave birth to the Titans, who in turn gave birth to the various gods and goddesses.

Transformation myths explain how certain -- mostly negative -- things came into this world. One of the most common transformation myths is that of the origin of death. In Greek mythology, Prometheus is blamed for this. He stole fire from heaven and gave it to mankind. In punishment for that, Zeus had Hephaestus make the first woman, the beautiful Pandora and gave her, with a box filled with misfortune, misery and despair, to Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus. Despite all warnings, Pandora opened the box and since then humankind is plagued with all kinds of disaster, although hope remains. In the Bible, the story of Eve and the forbidden fruit has a similar origin.

Etiological myths are stories which provide a mythological explanation for peculiar things in nature or certain events and customs of which the origin has long been forgotten. Two examples are why the Ethiopians are brown-coloured (they were roasted by the sun when Phaeton lost control of the sun’s chariot) and the story of why the rhinoceros has no hairs (it had been on fire once and then jumped into the water; since then his long hairs have never grown back). Such myths are primitive stories about the origins of things, symbolic and often anthropomorphic explanations of some aspect of the natural world that could not be explained “scientifically.” Thunder is often explained as the voice of a god, and thunder-bolts (lightning) are shown as the weapons with which Zeus punishes and fights. Other well-known myths ‘explain’ what an echo is, or why the nightingale sings so sadly.

Fire theft myths are those stories, common in mythology, where a god or god-like being or a culture hero, a part often played by a trickster, steals fire from the gods and presents it to mankind. Fire was so essential and so mysterious that it was thought to have been at first the sole property of the gods. Since it was sacred, those who dared stealing it were often punished most direly. Prometheus stole fire in order to help humanity survive; in punishment, Zeus had him chained to a rock. Each day, a giant eagle swept down from the sky and tore out his liver, and each day the liver grew back.

Flood myths are the tales, found in many cultures, of great floods, often sent to rid the earth of humanity. The Sumerian flood myth is the oldest (about 2000 BC) and forms the foundation of the Gilgamesh epic. The main character is here Utnapishtim who builds an ark and thus survives the flood. In the Bible, there is of course the story of Noah, very similar to the earlier Sumerian myth. In Greek

mythology, Deucalion is the hero of a very similar story. Survivors of such floods often became the progenitors of a new race of human beings.

Hero myths portray human figures of such heroic dimensions that they seem to be like gods. This is often expressed by giving them a god or supernatural figure as either father or mother. Thus Achilles is shown by Homer as being the son of the sea-nymph Thetis. Thetis was married to the mortal Peleus after the Titan Prometheus, liberated from his rocky prison, told Zeus (who desired her) that he would lose his throne to the son she would give him. Instead of a new Zeus, she bears Achilles and, in another famous tale, dips the child in the mythical underworld river Styx to make him invulnerable. Since she was holding his heel, the water could not touch it and in the end Achilles died by an arrow shot into his heel, proof that not even the gods can protect mortals from ultimate death.

Hercules

One of the most famous of all the heroes, Heracles (in Latin, Hercules) was said to be the son of Zeus and the human Alcmena, so that his life was cursed by Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus. Alcmena was the wife of Amphitryon and Zeus deceived her by taking the form of her husband and sleeping with her while the real Amphitryon was away at war. This story has been the subject of many comic dramas, until the present century.

Heracles/Hercules is best known for the "Twelve Labours" he was obliged to perform for King Eurystheus, a rather humorous story most fully told in a book written in the 1st or 2nd century A.D., although already familiar in classical Athens. Hercules' first labor was to kill the menacing Nemean Lion; Hercules strangled the creature and carried it back to Mycenae. The second task was to overcome the nine-headed snake known as the Hydra; Hercules' cousin Ioloas helped him out by burning the stumps of the heads after Hercules cut off the heads; since the ninth head was immortal, Hercules rolled a rock over it. The third task was to find the golden-horned stag and bring it back alive; Hercules followed the stag around for one full year; he finally captured the stag and took it back alive. The fourth labor was to capture a wild boar that terrorized Mycenae's people; Hercules chased the boar up a mountain where the boar fell in to a snow drift, where Hercules subdued it.

The fifth task of Hercules was to clean the Augean stables, where thousands of cattle were housed, in a single day; Hercules diverted two rivers so that they would flow into the Augean stables. The sixth labor was to destroy the man-eating Stymphalian birds; Hercules drove them out of their hiding places with a rattle and shot them with poison-tipped arrows. The sixth task was for Hercules to capture a Cretean savage bull; Hercules wrestled it to the ground and took it back to King Eurystheus. The eighth labor was to capture the four man-eating mares of Thrace; Hercules threw the master of the mares to them; the horses became very tame, so Hercules safely led them back to Mycenae.

Hercules' ninth labor was to obtain the girdle of the fierce Amazon warrior queen, Hippolyta; Hippolyta willingly gave her girdle to Hercules, but Juno convinced the Amazons that Hercules was trying to take Hippolyta from them, so they attacked him. Hercules fought them off and returned to his master with the girdle. The tenth labor was to capture the cattle of the monster, Geryon; Hercules killed Geryon, claimed the cattle, and took them back to the king. The eleventh task was to get the golden apples of the Hesperides; Hercules told Atlas (who carries the heavens on his back to prevent the sky falling on the earth) that if he would get the apples for him, he (Hercules) would hold the heavens for him; when Atlas returned from his task, Hercules tricked him into taking back the heavens.

The final labor of Hercules was to bring the three-headed watchdog of the underworld, Cerberus, to the surface without using any weapons; Hercules seized two of Cerberus' heads and the dog gave in. Hercules took the dog to his master, who ordered him to take it back. Finally, after twelve years and twelve tasks, Hercules was a free man.

Hercules went to the town of Thebes and married Deianira. She bore him many children. Later on in their life, the male centaur, Nessus, abducted Deianira, but Hercules came to her rescue by shooting Nessus with a poison tipped arrow. The dying Nessus told Deianira to keep a portion of his blood to use as a love potion on Hercules if she felt that she was losing him to another woman. A couple of months later, Deianira thought that another woman was coming between her and her husband, so Deianira washed one of Hercules' shirts in Nessus' blood and gave it to him to wear. Nessus had lied to

her, for the blood really acted as a poison and almost killed Hercules. On his funeral pyre, the dying Hercules ascended to Olympus, where he was granted immortality and lived among the gods.

Of all his Labours, the most famous, because proverbial, is his cleansing of the Augean Stables, where the droppings of the suns a truly "Herculean task" (also proverbial). But he is first mentioned by Pindar in a more heroic style, killing two great snakes while still only a baby. In the tragic theatre, Heracles is a figure of immense pathos, killing his wife and sons in a fit of madness according to Euripides, finally dying in torment because of Deianira's shirt according to Sophocles.

Perseus & Theseus

In a similar set of heroic tales, Perseus is born and lives surrounded by magic. His grandfather is warned (as in the Oedipus story) that his daughter's son will kill him. She, Danae, is therefore shut up in a tower so that no man can reach her. She is visited there by Zeus in the form of a shower of gold, a popular theme in Renaissance art, and a son is born, Perseus. Mother and child are thrown into the sea in a chest but survive, naturally. Perseus is mainly known as the killer of the Gorgon Medusa, whose hair is a mass of snakes and who could turn people to stone on sight. He is helped in this task by gifts from gods: Pluto gives him a helmet that makes him invisible, Hermes gives him wings to his feet, and Athene gives him a shield polished into a mirror (so that he can kill Medusa without looking directly at her). He uses the head of Medusa to overcome a variety of enemies by turning them to stone. He also saves the maiden Andromeda from being sacrificed to a dragon, and marries her. He finally kills his grandfather as had been foretold, striking him by accident with a discus during an athletics match.

Theseus was the great Athenian hero. His main exploits include the killing of the monstrous Minotaur in the Labyrinth built by Daedalus for king Minos in Crete. The Minotaur was the child of Minos' wife Pasiphae, who was inspired by Poseidon with a violent passion for a bull. Ariadne, daughter of Minos, falls in love with Theseus and with the help of a ball of thread she gives him he is able to find the way out of the Labyrinth. He forgets to change the colour of the sails on the ship as he returns to Athens from Crete, so that his father Aegeus sees black sails and thinks that Theseus is dead; he kills himself by jumping into the "Aegean" Sea and Theseus becomes King of Athens.

In the story of Seven against Thebes, told in drama and forming the starting point for Sophocles' Antigone, Theseus has become the defender of human rights (as he is in Chaucer's Knight's Tale) and for Athens he was the father of democracy, resigning his kingship in order to unify the city. He is the symbol of Athenian mercy and hospitality in the tragedies of Oedipus and Heracles.

Theseus goes to conquer the Amazons, warrior-women, and brings one, Hippolyta, back to Athens to marry. This is the starting point of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. They had a son Hippolytus. Later Theseus marries Phaedra and her fatal passion for Hippolytus is the subject of Racine's great French tragedy Phèdre, inspired by Seneca's version of the story.

The Trojan War

Given the importance for Greece of the great epics Iliad and Odyssey, it is not surprising that there are many stories, found in various places, explaining the origins of the dispute between Troy and the Greeks. Helen's birth is told in a well-known story of Zeus uniting with a human woman. Helen's mother Leda was married to King Tyndareus of Sparta and they had a daughter Clytemnestra, but Helen was the result of a visit to Leda by Zeus disguised in the form of a swan. This is a scene much favoured in Renaissance painting, and mentioned by poets including W. B. Yeats.

The other important background to the Trojan War depends on the link uniting Menelaus, the King of Sparta by his marriage to Helen, and his brother Agamemnon, King of Argos according to Aeschylus, king of Mycenae in Homer, to the clan of Tantalus. This is a family marked by some mysterious curse. Tantalus was at first a human who was a friend of the gods, in return for their favour he offered them his son Pelops cooked in a stew, trying to deceive them but of course, they knew what he has done, and brought Pelops back to life. The punishment of Tantalus is famous: he stands in Hades in a pond with water up to his chin and delicious fruit dangling before his eyes, but they "tantalizingly" withdraw from him every time he tries to drink or eat.

Pelops had two sons, Atreus and Thyestes. Thyestes seduced his brother's wife; Atreus, to punish him, gave him a meal of his own children, and he ate them, not knowing. Yet Atreus lived successfully, and died unpunished. His sons were Agamemnon and Menelaus, while the son of Thyestes was Aegisthus. For no clear reason (these things are not rational), all the curse fell upon Agamemnon, whose wife, Helen's sister Clytemnestra, took Aegisthus as her lover during the Trojan War. When Agamemnon returned, they killed him. Orestes and Electra, the children of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, later kill their mother and her lover in revenge.

This theme of the curse on Tantalus' descendants is as important in explaining the origins of the war with Troy as that, lighter and more comic, of the judgement of Paris and its reward. Strife (Eris) is always the bringer of discord. By rolling a golden apple marked "For the fairest" into the midst of the gods at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (Achilles' parents), to which she was not invited, Eris provoked a quarrel between Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite, who each claimed to be the most beautiful. They agreed it should be settled by the judgement of Paris, the most handsome man of the day. Oddly, Paris is shown working as a simple shepherd although he is one of the many sons of Priam, king of Troy. The goddesses each offer him bribes; Hera offers him greatness, Athene success in war, and Aphrodite the most beautiful woman in the world as wife. He gives the apple to Aphrodite. In thanks for which Aphrodite gave him Helen.

Unfortunately, she was already married to Menelaus, and he had become the king of Sparta, not a very impressive figure. All the kings of Greece had desired her and in the end the only way to avoid war between them was to give her to Menelaus. Stories tell that after Paris arrived in Sparta on a visit, Menelaus left on a journey, leaving him with Helen, and they duly left for Sparta together. All the kings of Greece had agreed to protect the union of Menelaus with Helen, which obliged them all to join in the expedition to Troy to bring her back. The expedition was led by Agamemnon. As the Greek fleet prepared to set out, the winds were against them until Calchas the seer told Agamemnon that he would have to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis in order to gain favourable winds. This story too is the subject of great dramas. In many version she is spirited away to Aulis where her brother Orestes later finds her.

Homer and Virgil wrote epics set during and after the Trojan War yet neither is the full "story of the war" and each should be seen as a work of narrative fiction in its own form, rather than as a bit of the "Troy story." The end of Troy, its capture thanks to the trick of the Wooden Horse, is always in the background. It is told in detail near the beginning of Virgil's Aeneid. Knowledge of what happens in the end casts a shadow of doom over any Trojan story, such as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde.

At the end of the Iliad, Achilles has killed Hector, the son of the Trojan King Priam, although he knows that he is destined to die soon after Hector. In the Aeneid, Virgil tells how Paris kills Achilles by an arrow that strikes him in the heel, the only weak spot in his body ("Achilles' Heel"). After Paris has been killed, the wooden horse is prepared to Odysseus' plans. The Greeks pretend to sail away and one soldier, Sinon, an expert liar, is left alone in the Greek camp. His lying tale that the horse is a pledge of divine protection sounds so convincing that the great horse full of Greeks is brought inside the walls of Troy. Sinon was to become a proverbial symbol of deceit. Only the Trojan priest Laocoon and his sons doubt, and they are destroyed by huge serpents from the sea (subject of a most famous sculpture). The Greeks emerge from inside the horse, open the gates to the main army that has now returned, and the city is taken in the night. Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, kills old Priam in front of his Queen, Hecuba, the subject of the Player's speech in Hamlet:

Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seemed in the air to stick;
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing...

Aroused vengeance sets him new awork,
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars's armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse that Pryhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam...
(Shakespeare, Hamlet 11, ii)

Only Aeneas and his companions escape, and he becomes the father of the Roman people according to Virgil, for whom Rome was the new Troy. The Greeks were seen as treacherous, deceitful rascals in Rome. Euripides made a great tragedy from the story of the surviving Trojan Women, led by Hector's widow, Andromache. Her later fate is the theme of a tragedy by the French writer Racine. On returning from Troy, Agamemnon was killed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover; he was duly avenged by Orestes and Electra, in a series of events shown by Aeschylus in the Oresteia. Ulysses/Odysseus wandered for ten more years before returning to his faithful wife Penelope (the Odyssey). Menelaus went home with Helen and we see them reunited in a strange kind of unheroic domesticity when, near the beginning of the Odyssey, Odysseus' son Telemachus goes travelling in search of news about his lost father.

The Argonauts

The Argonauts were the heroes who sailed with Jason on the Argo, in quest of the Golden Fleece. The Golden Fleece originated in the following fashion. Phryxus and Helle were the children of Athamus and the goddess Nephele. When Athamus remarried, the children's stepmother, Ino, became jealous of them and plotted to get rid of them. She arranged to have seed-corn roasted so that it would not sprout. When the crop failed, messengers were sent to consult the oracle at Delphi, and Ino persuaded the messengers to say that the oracle required the sacrifice of Phrixus to restore fertility to the fields. Before Phrixus could be sacrificed, however, Nephele sent a golden ram which carried both children off through the air. Helle fell into the Hellespont (which was named after her), but Phrixus arrived safely at Colchis, where he married the daughter of King Aetes. Phrixus sacrificed the ram to Zeus, and gave its pelt (the Golden Fleece) to Aetes. Aetes placed the fleece in an oak tree, where it remained until Jason arrived to claim it.

Jason, the son of Aeson, was the leader of the Argonauts and the husband of Medea. Because of a prophecy that Jason would someday do him harm, King Pelias of Iolcos sent Jason on a seemingly impossible quest to bring the Golden Fleece back from distant Colchis. For the quest, Jason assembled a crew of heroes from all over Greece; Argos built for the heroes the largest ship ever constructed, the Argo.

According to Apollonius of Rhodes, 55 men accompanied Jason; Apollodorus lists 43 men and one woman, and various numbers can be derived from other sources. The lists do not correspond very well, but the following are some of the more famous names mentioned: Orpheus (the greatest musician of the ancient world); Heracles; Hylas (Heracles' companion); Telamon (the father of Ajax); Peleus (the father of Achilles and the brother of Telamon); Argos (the builder of the Argo); Polydeuces and Castor (or Pollux and Castor -- known as the Dioscuri, they were the sons of Leda and Zeus, and the brothers of Helen of Troy); Meleager (who killed the Calydonian boar); Zetes and Calais (the Boreads); Theseus; Laertes (father of Odysseus); Autolycus (son of Hermes and a master thief); Atalanta (a great huntress who was the first to wound the Calydonian boar and was beloved by Meleager).

On the voyage to Colchis, in addition to other adventures, Jason and his crew of Argonauts became the first humans to pass through the Symplegades (the Clashing Rocks, they crash together when a ship tries to pass between them); they also freed Phineus from the curse of the Harpies. When they arrived at Colchis, King Aetes demanded that Jason accomplish a series of tasks to get the Golden Fleece: he must yoke a team of fierce, fire-breathing oxen and plow a field with them; then he must sow the teeth of a dragon in the field, and deal with the warlike armored men who sprouted from these "seeds"; finally, he must brave the sleepless dragon who guarded the Fleece. Jason accomplished all

these tasks with the help of Medea, Aeetes' daughter, who had fallen in love with him.

After obtaining the Golden Fleece, Jason and Medea fled from Colchis, pursued by King Aeetes' men. On their voyage back to Iolcos, they (like Odysseus) encountered the perils of the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis and the isle of the Sirens, as well as Talos the bronze guardian of Crete. In Iolcos, Medea contrived the murder of King Pelias, after which she and Jason fled to Corinth. In Corinth, after many years of marriage, Jason finally deserted Medea to marry King Creon's daughter; Medea wreaked a terrible vengeance, killing the bride and Creon, and even murdering her own children. She then escaped, leaving Jason to mourn his losses. Jason was killed years later when he was struck on the head by a timber from the Argo.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A large number of mythical stories of various origins were brought together in quasi-epic form by the Roman poet Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* is the source of most western writers' knowledge of them. Shakespeare and other Renaissance poets were particularly fond of the work and it has recently returned to the limelight in Ted Hughes's versions of certain episodes.

Ovid uses the many myths of change and transformation to explore the nature of identity and the process of time. A number of these fables are very familiar; most of the stories that follow (taken from Bulfinch's *Mythology*) are found there.

Daphne

Daphne was Apollo's first love. It was not brought about by accident, but by the malice of Cupid (Eros). Apollo saw the boy playing with his bow and arrows; and said to him, "What have you to do with warlike weapons, saucy boy? Leave them for hands worthy of them." Venus's boy heard these words, and rejoined, "Your arrows may strike all things else, Apollo, but mine shall strike you." So saying, he took his stand on a rock of Parnassus, and drew from his quiver two arrows of different workmanship, one to excite love, the other to repel it. The former was of gold and sharp-pointed, the latter blunt and tipped with lead. With the leaden shaft he struck the nymph Daphne, the daughter of the river god Peneus, and with the golden one Apollo, through the heart.

At once the god was filled with love for the maiden, while she abhorred the thought of loving. Apollo loved her, and longed to obtain her; and he who gives oracles to all the world was not wise enough to look into his own fortunes. He followed her; she fled, swifter than the wind, and delayed not a moment at his entreaties. So flew the god and the virgin - he on the wings of love, and she on those of fear. The pursuer is the more rapid, however, and gains upon her, and his panting breath blows upon her hair.

Her strength begins to fail, and, ready to sink, she calls upon her father, the river god: "Help me, Peneus! open the earth to enclose me, or change my form, which has brought me into this danger!" Scarcely had she spoken, when a stiffness seized all her limbs; her bosom began to be enclosed in bark; her hair became leaves; her arms became branches; her foot stuck fast in the ground, as a root; her face became a tree-top, retaining nothing of its former self but its beauty.

Apollo stood amazed. He touched the stem, and felt the flesh tremble under the new bark. He embraced the branches, and lavished kisses on the wood. The branches shrank from his lips. "Since you cannot be my wife," said he, "you shall assuredly be my tree. I will wear you for my crown; I will decorate with you my harp and my quiver; and when the great Roman conquerors lead up the triumphal pomp to the Capitol, you shall be woven into wreaths for their brows. And, as eternal youth is mine, you also shall be always green, and your leaf know no decay." The nymph, now changed into a Laurel tree, bowed its head in grateful acknowledgment.

Deucalion

Deucalion was the son of Prometheus and Clymene. When Zeus punished humankind for their lack of respect by sending a great flood, Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha were the sole survivors. They were saved because of their piety. Prometheus advised his son to build an ark and they survived by staying on the boat.

When they were finally able to get back on land (on Mount Parnassos), they gave thank offerings to Zeus and consulted the oracle of Themis how they might replenish the earth with humans once again. They were told to throw the bones of their mother behind their shoulder and the human race would reappear. Since the mother of all is Earth, they threw stones and re-established the human race. The stones thrown by Pyrrha became women, those thrown by Deucalion became men. The son of Deucalion and Pyrrha was Hellen, who gave his name to the Greek people as a whole (Hellas is the Greek name for Greece).

Pyramus and Thisbe

Pyramus was the handsomest youth, and Thisbe the fairest maiden, in all Babylonia, where Semiramis reigned. Their parents occupied adjoining houses; acquaintance ripened into love. They would gladly have married, but their parents forbade it. One thing, however, they could not forbid - that love should glow with equal ardour in the bosoms of both. They conversed by signs and glances, and the fire burned more intensely for being covered up.

In the wall that parted the two houses there was a crack, caused by some fault in the structure. No one had remarked it before, but the lovers discovered it. What will not love discover! It afforded a passage to the voice; and tender messages used to pass backward and forward through the gap. As they stood, Pyramus on this side, Thisbe on that, their breaths would mingle. "Cruel wall," they said, "why do you keep two lovers apart? But we will not be ungrateful. We owe you, we confess, the privilege of transmitting loving words to willing ears." Such words they uttered on different sides of the wall; and when night came and they must say farewell, they pressed their lips upon the wall, she on her side, he on his, as they could come no nearer.

One morning, they met at the accustomed spot. Then, after lamenting their hard fate, they agreed that next night, when all was still, they would slip away from the watchful eyes, leave their dwellings and repair to a well-known edifice outside the city called the Tomb of Ninus, and that the one who came first should await the other at the foot of a certain tree. It was a white mulberry tree, and stood near a cool spring. All was agreed on, and they waited impatiently for the sun to go down beneath the waters and night to rise up from them. Then cautiously Thisbe stole forth, unobserved by the family, her head covered with a veil, made her way to the monument and sat down under the tree. As she sat alone in the dim light of the evening she saw a lioness, her jaws bloodied with recent slaughter, approaching the fountain to slake her thirst. Thisbe fled at the sight, and sought refuge in the hollow of a rock. As she fled she dropped her veil. The lioness after drinking at the spring turned to retreat to the woods, and seeing the veil on the ground, tossed and rent it with her bloody mouth.

Pyramus, having been delayed, now approached the place of meeting. He saw in the sand the footsteps of the lion. Presently he found the veil all rent and bloody. He took up the veil, carried it with him to the appointed tree, and covered it with kisses and with tears. "My blood also shall stain your texture," said he, and drawing his sword plunged it into his heart. The blood spurted from the wound, and tinged the white mulberries of the tree all red; and sinking into the earth reached the roots, so that the red colour mounted through the trunk to the fruit.

By this time Thisbe, still trembling with fear, stepped cautiously forth, looking anxiously for the youth, eager to tell him the danger she had escaped. When she came to the spot and saw the changed colour of the mulberries she doubted whether it was the same place. While she hesitated she saw someone struggling in the agonies of death. She started back, but as soon as she recognized her lover, she screamed and beat her breast, embracing the lifeless body, pouring tears into its wounds, and imprinting kisses on the cold lips.

She saw her veil stained with blood and the scabbard empty of its sword. "Thy own hand has slain thee, for my sake," she said. "I too can be brave for once, and my love is as strong as thine. I will follow thee in death, for I have been the cause; and death which alone could part us shall not prevent my joining thee. And ye, unhappy parents of us both, deny us not our united request. As love and death

have joined us, let one tomb contain us. And thou, tree, retain the marks of slaughter. Let thy berries still serve for memorials of our blood.”

So saying she plunged the sword into her breast. Her parents ratified her wish, the gods also ratified it. The two bodies were buried in one sepulchre, and the tree ever after brought forth purple berries, as it does to this day.

Baucis and Philemon

On a certain hill in Phrygia stands a linden tree and an oak, enclosed by a low wall. Not far from the spot is a marsh, formerly good habitable land, but now indented with pools, the resort of fen-birds and cormorants. Once on a time Jupiter (Zeus), in human shape, visited this country, and with him his son Mercury (Hermes) without his wings. They presented themselves, as weary travellers, at many a door, seeking rest and shelter, but found all closed, for it was late, and the inhospitable inhabitants would not rouse themselves to open for their reception.

At last a humble mansion received them, a small thatched cottage, where Baucis, a pious old dame, and her husband Philemon, united when young, had grown old together. Not ashamed of their poverty, they made it endurable by moderate desires and kind dispositions. One need not look there for master or for servant; they two were the whole household, master and servant alike.

When the two heavenly guests crossed the humble threshold, and bowed their heads to pass under the low door, the old man placed a seat, on which Baucis, bustling and attentive, spread a cloth, and begged them to sit down. Then she raked out the coals from the ashes, and kindled up a fire, fed it with leaves and dry bark, and with her scanty breath blew it into a flame. She brought out of a corner split sticks and dry branches, broke them up, and placed them under the small kettle. Her husband collected some pot-herbs in the garden, and she shred them from the stalks, and prepared them for the pot. He reached down with a forked stick a flitch of bacon hanging in the chimney, cut a small piece, and put it in the pot to boil with the herbs, setting away the rest for another time. A bowl was filled with warm water, that their guests might wash. While all was doing, they beguiled the time with conversation.

On the bench designed for the guests was laid a cushion stuffed with sea-weed; and a cloth, only produced on great occasions, but ancient and coarse enough, was spread over that. The old lady, with her apron on, with trembling hand set the table. One leg was shorter than the rest, but a piece of slate put under restored the level. When fixed, she rubbed the table down with some sweet-smelling herbs. Upon it she set some olives, some berries preserved in vinegar, and added radishes and cheese, with eggs lightly cooked in the ashes. All were served in earthen dishes, and an earthenware pitcher, with wooden cups, stood beside them. When all was ready, the stew, smoking hot, was set on the table. Some wine, not of the oldest, was added; and for dessert, apples and wild honey; and over and above all, friendly faces, and simple but hearty welcome.

Now while the repast proceeded, the old folks were astonished to see that the wine, as fast as it was poured out, renewed itself in the pitcher, of its own accord. Struck with terror, Baucis and Philemon recognized their heavenly guests, fell on their knees, and with clasped hands implored forgiveness for their poor entertainment.

There was an old goose, which they kept as the guardian of their humble cottage; and they wanted to sacrifice this in honour of their guests. But the goose, too nimble for the old folks, eluded their pursuit, and at last took shelter between the gods themselves. They forbade it to be slain; and spoke in these words: “We are gods. This inhospitable village shall pay the penalty of its impiety; you alone shall go free from the chastisement. Quit your house, and come with us to the top of yonder hill.”

They hastened to obey, and, staff in hand, laboured up the steep ascent. There, turning their eyes below, they beheld all the country sunk in a lake, only their own house left standing. While they gazed at the sight, and lamented the fate of their neighbours, that old house of theirs was changed into a temple. Columns took the place of the corner posts, the thatch grew yellow and appeared a gilded roof, the floors became marble, the doors were enriched with carving and ornaments.

Then Jupiter spoke: “Excellent old man, and woman worthy of such a husband, speak, tell us your wishes; what favour have you to ask of us?” Philemon took counsel with Baucis a few moments; then declared to the gods their united wish, “We ask to be priests and guardians of this your temple; and

since here we have passed our lives in love and concord, we wish that one and the same hour may take us both from life, that I may not live to see her grave, nor be laid in my own by her.”

Their prayer was granted. They were the keepers of the temple as long as they lived. When they were very old, as they stood one day before the steps of the sacred edifice, Baucis saw Philemon begin to put forth leaves, and old Philemon saw Baucis changing in like manner. And now a leafy crown had grown over their heads, while exchanging parting words, as long as they could speak. “Farewell, dear spouse,” they said, together, and at the same moment the bark closed over their mouths. The Tyanean shepherd still shows the two trees, standing side by side, made out of the two good old people.

Echo and Narcissus

Echo was a beautiful nymph, fond of the woods and hills but Echo had one failing; she was fond of talking, and whether always wanted the last word. One day Juno was seeking her husband, who was amusing himself among the nymphs. Echo by her talk contrived to detain the goddess till the nymphs made their escape. When Juno discovered it, she passed sentence upon Echo: “You shall forfeit the use of that tongue with which you have cheated me, except for that one purpose you are so fond of— reply. You shall still have the last word, but no power to speak first.”

Echo saw Narcissus, a beautiful youth, as he was hunting in the mountains. She loved him and followed him. She longed to address him but it was not in her power. She waited with impatience for him to speak first, and had her answer ready. One day the youth, separated from his companions, shouted aloud, “Who’s here?” Echo replied, “Here.” Narcissus looked around, but seeing no one, called out, “Come.” Echo answered, “Come,” and hastened to the spot, ready to throw her arms about his neck. He started back, exclaiming, “Hands off! I would rather die than you should have me!” “Have me,” said she; but it was all in vain.

From that time forth she lived in hiding. Her form faded with grief, till at last all her flesh shrank away. Her bones were changed into rocks and there was nothing left of her but her voice. With that she is still ready to reply to any one who calls her, and keeps up her old habit of having the last word.

Narcissus’s cruelty in this case was not the only instance. He shunned all the rest of the nymphs, as he had done poor Echo. One day a maiden who had in vain endeavoured to attract him uttered a prayer that he might some time or other feel what it was to love and meet no return of affection. The avenging goddess heard and granted the prayer.

There was a clear fountain, with water like silver. Hither came one day the youth, thirsty. He stooped down to drink, and saw his own image in the water; he thought it was some beautiful water-spirit living in the fountain. He stood gazing with admiration at those bright eyes, those locks curled like the locks of Bacchus or Apollo, the rounded cheeks, the ivory neck, the parted lips, and the glow of health and exercise over all. He fell in love with himself. He brought his lips near to take a kiss; he plunged his arms in to embrace the beloved object. It fled at the touch, but returned again after a moment and renewed the fascination. He could not tear himself away; he lost all thought of food or rest. while he hovered over the brink of the fountain gazing upon his own image.

He talked with the supposed spirit: “Why, beautiful being, do you shun me? Surely my face is not one to repel you. The nymphs love me, and you yourself look not indifferent upon me. When I stretch forth my arms you do the same; and you smile upon me.” His tears fell into the water and disturbed the image. As he saw it depart, he exclaimed, “Stay, I entreat you! Let me at least gaze upon you, if I may not touch you.” With this, and much more of the same kind, he cherished the flame that consumed him, so that by degrees he lost his colour, his vigour, and beauty. He pined away and died; and when his shade passed the Stygian river, it leaned over the boat to catch a look of itself in the waters.

The nymphs mourned for him, especially the water-nymphs; and when they smote their breasts Echo smote hers also. They prepared a funeral pile and would have burned the body, but it was nowhere to be found; but in its place a flower, purple within, and surrounded with white leaves, which bears the name and preserves the memory of Narcissus.

Icarus

Icarus was the son of the inventor Daedalus and a slave named Naucratis. King Minos of Crete imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus in the Labyrinth to punish Daedalus for helping the hero Theseus to kill the monster called the Minotaur and to escape with Minos' daughter, Ariadne. Daedalus knew that Minos controlled any escape routes by land or sea, but Minos could not prevent an escape by flight. So Daedalus used his skills to build wings for himself and Icarus. He used wax and string to fasten feathers to reeds of varying lengths to imitate the curves of birds' wings.

When their wings were ready, Daedalus warned Icarus to fly at medium altitude. If he flew too high, the sun could melt the wax of his wings, and the sea could dampen the feathers if he flew too low.

Once they had escaped Crete, Icarus became exhilarated by flight. Ignoring his father's warning, he flew higher and higher. The sun melted the wax holding his wings together, and the boy fell into the water and drowned.

Daedalus looked down to see feathers floating in the waves, and realized what had happened. He buried his son on an island which would be called Icaria, and the sea into which Icarus had fallen would ever after be called the Icarian Sea (between the Cyclades and Asia Minor).

Pan and Syrinx

There was a certain nymph, whose name was Syrinx, who was much beloved by the satyrs and spirits of the wood; but she would have none of them, but was a faithful worshipper of Diana (Artemis), and followed the chase. You would have thought it was Diana herself, had you seen her in her hunting dress, only that her bow was of horn and Diana's of silver. One day, as she was returning from the chase, Pan met her, told her just this, and added more of the same sort. She ran away, without stopping to hear his compliments, and he pursued till she came to the bank of the river, where he overtook her, and she had only time to call for help on her friends the water nymphs.

They heard and consented. Pan threw his arms around what he supposed to be the form of the nymph and found he embraced only a tuft of reeds! As he breathed a sigh, the air sounded through the reeds, and produced a plaintive melody. The god, charmed with the novelty and with the sweetness of the music, said, 'Thus, then, at least, you shall be mine.' And he took some of the reeds, and placing them together of unequal lengths, side by side, made an instrument which he called Syrinx, in honour of the nymph.

Diana and Actaeon

There was a valley thick enclosed with cypresses and pines, sacred to the huntress queen, Diana (Artemis). In the extremity of the valley was a cave. A fountain burst out from one side, whose open basin was bounded by a grassy rim. Here the virgin goddess of the woods used to come when weary with hunting and bathe her limbs in the sparkling water.

One day, while the goddess was bathing, quite naked, Actaeon came to the place, led thither by his destiny. As he presented himself at the entrance of the cave, the nymphs, seeing a man, screamed and rushed towards the goddess to hide her with their bodies, but she was taller than the rest and overtopped them all by a head. She dashed water into the face of the intruder, adding these words: "Now go and tell, if you can, that you have seen Diana naked."

Immediately a pair of branching stag's horns grew out of his head, his neck gained in length, his ears grew sharp-pointed, his hands became feet, his arms long legs, his body was covered with a hairy spotted hide. Fear took the place of his former boldness, and the hero fled. He could not but admire his own speed; but then he saw his horns in the water, "Ah, wretched me!" he would have said, but no sound followed the effort. He groaned, and tears flowed down the face which had taken the place of his own. Yet his consciousness remained. What shall he do? - go home to seek the palace, or lie hid in the woods? While he hesitated, his dogs saw him.

They rushed after him swifter than the wind. Over rocks cliffs, through mountain gorges he fled and they followed. Where he had often chased the stag and cheered on his pack, his pack now chased him, cheered on by his huntsmen. He longed to cry out, "I am Actaeon; recognize your master!" but the

words came not at his will. The air resounded with the bark of the dogs. Presently one fastened on his back, another seized his shoulder. While they held their master, the rest of the pack came up and buried their teeth in his flesh.

His friends and fellow-huntsmen cheered on the dogs, and looked everywhere for Actaeon calling on him to join the sport. At the sound of his name he turned his head, and heard them regret that he should be away. He earnestly wished he was. He would have been well pleased to see the exploits of his dogs, but to feel them was too much. They were all around him, rending and tearing; and it was not till they had torn his life out that the anger of Diana was satisfied.

Pygmalion

Pygmalion was a sculptor, and had made with wonderful skill a statue of ivory, so beautiful that no living woman came anywhere near it. It was indeed the perfect semblance of a maiden that seemed to be alive, and only prevented from moving by modesty. His art was so perfect that it concealed itself and its product looked like the workmanship of nature. Pygmalion admired his own work, and at last fell in love with the counterfeit creation. Oftentimes he laid his hand upon it as if to assure himself whether it were living or not, and could not even then believe that it was only ivory. He caressed it, and gave it presents such as young girls love, - bright shells and polished stones, little birds and flowers of various hues, beads and amber. He put raiment on its limbs, and jewels on its fingers, and a necklace about its neck. To the ears he hung earrings, and strings of pearls upon the breast. Her dress became her, and she looked not less charming than when unattired. He laid her on a couch spread with cloths of Tyrian dye, and called her his wife, and put her head upon a pillow of the softest feathers, as if she could enjoy their softness.

The festival of Venus (Aphrodite) was at hand - a festival celebrated with great pomp at Cyprus. Pygmalion stood before the altar and timidly said, "Ye gods, who can do all things, give me, I pray you, for my wife" - he dared not say "my ivory virgin," but said instead - "one like my ivory virgin." Venus knew the thought he would have uttered; and caused the flame on the altar to shoot up thrice in a fiery point into the air.

When he returned home, he went to see his statue, and leaning over the couch, gave a kiss to the mouth. It seemed to be warm. He pressed its lips again, he laid his hand upon the limbs; the ivory felt soft to his touch and yielded to his fingers like the wax of Hymettus. While he stands astonished and glad, though doubting, and fears he may be mistaken, again and again with a lover's ardour he touches the object of his hopes. It was indeed alive! The veins when pressed yielded to the finger and again resumed their roundness. Then at last the votary of Venus found words to thank the goddess, and pressed his lips upon lips as real as his own.

The virgin felt the kisses and blushed, and opening her timid eyes to the light, fixed them at the same moment on her lover.

Venus and Adonis

Venus (Aphrodite), playing one day with her boy Cupid (Eros), wounded her bosom with one of his arrows. She beheld Adonis, and was captivated with him. Him she followed and bore him company. She who used to love to recline in the shade, now rambles through the woods and over the hills, dressed like the huntress Diana; and chases hares and stags, or other game that it is safe to hunt, but keeps clear of wolves and bears, reeking with slaughter. She charged Adonis, too, to beware of such dangerous animals.

Having given him this warning, she mounted her chariot drawn by swans, and drove away through the air. But Adonis was too noble to heed such counsels. The dogs had roused a wild boar from his lair, and the youth threw his spear and wounded the animal with sidelong stroke. The beast drew out the weapon with his jaws, and rushed after Adonis, who turned and ran; but the boar overtook him, buried his tusks in his side, and stretched him dying upon the plain.

Venus, in her swan-drawn chariot, had not yet reached Cyprus, when she heard coming up

through mid-air the groans of her beloved, and turned back to earth. She saw from on high his lifeless body bathed in blood. She beat her breast and tore her hair. Reproaching the Fates, she said, "Yet theirs shall be but a partial triumph; memorials of my grief shall endure, and the spectacle of your death, my Adonis, and of my lamentation shall be annually renewed. Your blood shall be changed into a flower; that consolation none can envy me." Thus speaking, she sprinkled nectar on the blood; and there sprang up a flower of bloody hue. It is said the wind blows the blossoms open, and afterwards blows the petals away; so it is called Anemone, or Wind Flower.

Hero and Leander

Leander was a youth of Abydos, a town of the Asian side of the Hellespont, the strait which separates Asia and Europe. On the opposite shore, in the town of Sestos, lived the maiden Hero, a priestess of Venus. Leander loved her, and used to swim the strait nightly to enjoy the company of his mistress, guided by a torch which she placed upon the tower for the purpose. But one night a tempest arose and the sea was rough; his strength failed, and he was drowned. The waves bore his body to the European shore, where Hero became aware of his death, and in her despair cast herself down from the tower into the sea and perished.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus was the son of Apollo and the Muse Calliope. He was presented by his father with a lyre and taught to play upon it, which he did to such perfection that nothing could withstand the charm of his music. Not only his fellow-mortals, but wild beasts were softened by his strains, and gathering round him laid by their fierceness, and stood entranced with his lay. The very trees and rocks were sensible to the charm. The former crowded round him and the latter relaxed somewhat of their hardness, softened by his notes.

Eurydice, shortly after her marriage, trod upon a snake in the grass, was bitten in the foot, and died. Orpheus sang his grief to all who breathed the upper air, both gods and men, and finding it all unavailing resolved to seek his wife in the regions of the dead (Hades). He descended by a cave situated on the side of the promontory of Taenarus and arrived at the Stygian realm. He passed through crowds of ghosts and presented himself before the throne of Pluto (Hades) and Proserpine (Persephone). Accompanying the words with the lyre, he sang.

As he sang, the very ghosts shed tears. Tantalus, in spite of his thirst, stopped for a moment his efforts for water, Ixion's wheel stood still, the vulture ceased to tear the giant's liver, the daughters of Danaus rested from their task of drawing water in a sieve, and Sisyphus sat on his rock to listen. Then for the first time, it is said, the cheeks of the Furies were wet with tears. Proserpine could not resist, and Pluto himself gave way. Eurydice was called. She came from among the new-arrived ghosts, limping with her wounded foot. Orpheus was permitted to take her away with him on one condition, that he should not turn around to look at her till they should have reached the upper air. Under this condition they proceeded on their way, he leading, she following, through passages dark and steep, in total silence, till they had nearly reached the outlet into the cheerful upper world, when Orpheus, in a moment of forgetfulness, to assure himself that she was still following, cast a glance behind him, when instantly she was borne away.

Stretching out their arms to embrace each other, they grasped only the air! Dying now a second time, "Farewell," she said, "a last farewell,"- and was hurried away, so fast that the sound hardly reached his ears.

Orpheus sang his complaints to the rocks and mountains, melting the hearts of tigers and moving the oaks from their stations. He held himself aloof from womankind, dwelling constantly on the recollection of his sad mischance. The Thracian maidens tried their best to captivate him, but he repulsed their advances. Finding him one day, excited by the rites of Bacchus (Dionysos), one of them exclaimed, "See yonder our despiser!" and threw at him her javelin. The weapon, as soon as it came within the sound of his lyre, fell harmless at his feet. So did also the stones that they threw at him. But the women

raised a scream and drowned the voice of the music, and then the missiles reached him and soon were stained with his blood.

The maniacs tore him limb from limb, and threw his head and his lyre into the river Hebrus, down which they floated, murmuring sad music, to which the shores responded a plaintive symphony. The Muses gathered up the fragments of his body and buried them at Libethra, where the nightingale is said to sing over his grave more sweetly than in any other part of Greece. His lyre was placed by Jupiter among the stars (constellation of Lyra). His shade passed a second time to Tartarus where he sought out his Eurydice and embraced her with eager arms. They roam the happy fields together now, sometimes he leading, sometimes she; and Orpheus gazes as much as he will upon her, no longer incurring a penalty for a thoughtless glance.