

Aeneid and Metamorphoses: Passages

“And yet the fates did not permit Troy’s hopes to perish with her walls. The heroic son¹ of Cytherea bore away upon his shoulders her sacred images and, another sacred thing, his father, a venerable burden. Of all his great possessions, he dutifully chose that portion, and his son, Ascanius. Then with his fleet of refugees he set sail...” (*Met.* 13.623-8)

“When the Trojan vessels had successfully passed this monster and greedy Charybdis too, and when they had almost reached the Ausonian shore, the wind bore them to the Libyan coast. There the Sidonian queen¹ received Aeneas hospitably in heart and home, endure her Phrygian lord’s departure. On a pyre, built under pretence of sacred rites, she fell upon his sword; and so, herself disappointed, she disappointed all.” (*Met.* 14.75-81)

“When he had passed these by and left the walled city of Parthenope upon the right, he came upon the left to the mound-tomb of the tuneful son of Aeolus² and the marshy shores of Cumae, and, entering the grotto of the long-lived sibyl, prayed that he might pass down through Avernus’ realm and see his father’s shade. The sibyl held her eyes long fixed upon the earth, then lifted them at last and, full of mad inspiration from her god, replied: “Great things do you ask, you man of mighty deeds, whose hand, by sword, whose piety, by fire, has been well tried. But have no fear, Trojan; you shall have your wish, and with my guidance you shall see the dwellings of Elysium and the latest kingdom of the universe; and you shall see your dear father’s shade. There is no way denied to virtue.” She spoke and showed him, deep in Avernus’¹ forest, a bough gleaming with gold, and bade him pluck it from its trunk. Aeneas obeyed; then saw grim Orcus’ possessions, and his own ancestral shades, and the aged spirit of the great-souled Anchises. He learned also the laws of those places, and what perils he himself must undergo in new wars. As he retraced his weary steps on the return journey he eased the toil with discourse with his Cumaean guide; and as he fared along the dismal road in the dim dusk he said: “Whether thou art a goddess in very truth, or a maid most pleasing to the gods, to me shalt thou always seem divine, and I shall confess that I owe my life to thee, through whose will I have approached the world of death, have seen and have escaped in safety from that world. And for these services, when I have returned to the upper regions, I will erect a temple to thee and there burn incense in thine honour.” The sibyl regarded him and, sighing deeply, said: “I am no goddess, nor is any mortal worthy of the honour of the sacred incense. But, lest you mistake in ignorance, eternal, endless life was offered me, had my virgin modesty consented to Phoebus’ love. While he still hoped for this and sought to break my will with gifts, he said: ‘Choose what you will, maiden of Cumae, and you shall have your choice.’ Pointing to a heap of sand, I made the foolish prayer that I might have as many years of life as there were sand-grains in the pile; but I forgot to ask that those years might be perpetually young. He granted me the years, and promised endless youth as well, if I would yield to love. I spurned Phoebus’ gift and am still unwedded. But now my joyous springtime of life has fled and with tottering step weak old age is coming on, which for long I must endure. While I have now spent seven centuries of life, yet, ere my years equal the number of the sands, I still must behold three hundred harvest-times, three hundred vintages. The time will come when length of days will shrivel me from my full form to but a tiny thing, and my limbs, consumed by age, will shrink to a feather’s weight. Then will I seem never to have been loved, never to have pleased the god. Phoebus himself, perchance, will either gaze unknowing on me or will deny that he ever loved me. Even to such changes shall I come. Though shrunk past recognition of the eye, still by my voice shall I be known, for the fates will leave me my voice.”

While thus along the hollow way the sibyl told her story, out of the Stygian world they emerged near the Euboean city.¹ Making due sacrifices here, Trojan Aeneas next landed on a shore which did not yet bear his nurse’s² name. Here also Neritian Macareus, a comrade of

all-suffering Ulysses, had stayed behind after the long weariness of his wanderings. He recognizes Achaemenides,³ whom they had left long since abandoned midst the rocks of Aetna. Amazed thus suddenly to find him still alive, he says: "What chance, what god has saved you, Achaemenides? Why does a Greek sail in a Trojan ship? What land does your vessel seek?" And to his questions Achaemenides, no longer roughly clad, his garments no longer pinned with thorns, but his own man once more, replied: "May I look on Polyphemus yet again, and those wide jaws of his, dripping with human gore, if I prefer my home and Ithaca to this ship, if I revere Aeneas less than my own father. Nor can I ever pay my debt of gratitude, though I should give my all. That I speak and breathe and see the heavens and the constellations of the sun, for this can I cease to thank him, and be mindful of him? 'Tis due to him that my life came not into the Cyclops' jaws, and though even now I should leave the light of life, I should be buried in a tomb, but surely not in that monster's maw. What were my feelings then (except that fear took away all sense and feeling) when, left behind, I saw you making for the open sea? I longed to call out to you, but I feared to betray myself to the enemy. Even your vessel Ulysses' cry almost wrecked. I saw when Cyclops tore up a huge rock from the mountain-side and hurled it far out to sea. I saw him again throwing great stones with his gigantic arms as from a catapult, and I feared lest the waves or the wind¹ should sink the ship, forgetting that I was not in her. But when you escaped by flight from certain death, he, groaning the while, went prowling all over Aetna, groping through the woods with his hands, and blindly dashing against the rocks. Then would he stretch out his bleeding arms to the sea and curse the whole Greek race, and say: 'Oh, that some chance would but bring Ulysses back to me, or some one of his friends, against whom my rage might vent itself, whose vitals I might devour, whose living body I might tear asunder with my hands, whose gore might flood my throat, and whose mangled limbs might quiver between my teeth! How nothing at all, or how slight a thing would the loss of my sight appear!' This and much more in fury. Pale horror filled me as I looked upon his face still smeared with blood, and his cruel hands, his sightless eye, his limbs and his beard, matted with human gore. Death was before my eyes, but that was the least of all my troubles. I kept always thinking: now he'll catch me, now he'll make my flesh part of his; and the picture stuck in my mind of that time when I saw him catch up two of my friends at once and dash them thrice and again upon the ground; and when, crouching like a shaggy lion over them, he filled his greedy maw with their vitals and their flesh, their bones full of white marrow, and their limbs still warm with life. A quaking terror seized me and I stood pale with horror as I watched him now chewing, now ejecting his bloody feast, now disgorging his horrid food mingled with wine. Such fate I pictured as in store for wretched me. For many days I kept myself in hiding, trembling at every sound, fearing death and yet longing to die, keeping off starvation with acorns and grass and leaves, alone, helpless and hopeless, abandoned to Suffering and death. And then, after a long time, far in the distance I saw this ship, and I begged them by my gestures to save me, I rushed down to the shore and I touched their hearts: a Trojan ship received a Greek! Now do you also tell of your adventures, best of comrades, what your leader suffered and the company which put to sea with you." (*Met.* 14.101-221)