

**Bacchus in Ovid: some main passages, with translations by A. S. Kline**  
*Metamorphoses 3, 528-4,30; Fasti 3.459-516; 713-808; Tristia 5, 3.*

Met. 3

Liber adest, festisque fremunt ululatibus agri:  
turba ruit, mixtaeque viris matresque nurusque  
vulgusque proceresque ignota ad sacra  
feruntur. 530  
'Quis furor, anguigenae, proles Mavortia, vestras  
attonuit mentes?' Pentheus ait; 'aerane tantum  
aere repulsa valent et adunco tibia cornu  
et magicae fraudes, ut, quos non bellicus ensis,  
non tuba terruerit, non strictis agmina telis, 535  
femineae voces et mota insania vino  
obsenique greges et inania tympana vincant?  
vosne, senes, mirer, qui longa per aequora vecti  
hac Tyron, hac profugos posuistis sede penates,  
nunc sinitis sine Marte capi? vosne, acrior  
aetas, 540  
o iuvenes, propiorque meae, quos arma tenere,  
non thyrsos, galeaque tegi, non fronde decebat?  
este, precor, memores, qua sitis stirpe creati,  
illiusque animos, qui multos perdidit unus, 545  
sumite serpentis! pro fontibus ille lacuque  
interiit: at vos pro fama vincite vestra!  
ille dedit leto fortes: vos pellite molles  
et patrium retinete decus! si fata vetabant  
stare diu Thebas, utinam tormenta virique  
moenia diruerent, ferrumque ignisque  
sonarent! 550  
essemus miseri sine crimine, sorsque querenda,  
non celanda foret, lacrimaeque pudore carerent;  
at nunc a puero Thebae capientur inermi,  
quem neque bella iuvant nec tela nec usus equorum,  
sed madidus murra crinis mollesque coronae 555  
purpuraque et pictis intextum vestibibus aurum,  
quem quidem ego actutum (modo vos absistite) cogam  
adsumptumque patrem commentaque sacra fateri.  
an satis Acrisio est animi, contemnere vanum  
numen et Argolicas venienti claudere portas: 560

Pentheas terrebit cum totis advena Thebis?  
ite citi' (famulis hoc imperat), 'ite ducemque  
attrahite huc vinctum! iussis mora segnibus abesto!'

Liber has come, and the festive fields echo with cries. The crowd all run, fathers, mothers, young girls, princes and people, mixed together, swept towards the unknown rites. Pentheus shouts 'What madness has stupefied your minds, children of the serpent, people of Mars? Can the clash of brazen cymbals, pipes of curved horn, and magical tricks be so powerful that men, who were not terrified by drawn swords or blaring trumpets or ranks of sharp spears, are overcome by the shrieks of women, men mad with wine, crowds of obscenities, and empty drumming? Should I admire you, elders, who, sailing the deep seas, sited your Tyre here, your exiled Penates, and now let them be taken without a fight? Or you younger men, of fresher age, nearer my own, for whom it was fitting to carry weapons and not the thyrsus, your heads covered with helmets not crowns of leaves? Remember, I beg you, from what roots you were created, and show the spirit of the serpent, who, though one alone, killed many. He died for his spring and pool, but you should conquer for your own glory! He put brave men to death, but you should make craven men run, and maintain the honour of your country! If it is Thebe's fate to stand for only a short time, I wish her walls might be destroyed by men and siege engines, that fire and iron might sound against her! Then we would be miserable but not sinful, we would lament our fate not try to hide it, our tears would be free from shame. But now Thebes will be taken by an unarmed boy, who takes no pleasure in fighting, or weapons, or the use of horses, but in myrrh-drenched hair, soft wreaths of leaves, and embroidered robes woven with gold. But, if you stand aside, I will quickly force him to confess that his pretended parentage and religion are inventions. Should Pentheus and the rest of Thebes be terrified of his arrival, when Acrisius had courage enough to defy a false god, and shut the gates of Argos at his coming? 'Go quickly', he ordered his attendants 'bind him and drag him here, this conqueror! Don't be slow in carrying out your orders!'

hunc avus, hunc Athamas, hunc cetera turba suorum  
corripiunt dictis frustraue inhibere laborant. 565

acrior admonitu est inritaturque retenta  
et crescit rabies remoraminaque ipsa nocebant:  
sic ego torrentem, qua nil obstabat eunti,  
lenius et modico strepitu decurrere vidi;  
at quacumque trabes obstructaque saxa  
tenebant, 570

spumeus et fervens et ab obice saevior ibat.  
Ecce cruentati redeunt et, Bacchus ubi esset,  
quaerenti domino Bacchum vidisse negarunt;  
'hunc' dixere 'tamen comitem famulumque sacrorum  
cepimus' et tradunt manibus post terga ligatis 575  
sacra dei quendam Tyrrhena gente secutum.  
adspicit hunc Pentheus oculis, quos ira tremendos  
fecerat, et quamquam poenae vix tempora differt,  
'o periture tuaque aliis documenta dature  
morte,' ait, 'ede tuum nomen nomenque  
parentum 580

et patriam, morisque novi cur sacra frequentes!  
ille metu vacuus 'nomen mihi' dixit 'Acoetes,  
patria Maeonia est, humili de plebe parentes.  
non mihi quae duri colerent pater arva iuveni,  
lanigerosve greges, non ulla armenta reliquit; 585  
pauper et ipse fuit linoque solebat et hamis  
decipere et calamo salientis ducere pisces.  
ars illi sua census erat; cum traderet artem,  
"accipe, quas habeo, studii successor et heres,"  
dixit "opes," moriensque mihi nihil ille  
reliquit 590

praeter aquas: unum hoc possum adpellare paternum.  
mox ego, ne scopulis haererem semper in isdem,  
addidici regimen dextra moderante carinae  
flectere et Oleniae sidus pluviale capellae  
Taygetenque Hyadasque oculis Arctonque

notavi 595  
ventorumque domos et portus puppibus aptos.

His grandfather, [Cadmus](#), his uncle, [Athamas](#), and the rest of his advisors reprove his words, and try in vain to restrain him. He is only made more eager by their warning, and his rage is maddened and grows with restraint, and he is provoked by their objections. So I have seen a river, where nothing obstructs its passage, flow calmly and with little noise, but rage and foam wherever trees and obstacles of stone held it back, fiercer for the obstruction.

See now, they return, stained with blood, and when their lord queries where [Bacchus](#) is, they deny having seen Bacchus, but reply, 'We have captured this companion of his, a priest of his sacred rites' and they hand over a man of [Tyrrhenian](#) stock, with his hands bound behind his back, a follower of the worship of the god. [Pentheus](#) looks at him, with eyes made terrible by anger, and although he can scarcely wait for the moment of punishment, he says 'O you who are about to die, and, by your death, teach the others a lesson, tell me your name, your parents' name and your country, and why you follow the customs of this new religion!'

Without fear, he answers 'My name is [Acoetes](#), and [Maeonia](#) is my country, my parents humble ordinary people. My father did not leave me fields for sturdy oxen to work, no flocks of sheep, nor any cattle. I am poor as he himself was, and he used to catch fish in the streams with a rod and line and a hook to snare them. His skill was his wealth, and when he bequeathed it to me, he said 'Take what I have. Apply yourself to the work as my successor and heir.' Dying, he left me nothing but water. The only thing I can call my inheritance.

Soon, so that I was not stuck for ever to the same rocks, I learned how to guide boats, steering oar in hand, and to observe [Capella](#) and the rainy stars of the [Olenia](#) Goat, [Taygete](#) among the [Pleiades](#), the [Hyades](#), and the [Arctic Bears](#), the houses of the winds, and the havens for ships.

forte petens Delum Chiae telluris ad oras  
 adplicor et dextris adducor litora remis  
 doque levis saltus udaeque inmittor harenae:  
 nox ibi consumpta est; aurora rubescere  
 primo 600  
 coeperat: exsurgo laticesque inferre recentis  
 admoneo monstroque viam, quae ducat ad undas;  
 ipse quid aura mihi tumulo promittat ab alto  
 prospicio comitesque voco repetoque carinam.  
 "adsumus en" inquit sociorum primus  
 Opheltes, 605  
 utque putat, praedam deserto nactus in agro,  
 virginea puerum ducit per litora forma.  
 ille mero somnoque gravis titubare videtur  
 vixque sequi; specto cultum faciemque gradumque:  
 nil ibi, quod credi posset mortale, videbam. 610  
 et sensi et dixi sociis: "quod numen in isto  
 corpore sit, dubito; sed corpore numen in isto est!  
 quisquis es, o faveas nostrisque laboribus adsis;  
 his quoque des veniam!" "pro nobis mitte precari!"  
 Dictys ait, quo non alius conscendere  
 summas 615  
 ocior antemnas prenoque rudente relabi.  
 hoc Libys, hoc flavus, prorae tutela, Melanthus,  
 hoc probat Alcimedon et, qui requiemque modumque  
 voce dabat remis, animorum hortator, Epopeus,  
 hoc omnes alii: praedae tam caeca cupido  
 est. 620  
 "non tamen hanc sacro violari pondere pinum  
 perpetiar" dixi: "pars hic mihi maxima iuris"  
 inque aditu obsisto: furi audacissimus omni  
 de numero Lycabas, qui Tusca pulsus ab urbe  
 exilium dira poenam pro caede luebat; 625  
 is mihi, dum resto, iuvenali guttura pugno  
 rupit et excussum misisset in aequora, si non  
 haesissem, quamvis amens, in fune retentus.  
 in pia turba probat factum; tum denique Bacchus  
 (Bacchus enim fuerat), veluti clamore  
 solutus 630  
 sit sopor aque mero redeant in pectora sensus,  
 "quid facitis? quis clamor?" ait "qua, dicite, nautae,  
 huc ope perveni? quo me deferre paratis?"  
 "pone metum" Proreus, "et quos contingere portus  
 ede velis!" dixit; "terra sistere petita." 635

"Naxon" ait Liber "cursus advertite vestros!  
 illa mihi domus est, vobis erit hospita tellus."

Heading for [Delos](#), and being driven by chance onto the coast of the island of [Chios](#), making shore by skilful use of the oars, giving a gentle leap, and landing on the wet sand, there we passed the night. As soon as the dawn began to redden, I ordered the getting in of fresh water, and showed the path that lead to a spring. I myself commanded the view from a high hill to find what wind promised, called my comrades and went back to the boat. 'See, we are here' said [Opheltes](#), the foremost of my friends, and led a boy, with the beauty of a virgin girl, along the shore, a prize, or so he thought, that he had found in a deserted field. The boy seemed to stumble, heavy with wine and sleep, and could scarcely follow. I examined his clothing, appearance and rank, and I saw nothing that made me think him mortal. And I felt this and said it to my companions 'I do not know what god is in that body, but there is a god within! Whoever you are, O favour and assist our efforts, and forgive these men!' 'Don't pray for us' said [Dictys](#), who was the quickest at climbing to the highest yard and sliding down grasping the rigging. So said [Libys](#), and yellow-haired [Melanthus](#), the forward look-out, and [Alcimedon](#) agreed, and [Epopeus](#), who with his voice gave the measure and the pauses for the oarsmen to urge on their purpose. All the others said the same, so blind was their greed for gain.

'I still will not allow this ship to be cursed by a sacred victim to whom violence has been done' I said. 'Here I have the greatest authority'. And I prevented them boarding. Then [Lycabas](#) the most audacious of them all began to rage at me, he who had been thrown out of [Tuscany](#), and was suffering the punishment of exile from his city for a terrible murder. While I held him off, he punched me in the throat with his strong young fists, and would have thrown me semi-conscious into the sea, if I had not clung on, almost stunned, held back by the rigging. The impious crew cheered on the doer of it. Then, at last, Bacchus (for it was indeed Bacchus) was freed from sleep, as if by the clamour, and the sense returned to his drunken mind. 'What are you doing? Why this shouting?' he said. 'Tell me, you seamen, how I came here? Where do you intend to take me?' 'Have no fear', said [Proreus](#), 'and, whatever port you wish to touch at, you will be set down in the country you demand!' '[Naxos](#)' said [Liber](#), 'set your course for there! That is my home: it will be a friendly land to you!'

per mare fallaces perque omnia numina iurant  
 sic fore meque iubent pictae dare vela carinae.  
 dextera Naxos erat: dextra mihi linthea danti 640  
 "quid facis, o demens? quis te furor," inquit "Acoete,"  
 pro se quisque, "tenet? laevam pete!" maxima nutu  
 pars mihi significat, pars quid velit ore susurro.  
 obstipui "capiat" que "aliquis moderamina!" dixi  
 meque ministerio scelerisque artis que  
 removi. 645  
 increpor a cunctis, totumque inmurmurat agmen;  
 e quibus Aethalion "te scilicet omnis in uno  
 nostra salus posita est!" ait et subit ipse meumque  
 explet opus Naxoque petit diversa relicta.  
 tum deus inludens, tamquam modo denique  
 fraudem 650  
 senserit, e puppi pontum prospectat adunca  
 et flenti similis "non haec mihi litora, nautae,  
 promisistis" ait, "non haec mihi terra rogata est!  
 quo merui poenam facto? quae gloria vestra est,  
 si puerum iuvenes, si multi fallitis unum?" 655  
 iamdudum flebam: lacrimas manus in pia nostras  
 ridet et inpellit properantibus aequora remis.  
 per tibi nunc ipsum (nec enim praesentior illo  
 est deus) adiuro, tam me tibi vera referre  
 quam veri maiora fide: stetit aequore puppis 660  
 haud aliter, quam si siccam navale teneret.  
 illi admirantes remorum in verberere perstant  
 velaque deducunt geminaque ope currere temptant:  
 inpediunt hederæ remos nexuque recurvo  
 serpunt et gravidis distinguunt vela  
 corymbis. 665  
 ipse racemiferis frontem circumdatus uvis  
 pampineis agitat velatam frondibus hastam;  
 quem circa tigres simulacraque inania lyncum  
 pictarumque iacent fera corpora pantherarum.  
 exsiluere viri, sive hoc insania fecit 670  
 sive timor, primusque Medon nigrescere toto  
 corpore et expresso spinae curvamine flecti  
 incipit. huic Lycabas "in quae miracula" dixit  
 "verteris?" et lati rictus et panda loquenti 675  
 naris erat, squamamque cutis durata trahebat.  
 at Libys obstantis dum vult obvertere remos,  
 in spatium resilire manus breve vidit et illas  
 iam non esse manus, iam pinnas posse vocari.  
 alter ad intortos cupiens dare bracchia funes  
 bracchia non habuit truncoque repandus in  
 undas 680  
 corpore desiluit: falcata novissima cauda est,  
 qualia dividuae sinuantur cornua lunae.

undique dant saltus multaue adspergine rorant  
 emerguntque iterum redeuntque sub aequora rursus  
 inque chori ludunt speciem lascivaque  
 iactant 685  
 corpora et acceptum patulis mare naribus efflant.

The treacherous men swore, by the sea and all the gods, it would be so, and told me to get the painted vessel under sail. [Naxos](#) was to starboard, but as I trimmed the sails on a starboard tack, they, each one, asked me 'What are you doing, O madman? [Acoetes](#), what craziness has got into you? Take the port tack!' most of them letting me know what they intended with a nod of the head, the others in a whisper. I was horrified. 'Someone else can steer' I said, and distanced myself from the wickedness and deception. There were cries against me from all sides, the whole crew murmured against me. And one of them, [Aethalion](#), cried 'You seem to think that all our lives depend on you alone! Then he took my place himself, discharged my office, and abandoning Naxos took the opposite course.

Then the god, playfully, as though he had just realised their deceit, looked at the sea over the curve of the stern, and as though he were weeping said 'Sailors, these are not the shores you promised me, and this is not the land I chose for myself? What have I done to merit punishment? Where's the glory in men cheating a boy, or many cheating just one?' I was already weeping, but the impious crew laughed at my tears, and drove the ship quickly through the water.

Now I swear by the god himself (since there is no god more certainly present than he is) that what I say to you is the truth, though that truth beggars belief. The ship stands still in the waves, just as if it were held in dry dock. Amazed, the crew keep flogging away at the oars, and unfurling the sails, try to run on with double power. But ivy impedes the oars, creeping upwards, with binding tendrils, and drapes the sails with heavy clusters. The god himself waves a rod twined with vine leaves, his forehead wreathed with bunches of grapes. Around him lie insubstantial phantom lynxes, tigers, and the savage bodies of spotted panthers. The men leap overboard, driven to it either by madness or by fear. And [Medon](#) is the first to darken all over his body, and his spine to be bent into an arched curve.

[Lycabas](#) cries out to him 'What monster are you turning into?' And in speaking his jaws widen, his nose becomes hooked, and his skin becomes hard and scaly. But [Libys](#) hampered when he wishes to turn the oars sees his hands shrink suddenly in size, and now they are not hands, but can only be called fins. Another, eager to grasp at the tangled ropes, no longer has arms, and goes arching backwards limbless into the sea. His newest feature is a scythe-shaped tail, like the curved horns of a fragmentary moon. The dolphins leap everywhere drenched with spray. They emerge once more, only to return again to the depths, playing together as if they were in a troupe, throwing their

bodies around wantonly, and blowing out the seawater

drawn in through their broad nostrils.



de modo viginti (tot enim ratis illa ferebat)  
restabam solus: pavidum gelidumque trementi  
corpore vixque meum firmat deus "excute" dicens  
"corde metum Diamque tene!" delatus in  
illam 690

accessi sacris Baccheaque sacra frequento.'

'Praebuimus longis' Pentheus 'ambagibus aures,'  
inquit 'ut ira mora vires absumere posset.  
praecipitem, famuli, rapite hunc cruciataque diris  
corpora tormentis Stygiae demittite nocti!' 695  
protinus abstractus solidis Tyrrhenus Acoetes  
clauditur in tectis; et dum crudelia iussae  
instrumenta necis ferrumque ignesque parantur,  
sponte sua patuisse fores lapsasque lacertis  
sponte sua fama est nullo solvente catenas. 700

Perstat Echionides, nec iam iubet ire, sed ipse  
vadit, ubi electus facienda ad sacra Cithaeron  
cantibus et clara bacchantum voce sonabat.  
ut fremit acer equus, cum bellicus aere canoro  
signa dedit tubicen pugnaeque adsumit  
amorem, 705

Pentheas sic ictus longis ululatus aether  
movit, et audito clamore recanduit ira.

Monte fere medio est, cingentibus ultima silvis,  
purus ab arboribus, spectabilis undique, campus:  
hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanis 710  
prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu,  
prima suum misso violavit Pentheas thyrsos  
mater et 'o geminae' clamavit 'adeste sorores!  
ille aper, in nostris errat qui maximus agris,  
ille mihi feriendus aper.' ruit omnis in unum 715  
turba furens; cunctae coeunt trepidumque sequuntur,  
iam trepidum, iam verba minus violenta loquentem,  
iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem.  
saucius ille tamen 'fer opem, matertera' dixit  
'Autonoë! moveant animos Actaeonis  
umbræ!' 720

illa, quis Actaeon, nescit dextramque precanti  
abstulit, Ino lacerata est altera raptu.  
non habet infelix quae matri brachia tendat,  
trunca sed ostendens dereptis vulnera membris  
'adspice, mater!' ait. visis ululavit Agaue 725  
collaque iactavit movitque per aera crinem  
avulsumque caput digitis complexa cruentis  
clamat: 'io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!'  
non citius frondes autumnum frigore tactas  
iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore  
ventus, 730  
quam sunt membra viri manibus direpta nefandis.

talibus exemplis monitae nova sacra frequentant  
turaque dant sanctasque colunt Ismenides aras.

Of a group of twenty (that was how many the ship carried)  
I alone was left. The god roused me with difficulty, my  
body shaking with cold and terror, and barely myself,  
saying 'Free your heart from fear, and hold off for [Naxos](#)!  
And consigned to that island, I have adopted its religion,  
and celebrate the [Bacchic](#) rites.

'We have only listened to this winding tale', said  
[Pentheus](#), 'so that our anger might spend its strength in  
delay. 'You, attendants, remove this man, quickly, and let  
his body be tortured in greatest anguish, and send him  
down to [Stygian](#) night!' [Acoetes](#), the [Tyrrhenian](#), was  
dragged out, straightaway, and shut in a deep dungeon.  
But while the instruments of cruelty, the irons and the fire,  
were being prepared to kill him as had been ordered, the  
doors flew open by themselves, the chains loosening  
without any effort, so tradition holds.

The son of [Echion](#) persisted in his purpose, not ordering  
others to go, but now going himself, to where Mount  
[Cithaeron](#), chosen for performing the rites, was sounding  
with the chants and shrill cries of the [Bacchantes](#). As a  
brave horse snorts and shows his love for the fight, when  
the trumpeter's brass gives the signal for attack, so the  
heavens pulsating from the long drawn-out cries stirred  
Pentheus, and, hearing the clamour, his anger flared again.

Near the middle of the mountainside, was a clearing  
surrounded with remote woods, free of trees, and visible  
from all sides. Here as he watched the mysteries, with  
profane eyes, his mother was the first to see Pentheus, the  
first roused to run at him madly, the first to wound him,  
hurling her [thyrsus](#). She shouted 'O you two, sisters, come!  
That huge boar, who is straying in our fields, that boar is  
my sacrifice.' They all rush on him in one maddened  
crowd: they converge together pursuing the frightened  
man, frightened now, speaking words free of violence  
now, cursing himself now, realising his own offence.  
Stricken, he still shouts 'Help me, aunt [Autonoë](#)! Let  
[Actaeon](#)'s shade move your spirit!

She, not remembering Actaeon, tears away the  
suppliant's right arm. [Ino](#), in frenzy, rips off the other.  
Now the unhappy man has no limbs to hold out to his  
mother, but, showing his wounded trunk shorn of its  
members, he cries 'Mother, see!'. [Agave](#) howls, and  
twists her neck about, and thrashes her hair in the air, and  
tearing off his head, holding it in her bloody hands, shouts  
'Behold, sisters, this act marks our victory!'

The wind does not strip the leaves clinging there, from  
the high tree touched by an autumn frost, more quickly  
than this man's limbs are torn by those terrible hands.  
Warned by such an example, the [Theban](#) women throng to  
the new religion, burn incense, and worship at the sacred  
altars.

Met. 4

At non Alcithoe Minyeias orgia censet  
accipienda dei, sed adhuc temeraria Bacchum  
progeniem negat esse Iovis sociasque sorores  
inpietatis habet. festum celebrare sacerdos  
inmunesque operum famulas dominasque  
suorum 5  
pectora pelle tegi, crinales solvere vittas,  
serta coma, manibus frondentis sumere thyrsos  
iusserat et saevam laesi fore numinis iram  
vaticinatus erat: parent matresque nurusque  
telasque calathosque infectaque pensa  
reponunt 10  
turaque dant Bacchumque vocant Bromiumque  
Lyaemumque  
ignigenamque satumque iterum solumque bimatrem;  
additur his Nyseus indetonsusque Thyoneus  
et cum Lenaeo genialis consitor uvae  
Nycteliusque Eleleusque parens et Iacchus et  
Euhan, 15  
et quae praeterea per Graias plurima gentes  
nomina, Liber, habes. tibi enim inconsumpta iuventa est,  
tu puer aeternus, tu formosissimus alto  
conspiceris caelo; tibi, cum sine cornibus adstas,  
virgineum caput est; Oriens tibi victus,  
adusque 20  
decolor extremo qua tingitur India Gange.  
Penthea tu, venerande, bipenniferumque Lycurgum  
sacrilegos mactas, Tyrrhenaque mittis in aequor  
corpora, tu biiugum pictis insignia frenis  
colla premis lyncum. bacchae satyrique  
sequuntur, 25  
quique senex ferula titubantis ebrius artus  
sustinet et pando non fortiter haeret asello.  
quacumque ingrederis, clamor iuvenalis et una  
femineae voces impulsaque tympana palmis

concavaque aera sonant longoque foramine  
buxus. 30

But [Alcithoë](#), daughter of [Minyas](#), will not celebrate the Bacchic rites, in acceptance of the god. She is rash enough to deny that [Bacchus](#) is the son of [Jupiter](#), and her sisters share in her impiety.

The priest had ordered the observation of the festival, asking for all female servants to be released from work, they and their mistresses to drape animal skins across their breasts, free their headbands, wreath their hair, and carry an ivy-twined [thyrsus](#) in their hand. And he prophesied that the god's rage would be fierce if he was angered. The young women and mothers obey, leaving their baskets and looms, and their unfinished tasks, and burn incense, calling on Bacchus, on [Bromius](#), 'the noisy one', [Lyaeus](#), 'deliverer from care', on the child of the lightning, the twice-born, the son of two mothers, and adding to these calls [Nyseus](#), 'he of [Heliconian Nysa](#)', [Thyoneus](#), 'the unshorn' who is [Semele's](#) son, [Lenaeus](#), the planter of joy-giving vines, [Nyctelius](#), 'the nightcomer', father [Eleleus](#), of the howls, [Iacchus](#), of the shouts, and [Euhan](#), of the cries, and all of the other names you have, [Liber](#), among the peoples of Greece.

Unfading youth is yours, you boy eternal, you, [the most beautiful sight](#) in the depths of the morning and evening sky, your face like a virgin's when you stand before us without your horns. The Orient calls you its conqueror, as far as darkest India, dipped in the remote [Ganges](#). You, the revered one, punished [Pentheus](#), and [Lycurgus](#), king of [Thrace](#), who carried the double-headed axe, and you sent the [Tyrrhenians](#) into the waves. You yoke together two lynxes with bright reins decorating their necks, [Bacchantes](#) and [Satyrs](#) follow you, and that drunken old man, [Silenus](#), who supports his stumbling body with his staff, and clings precariously to his bent-backed mule. Wherever you go the shouts of youths ring out, and the chorus of female voices, hands beating on tambourines, the clash of cymbals, and the shrill piping of the flute.

quid facis? amplexus inquinat illa tuos.

## Fasti III

Protinus aspicias venienti nocte Coronam  
 Cnosida: Theseo crimine facta dea est.  
 iam bene periuro mutarat coniuge Bacchum  
 quae dedit ingrato fila legenda viro;  
 sorte tori gaudens 'quid flebam rustica?' dixit;  
 'utiliter nobis perfidus ille fuit.'  
 interea Liber depexos crinibus Indos 465  
 vicit, et Eoo dives ab orbe redit.  
 inter captivas facie praestante puellas  
 grata nimis Baccho filia regis erat.  
 flebat amans coniunx, spatiaque litore curvo  
 edidit incultis talia verba comis: 470  
 'en iterum, fluctus, similes audite querellas.  
 en iterum lacrimas accipe, harena, meas.  
 dicebam, memini, "periure et perfide Theseu!"  
 ille abiit, eadem crimina Bacchus habet.  
 nunc quoque "nulla viro" clamabo "femina  
 credat"; 475  
 nomine mutato causa relata mea est.  
 o utinam mea sors qua primum coeperat isset,  
 iamque ego praesenti tempore nulla forem.  
 quid me desertis morituram, Liber, harenis  
 servabas? potui dedoluisse semel. 480  
 Bacche levis leviorque tuis, quae tempora cingunt,  
 frondibus, in lacrimas cognite Bacche meas,  
 ausus es ante oculos adducta paelice nostros  
 tam bene compositum sollicitare torum?  
 heu ubi pacta fides? ubi quae iurare solebas?  
 me miseram, quotiens haec ego verba loquar? 485  
 Thesea culpabas fallacemque ipse vocabas:  
 iudicio peccas turpius ipse tuo.  
 ne sciat haec quisquam tacitisque doloribus urar,  
 ne totiens falli digna fuisse puter. 490  
 praecipue cupiam celari Thesea, ne te  
 consortem culpae gaudeat esse suae.  
 at, puto, praeposita est fuscae mihi candida paelex!  
 eveniat nostris hostibus ille color.  
 quid tamen hoc refert? vitio tibi gratior ipso

As soon as night falls you will see the [Cretan Crown](#):  
 Through [Theseus](#)' crime [Ariadne](#) was made a goddess.  
 She'd already happily exchanged that faithless spouse for  
[Bacchus](#),  
 She who'd given the ungrateful man the thread to follow.  
 Delighting in her wedded fate, she said: 'Why did I weep  
 Like a country-girl, his faithlessness has been my gain?'  
 Meanwhile [Bacchus](#) had conquered the straight-haired  
 Indians,  
 And returned with his riches from the Eastern world.  
 Among the captive girls, of outstanding beauty,  
 One, the daughter of a king, pleased Bacchus intensely.  
 His loving wife wept, and treading the curving shore  
 With dishevelled hair, she spoke these words:  
 'Behold, again, you waves, how you hear my complaint!  
 Behold again you sands, how you receive my tears!  
 I remember I used to say: "Perjured, faithless Theseus!"  
 He abandoned me: now Bacchus commits the same crime.  
 Now once more I'll cry: "Woman, never trust in man!"  
 My fate's repeated, only his name has changed.  
 O that my life had ended where it first began.  
 So that I'd not have existed for this moment!  
 Why did you save me, Liber, to die on these lonely sands?  
 I might have ceased grieving at that moment.  
 Bacchus, fickle, lighter than the leaves that wreath  
 Your brow, Bacchus known to me in my weeping,  
 How have you dared to trouble our harmonious bed  
 By bringing another lover before my eyes?  
 Alas, where is sworn faith? Where the pledges you once  
 gave?  
 Wretched me, how many times must I speak those words?  
 You blamed Theseus and called him a deceiver:  
 According to that judgement your own sin is worse.  
 Let no one know of this, let me burn with silent pain,  
 Lest they think I deserved to be cheated so!  
 Above all I wish it to be hid from Theseus,  
 So he may not joy in you as a partner in crime.  
 I suppose your fair lover is preferred to a dark,  
 May fair be the colouring of my enemies!  
 Yet what does that signify? She is dearer to you for that.  
 What are you doing? She contaminates your embrace.



Bacche, fidem praesta, nec praefer amoribus ullam  
 coniugis: adsuevi semper amare virum.  
 ceperunt matrem formosi cornua tauri,  
 me tua; at hic laudi est, ille pudendus  
 amor. 500  
 ne noceat quod amo: neque enim tibi, Bacche, nocebat  
 quod flammis nobis fassus es ipse tuas.  
 nec, quod nos uris, mirum facis: ortus in igne  
 diceris, et patria raptus ab igne manu.  
 illa ego sum cui tu solitus promittere caelum. 505  
 ei mihi, pro caelo qualia dona fero!  
 dixerat; audibat iamdudum verba querentis  
 Liber, ut a tergo forte secutus erat.  
 occupat amplexu lacrimasque per oscula siccant,  
 et 'pariter caeli summa petamus' ait: 510  
 'tu mihi iuncta toro mihi iuncta vocabula sumes,  
 nam tibi mutatae Libera nomen erit,  
 sintque tuae tecum faciam monimenta coronae,  
 Vulcanus Veneri quam dedit, illa tibi.'  
 dicta facit, gemmasque novem transformat in  
 ignes: 515  
 aurea per stellas nunc micat illa novem.

Bacchus, be true, and do not prefer her to a wife's love.

I am one who would love my husband for ever.

The horns of a gleaming bull captivated my [mother](#).  
 Yours, me: but this is a love to be praised, hers shameful.  
 Let me not suffer, for loving: you yourself, Bacchus,  
 Never suffered for confessing your desire to me.  
 No wonder you make me burn: they say you were born  
 In fire, and were snatched from the flames by your [father](#).  
 I am she to whom you used to promise the heavens.  
 Ah me, what a reward I suffer instead of heaven!  
 She spoke: Liber had been listening a long while  
 To her complaint, since he chanced to follow closely.  
 He embraced her, and dried her tears with kisses,  
 And said: 'Together, let us seek the depths of the sky!  
 You'll share my name just as you've shared my bed,  
 Since, transmuted, you will be called [Libera](#):  
 And there'll be a memory of your crown beside you,  
 The crown [Vulcan](#) gave to [Venus](#), and she to you.'  
 He did as he said, and changed the nine jewels to fire:  
 Now the golden crown glitters with nine stars.

Tertia post Idus lux est celeberrima Baccho:  
 Bacche, fave vati, dum tua festa cano.  
 nec referam Semelen, ad quam nisi fulmina  
 secum 715  
 Iuppiter adferret, ~parvus inermis eras~;  
 nec, puer ut posses maturo tempore nasci,  
 expletum patrio corpore matris opus.  
 Sithonas et Scythicos longum narrare triumphos  
 et domitas gentes, turifer Inde, tuas. 720  
 tu quoque Thebanae mala praeda tacebere matris,  
 inque tuum furiis acte Lycurge genus.  
 ecce libet subitos pisces Tyrrhenaque monstra  
 dicere; sed non est carminis huius opus.  
 carminis huius opus causas exponere quare 725  
 vitisator populos ad sua liba vocet.  
 ante tuos ortus arae sine honore fuerunt,  
 Liber, et in gelidis herba reperta focis.  
 te memorant, Gange totoque Oriente subacto,  
 primitias magno seposuisse Iovi: 730  
 cinnama tu primus captivaque tura dedisti  
 deque triumphato viscera tosta bove.  
 nomine ab auctoris ducunt libamina nomen  
 libaque, quod sanctis pars datur inde focis;  
 liba deo fiunt, sucis quia dulcibus idem 735  
 gaudet, et a Baccho mella reperta ferunt.  
 ibat harenoso satyris comitatus ab Hebro  
 (non habet ingratos fabula nostra iocos);  
 iamque erat ad Rhodopen Pangaeaue florida ventum:  
 aeriferae comitum concrepuere manus. 740

There's a popular festival of [Bacchus](#), on the third day  
 After the Ides: Bacchus, favour the poet who sings your  
 feast.

I'll not speak about [Semele](#): you'd have been born  
 defenceless,  
 If it hadn't been that [Jupiter](#) brought her his lightning too.  
 Nor will I tell how the mother's labour was fulfilled  
 In a father's body, so you might duly be born their son.  
 It would take long to tell of the conquered Sithonians,  
 And the Scythians, and the races of incense-bearing India.  
 I'll be silent about you too, [Pentheus](#), sad prey to your  
 own mother,  
 And you [Lycurgus](#), who killed your own son in madness.  
 Lo, I'd like to speak of the monstrous Tyrrhenians, who  
 Suddenly became dolphins, but that's not the task of this  
 verse.  
 The task of *this* verse is to set out the reasons,  
 Why a vine-planter sells his cakes to the crowd.  
[Liber](#), before your birth the altars were without offerings,  
 And grass appeared on the stone-cold hearths.  
 They tell how you set aside the first fruits for Jupiter,  
 After subduing the Ganges region, and the whole of the  
 East.  
 You were the first to offer up cinnamon and incense  
 From conquered lands, and the roast entrails of triumphal  
 oxen.  
 Libations derive their name from their originator,  
 And cake (*liba*) since a part is offered on the sacred hearth.  
 Honey-cakes are baked for the god, because he delights in  
 sweet  
 Substances, and they say that [Bacchus](#) discovered honey.  
 He was travelling from sandy [Hebrus](#), accompanied  
 By [Satyrs](#), (my tale contains a not-unpleasant jest)  
 And he'd come to Mount Rhodope, and flowering  
 Pangaeus:  
 With the cymbals clashing in his companions' hands.

ecce novae coeunt volucres tinnitibus actae,  
 quosque movent sonitus aera, sequuntur apes;  
 colligit errantes et in arbore claudit inani  
 Liber, et inventi praemia mellis habet.  
 ut satyri levisque senex tetigere saporem 745  
 quaerebant flavos per nemus omne favos.  
 audit in exesa stridorem examinis ulmo,  
 aspicit et ceras dissimulatque senex;  
 utque piger pandi tergo residebat aselli,  
 adplicat hunc ulmo corticibusque cavis. 750  
 constitit ipse super ramoso stipite nixus,  
 atque avide trunco condita mella petit:  
 milia crabronum coeunt, et vertice nudo  
 spicula defigunt oraque sima notant.  
 ille cadit praeceps et calce feritur aselli, 755  
 inclamatque suos auxiliumque rogat.  
 concurrunt satyri turgentiaque ora parentis  
 rident: percusso claudicat ille genu.  
 ridet et ipse deus, limumque inducere monstrat;  
 hic paret monitis et linit ora luto. 760  
 melle pater fruitur, liboque infusa calenti  
 iure repertori splendida mella damus.  
 femina cur praesit, non est rationis opertae:  
 femineos thyrsos concitat ille choros.  
 cur anus hoc faciat, quaeris? vinosior aetas 765  
 ~haec erat et~ gravidae munera vitis amat.  
 cur hedera cincta est? hedera est gratissima Baccho;  
 hoc quoque cur ita sit, discere nulla mora est.  
 Nysiadas nymphas puerum quaerente noverca  
 hanc frondem cunis opposuisse ferunt. 770

Behold unknown winged things gather to the jangling,  
 Bees, that follow after the echoing bronze.  
 Liber gathered the swarm and shut it in a hollow tree,  
 And was rewarded with the prize of discovering honey.  
 Once the Satyrs, and old bald-headed [Silenus](#), had tasted  
 it,  
 They searched for the yellow combs in every tree.  
 The old fellow heard a swarm humming in a hollow elm,  
 Saw the honeycombs, but pretended otherwise:  
 And sitting lazily on his hollow-backed ass,  
 He rode it up to the elm where the trunk was hollow.  
 He stood and leant on the stump of a branch,  
 And greedily reached for the honey hidden inside.  
 But thousands of hornets gathered, thrusting their stings  
 Into his bald head, leaving their mark on his snub-nosed  
 face.  
 He fell headlong, and received a kick from the ass,  
 As he shouted to his friends and called for help.  
 The Satyrs ran up, and laughed at their father's face,  
 While he limped about on his damaged knee.  
 Bacchus himself laughed and showed him the use of mud:  
 Silenus took his advice, and smeared his face with clay.  
 Father Liber loves honey: its right to offer its discoverer  
 Glittering honey diffused through oven-warm cakes.  
 The reason why a woman presides isn't obscure:  
[Bacchus](#) stirs crowds of women with his *thyrsus*.  
 Why an old woman, you ask? That age drinks more,  
 And loves the gifts of the teeming vine.  
 Why is she wreathed with ivy? Ivy's dearest to Bacchus:  
 And why that's so doesn't take long to tell.  
 They say that when [Juno](#) his stepmother was searching  
 For the boy, the nymphs of [Nysa](#) hid the cradle in ivy  
 leaves.

Restat ut inveniam quare toga libera detur  
 Lucifero pueris, candide Bacche, tuo:  
 sive quod ipse puer semper iuvenisque videris,  
 et media est aetas inter utrumque tibi;  
 seu quia tu pater es, patres sua pignora,  
 natos, 775  
 commendant curae numinibusque tuis:  
 sive, quod es Liber, vestis quoque libera per te  
 sumitur et vitae liberioris iter:  
 an quia, cum colerent prisca studiosius agros,  
 et faceret patrio rure senator opus, 780  
 et caperet fasces a curvo consul aratro,  
 nec crimen duras esset habere manus,  
 rusticus ad ludos populus veniebat in Urbem—  
 sed dis, non studiis ille dabatur honor:  
 luce sua ludos uvae commentor habebat, 785  
 quos cum taedifera nunc habet ille dea—  
 ergo ut tironem celebrare frequentia possit,  
 visa dies dandae non aliena togae?  
 mite caput, pater, huc placataque cornua vertas,  
 et des ingenio vela secunda meo. 790  
 Itur ad Argeos (qui sint, sua pagina dicet)  
 hac, si commemini, praeteritaque die.  
 stella Lycaoniam vergit declinis ad Arcton  
 Miluus: haec illa nocte videnda venit.  
 quid dederit volucris, si vis cognoscere,  
 caelum, 795  
 Saturnus regnis a Iove pulsus erat;  
 concitat iratus validos Titanas in arma,  
 quaeque fuit fati debita temptat opem.  
 matre satus Terra, monstrum mirabile, taurus  
 parte sui serpens posteriore fuit: 800  
 hunc triplici muro lucis incluserat atris  
 Parcarum monitu Styx violenta trium.  
 viscera qui tauri flammis adolenda dedisset,  
 sors erat aeternos vincere posse deos.  
 immolat hunc Briareus facta ex adamante  
 securi, 805  
 et iamiam flammis exta daturus erat:

Iuppiter alitibus rapere imperat: attulit illi  
 miluus, et meritis venit in astra suis.

It remains for me to reveal why the *toga virilis*, the gown  
 Of manhood, is given to boys on your day, [Bacchus](#):  
 Whether it's because you seem to be ever boy or youth,  
 And your age is somewhere between the two:  
 Or because you're a father, fathers commend their sons,  
 Their pledges of love, to your care and divinity:  
 Or because you're Liber, the gown of liberty  
 And a more liberated life are adopted, for you:  
 Or is it because, in the days when the ancients tilled the  
 fields  
 More vigorously, and Senators worked their fathers' land,  
 And 'rods and axes' took Consuls from the curving  
 plough,  
 And it wasn't a crime to have work-worn hands,  
 The farmers came to the City for the games,  
 (Though that was an honour paid to the gods, and not  
 Their inclination: and the grape's discoverer held [his](#)  
[games](#)  
 This day, while now he shares that of torch-bearing [Ceres](#)):  
 And the day seemed not unfitting for granting the *toga*,  
 So that a crowd could celebrate the fresh novice?  
 Father turn your mild head here, and gentle horns,  
 And spread the sails of my art to a favourable breeze.  
 If I remember rightly, on this, and the preceding day,  
 Crowds go to the [Argei](#) (their own page will tell who they  
 are).  
 The Kite star turns downwards near  
 The [Lycaonian Bear](#): on this night it's first visible.  
 If you wish to know who raised that falcon to heaven,  
 It was when [Saturn](#) had been dethroned by [Jupiter](#):  
 Angered, he stirred the mighty Titans to battle,  
 And sought whatever help the Fates could grant him.  
 There was a bull, a marvellous monster, born of Mother  
 Earth, the hind part of which was of serpent-form:  
 Warned by the three Fates, grim [Styx](#) had imprisoned him  
 In dark woods, surrounded by triple walls.  
 There was a prophecy that whoever burnt the entrails  
 Of the bull, in the flames, would defeat the eternal gods.  
[Briareus](#) sacrificed it with an adamant axe,  
 And was about to set the innards on the flames:  
 But Jupiter ordered the birds to snatch them: and the Kite  
 Brought them, and his service set him among the stars.

Tristia V, 3

Illa dies haec est, qua te celebrare poetae,  
si modo non fallunt tempora, Bacche, solent,  
festaque odoratis innectunt tempora sertis,  
et dicunt laudes ad tua uina tuas.  
Inter quos, memini, dum me mea fata sinebant,  
non inuisa tibi pars ego saepe fui,  
quem nunc suppositum stellis Cynosuridos Vrsae  
iuncta tenet crudis Sarmatis ora Getis.  
Quique prius mollem uacuaque laboribus egi  
in studiis uitam Pieridumque choro,  
nunc procul a patria Geticis circumsonor armis,  
multa prius pelago multaque passus humo.  
Sive mihi casus sive hoc dedit ira deorum,  
nubila nascenti seu mihi Parca fuit,  
tu tamen e sacris hederæ cultoribus unum  
numine debueras sustinuisse tuo.  
An dominae fati quicquid cecinere sorores,  
omne sub arbitrio desinit esse dei?  
Ipse quoque aetherias meritis inuectus es arces,  
quo non exiguo facta labore uia est.  
Nec patria est habitata tibi, sed adusque niuosum  
Strymona uenisti Marticolamque Geten,  
Persidaque et lato spatiantem flumine Gangen,  
et quascumque bibit decolor Indus aquas.  
Scilicet hanc legem nentes fatalia Parcae  
stamina bis genito bis cecinere tibi.  
Me quoque, si fas est exemplis ire deorum,  
ferrea sors uitae difficilisque premit.  
Illo nec leuius cecidi, quem magna locutum  
reppulit a Thebis Iuppiter igne suo.  
ut tamen audisti percussum fulmine uatem,  
admonitu matris condoluisse potes,  
et potes aspiciens circum tua sacra poetas  
"nescioquis nostri" dicere "cultor abest."  
This is [the day](#), [Bacchus](#), that the poets are accustomed  
to celebrate you, if only I've not got the date wrong,  
wreathing scented garlands round their foreheads,

and singing your praises to the wine you gave us.

I remember how, while my fortunes still allowed it,  
I often took part, among them, and didn't displease you,  
I who am now subjected to the stars of the [Little Bear](#),  
held fast to the [Sarmatian](#) shore of the savage [Getae](#).  
I, who led a life of ease, free of labour,  
in my studies, among the [Pierian](#) choir,  
after many sufferings on sea and land, I'm surrounded  
by the noise of Getic weapons, and far from home.  
Whether chance or the anger of the gods caused it,  
or whether a dark [Fate](#) attended my birth,  
you, at least, with divine power, should have aided  
one of the worshippers of your sacred ivy.  
Or is it that what the Sisters, the Mistresses of Fate,  
ordain is no longer wholly in the god's power?  
You yourself were admitted to the heavens, on merit,  
to which one makes one's way with no little toil.  
You did not live in your native land, but went  
all the way to snowy [Strymon](#), and the warlike Getae,  
to Persia, and the wide-flowing River [Ganges](#),  
and all the waters the dusky Indian drinks.  
This was the destiny for sure that the Parcae, who spun  
the fatal thread, twice ordained for you, at your double  
birth.  
I too, if it's right to take the gods as examples,  
am crushed by a difficult, an iron fate in life.  
I've fallen no less heavily than [Capaneus](#), whom [Jupiter](#)  
drove, for his pride, from [Thebes](#)' walls, with lightning.  
And when you heard a poet had been struck by fire,  
you might have remembered your mother, [Semele](#),  
and had sympathy, and gazing at the bards round your  
altar,  
have said: 'One of my worshippers is missing.'



Fer, bone Liber, opem: sic altera degraue ulmum  
uitis et incluso plena sit uua mero,  
sic tibi cum Bacchis Satyrorum gnaua iuuentus  
adsit, et attonito non taceare sono,  
ossa bipenniferi sic sint male pressa Lycurgi,  
impia nec poena Pentheos umbra uacet,  
sic micet aeternum uicinaque sidera uincat  
coniugis in caelo clara corona tuae:  
huc ades et casus releues, pulcherrime, nostros,  
unum de numero me memor esse tuo.  
Sunt dis inter se commercia. Flectere tempta  
Caesareum numen numine, Bacche, tuo.  
Vos quoque, consortes studii, pia turba, poetae,  
haec eadem sumpto quisque rogate mero.  
Atque aliquis uestrum, Nasonis nomine dicto,  
opponat lacrimis pocula mixta suis,  
admonitusque mei, cum circumspexerit omnes,  
dicat "ubi est nostri pars modo Naso chori?"  
Idque ita, si uestrum merui candore fauorem,  
nullaque iudicio littera laesa meo est,  
si, ueterum digne ueneror cum scripta uirorum,  
proxima non illis esse minora reor.  
Sic igitur dextro faciatis Apolline carmen:  
quod licet, inter uos nomen habete meum.

Help me, good [Liber](#): and may another vine burden the  
elm,  
and the grapes be filled with the imprisoned juice,  
may the [Bacchae](#) and the vigorous young [Satyrs](#)  
be here, and their cries of inspiration not be silent,  
may the bones of [Lycurgus](#) the axe-bearer be crushed,  
and [Pentheus](#)' impious shade never free of torment,  
may your [Ariadne](#)'s crown glitter brightly in the sky,  
and shine more brilliantly than the neighbouring stars:  
be here, and ease my fate, loveliest of the gods,  
remembering that I am one of your own.  
The gods traffic between themselves. Bacchus,  
try to influence Caesar's power with your own.  
You too, loyal crowd of poets who share my studies,  
drink the neat wine, and make the same request.  
And one of you, mentioning Ovid's name,  
pledge him in a cup mixed with your own tears,  
and when you've gazed around you, say in memory  
of me: 'Where's Ovid, who was lately one of our choir?'  
This only if I've earned your approval by my honesty,  
and never a book's been wounded by my criticism:  
if, though I revere the noble writings of ancient men,  
I still think the recent ones to be worth no less.  
So, as you may make songs empowered by [Apollo](#),  
keep my name fresh among you, as is right.