Ovid: Selections from *Metamorphoses*

Women feature strongly in Ovid's compilation of mythological stories, Metamorphoses*—often bearing the burden of decisions made by men, and thereby becoming the origin of important elements of the later Greek and Roman world. Below are excerpts relating the stories of Daphne, a nymph pursued by Apollo; Hecuba, queen of the destroyed Troy; unhappy lovers Pyramus and Thisbe; and Galatea, the sea-nymph beloved of Acis and coveted by Polyphemus, the Cyclops. The work is Roman, from the first century BCE.*[1]

Daphne's Refusal

I:438-472 Phoebus kills the Python and sees Daphne

Indeed, though she would not have desired to, she then gave birth to you, great Python, covering so great an area of the mountain slopes, a snake not known before, a terror to the new race of men. The archer god, with lethal shafts that he had only used before on fleeing red deer and roe deer, with a thousand arrows, almost emptying his quiver, destroyed the creature, the venom running out from its black wounds. Then he founded the sacred Pythian games, celebrated by contests, named from the serpent he had conquered. There the young winners in boxing, in foot and chariot racing, were honoured with oak wreaths. There was no laurel as yet, so Phoebus crowned his temples, his handsome curling hair, with leaves of any tree.

Phoebus's first love was Daphne, daughter of Peneus, and not through chance but because of Cupid's fierce anger. Recently the Delian god, exulting at his victory over the serpent, had seen him bending his tightly strung bow and said 'Impudent boy, what are you doing with a man's weapons? That one is suited to my shoulders, since I can hit wild beasts of a certainty, and wound my enemies, and not long ago destroyed with countless arrows the swollen Python that covered many acres with its plague-ridden belly. You should be intent on stirring the concealed fires of love with your burning brand, not laying claim to my glories!' Venus's son replied 'You may hit every other thing Phoebus, but my bow will strike you: to the degree that all living creatures are less than gods, by that degree is your glory less than mine.' He spoke, and striking the air fiercely with beating wings, he landed on the shady peak of Parnassus, and took two arrows with opposite effects from his full quiver: one kindles love, the other dispels it. The one that kindles is golden with a sharp glistening point, the one that dispels is blunt with lead beneath its shaft. With the second he transfixed Peneus's daughter, but with the first he wounded Apollo piercing him to the marrow of his bones.

I: 473-503 Phoebus pursues Daphne

Now the one loved, and the other fled from love's name, taking delight in the depths of the woods, and the skins of the wild beasts she caught, emulating virgin Phoebe, a careless ribbon holding back her hair. Many courted her, but she, averse to being wooed, free from men and unable to endure them, roamed the pathless woods, careless of Hymen or Amor, or whatever marriage might be. Her father often said 'Girl you owe me a son-in-law', and again often 'Daughter, you owe me grandsons.' But, hating the wedding torch as if it smacked of crime she would blush red with shame all over her beautiful face, and clinging to her father's neck with coaxing arms, she would say 'Dearest father, let me be a virgin for ever! Diana's father granted it to her.' He yields to that plea, but your beauty itself, Daphne, prevents your wish, and your loveliness opposes your prayer.

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[1] Source: Ovid, and A.S. Kline. 2014. *Ovid: The Metamorphoses – A Complete English Translation and Mythological Index*. CreateSpace. https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Ovhome.php.

Phoebus loves her at first sight, and desires to wed her, and hopes for what he desires, but his own oracular powers fail him. As the light stubble of an empty cornfield blazes; as sparks fire a hedge when a traveller, by mischance, lets them get too close, or forgets them in the morning; so the god was altered by the flames, and all his heart burned, feeding his useless desire with hope. He sees her disordered hair hanging about her neck and sighs 'What if it were properly dressed?' He gazes at her eyes sparkling with the brightness of starlight. He gazes on her lips, where mere gazing does not satisfy. He praises her wrists and hands and fingers, and her arms bare to the shoulder: whatever is hidden, he imagines more beautiful. But she flees swifter than the lightest breath of air, and resists his words calling her back again.

I:504-524 Phoebus begs Daphne to yield to him

'Wait nymph, daughter of Peneus, I beg you! I who am chasing you am not your enemy. Nymph, Wait! This is the way a sheep runs from the wolf, a deer from the mountain lion, and a dove with fluttering wings flies from the eagle: everything flies from its foes, but it is love that is driving me to follow you! Pity me! I am afraid you might fall headlong or thorns undeservedly scar your legs and I be a cause of grief to you! These are rough places you run through. Slow down, I ask you, check your flight, and I too will slow. At least enquire whom it is you have charmed. I am no mountain man, no shepherd, no rough guardian of the herds and flocks. Rash girl, you do not know, you cannot realise, who you run from, and so you run. Delphi's lands are mine, Claros and Tenedos, and Patara acknowledges me king. Jupiter is my father. Through me what was, what is, and what will be, are revealed. Through me strings sound in harmony, to song. My aim is certain, but an arrow truer than mine, has wounded my free heart! The whole world calls me the bringer of aid; medicine is my invention; my power is in herbs. But love cannot be healed by any herb, nor can the arts that cure others cure their lord!'

I:525-567 Daphne becomes the laurel bough

He would have said more as timid Peneïs ran, still lovely to see, leaving him with his words unfinished. The winds bared her body, the opposing breezes in her way fluttered her clothes, and the light airs threw her streaming hair behind her, her beauty enhanced by flight. But the young god could no longer waste time on further blandishments, urged on by Amor, he ran on at full speed. Like a hound of Gaul starting a hare in an empty field, that heads for its prey, she for safety: he, seeming about to clutch her, thinks now, or now, he has her fast, grazing her heels with his outstretched jaws, while she uncertain whether she is already caught, escaping his bite, spurts from the muzzle touching her. So the virgin and the god: he driven by desire, she by fear. He ran faster, Amor giving him wings, and allowed her no rest, hung on her fleeing shoulders, breathed on the hair flying round her neck. Her strength was gone, she grew pale, overcome by the effort of her rapid flight, and seeing Peneus's waters near cried out 'Help me father! If your streams have divine powers change me, destroy this beauty that pleases too well!' Her prayer was scarcely done when a heavy numbness seized her limbs, thin bark closed over her breast, her hair turned into leaves, her arms into branches, her feet so swift a moment ago stuck fast in slow-growing roots, her face was lost in the canopy. Only her shining beauty was left.

Even like this Phoebus loved her and, placing his hand against the trunk, he felt her heart still quivering under the new bark. He clasped the branches as if they were parts of human arms, and kissed the wood. But even the wood shrank from his kisses, and the god said 'Since you cannot be my bride, you must be my tree! Laurel, with you my hair will be wreathed, with you my lyre, with you my quiver. You will go with the Roman generals when joyful voices acclaim their triumph, and the Capitol witnesses their long processions. You will stand outside Augustus's doorposts, a faithful guardian, and keep watch over the crown of oak between them. And just as my head with its un-cropped hair is always young, so you also will wear the beauty of undying leaves.' Paean had done: the laurel bowed her newly made branches, and seemed to shake her leafy crown like a head giving consent.

The Lament of Hecuba, Priam's Queen

XIII:481-575 Hecuba's lament and transformation

The Trojan women lift her body, counting over the lamented children of Priam, and recounting how much blood one house has surrendered. They weep for you, girl, and for you, Hecuba, who were lately called the royal wife, the royal parent, the image of bright Asia, now in evil circumstances, even for a prisoner, whom victorious Ulysses would not have wanted, except for the fact that you had given birth to Hector a partner for his mother that Hector would scarcely have imagined!

Embracing the body of Polyxena, now empty of that brave spirit, she sheds the tears for her that she has shed so often for her husband, sons and country. She pours her tears over her daughter's wound, covers her lips with kisses, and beats at her own bruised breast.

Then, tearing at her white hair caked with blood, and plucking at her breast, she said this amongst other things: 'Child – since, what else is left me? – your mother's last grief, Child, you lie there, and I see your wound, that is my wound. Look, you also have your wound, so that I might lose none of my children without bloodshed. Because you were a woman, I thought you safe from the sword: yet, a woman, you have died by the sword: and that same Achilles who has ruined Troy and made me childless, who has destroyed so many of your brothers, has killed you in the same way.

Yet when he fell to the arrow of Paris, and Phoebus, I said: "Now surely, Achilles is no longer to be feared." Yet even then I still needed to fear him. His very ashes in the tomb are hostile to our race: even in the grave we feel his enmity: I gave birth for the Aeacidae! Mighty Ilium is in the dust, and, in a grievous outcome, our ruined State is ended. But still, it ended: in me, only, Pergama remains. My grief still takes it course. A moment ago I was endowed with the greatest things, so many sons and daughters, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, and my husband. Now, exiled, destitute, torn from the tombs of my loved ones, I am dragged off as a prize, to serve Penelope. She will point me out to the women of Ithaca, as I spin the wool she gives me, and say: "This is the famous mother of Hector, this is Priam's queen." Now you, Polyxena, after so many have been lost, you, who were the only one left to comfort your mother's grief, have been sacrificed on an enemy tomb! I have borne offerings for the enemy dead!

Why do I remain, unyielding? Why do I linger here? Why do you preserve me, wrinkled old age? Why prolong an old woman's life, cruel gods, unless it is for me to view more funerals? Who would have thought Priam could be happy when Pergama has fallen? Yet he is happy, in death! He did not see you killed, daughter, but left his kingdom and his life together. Do I imagine you will be endowed with funereal splendour, and your body laid to rest in the ancestral tomb? That is not our house's fate! Your mother's tears will be your funeral gift, and the wastes of foreign sand. I have lost everything: now an only child is left, once the youngest son of my family, his mother's dearest, a reason to endure life for a brief space of time, Polydorus, sent to these shores, to the Ismarian king. But why do I delay, meanwhile, the cleansing of your cruel wound with water, your face spattered with drops of blood?'

She spoke, and went to the shore, with the stumbling steps of an old woman, tearing at her white hair. 'Give me an urn, women of Troy!' said the unhappy mother, wanting to draw water from the sea. There, she saw Polydorus's body, thrown on the beach, covered with open wounds made by Thracian spears. The Trojan women cried out, but she was dumb with grief. The grief itself obliterated both her powers of speech and the tears welling inside, and she stood unmoving like solid rock, at one moment with her gaze fixed on the ground, the next lifting her face grimly towards the sky. Now she looked at her dead son's face, now at his wounds, mostly at his wounds,

awakening a growing anger in herself. Then it blazed out, and she, as if she were still a queen, determined on vengeance, her whole mind filled with thoughts of punishment.

Hecuba, her grief mixed with anger, forgetting her age, but not forgetting her rage, like a lioness maddened by the theft of her unweaned cub, that, though she cannot see her enemy, follows the traces she finds of his footsteps, found her way to the author of the dreadful crime, Polymestor. She made out that she wanted to show him a secret hoard of gold, to be given to her son. The Thracian believed her, and with his usual desire for gain, came with her secretly. Then with smooth and cunning words, he said: 'Do not delay, Hecuba: give me your gift to your son! It will all be for him, both what you give and what was given before, I swear by the gods.'

She gazed at him, grimly, as he spoke and swore his lying oath, until, her seething anger boiling over, she called on her train of captive women to attack the man, and drove her nails into his deceitful eyes, and (made strong by anger) tore the eyeballs from their sockets, and dipped her hand, and drank, stained with his sinful blood, not from his eyes (nothing of them remained) but from the holes that were his eyes.

The Thracians, enraged by the murder of their king, attacked the Trojan woman, hurling stones and missiles, but she chased the stones they threw, snapping at them with a harsh growling, and, readying her jaws for words, barked when she tried to speak. The place is still there, and takes its name, Cynossema, the Monument of the Bitch, from this, and she still howls mournfully amongst the Sithonian fields, remembering endlessly her ancient suffering.

Her fate moved the Trojans and her enemies the Greeks, and it moved all the gods as well, yes, all, so that even Juno, Jove's sister-wife, said that Hecuba did not merit such misfortune.

Pyramus and Thisbe

IV:55-92 Arsippe tells the story of Pyramus and Thisbe

'Pyramus and Thisbe, he the loveliest youth, and she the most sought after girl, the East held, lived in neighbouring houses, in the towering city of Babylon, that Semiramis is said to have enclosed with walls of brick. Their nearness and their first childhood steps made them acquainted and in time love appeared. They would have agreed to swear the marriage oath as well, but their parents prevented it. They were both on fire, with hearts equally captivated, something no parent can prevent. They had no one to confide all this to: nods and signs were their speech, and the more they kept the fire hidden, the more it burned.

There was a fissure, a thin split, in the shared wall between their houses, which traced back to when it was built. No one had discovered the flaw in all those years – but what can love not detect? – You lovers saw it first, and made it a path for your voices. Your endearments passed that way, in safety, in the gentlest of murmurs. Often, when they were in place, Thisbe here, and Pyramus there, and they had each caught the sound of the other's breath, they said "Unfriendly wall, why do you hinder lovers? How hard would it be for you to let our whole bodies meet, or if that is too much perhaps, to open to the kisses we give each other? Not that we are not grateful. We confess that we owe it to you that words are allowed to pass to loving ears." So they talked, hopelessly, sitting opposite, saying, as night fell, "Farewell", each touching the wall with kisses that could not reach the other side.

One morning when Aurora had quenched the fires of night, and the sun's rays had thawed the frosty grass, they came to their usual places. Then they decided, first with a little murmur of their great sorrows, to try, in the silence of night, to deceive the guards, and vanish outside. Once out of the house they would leave the city as well, and they agreed, in case they went astray crossing the open country, to meet by the grave of Ninus, and hide in the shelter of a tree. There was a tall mulberry tree there, dense with white berries, bordering a cool fountain. They

were satisfied with their plan, and the light, slow to lose its strength, was drowned in the waters, and out of the same waters the night emerged.'

IV:93-127 The death of Pyramus

'Carefully opening the door, Thisbe, slipped out, deceiving her people, and came to the tomb, her face veiled, and seated herself under the tree they had agreed on. Love made her brave. But a lioness fresh from the kill, her jaws foaming, smeared with the blood of cattle, came to slake her thirst at the nearby spring. In the moonlight, Babylonian Thisbe sees her some way off, and flees in fear to a dark cave, and as she flees, she leaves behind her fallen veil. When the fierce lioness has drunk deeply, returning towards the trees, she chances to find the flimsy fabric, without its owner, and rips it in her bloodstained jaws. Leaving the city a little later, Pyramus sees the creature's tracks in the thick dust, and his face is drained of colour. When he also discovers the veil stained with blood, he cries, "Two lovers will be lost in one night. She was the more deserving of a long life. I am the guilty spirit. I have killed you, poor girl, who told you to come by night to this place filled with danger, and did not reach it first. O, all you lions, that live amongst these rocks, tear my body to pieces, and devour my sinful flesh in your fierce jaws! Though it is cowardly to ask for death"

He picks up Thisbe's veil, and carries it with him to the shadow of the tree they had chosen. Kissing the token, and wetting it with tears, he cries, "Now, be soaked in my blood too." Having spoken he drove the sword he had been wearing into his groin, and, dying, pulled it, warm, from the wound. As he lay back again on the ground, the blood spurted out, like a pipe fracturing at a weak spot in the lead, and sending long bursts of water hissing through the split, cutting through the air, beat by beat. Sprinkled with blood, the tree's fruit turned a deep blackish-red, and the roots, soaked through, also imbued the same overhanging mulberries with the dark purplish colour.'

IV:128-166 The death of Thisbe

'Now Thisbe returns, not yet free of fear, lest she disappoint her lover, and she calls for him with her eyes and in her mind, eager to tell him about the great danger she has escaped. Though she recognises the place and the shape of the familiar tree, the colour of the berries puzzles her. She waits there: perhaps this is it. Hesitating, she sees quivering limbs writhing on the bloodstained earth, and starts back, terrified, like the sea, that trembles when the slightest breeze touches its surface, her face showing whiter than boxwood. But when, staying a moment longer, she recognises her lover, she cries out loud with grief, striking at her innocent arms, and tearing at her hair. Cradling the beloved body, she bathes his wounds with tears, mingling their drops with blood. Planting kisses on his cold face, she cries out 'Pyramus, what misfortune has robbed me of you? Pyramus, answer me! Your dearest Thisbe calls to you: obey me, lift your fallen head!' At Thisbe's name, Pyramus raised his eyes, darkening with death, and having looked at her, buried them again in darkness.'

'When she recognised her veil and saw the ivory scabbard without its sword, she said, "Unhappy boy, your own hand, and your love, have destroyed you! I too have a firm enough hand for once, and I, too, love. It will give me strength in my misfortune. I will follow you to destruction, and they will say I was a most pitiful friend and companion to you. He, who could only be removed from me by death, death cannot remove. Nevertheless I ask this for both of us, in uttering these words, O our poor parents, mine and his, do not deny us the right to be laid in one tomb, we whom certain love, and the strangest hour have joined. And you, the tree, that now covers the one poor body with your branches, and soon will cover two, retain the emblems of our death, and always carry your fruit darkened in mourning, a remembrance of the blood of us both."

Saying this, and placing the point under her heart, she fell forward onto the blade, still warm with his blood. Then her prayer moved the gods, and stirred her parents' feelings, for the colour of the berry is blackish-red, when fully ripened, and what was left from the funeral pyres rests in a single urn.'

Galatea the Sea Nymph

XIII:705-737 Aeneas's journey to Sicily

From there, remembering that they, the Teucrians, came originally from the blood of Teucer, they made for his Crete. But, unable to endure Jove's plague, they left Crete with its hundred cities, hoping to reach the harbours of Ausonian Italy. Tempests raged, and tossed the heroes on stormy seas, and taking refuge in the treacherous harbour of the Strophades, they were terrified by the harpy, Aëllo.

Now they were carried past Dulichium's anchorage; past Same, and the houses of Neritos; and Ithaca, cunning Ulysses's kingdom. They saw Ambracia, famous now for its Apollo of Actium, once contended over by quarreling gods; and saw the image of the judge who was turned to stone; Dodona's land with its oracular oaks; and Chaonia's bay, where the sons of Munichus, the Molossian king, escaped the impious flames on new-found wings.

Next they headed for the country of the Phaeacians, set with rich orchards, and touched at Buthrotus in Epirus, a miniature Troy, ruled by Helenus, the Trojan seer. From there, certain of their future, all of which Helenus, Priam's son predicted, with reliable warnings, they entered Sicilian waters. Three tongues of this land run down into the sea. Of these Pachynos faces the rainy south, Lilybaeon fronts the soft western breeze, and Peloros looks to the northern Bears that never touch the waves. Here the Teucrians came, and rowing, with a favourable tide, their fleet reached the sandy beach of Zancle, as night fell.

Scylla attacks from the right-hand coast, restless Charybdis from the left. The latter sucks down and spits out ships she has caught: the former has a girdle of savage dogs round her dark belly. She has a girl's face, and if the tales of poets are not all false, she was once a girl also. Many suitors wooed her, whom she rejected, and she would go and tell the ocean nymphs, being well loved by the ocean nymphs, of the thwarted desires of young men.

XIII:738-788 Acis and Galatea

Once while Galatea let Scylla comb her hair, she addressed these words to her, sighing often: 'At least, O virgin Scylla, you are not wooed by a relentless breed of men: and you can reject them without fear, as you do. But I, whose father is Nereus, and whose mother is sea-green Doris, I, though protected by a crowd of sisters, was not allowed to flee the love of Polyphemus, the Cyclops, except through sorrow', and tears stopped the sound of her voice. When the girl had wiped away the tears with her white fingers, and the goddess was comforted, she said: 'Tell me, O dearest one: do not hide the cause of your sadness (I can be so trusted).' The Nereid answered Crateis's daughter in these words: 'Acis was the son of Faunus and the nymph Symaethis, a great delight to his father and mother, but more so even to me, since he and I alone were united. He was handsome, and having marked his sixteenth birthday, a faint down covered his tender cheeks. I sought him, the Cyclops sought me, endlessly. If you asked, I could not say which was stronger in me, hatred of Cyclops or love of Acis, both of them were equally strong.

Oh! Gentle Venus, how powerful your rule is over us! How that ruthless creature, terrifying even to the woods themselves, whom no stranger has ever seen with impunity, who scorns mighty Olympus and its gods, how he feels what love is, and, on fire, captured by powerful desire, forgets his flocks and caves. Now Polyphemus, you care for your appearance, and are anxious to please, now you comb your bristling hair with a rake, and are pleased to cut your shaggy beard with a reaping hook, and to gaze at your savage face in the water and compose its

expression. Your love of killing, your fierceness, and your huge thirst for blood, end, and the ships come and go in safety.

Meanwhile, Telemus the augur, Telemus, the son of Eurymus, whom no flight of birds could deceive, came to Sicilian Mount Aetna, addressed grim Polyphemus, and said: "Ulysses will take from you, that single eye in the middle of your forehead." He laughed, and answered: "O most foolish of seers, you are wrong, another, a girl, has already taken it." So he scorned the true warning, given in vain, and weighed the coast down, walking with giant tread, or returned weary to his dark cave.

A wedge-shaped hillside, ending in a long spur, projects into the sea (the waves of the ocean wash round it on both sides). The fierce Cyclops climbed to it, and sat at its apex, and his woolly flocks, shepherd-less, followed. Then laying at his feet the pine trunk he used as a staff, fit to carry a ship's rigging, he lifted his panpipes made of a hundred reeds. The whole mountain felt the pastoral notes, and the waves felt them too. Hidden by a rock, I was lying in my Acis's arms, and my ears caught these words, and, having heard them, I remembered:'

XIII:789-869 The song of Polyphemus

'Galatea, whiter than the snowy privet petals,
taller than slim alder, more flowery than the meadows,
friskier than a tender kid, more radiant than crystal,
smoother than the shells, polished, by the endless tides;
more welcome than the summer shade, or the sun in winter,
showier than the tall plane-tree, fleeter than the hind;
more than ice sparkling, sweeter than grapes ripening,
softer than the swan's-down, or the milk when curdled,
lovelier, if you did not flee, than a watered garden.
Galatea, likewise, wilder than an untamed heifer,
harder than an ancient oak, trickier than the sea;
tougher than the willow-twigs, or the white vine branches,
firmer than these cliffs, more turbulent than a river,
vainer than the vaunted peacock, fiercer than the fire;
more truculent than a pregnant bear, pricklier than thistles,
deafer than the waters, crueller than a trodden snake;
oh, what I wish I could alter in you, most of all, is this:
that you are swifter than the deer, driven by loud barking,
swifter even than the winds, and the passing breeze.

But if you knew me well, you would regret your flight, and you would condemn your own efforts yourself, and hold to me: half of the mountain is mine, and the deep caves in the natural rock, where winter is not felt nor the midsummer sun. There are apples that weigh down the branches, golden and purple grapes on the trailing vines. Those, and these, I keep for you. You will pick ripe strawberries born in the woodland shadows, in autumn cherries and plums, not just the juicy blue-purples, but also the large yellow ones, the colour of fresh bees'-wax. There will be no lack of fruit from the wild strawberry trees, nor from the tall chestnuts: every tree will be there to serve you.

This whole flock is mine, and many are wandering the valleys as well, many hidden by the woods, many penned in the caves. If you asked me I could not tell you how many there are: a poor man counts his flocks. You can see, you need not merely believe me, how they can hardly move their legs with their full udders. There are newborn lambs

in the warn sheepfolds, and kids too, of the same age, in other pens, and I always have snow-white milk: some of it kept for drinking, and some with rennet added to curdle it.

You will not have vulgar gifts or easily found pleasures, such as leverets, or does, or kids, or paired doves, or a nest from the treetops. I came upon twin cubs of a shaggy bear that you can play with: so alike you can hardly separate them. I came upon them and I said: "I shall keep these for my mistress."

Now Galatea, only lift your shining head from the dark blue sea: come, do not scorn my gifts. Lately, I examined myself, it's true, and looked at my reflection in the clear water, and, seeing my self, it pleased me. Look how large I am: Jupiter, in the sky, since you are accustomed to saying some Jove or other rules there, has no bigger a body. Luxuriant hair hangs over my face, and shades my shoulders like a grove. And do not consider it ugly for my whole body to be bristling with thick prickly hair. A tree is ugly without its leaves: a horse is ugly unless a golden mane covers its neck: feathers hide the birds: their wool becomes the sheep: a beard and shaggy hair befits a man's body. I only have one eye in the middle of my forehead, but it is as big as a large shield. Well? Does great Sol not see all this from the sky? Yet Sol's orb is unique.

Added to that my father, Neptune, rules over your waters: I give you him as a father-in-law. Only have pity, and listen to my humble prayers! I, who scorn Jove and his heaven and his piercing lightning bolt, submit to you alone: I fear you, Nereid your anger is fiercer than lightning. And I could bear this contempt of yours more patiently, if you fled from everyone. But why, rejecting Cyclops, love Acis, and prefer Acis's embrace to mine? Though he is pleased with himself, and, what I dislike, pleases you too, Galatea, let me just have a chance at him. Then he will know I am as strong as I am big! I'll tear out his entrails while he lives, rend his limbs and scatter them over the fields, and over your ocean, (so he can join you!) For I am on fire, and, wounded, I burn with a fiercer flame, and I seem to bear Aetna with all his violent powers sunk in my breast, yet you, Galatea, are unmoved.'

XIII:870-897 Acis is turned into a river-god

'With such useless complaints he rose (for I saw it all) and as a bull that cannot stay still, furious when the cow is taken from it, he wanders through the woods and glades. Not anticipating such a thing, without my knowing, he saw me, and saw Acis. "I see you," he cried, "and I'll make this the last celebration of your love." His voice was as loud as an angry Cyclops's voice must be: Aetna shook with the noise. And I, terrified, plunged into the nearby waters. My hero, son of Symaethis, had turned his back, and ran, crying: "Help me, I beg you, Galatea! Forefathers, help me, admit me to your kingdom or I die!"

Cyclops followed him and hurled a rock wrenched from the mountain, and though only the farthest corner of the stone reached him, it still completely buried Acis. Then I, doing the only thing that fate allowed me, caused Acis to assume his ancestral powers. From the rock, crimson blood seeped out, and in a little while its redness began to fade, became the colour of a river at first swollen by rain, gradually clearing. Then the rock, that Polyphemus had hurled, cracked open, and a tall green reed sprang from the fissure, and the mouth of a chamber in the rock echoed with leaping waters, and (a marvel) suddenly a youth stood, waist-deep in the water, his fresh horns wreathed with rushes. It was Acis, except that he was larger, and his face dark blue: yet it was still Acis, changed to a river-god, and his waters still retain his former name.