

Innumerable, fled, and the charmed snakes,
 The train of beasts, Orpheus' glory, followed.
 The Maenads stole the show. Their bloody hands
 Were turned against the poet; they came thronging
 Like birds who see an owl, wandering in daylight;
 They bayed him down, as in the early morning,
 Hounds circle the doomed stag beside the game-pits.
 They rushed him, threw the wands, wreathed with green
 leaves,

Not meant for such a purpose; some threw clods,
 Some branches torn from the tree, and some threw stones,
 And they found fitter weapons for their madness.
 Not far away there was a team of oxen
 Plowing the field, and near them farmers, digging
 Reluctant earth, and sweating over their labor,
 Who fled before the onrush of this army
 Leaving behind them hoe and rake and mattock
 And these the women grabbed, and slew the oxen
 Who lowered horns at them in brief defiance
 And were torn limb from limb, and then the women
 Rushed back to murder Orpheus, who stretched out
 His hands in supplication, and whose voice,
 For the first time, moved no one. They struck him down,
 And through those lips to which the rocks had listened,
 To which the hearts of savage beasts responded,
 His spirit found its way to winds and air.

The birds wept for him, and the throng of beasts,
 The flinty rocks, the trees which came so often
 To hear his song, all mourned. The trees, it seemed,
 Shook down their leaves, as if they might be women
 Tearing their hair, and rivers, with their tears,
 Were swollen, and their naiads and their dryads
 Mourned in black robes. The poet's limbs lay scattered
 Where they were flung in cruelty or madness,
 But Hebrus River took the head and lyre

And as they floated down the gentle current
 The lyre made mournful sounds, and the tongue murmured
 In mournful harmony, and the banks echoed
 The strains of mourning. On the sea, beyond
 Their native stream, they came at last to Lesbos
 And grounded near the city of Methymna.
 And here a serpent struck at the head, still dripping
 With sea-spray, but Apollo came and stopped it,
 Freezing the open jaws to stone, still gaping.
 And Orpheus' ghost fled under the earth, and knew
 The places he had known before, and, haunting
 The fields of the blessed, found Eurydice
 And took her in his arms, and now together
 And side by side they wander, or Orpheus follows
 Or goes ahead, and may, with perfect safety,
 Look back for his Eurydice.

But Bacchus
 Demanded punishment for so much evil.
 Mourning his singer's loss, he bound those women,
 All those who saw the murder, in a forest,
 Twisted their feet to roots, and thrust them deep
 Into unyielding earth. As a bird struggles
 Caught in a fowler's snare, and flaps and flutters
 And draws its bonds the tighter by its struggling,
 Even so the Thracian women, gripped by the soil,
 Fastened in desperate terror, writhed and struggled,
 But the roots held. They looked to see their fingers,
 Their toes, their nails, and saw the bark come creeping
 Up the smooth legs; they tried to smite their thighs
 With grieving hands, and struck on oak; their breasts
 Were oak, and oak their shoulders, and their arms
 You well might call long branches and be truthful.

The Story of Midas

And even this was not enough for Bacchus.
 He left those fields, and with a worthier band

He sought the vineyards of his own Timolus
 And Pactolus, a river not yet gold
 Nor envied for its precious sands. The throng
 He always had surrounded him, the satyrs,
 The Bacchanals; Silenus, though, was missing.
 The Phrygian rustics found him, staggering
 Under the weight of years, and maybe also
 From more than too much wine, bound him with wreaths
 And led him to King Midas. Now this king
 Together with the Athenian Eumolpus
 Had learned the rites of Bacchic lore from Orpheus.
 And therefore, since he recognized a comrade,
 A brother in the lodge, he gave a party
 For ten long days and nights, and then, rejoicing,
 Came to the Lydian fields and gave Silenus
 Back to his precious foster son. And Bacchus,
 Happy and grateful, and meaning well, told Midas
 To make his choice of anything he wanted.
 And Midas, never too judicious, answered:
 "Grant that whatever I touch may turn to gold!"
 Bacchus agreed, gave him the ruinous gift,
 Sorry the monarch had not chosen better.
 So Midas went his cheerful way, rejoicing
 In his own bad luck, and tried to test the promise
 By touching this and that. It all was true,
 He hardly dared believe it! From an oak-tree
 He broke a green twig loose: the twig was golden.
 He picked a stone up from the ground; the stone
 Paled with light golden color; he touched a clod,
 The clod became a nugget. Awns of grain
 Were a golden harvest; if he picked an apple
 It seemed a gift from the Hesperides.
 He placed his fingers on the lofty pillars
 And saw them gleam and shine. He bathed his hands
 In water, and the stream was golden rain
 Like that which came to Danae. His mind

Could scarcely grasp his hopes—all things were golden,
 Or would be, at his will! A happy man,
 He watched his servants set a table before him
 With bread and meat. He touched the gift of Ceres
 And found it stiff and hard; he tried to bite
 The meat with hungry teeth, and where the teeth
 Touched food they seemed to touch on golden ingots.
 He mingled water with the wine of Bacchus;
 It was molten gold that trickled through his jaws.

Midas, astonished at his new misfortune,
 Rich man and poor man, tries to flee his riches
 Hating the favor he had lately prayed for.
 No food relieves his hunger; his throat is dry
 With burning thirst; he is tortured, as he should be,
 By the hateful gold. Lifting his hands to Heaven,
 He cries: "Forgive me, father! I have sinned.
 Have mercy upon me, save me from this loss
 That looks so much like gain!" The gods are kind,
 And Bacchus, since he owned his fault, forgave him,
 Took back the gift. "You need not be forever
 Smear'd with that foolish color: go to the stream
 That flows by Sardis, take your way upstream
 Into the Lydian hills, until you find
 The tumbling river's source. There duck your head
 And body under the foaming white of the fountain,
 And wash your sin away." The king obeyed him,
 And the power of the golden touch imbued the water,
 So that even now the fields grow hard and yellow
 If that vein washes over them to flood
 Their fields with the water of the touch of gold.

Midas Never Learns

Now Midas, hating wealth, haunted the forests,
 The fields, and worshipped Pan, who has his dwelling
 In the mountain caves. But Midas still was stupid,

And once again his foolish wits were destined
 To do their master damage. Where Timolus
 Looks out to sea, towering high, one slope
 Falling to Sardis and the other slanting
 Toward little Hypaepa, Pan was singing tunes
 Tossing them off to the soft nymphs, and warbling
 A trill or two on the reeds joined with wax,
 Remarking that the music of Apollo
 Was poor beside his own, and offering challenge
 To an unequal contest, with Timolus
 To be the umpire. So the ancient judge,
 Seated on his own mountain, shook his ears
 Loose from the trees. Around his dark-blue hair
 An oaken chaplet twined; acorns hung down
 Around his hollow temples. He looked at Pan,
 "The judge is ready," he said, and Pan made music
 On the rustic reeds, and the barbaric song
 Delighted Midas utterly—it so happened
 Midas was listening. Then old Timolus
 Turned to Apollo, and his forests followed
 As he inclined his gaze. Apollo's hair,
 Golden, was wreathed with laurel of Parnassus,
 His mantle, dipped in Tyrian crimson, swept
 Along the ground. His lyre, inlaid with jewels,
 With Indian ivory, his left hand held;
 His right hand held the plectrum. You could tell
 The artist from his bearing. With his thumb
 He plucked the strings, and charmed by that sweet music,
 Timolus ordered Pan to lower his reeds,
 Submissive to the lyre, and all approved
 The judgment of the holy god of the mountain,
 All except Midas, who began to argue,
 Calling it most unfair. Such stupid ears
 Apollo thought, were surely less than human,
 And so he made them longer, stuffed them full
 Of gray and shaggy hair, and made their base

Unstable, giving them the power of motion.
 The rest of him was human; this one feature
 Alone was punished, and he wore the ears
 Of the slow-going jackass. So, disfigured,
 Ashamed, he tried to hide them with a turban,
 But when he had his hair cut, then his barber
 Saw, dared not tell, and wanted to, and could not
 Keep matters to himself, no more than barbers
 Today can do, and so he dug a hole
 Deep in the ground, and went and whispered in it
 What kind of ears King Midas had. He buried
 The evidence of his voice, filled up the hole,
 Sneaked silently away. But a thick growth
 Of whispering reeds began to grow there; these,
 At the year's end full-grown, betrayed the sower,
 For when a light breeze stirred them, they would whisper
Midas has asses' ears! You can still hear them.

The Building of the Walls of Troy

So, satisfied, Latona's son left Timolus,
 Borne through the liquid air, this side of Helle,
 The narrow sea, and landed on the plain
 Midway between two capes, where an old altar
 Sacred to Jove arose, Jove the All-Voicer,
 And there Apollo saw Laomedon
 Building the walls of his new city, Troy,
 And saw the work was hard, and going slowly,
 Demanding no small resource. He and Neptune,
 The trident-bearing sire of swelling Ocean,
 Assumed the form of men, and built the walls,
 Payment in gold contracted for and promised.
 There stood the work. But King Laomedon
 Denied his obligation, adding lies,
 Swearing he never agreed to such a bargain.
 "Still, you will pay!" the sea-god roared, and loosed
 His waters over the shore of that stingy country.