

METAMORPHOSES 11.1-19 : DEATH OF ORPHEUS (A PARAPHRASE)

BRIAN LAM

His song takes up whole forests, the spirits of beasts;
he, Thrace's vate, leads even rock on rock in train.
Behold here!—Thrace's ninnies bewildering from the hill
perceive him, breast and bosom loosening under wild hides.
He plays the song to the beaten chords.

One woman, thin air about her ruffled hair, shot out:
“Behold!—behold!—the man who will not love us!”
But the spear she hastened at his vowels, hurled at his face
and at Apollo's art—jotted gentle on the skin like soft new leaf.
No wound, no arrowhead, now brush.

You, second woman, flung your stone through the strange
canted air of lyre and voice; and for so much furious mission
the dumb thing dropped its force at his feet, as if weak-kneed
at prayer—but your war, your rash sisters are more than reason:
Fury herself reigns in the night of measure.

His song wanted mastery of them all—but in that thick thrall
of shrieks, of shattered Berecyntian pipes, under the round drum's
shaking thunder, before the rushing beating chests and fists—Bacchus
in ululation, Bacchus in ululation—his fine strung sound was none at all.
The rocks blushed to have his muffled blood.