

METAMORPHOSES 10.483-500 : MYRRHA
(A PARAPHRASE)
BRIAN LAM

“O you spirits who candidly receive what is confessed:
 I will meet whatever price I must, woeful but deserved.
 Indeed if by living on, I violate the living here—and if
 my dying gives violation to others dead—then throw me
 clear of either kingdom! Know to grant me neither
 death nor added life. You must transform me.”

Somewhere she found her god who opened up her prayer,
 as our last wishes surely have that power.

Still begging,
 earth crept over her. First one foot, one leg—then root
 extends, curves down crooked, busting toes—anchoring
 her lengthened trunk, her bones increase in strength.

But one thing did not change, though—the very centre.
 As for her rest, she bled now sap, forearm shot into
 branch—and from each finger came new shoots.
 Feminine skin coarsens to bark—already she was tree,
 hardly woman. Round womb straightens in her rocket vertigo,
 two breasts flatten out to nothing—soft neck at point of burial.
 All the while Myrrha could not wait. In fact she met the pith
 head-on, relaxing farther back into the change, turned her face
 against the leaping rigour. Although she let go the old self
 with the old form, she still cries drops that drip down, warm.

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.