

that Fortune has set before me, and now my great spirit will go beneath the earth. I have founded a glorious city and lived to see the building of my own walls. I have avenged my husband and punished his enemy who was my brother. I would have been happy, more than happy, if only Trojan keels had never grounded on our shores.' She then buried her face for a moment in the bed and cried: 'We shall die unavenged. But let us die. This, this, is how it pleases me to go down among the shades. Let the Trojan who knows no pity gaze his fill upon this fire from the high seas and take with him the omen of my death.'

So she spoke and while speaking fell upon the sword. Her attendants saw her fall. They saw the blood foaming on the blade and staining her hands, and filled the high walls of the palace with their screaming. Rumour ran raving like a Bacchant through the stricken city. The palace rang with lamentation and groaning and the wailing of women and the heavens gave back the sound of mourning. It was as though the enemy were within the gates and the whole of Carthage or old Tyre were falling with flames raging and rolling over the roofs of men and gods. Anna heard and was beside herself. She came rushing in terror through the middle of the crowd, tearing her face and beating her breast, calling out her sister's name as she lay dying: 'So this is what it meant? It was all to deceive your sister! This was the purpose of the pyre and the flames and the altars! You have abandoned me. I do not know how to begin to reproach you. Did you not want your sister's company when you were dying? You could have called me to share your fate and we would both have died in the same moment of the same grief. To think it was my hands that built the pyre, and my voice that called upon the gods of our fathers, so that you could be so cruel as to lay yourself down here to die without me. It is not only yourself you have destroyed, but also your sister and your people, their leaders who came with you from Sidon and the city you have built. Give me water. I shall wash her wounds and catch any last lingering breath with my lips.'

Saying these words, she had climbed to the top of the pyre and was now holding her dying sister to her breast and cherishing her, sobbing as she dried the dark blood with her own dress. Once more Dido tried to raise her heavy eyes, but failed. The wound hissed round the sword beneath her breast. Three times she raised herself on her elbow. Three times she fell back on the bed. With wavering eyes she looked for light in the heights of heaven and groaned when she found it.

All-powerful Juno then took pity on her long anguish and difficult death and sent Iris down from Olympus to free her struggling spirit and loosen the fastenings of her limbs. For since she was dying not by the decree of Fate or by her own deserts but pitifully and before her time, in a sudden blaze of madness, Proserpina had not yet taken a lock of her golden hair or consigned her to Stygian Orcus. So Iris, bathed in dew, flew down on her saffron wings, trailing all her colours across the sky opposite the sun, and hovered over Dido's head to say: 'I am commanded to take this lock of hair as a solemn offering to Dis, and now I free you from your body.'

With these words she raised her hand and cut the hair, and as she cut, all warmth went out of Dido's body and her life passed into the

## PUBLIUS OVIDIUS NASO ("OVID")

### *From the Heroides*<sup>†</sup>

[Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.) was widely admired and imitated throughout the Middle Ages, his popularity at times rivaling that of Virgil. Although best known for the *Metamorphoses*, a catalogue of myths united by the theme of change, his satiric poems on love and seduction (e.g., the *Amores*, the *Ars amatoria*, and the *Remedia amoris*) also influenced medieval writers. Ovid's writings on romantic love were a source for the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, a love vision that was one of the most important literary influences on Chaucer's work.]

Ovid's *Heroides* ("Heroines") presents a series of letters written from the perspective of famous mythological women, to the husbands and lovers who have deserted them. Each letter, or monologue, poignantly explores its writer's character, allowing Ovid to retell the most famous classical myths from a new, female perspective.

The *Heroides*' influence on Chaucer is most apparent in the first book of the *House of Fame* and in the *Legend of Good Women*. In the latter work, Chaucer bases many of his stories of abandoned women on the laments invented by Ovid, though he takes pleasure as well in showing places where Ovid's versions are in tension with other literary treatments. For example, Chaucer's account of the Carthaginian queen Dido, forsaken by Aeneas, owes much to Ovid's characterization, but also allows for a Virgilian point of view on the heroine's tragedy.]

#### *Dido to Aeneas*

[In *Heroides* 7, Dido addresses Aeneas, acknowledging his inevitable abandonment of her, yet pleading for him to remain with her in Carthage. She prays to Venus and to Love to have pity on her, and proceeds to warn Aeneas of the dangers of the sea, especially to those who have been unfaithful in love.]

And so, at fate's call, the white swan lets himself  
down in the water-soaked grasses by  
the Meander's shoreline to sing his last song;  
but I will not hope to move your heart  
5 with my prayer because the god opposes me.  
After the loss of all that is mine,  
good name, chastity of both body and soul,  
a loss of words is not important.  
But I ask again: are you still determined  
10 to abandon me to misery  
and permit both your ships and your promises  
to sail from this shore on the same wind?  
Aeneas, are you still determined to leave  
both your mooring and your solemn pledge

15 to seek a kingdom in remote Italy,  
 a place whose shores you have never seen?  
 Aren't you impressed by the new walls of Carthage  
 and the sceptre I've placed in your hand?  
 You have rejected what is done and insist  
 20 on pursuing some unfinished work.  
 I have given you a kingdom; still you seek,  
 through all the world, a land of your own.  
 Let us suppose you find the country you seek:  
 who would give it to you? Is there one  
 25 man who would trust a foreigner in his fields?  
 You must win another Dido's love,  
 you must give pledges to some other woman  
 and I know you will again be false.  
 How do you hope to found another city  
 30 like this so that you in a tower  
 can observe a people that belongs to you?  
 If all your wishes were granted now,  
 without any further delay, could you find  
 a wife who will love you as I have loved you?  
 35 Like devout incense thrown on smoking altars,  
 like wax torches tipped with sulphur, I  
 am burning with love: all day long and all night,  
 I desire nothing but Aeneas.  
 40 But Aeneas is not grateful; he rejects  
 my care for him. If I had no love  
 for him he could go and I would be willing.  
 But no matter how bad he might think  
 I am, I can never say that I hate him  
 45 but I will complain: he is unfaithful.  
 When my complaint has been said, I love him more.  
 Venus spare me, let me be his wife;  
 Brother, Love, change the hard heart of your brother  
 that he will do service in your camp.  
 50 If this cannot be, I who was first to love—  
 I say this without the slightest shame—  
 can supply the love that will kindle the fuel  
 for loving that he has within him.  
 But this is all delusions and lies, the dream  
 55 that hovers before me is not true;  
 his mother's heart does not beat in Aeneas.  
 You were conceived by rocks and mountains,  
 born of oaks on the high cliffs, of the savage  
 beasts, or of raging seas, such a sea  
 60 of hostile tides as now you can observe, tossed  
 by the winds, on which you will soon sail.  
 Where do you flee? The rising storm will stop you,  
 indeed, it will be my gift to you.  
 Look now, how the wind tosses the rolling waves.  
 65 What I had wanted to owe to you  
 I will owe to the winds of the storm because

winds and waves are more than just your soul.  
 My worth is not great enough for you to die  
 in fleeing from me on the high seas—  
 70 why can I not place a wrong value on you—  
 if you are able to risk dying  
 to be free of me, then you have paid too much  
 for this hatred you are indulging.  
 The winds must soon cease, and over the smooth waves  
 75 old Triton will drive his sky-born team.  
 Oh that you too might be so easily changed;  
 and so you shall be changed, unless you  
 are harder than the oak. Why does one who knows  
 the sea like you so trust the waters  
 80 whose power you have felt? When you have cast off  
 your mooring because the sea is good,  
 there will still remain much to fear from the sea.  
 It is right that this should be, for it  
 was from the sea, near Cythera, it is said,  
 85 that the naked mother of the Loves  
 came, and so one who has been unfaithful should  
 not tempt the waves that flow in that place.  
 I am doomed, but I fear that I will ruin  
 90 him who harmed me, that I will harm  
 him who harmed me, I fear my foe will be wrecked  
 at sea and be drowned. Aeneas live,  
 I pray it, for by living you will be hurt  
 more than you could be hurt by dying.  
 You will be well-known as the cause of my fate.  
 95 Imagine—may this be no omen—  
 that the storm has swept you up, what will you think?  
 You will think of me and your false tongue;  
 you will think of Dido forced to die because  
 100 one from Phrygia was unfaithful;  
 you will see the tears of your abandoned bride,  
 her shoulders bent in grief, hair undone,  
 all stained with blood. What is it that you gain now  
 to pay you enough that you can say,  
 105 'This was I justly owed, the gods forgive me,  
 as the thunderbolts are hurled at you?'  
 Wait a little, for your meanness and the sea's  
 to calm, for your safe voyage will be  
 your reward for waiting. Perhaps you  
 110 can ignore such things, still you must let  
 young Iulus live. You alone will have enough  
 if it is known that you caused my death.  
 What is Ascanius' guilt, or your Penates'  
 that they be worthy of such a fate?  
 Have they been saved from a burning city so  
 115 that now they can be lost in the sea?  
 But you are false. All this talk of your father

to escape the flames, is still more of your lies.

I was not first nor will I be last  
to feel the heavy burden of your deceit.

120

Do they ask about your son's mother?  
She was left dead and abandoned by her lord.

You told me that, and I should have known  
that you were only giving me fair notice.

125

Now, let me be burned as she was burned  
for such a punishment is very much less  
than the pain my crime should win for me.

And I am certain that your gods are angry  
for this is now the seventh winter

130

that you have been tormented by the harsh winds.  
The sea washed you up on my shore and  
I welcomed you to a safe refuge; hardly

knowing your name, I gave you my throne.  
I wish these gifts had been all, that everything  
else could be buried and forgotten.

135

That awful day, when a sudden storm came out  
of the blue sky and we took shelter

in a high-ceilinged cave, was my doom. I heard  
a voice, I thought it was a nymph's song

140

but it was the Eumenides shouting out  
a warning of the fate that was mine.  
Virtue lost, you may exact the penalty

which I owe to Sychaeus, I go  
in shame and misery to seek forgiveness.

145

His statue stands in a marble shrine  
among green branches and ribbons of white wool.

From that sacred place four times I heard  
a voice that I remember quite well faintly  
calling out to me, 'Elhissa, come.'

150

He calls me to his bed because I am his.  
I am late because I have confessed

my awful crime, I come in shame, forgive me.  
He who caused my fall was worthy and  
he makes my sin less hateful. It was my hope

155

that his divine mother and the weight  
of his old father would make a faithful son  
become for me a faithful husband.

If I have failed, my fault has a worthy cause;  
if he be true, I have no regret.

160

Now, near the end of life, my fate is unchanged  
and it will follow me to the end.

My husband's blood washed the altars of his house,  
my brother reaped the fruits of that crime.  
I was driven out of Tyre into exile

165

leaving both his ashes and my land.  
My enemy pursued me along hard paths;  
I reached this coast, having escaped both

my brother and the sea, and I thought these shores

the land that I gave you, faithless man.

170

I founded my city, I laid foundations  
on which huge walls would rise, exciting  
the jealous fears of the neighbouring kingdoms.

A stranger and a woman, I found

myself soon threatened by war. Quickly, I raised  
gates and prepared a hasty defence.

175

I have a thousand suitors, each one eyeing  
me with fondness and all complaining

because I prefer a foreigner. Tie me,  
give me to Iarbas of Gaetulia;

180

I would permit it. My brother might sprinkle  
his profane hand with my blood as it  
was sprinkled once with the blood of my husband.

Set aside your gods and holy things,  
your hand profanes them. An unholy right hand  
should never worship a deity.

185

If it was decreed that you worship  
these gods who escaped a city's flames,

it might well be that these same gods now regret  
the fate that let them escape those flames.  
But perhaps it is Dido, swollen with child,

190

whom you abandon with part of you.  
To the mother's fate must be added the child's,

you will cause your unborn child to die.  
Iulus' brother will soon die with his mother,  
one fate will take us both together.

195

'But the god has ordered this!' It is my wish  
he had prevented your coming here,  
that Trojan foot never had touched Punic soil.

Could this be the same god who led you  
to spend so many years on the harsh seas, tossed  
and tormented by the hostile winds?

Surely, you could more easily return straight  
to Pergamum, if it but remained  
thriving as it did when Hector was alive.

But the Simois of your fathers

205

is not what you seek, it is the Tiber's stream.  
You will land in that place a stranger

while the land you seek is so hidden from sight,  
so draws back from the keels of your ships,  
that you will never be able to approach

210

until you have become an old man.  
Stop this wandering! Choose me and my dowry—  
the riches of Pygmalion and

the people I brought to this place. Move Ilion  
to this safer Tyrian city,

215

take pleasure in a king's estate and divine  
rights that belong to a king's sceptre.  
If it is war for which you thirst, if Iulus

we shall find enemies for him to conquer.

220 Nothing will be lacking because we  
shall have here a place for both the laws of peace  
and a place for the display of arms.

I ask only this and by your mother pray,  
and by your brother's arrows and by

225 your divine companions, gods of Dardanus,  
may those Trojans you saved survive fate,  
may that awful war be your last misfortune,  
may Ascanius find joy at last

and may the bones of old Anchises find rest  
230 here in a peaceful grave. Only spare  
this house that has been given into your hands  
without condition. I ask no more.

You can accuse me of nothing more than love.

235 I do not come from Phthia nor  
and I a daughter of Mycenae; neither  
husband nor father ever fought you.

If some scruple prevents your calling me wife,  
then let me be merely your hostess.

240 Whatever you require of Dido, she will  
gladly do so long as she is yours.

Believe me, Aeneas, I know how the waves  
can break against these African shores.

They will let you sail or keep you here in port  
according to the times they decide.

245 When the wind is right you will raise the white sails,  
but then the seaweed may keep you here.

Trust me to watch the skies and guess the weather;  
I will see that you get underway.

250 Even if it were your desire to stay, then  
I myself will not let you remain.

Your sailors need rest and your fleet needs repair:  
shattered by storms, it is not ready.

By your former kindness to me, by that debt  
which I will owe you after marriage,

255 give me just a little time until the sea  
and my love for you have both grown calm,  
while with time and courage I acquire the strength  
to bear up bravely in my sadness.

260 But if you will not listen to me, then with  
my own hands I will pour my life out.

You have been so cruel and are cruel to me now;  
Soon, I will be able to escape.

You should see my face while I write this letter:  
a Trojan knife nestles in my lap;

265 tears fall from my cheeks on its hammered steel blade  
and soon it will be stained with my blood.

How fitting that this knife was your gift to me,  
for death will not diminish my wealth.

My heart has already been torn by your love

270 another wound will hardly matter.

Anna, my sister; you, my sister, wretched  
with the knowledge of my shameful guilt:  
too soon, you must give my ashes their last grace.

275 When I have been consumed by the flames,  
do not write, 'Elissa, wife of Sychaeus',  
but in the marble of my tomb, carve:

'From Aeneas came a knife and the cause of death,  
from Dido herself came the blow that left her dead.'

## PUBLIUS OVIDIUS NASO ("OVID")

### *From the Metamorphoses*<sup>†</sup>

[Ovid is best remembered for the *Metamorphoses*, a collection of the greatest tales in Greco-Roman mythology, linked by the common theme of transformation. The *Metamorphoses* was used as a source of classical mythology from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages. In the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer retells the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. As well as introducing Morpheus, the god of sleep to whom Chaucer's narrator prays for rest, Ovid's tale of a mourning spouse sets the tone for Chaucer's vision of a Knight grieving over the loss of his lady.]

### *[The Story of Ceyx and Alcyone]*

[In Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, King Ceyx decides to sail to Apollo's temple at Claros to consult the oracle. Fearing that he will drown, his wife, Queen Alcyone, begs him not to go; she tells him that, even though she is the daughter of Aeolus, god of the winds, this connection will not save him from danger. Despite her misgivings, Ceyx sets/sail. His ship is soon caught in a violent storm and breaks apart.]

A whirlwind breaking in destroys the mast  
and wrecks the rudder too; now the last wave,  
790 like a conqueror rejoicing in his spoils,  
rears up and looks/down on the lesser waves,  
and no more lightly than if one could tear  
Mount Athos and Mount Pindus from their seats  
and haul them both into the open sea,  
that wave came crashing down upon the ship,  
and by its weight and overwhelming force,  
plunged it right to the bottom; with it went

<sup>†</sup> From the *Metamorphoses*, translated by Charles Martin (New York: Norton, 2004), 393–401, 408–09. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. The translator's notes have been