

English translation of *Ovide moralisé*, Myrrha's transformation

Lines 1900-1987

Myrrha fled and he [Cinyras] hunted her, but in the end he lost her trail because of the darkness of the night. Myrrha escaped, then fled. She went so far that she came to Arabia. In the ninth month she entered the Sabaean kingdom. She was so weary/wretched from her suffering and from her belly, that she could no longer bear it [her child]. She stopped and remained in Saba. She hates the life that sustains her, but she fears the peril of death. She sighs and weeps tenderly. She repents greatly in her heart.

She begs for mercy for her sin: “God, if you ever had pity on anyone who asked for mercy and who rejected their sin, help this wretched sinner. It is a great sorrow that I am alive for so long. It seems to me that I have done so much evil/wrongdoing. So that I corrupt neither the dead nor the living with my wickedness or the stain of my shame, take my life from me without me dying. Truly, I want to suffer penitence to atone for my sins. Change for me my form and my body.”

There was never a sinner so evil, who had committed so many sins and evils, who, if they begged for mercy with a good heart, would not find mercy in God. Myrrha sought mercy. It was not lacking. Before she had even finished her prayer, the earth opened up beneath her, covering her feet and legs. I do not know why I would prolong my subject matter or delay describing her transformation: she was transformed more quickly than I could describe it. Her bones were transformed into wood. Her marrow/essence did not change. Her blood transformed into sap. Her arms and her fingers became branches: the gods assisted it, those who demonstrated their power through her. Her skin was transformed into bark, which has now covered her breast: only her face remained uncovered, that the bark wanted to cover up. She could not stand it any longer. It seemed to her that it was taking too long. She bent her

face towards the bark, then she put it inside [the bark] and hid. She lost both her body and her mind. Nevertheless she still cries drop by drop. The tears that drip from the tree and the tree itself were called “myrrh”. Now it will always be spoken of.

The child conceived in sorrow grew so much beneath the bark that he came to term. He sought for a way to leave that place but could not find one. The tree needed to split and part, so that the child could be born. Nymphs came to his birth, they delivered him and raised him and washed him with myrrh. The child was very beautiful, he was so noble in his body and his face that even Envy should praise him. Anyone who saw him would think that he resembled the god of love, if their clothes did not distinguish them. Much changes, much alters with time, which transforms all things. Nothing compares to its speed. The child who was conceived from sorrow and in disloyalty, the son of his sister, grandson of his father, who not long ago was a new-born beneath the tree, was in little time a young man, more pleasing and beautiful than any other. The young man’s name was Adonis, and he was of great renown.