

Ovid, *The Metamorphoses* (from Book One)
Translated by Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et
al.

The Creation of the World

Of bodies chang'd to various forms, I sing:
Ye Gods, from whom these miracles did spring,
Inspire my numbers with celestial heat;
'Till I my long laborious work compleat:
And add perpetual tenour to my rhimes,
Deduc'd from Nature's birth, to Caesar's times.
Before the seas, and this terrestrial ball,
And Heav'n's high canopy, that covers all,
One was the face of Nature; if a face:
Rather a rude and indigested mass:
A lifeless lump, unfashion'd, and unfram'd,
Of jarring seeds; and justly Chaos nam'd.
No sun was lighted up, the world to view;
No moon did yet her blunted horns renew:
Nor yet was Earth suspended in the sky,
Nor pois'd, did on her own foundations lye:
Nor seas about the shores their arms had thrown;
But earth, and air, and water, were in one.
Thus air was void of light, and earth unstable,
And water's dark abyss unnavigable.
No certain form on any was imprest;
All were confus'd, and each disturb'd the rest.
For hot and cold were in one body fixt;
And soft with hard, and light with heavy mixt.

But God, or Nature, while they thus contend,
To these intestine discords put an end:
Then earth from air, and seas from earth were driv'n,
And grosser air sunk from aethereal Heav'n.
Thus disembroil'd, they take their proper place;
The next of kin, contiguously embrace;
And foes are sunder'd, by a larger space.
The force of fire ascended first on high,
And took its dwelling in the vaulted sky:
Then air succeeds, in lightness next to fire;
Whose atoms from unactive earth retire.
Earth sinks beneath, and draws a num'rous throng
Of pondrous, thick, unwieldy seeds along.
About her coasts, unruly waters roar;
And rising, on a ridge, insult the shore.
Thus when the God, whatever God was he,
Had form'd the whole, and made the parts agree,
That no unequal portions might be found,
He moulded Earth into a spacious round:
Then with a breath, he gave the winds to blow;
And bad the congregated waters flow.
He adds the running springs, and standing lakes;
And bounding banks for winding rivers makes.
Some part, in Earth are swallow'd up, the most
In ample oceans, disembogu'd, are lost.
He shades the woods, the vallies he restrains
With rocky mountains, and extends the plains.

And as five zones th' aethereal regions bind,
Five, correspondent, are to Earth assign'd:
The sun with rays, directly darting down,
Fires all beneath, and fries the middle zone:
The two beneath the distant poles, complain
Of endless winter, and perpetual rain.
Betwixt th' extreams, two happier climates hold
The temper that partakes of hot, and cold.
The fields of liquid air, inclosing all,
Surround the compass of this earthly ball:
The lighter parts lye next the fires above;
The grosser near the watry surface move:
Thick clouds are spread, and storms engender there,
And thunder's voice, which wretched mortals fear,
And winds that on their wings cold winter bear.
Nor were those blustering brethren left at large,
On seas, and shores, their fury to discharge:
Bound as they are, and circumscrib'd in place,
They rend the world, resistless, where they pass;
And mighty marks of mischief leave behind;
Such is the rage of their tempestuous kind.
First Eurus to the rising morn is sent
(The regions of the balmy continent);
And Eastern realms, where early Persians run,
To greet the blest appearance of the sun.
Westward, the wanton Zephyr wings his flight;
Pleas'd with the remnants of departing light:
Fierce Boreas, with his off-spring, issues forth
T' invade the frozen waggon of the North.
While frowning Auster seeks the Southern sphere;
And rots, with endless rain, th' unwholsom year.

High o'er the clouds, and empty realms of wind,
The God a clearer space for Heav'n design'd;
Where fields of light, and liquid aether flow;
Purg'd from the pondrous dregs of Earth below.

Scarce had the Pow'r distinguish'd these, when streight
The stars, no longer overlaid with weight,
Exert their heads, from underneath the mass;
And upward shoot, and kindle as they pass,
And with diffusive light adorn their heav'nly place.
Then, every void of Nature to supply,
With forms of Gods he fills the vacant sky:
New herds of beasts he sends, the plains to share:
New colonies of birds, to people air:
And to their oozy beds, the finny fish repair.

A creature of a more exalted kind
Was wanting yet, and then was Man design'd:
Conscious of thought, of more capacious breast,
For empire form'd, and fit to rule the rest:
Whether with particles of heav'nly fire
The God of Nature did his soul inspire,
Or Earth, but new divided from the sky,
And, pliant, still retain'd th' aethereal energy:
Which wise Prometheus temper'd into paste,

And, mixt with living streams, the godlike image cast.

Thus, while the mute creation downward bend
Their sight, and to their earthly mother tend,
Man looks aloft; and with erected eyes
Beholds his own hereditary skies.
From such rude principles our form began;
And earth was metamorphos'd into Man.

The Golden Age

The golden age was first; when Man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew:
And, with a native bent, did good pursue.
Unforc'd by punishment, un-aw'd by fear,
His words were simple, and his soul sincere;
Needless was written law, where none oppress:
The law of Man was written in his breast:
No suppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
No court erected yet, nor cause was heard:
But all was safe, for conscience was their guard.
The mountain-trees in distant prospect please,
E're yet the pine descended to the seas:
E're sails were spread, new oceans to explore:
And happy mortals, unconcern'd for more,
Confin'd their wishes to their native shore.
No walls were yet; nor fence, nor mote, nor mound,
Nor drum was heard, nor trumpet's angry sound:
Nor swords were forg'd; but void of care and crime,
The soft creation slept away their time.
The teeming Earth, yet guiltless of the plough,
And unprovok'd, did fruitful stores allow:
Content with food, which Nature freely bred,
On wildings and on strawberries they fed;
Cornels and bramble-berries gave the rest,
And falling acorns furnish'd out a feast.
The flow'rs unsown, in fields and meadows reign'd:
And Western winds immortal spring maintain'd.
In following years, the bearded corn ensu'd
From Earth unask'd, nor was that Earth renew'd.
From veins of vallies, milk and nectar broke;
And honey sweating through the pores of oak.

The Silver Age

But when good Saturn, banish'd from above,
Was driv'n to Hell, the world was under Jove.
Succeeding times a silver age behold,
Excelling brass, but more excell'd by gold.
Then summer, autumn, winter did appear:
And spring was but a season of the year.
The sun his annual course obliquely made,
Good days contracted, and enlarg'd the bad.
Then air with sultry heats began to glow;
The wings of winds were clogg'd with ice and snow;
And shivering mortals, into houses driv'n,
Sought shelter from th' inclemency of Heav'n.
Those houses, then, were caves, or homely sheds;
With twining oziars fenc'd; and moss their beds.
Then ploughs, for seed, the fruitful furrows broke,

And oxen labour'd first beneath the yoke.

[Omitted: Bronze and Iron Ages. A race of giants then rebels against the gods, and Jupiter decides to wipe all life from the earth, at first by using fire. . . .]

Already had he toss'd the flaming brand;
And roll'd the thunder in his spacious hand;
Preparing to discharge on seas and land:
But stopt, for fear, thus violently driv'n,
The sparks should catch his axle-tree of Heav'n.
Remembring in the fates, a time when fire
Shou'd to the battlements of Heaven aspire,
And all his blazing worlds above shou'd burn;
And all th' inferior globe to cinders turn.
His dire artill'ry thus dismiss, he bent
His thoughts to some securer punishment:
Concludes to pour a watry deluge down;
And what he durst not burn, resolves to drown.

The northern breath, that freezes floods, he binds;
With all the race of cloud-dispelling winds:
The south he loos'd, who night and horror brings;
And fogs are shaken from his flaggy wings.
From his divided beard two streams he pours,
His head, and rheumy eyes distill in show'rs,
With rain his robe, and heavy mantle flow:
And lazy mists are lowring on his brow;
Still as he swept along, with his clenched fist
He squeez'd the clouds, th' imprison'd clouds resist:
The skies, from pole to pole, with peals resound;
And show'rs enlarg'd, come pouring on the ground.
Then, clad in colours of a various dye,
Junonian Iris breeds a new supply
To feed the clouds: impetuous rain descends;
The bearded corn beneath the burden bends:
Defrauded clowns deplore their perish'd grain;
And the long labours of the year are vain.

Nor from his patrimonial Heaven alone
Is Jove content to pour his vengeance down;
Aid from his brother of the seas he craves,
To help him with auxiliary waves.
The watry tyrant calls his brooks and floods,
Who rowl from mossie caves (their moist abodes);
And with perpetual urns his palace fill:
To whom in brief, he thus imparts his will.

Small exhortation needs; your pow'rs employ:
And this bad world, so Jove requires, destroy.
Let loose the reins to all your watry store:
Bear down the damms, and open ev'ry door.

The floods, by Nature enemies to land,
And proudly swelling with their new command,
Remove the living stones, that stopt their way,
And gushing from their source, augment the sea.
Then, with his mace, their monarch struck the ground;

With inward trembling Earth receiv'd the wound;
And rising streams a ready passage found.
Th' expanded waters gather on the plain:
They float the fields, and over-top the grain;
Then rushing onwards, with a sweepy sway,
Bear flocks, and folds, and lab'ring hinds away.
Nor safe their dwellings were, for, sap'd by floods,
Their houses fell upon their household Gods.
The solid piles, too strongly built to fall,
High o'er their heads, behold a watry wall:
Now seas and Earth were in confusion lost;
A world of waters, and without a coast.

One climbs a cliff; one in his boat is born:
And ploughs above, where late he sow'd his corn.
Others o'er chimney-tops and turrets row,
And drop their anchors on the meads below:
Or downward driv'n, they bruise the tender vine,
Or tost aloft, are knock'd against a pine.
And where of late the kids had cropt the grass,
The monsters of the deep now take their place.
Insulting Nereids on the cities ride,
And wond'ring dolphins o'er the palace glide.
On leaves, and masts of mighty oaks they brouze;
And their broad fins entangle in the boughs.
The frighted wolf now swims amongst the sheep;
The yellow lion wanders in the deep:
His rapid force no longer helps the boar:
The stag swims faster, than he ran before.
The fowls, long beating on their wings in vain,
Despair of land, and drop into the main.
Now hills, and vales no more distinction know;
And levell'd Nature lies oppress'd below.
The most of mortals perish in the flood:
The small remainder dies for want of food.

A mountain of stupendous height there stands
Betwixt th' Athenian and Boeotian lands,
The bound of fruitful fields, while fields they were,
But then a field of waters did appear:
Parnassus is its name; whose forky rise
Mounts thro' the clouds, and mates the lofty skies.
High on the summit of this dubious cliff,
Deucalion wafting, moor'd his little skiff.
He with his wife were only left behind
Of perish'd Man; they two were human kind.
The mountain nymphs, and Themis they adore,
And from her oracles relief implore.
The most upright of mortal men was he;
The most sincere, and holy woman, she.

When Jupiter, surveying Earth from high,
Beheld it in a lake of water lie,
That where so many millions lately liv'd,
But two, the best of either sex, surviv'd;
He loos'd the northern wind; fierce Boreas flies
To puff away the clouds, and purge the skies:
Serenely, while he blows, the vapours driv'n,

Discover Heav'n to Earth, and Earth to Heav'n.
The billows fall, while Neptune lays his mace
On the rough sea, and smooths its furrow'd face.
Already Triton, at his call, appears
Above the waves; a Tyrian robe he wears;
And in his hand a crooked trumpet bears.
The sovereign bids him peaceful sounds inspire,
And give the waves the signal to retire.
His writhen shell he takes; whose narrow vent
Grows by degrees into a large extent,
Then gives it breath; the blast with doubling sound,
Runs the wide circuit of the world around:
The sun first heard it, in his early east,
And met the rattling echos in the west.
The waters, listning to the trumpet's roar,
Obey the summons, and forsake the shore.

A thin circumference of land appears;
And Earth, but not at once, her visage rears,
And peeps upon the seas from upper grounds;
The streams, but just contain'd within their bounds,
By slow degrees into their channels crawl;
And Earth increases, as the waters fall.
In longer time the tops of trees appear,
Which mud on their dishonour'd branches bear.

At length the world was all restor'd to view;
But desolate, and of a sickly hue:
Nature beheld her self, and stood aghast,
A dismal desart, and a silent waste.

Which when Deucalion, with a piteous look
Beheld, he wept, and thus to Pyrrha spoke:
Oh wife, oh sister, oh of all thy kind
The best, and only creature left behind,
By kindred, love, and now by dangers joyn'd;
Of multitudes, who breath'd the common air,
We two remain; a species in a pair:
The rest the seas have swallow'd; nor have we
Ev'n of this wretched life a certainty.
The clouds are still above; and, while I speak,
A second deluge o'er our heads may break.
Shou'd I be snatcht from hence, and thou remain,
Without relief, or partner of thy pain,
How cou'dst thou such a wretched life sustain?
Shou'd I be left, and thou be lost, the sea
That bury'd her I lov'd, shou'd bury me.
Oh cou'd our father his old arts inspire,
And make me heir of his informing fire,
That so I might abolisht Man retrieve,
And perisht people in new souls might live.
But Heav'n is pleas'd, nor ought we to complain,
That we, th' examples of mankind, remain.
He said; the careful couple joyn their tears:
And then invoke the Gods, with pious prayers.
Thus, in devotion having eas'd their grief,
From sacred oracles they seek relief;
And to Cephysus' brook their way pursue:

The stream was troubled, but the ford they knew;
With living waters, in the fountain bred,
They sprinkle first their garments, and their head,
Then took the way, which to the temple led.
The roofs were all defil'd with moss, and mire,
The desert altars void of solemn fire.
Before the gradual, prostrate they ador'd;
The pavement kiss'd; and thus the saint implor'd.

O righteous Themis, if the Pow'rs above
By pray'rs are bent to pity, and to love;
If humane miseries can move their mind;
If yet they can forgive, and yet be kind;
Tell how we may restore, by second birth,
Mankind, and people desolated Earth.
Then thus the gracious Goddess, nodding, said;
Depart, and with your vestments veil your head:
And stooping lowly down, with losen'd zones,
Throw each behind your backs, your mighty mother's
bones.

Amaz'd the pair, and mute with wonder stand,
'Till Pyrrha first refus'd the dire command.
Forbid it Heav'n, said she, that I shou'd tear
Those holy reliques from the sepulcher.
They ponder'd the mysterious words again,
For some new sense; and long they sought in vain:
At length Deucalion clear'd his cloudy brow,
And said, the dark Aenigma will allow
A meaning, which, if well I understand,
From sacrilege will free the God's command:
This Earth our mighty mother is, the stones
In her capacious body, are her bones:
These we must cast behind. With hope, and fear,
The woman did the new solution hear:
The man diffides in his own augury,
And doubts the Gods; yet both resolve to try.
Descending from the mount, they first unbind
Their vests, and veil'd, they cast the stones behind:
The stones (a miracle to mortal view,
But long tradition makes it pass for true)
Did first the rigour of their kind expel,
And suppl'd into softness, as they fell;
Then swell'd, and swelling, by degrees grew warm;
And took the rudiments of human form.
Imperfect shapes: in marble such are seen,
When the rude chizzel does the man begin;
While yet the roughness of the stone remains,
Without the rising muscles, and the veins.
The sappy parts, and next resembling juice,
Were turn'd to moisture, for the body's use:
Supplying humours, blood, and nourishment;
The rest, too solid to receive a bent,
Converts to bones; and what was once a vein,
Its former name and Nature did retain.
By help of pow'r divine, in little space,
What the man threw, assum'd a manly face;
And what the wife, renew'd the female race.
Hence we derive our nature; born to bear

Laborious life; and harden'd into care.

The rest of animals, from teeming Earth
Produc'd, in various forms receiv'd their birth.
The native moisture, in its close retreat,
Digested by the sun's aetherial heat,
As in a kindly womb, began to breed:
Then swell'd, and quicken'd by the vital seed.
And some in less, and some in longer space,
Were ripen'd into form, and took a sev'ral face.
Thus when the Nile from Pharian fields is fled,
And seeks, with ebbing tides, his ancient bed,
The fat manure with heav'nly fire is warm'd;
And crusted creatures, as in wombs, are form'd;
These, when they turn the glebe, the peasants find;
Some rude, and yet unfinish'd in their kind:
Short of their limbs, a lame imperfect birth:
One half alive; and one of lifeless earth.

For heat, and moisture, when in bodies join'd,
The temper that results from either kind
Conception makes; and fighting 'till they mix,
Their mingled atoms in each other fix.
Thus Nature's hand the genial bed prepares
With friendly discord, and with fruitful wars.

From hence the surface of the ground, with mud
And slime besmear'd (the faeces of the flood),
Receiv'd the rays of Heav'n: and sucking in
The seeds of heat, new creatures did begin:
Some were of sev'ral sorts produc'd before,
But of new monsters, Earth created more.
Unwillingly, but yet she brought to light
Thee, Python too, the wondrous world to fright,
And the new nations, with so dire a sight:
So monstrous was his bulk, so large a space
Did his vast body, and long train embrace.
Whom Phoebus basking on a bank espy'd;
E're now the God his arrows had not try'd
But on the trembling deer, or mountain goat;
At this new quarry he prepares to shoot.
Though ev'ry shaft took place, he spent the store
Of his full quiver; and 'twas long before
Th' expiring serpent wallow'd in his gore.
Then, to preserve the fame of such a deed,
For Python slain, he Pythian games decreed.
Where noble youths for mastership shou'd strive,
To quoit, to run, and steeds, and chariots drive.
The prize was fame: in witness of renown
An oaken garland did the victor crown.
The laurel was not yet for triumphs born;
But every green alike by Phoebus worn,
Did, with promiscuous grace, his flowing locks adorn.