

Ovid
The Metamorphoses
(translated by Anthony S. Kline)

Below are passages relevant to *The Prophecy Keepers* Chapters Five and Six. For the rest, visit:

<http://etext.virginia.edu/latin/ovid/trans/Ovhome.htm>

In Chapter Five, the humans of Englafeld are cutting down dryads' trees. In retaliation, some of the dryads call forth Thearfian (Hunger) to punish the humans. Erys, Tate, and Eadgar are all based on Erysichthon, Tate is also based on Triopas, and Elah performs some of Ceres's action.

Bk VIII:725-776 Erysichthon fells Ceres's sacred oak tree

Mestra, Erysichthon's daughter, the wife of Autolycus, had no less power. Her father was a man scornful of the gods, who burnt no incense on their altars. Erysichthon, it is said, once violated the grove of Ceres with an axe, and desecrated the ancient woods with iron. Within them stood a great oak, massive with the years, a sacred grove in itself: strands of wool, wreaths of flowers and votive tablets surrounded it, evidence of prayers granted. Often beneath it the Dryads held their festive dances: often, also, linking hands, in line, they circled its trunk's circumference, its massive girth measuring fifteen arm's-lengths round. The other trees were not less far below it than the grass was far below all of them. Triopas's son would not hold back the blade, even for those reasons, commanding his servants to fell the sacred oak.

When he saw them hesitating at the order, the wretched man snatched the axe from one of them, saying: "Though this be, itself, the goddess, not just what the goddess loves, now its leafy crown will meet the earth." As he spoke, while he balanced the blade, for the slanting stroke, Ceres's oak-tree trembled all over and gave a sigh, and at the same time its acorns and its leaves began to whiten, and its long branches grew pale. And, when his impious hand made a gash in the trunk, blood poured out of its damaged bark, like the crimson tide from its severed neck, when the mighty bull falls, in sacrifice, before the altar.

All stood astonished, and one of them tried bravely to prevent the evil, and hinder the barbarous double-edged weapon. But the Thessalian glared at him, saying: "Here's the prize for your pious thought!" and swinging his blade at the man not the tree, struck his head from his trunk. He was hewing at the oak-tree repeatedly, when the sound of a voice came from inside the oak, chanting these words:

*"I am a nymph, most dear to Ceres,
under the surface of this wood,
who prophesy to you, as I die,
that punishment will follow blood:
out of my ruin, the only good."*

But he pursued his course of evil, and at last, weakened by innumerable blows, and dragged down by ropes, the tree fell, its weight cutting a swathe through the wood.'

Bk VIII:777-842 Ceres sends Famine to Erysichthon

'All her sister Dryads, mourning and dressed in black, horrified at the forest's loss and their own, went to Ceres, and begged her to punish Erysichthon. She assented, and, with a motion of her head, that most beautiful of goddesses stirred the fields, heavy with ripened grain. She devised a punishment to rouse men's pity, if his actions had deserved any pity: to torment him with baleful Hunger. But since the goddess herself could not approach her (for fate does not allow Famine and Ceres to meet) she called for one of the mountain spirits, an Oread of wild places, and said to her: "There is a place at the furthest bounds of icy Scythia, with sombre, sterile ground, a land without crops or trees. Torpid Cold inhabits it, Fear and Trembling and barren Hunger. Order Famine to immure herself in the belly of that sacrilegious wretch, and let no plenty oust her, and let her overcome me in any trial of strength. So that the length of the journey does not worry you, take my chariot, take my winged dragons, and govern their bridles on high."

And she gave her the reins. The nymph came to Scythia, carried through the air, in the chariot she was given. On the summit of a frozen mountain chain (they call the Caucasus) she loosed the dragons' necks, and, searching for Famine, saw her in a field of stones, picking at the sparse grass with her nails and teeth. Her hair was matted, her eyes sunken, her face pallid: her lips were grey with mould, her throat with scabrous sores: through the hardened skin, her inner organs could be seen: dry bones stuck out beneath her hollow loins: her belly was only the excuse for a belly: her breastbone seemed to hang loosely, only held by the frame of her spine. Emaciation made the joints look large: the curve of her knees seemed swollen: and the ankles appeared as extravagant lumps.

When the Oread saw her, she relayed the goddess's command, from a distance (since she did not dare to approach her), and though she only delayed an instant, and stayed far off, though she had only arrived there a moment before, she still seemed to feel the hunger. Changing course, high in the air, she directed the dragons towards Haemonia.

Famine carried out Ceres's orders, though their tasks are ever opposed, and flew down through the eye of the wind to the appointed house. Straight away she entered the bedroom of the sacrilegious man, who was sunk in profound sleep (since it was night), and breathed herself into him, covering his throat, and chest, and lips, with her exhalations, and causing a lack of nourishment in his hollow veins. Completing her mission, she left the fertile lands, returning to the houses of poverty, and her customary caves.

Gentle Sleep still lulls Erysichthon, with his peaceful wings. He, in sleep, in imagination, dreams of feasts, closes his mouth on vacancy, grinds tooth on tooth, exercises his gluttony on insubstantial food, and, instead of a banquet, fruitlessly eats the empty air. But when indeed peace departs, a desperate desire to eat possesses his famished jaws and burning belly. Without a moment's delay he calls out for whatever earth, air and sea produce, and at table complains of hunger, and in the midst of eating demands to eat. What would feed a city, or satisfy a people, is not enough for one. The more he puts away inside, the greater his desire. As the ocean receives the rivers of all the earth, and unfilled by the waters, swallows every wandering stream: as the devouring flames never refuse more fuel, burn endless timber, and look for more, the greater the piles they are given, more voracious themselves by being fed: so Erysichthon's profane lips accept and demand all foods, in the same breath. All nourishment in him is a reason for nourishment, and always by eating he creates an empty void.'

Bk VIII:843-884 The fate of Erysichthon and his daughter Mestra

‘Now hunger, and the deep pit of his gut had consumed his wealth, but even so, Famine worked unabated and his burning appetite was unappeased. Eventually, when all he owned was inside him, only his daughter, Mestra, was left, a girl whom the father was not worthy of. Having nothing, he tried to sell her too. The honourable child refused to accept a possessor, and stretching her hands out over the waves of the shore, she cried: “You god, who stole away the prize of my virginity”, for Neptune had stolen it, “save me from slavery.” He did not scorn her prayer. Although the buyer had been following her, and had seen her a moment ago, the god altered her shape, giving her a man’s features, and clothes appropriate to a fisherman.

Her purchaser looked at her, and said: “O, you who control the rod, and hide your bronze hook in a little bait, may you have calm sea, and gullible fish, that feel nothing of the hook until they bite. Tell me where she is, the girl with shabby clothes and straggling hair, who stood here on this beach a moment ago (since I saw her, standing on the beach): there are no footprints further on!”

She sensed the god’s gift was working well for her, and delighted that he was asking her for news of herself, replied to his question: “Forgive me, whoever you are: I have had no eyes for anything except this pool: I have been occupied taking pains over my fishing. To convince you, and may the sea god help me in these arts of mine, no man has been on this beach, except myself, for a long time, and no woman either.”

He believed her, and turning round on the sand, having been outplayed, departed. Then her true shape was restored. When her father realised that she could change her shape, he often surrendered Mestra to others, so that she, escaping in the form of a mare, or a bird, or again as a heifer or a hind, repeatedly obtained her price, dishonestly, for her gluttonous father.

In the end when the evil had consumed everything they had, and his grave disease needed ever more food, Erysichthon began to tear at his limbs and gnaw them with his teeth, and the unhappy man fed, little by little, on his own body.’

Chapter Six

In this chapters, the companions finally make it to Pharos, where they will find Nabhas. It turns out however, that Nabhas has become one with the water sprite Prætus. Thetis tells Lisandra that in order to get the Prophecy Piece, she must find and catch hold of Prætus and hold him while he changes shape. Prætus is based on Proteus.

Bk VIII:725

Lelex finished, and the tale and the teller of it had moved them all, Theseus particularly. He wished to hear more of the marvelous acts of the gods. Acheloüs, the river-god of Calydon, leaning on his elbow, said: ‘Hero, there are those who, once changed in form, retain that transformation: there are others who are allowed to transmute into many shapes: you, for instance, Proteus, inhabitant of the earth-encircling sea. A moment ago they saw you as a young man, then as a lion: now as a raging boar, then as a serpent, they fear to touch: and, in a moment, horns revealed you as a bull. Often you might have appeared as a stone, often, also, as a tree: sometimes, you formed the likeness of running water, and became a river: sometimes fire, water’s opposite.

Bk XI:221-265 Peleus and Thetis

For aged Proteus had said to Thetis: ‘Goddess of the waves, conceive: you will be the mother of a warrior who will surpass his father’s deeds when he reaches manhood, and will be more famous than him.’ So Jupiter, lest earth produce someone greater than himself, fled from

union with ocean-dwelling Thetis, though he had felt the hot fire of passion in his heart, and ordered his grandson, Peleus, son of Aeacus, to fulfil his promise, on his behalf, and enter the arms of the sea-maiden.

There is a bay, shaped like a scythe, in Haemonia, its arms projecting in a curved arc, which would provide a harbour, if the waves were deeper: the waters cover the surface of the sand: the shore is solid earth, that takes no footprints, does not hinder a passage, and has no seaweed covering it. A myrtle grove grows nearby, dense with its red and black berries. There is a cave in the centre, whether fashioned by art or nature is uncertain, but probably by art. Often, Thetis you used to come there, naked, seated on a bridled dolphin. There Peleus found you, as you lay, overcome by sleep, and when, though influenced by his entreaties, you refused him, he prepared to use force, winding both arms round your neck.

He would have taken you then, if you had not, by your well-known arts, frequently changed your form. But when you became a bird, he still held you as a bird; now as a tree, Peleus clung fast to the tree. Your third guise was a striped tigress: in fear of that the son of Aeacus loosed his arms from your body. Then he entreated the gods of the sea, with wine poured over the waters, with sheep's entrails, and the smoke of incense, until Proteus, the Carpathian seer spoke from his deep gulfs: 'Son of Aeacus, you will have the bride you desire, if you bind her, unawares, with nooses and tight cords, while she is lulled asleep in the rocky cave. Though she deceives you with a hundred counterfeit shapes, hold her to you, whatever she becomes, until she is again what she was before.' So he spoke, and hid his face below the waves, letting the waters flow in upon his final words.

Now Titan was low in the sky, and, his chariot pointed downwards, was close to the western ocean, when the lovely Nereid left the waves, and came to her accustomed bed. Peleus had scarcely taken a good grip of her virgin body, when she took on new forms, until she realised her limbs were tightly bound, and her arms spread wide apart. Then at length she sighed, saying: 'Not without some god's help have you won,' and she showed herself as Thetis. When she acknowledged herself, the hero embraced her, achieved his wish, and conceived with her the mighty Achilles.