â??Ambrosia,â?• â??Plutoâ??s Triumphâ?•

Description

AMBROSIA

â??**Plutoâ??s Triumph**â?•

â??Tis said a story never loses,
Which to rehearse no one refuses;
Or when (says Pope) from north to south,
It propagates from mouth to mouth;
For as it goes-â??it always varies,
And from thâ?? original miscarries:
For instance nowâ??the fate of Dido,
Of Daphne tooâ??and Pastor Fido;
The angry moods of jealous Juno,
The loves of Proserpine and Pluto;
The amours of the mighty Jove,
With Juno, Calisto, above,
Asteria, Antiope below,
Are just what fables please to show:
They show how this one gainâ??d a lover,
And how that Goddess lost another;
How Venus from the waters sprung,
How musical a Syrenâ??s tongue;
How Jupiterâ??(as they depute)
To win Europa turnâ??d a brute;
AEgina, Danae, Leda won,
By strange disguises putting on;
In short, describe the forms of Heavâ??n,
To which and which most powâ??r was given.
Such stories then if you believe,
And all the Poets do conceive,
You may believeâ??(thatâ??s if you please)
Juno a justice and the moon a cheese.
However for romanceâ??s glory,
Iâ??ll tell youâ??what?â??Iâ??ll tell a story.
A story should (says Sancho Panza)
Begin with some old Latin stanza,
Or saying of the censor Cato,
Demosthenes, Cicero, or Plato;
Now such as thisâ??â??He that seeks evil,â?•

(So Sancho says)â??â??May meet the Devil.â?•
But this, and all their scraps of Greek,
To me appears but self-conceit;
Mere vanity;â??an outward show,
Of what they would be thought to know:
However it appears like learning,
To those who are not so discerning,
And raises in the public eye,
A name of no small prodigy;
A good deviceâ??for those that canâ??t
Derive the requisites they want;
So by such authors as they quote,
They hope to gain a name of note:
For sure that man which takes from Ovid
A line or two,â??can be no blockhead;
Certainly no;â??â??(preserve my patience)
We say that man knows all the ancients;
And all who Greek or Latin uses,
We say are favoured by the muses;
And in right form the sentence places,
We say that man has all the graces.â??
â??Tis so these seeming wise ones raise
A name of learning and of praise.
On others fame they build their own,
And live on vanity alone.â??â??
But to proceedâ??Iâ??ll tell my story
In plainer terms than those before me,
Yet like a fabulist of yore be.
I mean by this expression,â??you
Must (like the suppositious crew,)
Believe my fable to be true.
Youâ??ll say thatâ??s wrong,â??â??tis why I quote it,
Because I thought so when I wrote it;
â??Tis rather foolishâ??and I know it,
But my excuse isâ??â??Iâ??m a poet:
For poets have a prior claim,
To many faults that I could name;
Which are alleged by some to be
Superior taste in poetry;
Invention, fancy and the plotâ??-â??â??
But this as poet Iâ??ve forgot;
For â??stead of telling Plutoâ??s tale,
Iâ??ve written quite satyrical.
I say no moreâ??the proemâ??s ended,
And if Iâ??ve gave offenceâ??â??twas not intended.
When Pluto from the dark abodes,
Ascended to his brother Gods,
He sought among the heavâ??nly race,

A Goddess worthy his embrace:
And as he wishâ??d to meet success,
(That nought should make his merit less)
To all he made a handsome present,
To this a peacock, that a pheasant,
And managâ??d matters pretty decent.
But yet (oh strange !) he was neglected,
And by (which little he expected)
Celestial Goddesses rejected.â??â??
Stung to the heart with this reproach,
He orderâ??d instantly his coach.
â??Here drive me to the Enna fields,
Iâ??ll try (quoth he) what Enna yields;
A bachelor to rove and range,
Is as ridiculous as strange.â?•
Sated of Heavâ??n away was drove,
And gained at Enna, Proserpine his love.

NOTES:

Title *Pluto* The Roman equivalent of Hades. Pluto is the King of the Underworld.

3 *Pope* Alexander Pope (1688-1744), English poet and satirist. The lines alluded to are from *The Temple of Fame* (1715), ll. 473-74.

7 *Dido* In Greek mythology, Dido was the former Queen of Tyre, and the founder and Queen of Carthage. After she was forced to flee Tyre by her authoritarian brother, Pygmalion, she married Aeneas, a Trojan warrior on a heroic journey. Aeneas was, ultimately, prompted by the gods to leave Dido and continue on his quest, which led to Didoâ??s suicide (*World History Encyclopedia*).

8 *Daphne* Daphne was highly coveted by many men, including the god Apollo, whom she rejected. She prayed to be rescued, and was turned into a laurel tree (*Britannica*); *Pastor Fido* Probably a reference to Mirtillo, the faithful shepherd character in Giovanni Battista Guariniâ??s pastoral tragicomedy, *Il pastor fido* (1590). He takes the place of his lover, Amarilli, to be sacrificed, but is saved at the end of the play (*Britannica*).

9 *Juno* In Roman mythology, â??she is the female counterpart to Jupiterâ?¦.Ovid relates that Juno was jealous of Jupiter for giving birth to Minerva from his own headâ?• (*Britannica*).

10 *Proserpine* The Roman equivalent of Persephone. Proserpine, or Proserpina, is the goddess of springtime and became Queen of the Underworld after her marriage to Pluto.

11 *Jove* Another name for Jupiter, â??the chief ancient Roman and Italian god;â?• the equivalent of Zeus in the Greek tradition (*Britannica*).

12 *Calisto* A nymph in Greek myth, Callisto was one of Artemisâ??s huntresses who had sworn herself to celibacy. She had an affair with Zeus and, to punish her, she was turned into a â??she-bearâ?• and consequently killed by Artemis, who mistook her for a real bear (*Britannica*).

13 *Asteria* A Titan in Greek myth; â??Asteria was loved by Zeusâ?• and, to escape him, â??she transformed herself into a quail, threw herself into the sea, and ultimately became the island of Delosâ?• (*Mythopedia*); *Antiope* According to Greek legend, â??her beauty attracted Zeus, who, assuming the form of a satyr, took her by forceâ?• (*Britannica*).

17 *Venus* Venus is the Roman goddess of beauty, love, and fertility.

18 *Syren* In Greek mythology, a syren (or siren), was a half-bird, half-woman creature who lured sailors to their demise through their seductive songs (*Britannica*).

20 *Jupiter* The Roman equivalent of Zeus and the counterpart of Juno (*Britannica*); *Europa* Europa was the princess of Phoenicia and so beautiful that Zeus abducted her, disguised as a white bull (*Britannica*).

21 *AEgina* A nymph in Greek myth; Zeus fell in love with her and, in the shape of a flame, carried her off to the island of Oenone (*World History Encyclopedia*); *Danae* According to Greek myth, an oracle prophesied that Danaeâ??s son would one day kill her father, so she was confined to â??a bronze tower.â?• Zeus, still, was entranced by her beauty and impregnated her under the guise of â??a shower of goldâ?• (*Encyclopedia*); *Leda* A figure in Greek myth who was seduced by Zeus when he took the form of a magnificent swan (*World History Encyclopedia*).

31-36 *Sancho Panzaâ?¦May meet the Devil* Sancho is the fictional squire in Cervantesâ??s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615). In Tobias Smolettâ??s 1755 translation, Sancho tells Quixote, â??â??â?¦the beginning of ancient tales, is not just what came into the head of the teller: no, they have always began with some saying of Cato the censor of Rome, like this of He that seeks evil, may he meet with the devil.'â?• (Book 3, Chapt. 6, p. 133).

33 *Cato* Marcus Porcius Cato (234 BCE-149 BCE), or Cato the Elder, â??a Roman statesman, oratorâ?• and historian (*Britannica*).

34 *Demosthenes* (384 BCE-322 BCE) An ancient Greek statesman, who was widely known as one of the greatest orators of ancient Athens (*Britannica*); *Cicero* Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE-43 BCE) was a Roman â??statesman, lawyer, and scholarâ?• and is credited with being one of the best orators in ancient Rome (*Britannica*); *Plato* (c. 429 BCE-347 BCE) A prominent ancient Greek philosopher, best known for his teachings on the physical and metaphysical worlds, as well as his incredulous influence on modern Western philosophy (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

49 *Ovid* (43 BCE-17 CE) A Roman poet famous for his interpretations of classical myths and his technical influence on the development of Latin language and poetry (*Britannica)*.

63 *fabulist* â??One who relates fables or legends; a composer of apologuesâ?• (*OED*).

79 *proem* â??A preface, preambleâ?• (*OED*).

95 *Enna Fields,* â??The Enna Fields was a beautiful place in the middle of the Island of Sicily, therefore called Umbilicus Siciliae: Here Pluto first alighted after his rejection in Heaven, where seeing a company of beautiful virgins gathering flowers, Proserpine, who was one, pleased him so much above the rest, as she excelled them in beauty, that he carried her away with him, and made her his wifeâ?• [Authorâ??s Note].

SOURCE: *The London Magazine, or Gentlemanâ??s Monthly Intelligencer* (London, 1776), pp. 608-9. [HathiTrust]

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