

OVID | THE METAMORPHOSES

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Pan and Syrinx

[668] The sovereign god no longer could endure to witness Io's woes. He called his son, whom Maia brightest of the Pleiades brought forth, and bade him slay the star eyed guard, Argus. He seized his sleep compelling wand and fastened waving wings on his swift feet, and deftly fixed his brimmed hat on his head:—lo, Mercury, the favoured son of Jove, descending to the earth from heaven's plains, put off his cap and wings,—though still retained his wand with which he drove through pathless wilds some stray she goats, and as a shepherd fared, piping on oaten reeds melodious tunes. Argus, delighted with the charming sound of this new art began; "Whoever thou art, sit with me on this stone beneath the trees in cooling shade, whilst browse the tended flock abundant herbs; for thou canst see the shade is fit for shepherds."

[682] Wherefore, Mercury sat down beside the keeper and conversed of various things—passing the laggard hours.—then soothly piped he on the joined reeds to lull those ever watchful eyes asleep; but Argus strove his languor to subdue, and though some drowsy eyes might slumber, still were some that vigil kept. Again he spoke, (for the pipes were yet a recent art) "I pray thee tell what chance discovered these."

[689] To him the God, "A famous Naiad dwelt among the Hamadryads, on the cold Arcadian summit Nonacris, whose name was Syrinx. Often she escaped the Gods, that wandered in the groves of sylvan shades, and often fled from Satyrs that pursued. Vowing virginity, in all pursuits she strove to emulate Diana's ways: and as that graceful goddess wears her robe, so Syrinx girded hers that one might well believe Diana there. Even though her bow were made of horn, Diana's wrought of gold, yet might she well deceive. "Now chanced it Pan. Whose head was girt with prickly pines, espied the Nymph returning from the Lycian Hill, and these words uttered he"—But Mercury refrained from further speech, and Pan's appeal remains untold. If he had told it all, the tale of Syrinx would have followed thus:—but she despised the prayers of Pan, and fled through pathless wilds until she had arrived the placid Ladon's sandy stream, whose waves prevented her escape. There she implored her sister Nymphs to change her form: and Pan, believing he had caught her, held instead some marsh reeds for the body of the Nymph; and while he sighed the moving winds began to utter plaintive music in the reeds, so sweet and voice like that poor Pan exclaimed; "Forever this discovery shall remain a sweet communion binding thee to me."—and this explains why reeds of different length, when joined together by cementing wax, derive the name of Syrinx from the maid.