

RUBICON

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NARRATION

L'APRÈS-MIDI
D'UNE NYMPHE



L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UNE NYMPHE

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with excerpts from Leonardo De Lorenzo's Suite Mythologique Op.38: I. Pan complementing the poetry

NOEMI GYORI *flute*

ZOLTÁN FEJÉRVÁRI *piano*

KATE FLEETWOOD *narration*

Artist biographies can be found at www.rubiconclassics.com



THE AFTERNOON OF A NYMPH

Greek mythology has profoundly shaped society, influencing cultural norms, traditions, and even systems of governance. Its narratives offer timeless lessons in problem-solving and moral reflection, with many foundational concepts of modern thought tracing back to these ancient stories. Music, too, has drawn inspiration from Greek mythology, giving rise to celebrated works like those of Claude Debussy, which redefined Western art music and revolutionized the flute's role within it. Pierre Boulez aptly remarked, 'The flute of the faun brought new breath to the art of music,' highlighting the transformative impact of Debussy's mythologically inspired compositions.

Debussy's *Syrinx* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, both inspired by the myths of Pan, have always been close to my heart. These pieces invite the flutist to create a deeply personal, soulful sound, brought to life through their sensitive colors and extraordinary textures. Yet, over years of performing these works, I have felt a growing need to spotlight the often-overlooked perspectives of the nymphs in these myths. Historically marginalized in both mythology and art, these female figures offer a rich yet neglected narrative ripe for reinterpretation. This desire led me to collaborate with Hungarian poet Anna T. Szabó to create *The Afternoon of a Nymph*, a program that transforms our engagement with these canonical works and broadens their narrative scope.

At the heart of *The Afternoon of a Nymph* are Debussy's masterpieces, complemented by two other French repertoire gems tied to mythology: Jules Mouquet's *La Flûte de Pan* and André Jolivet's *Chant de Linos*. Each is paired with original poetry by Anna T. Szabó, offering a significant platform for the female voice within these stories. To provide historical literary context, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *A Musical Instrument* accompanies T. Szabó's texts, while excerpts from Leonardo De Lorenzo's *Suite Mythologique*, Op.38 add further musical texture with its first movement, Pan.

I am deeply grateful to Anna T. Szabó for her powerful texts, which create a dialogue between ancient myths and contemporary reflections, music and literature. These poems give voice to the nymphs, exploring themes of gender dynamics, unity, and humanity's connection to nature. They celebrate both female and male perspectives, encouraging audiences to reconsider traditional narratives in music and beyond.

I am equally thankful to Clare Pollard for her elegant translations of the poems from Hungarian to English and to Kate Fleetwood for her remarkable interpretations. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Zoltán Fejérvári, whose exceptional artistry as a chamber music partner brought this project to life, and to everyone who contributed their support – financially or otherwise – to make this dream a reality.

NOEMI GYORI

CLAUDE DEBUSSY: SYRINX

Wiener Urtext Edition, 1996

According to legend, the nymph Syrinx transformed into a bundle of reeds to escape the amorous pursuit of the satyr Pan. Drawn to the haunting sound of the wind through the reeds, Pan cut them and created the first pan flute, cementing its association with his myth and image. Claude Debussy's *Syrinx*, composed in 1913, reflects the emotional depth of this story. Written as incidental music for Gabriel Mourey's unfinished play *Psyché*, the piece underscores a poignant moment where Pan mourns his unfulfilled desire for Syrinx. This short yet evocative flute solo later transcended its theatrical origins, becoming a cornerstone of the flute repertoire thanks to Louis Fleury, the flutist in the original production, who championed the piece in concerts, solidifying its prominence. Initially published as *Flûte de Pan*, the piece was renamed *Syrinx* in 1927, years after Debussy's death.

According to current scholarship, the piece is believed to have been originally written without bar lines or breath marks, offering performers interpretative freedom, and inviting flutists to shape the music with their personal expression. It seems that renowned French flutist Marcel Moyse later added bar lines and breath indications, which are now commonly included in modern editions. Through its timeless connection to myth and its innovative approach to solo flute composition, *Syrinx* remains a celebrated masterpiece of early 20th-century music.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY: PRÉLUDE À L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE

Universal Edition, edited by Karl Lenski, 1984

The premiere of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* on December 22, 1894, in Paris, marked a pivotal moment in music history. With this piece, Debussy introduced a groundbreaking harmonic language that challenged conventions and paved the way for a new era in 20th-century music. The work, inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé's symbolist poem *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, evokes the dreamlike reveries of a faun resting in a sunlit Mediterranean grove. The faun, caught between waking and dreaming, reflects on a fleeting encounter – perhaps real, perhaps imagined – with two nymphs. As his thoughts drift and the warmth of the day intensifies, he surrenders again to sleep, seeking in dreams what eludes him in reality. Debussy's music, with its delicate textures and shimmering harmonies, perfectly captures the sensuous and elusive nature of Mallarmé's imagery.

This arrangement for flute and piano, created by Karl Lenski, is based on two key sources: an early autograph sketch from Alfred Cortot's collection, which represents the first draft of the composition, and Debussy's later adaptation for two pianos. The sketch reveals intriguing details about Debussy's orchestration process and provides insight into the challenges he faced in crafting the final version. Notably, the original version assigned a much greater share of the melodic material to the flute than in the orchestral score. In this adaptation, the flute part remains loyal to the original melodic lines, showcasing the instrument's lyrical potential. Meanwhile, the piano accompaniment, derived primarily from the two-piano arrangement, enriches the texture with harmonic depth and subtle dynamic contrasts, allowing the music's interplay of voices to shine.

JULES MOUQUET: LA FLÛTE DE PAN

Henry Lemoine, 1904

Jules Mouquet (1867–1946), a distinguished composer and flutist, created *La Flûte de Pan* as one of his notable works for the instrument. Composed at the turn of the 20th century, this piece reflects his immersion in both the late Romantic and early Impressionist styles. Inspired by the myth of Pan, the half-man, half-goat Greek god, Mouquet captures the essence of this figure through a musical narrative across three movements. Each section brings the mythical world to life, with vivid representations of Pan's interactions with nature. *La Flûte de Pan* not only demonstrates Mouquet's deep understanding of the flute's technical potential but also reflects the instrument's central role in French music during that era.

The first movement, *Pan et les bergers* (Pan and the Shepherds), conveys a scene on the mountainside. Mouquet opens the movement with a gentle, rhythmic theme that evokes the shepherds' activities and Pan's serene connection with his pastoral surroundings. The second movement, *Pan et les oiseaux* (Pan and the Birds), shifts the focus to Pan's solitude in the woods, where the melody grows more reflective, symbolizing his quiet interaction with the birds around him. The third movement, *Pan et les nymphes* (Pan and the Nymphs), is inspired by the joyous and ethereal dance of nymphs in the presence of the god. The music alternates between spirited dance-like sections and more languorous, passionate moments, creating a vivid portrayal of nature and myth intertwining.

ANDRÉ JOLIVET: CHANT DE LINOS

Alphonse Leduc, 1946

André Jolivet (1905–1974) was a French composer whose work was deeply influenced by his studies with Edgard Varèse, becoming his only European student. Varèse introduced Jolivet to a revolutionary approach to sound, which significantly shaped his compositions. Jolivet's flute music, though only a small portion of his output, remains iconic, demonstrating his exceptional understanding of the instrument.

Chant de Linos (1944) is based on the ancient Greek myth of Linos, the son of Apollo. Linos was a talented musician who taught Orpheus the lyre but met a tragic end at the hands of Heracles, who killed him after taking offense at his criticism. The piece is a threnody, a funeral lament that reflects the sorrow and loss associated with Linos's death. The work opens with a poignant cadenza and two contrasting lamenting melodies, each interrupted by expressive cries symbolizing mourning. Jolivet masterfully combines these elements – lament, cry, and dance – to create a unique emotional and musical landscape. The rhythmic complexity, a hallmark of Jolivet's style, underscores the intensity of the piece, while the modal melodies evoke the ancient world. *Chant de Linos* is a pivotal work for flutists, noted not only for its technical demands but also for its profound emotional depth and its connection to the timeless story of Linos.

LEONARDO DE LORENZO: SUITE MYTHOLOGIQUE FOR SOLO FLUTE, OP.38: I. PAN

Zimmermann (1930)

Leonardo De Lorenzo (1875–1962), an Italian-born flutist, made a lasting impact on the flute world with his exceptional talent and contributions. Though primarily self-taught, his unwavering dedication and passion led him to achieve international acclaim as a flutist. In 1891, De Lorenzo emigrated to the United States, where he continued to expand his professional career. In addition to his autobiography, *My Complete Story of the Flute*, De Lorenzo authored ten influential flute method books that remain essential for mastering technical and artistic skills. His creative output includes nearly 300 works, encompassing solo pieces, chamber music, études, and exercises. Among these compositions is *Suite Mythologique*, Op.38, a three-movement work for solo flute. Excerpts from the first movement, Pan, are featured in this recording, serving as a musical complement to the selected poetry.

Noemi Gyori is a celebrated flutist on modern and baroque flutes, hailed internationally for her ‘phenomenal technique and sparkling play of colours’ (*Opus Klassiek*), ‘rich tonal repertoire and enchanting melodic shaping’ (*Turun Sanomat*), and ‘great skill and intensity’ (*Flute Journal*). At home in all repertoire and a leading interpreter of contemporary music, she regularly premieres concertos and other works dedicated to her. As a soloist and chamber musician, Noemi has captivated audiences in over 30 countries, performing with orchestras across the globe. She has appeared with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège, Turku Philharmonic Orchestra and Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra to name but a few, and in her home country has performed with the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra, and most of Hungary’s symphonic and chamber orchestras. She has appeared at many notable classical music festivals, collaborated with esteemed ensembles, and co-directed events such as the Ördögkatlan Classical, Arcus Temporum and her own IKZE Contemporary Music Festival.

Noemi holds a master’s degree with honours from the Liszt Academy of Music Budapest, as well as a postgraduate diploma from the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München. Her mentors included Henrik Pröhle, Barbara Gisler-Haase, András Adorján, Lisa Beznosiuk, and Benedek Csalog. In 2020, she made history as the first flutist to earn a PhD in Performance Practice from the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Beyond her solo career, Noemi is principal flutist of the Jewish Chamber Orchestra Munich and has performed with the Vienna Philharmonic (Vienna State Opera) and BBC Philharmonic. As an educator, she has taught flute at the Junior Royal Northern College of Music for well over a decade and at the University of Manchester since 2019. A sought-after adjudicator and masterclass leader, Noemi has shared her expertise at conservatoires and festivals across three continents, while her work with the Tampere Flute Fest, where she joined the Artistic Team in 2024, further underscores her global leadership in the flute community.

Noemi’s discography includes six critically acclaimed albums published on Rubicon, Hungaroton, and Genuin labels, with three more releases slated for 2025–2026. Her performances have been featured on numerous international networks and radio stations, including the premiere of Christian Mason’s *Thaleia Concerto*, broadcast by Mezzo/Medici.

A regular feature in the international press, Noemi has appeared on the covers of *The Flute View* (USA), *The Flute* (Japan), *Eurowinds* (Germany), and *Gramofon* (Hungary). Playing a 14k gold Miyazawa flute supported by the Solti and Philip Loubser Foundations, she balances her thriving career with family life in London, where she resides with her conductor husband, Gergely Madaras, and their two daughters.

Zoltán Fejérvári has established himself as one of the most intriguing and exciting pianists of the new generation of Hungarian musicians. Winner of the 2017 Concours Musical International de Montréal and a recipient of the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2016, Fejérvári has given recitals across the Americas and Europe, performing at esteemed venues such as Carnegie Hall, Montreal's Place des Arts, the Gasteig in Munich, Lingotto in Turin, Palau de la Música in Valencia, Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires, and the Liszt Academy in Budapest.

As a soloist, he has performed with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Hungarian National Orchestra, the Verbier Chamber Orchestra, and Concerto Budapest, collaborating with renowned conductors including Iván Fischer, Markus Stenz, Gábor Tákács-Nagy, Ken-Ichiro Kobayashi, and Zoltán Kocsis. Fejérvári's debut solo recording, *Janáček*, released in January 2019, received glowing praise, with *Gramophone* hailing it as 'the most sensitive and deeply probative recording' of the composer's work. His latest recording, *Schumann*, released on the ATMA Classique label in May 2020, earned further acclaim, with *Gramophone* stating: 'Fejérvári is a deeply communicative artist who combines an imperturbable yet magisterial command of his instrument with impeccable musicality. Those who have yet to hear him are in for a rare treat.'

Fejérvári is also an accomplished chamber musician, having performed with the Elias Quartet under the auspices of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, with Joshua Bell and Nicolas Altstaedt at the Liszt Academy, and with violinist Diana Tishchenko in Aix-en-Provence and La Chaux-de-Fonds. He has collaborated with the Keller and Kodály Quartets; violinists Joseph Lin and András Keller; cellists Gary Hoffman, Christoph Richter, Ivan Monighetti, Frans Helmerson, and Steven Isserlis; and horn player Radovan Vlatković. He has appeared at prestigious festivals and programs such as Kronberg's Chamber Music Connects the World, IMS Prussia Cove's Open Chamber Music, Les Lisztomanias in Châteauroux, the Tiszadob Piano Festival in Hungary, Encuentro de Música in Santander, Spain, and the Brooklyn Chamber Music Festival. Invited by artistic director Mitsuko Uchida, Fejérvári participated twice in the Marlboro Music Festival and toured the United States with Musicians from Marlboro during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons.

Fejérvári currently serves as a professor at the Hochschule für Musik FHNW, Musik Akademie Basel in Basel, Switzerland where he teaches piano and chamber music.

Hungarian poet, writer and translator **Anna T. Szabó** was born in Transylvania (Romania) in 1972 and moved to Hungary in 1987 where she studied English and Hungarian literature at the ELTE University of Budapest, and received her PhD in English Renaissance Literature in 2007. Since her first book (1995) she has published ten volumes of poetry for adults, eight books for children and three short story collections (two of them shortlisted among the ten best books of the year), has co-edited an anthology on motherhood and parenthood, and is currently working on a new book of short stories.

Her main interest in poetry and prose is passion, aggression, equality, epistemology, inner freedom, and the irrational. In her early thirties she tried her hand at creating fictional poets, publishing a book of indecently ironical love poetry under the pseudonym of an older, old-fashioned male poet who was her Satyr/Faun character. Later she created her Nymph character, publishing pseudo-Latin-styled poems under the name of Fulvia, a young supermodel – these two experiments were not only literary pranks but also serious studies and explorations on the nature of love and human nature, revealing and subverting gender roles in order to find equality and equilibrium between the sexes. Surprisingly or serendipitously, these former playful approaches all led to the present nymph-faun poems.

She used to be the poetry editor of *The Hungarian Quarterly* and co-leader of many translation seminars for the British Council, and is currently a member of the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts (an independent section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). In her 30 years of being an active member of the Hungarian literary scene she has received several prestigious prizes in her native country as well as international grants (Berlin, Tampere, Krems), and has taken part in many international poetry events and poetry translation seminars. She has translated in abundance (poems, drama, librettos, essays and prose, including works by Shakespeare, John Updike, Bertolt Brecht, Dr. Seuss and Beatrix Potter), and occasionally writes essays, articles and reviews.

In the early 2000s she took part in three popular literary series on television and in a movie, and participated in several international readings and translation seminars. Her poems and prose have been translated into many languages and published in various literary magazines and anthologies, including the *Being Human* and *Staying Alive* anthologies by Bloodaxe Books. *Trust*, her first English-language volume of poetry, published by Arc Publications in 2021, features poems selected by Clare Pollard and co-translated by Clare and herself.

She has been working freelance all her life, as a writer, translator, essayist and lecturer, has appeared as a performer on stage with various jazz and classical musicians, and has co-operated with numerous illustrators. She lives in a town near Budapest with her husband of 30 years, the novelist György Dragomán. They have two sons.

Kate Fleetwood is a distinguished British actress whose work has captivated audiences across stage and screen. A Tony and Olivier Award nominee, Fleetwood's career is defined by her remarkable ability to bring depth and intensity to a wide range of roles, establishing her as a versatile and dynamic force in both classical and contemporary theatre.

Fleetwood's stage career is distinguished by her powerful interpretations of Shakespearean characters. Her portrayal of Lady Macbeth in the 2007 production of *Macbeth*, directed by Rupert Goold and performed at Chichester Festival Theatre, the Gielgud Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music and Broadway, earned her a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in a Play. She also received an Olivier Award nomination for her role as Julie in the National Theatre's 2012 production of *London Road*.

Her extensive stage credits include *The Winter's Tale* with the Royal Shakespeare Company, *Othello* at Northampton Theatre Royal, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Bristol Old Vic. She has also delivered standout performances in *Medea* at the Almeida Theatre, *High Society* at The Old Vic, *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* at Chichester Festival Theatre, and *Hecuba* and *Life is a Dream* at Donmar Warehouse. Additional notable credits include *A View from the Bridge* (Theatre Royal Haymarket), *101 Dalmatians* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre), *Absolute Hell*, *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *Love's Labour's Lost* (National Theatre), *Bug* (Found111) and *Pericles* (Royal Shakespeare Company). Critics have praised her work as compelling and emotionally resonant, solidifying her as an established and admired figure in British theatre.

Fleetwood has also made a notable impact on screen. She appeared in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* as Mary Cattermole, and her television work includes standout roles in *Big Mood*, *Mary and George*, *Rain Dogs*, *The Wheel of Time*, *Fate: The Winx Club Saga*, *Brave New World*, *Victoria*, *Harlots*, *War and Peace*, *The People Next Door*, *The Widower*, *Way to Go*, *Touch of Cloth*, *Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Hustle*, and *After Thomas*. Her film work includes *Scoop*, *Choose or Die*, *Beirut*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *London Road*, *Philomena*, *Les Misérables*, *Macbeth*, *The Golden Age*, *77 Beds*, *Vanity Fair*, *A Changed Man*, and *Beautiful People*.

In spring 2025, Fleetwood will star in Lila Raicek's play *My Master Builder* in the West End.

Offstage, Fleetwood has contributed to radio drama and voice work, including audio adaptations of classic and contemporary plays.

Fleetwood studied at Exeter University and began her career with the Royal Shakespeare Company, where she developed her expertise in the classics and built a foundation for her wide-ranging career. She is married to Rupert Goold, with whom she has two children.

Clare Pollard was born in Bolton in 1978 and now lives in South London with her husband and two children. She holds an honorary Doctor of Letters from Bolton University, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Her first poetry collection, *The Heavy-Petting Zoo* (1998), was written while she was still at school and earned an Eric Gregory Award. This was followed by *Bedtime* (2002), *Look, Clare! Look!* (2005) – a set text on the WJEC A-level syllabus – *Changeling* (2011), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and *Incarnation* (2017). Her poem *Pollen* was shortlisted for the 2022 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. Her sixth collection, *Lives of the Female Poets* is forthcoming in autumn 2025.

Clare's first play, *The Weather* (Faber, 2004), premiered at the Royal Court Theatre and has been staged internationally. Passionate about translation, she co-translated *The Sea-Migrations* by Asha Lul Mohamud Yusuf (2017), which won a PEN Translates award and was named *The Sunday Times* poetry book of the year. She has also translated *Ovid's Heroines* (2013), which she performed as a one-woman show, and *Trust* by Anna T. Szabó (2021).

An experienced editor and journalist, Clare was the editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation* for five years and is currently poetry editor for *The Idler*. She has judged major literary prizes, including the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award. In 2019, she published *Fierce Bad Rabbits: The Tales Behind Children's Picture Books*. She has written a children's novel, *The Untameables*, which was long-listed for the Branford Boase Award. Her adult novels *Delphi* (2022) and *The Modern Fairies* (2024) have been published in multiple languages. She is currently the Artistic Director of Winchester Poetry Festival.

ANNA T. SZABÓ

THE SONG OF THE WOOD NYMPHS

When an instrument makes music,
when there is spring and love,
when lively music
flees the flesh, flies out,
as soft and light
as wind through the trees,

when an instrument is played
and we step out of our bodies
and the dream steps out naked,
the soul quits, he leaves,
so softly and naturally,
as night from twilight.

If you're overwhelmed by music,
deep and soft as a girl's eyes,
high as the wide sky,
there and not there, like a bubble,
mist and spray, soft feathers,
that rise from a bird's body

to where the sun dwells,
and always looking for someone,
someone to love,

for desire's the only pleasure,
remember music empowers us,
and warms those who are cold,
gives mortals immortality;
eternal consolation.

—

It comes, the sound, from far away,
it keeps us when we fail and fall,
it comes to us from the bright heights,
reverberating like a bell,

The melody comes shining through –
I am desire, all flame and heat,
I am a hot and lively tune.
But it is not the blood's wild beat,

not made of flesh, not made on earth:
it is from sky and cloud and star,
and I am not my small, framed self:
I'm boundlessness, the vastest far.

The love of spheres pulsates through me,
untangling itself from earth –
and music, music, music
is the universe's breath.

ECHO'S FIRST DANCE

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss

John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

Watch me dance, how I don't care
to notice the musician there –
the rhythm's mine, I show it how,
because I am your mistress now.
Your flute is in service of me!
Not looking at you, I won't see!

Blow your whistle, little Pan,
nothing waits when this is gone,
though you want, you can't catch,
when I'm dancing you just watch,
when your little tune has stopped,
my thin air is all you'll grip.

Like a vapour, I dissolve,
leave cool tracks that you can't solve.
You'll be longing for my heat,
but I don't long for you, my sweet,
I'm not yours. You're my Pan,
but I'll not yield to anyone.

Bow my head? No I shan't
for hairy flesh I do not want.
I have my own better world,
I want dewy nymphs and girls,
silky skin and lovely smells –
here's my hanky, go inhale.

You'll never get any closer,
reach to touch, this dance will wither.
Fondle with your harmonies,
take pleasure in some melodies –
I've other things to do today.
You have a pipe, so go and play.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

I.
WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

II.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

III.

High on the shore sat the great god Pan,
While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

IV.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sat by the river.

V.

'This is the way,' laughed the great god Pan,
(Laughed while he sat by the river,)
'The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.'
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river.

VI.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

VII.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, –
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

ANNA T. SZABÓ

SACRIFICE (THE FIRST SONG OF FULVIA, NYMPH OF SPRING)

*Now the first task, for you who come as a raw recruit,
is to find out who you might wish to love.*

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book 1

The body is not all, but it's very much there.
It's our maid-master, for we never choose
when passions will arise or cease:
Cupid strings his bow, and with a pang
the arrow flies from the overstrung string.

Whoever hunts us is the god of all!
In his service we are rapt into heaven.
Like an arrow in the flesh, pleasure burns:
bodily love is grateful sacrifice;
flesh is the servant we bow down to worship.

Our proud necks are yoked by Venus,
we, her oxen, break her fields – O lead us
to near-collapse, to puff and sweat,
to bear our load – we vow to tolerate
this bestial, mortal, divine law.

INSTRUCTIONS ON STEAMING YOUR FACE

Look what I've got: a cooking pot of
aluminium; a small, clean mirror.
When the water boils, I'll tarnish it
with lemon oil.

I recommend this skin-friendly technique
warmly, if you're sniffly, or short of money:
no need for equipment, just water and a pot
put on to boil!

Finally, you require a fluffy, soft towel
to hem in the sultry steam,
to embrace you in the febrile fog;
sweet scented mask.

Your face, as in a mirror framed,
might be a vestal virgin's, perhaps you'll see
the Syrinx's pretty eyes... though there's a risk
Medea might look back.

EN GARDE

But the complacent Nymphs just laughed.

Virgil, *Eclogue III*

My look is a sabre on this catwalk's edge –
I'll run you through without mercy.
Let him look on me, who dares.
Blink at my blade.

In the world of fashion the only winner,
the one who won't tire, is an expert fencer
who won't tremble to step into light
almost nude.

My naked breasts peek out of my blouse,
my swinging skirt is incredibly short
and these sharp golden stilettos
quiver my hips.

Nothing to protect me from violence
but how I stare back – and in this sport
no one so cunning, so defiant...
Draw your foil!

SPRING FASHION WEEK (FULVIA'S SONG)

Taking pains brings beauty: beauty neglected dies.

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book 3

Life's flame sizzles and Aether implodes,
a sun-scented wind is igniting the world,
cold earth's aflame, rainy air radiates,
the dead long for this light.

Stamens on stiff branches, shivering,
send pollen to touch the warm, slick pistils,
grass moistens as Flora fondles the buds,
scatters petals on airy love.

In a bright dress, with light butterfly charm,
I strut on a catwalk, in Aries' sign,
tender young model in rose-petal pollen,
my Gucci silks.

Beauty's butterfly flies to the flame,
and trustingly circles, although the flame slays.
From the barren heart of this closed space
I long for blazing life.

THERE IS NOTHING BUT

pink reverberations, white sails,
wings in wind, pollen's flight,
hot cup of scent, of something calling,
a coming up – no trunk or root,
manure or rain or buried bones,
no, no – just swinging, swaying,
a shining lie, low-lying cloud,
a petal-mist, sweet blindness.

Soft skin is good, warm mouths.
Blood's flow is good, to rock,
to sew together, intertwine,
to drink each other, shed ourselves,
to kick the ground away from feet,
and not to see, but grope in mist,
up or down, up, down, forgetfully,
stitching death into the other's body.

THE NYMPH TO THE FAUN

*These nymphs, I would perpetuate them [...]
I adore you, wrath of virgins, O shy
Delight of the nude sacred burden that glides
Away to flee my fiery lip, drinking
The secret terrors of the flesh*

Stéphane Mallarmé, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*

I, nymph, only long to live on.

You didn't care you were my first.
I had no place to hide.
You filled me and I quenched your thirst
but nobody quenched mine.
I've no desire for flesh or flute,
I'm hungry for soft speech.
You can't awake my appetite
when it's for skin you reach.

I'm broken into, something breaks,
you pin me like a beast,
you grasp with each demand you make,
I'm smothered, crushed to dust.
I tell myself I am not meat –
if loved, I'll evanesce.
For I am only made of light.
What bliss to incandesce!

I'd tend to you with tenderness,
If you were kind to me.
If you loved me I'd love you, yes –
both flame and soul I'd be.
We could both be divinities
if you'd dance to my rhythm.
You make muck from infinity
each time you stick it in.

You act like you're a warrior,
but what you want you kill.
Your hunting ground's your lover.
I'm meant to want you still?
You're satisfied with this half-life,
and coveting in vain.
Eternal thirst's the only knife;
desire the source of pain,

but if you'd learn my nature,
then you'd see eternal wonder!
Let my shine give you lustre,
and we'd sparkle through each other,
I want an equal partner, please
and then I'd meet your fervour.
But my soul cannot be at ease
when poked at with a skewer.

This cosmos of complexity,
you trash. You can't perceive –
so you devour totality,
think everything should serve.
And yet you're ruled by appetite,
slave to your wild hunger,
your blood is always in revolt,
demanding love in anger,

you want me to be round and soft,
to curl up in your hand,
to melt away whatever's stiff,
whilst turning into cloud,
you want me sweet and welcoming,
the lapping waters, warm
and crumbly and dissolving,
always fondling your groin,

to help you go to sleep at night
to flatter you, to fool,
to swallow every angry word
to lie to him who rules.
Your fever – I will not rebel –
I'll make belong to me,
I'll learn humility as well.
This nymph will now obey,

or else, I know, I'm helpless,
for you are strong and great,
therefore enjoy my weakness,
enjoy watching me break,
for you have all the power,
I'm your prey: you're what I'm for.
A wailing song. Crushed flower.
Plaything in your savage paw.

THE AIR IS FULL

of joyous fluff and bugs,
angels up high are winged, and freely waltz,
as fountains spurt, as doves sing out from trees,
the dawn-song's lust for life animates light,
a million leaves fast-flutter, tree-roof-flicker,
the breeze – swift nymph – steps on the grass and flowers;
glade shimmers at her feet, so weightless-sweet.
She calls the buds to bloom, makes pistils tingle,
beneath sun's smile, the landscape lives in love,
no lust but whistling leads this softest dance,
Ethereal union with which they've been blessed:
together bad and good, the hard and soft,
what's twain dissolves, it merges, becomes one –
I see a host of women: petals, pollen,
a mist that burns, a kiss that scorches skin,
I'm just a mortal girl, yet fairies, soft-
-ly call to me like birds to wander, sing,
to live the whole, free, breathing new-lush world,
they win at death, for they've no heavy step –
their battle's peace, death lives, and stone can seed,
and good and bad are dreams, and dark and light
are nothing but this love as huge as life.

SPRING CARNIVAL (A FRAGMENT)

Look: fauns and satyrs wait in bushes as bait.
Nymphs – if you run that way – catch your scent.
In war they hunt enemies, in peace-time girls
who flee in terror from their laughter.

Bestial masks approach, carnival disguises:
hirsute bear-face, wild bull, long-eared hare
moves to the drum-beat with obscene gestures:
hawk lies with goose, wolf with goat.
Ecstasy, this Spring! Its rhythm lures even the dead,
this drunken mating, blazing, blossoming,
torch-lit wine, lantern-lit song,
those who watch it yearn to touch –
stink, cum, flame, blood, booze: all glue-traps.
From our bone-cages, we long for union.

THE SONG OF FREE NYMPHS

First Nymph

The wind ruffles the leaves, you say, it's like my hair.
Those who see freely know well: it's the hair of mother earth.
Flesh of earth, flesh of mud, her deep swamp
pulls down all who tread on it; all steps mean death.

Second Nymph

The maenads with dishevelled hair,
the flickering of a greedy fire –
night's dangerous.
You'll fall into the killing flame;
the jerking dance of shadowplay,
emptied by lust.

Third Nymph

A dancer cannot be afraid:
full of fire and full of life,
in their fury and their joy
they take in the whole of life.
Who can resist it!

Every thrash, every stamp
delivers us when evil comes.
A dancer battles death each day,
heartbeat like a stubborn drum.
Who can resist it!

Listen to the weaving flute:
up into the sky it lifts.
When its tongue of flame whirls round,
living feels a precious gift!
Who can resist it!

Not the body, but the soul,
is the part that elevates,
when celestial music sounds,
it's the soul that celebrates.
Who can resist it!

Only movement, only breath,
Only bending, let us sway,
eternal flame, eternal life,
it's the beat that leads the way.
Who can resist it!

DIANA'S DANCE

I am free, you hear me? Free!
I'm a hunter, you're the game.
We are many, you're alone.

I'm so free that my hair flies!
I've got two lovers: me and I.
When my feet move,
stars are shining,
when my skirt swings,
skies are turning,

I am fluff, a cloud up high,
I am here and far away,
I'm a veil, a tongue of flame
that can melt through any stone,
silky on your naked skin,
desire scorches you within

whilst on tiptoe I will dance,
my thighs branches, breeze my hands,
my arms are fiery whirlpools,
I'm the living light that lifts you,
all the green and steam and flame,
as joy spins me in its fever!

Conjoined and torn asunder,
for the last time and forever,
up, go on, up to the top,
one and two, and never stop,
I shine on every mountain top –
the universe my lover,
for my body is a soul,
and I create this world!

THE CRUEL NYMPH

*Arrested by the Nymph Calypso, the divine mistress,
in the cavernous bosom of the cave, she coveted him as her husband.*

Homer, *The Odyssey*

I, Calypso, am the sea
and the cave, shell that's shut,
though talk's scarce I sentence you:
stay for seven years of lust.
You bawl like a little babe,
can you be a man and whinge?
In my prison as the grave:
in my earthy crotch you'll plunge.

Be a wifey, hear my song –
my melodious little trap –
only listen and stay young,
you can lose the mortal crap.
I'll rebirth you through my arms
you will rise and rise again.
Darling, never come to harm –
I'm the end of death and pain.

I'll envelop you like steam,
Lifting, falling, like an ether
waiting for some mortal meat.
What if I'm not craving either?
What need have you of a human
who will wither to a crone?
I've a body you can romance,
elemental, not just bones.

I will suck you like an ocean,
lap you up and wash your hair,
I'm not someone to abandon –
you'll be vapour if you dare.
You can't sate my appetite,
no, nor that of any goddess,
in this wild cave, you're a bite,
(it's more a pantry if I'm honest).

I'm nobody's and you're mine,
so come on and shag me, Noone.
I've been lonely all this time,
you're a god but only my one.
For all that you grind and rave
I'm the jailor. Do your worst –
turn on me, then, dig your grave,
but only quench this thirst!

SONG OF NYMPHS

Do you do what you do? Do you know what you know?
Will you or can you? Breathe in or blow?
Your lungs and your spine, what is and will be,
what isn't and was will mix up, loving me!

If inhale or exhale, if the drum, if the heart,
if the body is mind, if the whole is the part,
the wind as it rushes, how all of life moves –
he believes so he dies, he is old, he's a youth.

Not the fire, not the space, not body, not blood,
not the deed or the word, not the bad or the good,
not the kiss, not the meat, not your will (that wild beast!)
Life pours past like foam, nothing's free as this lust.

THE THIRST (SONG OF LORELEI, THE WATER NYMPH)

*If my body could be a carnivorous plant,
you'd fall into me, lured by my scent..*

Ágnes Nemes Nagy

Can you hear this sunken silence? My voice inside you?
Do you understand, my dear, what sings? That you must start?
My wetness calls. You cannot rest, you see: no rest.
One day you'll wake up and believe. Now leave your family.

Companions are calling. But you must come alone
because the reckless waters call you. You're a little scared.
Can you hear my voice? My longing? Do you feel it in dreams?
Come on, desire is killing you. I'll do anything to quench it.

Glide into this foamy stream – my flesh, my juice – you long
for my secret bed; how it will caress you, lick you, leave you.
A canyon opens. Does your body understand?
Crawl up and down on wild froth, pouring with sweat.

More, please. Come, come, we have to keep going –
these moist noises are my gift. It's not enough, not enough.
I'll give you rest. I'll shush. I'm going to stretch out,
spit you out onto the lake. I'll rock you with this silence.

Underwater, hearts pulsate. You still pant. Blood slows.
That was all, and all too little. Aren't you hungry for my depths?
You float on endless calm... Oh, you silly little boy!
Am I lulling you asleep? Listen! Look into these eyes!

I know you're hypnotized. You'll have my everything.
You'll be within my skin. I'm done with what's outside.
Dizzy, dazed, you'll plunge into my soft, green emptiness...
I'll jerk down, drown you, yes. It's done, I'm satisfied.

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