

CREATION STORIES FROM THE ANCIENT WESTERN TRADITION

**DID I REQUEST THEE, MAKER, FROM MY CLAY
TO MOULD ME MAN? DID I SOLICIT THEE
FROM DARKNESS TO PROMOTE ME?**

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book 10, lines 743-45.

HOMER, *ILIAD*

Homer (8th century BCE) is credited with the two foundational epic poems of ancient Greece: the Iliad and the Odyssey, the former concerning the ten-year Trojan War and eventual fall of Troy, the latter concerning the voyage home of Odysseus and his crew.

The Iliad is divided into twenty-four books. In Book Eighteen, from the which the following passage is drawn, we find the sea-nymph Thetis, the mother of Achilles, the great Greek warrior, visiting the blacksmith god Hephaestus on Mount Olympus, with the intention of procuring a new suit of armor for her son. (Stanley Lombardo translation)

While they spoke to each other this way, [396]
Thetis' silver feet took her to Hephaestus' house,
A mansion the lame god had built himself
Out of starlight and bronze, and beyond all time.
She found him at his bellows, glazed with sweat [400]
As he hurried to complete his latest project,
Twenty cauldrons on tripods to line his hall,
With golden wheels at the base of each tripod
So they could move by themselves to the god's parties
And return to his house — a wonder to see.
They were almost done. The intricate handles
Still had to be attached. He was getting these ready,
Forging the rivets with inspired artistry,
When the silver-footed goddess came up to him.
And Charis, Hephaestus' wife, lovely [410]
In her shimmering veil, saw her, and running up,
She clasped her hand and said to her:
"My dear Thetis, so grave in your long robe, What brings
you here now? You almost never visit.
Do come inside so I can offer you something."
And the shining goddess led her along
And had her sit down in a graceful

Silver-studded chair with a footstool.
Then she called to Hephaestus, and said:
"Hephaestus, come here.
Thetis needs you for something." [420]
And the renowned smith called back:
"Thetis? Then the dread goddess I revere
Is inside. She saved me when I lay suffering
From my long fall, after my shameless mother
Threw me out, wanting to hide my infirmity.
And I really would have suffered, had not Thetis
And Eurynome, a daughter of Ocean Stream,
Taken me into their bosom. I stayed with them
Nine years, forging all kinds of jewelry,
Brooches and bracelets and necklaces and pins, [430]
In their hollow cave, while the Ocean's tides,
Murmuring with foam, flowed endlessly around.
No one knew I was there, neither god nor mortal,
Except my rescuers, Eurynome and Thetis.
Now the goddess has come to our house.
I owe her my life and would repay her in full.
Set out our finest for her, Charis,
While I put away my bellows and tools."
He spoke and raised his panting bulk
Up from his anvil, limping along quickly
On his spindly shanks. He set the bellows
Away from the fire, gathered up the tools
He had been using, and put them away
In a silver chest. Then he took a sponge
And wiped his face and hands, his thick neck,
And his shaggy chest. He put on a tunic,
Grabbed a stout staff, and as he went out
Limping, attendants rushed up to support him,
Attendants made of gold who looked like real girls, [450]

With a mind within, and a voice, and strength,
 And knowledge of crafts from the immortal gods.
 These busily move to support their lord,
 And he came hobbling up to where Thetis was,
 Sat himself down on a polished chair,

And clasping her hand in his, he said:
 “My dear Thetis, so grave in your long robe,
 What brings you here now? You almost never visit.
 Tell me what you have in mind, and I will do it
 If it is anything that is at all possible to do.” [460]

HESIOD, *THEOGONY*

Hesiod (c. 700 BCE), the other great poet of ancient Greece, left us two works — Theogony (literally: the origin of the gods) and Works and Days. Much of the mythology of the Greek gods stems from Hesiod's Theogony. Translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White.

Now Iapetus took to wife the neat-ankled maid Clymene, daughter of Ocean, and went up with her into one bed. And she bore him a stout-hearted son, Atlas: [510] also she bore very glorious Menoetius and clever Prometheus, full of various wiles, and scatter-brained Epimetheus who from the first was a mischief to men who eat bread; for it was he who first took of Zeus the woman, the maiden whom he had formed. But Menoetius was outrageous, and farseeing Zeus [515] struck him with a lurid thunderbolt and sent him down to Erebus because of his mad presumption and exceeding pride. And Atlas through hard constraint upholds the wide heaven with untiring head and arms, standing at the borders of the earth before the clear-voiced Hesperides; [520] for this lot wise Zeus assigned to him. And ready-witted Prometheus he bound with inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver; but by night the liver grew [525] as much again everyway as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day. That bird Heracles, the valiant son of shapely-ankled Alcmene, slew; and delivered the son of Iapetus from the cruel plague, and released him from his affliction — not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, [530] that the glory of Heracles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before over the plenteous earth. This, then, he regarded, and honored his famous son; though he was angry, he ceased from the wrath which he had before because Prometheus matched himself in wit with the almighty son of Cronos. [535] For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute at Mecone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to deceive the mind of Zeus. Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts

thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch; [540] but for Zeus he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat. Then the father of men and of gods said to him: “Son of Iapetus, most glorious of all lords, good sir, how unfairly you have divided the portions!”

[545] So said Zeus whose wisdom is everlasting, rebuking him. But wily Prometheus answered him, smiling softly and not forgetting his cunning trick: “Zeus, most glorious and greatest of the eternal gods, take which ever of these portions your heart within you bids.” [550] So he said, thinking trickery. But Zeus, whose wisdom is everlasting, saw and failed not to perceive the trick, and in his heart he thought mischief against mortal men which also was to be fulfilled. With both hands he took up the white fat and was angry at heart, and wrath came to his spirit [555] when he saw the white ox-bones craftily tricked out: and because of this the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars. But Zeus who drives the clouds was greatly vexed and said to him: “Son of Iapetus, clever above all! [560] So, sir, you have not yet forgotten your cunning arts!” So spake Zeus in anger, whose wisdom is everlasting; and from that time he was always mindful of the trick, and would not give the power of untiring fire to the Melian race of mortal men who live on the earth. [565] But the noble son of Iapetus outwitted him and stole the far-seen gleam of untiring fire in a hollow fennel stalk. And Zeus who thunders on high was stung in spirit, and his dear heart was angered when he saw amongst men the far-seen ray of fire. [570] Forthwith he made an evil thing for men as the price of fire; for the very famous Limping God formed of earth the likeness of a shy maiden as the son of Cronos willed. And the goddess bright-eyed Athena girded and clothed her with silvery raiment, and down from her head [575] she spread with her hands an embroidered veil, a wonder to see; and she, Pallas Athena, put about her head lovely garlands, flowers of new-grown herbs. Also she put upon

her head a crown of gold which the very famous Limping God made himself [580] and worked with his own hands as a favor to Zeus his father. On it was much curious work, wonderful to see; for of the many creatures which the land and sea rear up, he put most upon it, wonderful things, like living beings with voices: and great beauty shone out from it. [585] But when he had made the beautiful evil to be the price for the blessing, he brought her out, delighting in the finery which the bright-eyed daughter of a mighty father had given her, to the place where the other gods and men were. And wonder took hold of the deathless gods and mortal men when they saw that which was sheer guile, not to be withstood by men. [590] For from her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmeets in hateful poverty, but only in wealth. And as in thatched hives bees [595] feed the drones whose nature is to do mischief — by day and throughout the day until the sun goes down the bees are busy and lay the white combs, while the drones stay at home in the covered hives and reap the

toil of others into their own bellies — [600] even so Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil. And he gave them a second evil to be the price for the good they had: whoever avoids marriage and the sorrows that women cause, and will not wed, reaches deadly old age [605] without anyone to tend his years, and though he at least has no lack of livelihood while he lives, yet, when he is dead, his kinsfolk divide his possessions amongst them. And as for the man who chooses the lot of marriage and takes a good wife suited to his mind, evil continually contends with good; [610] for whoever happens to have mischievous children, lives always with unceasing grief in his spirit and heart within him; and this evil cannot be healed. So it is not possible to deceive or go beyond the will of Zeus: for not even the son of Iapetus, kindly Prometheus, [615] escaped his heavy anger, but of necessity strong bands confined him, although he knew many a wile.

HESIOD, *WORKS AND DAYS*

For the gods keep hidden from men the means of life. Else you would easily do work enough in a day to supply you for a full year even without working; [45] soon would you put away your rudder over the smoke, and the fields worked by ox and sturdy mule would run to waste. But Zeus in the anger of his heart hid it, because Prometheus the crafty deceived him; therefore he planned sorrow and mischief against men. [50] He hid fire; but that the noble son of Iapetus stole again for men from Zeus the counsellor in a hollow fennel-stalk, so that Zeus who delights in thunder did not see it. But afterwards Zeus who gathers the clouds said to him in anger: “Son of Iapetus, surpassing all in cunning, [55] you are glad that you have outwitted me and stolen fire—a great plague to you yourself and to men that shall be. But I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction.” So said the father of men and gods, and laughed aloud. [60] And he bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses in face; and Athena to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web;

[65] and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes the guide, the Slayer of Argus, to put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature. So he ordered. And they obeyed the lord Zeus the son of Cronos. [70] Forthwith the famous Lamé God moulded clay in the likeness of a modest maid, as the son of Cronos purposed. And the goddess brighteyed Athena girded and clothed her, and the divine Graces and queenly Persuasion put necklaces of gold upon her, [75] and the rich-haired Hours crowned her head with spring flowers. And Pallas Athena bedecked her form with all manner of finery. Also the Guide, the Slayer of Argus, contrived within her lies and crafty words and a deceitful nature at the will of loud thundering Zeus, [80] and the Herald of the gods put speech in her. And he called this woman Pandora, because all they who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift, a plague to men who eat bread. But when he had finished the sheer, hopeless snare, the Father sent glorious Argus-Slayer, [85] the swift messenger of the gods, to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not think on what Prometheus had said to him, bidding him never take a gift of Olympian Zeus, but to send it back for

fear it might prove to be something harmful to men. But he took the gift, and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood. [90] For ere this the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses which bring the Fates upon men; for in misery men grow old quickly. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands [95] and scattered, all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for

ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds. [100] But the rest, countless plagues, wander amongst men; for earth is full of evils, and the sea is full. Of themselves diseases come upon men continually by day and by night, bringing mischief to mortals silently; for wise Zeus took away speech from them. [105] So is there no way to escape the will of Zeus. Or if you will, I will sum you up another tale well and skilfully — and do you lay it up in your heart, — how the gods and mortal men sprang from one source.

GENESIS

Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”), although perhaps one of the last to be written down. The story of creation comes in two versions. The older Yahwistic version (2:4-24) — so-called because of the use of the word ‘Yahweh’ for the god of Israel — was likely written down in the 7th-6th century BCE. The newer Priestly version (1:1-2:3) is thought to have been written down after the Babylonian exile, in the 6th-5th century. The following selection comes from the Revised Standard Version.

Gen. 1:1-31 (the Priestly creation story)

[1] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2] Now the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

[3] And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. [4] And God saw that light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. [5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

[6] And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.”

[7] And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. [8] And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

[9] And God said, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. [10] God called the dry land Earth and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. [11] And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees

bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. [12] The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. [13] And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

[14] And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, [15] and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. [16] And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. [17] And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, [18] to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. [19] And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

[20] And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” [21] So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. [22] And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” [23] And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

[24] And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. [25] And God made the beasts of the earth according to

their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good.

[26] Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” [29] And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. [30] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. [31] And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Gen. 2:4-24 (the Yahwistic creation story)

[4] These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, [5] when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; [6] but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground — [7] then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

[8] And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

[9] And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[10] A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. [11] The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; [12] and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

[13] The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. [14] And the name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[15] And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. [16] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’

[18] Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.’ [19] So out of the ground Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. [20] The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. [21] So Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. [22] Yahweh God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ [24] Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

PLATO

Plato (427-347 BCE) was only twenty-eight when Socrates (470-399 BCE) was executed by Athenians on trumped-up charges of “impiety and corrupting the youth.” Socrates wrote nothing, and without Plato his fame would never have spread so widely and endured these many centuries. Not only was Plato an acute analytic thinker, he was a gifted stylist whose prose has won praise from ancient and modern

readers alike.

Nearly all of Plato’s writings are in the form of dialogues, almost all of which cast Socrates as one of the speakers. It is believed the early dialogues represent the historical Socrates and his views fairly closely, while the middle and later dialogues are explorations of Plato’s own views.

The following brief passages from the Euthyphro and the Meno are included here because of their mention of Daedalus and his statues. Euthyphro is a supercilious priest who considers himself wise in the ways of the gods, while Meno is an arrogant, ambitious, and intellectually shallow young general from Thessaly. The translation from the Greek is by G. M. A. Grube.

EUTHYPHRO (11B-E)

Socrates: Your statements, Euthyphro, seem to belong to my ancestor, Daedalus. If I were stating them and putting them forward, you would perhaps be making fun of me and say that because of my kinship with him, my conclusions in discussion run away and will not stay where one puts them. As these propositions are yours, however, we need some other jest, for they will not stay put for you, as you say yourself.

Euthyphro: I think the same jest will do for our discussion, Socrates, for I am not the one who makes them go around and not remain in the same place; it is you who are the Daedalus; for as far as I am concerned they would remain as they were.

Socrates: It looks as if I was cleverer than Daedalus in using my skill, my friend, insofar as he could only cause to move the things he made himself, but I can make other people's things move as well as my own. And the smartest part of my skill is that I am clever without wanting to be, for I would rather have your statements to me remain unmoved than possess the wealth of Tantalus as well as the cleverness of Daedalus. But enough of this.

MENO (97D-E)

Socrates: Do you know why you wonder, or shall I tell you?

Meno: By all means tell me.

Socrates: It is because you have paid no attention to the statues of Daedalus, but perhaps there are none in Thessaly.

Meno: What do you have in mind when you say this?

Socrates: That they too run away and escape if one does not tie them down but remain in place if tied down.

Meno: So what?

Socrates: To acquire an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much, like acquiring a runaway slave, for it does not remain, but it is worth much if tied down, for his works are very beautiful.

ARISTOTLE, *POLITICS*

At the age of seventeen, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) traveled from northern Greece to Athens where he hoped to study at Plato's famous Academy. He must have liked what he found, since he stayed for nineteen years, eventually becoming one of the teachers. He left the Academy and Athens when Plato died in 347, but returned in 335 to open his own school at the Lyceum (a gymnasium and garden located near the temple of Apollo Lyceus). Aristotle is reported to have written dialogues after the manner of Plato, as well as the extensive lecture notes that he used in the classroom, and ancient readers of his dialogues claim that he was an exceptionally gifted writer. Unfortunately none of these dialogues survived many centuries past his death, and all that we have had available of Aristotle's writings (at least for the last two thousand years or so) are his lecture notes. The following is the open text of Aristotle's Politics, Bk. 1, ch. 4 (1253b23-39), as translated by Benjamin Jowett.

Property is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessaries. And as in the arts which

have a definite sphere the workers must have their own proper instruments for the accomplishment of their work, so it is in the management of a household. Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others lifeless; in the rudder, the pilot of a ship has a lifeless, in the look-out man, a living instrument; for in the arts the servant is a kind of instrument. Thus, too, a possession is an instrument for maintaining life. And so, in the arrangement of the family, a slave is a living possession, and property a number of such instruments; and the servant is himself an instrument which takes precedence of all other instruments. For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, "of their own accord entered the assembly of the gods"; if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.

OVID, *METAMORPHOSES*

Ovid (43 BCE – AD 17/18) — or to use his full name: Publius Ovidius Naso — wrote the Metamorphoses in fifteen books, a long narrative poem in Latin recounting the various stories of the (Greek/Roman) gods, and in Book Ten he recounts the story of the Cypriot sculpture Pygmalion and the life-like statue (later in the tradition given the name Galatea) in which he falls in love.

The following selection comes from the 1717 translation into English by a number of eminent writers, including Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope, but most by John Dryden, who was responsible for this story. (The bracketed numbers to the right gives the line count for Book Ten.

Pygmalion, loathing their lascivious life,
 Abhorr'd all womankind, but most a wife;
 So single chose to live, and shunn'd to wed,
 Well pleased to want a consort of his bed; [345]
 Yet fearing idleness, the nurse of ill,
 In sculpture exercised his happy skill,
 And carved in ivory such a maid, so fair,
 As nature could not with his art compare, [350]
 Were she to work; but, in her own defence,
 Must take her pattern here, and copy hence. [355]
 Pleased with his idol, he commends, admires,
 Adores, and last, the thing adored desires:
 A very virgin in her face was seen,
 And had she moved, a living maid had been: [360]
 One would have thought she could have stirr'd, but strove
 With modesty, and was ashamed to move:
 Art hid with art, so well perform'd the cheat,
 It caught the carver with his own deceit:
 He knows 'tis madness, yet he must adore, [365]
 And still the more he knows it, loves the more.
 The flesh, or what so seems, he touches oft,
 Which feels so smooth that he believes it soft;
 Fired with this thought, at once he strain'd the breast,
 And on the lips a loving kiss impress'd. [370]
 'Tis true, the harden'd breast resists the gripe,
 And the cold lips return a kiss unripe:
 But when, retiring back, he look'd again,
 To think it ivory was a thought too mean;
 With flattery now he seeks her mind to move, [375]

And now with gifts, the powerful bribes of love
 He furnishes her closet first, and fills
 The crowded shelves with rarities of shells;
 Adds orient pearls, which from the conchs he drew,
 And all the sparkling stones of various hue; [375]
 And parrots, imitating human tongue,
 And singing birds, in silver cages hung;
 And every fragrant flower and odorous green
 Were sorted well, with lumps of amber laid between:
 Rich fashionable robes her person deck, [380]
 Pendants her ears, and pearls adorn her neck;
 Her taper'd fingers too with rings are graced,
 And an embroider'd zone surrounds her slender waist.
 Thus like a queen array'd, so richly dress'd,
 Beauteous she show'd, but unadorn'd the best. [385]
 Then from the floor he raised a royal bed,
 With coverings of Sidonian purple spread.
 The feast of Venus came, a solemn day,
 To which the Cypriots due devotion pay;
 With gilded horns the milk-white heifers led, [390]
 Slaughter'd before the sacred altars bled.
 Pygmalion offering, first approach'd the shrine,
 And then with prayers implored the powers divine:
 Almighty gods, if all we mortals want,
 If all we can require, be yours to grant, [395]
 Make this fair statue mine, he would have said,
 But changed his words for shame, and only pray'd,
 "Give me the likeness of my ivory maid."
 The golden goddess, present at the prayer,
 Well knew he meant th' inanimated fair, [400]
 And gave the sign of granting his desire;
 For thrice in cheerful flames ascends the fire.
 The youth, returning to his mistress hies,
 And, impudent in hope, with ardent eyes,
 And beating breast, by the dear statue lies. [405]
 He kisses her white lips, renews the bliss,
 And looks, and thinks they redden at the kiss;
 He thought them warm before, nor longer stays,
 But next his hand on the hard substance lays;
 Hard as it was, beginning to relent, [410]
 It seem'd the block beneath his fingers bent:
 He felt again—his fingers made a print—

'Twas flesh, but flesh so firm, it rose against the dint:
 The pleasing task he fails not to renew;
 Soft, and more soft, at every touch it grew; [415]
 Like pliant wax, when chafing hands reduce
 The former mass to form, and frame for use.
 He would believe, but yet is still in pain,
 And tries his argument of sense again,
 Presses the pulse, and feels the leaping vein: [420]
 Convinced, o'erjoy'd, his studied thanks and praise.
 To her who made the miracle, he pays:

Then lips to lips he join'd; now freed from fear,
 He found the savour of the kiss sincere.
 At this the waken'd image oped her eyes, [425]
 And view'd at once the light and lover with surprise.
 The goddess, present at the match she made,
 So bless'd the bed, such fruitfulness convey'd,
 That ere ten months had sharpen'd either horn,
 To crown their bliss, a lovely boy was born: [430]
 Paphos his name, who, grown to manhood, wall'd
 The city Paphos, from the founder call'd.

THE GOLEM

The following selection comes from the Wikipedia entry on "Golem" (retrieved 12 Jul 2015).

ETYMOLOGY

The word golem occurs once in the *Bible* in Psalm 139:16, which uses the word גלמי (*galmi*; my golem) meaning "my unshaped form," connoting the unfinished human being before God's eyes. The *Mishnah* uses the term for an uncultivated person [...]

EARLIEST STORIES

The oldest stories of golems date to early Judaism. In the Talmud (*Tractate Sanhedrin* 38b), Adam was initially created as a golem (גולם) when his dust was "kneaded into a shapeless husk." Like Adam, all golems are created from mud, by those close to divinity; but no anthropogenic golem is fully human. Early on, the main disability of the golem was its inability to speak. *Sanhedrin* 65b describes Rava creating a man (*gavra*). He sent the man to Rav Zeira. Rav Zeira spoke to him, but he did not answer. Rav Zeira said, "You were created by the sages; return to your dust."

During the Middle Ages, passages from the *Sefer*

Yetzirah (Book of Creation) were studied as a means to create and animate a golem, although there is little in the writings of Jewish mysticism that supports this belief. It was believed that golems could be activated by an ecstatic experience induced by the ritualistic use of various letters of the Hebrew Alphabet forming a "shem" (any one of the Names of God), wherein the shem was written on a piece of paper and inserted in the mouth or in the forehead of the golem.

In some tales (for example, some versions of those of the golems of Chełm and Prague, as well as in Polish tales and version of Brothers Grimm), a golem is inscribed with Hebrew words, such as the word *emet* (אמת, "truth" in Hebrew) written on its forehead. The golem could then be deactivated by removing the aleph (א) in *emet*, thus changing the inscription from "truth" to "death" (*met*, מת, meaning "dead"). Other versions add that after creating an entity out of clay, it would be brought to life by placing into his mouth a shem with a magic formula, and could later be immobilized by pulling out the shem, or by reversing the creative combinations, for, as Rabbi Jacob ben Shalom, who arrived at Barcelona from Germany in 1325, remarked, the law of destruction is the reversal of the law of creation.