

Mani Rao

Poem Notes

Venus & Adonis

Adonis is a handsome Greek youth loved by the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. Ignoring Aphrodite's advice, Adonis goes hunting and is gored to death by a wild boar. According to Ovid, Aphrodite transformed his blood into a red anemone, a short living plant. The goddess Venus is the Roman version of Aphrodite, and thus, this poem also plays with cross-cultural humor. Shakespeare wrote a poem called "Venus and Adonis."

Or Us

Orpheus is a poet and musician in Greek mythology whose music, it was said, could charm animals, and make rocks and trees dance. When his wife Eurydice dies of a snakebite, Orpheus visits the underworld to retrieve her. His music puts the ferocious Cerberus to sleep and charms even Hades. Eurydice is allowed to follow him back to earth upon condition that he not look back. Of course, Orpheus looks back, and loses Eurydice. Plunged into grief, he roams the wild, the Maenads tear him apart, and his head floats into a cave to become an oracle. Ovid has an account of the story in *Metamorphosis*. "The Regrets" is a New Zealand band.

Poem, Sisyphus

In Greek mythology, King Sisyphus had to roll a massive rock up a steep hill as punishment – it would roll down at once, and he would have to haul it up again and so on throughout eternity. The word "Sisyphean" has thus come to refer to an endless task. In Indian mythology, Brahma is the creator. A day in the life of Brahma is 4.32 billion human years, and so is a night. Brahma's life of a hundred years (36,000 days) is 311.04 trillion human years, and human life is not manifest during Brahma's night.

Poet Notes

Mani Rao (b.1965 India) is the author of eight poetry books and a translation of the Sanskrit spiritual text, *Bhagavad Gita*. Her poems and essays are published in journals including *Tinfish*, *Wasafiri*, *Meanjin*, *JAAM*, *Takahe*, *Printout*, *Washington Square*, *Fulcrum*, *West Coast Line*, and *Interim*, and in anthologies including *Zoland Poetry*, WWNorton's *Language for a New Century*, Penguin's *60 Indian Poets*, and the *BloodAxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets*. She has performed at literary festivals including the *Age Melbourne Writers' Festival*, *Vancouver Asian Heritage Month*, *Chicago Humanities Festival*, *New York PEN World Voices*, *Man Hong Kong International Literary Festival*, and *Singapore International Poetry Festival*. Translations of her poems have been published in Latin, Italian, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, French and German. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Iowa International Writing Program in 2005 and 2009, and the 2006 University of Iowa International Programs writer-in-residence. Mani has an MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is a PhD student of Religion at Emory University. Mani was married to the New Zealand songwriter, co-author and publisher of *Instant! Maori*, Nick Theobald for over a decade, and had a home in Palm Beach, Waiheke Island, New Zealand, where the natural environment especially, is a presence in her writing, and continues to be vivid in her memory and imagination. Her website is www.manirao.com

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Venus and Adonis

Exactly the
Accent I
Like
Olive in mouth
Let's
 In the orchard
 Pips around us
Promise me you'll
Speak
Greek

What are you waiting for?
The moon won't get any fuller nor
Venus more voluptuous

Adonis prefers to hunt not
Be chased in any case
Mama Love's
Too Romanesque for his taste

Or Us

Whose story isn't Orpheus
You've been in Hell made a mistake been afraid you've got song you're prophecy you're God
 and you're not
Appreciated Decapitated
At the height of a party your wife keels over
That you don't want her back you're guilty in fidelity you turn gay the Maenads have a field
 day the Maenads are our mothers
Orpheus starts a band The Regrets
Dark dark dark dark
Tar tar us
Place as place
Grey gag
Absent air

Poem, Sisyphus

Moon, Sisyphus
Full
Null

Life, Sisyphus
Chain

Who knows how many

Days in the
Life of Brahma

Pebble, Sisyphus
On a beach
 Wave
 Wave
 Wave
Polishing

Up there
Slick stars who made it