

Metamorphoses – Ovidius – Notes Ninke – Nov/Dec 2023

This story was used by Alina as a basis for her performance.

Cupid, and the God Apollo who tries to seduce Daphne.

Daphne's story

The story comes from the very first book of Metamorphoses. The earth had just been created. But, it had suffered from the first deluge or flood (Sintflut); as a punishment for the first people living in sin. The book explains that after the flood, the wet earth, bathing in sunlight, started to create all kinds of new life. (Because they believed new life could come from the combination of warmth and wetness). All kinds of new creatures were made. Some were still half-earth half body, so they couldn't live, but some fully formed.

One of the creatures that came from this process was a big Python. Apollo (God of the hunt, music, medicine, fortune telling and poetry), used his bow for the first time on this kind of animal. He had to fight hard to overcome the Python, but in the end he manages to kill the snake. This triumph is so big for him, he decides to create a festival every year, where the 'Pythean games' are played and the strength of men can be tested there. In this context, after just having slain the Python, he sees Cupid, also with a bow and arrow. And he mocks him, telling him "This bow of yours, I would look much better carrying that." And he starts bragging about the big snake he just killed.

This makes Cupid take revenge on him. He shoots an arrow that makes you fall madly in love into Apollo's heart, and the other one, which makes you lose all interest in love, in Daphne's. Apollo then starts to hunt Daphne, and tries and tries to seduce her over and over again, while she keeps running away from him, until she is exhausted from running and begs her father Peneius, a river god, to help her out. He then transforms her into a Laurel Tree (Lorbeerbaum). Apollo still feels attracted to her, but it seems that even the wood tries to turn away from him. Then, he decides that from now on, this kind of wood will be used for the laurel wreath (Lorbeer-Kranz) that he wears on his head, and will adorn his lyre and his bow and arrow and that this kind of tree will be a 'signpost' on the Capitol. It is said that only from this day, Apollo wore Laurel around his head. And the story also says that the tree 'bowed its head', to agree with this.