“Midas and the Golden Touch”

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book 11.100-105, 119-126

Blessed and cursed with the infamous “touch of gold,” Midas is one of the more memorable characters to be found in Ovid’s motley collection of myths entitled *The Metamorphoses* (“The Changes”).

**Section I. 100-105.** After Midas, the king of Phrygia, took in Silenus, the god of wine, Bacchus is delighted to be reunited with his foster-father (*altor*) and offers to grant any favor Midas might choose. Unfortunately, the mortal king is driven by avarice and asks that everything he touch turn to gold.

**Section II. 119-126.** As he goes about touching everything within reach, ecstatic over his newly-granted power, Midas discovers there is a drawback to his new power.

**Text and Translation**

**Section I**

Huic deus optandi gratum — sed inutile! — fecit
To this man the god gave (lit. “created”) the power of choosing a pleasing —

muneris arbitrium, gaudens altore recepto.
but useless! — gift, rejoicing in (his) foster-father returned.

100.  **optandi**: opto (1): choose; genitive gerundive (“of choosing”) agreeing with *muneris* (line 102)

    **gratum**: gratus, -a, -um: pleasing

    **inutile**: inutilis,-e: useless

101.  **muneris**: munus,-eris, n: gift

    **arbitrium**: arbitrium, -i, n.: power

    **gaudens**: gaudeo, -ere, gavisus sum: rejoice

    **altore**: altor,-oris, m: foster-father
Ille, male usurus donis, ait “Effice, quicquid
corpore contigero, fulvum vertatur in aurum.”
Adnuit optatis nocituraque munera solvit
Liber et indoluit quod non meliora petisset. . .

Ille, male usurus donis, ait “Effice, quicquid
That man, about to use the gifts poorly, said, “Make (it that) whatever
corpore contigero, fulvum vertatur in aurum.”
I will have touched with my body, might be turned into tawny gold.”

Adnuit optatis nocituraque munera solvit
Liber granted (the things) desired and (though they were) going to harm paid
Liber et indoluit quod non meliora petisset. . .
the gift(s) and grieved because he had not sought better things.

102. male: poorly
usurus: utor, -i, usus (deponent verb; + abl. object): “(he) about to use”
effice: efficio,-ere, feci, fectum: make it (that . . .)
quicquid: (indefinite pronoun) whatever

103. contigero: contingo,-ere, -tigi,-tactum: touch
fulvum: fulvus,-a,-um: tawny
aurum: aurum,-i, n.: gold

104. adnuit: adnuo, -ere, adnui,adnutum: grant (the subject is Liber)
optatis: optatum, -i, n.: wish
nocitura: noceo,-ere, nocui, noxitum: harm
munera: munus, muneris, n.: gift; here, plural for singular
solvit: solvo, -ere, solvi, solutum: pay

105. Liber: Liber, -eri, m.: another name for the god Bacchus
indoluit: indolesco, -ere, indolui: grieve
petisset: = petivisset
Section II

... Gaudenti mensas posuēre ministri
To (him) rejoicing, (his) servants set tables

exstructas dapibus nec tostae frugis egentes:
heaped up with meals and not lacking in (lit. “of”) baked bread:

tum, vero, sive ille suā Cerealia dextrā
then, truly, whether that man had touched with his own

munera contigerat, Cerealia dona rigebant,
right hand (the gifts) of Ceres, the gifts of Ceres became stiff,

sive dapes avido convellere dente parabat,
or if he was preparing to tear apart a meal with a greedy tooth,

119. gaudenti: see line 101
mensas: mensa, -ae, f.: table
posuēre: = posuerunt
ministri: minister, -tri, m.: servant

120. exstructas: exstruo, -ere, exstruxi, exstructum: heap up
dapibus: daps, dapis, f.: meal
tostae: tostus, -a, -um: baked
frugis: frux, frugis, f.: grain; here, bread
egentes: egeo, -_re, egui: lack; with genitive (literally, “lacking of...”)

121. vero: (adverb) truly
sive...sive: (conj.) whether... or if
Cerealia: Cerealis, -e: belonging to Ceres, the goddess of grain; here, “of Ceres”
dextrā (manū): dexter, -tra, -trum: right (hand)

122. rigebant: rigeo, -ere: become stiff

123. avido: avidus, -a, -um: greedy
convellere: convello, -ere, -vellī, -vulsum: tear apart
dente: dens, dentis, m.: tooth
lammina fulva dapes admoto dente premebat;
he was pressing golden sheets of metal (for) food when (his) tooth was applied;

miscuerat puris auctorem muneris undis:
125
had he mixed the giver of the gift with pure water(s):

fusile per rictūs aurum fluitare videres.
you would see liquid gold flow over his open mouth.

124 lammina: lammina, -ae, f.: sheet of metal
admonto: admoveo, -ere, -movi, -motum: apply

125. miscuerat: misceo, -ere, miscui, mixtum: mix
puris: purus, -a, -um: pure
auctorem: here, giver
undis: unda, -ae, f.: water

126. fusile: fusilis, -e: liquid
per: here, over
rictūs: rictus, -ās, m.: open mouth; here, plural for singular
fluitare: fluito (1): flow