

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6: Arachne and Minerva

Minerva, the Roman embodiment of Athena the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, was the inventor and patron deity of weaving and embroidery, skills which women in classical antiquity learned and practiced in the home. As a goddess, she expected the usual adoration and devotion from those who worshiped her, especially those gifted in her own spinner's art.

Arachne, a poor country girl, was known far and wide as a wondrous weaver. However, she was also boastful, claiming even that she was superior to Minerva. Offended, the goddess dressed up as an old hag and went to Arachne to warn her against her *hubris* (immoderate pride). Nothing fazed this girl who only slightly blushed when Minerva revealed herself.

Far from giving credit to the goddess as the source of her skill, and unmindful of the danger posed by the presence of an angry deity so close by, the foolish girl challenged Minerva to a yarn duel, a looming Olympics.

In Ovid's tale, when both are finished with their furious fabricating, Arachne has indeed won the contest—*non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor / possit opus* ("Not Pallas, not Envy could pluck out a flaw in that work"), says Ovid—having flawlessly detailed the gods and their improprieties with mortal women, a thinly-veiled ironic affront. Minerva, on the other hand, had spun pictures of puny mortals turned into various creatures after defying the gods' warning, an admonition literally woven into every corner.

As Ovid heads into the following passage, the question that lingers in the reader's mind is what web of retribution has the arrogant Arachne spun for herself.

doluit successu flava virago
the golden-haired goddess felt pain at the outcome

130

et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes,
and she broke down the embroidered cloth, (depicting) divine crimes,

utque Cytoriaco radium de monte tenebat,
and as she held the shuttle from the Cytorian mountain,

ter quarter Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnēs.
twelve times Minerva struck the forehead of Idmonian Arachne.

[continued on the next page]

non tulit infelix, laqueoque animosa ligavit
The unlucky (girl) did not suffer (the insult) and with a noose she bound

guttura: pendentem Pallas miserata levavit 135
(her) proud throat: feeling pity, Minerva lifted (her) up, hanging,

atque ita ‘Vive quidem, pende tamen, improba,’ dixit
and said thus: “Live, then! Yet hang, presumptuous (girl)!”

‘lexque eadem poenae, ne sis secura futuri,
and let the same condition of penalty, lest you be carefree about the future,

dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto!’
be set for your offspring and distant descendants!”

post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos herbae
After these things, (as she was) departing, she suddenly sprinkled (her)

sparsit et extemplo tristi medicamine. Tactae 140
with the juices of an infernal herb and a poisonous drug. Touched,

defluxere comae, cum quis et naris et aures,
(Arachne’s) hair flowed away and with them both (her) nose and ears,

fitque caput minimum, toto quoque corpore parva est:
and (her) head becomes very small, she is also small in her whole body;

in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent,
slender fingers cling on (her) side in place of legs,

cetera venter habet: de quo tamen illa remitterit
(her) belly occupies the rest: from which, nevertheless, that (girl) lets out

stamen, et antiquas exercet aranea telas. 145
a thread, and the spider works (her) ancient looms.

Arachne and Minerva: Worksheet

a. The questions below pertain to the forms underlined in the passage.

b. When you're asked to change a word from one form to another, change only **that** form of the word. For instance, if you're asked to change *habet* to the passive voice, make *habet* passive but leave it in the 3rd person singular, present indicative.

1. Make **doluit** pluperfect. _____
2. Change **flava virago** to dative. _____
3. What case is **crimina** and why? _____
4. What case is **Cytoriaco** and why? _____
5. Change **percussit** to future passive. _____
6. Make **infelix** neuter. _____
7. Change **ligavit** to a future active participle modifying *laqueo*. _____
8. Make **pendentem** modify *guttura*. _____
9. What mood is **pende** and why? _____
10. What case is **improba** and why? _____
11. Change **eadem** to genitive plural. _____
12. Make **ea** singular. _____
13. Change **discedens** to perfect passive. _____
14. Make **sparsit** passive. _____
15. What case is **medicamine** and why? _____
16. Change **naris** to genitive plural. _____

[continued on the next page]

17. Make **caput** plural. _____
18. Make **toto...corpore** genitive. _____
19. What case is **parva** and why? _____
20. Change **haerent** to perfect second person singular. _____
21. What case is **cetera** and why? _____
22. Change **habet** to a future passive participle modifying *venter*. _____
23. Change **remittit** to a passive infinitive. _____
24. Change **stamen** to genitive plural. _____
25. Change **exercet** to a future active participle modifying *stamen*. _____

Arachne and Minerva: Notes and Vocabulary

130. **doluit:** *doleo, -ere, dolui, dolitum*: feel pain
successu: *successus, -s, m.*: outcome; ablative of cause (“at the outcome,” i.e. of the weaving contest)
flava: *flavus, -a, -um*: blonde, golden-haired
virago: *virago, -inis, f.*: heroic woman; here, goddess
131. **rupit:** *rumpo, -ere, rupi, ruptum*: break down
pictas: *pictus, -a, -um*: painted, embroidered
caelestia: *caelestius, -a, -um*: divine
crimina: *crimen, -inis, n.*: crime
vestes: *vestis, -is, f.*: cloth
132. **ut:** (conj.) as
Cytoriaco...de monte: “from the Cytorian mountain,” referring to boxwood, a type of tree which grows in Greece. The shuttle of Athena’s loom is made of boxwood.
radium: *radius, -ii, m.*: pointed rod; here, shuttle
133. **ter** (adv.): three times
quarter (adv.): four times; with *ter*, “twelve times”
Idmoniae:; Idmonian, from the family of Idmon; with *Arachn_s*
frontem: *frons, frontis, f.*: forehead
percussit: *percutio, -ere, -cussi, -cussum*: strike
Arachn_s: *Arachn_, -s, f.*: Greek genitive: Arachne, daughter of Idmon
134. **tulit:** *fero, ferre, tuli, latus*: suffer
infelix: *infelix, -icis*: unlucky
laqueo: *laqueus, -i, m.*: noose
animosa: *animosus, -a, -um*: proud
ligavit: *ligo, -are, -avi, -atum*: tie
135. **guttura:** *guttur, -uris, n.*: throat; here, plural for singular
pendentem: *pendeo, pendere, pependi*: hang
Pallas: Pallas Athene: (Greek nominative), equated with the Roman goddess Minerva
miserata: “feeling pity”
levavit: *levo, -are, -avi, -atum*: lift
136. **ita:** (adv.) thus
quidem: (conj.) then
tamen: (conj.) yet
improba: *improbus, -a, -um*: shameless, presumptuous; here, used as a substantive
137. **lex:** *lex, legis, f.*: law; here, condition
ne sis: “lest you be”; *sis* is the present subjunctive second singular of *sum*
secura: *securus, -a, -um*: secure, carefree
138. **dicta:** with *esto*, said; here, set (+ dative)

- generi:** here, offspring, family
seris: *serus, -a, -um*: late(r); here, distant
nepotibus: *nepos, -otis, m.*: grandson, descendant
esto: let...be! (imperative second person singular of *sum*)
139. **discedens:** *discedo, -ere, -cessi, -cessum*: depart
sucis: *sucus, -i, m.*: juice, sap
Hecateidos: an adjective based on the Greek name *Hecat_*, *-_s*, f., the moon-goddess and mistress of witch-craft; agrees with *herbae*. Also referred to as Hell-bane, this poison usually causes death but in Arachne's case turns her into a spider.
herbae: *herba, -ae, f.*: herb, plant
140. **sparsit:** *spargo, -ere, sparsi, sparsum*: sprinkle
extemplo: (adv.) immediately
tristi: *tristis, -e*: sad; here, "poisonous"
medicamine: *medicamen, -inis, n.*: drug, medicine
141. **defluxere:** = *defluerunt; defluo, -ere, fluxi*: flow away
comae: *coma, -ae, f.*: hair
cum quis: = *quibuscum (defluxere)*
naris: *naris, -is, f.* nose
ares: *auris, -is, f.*: ear
142. **fit:** "becomes"; from *fito, fieri, factus sum*: be made, become
caput: *caput, capitis, n.*: head
toto...corpore: lit. "in (respect to her) whole body"; ablative of specification
quoque: (adv.) also, too; usually placed after the word it emphasizes
143. **latere:** *latus, -eris, n.*: side
exiles: *exilis, -e*: slender
digiti: *digitus, -i, m.*: finger
pro: (prep.) in place of; + ablative
cruribus: *crus, cruris, n.*: leg
haerent: *haereo, -ere, haesi, haesum*: cling
144. **ceteri, -ae, -a:** the rest
venter: *venter, ventris, m.*: belly
remittit: *remitto, -ere, remisit, remissum*: let out
145. **stamen:** *stamen, -inis, n.*: warp (of a loom); i.e. the thread hanging from a distaff
exercet: *exerceo, -ere, -ui, -itum*: work
aranea: *aranea, -ae, f.*: spider
telas: *tela, -ae, f.*: web; loom