

Dialogues of the Sea Gods, by Lucian of Samosata, English translated by H. W. & F. G. Fowler

1. DORIS AND GALATEA

DORIS

A handsome lover, Galatea, this Sicilian shepherd who they say is so mad for you!

GALATEA

Don't be sarcastic, Doris; he is Posidon's son, after all.

DORIS

Well, and if he were Zeus's, and still such a wild shaggy creature, with only one eye (there is nothing uglier than to have only one eye), do you think his birth would improve his beauty?

GALATEA

Shagginess and wildness, as you call them, are not ugly in a man; and his eye looks very well in the middle of his forehead, and sees just as well as if it were two.

DORIS

Why, my dear, from your raptures about him one would think it was you that were in love, not he.

GALATEA

Oh no, I am not in love; but it is too bad, your all running him down as you do. It is my belief you are jealous, Do you remember? we were playing on the shore at the foot of Etna, where the long strip of beach comes between the mountain and the sea; he was feeding his sheep, and spied us from above; yes, but he never so much as glanced at the rest of you; I was the pretty one; he was all eyes—eye, I mean—for me. That is what makes you spiteful, because it showed I was better than you, good enough to be loved, while you were taken no notice of.

DORIS

Hoity-toity! jealous indeed! because a one-eyed shepherd thinks you pretty! Why, what could he see in you but your white skin? and he only cared for that because it reminded him of cheese and milk; he thinks everything pretty that is like them. If you want to know any more than that about your looks, sit on a rock when it is calm, and lean over the water; just a bit of white skin, that is all; and who cares for that, if it is not picked out with some red?

GALATEA

Well, if I am all white, I have got a lover of some sort; there is not a shepherd or a sailor or a boatman to care for any of you. Besides, Polyphemus is very musical.

DORIS

Take care, dear; we heard him singing the other day when he serenaded you. Heavens! one would have taken him for an ass braying. And his lyre! what a thing! A stag's skull, with its horns for the uprights; he put a bar across, and fastened on the strings without any tuning-pegs! then came the performance, all harsh and out of tune; he shouted something himself, and the lyre played something else, and the love ditty sent us into fits of laughter. Why, Echo, chatterbox that she is, would not answer him; she was ashamed to be caught mimicking such a rough ridiculous song. Oh, and the pet that your beau brought you in his arms!—a bear cub nearly as shaggy as himself. Now then, Galatea, do you still think we envy you your lover?

GALATEA

Well, Doris, only show us your own; no doubt he is much handsomer, and sings and plays far better.

DORIS

Oh, I have not got one; I do not set up to be lovely. But one like the Cyclops—faugh, he might be one of his own goats!—he eats raw meat, they say, and feeds on travellers—one like him, dear, you may keep; I wish you nothing worse than to return his love.

2. CYCLOPS AND POSEIDON

CYCLOPS

Only look, father, what that cursed stranger has been doing to me! He made me drunk, and set upon me whilst I was asleep, and blinded me.

POSEIDON

Who has dared to do this?

CYCLOPS

He called himself 'Noman' at first: but when he had got safely out of range, he said his name was Odysseus.

POSEIDON

I know—the Ithacan; on his way back from Troy. But how did he come to do such a thing? He is not distinguished for courage.

CYCLOPS

When I got back from the pasture, I caught a lot of the fellows in my cave. Evidently they had designs upon the sheep: because when I had blocked up my doorway (I have a great big stone for that), and kindled a fire, with a tree that I had brought home from the mountain,—there they were trying to hide themselves. I saw they were robbers, so I caught a few of them, and ate them of course, and then that scoundrel of a Noman, or Odysseus, whichever it is, gave me something to

drink, with a drug in it; it tasted and smelt very good, but it was villanously heady stuff; it made everything spin round; even the cave seemed to be turning upside down, and I simply didn't know where I was; and finally I fell off to sleep. And then he sharpened that stake, and made it hot in the fire, and blinded me in my sleep; and blind I have been ever since, father.

POSEIDON

You must have slept pretty soundly, my boy, or you would have jumped up in the middle of it. Well, and how did Odysseus get off? He couldn't move that stone away, I know.

CYCLOPS

I took that away myself, so as to catch him as he went out. I sat down in the doorway, and felt about for him with my hands. I just let the sheep go out to pasture, and told the ram everything I wanted done.

POSEIDON

Ah! and they slipped out under the sheep? But you should have set the other Cyclopes on to him.

CYCLOPS

I did call them, and they came: but when they asked me who it was that was playing tricks with me, I said `Noman'; and then they thought I was mad, and went off home again. The villain! that name of his was just a trick! And what I minded most was the way in which he made game of my misfortune: `Not even Papa can put this right,' he said.

POSEIDON

Never mind, my boy; I will be even with him. I may not be able to cure blindness, but he shall know that I have something to say to mariners. He is not home yet.

3. POSEIDON AND ALPHEUS

POSEIDON

What is the meaning of this, Alpheus? unlike others, when you take your plunge you do not mingle with the brine as a river should; you do not put an end to your labours by dispersing; you hold together through the sea, keep your current fresh, and hurry along in all your original purity; you dive down to strange depths like a gull or a heron; I suppose you will come to the top again and show yourself somewhere or other.

ALPHEUS

Do not press me, Posidon; a love affair; and many is the time you have been in love yourself.

POSEIDON

Woman, nymph, or Nereid?

ALPHEUS

All wrong; she is a fountain.

POSEIDON

A fountain? and where does she flow?

ALPHEUS

She is an islander—in Sicily. Her name is Arethusa.

POSEIDON

Ah, I commend your taste. She is pellucid, and bubbles up in perfect purity; the water as bright over her pebbles as if it were a mass of silver.

ALPHEUS

You know my fountain, Posidon, and no mistake. It is to her that I go.

POSEIDON

Go, then; and may the course of love run smooth! But pray where did you meet her? Arcadia and Syracuse, you know!

ALPHEUS

I am in a hurry; you are detaining me, with these superfluous questions.

POSEIDON

Ah, so I am. Be off to your beloved, rise from the sea, mingle your channels and be one water.

4. MENELAUS AND PROTEUS

MENELAUS

I can understand your turning into water, you know, Proteus, because you are a sea-god. I can even pass the tree; and the lion is not wholly beyond the bounds of belief. But the idea of your being able to turn into fire, living under water as you do,—this excites my surprise, not to say my incredulity.

PROTEUS

Don't let it; because I can.

MENELAUS

I have seen you do it. But (to be frank with you) I think there must be some deception; you play

tricks with one's eyes; you don't really turn into anything of the kind?

PROTEUS

Deception? What deception can there possibly be? Everything is above-board. Your eyes were open, I suppose, and you saw me change into all these things? If that is not enough for you, if you think it is a fraud, an optical illusion, I will turn into fire again, and you can touch me with your hand, my sagacious friend. You will then be able to conclude whether I am only visible fire, or have the additional property of burning.

MENELAUS

That would be rash.

PROTEUS

I suppose you have never seen such a thing as a polypus, nor observed the proceedings of that fish?

MENELAUS

I have seen them; as to their proceedings, I shall be glad of your information.

PROTEUS

The polypus, having selected his rock, and attached himself by means of his suckers, assimilates himself to it, changing his colour to match that of the rock. By this means he hopes to escape the observation of fishermen: there is no contrast of colour to betray his presence; he looks just like stone.

MENELAUS

So I have heard. But yours is quite another matter, Proteus.

PROTEUS

I don't know what evidence would satisfy you, if you reject that of your own eyes.

MENELAUS

I have seen it done, but it is an extraordinary business; fire and water, one and the same person!

5 (8). POSEIDON AND THE DOLPHINS

POSEIDON

Well done, Dolphins!—humane as ever. Not content with your former exploit, when Ino leapt with Melicertes from the Scironian cliff, and you picked the boy up and conveyed him to the Isthmus, one of you swims from Methymna to Taenarum with this musician on his back, mantle and lyre and all. Those sailors had almost had their wicked will of him; but you were not going to stand that.

DOLPHIN

You need not be surprised to find us doing a good turn to a man, Posidon; we were men before we were fishes.

POSEIDON

Yes; I think it was too bad of Dionysus to celebrate his victory by such a transformation scene; he might have been content with adding you to the roll of his subjects.—Well, Dolphin, tell me all about Arion.

DOLPHIN

From what I can gather, Periander was very fond of him, and was always sending for him to perform; till Arion grew quite rich at his expense, and thought he would take a trip to Methymna, and show off his wealth at home. He took ship accordingly; but it was with a crew of rogues. He had made no secret of the gold and silver he had with him; and when they were in mid Aegean, the sailors rose against him. As I was swimming alongside, I heard all that went on. 'Since your minds are made up,' says Arion, 'at least let me get my mantle on, and sing my own dirge; and then I will throw myself into the sea of my own accord.'—The sailors agreed. He threw his minstrel's cloak about him, and sang a most sweet melody; and then he let himself drop into the water, never doubting but that his last moment had come. But I caught him up on my back, and swam to shore with him at Taenarum.

POSEIDON

I am glad to find you a patron of the arts. This was handsome pay for a song.

6 (9). POSEIDON, AMPHITRITE & THE NEREIDS

POSEIDON

The strait where the child fell shall be called Hellespont after her. And as for her body, you Nereids shall take it to the Troad to be buried by the inhabitants.

AMPHITRITE

Oh no, Posidon. Let her grave be the sea which bears her name. We are so sorry for her; that step-mother's treatment of her was shocking.

POSEIDON

No, my dear, that may not be. And indeed it is not desirable that she should lie here under the sand; her grave shall be in the Troad, as I said, or in the Chersonese. It will be no small consolation to her that Ino will have the same fate before long. She will be chased by Athamas from the top of Cithaeron down the ridge which runs into the sea, and there plunge in with her

son in her arms. But her we must rescue, to please Dionysus; Ino was his nurse and suckled him, you know.

AMPHITRITE

Rescue a wicked creature like her?

POSEIDON

Well, we do not want to disoblige Dionysus.

NEREIDS

I wonder what made the poor child fall off the ram; her brother Phrixus held on all right.

POSEIDON

Of course he did; a lusty youth equal to the flight; but it was all too strange for her; sitting on that queer mount, looking down on yawning space, terrified, overpowered by the heat, giddy with the speed, she lost her hold on the ram's horns, and down she came into the sea.

NEREIDS

Surely her mother Nephele should have broken her fall.

POSEIDON

I dare say; but Fate is a great deal too strong for Nephele.

7 (5). PANOPE AND GALENE

PANOPE

Galene, did you see what Eris did yesterday at the Thessalian banquet, because she had not had an invitation?

GALENE

No, I was not with you; Posidon had told me to keep the sea quiet for the occasion. What did Eris do, then, if she was not there?

PANOPE

Thetis and Peleus had just gone off to the bridal chamber, conducted by Amphitrite and Posidon, when Eris came in unnoticed—which was easy enough; some were drinking, some dancing, or attending to Apollo's lyre or the Muses' songs—Well, she threw down a lovely apple, solid gold, my dear; and there was written on it, FOR THE FAIR. It rolled along as if it knew what it was about, till it came in front of Hera, Aphrodite, and Athene. Hermes picked it up and read out the inscription; of course we Nereids kept quiet; what should we do in such company? But they all made for it, each insisting that it was hers; and if Zeus had not parted them, there would have been a battle. He would not decide the matter himself, though they asked him to. `Go, all of you,

to Ida,' he said, 'to the son of Priam; he is a man of taste, quite capable of picking out the beauty; he will be no bad judge.'

GALENE

Yes. and the Goddesses, Panope?

PANOPE

They are going to Ida to-day, I believe; we shall soon have news of the result.

GALENE

Oh, I can tell you that now; if the umpire is not a blind man, no one else can win, with Aphrodite in for it.

8 (6). TRITON, POSEIDON AND AMYMONE

TRITON

Posidon, there is such a pretty girl coming to Lerna for water every day; I don't know that I ever saw a prettier.

POSEIDON

What is she, a lady? or a mere water-carrier?

TRITON

Oh no; she is one of the fifty daughters of that Egyptian king. Her name is Amymone; I asked about that and her family. Danaus understands discipline; he is bringing them up to do everything for themselves; they have to fetch water, and make themselves generally useful.

POSEIDON

And does she come all that way by herself, from Argos to Lerna?

TRITON

Yes; and Argos, you know, is a thirsty place; she is always having to get water.

POSEIDON

Triton, this is most exciting. We must go and see her.

TRITON

Very well. It is just her time now; I reckon she will be about half-way to Lerna.

POSEIDON

Bring out the chariot, then. Or no; it takes such a time getting it ready, and putting the horses to. Just fetch me out a good fast dolphin; that will be quickest.

TRITON

Here is a racer for you.

POSEIDON

Good; now let us be off. You swim alongside.—Here we are at Lerna. I'll lie in ambush hereabouts; and you keep a look-out. When you see her coming—

TRITON

Here she comes.

POSEIDON

A charming child; the dawn of loveliness. We must carry her off.

AMYMONE

Villain! where are you taking me to? You are a kidnapper. I know who sent you—my uncle Aegyptus. I shall call my father.

TRITON

Hush, Amymone; it is Posidon.

AMYMONE

Posidon? What do you mean? Unhand me, villain! would you drag me into the sea? Help, help, I shall sink and be drowned.

POSEIDON

Don't be frightened; no harm shall be done to you. Come, you shall have a fountain called after you; it shall spring up in this very place, near the waves; I will strike the rock with my trident.—Think how nice it will be being dead, and not having to carry water any more, like all your sisters.

9 (10). IRIS AND POSEIDON

IRIS

Posidon: you know that floating island, that was torn away from Sicily, and is still drifting about under water; you are to bring it to the surface, Zeus says, and fix it well in view in the middle of the Aegean; and mind it is properly secured; he has a use for it.

POSEIDON

Very good. And when I have got it up, and anchored it, what is he going to do with it?

IRIS

Leto is to lie in there; her time is near.

POSEIDON

And is there no room in Heaven? Or is Earth too small to hold her children?

IRIS

Ah, you see, Hera has bound the Earth by a great oath not to give shelter to Leto in her travail. This island, however, being out of sight, has not committed itself.

POSEIDON

I see.—Island, be still! Rise once more from the depths; and this time there must be no sinking. Henceforth you are terra firma; it will be your happiness to receive my brother's twin children, fairest of the Gods.—Tritons, you will have to convey Leto across. Let all be calm.—As to that serpent who is frightening her out of her senses, wait till these children are born; they will soon avenge their mother.—You can tell Zeus that all is ready. Delos stands firm: Leto has only to come.

10 (11). XANTHUS AND SEA

XANTHUS

O Sea, take me to you; see how horribly I have been treated; cool my wounds for me.

SEA

What is this, Xanthus? who has burned you?

XANTHUS

Hephaestus. Oh, I am burned to cinders! oh, oh, oh, I boil!

SEA

What made him use his fire upon you?

XANTHUS

Why, it was all that son of your Thetis. He was slaughtering the Phrygians; I tried entreaties, but he went raging on, damming my stream with their bodies; I was so sorry for the poor wretches, I poured down to see if I could make a flood and frighten him off them. But Hephaestus happened to be about, and he must have collected every particle of fire he had in Etna or anywhere else; on he came at me, scorched my elms and tamarisks, baked the poor fishes and eels, made me boil over, and very nearly dried me up altogether. You see what a state I am in with the burns.

SEA

Indeed you are thick and hot, Xanthus, and no wonder; the dead men's blood accounts for one, and the fire for the other, according to your story. Well, and serve you right; assaulting my

grandson, indeed! paying no more respect to the son of a Nereid than that!

XANTHUS

Was I not to take compassion on the Phrygians? they are my neighbours.

SEA

And was Hephaestus not to take compassion on Achilles? He is the son of Thetis.

11 (7). SOUTH WIND AND WEST WIND

SOUTH WIND

Zephyr, is it true about Zeus and the heifer that Hermes is convoying across the sea to Egypt?—that he fell in love with it?

WEST WIND

Certainly. She was not a heifer then, though, but a daughter of the river Inachus. Hera made her what she is now; Zeus was so deep in love that Hera was jealous.

SOUTH WIND

And is he still in love, now that she is a cow?

WEST WIND

Oh, yes; that is why he has sent her to Egypt, and told us not to stir up the sea till she has swum across; she is to be delivered there of her child, and both of them are to be Gods.

SOUTH WIND

The heifer a God?

WEST WIND

Yes, I tell you. And Hermes said she was to be the patroness of sailors and our mistress, and send out or confine any of us that she chooses.

SOUTH WIND

So we must regard ourselves as her servants at once?

WEST WIND

Why, yes; she will be the kinder if we do. Ah, she has got across and landed. Do you see? she does not go on four legs now; Hermes has made her stand erect, and turned her back into a beautiful woman.

SOUTH WIND

This is most remarkable, Zephyr; no horns, no tail, no cloven hoofs; instead, a lovely maid. But

what is the matter with Hermes? he has changed his handsome face into a dog's.

WEST WIND

We had better not meddle; he knows his own business best.

12. DORIS AND THETIS

DORIS

Crying, dear?

THETIS

Oh, Doris, I have just seen a lovely girl thrown into a chest by her father, and her little baby with her; and he gave the chest to some sailors, and told them, as soon as they were far enough from the shore, to drop it into the water; he meant them to be drowned, poor things.

DORIS

Oh, sister, but why? What was it all about? Did you hear?

THETIS

Her father, Acrisius, wanted to keep her from marrying. And, as she was so pretty, he shut her up in an iron room. And—I don't know whether it's true—but they say that Zeus turned himself into gold, and came showering down through the roof, and she caught the gold in her lap,—and it was Zeus all the time. And then her father found out about it—he is a horrid, jealous old man—and he was furious, and thought she had been receiving a lover; and he put her into the chest, the moment the child was born.

DORIS

And what did she do then?

THETIS

She never said a word against her own sentence; she was ready to submit: but she pleaded hard for the child's life, and cried, and held him up for his grandfather to see; and there was the sweet babe, that thought no harm, smiling at the waves. I am beginning again, at the mere remembrance of it.

DORIS

You make me cry, too. And is it all over?

THETIS

No; the chest has carried them safely so far; it is by Seriphus.

DORIS

Then why should we not save them? We can put the chest into those fishermen's nets, look; and then of course they will be hauled in, and come safe to shore.

THETIS

The very thing. She shall not die; nor the child, sweet treasure!

13. ENIPEUS AND POSEIDON

14. TRITON AND NEREIDS

TRITON

Well, ladies: so the monster you sent against the daughter of Cepheus has got killed himself, and never done Andromeda any harm at all!

NEREIDS

Who did it? I suppose Cepheus was just using his daughter as a bait, and had a whole army waiting in ambush to kill him?

TRITON

No, no.—Iphianassa, you remember Perseus, Danae's boy?—hey were both thrown into the sea by the boy's grandfather, in that chest, you know, and you took pity on them.

IPHIANASSA

I know; why, I suppose he is a fine handsome young fellow by now?

TRITON

It was he who killed your monster.

IPHIANASSA

But why? This was not the way to show his gratitude.

TRITON

I'll tell you all about it. The king had sent him on this expedition against the Gorgons, and when he got to Libya—

IPHIANASSA

How did he get there? all by himself? he must have had some one to help him?—it is a dangerous journey otherwise.

TRITON

He flew,—Athene gave him wings.—Well, so when he got to where the Gorgons were living, he caught them napping, I suppose, cut off Medusa's head, and flew away.

IPHIANASSA

How could he see them? The Gorgons are a forbidden sight. Whoever looks at them will never look at any one else again.

TRITON

Athene held up her shield—I heard him telling Andromeda and Cepheus about it afterwards—Athene showed him the reflection of the Gorgon in her shield, which is as bright as any mirror; so he took hold of her hair in his left hand, grasped his scimeter with the right, still looking at the reflection, cut off her head, and was off before her sisters woke up. Lowering his flight as he reached the Ethiopian coast yonder, he caught sight of Andromeda, fettered to a jutting rock, her hair hanging loose about her shoulders; ye Gods, what loveliness was there exposed to view! And first pity of her hard fate prompted him to ask the cause of her doom: but Fate had decreed the maiden's deliverance, and presently Love stole upon him, and he resolved to save her. The hideous monster now drew near, and would have swallowed her: but the youth, hovering above, smote him with the drawn scimeter in his right hand, and with his left uncovered the petrifying Gorgon's head: in one moment the monster was lifeless; all of him that had met that gaze was turned to stone. Then Perseus released the maiden from her fetters, and supported her, as with timid steps she descended from the slippery rock.—And now he is to marry her in Cepheus's palace, and take her home to Argos; so that where she looked for death, she has found an uncommonly good match.

IPHIANASSA

I am not sorry to hear it. It is no fault of hers, if her mother has the vanity to set up for our rival.

DORIS

Still, she is Andromeda's mother; and we should have had our revenge on her through the daughter.

IPHIANASSA

My dear, let bygones be bygones. What matter if a barbarian queen's tongue runs away with her? She is sufficiently punished by the fright. So let us take this marriage in good part.

15. WEST WIND AND SOUTH WIND

WEST WIND

Such a splendid pageant I never saw on the waves, since the day I first blew. You were not there, Notus?

SOUTH WIND

Pageant, Zephyr? what pageant? and whose?

WEST WIND

You missed a most ravishing spectacle; such another chance you are not likely to have.

SOUTH WIND

I was busy with the Red Sea; and I gave the Indian coasts a little airing too. So I don't know what you are talking about.

WEST WIND

Well, you know Agenor the Sidonian?

SOUTH WIND

Europa's father? what of him?

WEST WIND

Europa it is that I am going to tell you about.

SOUTH WIND

You need not tell me that Zeus has been in love with her this long while; that is stale news.

WEST WIND

We can pass the love, then, and get on to the sequel. Europa had come down for a frolic on the beach with her playfellows. Zeus transformed himself into a bull, and joined the game. A fine sight he was—spotless white skin, crumpled horns, and gentle eyes. He gambolled on the shore with them, bellowing most musically, till Europa took heart of grace and mounted him. No sooner had she done it than, with her on his back, Zeus made off at a run for the sea, plunged in, and began swimming; she was dreadfully frightened, but kept her seat by clinging to one of his horns with her left hand, while the right held her skirt down against the puffs of wind.

SOUTH WIND

A lovely sight indeed, Zephyr, in every sense—Zeus swimming with his darling on his back.

WEST WIND

Ay, but what followed was lovelier far. Every wave fell; the sea donned her robe of peace to speed them on their way; we winds made holiday and joined the train, all eyes; fluttering Loves skimmed the waves, just dipping now and again a heedless toe—in their hands lighted torches, on their lips the nuptial song; up floated Nereids—few but were prodigal of naked charms—and clapped their hands, and kept pace on dolphin steeds; the Triton company, with every sea-creature that frights not the eye, tripped it around the maid; for Posidon on his car, with Amphitrite by him, led them in festal mood, ushering his brother through the waves. But, crowning all, a Triton pair bore Aphrodite, reclined on a shell, heaping the bride with all flowers that blow. So went it from Phoenice even to Crete. But, when he set foot on the isle, behold, the bull was no more; 'twas Zeus that took Europa's hand and led her to the Dictaeon Cave—blushing and downward-eyed;

for she knew now the end of her bringing. But we plunged this way and that, and roused the still seas anew.

SOUTH WIND

Ah me, what sights of bliss! and I was looking at griffins, and elephants, and blackamoors!

THE END.