

# Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(THE EPISTOLE)

*a quarterly newsletter for Hellenic polytheists*

*published by:*



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**THE NEOKOROI\*** are a group of Hellenic polytheists who feel called to a path of service and devotion to the gods. We support mysticism, hard polytheism, and tend to favor reconstructionism as an approach to developing Hellenismos, while also recognizing the importance of personal experience and local cultus. We are especially dedicated to fostering communities, festivals, and public shrines, and providing guidance and information on religious matters – all to ensure the strength and longevity of the worship of the Greek gods.

**HE EPISTOLE** (a “message” or “letter”) is published four times a year. We offer articles, hymns, prayers, poetry, reviews, information, rituals, community notices, fiction, recipes, and anything else of interest to the Hellenic polytheist community. We welcome feedback, and submissions from guest writers. He Epistole is a free publication and can be found in many locations nationwide. If you would like the newsletter delivered to you directly, contact us for more information. And please contact us if you would like to distribute copies in your area – in return you receive the issues in electronic format for free. Back issues can be downloaded in PDF form from the website for free.

To contact the editor, email: [info@neokoroi.org](mailto:info@neokoroi.org) - or visit the Neokoroi website: [www.neokoroi.org](http://www.neokoroi.org). (We have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!) Our next issue will be coming out in June 2008. The deadline for submissions is May 20<sup>th</sup>.

\*The word *neokoros* is derived from the Greek words *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep) and originally meant "the one who sweeps the temple" or "the temple keeper". It was a humble position, but an important one, for it was the neokoros' responsibility to make sure that the temple was kept clean and free of any pollution, and also to tend to the daily service of the god in whose temple he or she served.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### *Essays*

On the Delphic Maxims.....	3
Urania, Muse of Astronomy.....	4

### *Poetry & Hymns*

Eurydice's Lament.....	8
Acrostic Lenaia Poem for Dionysos.....	10

### *Artwork*

Urania.....	5
Hyakinthos.....	8

### *Short Stories*

The Stories of Daphne and Hyakinthos.....	6
A Wedding Strife.....	9

# O n the Delphic Maxims

*By Allyson Szabo*

Think as a mortal.

This one caught my eye this morning. It stands out, being somewhat different from the others, although it certainly belongs. If the writer is exhorting us to, "Think as a mortal," that implies that we might think otherwise, that we might see ourselves or think as Immortal.

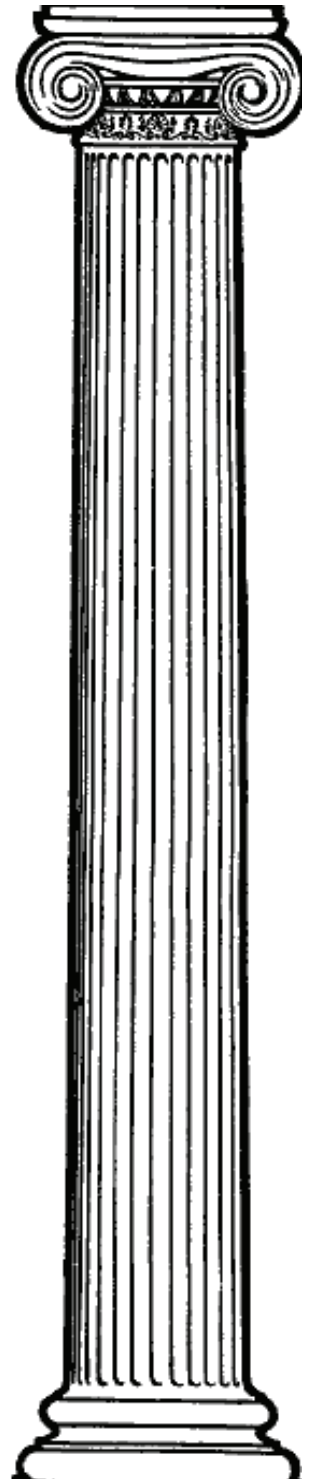
The Maxim tells us not to elevate ourselves to the status of the Gods. We have the spark of the Divine within us, yes, but we ourselves are not Divine. We are the children of the Gods, as it were, and adopted ones at that. No immortal blood runs through our veins. We are simply mortals, with all the foibles and emotions there attached.

When we label others as wrong, or criticize others for their beliefs, we are thinking as immortals. We are allowing ourselves to think along the lines of the Gods themselves. Certainly there are times when someone is wrong:  $2 + 2$  does not equal 5, no matter how you manipulate the numbers. However, when dealing with spiritual matters, issues that do not have hard facts to back them, we must be more circumspect.

It is one thing to say, "I disagree with So and So about the Gods. I think X, Y, and Z." That is a statement of opinion, human and very mortal opinion. We are entitled to our opinions! It is entirely different, however, to make the statement, "So and So is drowning in hubris because they don't believe X, Y, and Z." That is thinking as the Gods do, and that is not for us to do. We are not the Gods, and it is not our job to label someone's thinking (or actions!) as hubris. That is between the person and their God(s).

The very act of labeling another person as suffering from hubris, is hubris itself. Overweening pride and arrogance is thinking like the immortals we claim to worship. This is something that the Maxims, and many of the myths, warn us is incorrect thinking. How many people, in legends and myth, are harmed because of their own presumptions? I am reminded of the myth of King Midas, and his hubris, thinking he knows more than Dionysus.

Should you see someone that you feel is acting as though trapped by hubris, the correct action would be to lead by example. If they ask your opinion, you are free to give it. That is a mortal asking the opinion of another mortal, and that's acceptable. However, if your advice is not solicited, beware falling into the trap of thinking like the immortals. It is not your job to inform others where they are wrong.



*(Continued on Page Four)*

All that said, there are times when our brains simply take over. We're human, and we have failings. If I catch myself criticizing another person, or accusing them of hubris, or telling them they are wrong without good, HARD facts to back up my claims, I need to step down. I need not apologize for my opinion - that is mine, given by the Gods. I do, however, need to correct my thinking. I need to remind myself that I am not the Gods, and that I should not be stepping blithely into their territory.

I must ask anyone who feels they must meddle in the affairs of others, why do you think the Gods have appointed you to be the judge of others? What special trait do you have, that the Gods have asked you to intervene in their worshipper's lives? Do you believe that you can do something that the Gods cannot?

I ask myself these questions, too. I am not God, either. Each day, I learn more, and become a better priestess, both to my Gods, and to those who chose me as their leader. That is the point, isn't it?

## **U**rania: the Muse of **Astronomy... and Astrology**

*By K.S. Roy*

Urania has always been my favorite muse. Sometimes pictured with a planetary globe, sometimes painted with a crown of stars, she's known to most as the Muse of Astronomy. What few people realize or acknowledge, however, is that in ancient times there was no real distinction between astronomy and astrology as it exists today. For those of us walking the path of Hellenismos, it's easy to see the influence of Hellenic spirituality and culture on the practice of astrology. The Greeks named the planets they could see for their gods...[1] the stories from our favorite myths gave birth to most of our constellations. Yet in modern Hellenic circles, it seems there's little mention of astrology, even where other forms of oracle and divination are passionately pursued.

To be certain, astrology has received a lot of bad press over the ages. Some of us who came to Hellenismos from other neo-pagan paths may have been only too eager to discard it, seeing it as somehow too "New

Agey" to fit in with the rest of our practice. And admittedly, there are practitioners of astrology that seem to back up the "New Age" stereotype. Others who put high value in reason and logic, may have bought into the scientific community's claims that astrology is a mere "pseudo-science" with no validity or worth, even though this couldn't be further from the truth. Fortunately, that's not all there is to astrology.

Astrology in its entirety goes much further than the horoscope columns in your daily newspaper, or the phases of the moon given in popular Pagan almanacs. The "sign" that most people are familiar with represents the position of the Sun in the zodiac at the time of your birth, the zodiac being an imaginary band that circles the Earth divided evenly into the twelve signs we know today.[2] But astrology also takes note of the moon and other planets in the solar system (along with a few notable asteroids!). All this is contained within your birth chart, a map of the heavens set for the exact date, time and place of your birth; so unique that it will not be exactly duplicated for millions of years!

The word astrology itself comes from the Greeks: *αστρον* (astron), "star", and *λόγος* (logos), "theory", "study": literally the "study of the stars." The word for the planets was *πλάνητες αστέρες* (*planetes asteres*),  
*(Continued on Page Five)*



meaning "wandering stars," and applying to the luminaries of the Sun and Moon as well as the other planetary bodies. The ancient Greeks were responsible for much of our astrological (and thus astronomical) beginnings, and as modern Hellenes, astrology still has much to offer us today. Astrology can show us what we're made of, our strengths and weaknesses, our highest goals and the obstacles that may sidetrack us from achieving those goals. It can show us the best time to pursue a course of action, or simply help us to understand the changes and cycles of our own lives. It can show us how and why we relate to other people as we do, and how to strengthen our relationships and interactions with others. And as a form of oracle or divination, it can carry the messages of the gods to us through its rich symbolism and meaning.

In my case, it was the study of astrology that first led me to the gods. I learned to cast my first chart at age 12, and enjoyed learning the myths of the gods as they intertwined with my study of the wandering stars. Years later when I became involved with Internet forums and groups relating to astrology, I had my first exposure to Pagan paths and was delighted to discover that the gods I loved so much were still being worshipped today, enjoying a new renaissance.

And astrology (along with my patrons Hekate & Hermes), was also responsible for leading me to Hellenismos. Astrology currently has its own "reconstruction movement" going on, via the study of Hellenistic Astrology and the work of an organization called Project Hindsight. As they began to translate some of the old Greek texts and share what they had learned, the philosophy of the ancients called out to me. After awhile it was no longer enough for me to simply honor the gods in a neo-pagan framework. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the old ways, to make a deeper commitment to the gods by learning about their past and bringing it into my modern life.

And so I owe the Muse of Astronomy/Astrology a lot of credit for starting me on the path I walk today. Urania led me to the gods, and inspired me to honor them, both through my practice of astrology and my astrological artwork which celebrates the gods that gave the planets their names and symbolism. In my practice of Hellenismos, astrology has been a tremendous asset to me. Through astrology's symbols, I see the lessons the gods have laid out for me to learn, I see the messages they have for me more clearly than I could have otherwise, and see the active parts they play in my life. To me, the planets are symbolic messengers for the deities they represent, and this has immensely deepened my relationship with the gods. I hope to inspire some of my fellow Hellenes to spend some time getting to know this particular muse, and see the hands of the divine at work in the orderly motion of the wandering stars.

Notes:

[1] The Greeks were not the first to do so, or the last. The Babylonians before them gave the planets the names of their gods, and the Romans continued to do so after, as survives to this day.

[2] In Western Tropical astrology, the zodiac is not tied to the actual stars making up the constellations, but to the seasons as represented by the solstices and equinoxes.



# **T**he Stories of Daphne and Hyakinthos

*Re-Told By Ruadhan J. McElroy*

Once Artemis noted to her twin, “Dear brother, you advise to mortals ‘everything in moderation’, and yet you have lost yourself in the passions for those who have caught your fancy twice.”

“Ah,” he replied, “this is true. But remember, I advise *everything* in moderation – this includes moderation itself!”

This is the story of those instances.

Once, quite a long time ago, Apollon and Eros (who is older than all the Olympian Gods, but still rather child-like in his passions and general outlook), were in a dispute over who was the better archer of the two. Eros mentioned his millennia of years on the silver-bowed seer and how His own abilities of pairing of Gods and men alike had given him much more experience. Apollon scoffed, saying that it was not years, but the time He took to perfect his skill that made *Him* the superior bowman.

Apollon had decided he had enough of this pettiness and declared he was off to Gaia’s fertile plains to make music for the Nymphai – He may have been Eros’ junior in years, but he was old enough to know when such an argument was going to go nowhere.

Now Love always has something to prove, and with the encouragement of his companion Aphrodite, Eros simply could not let this go, and his golden arrow struck fair Apollon in the shoulder as the other eternal youth looked up from His lyre to glance at the dancing Naiad Daphne, the nymph of the artesian fountain nearby.

Now all nymphai love Apollon dearly, but most of them maintain chaste feelings toward him, feeling the virile lasciviousness of the satyroi over the God’s refinement. Quite startled Daphne was when Apollon set down his hard and beckoned her nearer.

“But my Lord,” she replied, “I do not mean to offend, but if it is all the same to you, I would very much rather dance.”

“How can you mean that when I want nothing more than to be so nearer to you, sing of your beautiful chestnut hair and whisper sweet nothings in your ear?”

Startled, she began to back away. Unable to see the shaft of Eros’ dart for Apollon’s free-flowing mane, all that she could tell was that this was very much unlike her God. When Apollon stood up and started toward her, telling her of her beauty, Daphne feared a malevolent spirit was trying to trick her, had somehow disguised itself as her dear God, and she turned from Apollon’s hand and sped off at the speed of Eros’ dart.

“My beloved!” the confused God cried out. “Why do you run from your Lord?” Apollon ran to catch up with Daphne.

“You cannot be my Lord Apollon! My Lord knows that my heart belongs to the satyros Argyros, a keeper of hares! Whatever wicked spirit you are, return to where you came from! Do not touch me!”

“How can you not recognize your God? Please, dear woman,” Apollon begged, grabbing a hold of Daphne’s arm. “I beg of you, be done with this nonsense!”

Daphne turned her head and noticed that they had come upon the river of her father, Ladon, and called out to the river-God for help as Apollon held onto her and pleaded with her to allow Him to love her. By the power within Him, Ladon transformed His daughter at her plea that “anything would be better than being pursued by this fiend!”

Daphne’s feet took root into the ground below her as Gaia opened up her pores for the tearful nymphe. Her skin became thick, and like that of a tree as her rich brown hair spiraled upward and became covered with leaves thick and flavorful, but sharp to those who should bite them.

At first startled by her metamorphosis, Apollon’s heart then broke at the realization of what He had driven his old friend to beg for. He then felt the golden head of Eros’ dart under His skin, and realized what the

*(Continued on Page Seven)*

ancient ephebos had done to Him for daring to think Himself better than Nyx's self-begotten son.

He begged the forgiveness of Ladon for so foolishly pursuing Daphne, and asked if He could bless this monument to the fair nymphe. He infused its leaves with the gift of second sight to all who should worship Him. Indeed, even today, followers of Apollon have been known to chew on or burn leaves of the divine Daphne, known to the Latin-speaking Romans as "Laurel nobilis" and to modern speakers of the Briton tongue, which some believe is Hyperborean in nature, as "bay."

Now once, quite some time after Daphne was but a memory but when mortal men were still in their infancy as a race, and the Gods roamed more freely among us than They do today, Lord Apollon became enchanted by a boy of Spartan nobility. The ephebe's name was Hyakinthos, and even his mother was so mystified by her son's beauty and intellect that she, like her neighbors, was hardly above comparing his charms to those of Apollon. Indeed, even His sister Artemis had to look twice when seeing them about, just to make sure that He had not found himself another twin.

"Well, my Brother," She said when they parted from a playful and loving kiss. "I do believe that you have just proven yourself to not be above vanity. Even your beloved is only distinguishable from you by his mortal aura and the small imperfections in his skin alone."

"But do you not see, dear Sister, jealousy is such a waste. I am sure your beloved nymphe could have born Hermes in comfort if only your jealousy did not frighten even our dear Father."

Artemis knew better that to quarrel with Her twin over the differences between jealousy and the wrath reserved for oath-breakers. He knew the difference, and despite Her wild ways, She was too mannered than to argue with Him in front of His new lover.

Despite his unwavering love for Apollon, Hyakinthos was still mortal and therefore flawed. One of these flaws was

that he still could not tell when his own youthful flirting may be taken more seriously than it was intended to be, and this finally was met with sorrow from Zephyros, who had become quite enamored with the mortal boy.

When Hyakinthos finally realized that Zephyros had fallen in love with him, he apologized to the north wind – he did not mean to mislead Him of his own affections.

"I am gravely sorry, but my heart belongs to Apollon."

"No! I refuse to believe it!"

"But it is true. And I swear on my life that I had no intentions to make you think I felt that way toward you. I ask that you accept my admittance of this mortal mistake. Just please, I beg of you, dear God, turn your head so that you may see the truth."

"Why should eruthibios Olympian have the heart of all the lovely young men of the world? Am I not myself attractive?"

"You are indeed fair in your own right, but it is impossible for me to share my heart with two. If I were to even try such a feat, one would become favored over the other. No mortal can love more than one in the way that I love Apollon. If he tried to, he would fail. There are polygamists who take as many as they can financially provide for equally, but one wife is always awarded the lion's share of his heart, meaning that his provisions can never be truly equal. Even great Zeus obviously gives more of his heart to Hera than to those he unites with in passing fancy."

As the boy ran toward Apollon's beckoning, Zephyros cried out in heartbreak, "Mark my word, fair mortal – if I cannot love you, than neither can He!"

Apollon, honored by men of the gymnasia, was teaching his young paramour to throw the discus and were now playing an old catching game with the throwing circle as Artemis and Hekate sat by and watched as their dogs ran about with the masculine beings of golden hair.

Then just as Hyakinthos ran to catch the disc as he had been, Hekate could see from the corner of her eye Zephyros, with a jealous look in his.

*(Continued on Page Eight)*



Hekate cried out “Wait, stop!” but Apollon had already thrown the discus. Zephyros then blew the weighted toy off its course, and quickly did Hyakinthos’ neck snap as the heavy circle beat the mortal youth across his brow.

Where his blood fell, flowers did begin to sprout and take root, as Apollon lifted the boy up, tears pouring down his own face.

The story ends here for many people, offering them nothing more than an allegorical tale of the death of childhood. But in Sparta it was said that the fair boy, who was one of their own, by petition of Apollon and the will of Hades, whose heart was softened by his wife Persephone – so girlishly romantic, deep down inside – was reborn as a demigod and every summer in Sparta, they would honor this death with solemn feasts and his rebirth by offering fine clothes to Apollon, singing songs of He and His beloved Spartan boy, and some were even inducted in the mysteries of Apollon and His favorite of all youths.



*Painting by Ruadhan J. McElroy*

## **E**urydice’s Lament

Maybe he will come again  
When the Earth  
Has swallowed  
The sun  
And winds  
Whisper mythologies  
About passing  
dead ones.  
Maybe he will surprise me  
And he won’t  
look back –  
I no longer wish  
To be a goddess  
Of the underworld.  
Maybe he will come again  
Draining  
Red and  
Black  
Waves  
Into

A  
Forgotten  
Gray,  
Maybe he will surprise me  
With flowers

That echo  
Spring  
Draining  
Dark whispers  
Of dead things.

\*

No longer  
When the Earth has swallowed the sun  
No longer  
When the winds  
Whisper mythologies about  
Passing dead ones  
No longer,  
His eyes –

*A dark fountain  
Between my thighs.*

*Poem by Larissa Bernardes*



## Wedding of Strife

*By Miguel Oliveira*

The tables are rich with food and flowers. Huge roasted stags and boars, bountiful fruits and bread, golden honey cakes and the sweet smell of hydromel, beautiful dishes crafted by the immortal crafters, resting atop a table built with wood from the western land along with extraordinary food from the Hyperboreans themselves.

The assembly was no poorer than the table. Gods and Goddesses, nymphs and heroes. As Apollo sings and plays the Muses play and dance with him. A few immortals watch, others dance, others talk. Joy and happiness.

The bridal couple covered in white and roses. She is fair as Aphrodite, whose love blisters in the bridal eyes. Her hair lush as Demeter's, her joy and innocence like that of Artemis – gifts most certainly cast upon her by the Goddesses. And in his face you can see passion, the strength of ages and the blessing of the deathless.

Music floats through the invitees. Music that swims across the skies, down to the earth and up to the sky, filling every heart with joy and ecstasy. And it reaches every ear, the farmer's, the warrior's and even kings and prisoners ear it. And so does Eris.

In her soul rage grows and crawls like a wild and dark beast. It is not something she isn't used to - it would be rather strange if we found her peaceful and calm, singing with the birds and playing with water. She is fire, she is strife, to her answer bullies and criminals, she demands chaos and chaos is her pleasure.

She wasn't invited. But that wouldn't stop her from having fun. She could picture the wars she could start, the destruction and anarchy. Eris ran through the land seeking crystals of hate and distilling jealousy – turning friend against friend, creating enemies amid families, destroying love and trust.

And then she looked up to the wedding. The golden ones, surrounded with golden music and golden food - from their mouth only golden and peaceful words emerged, their hands adorned with golden acts of order, their eyes seeing only golden tranquility. And golden should be their fall, strife should surface among the immortals and leave great wars and destruction. She knew it would.

Eris grabbed a beautiful golden quince, so shiny and bright no God could resist it. Hera couldn't allow any but the queen to have it; Athena would certainly claim it for herself, as is fitting of Zeus' right arm; and Aphrodite who loved shallowness and beauty wouldn't let the quince go to any but her. At least those three would rise to claim it – and how many more would desire it among the nymphs and lesser Goddesses?

And so it was that in the calm and peaceful lake of the wedding a golden drop fell and cast tidal waves that would destroy Troy and render miserable the life of thousands of mortals.

(Continued on Page Ten)

The orderly and golden Phoebus caught it and read it. Each word a hymn to order and tranquility, casting chaos and strife: "To the most beautiful".

And, as Eris had planned, for despite being chaotic and hateful she plans and foresees, the three Goddesses rose to claim it. The three fighting, joy and happiness gone, eerie becoming dark; and no God would dare choose one.

No God would dare. And because no God could do it they picked a mortal; they picked a shepherd to judge what no God would. And, foolishly, I did.

## **A**crostic Lenaia poem for Dionysos

*Poem by Sannion*

His spirit moves upon the earth  
a stirring of life into fullness, heady and sensual  
intoxication overwhelming our senses,  
liberating us from our cares so that we may dance freely in his riotous  
throng, wild like the mountain-dwelling beasts,  
holy like the stars in heaven.  
Euoi drips from every lip like nectar,  
calling up the god with everything we have.  
He stalks through the night,  
invisible to human eyes, yet no one can deny the feeling of his presence in their flesh.  
Languid like the heavy bunches of grapes hanging plump on the vine,  
drawing us closer to the edge of insanity, and we not caring one bit.  
Into his arms we fall, panting and flushed from the dance, our hearts racing,  
not able to speak or think or feel anything except  
the pounding of the drums, echoing through our bodies, the  
heat of the fire lighting up the night, the  
exquisite joy of worshipping the god with our bodies!  
Blessed are we who dance in frenzy for Lusios,  
awakened fully by the call of the god whom we awakened this night.  
Sap courses through the trees,  
keeping time with our stamping feet.  
Earth is soft as it receives those who fall in the dance, a bed of grass and ivy  
tendrils cushioning their bodies.  
Hidden in the forest nearby the animals join in the revelry, leaping  
and lifting their brute voices in praise of the god.

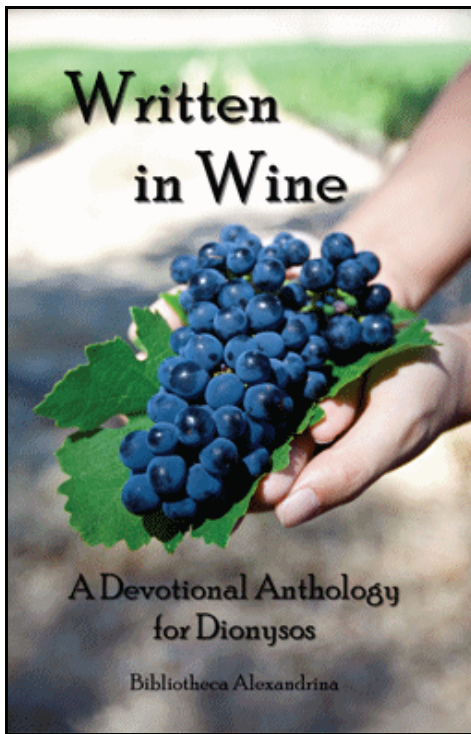
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In the clearing we can hear them, and are glad, for we know that they too worship the  
lord of all creation, the living god of Nysa.  
Does anything remain apart from the rapturous bliss?  
If so, I am not aware of it.  
Onward we dance throughout the night,  
numb to the pain of aching feet and tired limbs,  
yearning to feel his presence deeper and more completely, that  
sensual stirring of the god within us  
our bodies throbbing and burning in the flames of desire that birthed him,  
sexual and something more at the same time, his presence  
lifting our spirits up until they are  
immense as the god's own.  
Kaleidoscopic, the world shifts before our eyes, and we see things as they are.  
Not the dim, shadowy existence that most people sleep-walk through -  
instead we behold the earth alive, and vibrant, and everything connected.  
The pulse of life, the rhythm of the dance, the  
ecstasy of Dionysos flows through it all,  
surging forth like wine poured from the flask.

Io! Io euoi! Io Dionysos Liknites!





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