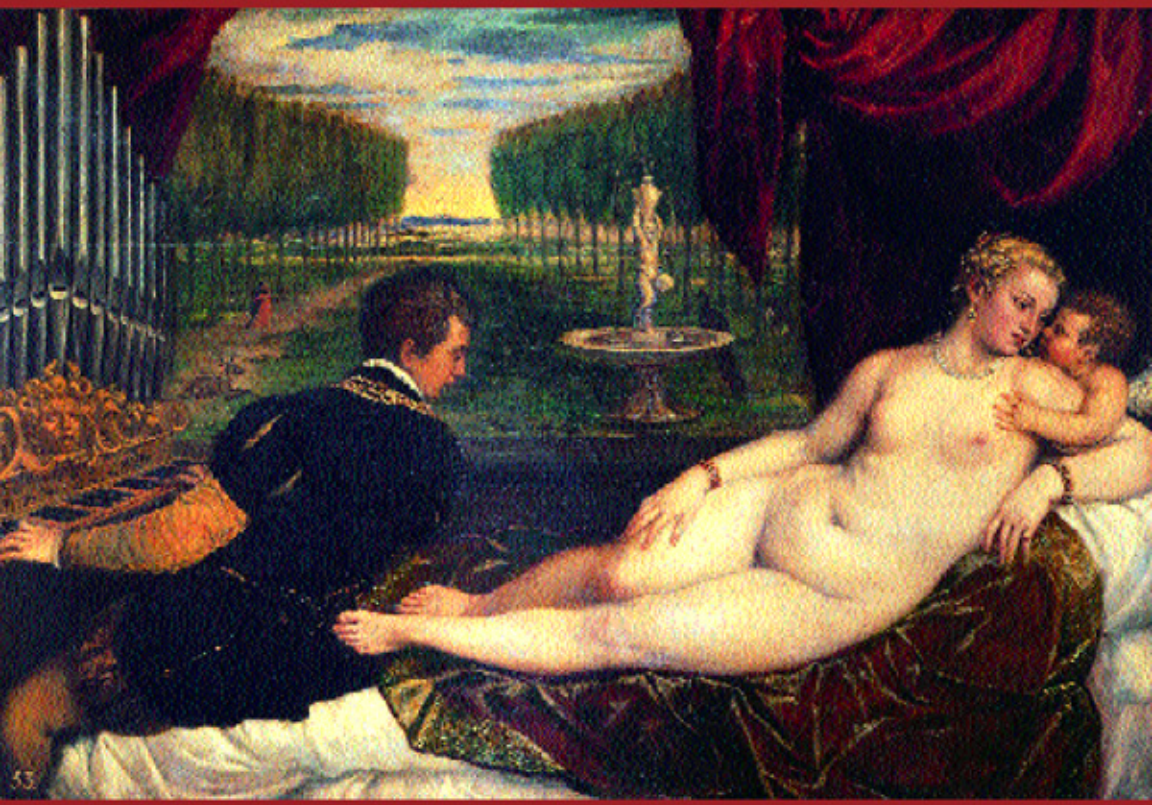
Propertius in Love

THE ELEGIES



Sextus Propertius

TRANSLATED BY DAVID R. SLAVITT

With a Foreword by Matthew S. Santirocco

Propertius in Love

The Joan Palevsky  Imprint in Classical Literature

In honor of beloved Virgil—

"O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . ."

—Dante, *Inferno*

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The Elegies

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For Janet

Doctors can cure the pains of many diseases,
but those whom this one afflicts do not desire a cure.

CONTENTS

Foreword

READING PROPERTIUS

MATTHEW S. SANTIROCCO

I

Quot editores, tot Propertii. The learned quip—"There are as many Propertiuses as there are editors"—refers to the notorious unreliability of the Latin text and to the ingenuity of such scholars as A. E. Housman who have tried to emend and restore it. But the phrase could apply just as easily to the wide variety of literary interpretations, equally ingenious and often incompatible, that Propertius' love elegies have provoked over the centuries.

Writing in the Rome of the emperor Augustus toward the end of the first century B.C.E., Sextus Propertius captured and critiqued the experience of a generation that had lived through civil wars only to have peace restored at the expense of republican government, a generation for whom personal desires were often at odds with public duty and for whom the demands of aesthetics could be as urgent and morally compelling as political

necessities. In his own day, Propertius would have us believe, he was something of a scandal (*Elegy* II.24a.1–8). Several years later, the rhetorician Quintilian admired the elegies of Tibullus for their terseness and elegance (qualities that would appeal to a rhetorician), and only grudgingly admitted that "there are those who prefer Propertius" (*Institutes of Oratory* 10.1.93). By the Christian Middle Ages, the elegist was virtually unknown, perhaps owing to the immorality or at least perceived irrelevance of his sort of poetry. The earliest manuscript we have dates to around 1200; and it was only later, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that texts of Propertius circulated and he was rediscovered by readers. Among these was the great humanist and author of love sonnets Petrarch, whose copy (now lost) was the source of the largest family of extant manuscripts.[1] Goethe, whose *Roman Elegies* (1795) drew on Propertius, recognized in him a romantic sensibility akin to his own. Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917), on the other hand, read the poet as a fellow satirist and political dissident.[2]

Whatever the merits of these, and other, competing interpretations, Propertius has by now certainly come into his own, acquiring a whole new generation of readers. Indeed, in his

1. For a brief overview of the manuscript tradition, see R. J. Tarrant's essay in L. D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmissions: A Survey of the Latin Classics,* corr. reprint (Oxford, 1990), 324–26; for fuller discussion of all 146 manuscripts, see James Butrica, *The Manuscript Tradition of Propertius* (Toronto, 1984).

2. See J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (Austin, Tex., 1964).

1997 play about the scholar-poet Housman, Tom Stoppard suggests that it was poets like Propertius who were responsible for "the invention of love" in the West. The occasion of a lively new version by the poet David Slavitt invites a reexamination of Propertius, with particular attention to what most recommends him to us today: his sophisticated exploration of love and gender relations (section II below), his difficult—we might almost say modernist[3]—poetics (section III), his strikingly independent politics that are concomitant with an overriding commitment to love and to literature (section IV), and, finally, his attempt later in life to reinvent himself and his art (section V).

II

Great love poetry is mostly about problematic love—from the unrequited passion Sappho expressed for other women to the medieval troubadours serenading an idealized and inaccessible beloved. Propertius' contemporary (and possibly rival), the lyric poet Horace, understood well the inevitable incommensurability of lovers' affections and adopted a distanced, ironic, even amused perspective on other peoples' love affairs—as well as on his own. Nothing could be further from the stance taken by the Roman elegists. Indeed, when things go wrong (as they always do), the elegists complain bitterly—so much so that "complaint," *querel(l)a,* was an alternative name for the genre in antiquity.

3. As is claimed by D. Thomas Benediktson, *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity* (Carbondale, Ill., 1989).

At its most basic the genre is defined by its meter, the elegiac couplet.

> Im Hexameter steight des Springquells flüssige Säule,
> Im Pentameter drauf fällt sie melodisch herab.

> In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column:
> In the pentameter aye falling in melody back.

Allowing for the difference between the quantitative metric of Latin and the stress-based systems of German and English, Schiller's paradigm and Coleridge's translation of it reproduce the effect of the rhythm, the upward and then downward movement whereby the expansiveness of the heroic hexameter is cut back in the following pentameter to a more personal, private dimension.[4] Ovid plays with this in the opening elegy of his *Amores (Loves):*

> Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making ready to sound forth—in weighty numbers, with matter suited to the measure. The second verse was equal to the first—but Cupid, they say, with a laugh stole away one foot.
>
> Amores *I.1.1–4; trans. Grant Showerman*[5]

4. See further Maurice Platnauer, *Latin Elegiac Verse: A Study of the Metrical Usages of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid* (Cambridge, 1951; reprint, Hamden, Conn., 1971).

5. Grant Showerman, trans., *Ovid I: Heroides and Amores,* 2nd ed., rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1977).

Ovid's lines explicitly connect the meter to the theme of love. In archaic Greece, however, the elegiac couplet was used for inscriptions and also appeared in a variety of literary contexts, not only amatory epigram but also dirge and martial exhortation. Later, the Hellenistic poets used the meter for longer narrative poems, some about other people's love affairs. As far as we can tell, it was the Romans who adapted the form to deal at some length with their own subjective experience of love.[6] The forerunner of the genre was Catullus, who wrote in the elegiac but also many other meters; the major practitioners were Gallus (whose works are mostly lost), Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid.[7] To be sure, not all their elegies are erotic, since the genre could still embrace many different topics, public as well as private. But what defines the genre is that the subjects are refracted through the singular, often relentless, viewpoint of a narrator who purports to be a lover—and not just any lover, but a particular individual with a unique life history, sensibility, and values.

Catullus established the basic pattern: an irresistible woman,[8]

6. For fuller discussion, see Archibald A. Day, *The Origins of Latin Love-Elegy* (Oxford, 1938; reprint, Hildesheim, 1972); see also Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy,* 2nd ed. (London, 1969), 25–69.

7. Ovid lists Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, and himself (*Tristia* IV.10.51–54); Propertius names as precursors Catullus as well as (the now largely lost) Varro of Atax, Calvus, and Gallus (II.25.1–4 [trans., 1–6, Slavitt]; II.34b.85–92 [trans., 99–106, Slavitt]).

8. In only a few of Catullus' poems is Lesbia actually named, but such is the force of her personality as represented there that the unnamed women in many of the other poems are plausibly identified with her. Catullus also addresses poems to a young man, Juventius, which treat love

cultivated as well as beautiful, but ultimately unfaithful, captures the heart—and the literary imagination—of an idealistic poet-lover who is obsessed with her but eventually disillusioned and distraught. Though his relationship with the woman he calls Lesbia is extramarital, Catullus is at pains to characterize it as much more than a physical affair, comparing it to relationships that were socially less problematic—marriage, a contract, the patron-client relationship, and, in one stunningly domestic image, the pure love a father has for his sons and sons-in-law. The realization that Lesbia is unfaithful provokes a series of violent emotional responses: increased sexual passion (which, he tells us, burns all the stronger as love fades), despair, anger, and—perhaps—resignation.

Tibullus also imagines a domestic relationship with his mistress, Delia,[9] though he locates such bliss not in the city but in the georgic countryside. One of his most charming elegies portrays her as the *domina* or mistress of his rural household *(domus),* tending the slave children, entertaining a guest, supervising the harvest, and performing rituals of rustic piety. When confronted with the reality of Delia's infidelity, Tibullus is more self-pitying than violent; displacing responsibility from his mistress to the individual who corrupted her or to the tempting

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in basically the same way. That Catullus should write homosexual poems is in keeping with Greek literary convention but also reflects the reality of a bisexual culture (on which see Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World,* trans. Cormac O'Cuilleanain [New Haven, 1992], esp. 120–54, "The Late Republic and the Principate").

9. In book II of Tibullus, Delia is replaced by the aptly named Nemesis. Like Catullus, Tibullus also wrote homosexual poems; his were addressed to a certain Marathus.

materialism of the age, he resorts to entreaty, prayer, and vows. Ultimately, though, he recognizes that his dreams of domestic bliss were mad fictions of his own creation—*haec mihi fingebam,* "I was inventing these things" (I.5.35)—and in that recognition he captures the very essence of the genre.[10]

Propertius is even more self-conscious. His self-presentation is calculatedly extreme—more obsessive, tortured, degraded. His unique stance is perfectly captured in the opening lines of his first and (hence) programmatic elegy:

Cynthia's eyes ensnared me who'd never before been
caught
in desire's nets: then I bent my once proud head
(as Meleager describes) in submission to Amor's triumph.
That villain forced me to do his vulgar dance,
to avoid decent young girls and live in demimondaine
excess—an entire year is down the drain,
wasted in frenzy the gods look down on in pained distaste.
. . . . . .
I need a witch who can lure the moon from the sky
and conjure spirits to come with her chants and her altar's
fire.
Let her cast a spell on my mistress' heart,
and then her cheek will turn as pale as mine with longing,

10. The telling line provides the title to a useful study of the poet: David F. Bright, *Haec Mihi Fingebam: Tibullus in His World* (Leiden, 1978). Other accessible studies in English include Francis Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge, 1979); Robert J. Ball, *Tibullus the Elegist* (Gottingen, 1983); and Parshia Lee-Stecum, *Powerplay in Tibullus* (Cambridge, 1998).

and I shall sing praises of powers as strong as
Medea's.
The only other option is to take my friends' advice
and go to a doctor for cures for my cardiac ailment.
Surgeons perhaps can cut or cauterize my wound.

I.1.1–7, 18–25, Slavitt[11]

Whereas other poets represent their progress as a movement from idealism to disillusionment, Propertius acknowledges the impossibility of the relationship from the outset, an impossibility that arises not only from Cynthia's infidelity but also from more existential causes: a clash of temperament, values, perhaps even of class—if this is the point of the observation that Cynthia taught Propertius to hate decent, that is, chaste *(castas),* girls. The wide range of images here conveys the self-destructive quality of the attachment—entrapment, military defeat, enslavement, madness, and disease;[12] in other poems Propertius explicitly links love and death.[13] That his friends are worried attests to the moral and social degradation in which a masochistic Propertius revels and from which he is utterly unwilling to extricate himself. It is as if the *domina* has been transformed from "mistress" of the house to "mistress" as dominatrix.

11. Throughout this essay, when citing the translation I use Slavitt's line numeration rather than that of the Latin text (which it approximates); I do this as a convenience to the reader but also to demonstrate that this version, albeit free, will sustain interpretation.

12. On the use of such figuration, see Duncan F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993), 46–63.

13. See Theodore D. Papanghelis, *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* (Cambridge, 1987).

But if Propertius is more extreme than Catullus or Tibullus in his own self-presentation, he is no less remarkable in this representation of the beloved.[14] The novelist Apuleius (*Apology* 10), purporting to reveal the real identities of the Roman poets' mistresses, informs us that "Cynthia" was a pseudonym for a certain Hostia. This individual is otherwise unknown to us and, in any case, her identity is less relevant than the implications of the pseudonym. The name "Cynthia" aptly evokes not just the sun-god Apollo (who was born on Mount Cynthus) but also his sister, Diana, who was associated with the moon, beautiful but also changeable and believed to drive men mad (hence our word "lunatic"). Whatever the reality underlying these poems, the name alerts us to what even a cursory reading suggests, that Cynthia is a poetic construct, like Catullus' Lesbia, Tibullus' Delia, and Ovid's Corinna. But the name, with its associations of mutability, also gives us a clue to her distinctive, volatile character.[15]

As early as the third poem, Cynthia is set apart from these other women. Returning after a night on the town, drunk and sexually aroused, Propertius lies beside her as she sleeps, admiring her beauty. The romantic moment is shattered, however,

14. For recent discussions of Cynthia, I have found particularly useful Ellen Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore, 1998), 37–66, with literature there cited (especially the series of important articles by Maria Wyke), and Micaela Janan, *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV* (Berkeley, 2001); see further nn. 28 and 29 below.

15. See Edward N. O'Neil, "Cynthia and the Moon," *Classical Philology* 53 (1958): 1–8.

as a moonbeam—appropriately—awakens her from her slumbers:

> She woke and raised herself, propped her head on her arm
> and asked: "Have you been rejected? Has some other girl
> slammed her door in your face so that you come running to me?
> Where have you been all night? What time is it now,
> when you come lurching in, by the light of the last exhausted
> stars? Such a night as I've had, I wish on you
> in turn, you thoughtless bastard. Let me know how you like it!
> I was up all hours weaving until I was weary
> and when, at last, I began to feel sleepy, I sang my lonely lament, as sad as any Orpheus keened,
> complaints about you, tomcatting around all hours in strangers'
> beds, until at last, to mine, Sleep came
> in mercy to bring his relief and close with his soothing wings
> my eyes, reddened, burning, and ugly from weeping."
>
> *I.3.32–44, Slavitt*

It is here in Roman elegy that the woman has been given voice. To be sure, it would be too facile to see Propertius as in any way a proto-feminist. The first part of the elegy, in which she is subjected to the male gaze, objectifies Cynthia, and she is portrayed unflatteringly as petulant and shrill; moreover, her subsequent words are, after all, scripted by the poet and not,

like the poems of Sulpicia, the actual words of a real woman.[16] Still, that Propertius puts in Cynthia's mouth a plausible critique of himself, that she is compared to the archetypal poet Orpheus, and that her words are represented as sung lament *(querebar,* cognate with the word for elegy itself, *querella)*—all this problematizes Propertius' own perspective here and in the poems that follow, and invites us to rethink the roles assigned to each sex in love relations, and in love poetry.

III

If Cynthia (like Propertius) is to some extent a poetic construct that enables the exploration of various amatory themes, responses, and voices, female as well as male, she is also a way of talking about poetry itself. Indeed, one essential characteristic of elegy is that just as it collapses into a single figure the lover and the poet, so too it conflates love affairs with love poetry, mistress with Muse. Thus, Propertius' first book, the so-called *Monobiblos* (single book), was also known as the *Cynthia* from its first word and leading character.[17] And in the programmatic

16. For a general appreciation of Sulpicia, see my remarks, "Sulpicia Reconsidered," *Classical Journal* 74 (1979): 229–39; since that article appeared, there have been many studies of this slender corpus, including a recent and unconvincing attempt to argue that Sulpicia's poems were written by a man! For an overview of the few (mostly Greek) female poets of antiquity, see Jane M. Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale, Ill., 1989).

17. Propertius refers to the book by this title in II.24.2, which reads literally, "Do you talk thus, now that your famous book has made you a legend, and your 'Cynthia' is read all over the forum?" (G. P. Goold,

poem of book II, Propertius rejects heroic epic in favor of elegy precisely by expressing a preference for Cynthia as his Muse over traditional sources of inspiration:

> You want to know why I keep on writing these poems of love,
> these sweets that melt in the mouth? It isn't Apollo
> or even Calliope prompting me what to set down, but my darling,
> my mistress who gives me these special homework assignments.
> All she has to do is enter a room, a dazzle
> of flowing silk from Cos, and a book is born. . . .
> . . . . . .
> I watch when she fights against sleep and her delicate eyelids lower,
> and the poet in me awakes in celebration;
> and when I behold her naked, and we struggle together naked,
> it's as if I had been there at Troy at the funeral games.
>
> *II.1.1–6, 13–16, Slavitt*

The translation here seeks to unpack the rich associations of the last two lines, comparing the tussles of lovemaking with the struggles at Troy, the subject of love poetry with the subject of Homer's epic. The Latin is characteristically more compressed: "If, her dress torn off, she struggles naked with me, then, be sure of it, I compose long *Iliad*s" (II.1.13–14; trans. G. P. Goold).

Given that erotics and poetics so dramatically coalesce, it is

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trans., *Propertius: Elegies,* Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990]); see also Martial, *Epigrams* 14.189.

not surprising to find Propertius often and explicitly preoccupied with aesthetic concerns. In particular, he aligns himself with Callimachus of Cyrene and Philetas of Cos, Greek scholar-poets who lived and wrote in the third century B.C.E. at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria. At one level, there is nothing unusual about this; Roman literature generally maps itself onto the Greek, not in an overly imitative or dependent way but as part of a process of creative *aemulatio*.[18] But Propertius' effort to affiliate is striking since, as we have seen (in section II above), love elegy happens to be one of the few genres that Rome could legitimately claim to have invented rather than to have borrowed from Greece. (Callimachus and Philetas had written erotic poems in the elegiac meter, but those poems did not purport to tell of their authors' *own* love affairs.) The real basis of the affiliation, then, is not a shared subject matter so much as a shared aesthetic, a way of thinking about poetry that made its way from Alexandria to Rome and that exerted a profound influence on Catullus and on the Augustan poets.

Earlier Greek poetry had been social, performed in or at least alluding to a communal context. After the death of Alexander the Great, who had transformed the political order, much of Greek cultural production shifted from Athens and the other Greek city-states to Alexandria in Hellenized Egypt, where a different, more bookish literature emerged. Callimachus not only exemplified this new type of poetry but also set forth exacting standards for it in a series of influential polemics. The most important is contained in the now lacunose prologue to

18. For general discussion, see Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), esp. pp. 250–357.

his *Aetia,* a series of short poems (or a "collective poem" containing many smaller parts) about origins. Answering critics who rebuke him for not writing "one continuous poem of many thousands of lines on. . .kings or. . .heroes," Callimachus goes on the attack, accusing his critics of jealousy and aligning heaven on the side of quality rather than quantity:

> For, when I first placed a tablet on my knees, Lycian Apollo said to me: ". . .poet, feed the [sacrificial] victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the Muse slender. This too I bid you: tread a path which carriages do not trample; do not drive your chariot upon the common tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn paths, though your course be more narrow."
>
> Aetia, *fr. 1.17–34; trans. C. A. Trypanis, adapted*[19]

At the end of his *Hymn to Apollo,* Callimachus again rebukes his critics and in very similar terms, attributing their views to jealousy and affiliating himself with Apollo:

> Envy spoke secretly in Apollo's ear: "I do not admire the poet who does not sing things as numerous as the sea." But Apollo spurned Envy with his foot and said: "Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but it carries much mud and refuse on its waters. Not from every source do the Melissae [literally, "bees," a name for priestesses] carry water to Demeter, but from the trickling stream that springs

19. Adapted from C. A. Trypanis, ed. and trans., *Callimachus: Aetia [etc.],* Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1958).

from a holy fountain, pure and undefiled. . . ."

Hymn *II.105–12, trans. A. W. Mair, adapted*[20]

In his own poems (including these passages just cited) Callimachus exemplified the principles he set forth: the privileging of short poems over long, quality over quantity, refinement and polish rather than bombast, novelty and experimentation rather than common themes and hackneyed treatments, avoidance of discursive narrative for a style that is discontinuous and allusive, and, as befit a scholar-poet at the Alexandrian library, great learning—in short, serious literature that makes real demands on its (necessarily small) audience.

These features, which contribute to the difficulty we often have when we first encounter a Propertian elegy (and which account for the footnotes at the end of this volume), are seen everywhere in Propertius' work, but nowhere perhaps so clearly as in the treatment of mythology. Myth was, of course, a staple of ancient literature from all periods. The Hellenistic scholar-poets took particular interest in recondite or variant legends. The Greek author Parthenius even compiled a compendium of myths about unhappy lovers for the elegist Gallus to draw on, and his work was presumably used by other poets. For the treatment of myth, as for much else, Propertius' first elegy is programmatic. Having characterized the actuality of his wretched and debased existence, he shifts suddenly to the world of myth:

20. Adapted from A. W. and G. R. Mair, trans., *Callimachus, Lycophron, and Aratus,* Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1960); see also *Epigram* 30 (in Mair's numeration; *Ep.* 28 Pfeiffer), which rejects the commonplace in literature as in life.

I'm not at all the Milanion, whom Atalanta disdained
until at last he won her. Lovelorn, distraught,
he wandered her haunts in Arcadia's rugged hillsides and valleys
braving the shaggy beasts of that wild country,
and Hylaeus, the Centaur, who also yearned for the swift-footed girl,
attacked with a club and smote him: he lay on the ground
stricken for his devotion and moaning. . .and won her heart.
For me, however, there's no such peripeteia.

I.1.9–16, Slavitt

The usual story, set in Boeotia, had Atalanta rejecting suitors by challenging them to a footrace that they could never hope to win. Hippomenes (or in some versions Milanion) managed to succeed by dropping golden apples in her path, thereby distracting her and slowing her progress. Propertius knows an obscure variant of the story, set in Arcadia, in which Milanion won Atalanta's hand not by cunning but by enduring great sufferings on her behalf. The full story, however, is not told but only alluded to, as the narrative is compressed into a few, highlighted details. The poet subtly alerts us to his game by applying to Atalanta the almost throwaway epithet "swift-footed" (13), revealing that he is aware of the other, more common version, and that he has self-consciously eschewed it. He is also playing against our expectation that myths function in literature as a form of exemplification, a timeless context in which to construe our own quotidian experience. The myth here (as so often in Propertius) serves quite a different purpose, not to point out

similarity but to create dissonance, since Milanion's success is adduced as the opposite to Propertius' own experience of love—in this witty translation, "For me, however, there's no such peripeteia."

IV

Propertius signals his Alexandrianism in many ways, from directly naming his models (III.1.1–2) to covertly alluding to them, as when Cynthia wears *Coan* silk (II.1.6), recalling Philetas of Cos, or lies upon a *narrow* bed (*angusto. . .lecto,* I.8.33, II.1.45), as befits Callimachus' *slender* Muse and *narrow* path. But the most common way of affiliating with Callimachus was by adapting that poet's famous prologue to the *Aetia,* particularly the god's prohibition (quoted above). Propertius clearly alludes to that passage when, in *Elegy* III.3, he imagines himself on Mount Helicon contemplating an epic—until Apollo restrains him:

> "Are you out of your mind? Or maybe sunstruck? None
> of those noble
> subjects your taste from the fountain has prompted
> within you
> is right for you. It's a joke, as you will be too, Propertius.
> Yours is no martial chariot. You've got a cart
> with little wheels that are suited to smooth and grassy
> ground,
> in a park where some pretty girl on a bench is waiting
> for her beau to show up and, maybe, to pass the time
> might read
> that kind of light entertainment you provide.

Why does your pen run wild? That fragile craft you
sail in
ought for safety's sake to hug the shoreline:
further from land, you risk a shift of wind and waves. . ."

III.3.25–35, Slavitt

The scene then shifts abruptly and Propertius finds himself in a grotto where Calliope addresses him in a similar admonitory fashion: "Keep to your stories of lovers / languishing out in the rain at their mistresses' doorways . . ." (55–56, Slavitt). Whereas in *Elegy* II.1 Propertius had rejected Apollo and Calliope in favor of Cynthia as his Muse, those two gods have now been rehabilitated and co-opted to the poet's vision.

While, as we have seen, the choice of love as a way of life implies a choice of poetry—elegy rather than epic—these choices also imply political preferences that could not have been present in Callimachus' program.[21] The genre of elegy embodies within its very assumptions and pretexts a challenge to traditional Roman values such as patriotism, martial courage, marital fidelity, and religious piety, values on which the emperor Augustus put a premium when he "restored" the republic.[22]

21. See Alan Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton, 1995), which argues that the Roman poets' refusal to write political poetry and the opposition between elegy and epic on which they ground that refusal were imported into Callimachus by the Roman poets for their own purposes; Callimachus' own polemic seems to concern the claims of long as opposed to short elegies, and, as his own works attest, he was not averse to writing political encomium.

22. For this and other aspects of the emperor's self-representation, see his autobiography, in P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, eds. and trans., *Res*

But Propertius' political independence goes well beyond generic stance. Sometimes the challenge can be subtle, as when he applauds the emperor's triumphal parade but views it from the bosom of his mistress (*sinu carae. . .puellae,* III.4.15), or when he describes a visit to the temple of Palatine Apollo, the emperor's patron deity, but casts the poem as a reply to his mistress' query about why he was late for an assignation (II.31)! Often, however, the critique is even sharper—as when he concludes his first book with a pair of moving poems on the battle of Perugia, a bloody episode in the civil wars where he lost a relative (I.21 and 22), or celebrates the repeal of Augustan legislation that would have compelled bachelors like himself to marry and produce sons to fight in the service of Roman imperialistic aspirations (II.7).

Perhaps the most serious political challenge (because it is directly personalized) is embodied in two poems that again espouse Callimacheanism, *Elegies* II.1 and III.9.[23] It is only here that Propertius addresses Maecenas, the close friend of Augustus and a literary patron whose circle included such great poets as Horace and Virgil. That Propertius, whose first book was dedicated to someone else, Tullus,[24] should now address Mae-

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Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus, corr. reprint (Oxford, 1970).

23. The following discussion of *Elegies* II.1 and III.9 is taken from my previously published observations, with literature there cited: "Poet and Patron in Ancient Rome," *Book Forum* 6.1 (1982): 56–62 (esp. 61–62), and "Strategy and Structure in Horace, *C.* 2.12," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History II,* ed. Carl Deroux, Collection Latomus 168 (Brussels, 1980), 223–36 (esp. 232–35).

24. That book I is dedicated to him is signaled by his address in several

cenas suggests that Propertius eventually attracted the attention of the emperor. Both elegies, however, are *recusationes,* poems that purport to refuse a patronal request to celebrate Augustus in heroic song. Recent critics, who doubt whether Maecenas really asked for such verse, read *recusationes* as a literary fiction, a way for Virgil, Horace, and Propertius to signal their Alexandrianism. But the popularity of the genre suggests that Maecenas and Augustus must have had at least some expectations; and if so, this method of establishing literary affiliation had great advantages also as a strategy of independence.

Elegy II.1 opens as Propertius explains (in a passage discussed earlier in this essay) that he continues to write love poems because Cynthia is his Muse. The next lines, addressed to Maecenas, further explain that as a Callimachean poet, he lacks talent for more capacious verse. He then lists the Caesarian exploits he would celebrate if only he were able to do them justice: the battles at Mutina, Philippi, Naulochus, Perugia, and Actium. But these were episodes in the civil wars with potentially unpleasant associations for the new regime. Philippi, for instance, is explicitly characterized as "bloodshed / where Romans fought against Romans, to be reunited in death" (32–33, Slavitt). And at Perugia, which Propertius characterized as a civil war (I.22.3–4) and which is displaced chronologically in the catalogue for emphasis, Antonian propaganda had it that the future emperor had offered human sacrifice to the shade of his adopted father, Julius Caesar (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus*

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elegies, including the first (I.1, 6, 14, and 22). He was the nephew of Lucius Volcacius Tullus, who had been consul with the future emperor Augustus in 33 B.C.E.

15). By such deliberate lack of tact in rehearsing these events, Propertius effectively proves his inability as an encomiast.

His second poem to Maecenas, *Elegy* III.9, opens in a similar fashion, again adapting the argument from inability. But now another and strategically more important reason for refusing to write encomiastic epic is introduced: the example of Maecenas himself. Although wealthy and public-spirited, Maecenas was not of senatorial rank and steadfastly declined the emperor's offers to ennoble him. His refusal of a grand public career is both parallel to and precedent for the poet's refusal of a grand poetic career. At the very end of the poem, however, this strategy of co-option seems to be abandoned, as Propertius promises to write heroics after all:

> But if you will lead the way, I promise to follow
> and do my best to sing of the ancient war of Jove
> with Coeus and Eurymedon, those Titans on Phlegra's
> bloody plain; I'll celebrate Romulus, Remus, the wolf,
> and the sacrifice of the brother that founded Rome.
> I'll do whatever noble work you deign to command
> as I follow along behind your martial car,
> rehearsing the many glories of all the campaigns
> you've led.
> Just ask and you'll get Augustus' expedition
> in Egypt with Antony's struggle and failure and suicide.
> Otherwise, let me continue as I have begun;
> bear with me with praise, support, and your patronage
> I prize.
> Whatever I have accomplished, the world will know
> how much I owe you, Maecenas, as, with your kind
> permission,

I follow that good example you set for us all.

III.9.54–68, Slavitt

Propertius has done it again. In the catalogue of epic topics, for example, he includes the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus, at the walls of the city. As in the earlier poem to Maecenas, Propertius is here being tactless, for Augustus had abandoned plans to take the name Romulus precisely because of this unsavory legend. Similarly, Actium is not cast, as by Augustus in his autobiography, as a victory over a foreign foe, Cleopatra, but rather as the defeat of a citizen, Antony, in a civil war. Finally, the image of Maecenas as general and charioteer is ironic in view of his unbellicose characterization earlier in the poem. Although some literal-minded readers have taken these lines at face value, they are anything but a sudden capitulation, for Propertius "promises" to write an epic in honor of Augustus only *if* Maecenas will be his general. But everything that has gone before makes it clear that Maecenas will not lead the way, and there is no evidence that, after this final refusal, Maecenas ever brought up the subject again!

V

By the end of book III Cynthia is out of the picture. The last two elegies (separated in the manuscripts but surely to be read as one) reverse the conceit of the very first poem: whereas Cynthia had earlier captivated the poet with her eyes (I.1.1), Propertius now realizes that it was his own admiring eyes that had made her proud and famous in his verse (III.24.1–4). After five tempestuous years, sanity has been restored; Propertius predicts

for Cynthia a harsh old age when the tables will be turned and, spurned by lovers, she will have to endure the sort of scorn to which she once subjected him (III.25).

The renunciation of Cynthia as lover is a closural gambit, signaling a shift to new themes. And book IV is indeed very different—not, to be sure, the heroics rejected in *Elegies* II.1 and III.9, but poems that are longer, more impersonal, and more patriotically Roman. Like Horace's fourth book of *Odes,* this volume is sometimes explained as a response to direct pressure from Augustus. There are factual problems with that interpretation, which rests on speculation about the political eclipse of Maecenas and which overreads certain references in Suetonius and the poets to the emperor's role in literary culture.[25] More important, though, is the evidence of the poems themselves. While they differ from Propertius' earlier works, they are consistent with his commitment there to Alexandrian aesthetics. In fact, it is here in book IV that the influence of Callimachus finally extends beyond aesthetics to the actual subject matter of the book, at least half of which consists of aetiological poems about Roman gods, cults, and places. And even when these deal with patriotic themes, they do not betray Propertius' earlier independence or political integrity.

25. For the alleged pressure exerted by Augustus on poets, see my brief remarks in "Horace and Augustan Ideology," *Arethusa* 28.2–3 (1995): 225–43 (esp. 234–38), with literature there cited. On the social context of Augustan literature, see Elaine Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture* (Baltimore, 1996); Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); and Barbara K. Gold, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987).

The best example of this is *Elegy* IV.6, which occupies the central position in the collection and which is the most overtly "Augustan." It purports to give the origin of the temple of Palatine Apollo, explaining it (incorrectly) as a thanks-offering for Augustus' decisive victory over Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.[26] Propertius' earlier treatment of the shrine (in II.31, discussed above) had subordinated the political theme to an amatory pretext. So too had his earlier treatment of the battle, in which Propertius described the dangerous allure of Cleopatra to explain how it was possible for a woman to rule his own life (III.11). Here in *Elegy* IV.6, however, the poet assumes a public, vatic stance, explicitly dedicating his poem to the glory of Augustus and then recounting the battle. The narration, however, is not historical but mythical, focusing almost exclusively on Apollo's role in vanquishing the enemy rather than on any actions of Augustus. And then, after briefly connecting the victory and the temple, Propertius abruptly announces that he has sung enough of arms and that Apollo now demands the lyre:

> I've sung enough of war. Apollo now directs
> that as he takes off his armor, I use his lyre
> For tunes for the dances of peace, as white-robed
> celebrants come

26. The temple was actually vowed as a thanks-offering for an earlier victory of Octavian (the future Augustus) over Sextus Pompeius; that it was dedicated years later, after the battle of Actium, made the (intentional) confusion possible. On the significance of that battle and its representations, see Robert Alan Gurval, *Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of War* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995).

to perform in the leafy grove—and I comply
with roses around my neck. Pour out the Falernian wine
and perfume my hair with rich Cilician spices.
The Muses are kind to the genius of tippling poets, and Bacchus
comes to the aid of his brother Phoebus Apollo.
Let somebody else declaim on the subject of martial exploits,
the Sygambri subjected, the Ethiopians tamed.
Let somebody better suited tell of the Parthian troubles,
how they dragged their feet to the truce to return the standards
they took from Crassus and how, if Augustus does not subdue them,
it will be to leave his sons the job and its glory.
Crassus can lie in his grave in confidence, waiting for Rome
to cross the Euphrates, performing its pious duty.
Meanwhile, I pass the evenings drinking and singing songs
until I can see the sunbeams dance in my glass.

IV.6.85–102, Slavitt

Arms and the lyre, war and poetry[27]—in his first three books these ideas were juxtaposed as alternatives, but now they are linked in the poem as they are in the temple (where Apollo is celebrated as martial victor but also as patron of poets) and in real life (where the peace purchased by arms has made the world safe for poets and parties). Thus, the poem concludes

27. This is the subject of Hans-Peter Stahl, *Propertius: "Love" and "War": Individual and State under Augustus* (Berkeley, 1985).

with the image of revelers entering a bower, of wine flowing freely, and of poets gathered to celebrate the achievements of the regime.

This is a new sort of verse, in which Alexandrianism and Augustanism coalesce, as the most recalcitrant of love poets now attempts to reinvent his genre and himself under the impulse of a Rome that has been renewed by Augustus. But it is important to note that even here the praise of Augustus is only indirect. By substituting mythic narrative for historical account, Propertius subtly displaces responsibility for the victory from Augustus to Apollo; and by exploiting the god's duality, as not only deadly avenger but also benign poetic patron, he shifts at the first available moment from battle narrative to the description of a more congenial literary party. And if some readers are still troubled by the poem, they might take comfort from the fact that in the final scene, Propertius represents himself only as listening to the panegyrics of his colleagues and does not himself join in.

That Propertius' bold reinvention in book IV preserves essential values is confirmed in *Elegy* IV.7, the poem with which the Actium elegy is jarringly juxtaposed.[28] Intensely personal

28. For discussion of IV.7 in the context of IV.6, see Janan, *Politics of Desire,* 100–113; she views these poems as "two centers,. . .one patriotic, one erotic-elegiac, so that the masculinist and nationalist assumptions articulated in 4.6 do not ultimately rest unchallenged" (102). See also Maurizio Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover,* trans. Laura Gibbs (Berkeley, 1999), 109–20, where the complaint of the mistress in IV.7 is read in conjunction with the final elegy of the book, IV.11, the lament of a faithful wife, Cornelia. Finally, on these poems and on book IV generally, see also Jeri

and retrospective, for many readers this poem will be the most memorable in the book. Now dead, Cynthia visits Propertius in a dream. Physically charred from the funeral pyre but with her personality essentially intact, she leans over the bed in which he sleeps—a conscious reversal of *Elegy* I.3, the first poem in which she spoke—and utters characteristic recriminations. She complains that he has forgotten their passionate nights, that his mourning for her was insufficient, that she was poisoned by her own slaves, and that a new mistress has displaced her in her own house. But, for all that, she still thinks of Propertius, "of those years I reigned in your heart and your poems" (54, Slavitt), and she swears that she has always stayed true to him and that she still loves him, despite his many betrayals. Not only does this poem invert Propertius' anxieties about his own death and funeral in *Elegy* II.13b, it also calls into question the poet's presentation of the relationship in the earlier books. Despite his frequent protestations that Cynthia had the upper hand, we now learn that she was dependent on the poet, even financially (hence her complaint about the cheap funeral he gave her); that, despite his worries about her infidelity, she was the faithful one; and that she is still being wronged (as a new mistress, Chloris, displaces her, obliterating traces of her memory and punishing her old servants).

Cynthia then makes a few final requests—that Propertius care for her old servants, that he burn the poems he wrote to and about her ("Don't use me to get yourself fame," 88, Slavitt), and that he tend her grave and set up an inscribed monument.

B. DeBrohun, *Roman Propertius and the Reinvention of Elegy* (Ann Arbor, Mich., forthcoming).

But the time is coming when they will be once again, and forever, reunited:

"...Our shades
waft abroad at night, free for a time from this prison,
and even Cerberus slips his tether and roves.
At dawn we are forced to return, recrossing the dark
Lethe,
where the ferryman takes his tally as each of us boards.
Other women may have you now, but my time will come,
and my bones shall cuddle and jump again with yours."

IV.7.97–104, Slavitt[29]

29. In addition to the works cited in the notes above, the following studies in English are useful: Steele Commager, *A Prolegomenon to Propertius,* Semple Lectures, 3rd ser. (Cincinnati, 1974); Margaret Hubbard, *Propertius* (New York, 1975); J. P. Sullivan, *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1976); R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace* (Oxford, 1980); John Warden, *Fallax opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius* (Toronto, 1980); Paul Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West,* trans. David Pellauer (Chicago, 1988).

The Elegies

I.1

Cynthia's eyes ensnared me who'd never before been caught
in desire's nets: then I bent my once proud head
(as Meleager describes) in submission to Amor's triumph.
That villain forced me to do his vulgar dance,
to avoid decent young girls and live in demimondaine
excess—an entire year is down the drain,
wasted in frenzy the gods look down on in pained distaste.
Consider, dear Tullus, your friend in my sorry plight.
I'm not at all the Milanion, whom Atalanta disdained
until at last he won her. Lovelorn, distraught, 10
he wandered her haunts in Arcadia's rugged hillsides and valleys
braving the shaggy beasts of that wild country,
and Hylaeus, the Centaur, who also yearned for the swift-footed girl,
attacked with a club and smote him: he lay on the ground
stricken for his devotion and moaning. . .and won her heart.
For me, however, there's no such peripeteia.
Love has turned clumsy and dull and seems to be no help whatever.

I need a witch who can lure the moon from the sky
and conjure spirits to come with her chants and her altar's fire.
Let her cast a spell on my mistress' heart, 20
and then her cheek will turn as pale as mine with longing,
and I shall sing praises of powers as strong as Medea's.
The only other option is to take my friends' advice
and go to a doctor for cures for my cardiac ailment.
Surgeons perhaps can cut or cauterize my wound.
Anger may be the answer. Or travel to lands
far away where women will never know how to find me.
And you, whom the god has favored with comfy love,
be content, stay at home, and enjoy yourselves, for Venus
has made my nights a torment, and Cupid is busy 30
all day long. Be warned. Avoid these terrible pangs.
Hold on tight to your sweethearts and wives. Don't rove,
or else you'll have occasion to think of me and remember
I warned you what it was like, and you didn't believe me.

I.2

What good is it, promenading that way, your coiffure amazing,
your couture an impressive shimmer of Cos
silk as your skirts swing this way and that? What good
are expensive Syrian attars you splash on yourself?
Fabrics, finery, foreign frippery, gold gewgaws . . .
they only distract from your own real beauty. Naked,
Love most admires nakedness, beauty that's unembellished.
See how the untilled meadow sends forth its floral
displays, how ivy is richest when it runs wild in the woods;
look at arbutus that's splendid out in the lonely 10
hollows where nobody prunes it; and water runs purer and sweeter
in brooks without the constraints of dams and dikes.
The prettiest shores are those where the beaches are unimproved
and the wet pebbles gleam like so many jewels,
just as the finest song is what the untutored birds,
who need no training or artifice, warble and trill.
Think of Leucippus' daughters, Phoebe, whom Castor loved,
and her sister, Hilaïra, whom Pollux adored:
do you think they titivated, accessorized or used makeup?

Did Marpessa, Evenus' daughter, resort to the wiles 20
of fashion to fan her husband Idas' ardor and Phoebus
Apollo's, and have them fight, competing to win her favor?
Did Hippodamia primp and improve on her looks to win
her Phrygian husband? The only aid these beauties
wanted or needed was what their chaste and modest souls
projected in those delicate hues a painter
as refined as Apelles would claim were those of his portraits.
And you are in every way their equal, believe me.
For a girl to be adored by a man, as I adore you,
is a rich adornment—and Phoebus bestows upon you 30
the beauty of his songs, and Calliope lends her lyre.
A charm that is all your own enhances your words,
your looks and gestures, and Venus approves and her sister
goddess
Minerva. Love of my life, you are wholly splendid—
or would be if you believed in me and yourself and abandoned
these wretched fashion tips and beauty tricks.

I.3

We have seen those paintings: Ariadne fallen into a swoon
on Knossos' shore as Theseus' ship disappears,
dwindles, a dot in the distance; or Andromeda, loosed from her cliff,
resting, exhausted; or else some Thracian Bacchant
utterly spent from her frenzied dance, collapsed on the greeny
bank of the Apidanus. And Cynthia, too,
seemed asleep, her breathing barely perceptible, head
pillowed on her bent arm, as I staggered home
sozzled from too much wine, and with sleepy servants waving
and shaking nearly spent torches to brighten my way. 10
In my not unpleasant haze, I lay on the bed beside her,
reaching out for her as two warring gods
reached out for me in their tug-of-war, Love and Drink
contending, but both agreeing that I should kiss her,
insinuating my arm beneath her unconscious body,
which I did, though uncertain of what her response might be
if her sleep was disturbed, having had samples, before, of her anger.

What could I do, unable to move—like Argus
gazing at Inachus' daughter, the beautiful suffering Io,
whose heifer-horns were sprouting out of her head? 20
I took from mine the garland I'd worn and put it on yours,
arranging the twined leaves about your brow,
sweet Cynthia, and arranged your hair that was spread on
the pillow.
An apple I'd brought with me, I placed in your hand,
but your fingers let it fall as I leaned toward you. You stirred,
sighed, and I held my breath. Was it me you dreamed of?
Or some other phantom lover, some stranger from whom you
recoiled
but who forced you nonetheless to yield to his ardor?
Then, through the shutter, the light of the moon, that friend
to lovers,
penetrated to open Cynthia's eyes. 30
She woke and raised herself, propped her head on her arm
and asked: "Have you been rejected? Has some other girl
slammed her door in your face so that you come running to me?
Where have you been all night? What time is it now,
when you come lurching in, by the light of the last exhausted
stars? Such a night as I've had, I wish on you
in turn, you thoughtless bastard. Let me know how you like it!
I was up all hours weaving until I was weary
and when, at last, I began to feel sleepy, I sang my lonely
lament, as sad as any Orpheus keened, 40
complaints about you, tomcatting around all hours in strangers'
beds, until at last, to mine, Sleep came
in mercy to bring his relief and close with his soothing wings
my eyes, reddened, burning, and ugly from weeping."

I.4

What's the point, Bassus? Your praises of all these girls
  and advice that I leave my mistress and look around
to find another and better are well-intended but useless.
  To this bondage of mine, I seem to be getting accustomed,
and it looks like the best way to spend what time I've got left.
  You tell me of beautiful girls, Antiope's rivals,
the equals of Helen's daughter, Hermione, in their beauty,
  the like of the best the age of myth produced,
but Cynthia, I tell you, outshines them one and all,
  and compared to living garden-variety women, 10
the most demanding judge would call her second to none.
  But her beauty is only part of it, just the beginning.
My helpless passion, Bassus, has other and greater prompting:
  her healthy glowing complexion, her perfect grace
as she walks and moves, not to mention her talents between
    the sheets.
  So the more you try to save me, the more we fight you,
and the stronger grow the bonds between us of mutual love.
  It's a dangerous game you're playing: my clever darling

will hear about it, go crazy, become your implacable foe,
and what abuse won't she heap on your poor head? 20
She'll forbid me to see you ever again, and in spite she'll contrive
to badmouth you to the all the girls she knows,
which means that you'll never be able to get a date again.
And she won't stop there. No altar of any god
no matter how unimportant will she neglect to bedew
with tears to them all for her delicious revenge.
She'll touch every sacred stone, muttering imprecations,
enraged as she'd be by whatever threatens her love
for me, as I'm proud to report (and I hope she never changes,
inasmuch as she's perfect the way she is now). 30

I.5

Hold your viper's tongue and leave us two alone
to go our way. What do you want, you madman?
To supplant me? You worthless villain, you'll soon see
troubles you've never imagined, the fires of hell.
You'll thirst for the pharmacopoeia of Thessaly's strongest poisons.
My darling is not like others you may have known.
Her emotions are unrestrained. She may, if you're lucky, ignore you—
otherwise you are in for serious grief.
She won't let you sleep or even close your eyes for a moment.
She's fierce when she's roused, a marvel, and more than a match
for any man who's brave or foolish enough to try her.
Your life, as you'll soon discover, is over and done with,
and one fine day you'll show up in misery here at my door,
your vain brashness forgotten and in its stead
sobbing and spilling tears that trickle down as you shudder,
in sorrow that's mixed with fear as you think what's next,

and you'll grimace, and words won't come as you stammer out
your complaints
that are all but incoherent, for you'll have been driven
mad and won't have the least idea who and where you are.
You'll learn what it means when she's cold and sends you
away 20
with your tail between your legs—and then you will understand
my lack of appetite and listless pallor
that you will have come to share. Your noble birth won't count,
for Love shows no respect for ancestors' names.
And then, if your eye should stray, you'll learn firsthand what
it means
to become the subject of gossip, the butt of jokes,
and you'll come to me for comfort, but what shall I say to you
or do for you that I couldn't do for myself?
Comrades in love and sorrow, we shall console one another,
or try to, and fail, and weep our torrents of tears. 30
Therefore, Gallus, stop it. Put Cynthia out of your mind.
You've issued an invitation to utter despair.

I.6

I'd sign on with you in a minute, Tullus, and go to sea,
the Aegean, the Adriatic, or any other.
I'd climb the northern mountains or trek across Egypt's deserts,
but the words of a clinging woman, the variations
on her one unchanging theme, are enough to keep me here.
From dusk to dawn I endure a shrill harangue,
her complaints that, if I leave her, there are no gods and the world
is a senseless, worthless place, her extravagant threats
that she will leave me before she'll let me abandon her. . . .
It's the usual thing a man will get from an angry 10
mistress, but then it always works, for what kind of lover
can find it in his heart to resist such tactics?
Sure, I'd like to visit Athens' great center of learning
or take a tour of Asia to see the sights,
but at what impossible price? I'd have to endure her abuse,
not only Cynthia's words but her tears and kisses
and her manicured fingernails that would rake my face like
a harrow
as she ranted, wailed, prayed, forbade the winds

to take me away, and called me all kinds of terrible names.
Meanwhile you venture forth to try to surpass 20
the achievement and even the rank of your uncle, Lucius, proconsul,
as you shape up the allied cities of Asia Minor.
What enterprise! What a noble and public-spirited life!
You haven't wasted your precious time on love,
except your love for your country. May Cupid continue to spare you
his arrows' torments and all my rivers of tears.
My life is different from yours: fortune has laid me low
and I'll wallow the rest of my days in this worthlessness,
as so many others have done, contented and even grateful—
so I'm not the worst or most trivial man on earth. 30
Glory and fame? They were never meant for me. I was born
for another kind of service, unmartial engagements,
enrolled as a trooper in what they call the lists of love.
Meanwhile, you go on your way, to Ionia's languors,
or the Pactolus' basin in Lydia's meadows and fields. You'll progress
over land and sea on your mission, your nation's service,
and now and again you may think of that friend you left behind
and that most unlucky star under which I was born.

I.7

Ponticus, as you sing of the deeds of the Theban brothers
in their grand and accursed warring with one another,
you rival Homer himself. I only pray that fate
may be kind and preserve your poem for future ages.
And I, what am I doing but scribbling verses of love,
squibs to amuse my mistress or soften her heart?
Whatever talent I have, my feelings hold it hostage,
obliging it to bewail my sorry plight.
In this are my days wasted; in this is whatever fame
I expect that my verses ever will earn for me. 10
The word on me will be that I had a mistress with taste
but mercurial moods, and readers will know how I suffered.
And other lovers in trouble will read with special attention
what I report, take comfort, and maybe learn.
You, too, may discover one day, if Cupid's arrow
nicks you (although I pray that this won't happen),
that your Seven against Thebes are becoming less and less active
and lie inert in the dust, however you nudge them,

while your pen will twitch with desire to write out these delicate
distychs,
for Love, when it comes, can be extremely demanding. 20
Then will you understand and even perhaps admire
what I have been writing. Then you may rank me higher,
one of Rome's leading lights. And young men everywhere
may weep over my grave for their passionate poet.
Don't put me down. When Love collects on that long-standing
debt you owe him, the interest may damn near break you.

I.8a

Are you out of your mind, woman? Does my love not give you second
thoughts? Do I matter to you at all? How can you
think that I am somehow less attractive than ice
in Illyria's wasteland? And him, whoever he is,
can he be such a great prize that you'd follow him anywhere, daring
the roar of the angry sea and the pitching deck
on which you'd have to bed down? With your daintily slippered feet,
you'll trudge across trackless expanses of permafrost?
Cynthia, tell me the truth: have you ever been cold in your life?
If only winter would last and keep the ships 10
here in their berths! If only the Pleiades' springtime appearance
were somehow delayed so that sailors would never loose
the hawsers that hold their vessels fast to the beach. If only
the winds could hear my prayers to blow onshore
where I often stand with my fists clenched and declaim to the world

how thoughtless, how mindlessly cruel you are to me.
But never mind what you surely deserve; I wish you luck,
and hope that lovely Galatea, the sea-nymph,
may bless your voyage. I trust that your oarsmen will clear Epirus'
headland and you will reach Illyria's harbor 20
safe and sound. Meanwhile, no woman will lure me away
from hanging about your door and writing poems
expressing my grief and rage, or loitering down near the harbor
to ask of sailors for news of your vessel's progress,
insisting to one and all, though I know I'll sound like a madman,
"However far she goes, she will always be mine."

I.8b

She'll stay! She has promised she's not going anywhere. Envy bursts
like a bubble. We win! How could she not yield
to my constant pleading? My torment of jealous rage and lust
is suddenly eased, as those pictures that flashed in my mind 30
fade away, for my Cynthia's wanderlust is forgotten.
She loves me again. Or still. And her favorite city
is Rome, which she wouldn't think of leaving. And I am here,
and without my love she wouldn't accept a kingdom.
Our room and our narrow bed are enough. For richer, for poorer,
she's pledged allegiance to me and salutes the flag.
If she were offered the dowry Hippodamia's suitors
strived for, she'd turn it down. What would she want
with all the wealth of Homer's "horse-pasturing Elis"?
He offered a lot, and was probably willing to sweeten 40

the pot, but as it turned out she couldn't be tempted by greed.
She stays in Rome, with me. We're together again.
It isn't gold she wants, or lustrous Indian pearls
but the praise of my verses for which she's developed a taste.
So the Muses aren't a myth, and the gods exist, and Apollo
will help a lover. In these I have put my faith.
Cynthia's mine, and in joy I can soar as high as the heaven's
starlit ballroom to dance there. Night and day,
I am the one. No rival will ever steal her away.
When my hair turns white, I'll still be boasting of this. 50

I.9

When you used to laugh at me in my sorry plight, I would tell you
that one day you might be stricken, even you,
who supposed yourself too smart and safe from such nonsense, but now
you are at last laid low, an abject slave. . . .
And to whom? A girl who was lately out on the streets. I told you,
and doves of Dodona's groves don't augur better
or truer than I. You see what suffering sometimes can earn?
(Not that I recommend this rigorous training!)
So where are your epics now, and what good can they do you?
You want to declaim to your sweetie all night long 10
the tale of how Amphion's lyre could build a wall?
In a boudoir, Mimnermus' verse is better than Homer's,
for Love, by nature pacific, prefers the genteel and refined,
and what can you do with all your gloomy tomes,
those epics that just aren't suited to croon in a girl's ear?
You've plenty of prompting, I think, for new compositions—
otherwise you'd be standing like Tantalus deep in a river
but unable to drink and therefore dying of thirst.

It's bad, how you're feeling now, but it will get worse in time:
the pallor, the fever's fire, the mind's anguish. 20
You'd be in better shape hunting Armenian tigers.
Bound as if in chains on Ixion's wheel,
you're wounded by Cupid's relentless weapons and by your mistress'
moods that never let up. Your heart is soaring
like a goddamn bird? It's only a target for Amor's arrows.
You thought your life would be easy when she said yes,
and your troubles would be behind you. Man, that's just the beginning.
Women fasten their hooks deep in our hearts.
Ponticus, old friend, your soul is no longer your own.
Entranced, you're unable to take your eyes off her 30
or watch at any door but hers. Your mind is no longer
yours to command. The hurt is deep, to the bone.
If trees and even the stupid stones are subject to love's
charms, your tender flesh doesn't stand a chance.
Admit it then. You were wrong. The pains you feel are real.
And as poets—or some of us—know, confession helps.

I.10

What a party! That night—how earthily unearthly—
I'll remember as long as I live: I watched you make love
as if from a great height, and your humping and pumping, gasping
and groaning seemed endearing. The hour was late,
and I was half asleep. The blushing moon was setting,
but there you were, Gallus, my trusting friend,
locked in embrace with that girl, and as you moved, I was moved
by the way you let me share in your intimate pleasure.
I offer, beyond my discrete silence, this small reward
of the skills I've acquired in long and difficult years 10
in my mistress' demanding school. I know how to rejoin
lovers who've quarreled or drifted apart. I can open
doors and hearts that have been slammed shut. I can cure the grievous
wounds that sweethearts inflict on each other with words
of power and hard-won wisdom I've learned when to employ.
What Cynthia's taught me, all men must seek to learn—
what to pursue and what to attempt to avoid—for Love
has demanded much but has given me much in return.

Never try to quarrel when a girl is in one of her moods.
Never talk down, or sulk and refuse to talk, 20
waiting for her to guess that you've been displeased and why.
If she asks you for something, never be curt or rude in refusing,
and when she says something nice, answer in kind, and promptly,
and let her know you are grateful. And when she's offended,
don't be surprised if she shows it, or when she is somehow
annoyed
consider how she is feeling and what she may do.
In other words, pay attention. And never mind about pride
and what you think you're entitled to. Meekness wins,
subservience, and subjection to all of Love's commands.
It may not sound like much of a trick, but it works. 30
Act like a grown-up. Your roaring roving days are behind you.
Be happy with her. I wish you both lasting joy.

I.11

You loll on the beach at Baiae, gazing at Hercules' causeway
or inspecting such tourist sights as the tomb of Misenus,
but do you sometimes at night find that you're thinking of me?
Still in some cranny there in your heart, is there room?
Or am I already displaced, stored away as "not wanted
on voyage," now that some rival has caught your eye?
Is the subject of all my songs no longer mine? There are girls
who've behaved in that way, not kept close or watched,
and straying, betraying the men who loved them, and even forgetting
the gods to whom they swore to be true to each other. 10
I try to think of you playing, paddling out in a dinghy
on Lake Lucrinus, or swimming an easy crawl
on the bay off Cumae, but then, in my weakness, I hear the whispers
of some roué who has planted his beach chair near yours.
It isn't that I have reason, but any lover gets nervous
and worries about his sweetheart and what she may do.

My letters whine? They offend you? I beg your pardon. Forgive them
and put the blame on the helplessness of my ardor.
Oh, my dear, I have never worried more for my mother
whom I dearly love. You are my family now, 20
my home, my parents, my hope of happiness, my whole life.
If I seem depressed or happy, I tell my friends,
whatever my mood may be, Cynthia must be the reason.
Leave corrupt Baiae behind. Come home.
Flee, as others have done, its frivolous seashore attractions
(my curse on them!) that ruin virtuous women.

I.12

The word around town these days is that I've become lazy
  and that Cynthia must be the reason. Alas, not so.
She is as far from away my bed as the River Po
  is from. . .What's out there, remote and exotic? The Bug!
Cynthia hasn't been feeding my passion lately. My soul
  is starved for her kisses. My ear thirsts for her whispers.
It's not the way it was when we pleased each other, defying
  Envy itself. It's as if some god had decided
I was in need of a little refresher course in human
  pain. Or is it some herb from Prometheus' peaks 10
that Medea kept in her kit to interfere with lovers?
  Whatever it is, I'm sadly diminished. Distance
changes a woman's heart, and the great strength of our passion
  is undermined. I spend my nights alone,
morose and full of self-pity. (I begin to bore myself.)
  That man who, in his pain, can complain to his mistress
who is there with him in the room, ought to be counting his
    blessings,

for love, when it's sprinkled with tears, will grow like a weed.
At the worst, he can work himself up to a kind of righteous anger,
enough to give him the nerve to break it off 20
and look somewhere else for love. I'm unable to do that.

For me, it's Cynthia, first, last, and always.

I.13

You've been up to your old tricks, making fun of your friend
  and seeming to take delight in my misfortune,
now that my love has gone and I am left to my own
  sorry devices. But Gallus, I will not turn
the table, and write in that way or copy your triste trope,
  wishing some girl of yours may prove untrue.
Nothing like that. Were you famous for playing the field, a free
  agent of love, not under contract? And now
have you fallen hard? Are you pale with lover's persistent
    heartache?
  Is this the one girl whose office it is 10
to extract the fines you owe for your many violations
  and all that running around? You're stopped in your tracks:
your notorious search for a new, prettier, more accomplished
  bedmate is now suspended. (It wasn't attractive.)
It wasn't from gossips I learned about your athletic habits;
  I saw, you will remember, with my own eyes,
amazed at your technique in the clinches, your hands, their holds,
  your quick moves, and how you managed to score,

and then the triumphant groans that I took as cheering.
I'd be less tralatician in my account, 20
but modesty compels, and the box score is clear enough.
Still, it was epic. With all my strength I could never
have torn you two apart, entwined as you were—like Neptune
going at it with Tyro, Salmoneus' child, whose response
was all that a man or god could ever want or imagine.
Or Hercules comes to mind, in love with the lovely Hebe,
after his torment and death on Oeta and apotheosis.
Look what has happened. The torch your love has kindled
burns within you as bright as it did in those old legends.
Your arrogance now is corrected and you have become 30
love's slave, which is not surprising, with an inamorata the equal
of Leda, whom Jupiter craved, and more than a match
for Leda's famous daughters, and all the Argive women
who seduced the gods and men and drove them on
to their strenuous fates. About to die like the gladiators,
you are in Love's arena, and I salute you.
Make the most of it. Maybe you'll find that she comprises
in one person that throng you used to pursue.

I.14

In elegant, indolent ease, stretched out by the banks of the Tiber
sipping Lesbotian wine from a silver cup
that carries Mentor's hallmark, you inspect the darting sailboats
and the slower progress of barges along the river
in a satisfaction that could, in another, look like smugness.
In your groves are rows of trees, healthy and tall
and all in fruit, but I do not envy you, whose pleasures
can never equal those that my love gives me,
for Amor, that rascal, has never shown respect for money.
Therefore, whenever Cynthia spends the night 10
or grants me a whole day that we spend together in bed,
Pactolis' fabulous waters bright with its grains
of gold flow by my door and gems that roll up on the sands
of India's beaches litter my garden, for such
is the richness fate has allotted my life that kings might envy.
There is no amount of wealth I'd trade for Venus'
favors. A serious god, she can break the hearts and the strength
of heroes, I tell you, Tullus, and goes where she will,
adventuring into ornate pavilions of Arab sheiks

and tweaking a prince as he lies on his purple cushions 20
to make him writhe and suffer. . .What good, then, are his silks?
As long as I stay on her regular route, I'm grateful,
honored, and happy, the equal of any man alive,
even Alcinoüs, king of rich Phaeacia.

I.15

Frivolous, thoughtless, impulsive, you've given me bad moments,
  but never like this betrayal, this perfidy. Ruin!
I am, I tell you Cynthia, in deepest despair. And you?
  You're doing your hair, repairing your damned coiffure,
after last night's exertions. You sit at your dressing table
  accessorizing! Is this brooch right? This pendant?
Do the gems in this piece go with that fabric? You sit there
    primping
  to look your best. . .And I ask myself *For whom?*
Think of Calypso weeping beside the sea at Ulysses'
  departure. She sat there for days as her tears ran down 10
a face that she never peered in mirrors to fix. Her hair
  was a riot of grief and passion, but did she think
of hairstyles or of him and of what they had been together?
  Or consider the moment of Jason's departure from Lemnos.
What did Hypsipyle do, left alone in her bedroom,
  now that the hero, her lover, was gone and she
nursed the numbness of knowing she'd never love again?
  Evadne, Capaneus' wife, in grief at his death

and resolved not to survive him, threw herself on his pyre.
And Alphesiboea, revenging Alcmaeon's death, 20
broke the ties of blood and murdered her own brothers.
Would the thought of these noble examples improve your behavior?
You decline the standard of legend, and nobility doesn't seem tempting,
but do not provoke the gods—or rub my nose
in the mess you've made. For pity's sake, think what you're doing—
and think of me, for the pain you bring down on yourself
I shall feel as much. Sooner will rivers flow
uphill from the sea, sooner will seasons reverse
their orderly march through the year than shall my love for you
change. Be whatever you want, but not 30
somebody else's girl. Those eyes of yours I adored
and put my trust in lied, as you lied to me,
swearing on them. At the top of your voice, you prayed those eyes
might fall like worthless pebbles out of their sockets
and into your outstretched hands if you weren't telling the truth . . .
You weren't, were you? How can you bear the sun
and its light of honest candor, and think of what you have done?
Who's doing was it that made you blush and blanch,
turn all colors, and then, from those lying eyes, weep tears
that burn my heart as they trickle down your face? 40
Those womanly wiles and allurements in which you put your trust
I trusted—and warn all lovers never to do.

I.16

I am the door that opened to heroes and splendid triumphs,
  a door as solid as all the patrician virtues
(chastity not least among them). Once, at my threshold gilded
  chariots drew up laden with suppliant tears
of eminent men, but now I am scorned, scarred, and dishonored
  as drunken louts gather around me to knock
with importunate hands, hang flowers, or, having been admitted,
  lay their torches down and char my woodwork.
I used to keep out these lowlifes, protect my mistress from scandal,
  and do what a door does. Lampoons and graffiti 10
bedeck me, badges of shame, hers and my own, too.
  You'd expect that these suggestive notes might focus
her mind and prompt her to think of her reputation, but, no,
  and in these shameful, licentious times, she stands out
for special mention in gossip from which no door can protect her.
  They won't give us any peace, these troublesome fellows,
and one is especially bad, who pesters with serenades—
  aubades, nocturnes, and everything in between.
"O door," he sings, "more cruel by far than is your mistress,

why are you unresponsive, unyielding, and. . .wooden? 20
Why do you never unbolt to admit my ardent love,
grant my fervent prayer, and let me in?
I languish here at your threshold, stretched out prostrate,
exhausted,
through all the hours of night until stars set
and, cold in the breezes of dawn, I fall asleep in the street.
Oh, if only my words could worm their way
through a crack in that door to reach my darling's ear and heart!
If she were as harsh as Aetna's frozen lava,
harder than iron or steel, still would her eyes betray her,
some tear welling up somehow from the depths of her soul. 30
Meanwhile, she sits, or more likely lies in somebody else's
arms inside, while I'm out here in the cold.
But you, dumb door, unmoved and unmoving, show no pity
for human griefs. Your hinges withhold their squeak
of sympathetic assent. To my riffs and trills you are deaf,
unless perhaps you have heard and taken exception,
umbrage even, insulted by what I have said in jest,
and therefore you are delighted by my discomfort,
as I talk myself hoarse and freeze my ass out here on the street.
How often have I amused you with clever poems! 40
How many times on my knees have I kissed your lovely doorstep
and offered prayers as if you were some god's shrine!"
Thus he goes on, with the endless routines of wretched lovers.
In the dawn's chorus of birdsong twitter, his voice
descants about my mistress, her defects, his lamentations,
and I am insulted on both sides and defamed.

I.17

So it's what I deserve for my rashness, having deserted her,
  and the seagulls here at the end of the world hear
my complaint on this vessel which never will make it safe
    and sound
  to port in Corfu. My prayers are a waste of breath.
You are not here, but the winds are playing, Cynthia, moaning
  and carrying on with threats, complaints, tirades . . .
Will it never come to an end, or is silence that small mercy
  my corpse will enjoy, sprawled on its sandy strand?
Moderate, I beg you, your imprecations. Consider,
  how dark it is on these treacherous shoals. My fear 10
is a punishment heavy enough. Will you ask about my death
  calmly, dry-eyed, or want to hug to your bosom
my bones or whatever the fish and the seabirds have spared?
    Death
  to whoever it was who invented ships and sails
and thought of going to sea in these frail flimsy contraptions!
  I'd have been better off braving my mistress'
temper (cruel though it be, she was wonderful, utterly lovely)

than setting out as I did to stare at these barren
coasts and hope for the intercession of Castor and Pollux,
protectors of those at sea. I need them now! 20
If I'd died at home in my woe and were buried under
a tombstone,
she might have come to weep, leave flowers, even
a lock of her hair, as she called my name into empty air
and prayed that the earth lie lightly upon my dust.
Instead, I have the mermaids, the daughters of beautiful Doris,
whom I invite to attend us, swimming about
our vessel: if ever Amor swooped like a vicious erne
to wound you, for our torments' sake, show mercy.

I.18

Here in this empty grove where the only whispers are those
of breezes in boughs of the trees, I can mope in private,
give vent to my woe, and be sure that the gray boulders, impassive,
discreet with the wisdom of age, will not go blabbing.
And what shall I tell them, Cynthia? Where can I even begin
to speak of the cause of my bitter weeping, I,
whom everyone thought to be lucky, the happiest lover alive?
Now I'm ashamed, despised, a figure of fun.
And what did I do wrong? With what crime am I charged?
There's no true bill! I have never been unfaithful. 10
There aren't other girls of whom you have cause to be jealous.
No dainty slippered foot has crossed my threshold,
even though, considering how you've been treating me lately,
no one would be surprised. But that's no way
to express my hurt and anger: I don't want to give you reasons
for that almost continual fury of yours I put up with,
or give you occasion to weep and ruin those gorgeous eyes.
Do I not sigh enough or show my feelings
in words and gestures or pallor and piteous hangdog looks?

Ask these trees, who will vouch for me and swear 20
how deep is my love and how much I care. The beech and
the pine
who are dear to Pan will testify and show you
"Cynthia" carved on their delicate bark as it is in my heart.
You have no idea how I've suffered. Closer at hand,
ask your door that would tell, if it could, of my anguished vigils.
Timid, I've learned to accept your whims and moods,
and not protest or even answer the shouts and complaints
about those things she deserves that I ought to have done.
And sometimes I retreat here for the respite of silence and calm,
the empty hills, the cold rocks, and the trails 30
where I am alone and can talk of my pain to the twittering birds.
But wherever you are back in town, you are also here,
for your name repeats, "Cynthia, Cynthia," echoes
the lonely rocks bounce back to a lonely sky.

I.19

Death isn't what I fear, or the grim underworld. That debt
the flesh owes to the pyre I'm willing to pay.
Still, Cynthia, dearest, I fret at the dismal thought
that you might not be one of my grieving mourners—
which is worse than death itself, for Cupid's grip on my soul
is such that even my dust will long for your love.
In that region of endless darkness, Protesilaus' shade
remembered his love for his wife Laodamia, yearned
for the joy of touching the warmth of her body once more
with his ghostly
hands, and that brave soldier, the first to fall 10
at Troy, contrived a visit to Greece, his home, and her.
Like him, I shall be a shade that still feels passion
and, even having crossed the shores of death, will be yours.
Whatever women may flock to greet me there
of those famous daughters of Troy who died in their city's ruin,
not one, I think, will compare to you in beauty,
Cynthia dearest, or please me so well as you always do.
You will, I hope, remain behind me on earth

for many years, but to me your gracefully aging body
will always be dear and the cause of my longing tears. 20
And if you could then be aware that these ashes of mine can feel
and long, still, for one of the living, death
would not be so bitter a thing. But I fear that you may ignore me,
spurning my grave, or even that heartless Amor
may come to dry your tears and distract you with someone else,
for even a faithful girl may yield to persistence.
But let us not be morbid. Instead, let's love and be happy
for the time we have—that we know is never enough.

I.20

To reciprocate for your constant love, Gallus, I offer
this poem as gift—a cautionary tale
I urge you to read and remember. It tells of the perils of lovers
and how, where you least expect it, disaster lurks,
for this is the story of Hylas, the Argonaut, and the sorry
turn of events at the River Ascanius. You
have a friend, I think, who is equal to Hylas in looks and bearing.
You two can go for a sail or stroll by the bank
of an Umbrian stream or stop to bathe your feet or admire
the woods and recount to each other the local legends, 10
but you must be on your guard for the dangerous Nymphs and Dryads
who may at any moment emerge from the water
or appear from the woods to reach out with lustful hands to grab
and carry your boyfriend away. . .Poof! And he's gone,
and you're running from brook to brook in an endless and useless quest
as Hercules once did, heartbroken, searching
for Hylas: he never found him and there on Ascanius' cold

and desolate bank, the hero wept bitter tears.
But first, let us set the scene: the *Argo* they built at the dockyards
at Pagasa put out to sea on its way to the Phasis; 20
it has passed the Hellespont and the Mysian cliffs and is beached
on a peaceful and welcoming shore where the ground is soft
with a carpet of leaves; and Hylas, Hercules' great and good
friend,
has gone inland in search of the fresh spring water
the ship will need. Now, two of his crewmates, the brothers, Zetes
and Calais, in a sporting way, pursue him,
playing a rough-and-tumble game of woodland grab-ass
that's half in fun. And Hylas feinting, dodging,
and darting this way and that escapes them again and again.
They grab him and kiss him, but once again he slips free, 30
and at last Pandion's sons, the Northwind's noble descendants,
give up, let Hylas go, and he climbs the slope
of Mount Arganthus to find the shaded spring-fed pool—
the Pege they call it—dear to the Bythnian nymphs
who love its pristine beauty, the silence, the sweet smells
of the apple trees no humans have touched and the flowers,
the vistas of crimson poppies with clumps of white of the lilies
that grow here and there by the bank, and Hylas, enchanted,
defers his chore for a time to pick himself a bouquet.
Then at the edge of the water, he kneels and sees 40
in the surface beneath his face the reflected boughs of the trees,
and patches of sky, and it's gorgeous. He's poised for a moment,
about to scoop up water to fill his skins, when the Dryads,
stricken, in love with the boy whom they think delicious,
forget the steps of their ritual dance and turn to him
and grab, and he slips and the ground gives way, and he falls

into the yielding water. He tries to shout but he sinks
in an instant under the water's surface. His friend
Hercules hears the splash and calls out, "Hylas!" again
and again, but only an empty echo answers, 50
fainter and fainter, and that, too, dies away. The lesson,
Gallus, is clear. At Tivoli, Baiae, at all
those posh resorts you like to go to together, be careful,
trust no one, and watch your ass, and his.

I.21
An Epitaph for Gallus

Go on, then. Run. You don't want to end up dead like me
in Perugia's muddy field. But don't look sick
or turn away at my groans, dear comrade-in-arms. This
is what can happen to soldiers. Go, let your parents
rejoice that you're home and alive. I wish you the best, but ask
one small favor—deliver a message; tell
my sister that Gallus, who made it safely through Caesar's lines,
still got killed, and by nobody special. The scattered
bones on the Tuscan hillside here are, some of them, mine
to be collected and buried with decent prayers. 10

I.22

You ask, Tullus, old friend, that I tell you my lineage, rank
and household gods: I offer a history lesson.
Think of Italy's troubles in these hard times and the dead
of Perugia's battle, Roman fighting Roman
in a slaughter dismaying to all the world but especially grievous
to me. In Etruscan dirt my kinsman's bones
that no one had thought to cover bleached in the pitiless sun.
From places in Umbria's plain of fertile farmland
where I was born, one can, on a clear day, see the Tuscan
hills where our blood, such as it is, spilled. 10

II.1

You want to know why I keep on writing these poems of love,
these sweets that melt in the mouth? It isn't Apollo
or even Calliope prompting me what to set down, but my darling,
my mistress who gives me these special homework assignments.
All she has to do is enter a room, a dazzle
of flowing silk from Cos, and a book is born,
as if I had found the idea in a hiding place in her pocket.
An errant wisp of hair that strays from her forehead
is enough to inspire a poem, or that queenly knack of her posture
and my joy at the way she holds her head when she walks, 10
or that delicate strum of her ivory fingers upon the strings
of a lyre, and how my heart will then resound;
I watch when she fights against sleep and her delicate eyelids
lower,
and the poet in me awakes in celebration;
and when I behold her naked, and we struggle together naked,
it's as if I had been there at Troy at the funeral games.
From whatever she's done and whatever she's said, I take my cue
and try to transcribe what she creates from the void.

I confess to you, Maecenas, it's not what I might have chosen.
If I were the kind of poet who writes of Titans 20
or Ossa heaped on Olympus and Pelion stacked on them both
to construct that lofty road to improvement through art,
or if I were one of those bards who could turn to historical
subjects,
Thebes or Pergamon, Troy, or Xerxes' campaigns,
or the founding of Rome, or the Punic Wars, or the German
campaigns,
I'd be glad to take your suggestion and sing of Caesar,
his conquests and wise decisions in governing us—and of you
in whom good taste and generosity meet.
I admit at once that you're right, that a poet ought to perform
in a serious way to honor those who have served 30
their country in times of crisis—Modena, for instance, deserves
commemoration in verse, or Philippi's bloodshed
where Romans fought against Romans, to be reunited in death.
The Sicilian expedition, Perugia's terrible
bloodshed, the Egyptian campaign and the triumph that followed,
the Nile pouring its captives into Rome
with the necks of its kings wearing their collars of gold and bent
in submission, and on the Via Sacra the prows
of Actium's splendid ships. . .These are appropriate subjects,
and, addressing them, I'd also acknowledge you, 40
your patriotism, your courage, your concern for the public good.
As Theseus even in hell continued loyal
to Pirithous, or in heaven's precincts Achilles preserved
his love for Patroclus, so shall you and Caesar
remain beside one another forever bound in a friendship
that will be your richest trophy and true reward.

But to do what you ask is no more within my narrow range
than it would be for Callimachus' delicate spinto
to belt out lays of the battle on Phlegra's plain of giants
fighting Olympian gods. An artist learns 50
his limitations, and I should avoid such heroic themes
as Caesar's martial deeds that carry on
in a great tradition that some maintain goes back to Troy.
The sailor can tell you of winds, and the diligent plowman
can speak about teams of oxen. The soldier can count his wounds,
and the shepherd, tote up his flocks. I know my subject—
those wars we wage in bed—and follow the rule, which is wise,
that a man only should talk about what he knows.
The glorious death I sing is that of passion and love,
and the honor I salute is the faithful lover's. 60
In art and in life as well, I am dedicated to this.
My mistress despises inconstancy—even Helen's,
which is why she won't allow the *Iliad* room on her shelf.
I tell you there's nothing I would not do for love,
drink Phaedra's potion, or swallow Circe's magic herbs
or even the brew of Medea's bubbling cauldron
hot from Jason's hearth. There's no turning back: one woman
is all I want in this world, and when I die
it is from her house that I hope my funeral train will depart.
Doctors can cure the pains of many diseases, 70
but those whom this one afflicts do not desire a cure.
Machaon healed Philoctetes' legs, and Chiron
reversed the blindness of Phoenix. Aesclepius' herbs revived
the dead Androgeon, Minos' son, and restored him
to his family's bosom. Telephus, Mysia's prince, was wounded
and that spear that hurt him made him whole again.

That doctor who can give me prescriptions for my affliction
could put into Tantalus' hand that elusive fruit
for which he is always reaching, or fill the Danaid maidens'
leaky amphorae. Revoking the gods' edict, 80
he'd free Prometheus' arms from that crag to which they are
bound,
and drive the vulture away that feeds on his breast.
I tell you, when fate demands I repay the life we all owe
and I dwindle down to a name on a marble marker,
then, Maecenas, friend, patron, the envy of Rome,
whom I'm proud to have known, if you should one day pass by,
pull the reins on your horses and halt your expensive British
chariot there for a moment to shed a tear
and pay my dust, if you will, this tribute: "A woman's demands
were the cause of the death of this unfortunate fellow." 90

II.2

Happy was I when I went to bed alone, but Amor
betrayed me, tricked me, and ruined my peace of mind.
How can there be such beauty walking around in the world?
Jupiter's sordid adventures make sense to me now.
With her gorgeous auburn hair, her long tapering fingers,
tall, slender, her posture divine, you'd think
she might be the sister of Jove, or call her Pallas' stand-in
if you give her the Gorgon aegis at Athens' altars.
To whom can I better compare her? The Lapiths' Ischomache,
whom the Centaurs carried off, or maybe Brimo 10
when she lay that time with Mercury near Lake Boebeis' waters.
Or think of Venus, attended by thousands of putti,
stepping out of the sea that gave her birth. Paris,
the shepherd, who judged those goddesses naked never
on Ida beheld a like perfection. If she lives long
as the Sybil of Cumae, old age won't dare to touch her.

II.3

You boasted that no girl could touch you, but see where you are,
caught, and that proud spirit of yours is humbled.
You couldn't last even a month without picking up your pen,
you unfortunate sap. And you issue a second book
that will make you, once more, a subject of gossip's pity and scorn.
In some such way I accused myself, and the answer
was just as sorry: I'd tried to change my ways, but a fish
doesn't do well in the desert's dunes, and a boar,
no matter how hard he tries, can't learn to swim in the sea.
I had no better chance trying to change 10
my habits and spend my nights in the study of serious subjects.
You put love out of your life, but it keeps coming
back. You'd think it would be her face that caught me. It's
splendid,
her complexion whiter than lilies framed by her hair
that spills down onto her neck, and those burning eyes like torches
or stars that sailors steer by, and see how she's stunning
when she moves in that wonderful liquefaction of Arab silk . . .
(I do not flatter: this is the prosy truth.)

Think of the Scythian snows with accents of Spanish vermilion,
or imagine the petals of roses floating in milk. 20
But it isn't so much her looks as the wonderful way she dances
when they're passing around the wine: she is Ariadne
leading her chorus of Maenads. Or singing and playing the lyre,
she could be one of the Muses at Aganippe's
icy mountain spring. And the poems she writes are the equal
of Corinna's best, or Erinna's—or better.
On the day of your birth, my darling, the god of love sneezed,
an event which augurs well, and the gifts you were given
were more than human and not from your parents merely:
the gods
must have played their part intending for you a glory 30
as the model Roman maidens might try to emulate.
Helen had such beauty, and now it returns
to appear on earth again to visit the beds of mortals
before you ascend to your rendezvous with Jove.
I'm not at all surprised that she sets our young men on fire.
For her, it would have made sense for Troy to burn.
I used to shake my head in disbelief at that war
when, for a woman, Europe fought with Asia,
but it seems quite plausible now. Paris, you had good reason,
and you, Menelaus, were justified, one for demanding, 40
and the other for then refusing to give her back. Her beauty
was worth Achilles' death and all the others'.
And Priam was right to accept the terrible risks of battle.
If I were a painter and wanted to make my name,
to surpass the work of the ancients, I'd use her as my model,
and wherever my work was hung, in the east or the west,
they'd love it: the west would burn in a fever and east would roast

on the slowly turning spit of hot desire.
I tell you, it's bad, and the only prayer I make to the gods
is to keep me from anything worse from another love, 50
some sharper and even more exquisite pain than the one I know.
A bull at first will balk and refuse the yoke,
but soon it becomes familiar and he's docile and willing to plow.
Young men when love first visits will likewise struggle,
but soon we lower our heads, are broken in, and put up
with whatever goads and blows rain down upon us.
Think of Melampus and what dishonor that seer endured,
who for the sake of his love of the beautiful Pero
stole Iphiclus' cattle, was caught, and imprisoned. I plead
not guilty, your honors, by reason of mental defect. 60

II.4

A mistress is trouble, a torment: you make some simple request,
  but nothing doing; refused, you feel like a fool,
and bite your nails and tap on the floor with a frustrated foot.
  You ask yourself, as I have done many times,
what on earth is the point of this silly pomade in my hair?
  I mince along like a goddamn dancer. . .For what?
There's nothing to do, no cure, no weird Colchian nostrum
  of herbs Perimede or some other sorceress gathers
to put it right. If I thought he could help, I'd go to a quack
  fortune-teller with cash in my sucker's hand, 10
or ask some crone to interpret my dreams and give me advice,
  but what's the point? I'm hopeless, a terminal case.
Doctors can do me no good, and bed rest is out of the question.
  Avoid the rain or the chilly night air? The risks
are always and everywhere. You're walking along happy,
  and healthy, and then, suddenly, stricken, dying,
dead, and your friends are amazed and appalled. It happens
    that way,
  and you never know, on your dimly lit path, which step

will be the one where you fall. There's no way to guard against it,
no weapon to carry, no prudent precaution to take. 20
Love for a woman? It's something I wish on my enemies. Friends
I tell to look for a smooth-cheeked boy for sex.
It's a walk in the park; you can't get hurt: the heart of a boy
is easy to understand. A single word
is enough to win him over, or back. But girls are crazy,
fierce, proud, unrelenting, and out for blood.

II.5

What obtains? Your name has become a watchword. All Rome
is telling Cynthia jokes with dirty punchlines.
What have I done to deserve such a vile thing? Your betrayal
will cost you. I'll be revenged. I'll sail away
to a safe haven and find myself some girl
who'll appreciate me and is eager to be immortal
in these verses of mine. And she will be better tempered, too,
and won't kick me around the way you do,
and then you'll know how it feels to be jilted, jealous, a joke.
It's what you deserve for taking my love for granted. 10
And this is the time to do it: I must leave when my anger is hot.
When the pain subsides, I'm afraid my love may return.
Just as Carpathian winds can shift and the storm clouds change
direction, the unpredictable hearts of lovers
behave in erratic ways. While I still have the chance, I'll do it,
freeing my neck at last from this heavy yoke.
The first night will be bad, but that kind of pain will diminish.
Love and its griefs are like that, unserious, fickle.
But don't carry on. I swear by the gentle goddess Juno,

you've no reason to fear for your physical safety. 20
Not that I'm fierce as a bull, but even a wounded sheep
will turn and offer to fight. But I won't assault you,
bang on your door at night, tear off your fancy clothes,
maul you, punch you, or pull out your hair by the roots.
That's for inarticulate boors and clowns. A poet,
I have other and better ways to hurt you—
with my pen, for instance: "Cynthia's fair, but Cynthia's false."
You're right to ignore the smutty jokes and believe
the gossip will go away, but this, my verse, and its hateful
truth you blanch at reading will last forever. 30

II.6

In Corinth, they lined up at Lais' famous house of ill-fame,
all the studs of Greece, and in Athens, for Thais,
of whom Menander wittily wrote, or for frisky Phryne,
who accumulated a big enough wad to finance
rebuilding the ruins of Thebes. But you outdo them all,
with your swarms of lovers for whom you contrive tall stories—
cousins, you claim, whom therefore it's proper for you to kiss.
But I'm not stupid, only crazy—and you
are clearly the cause of my illness. I'm demented with jealousy,
nuts!
Pictures of any young men, or their names you mention 10
will drive me insane, or even an innocent baby boy
in his cradle, an infant, who one day may grow up
to be a threat. . .I worry when I see your mother kiss you,
or one of your sisters, or maybe at some pajama party
a girlfriend. (Do they open their mouths? Do you open yours?
Are they really girls, I wonder, or men in drag?)
My mind's not right, I know. I think about how vice leads
to ruin, the slaughter at Troy. The frenzied fight

of Centaurs and Lapiths at Pirithous' wedding was caused by lust.
And it isn't just the Greeks. Closer to home, 20
Romulus nursed on milk from a she-wolf and taught our forebears
how to rape Sabine maidens, and since then Rome
is Cupid's prurient playground where the games go on forever.
There are exceptions: Admetus' wife, Alcestis,
was one, and Ulysses' famous faithful Penelope. . .And?
And I can't think of a third. It's hardly worthwhile
for virgins to join the temple order and swear to be chaste
or brides promise their grooms that they'll be faithful,
if women do as they like and behave just as they please.
I think it's the murals that do it, corrupting the youth, 30
those lewd frescoes that innocent eyes ought never to see.
Those painters should all be blinded for what they've done.
One never found, in the old days, such pornographic displays
in decent people's houses, but now it's the fashion.
What's covered up are the walls of temples where spiders have woven
webs that obscure the neglected statues of gods.
What guard, what chaperone can I find to protect your honor
(and mine)? You'd find some way to elude or evade.
The only thing that will work is a woman's sense of shame:
you'd be guarded perfectly well if you had that. 40

II.7

That terrible law Octavian put through, the tax on bachelors,
  has been repealed, and you are relieved, as I am.
Now I don't have to get married—not that I ever would have.
  No wife is going to part us, or other mistress.
You are the only wife or mistress I can imagine.
  But what would that law have meant to lovers like us?
Against our will, not even Jove could have forced us apart.
  "But Caesar is strong," they say, which is true in war,
but armies and nations' powers don't signify for love.
  I'd sooner have them cut off my head than marry, 10
be ordered around by a wife, and, worst of all, pass by
  your door from which, as a husband, I'd be barred.
How could I not look back, as Orpheus did, and weep
  at what I'd betrayed and lost. And Orpheus' music
would not be any more plaintive than the sound of my wedding flute's
  trill in your ear. Or call it a trumpeter's taps.
The shame of the thing! Such a marriage bed would never produce

those brave soldiers the emperor wants for the nation.
But with you? In those lists of love, Castor's spirited charger
would not be a challenge for me. I'd ride to glory. 20
It's only my love for you that has made my name and fame.
They know who I am in the frozen Scythian tundra.
I'm yours; you're mine. You're all I want. The middle-class pride
of a paterfamilias can't compare to passion.

II.8

My darling girl, whom I've loved beyond all measure, is gone,
taken from me, and your advice, old pal,
is not to weep? What kind of friend are you? Attack me,
kill me even, and I should hate you less.
I'm supposed to remain calm as I see her with someone else,
in somebody else's embrace? She was mine and now
is not, anymore. How can that be? I know what you're saying—
all things change and love changes more than most.
You win, you lose, as the wheel of Fortune goes round and round.
Tyrants and powerful generals make mistakes 10
and are beaten. Thebes is destroyed, and mighty Troy is burned.
But what's that to me? I think of all those poems
and all those presents I gave her. A tough broad she was, and
honest.
She never came out and said the words, "I love you."
(I might have argued back: "But you always took the money.
I paid the bills, was the man of the house, had rights. . . .
And what does that make me? What does it then make you?")
I'm a dead duck. Let her gloat, torment my ghost,

desecrate my pyre, and do a dance on my grave.
There are lots of ridiculous deaths for love's sake—Haemon 20
took his life with his sword and died at Antigone's tomb.
He couldn't continue to live if he couldn't have her.
That wouldn't be so bad. You'd have to die with me,
our blood mixing to drip from the same sharp blade.
A shameful death, it's not what you had in mind? Too bad.
It's Achilles' anger I feel, when they took Briseis.
In the face of the Trojan onslaught he skulked in his tent
and, worse,
looked on as Achaeans were dying along the shore.
In the Greek camp the flames that Hector had set ablaze
lit up the night sky. Impassive, he stared 30
at Patroclus' pathetic corpse stretched out on the sand with
the dried
blood caked in its hair, and Achilles, unmoved,
endured even this for the sake of his lovely Briseis. Such grief
is what a man feels when the woman he loves is taken.
They gave the woman back, and Achilles returned to the battle
to drive his horses that dragged great Hector's body.
I'm no Achilles, no hero, no son of a goddess, and yet
that grief he felt, I feel: it overwhelms me.

II.9

Where I used to be, some other son of a bitch is now,
enjoying himself, but give it a little time,
and he'll be cast off, too, and replaced by somebody else.
We read of Penelope's splendid example: she kept
her honor intact for years, for decades, warding off suitors,
with that trick of weaving by day and undoing at night
whatever progress she'd made at the loom and thereby postponing
that wedding day she dreaded—not that she thought
Ulysses would ever come home, but even so she was faithful.
Briseis, too, cradled Achilles' body 10
and tore at her cheeks with her nails. His captive, she mourned
his death
and washed his mangled corpse as it lay on the sand
of Simois' bank, and she trailed her hair in the dust as she knelt
over the huge body. Consider those tiny
hands of hers on that outsized frame of Achaea's hero.
It wasn't his father who served at these gloomy rites,
or his mother, the sea-born goddess, or his widow back home
in Skyros,

Deidamia, now alone in her bed,
but she, Briseis. In those days Greece could celebrate women
who were faithful and chaste, even in time of war. 20
There were such women then, but not anymore. For you
a single night without a man is too much.
What would you do if I were a soldier on overseas duty,
in India, say, or a sailor becalmed on the sea?
I don't need to be told. You two were laughing and drinking
and making jokes, I have no doubt, about me.
Even with that old beau who dumped you you're flirting again.
I hope he takes the bait: it'd serve you right.
What kind of fool was I to take those solemn vows
when you were deathly ill, your head nearly submerged 30
in the Styx, and your tearful friends were assembled around
your bed?
I prayed then to the gods that you might get well.
But where at that critical moment was he, your faithless gallant?
Did he make it his business to know how you were? Did
he care?
You invent excuses for him and yourself, and you make up stories,
reinventing the world to what you'd prefer:
it's a trick all women know. The winds and the tides near Sidra's
shoals are not more capricious, the leaves in a gale
that swirl and flutter this way and that are no more erratic
than a promise a woman may give when her temper's
roused, 40
no matter how grave the subject may be or how inconsequential.
But if that's how it is, then that's how it's going to be.
Wounded by Cupid's arrows, my only prayer to that god
is that of a beast to the hunter's only kindness—

to finish me off with sharper darts that may claim my blood.
I will be his greatest triumph and trophy.
The fading stars of the damp and chilly dawn will serve
as witnesses to my woe, and that dear door
that used to open discreetly to let me in will declare
that no one in all my life have I loved more, 50
and still, despite your unkindness, continue to love. No one
will take that place you have left in my heart and bed.
I am yours or no one's at all, and would rather lie down alone
to dream of you or imagine that man you're with,
after all those loyal years I gave you, suffering, dying,
turned somehow to stone, or dead as a stone.

. . . . . .

. . .For the sake of ambition, to gain a throne, those princes
of Thebes
killed one another in combat, although their mother
tried to prevent it. If Cynthia strove, likewise, to save us,
I'd brave death, if I knew that you'd die, too. 60

II.10

. . .but it's time to give up this ballroom dancing at Helicon hops
and turn to more serious business, saddling up
the Haemonian steeds of the epic and turning my mind to the praise
of our valorous squadrons and songs of Rome's brave leader.
I may not be up to this task, but even if strength should fail me,
men must admire my nerve. For great undertakings,
to dream is to take the first step, and the wish, sometimes, is enough.
A novice poet may sing at first of love,
but then he turns to the struggles of life and the thrill of battle.
Having already written plenty of praise 10
of my mistress, it's time to take up a different and more demanding
lyre to strum. Rise up, my soul, take flight,
and ask the Muses for help in poetry's loftier regions.
The Euphrates no longer will guard the Parthian rear
and regrets detaining the Crassi, and all of India bows
its deferential neck, recognizing Augustus'

triumph. Arabia's royal house, though not yet conquered,
trembles in awe before you. In all the world
there is no place so remote as not to partake of that fear.
This is the mode in which I shall now perform. 20
A great subject shall make my poetry great. This fateful
day is the start of a new and splendid career.
The practice, in temples where statues' heads are too high
for garlands,
is to lay, instead, the votive wreaths at their feet.
I take my cue from that: if I cannot mount the exalted
battle car, I can offer modest incense.
Helicon's heights are calling and Ascra's spring, more bracing
than Permessus' gentle brook where I dabbled with love songs.

II.11

Others may write your praises, or no one, or, even worse,
men without talent who sow on barren ground.
But whatever happens, your funeral day will come
when the pyre consumes whatever's left of your beauty.
And the passerby will have no idea who lies in the grave,
what a gorgeous girl you were, how vivacious, how smart.

II.12

Whoever he was who first described Love as a boy . . .
  Wasn't he the clever one? He saw
how it can happen, how lovers behave like naughty children
  and ruin the best parties with tantrums and sulks.
The wings are also correct, for the god flutters about
  and the changeable human heart is the winds' plaything,
buffeted this way and that at the whim of the fickle weather.
  The arrows are right, too, with their wicked barbs
in the little Cretan quiver he sports on his shoulder; he strikes
  just when we're feeling safe and have no idea 10
he's hunting and we are the quarry. (And the wound is often
    mortal.)
  He stays with me, that mischievous boy, relentless
as if he had lost the use of those wings. He doesn't give up
  but wages his constant war, tormenting a victim
with no more blood to lose. It's a dreadful way to behave,
  and I tell him so: "Boy, be gone, for shame!
Shoot at other, better, and as yet unwounded targets,

who never have felt the poison of your sharp darts.
Leave me in peace. It's only a ghost you're tormenting now.
And if you destroy that, who will sing your praises 20
or celebrate my darling's face, her hands, her eyes,
and the way she moves with that dainty deadly grace?"

II.13a

More than all the arrows of Susa's horde of archers
  has Amor fixed in my somehow still-beating heart.
That tyrant's command is clear, that I not ignore the slender
  Muses but make my home in Ascra's grove
where Hesiod lived and write, as he did, didactic verse.
  I don't of course expect the Pierian oaks
to sway to my words or the beasts in Ismarus' valley to gather
  for me as they once did when Orpheus sang.
I'd be pleased if their spell held Cynthia's flighty attention—
  that would mean more to me than Linus' fame. 10
What qualifies me to discourse on the subject of love? I admire
  beauty in women, of course—but that's not it.
I'm as much impressed as anyone else by noble bloodlines,
  but that's beside the point. What turns me on
is a woman's cultivation and taste. What I most adore
  is the thought of my book in the lap of a smart girl,
into whose shell-like ear, trained and discriminating,
  my words may ascend and even earn approval.
That, for me, is heaven, the only success I care for.

Compared to that, the crowd's babble is worthless. 20
The only judgment I trust is that of my darling; the only
reward I yearn for is not in Jove's gift but hers.

II.13b

. . .And when it happens that death at last shall close my eyes,
this how I'd like you to make the arrangements:
no long cortege of men in the old-fashioned waxen masks;
no blare of funereal trumpets lamenting my passing;
no bier on ivory posts on which my corpse is arrayed
on gaudy cloth-of-gold; no spicy dainties
to attract, impress, and repay the gathered throng of mourners.
All I want is the humble rite of interment. 30
Enough, oh more than enough, will be that modest procession
of these three rolls of verse that I shall be taking
to offer up as my gift to Queen Persephone. You
can follow along as well, with your breast bared
and torn in grief as you wail and call out my name and kiss
for the last time my cold and lifeless lips
and pour from the onyx box the Syrian aromatics.
Then, when the heat of the flames has turned my remains
to the powdery ash fit for a small but well-wrought urn,
you'll install me in that niche that will be my tomb 40
and plant, perhaps, a laurel to cast its shade on the spot
where the pyre burned, and a plaque to announce to the world:
"Who is buried here as dust was once love's faithful servant."
My tomb will rival in fame, then, that of the blood-stained
hero of Phthia, the great Achilles. And when you come

to the end of your days, I shall have blazed the path
you'll take to the world beyond. Old, I hope, white-haired,
you shall come to visit the grave that remembers you still.
(And do not neglect such duties: the dust of the dead is aware
and keeps track of what you do or fail to do.) 50
If only one of the Fates had decreed my death in the cradle!
We think we want the breath of life stretched out,
but it's nothing to be desired. Nestor outlived his time,
to see three generations that came and went.
Had he died a younger man, he would have been spared the sight
at the high ramparts of Troy of the death of his son
Antilochus, at which he complained in bitterness, "Death,
why do you come so late with your gift of release?"
It's not always unwelcome. Still, we mourn our loss
of a friend, or a mate we have promised to love forever. 60
Let Venus be my witness, whose white Adonis died
on Ida's peaks, gored by the cruel wild boar.
In the limpid streams she washed her lover's pitiful body,
and wailed, and tore her hair in frantic grief,
as you will wail for me and try to call back my ghost,
but how can my crumbling bones make you an answer?

II.14

Better than this? Nothing! Not Agamemnon's triumph
over the ruins of overweening Troy;
nor wily Ulysses at last come home from his endless journey
to Ithaca's so long longed-for shore;
nor Electra either, seeing her brother Orestes' return
for which she had wept and prayed in her grief and anger;
nor the princess Ariadne when Theseus came out safe
from the labyrinth where he'd used her trick with the thread
to solve Daedalus' puzzle. None of these moments of joy
can begin to compare with what I felt last night. 10
Another night like that, and I shall have been transported
beyond the mere mortal to join with the gods.
No more does she spurn or scorn or ignore my piteous tears.
I've learned better. No more that plaintive dejection,
which anyway didn't work, was hopeless—first aid for the dead!
The obvious thing to do was change my tactics,
which took me, I admit, a long time to figure out.
But that's the trouble with love: it addles your wits.
What works is to show disdain. Insouciant, nonchalant,

I seem not to care. . .and she loves it, gobbles it up. 20
No turns to *yes*. And while others are knocking in vain at her door,
I'm inside with her head on my arm as her pillow.
This is a victory, triumph, the rout of the Parthian hordes.
For this there should be parades, displays of booty,
with captive kings who follow my chariot's course as crowds
wave and cheer. And at Venus' temple I'll offer
a token of my thanksgiving that I'll nail to a votive pillar
with my name inscribed as her loyal and grateful servant:
THESE ARE THE GIFTS, O GODDESS, PROPERTIUS BRINGS TO YOUR SHRINE
IN THANKS FOR A HEAVENLY NIGHT OF HIS MISTRESS' FAVORS. 30
And what happens now? It's up to you, I believe, my darling.
Does my ship sail on? Do I founder now on the shoals?
I can hardly believe my luck. Should it change, what shall I do?
Something suave? Or fall down dead at your doorstep?

II.15

How happy I am! What a shining and glorious night I've enjoyed.
And you, dear little bed that squeaked and shuddered,
what a workout the two of us gave you, in the lamplight's glow
and then
when we tussled and mussed in the soft and velvety dark
like Graeco-Roman wrestlers, naked, sweaty, and close . . .
but clothed, too. I remember—I think—a nightgown
she put on just to tease me. (But she didn't wear it for long.)
I drifted off to sleep and she kissed my eyelids
to wake me again and complained, calling me "lazy," "a quitter."
I roused myself and we both acquitted ourselves 10
more splendidly than before and in several novel positions.
My lips are still sore from our fervent kisses.
What I remember best is the part in the light love rightly
prefers—the eyes, too, are erogenous zones.
It is said that Paris' soul was lost when he first saw Helen
naked emerging from Menelaus' bedroom,
and Diana when she beheld the nude Endymion sleeping
swooned in rapture and took him at once to bed.

It's more convenient and also cheaper to sleep in the nude—
you won't get your nightgown ripped by my clumsy hands, 20
which in their frenzy could also bruise your lovely arms.
What's not to be proud of with perky breasts
that do not sag like those of women who've borne children
and given suck. Rejoice in your own perfection
and let us feast our eyes on one another's good looks
all night long as our longings are satisfied.
It's the days I resent and their long hours of separation.
We ought to be bound in the chains of our embrace,
like doves that you sometimes see overhead, coupled together
even while they flutter across the sky. 30
Dangerous, maybe, but who puts limits on passion's madness?
When it's strong enough, desire knows no rules.
Sooner shall fields that farmers have planted with wheat
bring forth
crops of oats; sooner shall Phoebus Apollo
drive a car of blackness across a nighttime sky;
sooner shall rivers flow uphill to their source
and drain the sea beds dry to leave fish gasping in mud
than the love I feel for her shall waver or change.
She is my life, as I believe that I'm also hers,
so close that not even death will be able to part us. 40
All I want in this world is that she give me nights such as this,
and I'd be content forever. A year like that?
What men have known such bliss, or even immortal gods?
One night with her, and any man is a god.
If only the world knew, and this were the dream of men—
with limbs heavy with wine to lie down beside her—
there'd be no weapons of war, no infantry, no navy,

Actium's gentle waves would break on a quiet
beach. Rome would need no legions to regulate
conquests nor war widows to mourn their losses. 50
Posterity shall judge that mine are the proper campaigns
that cause offense neither to gods nor men.
As long as we live, Cynthia, let us be busy with love.
An infinite number of kisses would be too few.
Bouquets of flowers fade in their vases, but still they strew
their fragrant petals on tablecloths and bedsheets—
which is what we should keep in mind as we grow old together,
living each day as if it might be our last.

II.16

That prick of a praetor is back: from Illyria's outer darkness
he reappears, a huge target for you
and as huge a worry for me. What is the point of those rocks
on Epirus' headland if he sails by them safely?
Why wasn't he drowned? Neptune, what gifts I'd have offered.
But no, he's home, presiding at banquet tables
where all but me are feasting. The door is open all night
in a welcome to all but me for his celebration.
He's ripe for the plucking. A sheep to be sheared. A goose to
be cooked.
It's a chance too good for a clever girl to pass up. 10
Take him for all he's got, and then, when the river of presents
has left him broke, you can send him back again
to recover himself in whatever hinterland Rome can provide.
I understand it: your eye's on the main chance.
It isn't prestige you want, or the empty honors of office,
but cash on the barrel head (or the top of the bureau).
O Venus, help me, I beg you. Assuage my pains. Or visit
worse than them on him: a rupture, a torsion.

I'm shamed by my greedy darling, with a jeweler's loupe in
her eye.
Pearls from the oceans bed, trinkets from Tyre's 20
chic boutiques. . .Her demands I've tried my damnedest to meet.
It's corrupting of her and of me as well, a disgrace
offensive to Jove! If only Rome were a village, simple
and poor, with its leaders living still in huts
as Romulus did so long ago on the Palatine Hill . . .
It'd put an end to the courtesans' tacky business
with our women sorely tempted to trade their bodies for pricey
presents. Imagine a life in which maidens grew up
uncorrupted, grew old in the family manse. And lovers
weren't torn apart, as I have been for a week 30
with my sweetheart twining her lovely arms around that beast.
She's not paying me back. I have been faithful.
I give you my word. It's girls who wander from bed to bed.
And with whom? He once was a slave in the marketplace
doing the jig they do to demonstrate to buyers
how lively and fit they are and willing to work.
And then, in the wink of an eye, he's a potentate with a kingdom
and a *droit de seigneur* persuasive at least to you.
It wears me down, the endless anguish of all your betrayals.
I'm not the man I was. The theater? The shops? 40
Nothing's of any interest. Food is tasteless and dull.
I'm even bored by the shame of my sad situation.
As the sorry proverb tells us, a shameful love is deaf.
Blind, also, and stupid. Look at that hero
who fought at Actium's bay with the doomed legions he led.
A sordid passion undid him; he turned his ships
and fled and attempted to hide at the end of the earth with her.

Caesar triumphed, of course, and trumped his triumph
by returning the sword to its scabbard and bringing peace to
the world.
Whatever expensive silks he gave you, whatever 50
emeralds, chrysolites, or any other such baubles,
I hope a whirlwind comes to sweep them away,
swirling them out of your clutching hands into empty space
or turning them into so much worthless dust.
There are worse things that can happen. Think of Eriphyla's
present,
or bribe, call it, that necklace that Polynices brought her.
Think of Medea's gift to Creusa, Jason's bride,
that poisoned robe with its vile tormented death.
Jupiter does not smile at faithless lovers or listen
to tawdry prayers. You have heard the thunderclap 60
and seen how the lightning flashes down from the dome
of the sky.
It isn't only the Pleiades and Orion
who bring these storms in their season, but heaven's righteous
outrage
at girls who have proven untrue. Jupiter knows
and has wept himself at the troubles mortal women have
caused him.
It's a nice gown he's brought you from Sidon, darling.
Put it on, pose, and stare at yourself in your boudoir mirror,
and imagine it wet, drenched in Jove's downpour.

II.17

Not laid, but rather stood-up. The rendezvous, not canceled,
is forgotten, ignored. It's a dreadful thing to do,
wicked as murder, which isn't so far-fetched perhaps. The idea
keeps coming back—I could throw myself from a cliff,
or gulp down a dose of poison and bring an end to my torment,
this flopping around alone in a bed all night.
I reach out for her body and, with no one there, I fall
to the floor, bruising my pride along with my backside.
Tantalus' terrible torture we know and we pity his plight
with the water he never can carry to parching lips. 10
Sisyphus' labors we also read about with dismay
and think of rolling that huge stone up the hill
over and over again. But the lover's life is worse:
he's afflicted by his own hopes, which refuse to die.
Of all the roles in this world or even the next, the lover's
is the one that every wise man wants the least.
The worst of it is that I was admired, even envied . . .
Some gay blade, I am. Maybe every ten days
she lets me in. On a moonlit night you can see me prowling

the streets like a turned-out cat, or scribbling notes 20
to shove through the crack in her door. It's a crazy business.
But I won't quit. One day she'll come to her senses,
weep to see how persistent I've been, how faithful, how strong
my love for her has been, and will make it right.

II.18a

. . .and what ruins the lives of a lot of men is their constant
complaining.
Be the strong and silent type. They love it.
Whatever you've seen, forget it. Whatever she's done to hurt you,
keep quiet, or else deny that you've been hurt.

II.18b

. . .and what if my youth were fading, my hair turning white,
and my skin
furrowed, my cheeks a crazy maze of wrinkles?
Aurora did not disesteem Tithonus, although he was old,
or abandon him in the halls of the palace of dawn.
Sadly she mounted her car to set out on her daily run,
and gladly she would dismount, returning home 10
to embrace him, fondle and kiss him, even before she'd unhitched
her team of horses, rubbed them down, and fed them.
Far off in the Indian east, she complained that the day returned

too soon to recall her to her duty. The joy she took
in him in his old age exceeded even the grief
she felt at the death of their son Memnon at Troy.
A gorgeous girl like that was not at all ashamed
to go to bed with an older man, to kiss him,
and tousle his snowy hair, but you, ungrateful, faithless,
you call me old and feeble, although I'm not— 20
and you're the one who will soon be a bent and wrinkled crone.

II.18c

. . .Even so, I worry less when I think how it happens
that Cupid often turns on those he's favored.

II.18d

What a nutty thing to do, to get yourself up that way
daubing yourself with paint like a savage Briton!
Natural beauty is best, and the use of Belgian rouge
on a Roman woman's face is decadent, shameful.
Some model starts a trend, and eye shadow catches on,
and everyone's suddenly buying that azure gunk . . .
Why is that good? In hell there will be a cosmetics counter 30
and all the women will color their hair and streak it.
Stop it, please! I swear you are beautiful, just as you are.
The only other way I'd want to see you
would be a lot more often, but that's another story.
You have no brother or son, so let me act

as brother and son, and protect, as a family member would,
and warn you—not to go out in that gaudy war paint.
You don't want people to think you're *that* kind of woman,
do you?
Once a rumor gets started, where does it end?

II.19

So it's off to the countryside? You're leaving Rome? I confess
I'm relieved at the thought of you in rustic seclusion
in meadows and rolling fields where no young seducers lurk
tempting you to forget for a moment your virtue.
Quiet and peaceful, you won't be bothered by nighttime brawls
beneath your window, or gallants calling your name.
Will you be lonely? Perhaps, but the hills and fields are soothing.
You can go out to inspect the farmers' flocks
and crops in the worthwhile pursuit of useful, important
knowledge.
That may make up for the plays you miss at the theater, 10
or the rites at the temples you frequent, cruising the crowds
for playmates.
Instead, you can watch the oxen plowing their furrows.
You can see how they prune the grapevines, like hairdressers
with sickles.
There may be some country rite you'd like to attend
where they'll let you offer the incense at the sacrifice of a kid.
And I think some nights there are dances. Hitch up your dress

and amuse yourself by learning those intricate steps they do.
Why not? No one you worry about will see you.
When I get out to join you, I may take up hunting, forgo
the worship of Venus a while and pray to Diana, 20
run through the woods for game and offer the horns of my quarry,
hang them in the trees to thank the generous goddess.
"Yoiks!" I shall shout. "Tally-ho!" (Or whatever they call to
hounds.)
I may not be up to trying for lions or boar,
but rabbits are not so fierce. I could manage that, or a bird.
I can imagine it clearly, the lovely Clitumnus,
and there I am on its banks, in the glades and the leafy bowers,
my game bag full, resting, and watching the cattle.
Be good, now, darling. Remember, I'll be arriving shortly.
I picture those pleasant rural scenes, the hills 30
and streams, and I think of you out there all alone—and I try
not to fret about who might be taking advantage.

II.20

Why should you weep such tears as Briseis shed, abducted,
or sorrow more sorely than even Andromache, captive
of brutal Greeks? You weary the gods with complaints about me
and what you believe is my faithlessness and baseness.
As shrill as the nightingale's dirge from Attica's gloomy groves,
your wailing fills the air. Niobe's crying
on Sipylus' horrid height at the death of her dozen children
was not so bitter as your incessant keening.
And what is it for, I ask you? If I were tied down in fetters
the way they say Prometheus was, and you 10
were locked away in Danaë's tower, I swear somehow
I'd struggle to break the brazen chains that held me
and climb the walls of the tower to set my darling free.
I hear tales about you, to which I'm deaf.
Can't you return that favor? Trust me. I swear on the graves
of both my beloved parents (and if I lie,
may they come back to haunt me!) that I have always been faithful
and will be, up to the last hour I live.
Nothing in this world can part us, and even death

may find that it will have to take us together. 20
Your beauty and fame would be enough to keep me true,
but mostly what I love is that you are kind.
It's going on seven months that we've been the talk of the town,
your door being open to welcome me, and your bed,
and it wasn't for costly gifts that I never could have afforded
but only because of your love, your goodness of heart.
Whom could you not have chosen of all the eager men
who longed for you? But I was the one you wanted.
Do you think I could ever forget such unselfishness as yours?
If I do, for even an instant, I invite 30
the Furies to harry my soul and invoke Aeacus' ire
when it's time for me to face his underworld judgment.
May one of Tityus' vultures gnaw my quivering vitals,
or let me carry one of Sisyphus' rocks
endlessly up that hill. You needn't worry, my dearest,
or send me any pleading letters. Believe me!
My love shall be what it always has been. Remember, I said
when we began, that this is forever. I meant it.

II.21

What Panthus wrote was untrue. That page about me was malicious
fiction, and Venus, I pray, may treat him unkindly
as he so richly deserves. Meanwhile, it seems I'm correct,
as true a prophet as ever spoke in Dodona.
That lover of yours has decamped, or say he's pitched his camp
and has taken a wife. Those strenuous nights you invested,
what did they get you but shame and anger? He's flown your coop
and, free as a bird, he crows, while you lie alone.
Worse yet, they're talking and laughing together, he and his wife,
and telling stories, and you are the butt of their jokes. 10
You are the shrew, the leech, the hanger-on, the pest,
and it makes her feel good to hear him go on this way.
This is how Jason behaved to the sorry maiden from Colchis
when he jilted her in order to marry Creusa.
This is how the wily Ithacan king behaved
when he sailed away from Calypso's enchanted island.
But none of those stories can help. Girls are gullible, still,

and never learn: they're kind, and then they're abandoned.
The girl I love is prowling the town in search of a man,
someone this time who might turn out to be faithful. 20
The odds are against you, I fear. Meanwhile, you know I'm here,
forever, in sickness or health. You know I'm yours.

II.22a

They're all fine, Demophoön, the dark and the fair, the plump
and the scrawny, leggy girls. . .How can I choose?
But that's my trouble. I go outside for a walk and see
beauty on every side, at every corner,
to die for. And then at night, at the theater, an actress can move
her slender arm in a languidly liquid gesture
and my heart, I tell you, melts. Or she takes a breath to sing,
and my eyes bug right out of my sockets staring
at what I can see of the gorgeous mound of her bared breast.
Or she'll turn her head to the side so a lock of hair 10
will bounce against her forehead where she's wearing a glittering jewel,
and I am delighted, stupefied with love.
What causes this, you ask? It's a useless question. Love
doesn't answer questions or need any reasons.
It happens, and men go mad, as they do at the Phrygian rites
where Cybele's worshippers cut their arms with knives
or castrate themselves. Why? You can blame the gods or nature.
Each of us was born with some kinds of weakness.

Mine was this love of women—or call it appreciation
of whatever I see. And I don't think it would change 20
if one day, like the bard Thamyras, I were struck blind.
I'd contrive still to grope their adorable faces.
You think I'll ruin my health? Grow hairy palms? Lose weight?
So far it hasn't happened. I can perform
as many girls have discovered, amazed or appalled, all night,
and they beg me to stop, and I do, restraining myself,
but only just. For Alcmena Jupiter halted the whirling
constellations to double the length of the night,
during which time he left the throne of heaven empty.
And when he returned to take up his thunderbolts, 30
he was hardy and still strong and suffered from no ill effects.
Achilles, when he arose from Briseis' embrace,
was no less a threat to the Trojans who fled his flying spearpoints.
And Hector, on the other side, returning
from Andromache's rumpled bed, attacked the line of Achaean
black ships with his fury undiminished.
I cannot match them in war, but in love I consult the poets'
tales of these Greeks and Trojans, and do my best.
Look up in the sky and consider what nature sets before us:
the earth has the Sun's and the Moon's favors as well. 40
Likewise, for me, one girl is never enough. A spare
is handy to have: should the first come down with a headache,
or be otherwise discommoded or disinclined, another
is ready and willing, and makes for a pleasant change.
A ship is better secured with a pair of anchor cables.
And parents have less to fear if they're blessed with twins.

II.22b

You can tell me "no," if you want, or "yes," if you're feeling
friendly,
but what's the point of agreeing and not showing up?
Words lose all their value, and love and trust are betrayed.
It isn't a date you break, but a person's heart— 50
and he sighs and groans as he tosses in bed in a waking nightmare.
Refused, denied, demoted from lover to stranger,
he sends the messenger back again and again to ask
questions to which he dreads to know the answers.
Who else is there? With whom is she being unfaithful now?
For whose sake has he been cast out this way?

II.23

I who hated mobs and whatever was vulgar and common
now enjoy a drink from the public fountain.
What's changed my mind is women and the terrible scenes
I've witnessed
of freeborn men bribing and fawning on slaves
they hope will carry a mistress a billet-doux or will simply
say where she is, what portico, what park . . .
After you've knocked yourself out performing Hercules' labors,
does she show you her thanks? No, she demands a present.
And what will that get you? A tedious chaperoned evening?
A tryst
in a filthy hut somewhere (and she fails to show up)? 10
Sure, you sometimes get lucky. Is it more than once in a year?
And think how much you have spent! To hell with it all.
What's better is honest whores, who offer themselves unveiled,
uninhibited, unencumbered by husbands
or cousins or aunts. They walk the Via Sacra in sandals
they'll kick off at once if only anyone asks them.
Excuses? No. Or delays? Or demands for expensive gifts

you'll have to explain one day to your frugal father?
No sordid logistics, no plans to avoid the returning husband.
I love you, Baghdad beauties, Syrian sweeties. 20
No more tiresome talk with reluctant respectable women;
I prefer to keep my freedom and self-respect.

II.24a

"So who are you to be talking, giving advice to the lovelorn,
with all of Rome reading your book? You're living
legends, you and Cynthia, jokes, the talk of the forum. . ."
Who wouldn't, at such words, break out in a cold
sweat? It's not what a gentleman does—to kiss and tell.
He ought to be ashamed of himself and keep silent.
But is it my fault? If only Cynthia treated me right,
I'd have concealed that fire of passion she lit,
and would not be Rome's top tomcat, my name a snigger.
Now that I spend my time with whores and lowlifes, 10
I'm better off. There's less disgrace, and my reputation
is safe. There's a moral lesson in that somewhere.

. . .and a fan she wants, something grand, from a peacock's
gaudy tail,
and to hold in her hands, to keep them cool, some bauble
of crystal. And ivory dice. Whatever she sees in vitrines
in the Via Sacra boutiques, she's got to have it!
It isn't the money itself that's the great pain in the ass,
but knowing that all it buys is humiliation.

II.24b

For this, was it, you told me that I should rejoice and be happy?
For this? Are you not ashamed of yourself, so lovely 20
and yet so faithless and fickle. A night or two in your bed,
and that's it? I'm no longer welcome. My poems
you said you liked so much are boring you now? Or erased?
Your attention is turned elsewhere, just as your love's
wings have banked and swerved and you've lit on somebody new.
But can he compete with me in wit and in art?
Can he match me where it counts, in monomaniac passion?
Try him: send him to fight with the Hydra of Lerna;
dispatch him to fetch the Hesperides' apples from their garden
in the land of sunsets; dare him to quaff some deadly 30
poison or have him brave the seas in a leaky boat . . .
(Oh, my darling, I'd volunteer for such trials
in a minute!) See how your hero behaves. Will he show himself
as a coward, a braggart impostor, unworthy of honors?
I give you two a year. It can't last longer than that.
But the Sibyl's entire lifespan wouldn't suffice
for my devotion to change, or the labors of Hercules
discourage me. Not even death's dark day
will diminish my love. You'll lay me to rest and declare: "Here lie
your bones, my dear Propertius, faithful to me. . . 40
Oh, alas, yes, faithful—even though not noble,
and not very rich." There is nothing I cannot endure
for your sake, gladly. I've learned put up with your behavior,
and my love for you is never diminished or changed.
It's not a hardship but rather a part of your beauty's package.
Many men have been smitten, but of them how few

have remained, as I have, faithful and true? Consider the case
of Theseus who loved, for a time, Ariadne,
or Theseus' son Demophoön, whose passion for Phyllis was strong
but brief. Or think of Medea who sailed with Jason 50
only to be abandoned by the man whose life she had saved.
It's often the woman's fault, pretending to love
every man she meets. They don't realize that it's cruel.
Don't do that, and don't consort so much
with the rich, who never trust their friends and cannot therefore
be trusted, themselves. They'll turn on you at last—
as I never will. At your death, I'll come to mourn, although,
my hope is that I go first and you're at my grave,
your hair an attractive mess and your beautiful breast bared
in grief as you weep for the loss of my lifelong love. 60

II.25

Cynthia, you were born to cause me pain (but the dearest
  and sweetest pain, and I yearn for your invitations).
These torments I will put to use as I write my book
  to celebrate your beauty and bring it fame
in poems of love not even Catullus and Calvus—begging
  their pardons—could hope to match, let alone surpass.
The veteran soldier retires and stows away his weapons;
  the aged ox at a certain point refuses
to plow another furrow; and the old, rotten ship
  rests, an abandoned hulk drawn up on the beach. 10
You can see on the walls of temples those shields heroes have hung
  when the battle was over and peace was at last proclaimed.
In this campaign there is never peace or a truce: old age,
  Tithonus' or Nestor's, won't stop me from loving you.
It would be better to serve as one of Perillus' victims
  who groaned as they roasted alive in his hollow bull.
It would be better surely if a Gorgon turned me to stone,
  or off somewhere in the Caucasus' heights I were torn
by one of those man-eating vultures. This is as painful, but slower.

An iron sword is worn away by rust, 20
and the hardest rock will give way to the small and repeated assaults
of water drops. To a mistress' cruel abuse
that seems to go on forever, my ears are ever alert,
and my scorned ardor continues, undiminished,
confesses itself in the wrong, though blameless, and pleads for forgiveness.
Hangdog, ashamed, sent on its way, it returns.
You think you're doing well and therefore know about love?
Wrong, my friend. Women are fickle and change.
Does the sailor not yet home fulfill his vows to the gods
or wait for the ship to arrive at its home port? 30
(And danger still may be lurking: a ship at the pier can sink.)
Do the stewards announce the results of a chariot race
before the axles have passed the perilous turning post
for the seventh time? I'm happy you're doing well
at the moment, but do not trust fair weather: it never lasts,
and the ruin that bides its time is a terrible ruin.
Enjoy yourself, enjoy her professions of love undying,
but hold your peace and your cards close to your chest.
To boast as a man is tempted to do is inviting disaster.
Don't be too quick to accept her invitations, 40
and never, never let on to your friends how you've got it made.
Whatever it is will unmake itself and you.
I was young once. I've been there, have walked a mile in your shoes
and learned the hard lessons bad times teach,
which you, of course, don't believe. You'll find your own road, I'm sure.

And those who hedge their bets and play the field?
Do they have it right, I wonder? They see some breathtaking
blonde,
or gorgeous brunette, or a slender willowy figure,
or a more abundant and billowy shape. . .And they're all terrific,
in expensive fancy dress or simple frock. 50
Different kinds of delights, but the danger is always there,
and one woman's enough to drive a man crazy.

II.26a

In a dream, dearest, I see you, shipwrecked, your wearying arms
flailing against the waves of the heaving sea,
and your life is flashing before you—and you think of me, and your heart
is laden down in remorse as your sodden clothing
and hair are weighted with water and you thrash and struggle like Helle
whom the golden ram carried aloft on his back.
I fear that the sea will swallow you up likewise and sailors
passing that sorry place will weep for your loss.
What vows do I make to Neptune, what prayers do I frame to Castor
and Pollux, and Leucothoë, the doyenne of drowning? 10
Still, there you are, your head going under, your fingertips grasping
at insubstantial foam as you call out my name
in a surge of chagrin. Will Glaucus, the sea-god, glimpse you and spare you,
promote you perhaps to mermaid? Will sister sea-nymphs

Nesaeë and Cymothoë turn green at the gills with envy?
But, look! A kindly dolphin comes to help you,
perhaps the same one who carried Arion safely to Corinth.
I'm looking down from a cliff, and I want to leap
into the sea to help you, to try to save you, but fear
grips my tormented heart. . .And then I wake up. 20

II.26b

. . .What no one in Rome can even begin to believe is how
a gorgeous girl like that could have chosen me,
that a queen like her would be my slave, when the wealth of Croesus
is what she's clearly worth. Why would she want
a poet? Show him the door! But then, when she reads my verses,
she glows in her admiration, despises wealth,
and in her love for the art of words cries out my name.
Loyalty? Yes, of course. But poverty helps,
for he whose wealth can afford an array of gifts can expect
an array of grateful and willing women to choose from. 30

II.26c

Oh, dear! My dear is planning a long sea voyage! And I
will follow. The single breeze will propel us both
as we share dangers and pleasures. Each night, on shore, we'll sleep
together under the boughs of a single tree

and drink from the same spring. And by day we'll ride together
sharing the same thwart at the ship's prow
or the transom (wherever she chooses!). I'll endure whatever may come,
the savage wind from the east or the southern simoon
that bellies the sail and drives us wherever it will. Those willful
winds tormented unlucky Ulysses' vessel 40
and kept the thousand ships of Agamemnon's armada
beached and unable to put to sea from Aulis.
Those winds wail at the Clashing Rocks where the *Argo* sailed
darting after the dove they'd sent out to pass
safely between them and enter that ominous unknown sea.
As long as she is beside me, I can be brave.
Let Jupiter send his lightning to set our ship on fire
and I shall console myself that our naked corpses
at least will lie together, when they wash up on some strange beach.
Or, no, I'd rather that mine might be swept away, 50
if only yours could be laid in the earth and buried correctly.
But why must I worry? Neptune is kind to lovers,
for he, like his brother Jove, is not immune to passion.
Think of Amymone, yielding to him for the promise
that he would create a spring that would never run dry in Argos'
worst droughts. The god fulfilled his promise,
struck with his trident Lerna's marsh, and thereby created
the spring that always flows from her golden urn.
Boreas ravished Erectheus' daughter, the fair Orithyia,
but she was reconciled and at last forgave him. 60
Scylla can show us kindness and cruel Charybdis relent,

and the stars shall shine overhead to show us our way,
even Orion and Haedus, the kid, who preside over storms.
But if it should happen that danger should overtake us,
I may contrive a way to give up my life for yours,
and such a death in your embrace, I'd welcome.

II.27

Mortal, you want to know when you will meet your death
  and by what road will it come. You stare up at the sky,
a cloudless blue, and you look for auguries, Punic omens.
  You peer at the stars and wonder which bode well.
You march against the Parthians, sail to oppose the Britons,
  braving on land and sea unimagined perils.
You live as well as you can, but worry that civil war
  may sweep you up in one of Mars' campaigns
that could drag on year after year and never to any conclusion.
  You take good care, pay attention, but worry, worry. . . 10
Will your house burn down? Will somebody lace your drink
    with poison?
  It's only the lover who knows when he's likely to go
and how, and he has no fear of Boreas' icy blasts
  or the dismal clangor of armor. Let him embark
in Charon's skiff and trail his hand through the reeds of the Styx
  as the sail swells with a dank underworld breeze,
he's still alert for his mistress' voice calling his name
  and, whether the rules allow it or not, he'll answer.

II.28

Jupiter, have mercy. My sweetheart is ailing, failing,
and you will be blamed for the loss of a lovely creature.
Even implacable Juno has been mollified, relenting,
regretting, as anyone must, a beautiful maiden's
death. It's that time of year, the dog days: the air is hot
and the earth shimmers, molten, and people fall ill.
But is this the only reason? I fear it's her own behavior,
her lapses, her failures to hold the gods in awe.
Beautiful girls swear oaths the winds write on the sea-foam,
for their moods change and their solemn words are gone. 10
Is Venus vexed that my love was compared with her in looks?
Is her jealousy roused and her ire? Are Juno and Pallas
irked as they sometimes have been with gorgeous but boastful
mortals?
We, who are not exceptional, learn to curb
our tongues, but those with the gift of preternatural beauty
that they take for granted speak their minds directly
and even rashly—as you do, all too often, my darling,
and it can bring you to grief, as perhaps it has.

I pray that you may recover, outlive these special perils,
and enjoy in your waning days a tranquil hour. 20
Io, in youth, was tormented, lowed as a cow, was driven,
but then, at the banks of the Nile, she was transformed
to become at last a goddess. Ino, likewise, wandered
the earth and now as a goddess receives the prayers
of terror-stricken sailors. Andromeda, too, was a beauty
offered up to the monster, but then she became
Perseus' noble wife. Callisto wandered the woods
of Arcadia, having assumed the form of a bear,
and now, as a bear in the sky and immortal, she guides our ships
that sail at night. These stories offer us comfort. 30
Even if fate has decreed that you go to your final rest,
there is hope that for beauty's sake you may somehow persist
perhaps to converse with such as Semele who know
how loveliness is a gift that is not without peril—
elected and then stricken. Homer's heroines too
will invite you to take your rightful place among them,
a sister, an equal or even by common consent a leader.
As you lie there in your sickbed, bear this in mind,
that your fate is in heaven's hands and death may not be what
you fear,
but different and utterly strange. The whirling prayer wheel 40
may not have produced the effect you expected. The burning
laurel
is ash in the cold hearth. The implacable Moon
does not descend from her round in the cold of the nighttime sky.
An owl hoots its song of dismal omen.
The ferryman's single passage will carry our love across
with its somber sails set for the further shore.

Have pity, Jove, upon us. If you cannot pity one,
know that our fates are entwined, and that if she lives,
I too, shall live, or else, if she dies, I will die.
For the mercy you show us, I pledge to undertake 50
a serious poem of thanks and praise to Omnipotent Jove
that my darling girl is safe, is spared, and remains
mine. She will come to your temple to offer her sacrifice
and testify to the world that through your grace
she in her peril was saved. I pray to Persephone, too,
and her stern husband and consort, that they be kind.
The underworld has its bevy of countless beauties: on earth,
therefore, for pity's sake, let one remain.
Antiope, you have, and the lovely Tyro of Elis,
and Europa, as well, and Pasiphaë. Those legends 60
of beauty of Greece and Troy departed ages ago,
and the glories of Rome's heyday the greedy pyre
has taken away. My darling, an all the more precious relict,
will rise from her bed to remind us what woman can be
and dance at Diana's shrine and offer her prayers of thanks
to Io the driven heifer transformed to Isis,
the powerful goddess. And I will delight to collect those ten
nights she has solemnly promised to spend with me.

II.29a

A dream: as I staggered, drunk, through strange streets, I was ambushed
by a posse of naked dwarfs—diminutive cupids,
hunting such runaway slaves as myself. How many were they?
Enough—some with torches, some with their bows
and arrows, and some with ropes and chains. They insulted me, jeering.
What scared me, though, was that I was their special quarry.
"This is the guy," one said, and another called out, "Arrest him!
This is the man the girl wants us to find."
And deftly he lassoed my neck and tightened the choking noose,
while the rest of them crowded around me, pushing and shoving
and shouting derision: "We'll teach him to recognize us as gods.
We'll make him believe!" And they read me their complaint.
"You nitwit, you're cruising the streets, with a woman at home in bed
waiting for you for hours now, a girl

you could not begin to deserve. . .She's wearing her fancy
nightgown,
and her eyes are heavy with sleep, and she smells of sleep,
which is finer than any perfume of expensive Arabian spices.
Go home, why don't you, and bury your nose in that."
Then one of them proposed, "Let's spare the poor fool this time.
Let's send him home. Maybe he's learned his lesson." 20
I looked around and they'd led me back to the very door
I'd been searching for, and they took off the noose and
freed me.
I was relieved and ashamed, confused, but they seemed to know
my mind as they warned me to keep my ass at home.

II.29b

And awake? It's dawn. I go over to Cynthia's house, or say
frankly sneak over, to spy: I need to discover
whether she slept alone. I stand there, astonished, amazed . . .
She's never looked more beautiful, not even
that time she dressed in her purple tunic to visit the Vestals
to have them interpret some dream she was worried about. 30
She'd just emerged from sleep and seemed to me at that instant,
unadorned as she was, absolute perfection.
"You're spying on me!" was what she said, and knew she was
right.
"Do you think I'm like you, like a man, lecherous, faithless?
That's not how women are, or not this woman. One
man is enough—you, or someone more trusting

and worthy of trust. Look around! There's nobody here, no stains
on the sheets, no telltale signs in the room, or on me.
You won't turn up any sordid clues you're ashamed to look for."
I tried to give her a kiss, but she waved me away, 40
slipped then into her sandals and shuffled off in a huff,
which is what I deserved, I'm afraid, for my woeful misconduct.
I'm delighted with her, relieved, and pleased that she has been faithful,
but since then we haven't had a happy moment.

II.30a

You think you can just run off? You must know you're utterly
mad.
There's no way out, though you flee as far as the Don.
Love will pursue you, hound you every step of the way,
even if you could fly on Pegasus' back
or somehow walk on the winds with Perseus' feathered feet
or even with Mercury's wonderful winged sandals.
Love will still be there, looming above your head,
a heavy burden for mortal shoulders, or shackle
to chafe the neck of a man who was formerly free. Raise
your eyes from the ground for a moment, and that harsh
guard 10
will reprove you at once. Still, to a suppliant's honest prayers
he is not always and absolutely deaf. . . .

II.30b

Let envious geezers carp at pleasures we take in our love;
we'll keep on the path we've found for ourselves and ignore
their high-flown lectures on moral decay. Instead we'll listen
to pretty tunes of the pipe Minerva was wrong
to throw into the river when she saw how it puffed out her cheeks.
The pastoral mode is attractive—the simple life.
I'm in love with a single mistress. It's not, I admit, urbane,
but the man-about-town is no more. An idyllic grotto 20
tucked in the mossy hills is what I want, where the Muses
sing their ballades of Jove's adventures in love.
He burned for Semele, pined for Io, and changed his form
to that of an eagle to fly and grab up that boy he adored,
young Ganymede of Troy. That winged god has powers
against which no sane mortal can think to prevail.
For me to acknowledge defeat is therefore no disgrace.
Even the virgin Muses admit love's power,
for one of them, it is said, on the rocks of Thrace was ravished—
Oeagrus did it, or else it may have been 30
Apollo, disguised as him. Let them line up for their dance
with Bacchus in their midst with a raised baton,
and you, my dear, will take your place of honor among them,
and I will put on the wreath of sacred ivy
and perform in my role as poet, grateful to be inspired—
for without your inspiration, I'm nothing at all.

II.31

Why am I late? I'll tell you. Caesar himself detained me,
not, I admit, in person, but his new temple
has opened, is stunning: that brilliant golden pavilion
he promised Apollo is built on the Palatine Hill
with a grand promenade with a row of columns of yellowish marble,
between which the statues stand of Danaus' fifty
daughters. And then at the end, there's Phoebus, resplendent—his lyre
is mute and his parted lips produce no music,
but the god himself cannot be more impressive or handsome.
Milling around his altar are cattle the sculptor 10
Myron carved, and you'd swear that they might at any moment
chew the cud or moo, they seem so lifelike.
The shrine at the center is marble of purest white from Carrara,
and Phoebus cannot prefer his Ortygian home
to what Caesar has given him here in Rome. On the pediment
in rich detail is the sun's chariot, blazing.

On the doors in African ivory, one of the carvings depicts
the Gauls' defeat at Parnassus. The other portrays
Niobe's death and her children's. And between his mother and sister,
the Pythian god himself strums as he sings. 20

II.32

Whoever sees you commits the sin of lust in his heart;
    only he who has never met you is pure.
The eyes are to blame that, helpless, follow you everywhere.
    Why then do you parade so, consulting Fortuna
at her temple at Praeneste? Why do you venture forth
    to Telegonus' walls in Tusculum, or traipse
to Hercules' temple at Tivoli, or out on the Appian Way
    to Juno's Lanuvian shrine? Why can't you stay
here at home, in Rome, where you manage to make me jealous
    sashaying with burning torches to Trivia's grove? 10
Can it be that you're bored with the usual crowd of ogling men
    who idle at Pompey's court beneath the awnings
of cloth-of-gold in the deep shade of the Martian Campo?
    It's a pretty enough venue with rows of plane trees
and water that babbles forth from the fountain of Maro's wineskin
    or that of the Triton's conch to plash and cool
the city's passersby. You think I'm fooled? No, ma'am,
    I know it isn't the city you flee, but me.
Mine are the only eyes you want to avoid or evade,

or pull the wool over, but it's not working, 20
and I can see right through you, can look in your heart and know
the tricks you're up to or low enough to turn.
Your name has become a joke, but what does that mean to me?
The truth is sometimes unpleasant. But you have learned
to dismiss all that sordid gossip as a burden beauty must bear.
No one, so far, has accused you of first-degree murder.
They can call Phoebus himself to bear witness—your hands
are clean.
If you've spent a night or two doing indoor gymnastics,
that's not the kind of serious crime I'd worry about.
Helen came back to Sparta, and nobody dared 30
suggest that she'd misbehaved. Even the goddess Venus
was seduced by the lecherous Mars, but no other gods
in heaven criticized her or held her in disrepute.
On Ida, the nymph Oenone gave herself
to Paris and Hamadryads looked on and old Silenus
as Satyrs played in the trees and laughed when apples
dropped from boughs that they caught in gracefully outstretched
hands.
In all this sexual swarm, this orgy of excess,
who can presume to ask, "Why is that woman so rich?
To whom and how did she come across to receive 40
such grand rewards?" Consider how all of Rome is enriched,
or at least amused and enlivened by such behavior.
Catullus' famous and blameless Lesbia showed us the way.
(And who would then heap blame on her followers' heads?)
You want to hang out with the ancient Romans of Tatius' time,
or the Sabines? They haven't lately been seen around.
You'll sooner dry the waves of the sea with a paper towel

or scoop up a handful of stars from the bowl of the sky
than find a Roman girl unwilling to jump into bed.
That age of virtue was back in Saturn's reign. 50
Ever since the time of Deucalion's flood, the beds
of Rome are bouncing and squeaking. Learn to accept it.
Look to the gods: what goddess has kept to her husband's couch
as a faithful and chaste model for mortal women?
The legends' lessons are clear. Think of the wife of Minos
who was seized by lust for the handsome snow-white bull.
Consider Danaë, locked in her tower's brazen walls,
whose virtue counted for nothing, melted away
in the shower of mighty Jove. The X-rated examples
are what the Greek and Roman texts abound in. 60
You think you can buck the odds? The flesh, my friend is a prison,
from which no one has ever escaped alive.

II.33a

The year has brought round again the dismal rite of Isis,
  and Cynthia for ten nights, perversely devout,
abstains from sex. To hell, I say, with this foreign folly.
  It's a stupid custom Inachus' daughter brings us
from the turbid Nile to otherwise sensible matrons of Rome.
  Io, having become the Egyptian goddess
Isis, comes to separate ardent Roman lovers . . .
  Out of sheer spite? Resentful of what she suffered
after her love for Jove forced her to wander the earth
  and Juno's rage condemned her to put on horns, 10
moo like a cow, and chafe her delicate mouth with oak leaves
  or munch on bitter arbutus? Haughty and cruel,
she continues still to take her revenge on innocent mortals.
  Is Egypt lacking in lusty dusky daughters
to worship you as you want? Why do you come to Rome
  to inflict your mischief on our love affairs here?
You watch yourself. You'll grow those horns again and turn
  into that great cow you were. The Nile
is not a river for which the Tiber has much esteem.

And you, Cynthia, darling, what are you doing? 20
Is the purpose only to tease me? To stiffen my resolve?
Once this is done, I'll show you stiff times three.

II.33b

You pay no heed to my words that flutter on empty air,
while Icarius' oxen trudge through the turning stars.
It's midnight, and you're still drinking, haven't moved from the table,
though your arm should ache from throwing the dice so often.
Death to that bad man who discovered the trick of the grape
and how to turn it to wine. They take good water,
mix it with wine, and spoil it. The farmers of Athens were right
to cut your throat, Icarius. Your vines 30
bear fruit bitter to men. And to Centaurs, as well. Consider
Eurytion's dismal death, the result of drinking,
and Polyphemus' disaster, drugged with Ismarian wine.
Liquor that ruins a woman's beauty and youth
will also cloud the mind. With drink, a faithful mistress
may wander off, confused and compromised.
Good grief! You'd think she'd pass out. But she keeps on pouring it down
and doesn't show it. Steady as ever, and lovely . . .
Look at her there, with the garland askew on her head and her face
flushed from wine, and even so, she's gorgeous. 40
She can even pick up a poem and read it out in a voice
that hardly quavers and never slurring a word.

Then let the table slosh with floods of Falernian wine!
Pour it into her glass! Let her drink it down.

II.33c

The lover who's never around, that's what a woman yearns for,
but the sweetheart who's always there, ready and willing?
He's not what she dreams of in bed. But still he's better than
nothing.
Love? It's crazy and willful, and rules us all.

II.34a

Why would any sane man trust his heart's delight
to Love, that flighty and unreliable god?
I speak the gloomy truth, having learned in that hard school
experience keeps—I nearly lost my darling,
who was almost stolen away. Men are all villains, faithless,
and eager to seize on any attractive female
no matter to whom she belongs. The god who drives us is lacking
in decency, honor, respect for the sacred laws
of kinship or even the bonds of friendship. We turn on each other
in bitterest strife, no matter how close we've been. 10
Think of how Menelaus' guest betrayed his host.
Consider how the princess Medea, engaged,
forgot herself at once for the sake of the handsome stranger.
But you, even you, old Lynceus, buddy and pal,
for you to come on that way to the girl you know I love?
How could you do it? How could your tongue produce
such words? How could your hands not fall limp at your sides
rather than grope and paw your good friend's mistress?
What if she had not been so strong or so devoted

to me? Think of the shame you both would have felt! 20
Stab me with your sword or lace my wine with poison,
but leave her, for the sake of the gods, alone!
Ask what you want of me, of body or soul or wealth,
and whatever you name is yours—except for her.
Just stay out of my bed. That's where I draw the line
for any man or god, even Jove, himself.
When we're alone together, I resent my own shadow's intrusion.
That's how jealous I am, and how much in love.
Foolish? No one can judge who doesn't feel such passion.
I tremble in fears that I know are totally groundless. 30
Still, you were drunk, which explains if it doesn't excuse
your vile behavior that, this one time, I will pardon.
But watch yourself, and know that I shall be watching also,
now that you know how lucky I am in love.

II.34b

It's happened at last: Lynceus now has fallen in love.
You have come around to worship our god with a convert's
fervor. What is the good of Socratic philosophy now?
Epimenides' metaphysical musings
will not assuage your pangs or cool your unbearable ardor.
In your distracted condition, it's all you can do 40
to glance at Philetas' modest pages or Callimachus'
account of his dreams and his down-to-earth descriptions
of love and lovers. The only subject that now will engage you
will be tales of what the heart can do and how
it transforms, as it did Achelous, Hercules' rival, who longed

for Deianira and fought that hero and lost,
was maimed and slunk away in disgrace to his river cave.
You could do a riff about rivers, describe the Meander
and how it twists and turns as a figure of indecision.
Forget the epic and tragic themes, Adrastus' 50
talking horse or Capaneus' spectacular death.
To Aeschylus' high-flown subjects, you will bring nothing.
A smaller canvas, a different, more intimate battlefield
is what you want to express what you're feeling now.
It happens. They say that Antimachus and even Homer
succumbed
to women they wrote of. You're no longer immune.
Women are now your subject, and they don't brood about gods,
worry themselves about how the universe works,
look up into the sky to calculate how the Moon
depends on the steeds of the Sun as it crosses the sky, 60
trouble themselves with questions of whether the soul survives
our passage across the Styx, or ponder the lightning
that may or may not come from the hand of a sentient god.
You'll learn, my friend, new tricks, as the stubborn bull
yields at last to the yoke and learns to drag the plow
once his horns have been caught in the farmer's noose.
The grievous hardships of love you'll accept and somehow endure.
Like it or not, you can take a page from my book.
You see how I've come along from a modest background—
no money,
no famous forebears distinguished in distant battles. 70
But still, my name is established: I get invited to banquets,
and girls crowd around my chair to gush admiration
for what I've done with a talent you never much admired.

It's fooling around, I admit. I sprawl in the garden,
or lie on the grass, wounded by the naughty sharpshooting god,
pierced to the heart by his wickedly barbed arrows.
I don't have Virgil's grandeur. I do not sing of arms
and the man who driven by fate was first to come
from the shores of Troy. That's not, I'm afraid, my kind of subject.
I admire, of course, what he does. Make way, ye Romans, 80
and you, too, Greeks, make way for another *Iliad,* newer,
bigger, better. I grant him all that, and wish him
all the best. And the *Georgics,* an updated *Works and Days,*
I also admire, revere, and even envy.
Virgil, your work at least allows for the music I make.
Your fingers used to strum the pastoral lyre
with the skill of Apollo himself, as your shepherds and farmers
conversed,
albeit in rustic terms, on the subject of love.
Would it were always that simple, a matter of apples and goats
and willing girls who accept the tributes of nature. 90
Who has not read of Tityrus and Corydon and Alexis
and put himself, for the moment at least, in a grove
or glade or field, where the air was fresh and the wearying poet
took heart from the whispered praise of woodland nymphs?
Anser, that silly goose who tries to pass as a swan,
demonstrates that it isn't always easy.
But with talent, taste and conviction that the pains of love will
supply,
the subject is worth our attention, as Virgil has shown,
and Varro, too, who wrote, when his tale of Jason was finished,
of his love for the fair Leucadia, hotter than fire. 100
Catullus has made his Lesbia even more famous than Helen,

and Calvus has wrung our hearts with his splendid dirges
of poor Quintilia's rites. And think, as well, of our loss
of Gallus, who died but whose love for Lycoris will live
as long as men can read Latin. Propertius, too, may endure,
delighted if Fame should rank me with poets like these.

III.1

Reverend ghosts of such adepts as the great Callimachus
  and Philetas of Cos, allow me to enter
your grove to offer libations I draw from its cool spring.
  I'll dance the old Greek measures but bearing Italian
vessels: the delicate practice the two of you began,
  I shall contrive to continue, treading lightly
and taking dainty sips from your ornamental fountain.
  Let him who pesters Apollo with themes of warfare
be gone and leave us in peace. My aim is suave and pacific—
  to let my verses, polished and glossy, bear me 10
aloft to fly with the Muses' garlanded steeds or ride
  in one of the gaudy carts of Love's carousel.
I can see a trail of cupids that follow along behind me.
  A race? It isn't, but still it takes dedication.
The course the Muses laid out was not designed to be easy.
  Modish poets will sing their predictable praises
of Rome's triumphs in war and our far-flung Parthian outposts.
  Bactra, for instance, is ours again, if you please.
But what's that to me? I write for peacetime's pleasant diversion,

fetching these pages from loftier tracks on the mountain 20
where the Sisters gambol and play and bestow their delicate
laurels.
(The heavier crown of epic is not my style.)
After my death, when Fame has figured out what she owes me
and settled my account, I'll do just fine.
There's reverence paid the defunct, whose names on the lips of
the living
can resonate with an almost vulgar grandeur.
How else account for that splendid timbre of tales of Troy,
the gates of which the battering-ram horse breached.
The very names of the rivers sound in our ears—Simoïs,
and Jove's offspring, the Scamander, where Thessaly's hero 30
dragged in the dirt behind his chariot Hector's corpse.
They're long gone, Deiphobus, Helenus, Paris,
and Troy is a heap of rubble, but Homer's name is alive,
and only seems to grow with the passage of time.
Such a curious fate could perfectly well be mine,
so that after my ashes are cold my day may come.
That tomb where my bones lie may become a tourist attraction—
if Callimachus' ghost should approve my prayer.

III.2

Let me return, meanwhile, to my usual kind of song
that my darling knows and is likely still to find pleasing.
That poems can have a use is not so strange an idea.
Orpheus tamed the savage beasts with his lyre
and made the tumbling torrents stop in their beds to listen.
Cithaeron's boulders danced to make the walls
of Thebes when they heard Amphion playing his magical music.
And Galatea's horses turned and paused
when they heard the lovelorn Cyclops singing his serenade.
Bacchus and even Apollo may show me their kindness 10
and reward my celebrations of love with a crowd of girls
who adore, delight, and melt to hear my words.
I cannot claim to live in a marble-pillared mansion;
my ceilings sport no splendid vaultings of gold
with ivory inlays; orchards and man-made grottoes with culverts
carrying water for miles I confess I lack . . .
But the Muses are my good friends, and I am rich in readers
who find in my work some worth. Calliope dances
moving her feet to the feet of my indented lines.

The woman whose name I praise will have good cause 20
to rejoice and even preen in my testament to her beauty,
which well could outlast those pyramids pharaohs built,
the temple at Elis where Jove's astonishing statue stands,
or even Mausolus' monumental *tombeau*.
None of those are exempt from the ultimate fate of matter
to decompose or decay in fire or rain
or simply collapse from the crushing weight of the silent years.
But the fame my talent has won for me and for her
is not on the fragile papyrus but in words that fly through space
and time—for the glorious mind of man is immortal. 30

III.3

A vision: I'm sprawled on the shady grass of a mountainside.
It's Helicon, near the spring Bellerophon's horse
made with his hoof, and the world is bright and clear and small,
like something a jeweler had made, and my mind is affected.
I have the peculiar idea that I could take up the lyre
and sing of Alba's kings and their deeds of yore.
All I need to do is drink from that babbling fountain
and my voice will change and from out of my mouth will come
such splendid lines as issued from Ennius who once sipped
from this same source and invented for Latin verse 10
hexameter lines in which to celebrate such great subjects
as that of the three Curian brothers who fought
the Horatians, killing two, but the third killed all three of them;
or I might retell the story of cackling geese
that saved the Capitoline from the oncoming Gauls; or perhaps
rehearse the tale of Fabius' clever delays
and how he refused to confront the Carthaginian forces,
which, as the rout at Cannae later proved,
was sane and shrewd. (Thank heaven, we won the Punic war,

nevertheless, and drove Hannibal home, 20
and Aemilius' galleys brought back those splendid battle
trophies) . . .
But all this was still in my mind, an attractive plan,
when Phoebus Apollo approached from Parnassus' wooded slopes,
leaned on his golden lyre, and deigned to speak:
"Are you out of your mind? Or maybe sunstruck? None of those
noble
subjects your taste from the fountain has prompted within you
is right for you. It's a joke, as you will be, too, Propertius.
Yours is no martial chariot. You've got a cart
with little wheels that are suited to smooth and grassy ground,
in a park where some pretty girl on a bench is waiting 30
for her beau to show up and, maybe, to pass the time might read
that kind of light entertainment you provide.
Why does your pen run wild? That fragile craft you sail in
ought for safety's sake to hug the shoreline:
further from land, you risk a shift of winds and waves. . ."
He shook his head and pointed his ivory plectrum
to show me which way I should go (or tell me where to get off).
The scene changes abruptly as happens in dreams,
and there I am in a grotto, spooky but not unpleasant,
with the walls decked with musical instruments, 40
pipes of Pan, and a figure in clay of old Silenus.
There are Venus' birds, her doves, dipping their bills
in the Gorgon's pool, and the Muses are busy with pastoral tasks:
one is twining ivy to deck a thyrsus,
another is tuning the strings of a lyre, and others are plaiting
wreaths of roses. One of them comes to greet me,
Calliope, I am assuming (from the "pretty face" of her name),

and speaks: "Content yourself with one of our swan boats.
The warhorses and battles are not, I'm afraid, for you.
To the blaring trumpet call you ought not respond. 50
These groves of Helicon should not be defiled with bloodshed
and talk of carnage. The eagle of Marius' standard
is not your bird, and the German campaigns are none of your
business.
Of mangled Swabian bodies washing downstream
you cannot convincingly speak. Keep to your stories of lovers
languishing out in the rain at their mistresses' doorways,
and drinking to try to keep themselves warm and then getting
sozzled.
The kind of campaign you're fit for is tricking husbands
or sweet-talking a girl whom a father or husband is watching
and nevertheless contriving a rendezvous." 60
Thus she spoke as she dipped some water out of the spring
where Philetas used to drink, and she moistened my lips.

III.4

The divine Caesar conceives a plan, and we go to war:
  our navy's prows will cleave the pearl-rich seas
to India's tempting wealth that our valiant soldiers will share
  and bring back home in triumph from those exotic
lands that line the Euphrates' and Tigris' banks. Those rivers
  will pour their tribute forth as at last they accept
their destiny to become another Roman province
  when Parthia's spoils will bedeck Jupiter's temples.
Away all boats! Make sail, make haste. The task is at hand.
  The warhorses are eager. The omens are good. 10
The time is come to avenge Crassus' defeat at Carrhae,
  amending history's page to a happy conclusion.
I pray to the reverend Mars and the Vestal Virgins, pregnant
  with fate, that the day may come before I die
when we look upon troops returning, their wagons laden with loot
  and the captive chieftains on show in their curious trousers.
I can see it now: the horses shy at the cheers of the crowd,
  and among them my sweetheart and I, embracing in joy,
read the names of the captured towns on the passing floats

and gawk on the Via Sacra at all the outlandish 20
weapons our armies have taken. We watch the procession in awe
of the soldiers of Rome, and a prayer wells up in our hearts
to Aeneas' mother, Venus, whom the two of us worship: bless us
now and forever. Preserve and protect your city.

III.5

All that notwithstanding, the god of peace is Love,
  and we who are lovers worship, conversely, peace.
Those battles are plenty for me that we wage with one another
  between the sheets. My triumphs are there, and my loot.
I have no need of farmlands with thousands of teams of oxen.
  I want no golden drinking goblets with jewels.
The pelf of conquered Corinth is nothing for me to covet.
  What for, I ask you? What earthly sense does it make?
What a botch Prometheus made when he fashioned men out
    of clay
  and left so little space for the governing mind. 10
That should control our actions, but can't, and our fragile vessels
  pitch and yaw and the slightest wind is enough
to blow us far off course and out to sea to founder
  or find some war to begin or, worse, renew.
Whatever wealth you've piled up, you cannot take it with you.
  When you cross on that ferry into the world below,
you go aboard as naked as when you were born, equal,
  victor and vanquished, rich man and pauper together.

Marius, consul of Rome, is cheek by jowl with Jugurtha,
the captive released at the last from his festooned chains. 20
Croesus' fabulous wealth cannot buy him a better
seat in the skiff than that of the beggar Irus.
There, the only distinction is which of the dead can remember
details of a richer, a fuller, a happier life.
And that is my plan, to be able to boast that I really lived—
that from earliest youth I worshipped on Helicon's heights
and danced the Muses' quadrille; I drank the best *cuvées;*
and I wore on my brow garlands of freshest rosebuds.
But what will I do when the weight of the years has ground
me down
and my hair begins to go gray and love is behind me? 30
That will be time enough for my mind to turn to nature
to consider the ways of the gods who built this intricate house
we too often take for granted: the moon that waxes and wanes,
drawing her horns together again to a circle;
the winds that rule the seas; the clouds that pour down rain,
a moisture, vital for us, that's ever replenished;
how the world can continue forever (or will it end?);
why the rainbow's arc is all those colors
and how it drinks up the rain to refill the clouds' supplies;
what causes earthquakes; what do eclipses mean; 40
what are the movements of all those constellations and why
the stars are disposed as they are in spirals and clumps;
what keeps the sea in its bed; and how are the seasons arranged
to follow always in order; is this life we know
the preface to something beyond with judges of sinners' souls
and torments for those who've offended the laws of the gods
(Ixion's wheel, and Sisyphus' rock, and Tantalus' thirst)?

Are the myths true of Alcmaeon's terrible Furies,
or Phineus' horrible birds and his curse of endless hunger,
or Tisiphone's hair of coiling and writhing snakes? 50
Does Cerberus guard the mouth of the cave entrance of hell?
Does Tityus, that giant, stretch out on the ground
to cover those nine acres the poets all report,
or are these merely stories the troubled minds
of men have imagined who fear that beyond the grave is nothing,
nothing, nothing at all? These are the questions
to which I plan to address myself. In the meantime, I pray
that the gods may bring Crassus' standards safely home.

III.6

Okay, Lygdamus, talk. Tell me whatever you saw
when I sent you over to serve, the loyal houseman
of the man of the house—a favor, but not without strings. Report
and tell the truth, as an honest servant should,
in honor or else in fear of the beating you know you'll deserve
if you're caught out lying. Whatever you saw and remember,
speak, and I will listen. And don't try to pretty it up,
inventing details you think I might find pleasing.
You say you saw her weeping with her hair a mess and with tears
in rivulets down her cheeks? Was it just a performance? 10
Did you see, perhaps, a mirror somewhere among the bedclothes?
Had she put on rings or were her hands still bare?
How was she dressed? Had she thought to improve her face with
makeup?
Was the household as sad as you say with even the servants
forlorn as they spun and using the new wool to dry their tears
as they overheard her tirades and plaintive reproaches:
"Is this what you say he promised, Lygdamus? Is this what you
heard?

You were the witness, and slaves are not immune
from the reach of the laws that punish perjury. What have I done
to deserve such dreadful treatment? I have been blameless, 20
and he has thrown me over. Instead, he keeps a creature
I do not deign to name. And I am alone,
and he delights to hear it, is thrilled that I'm wasting away
in an empty bed. Where will it end, Lygdamus?
If he hears that I have died, will he come to dance on my grave?
That woman has won him away with magic potions
and hypnotized his mind by the constant spinning of
prayer-wheels.
Or, worse, she uses the venom of puffed-up toads,
or the bones of vipers, or owl pellets she takes from graveyards
in the dark of the moon and ribbons left on tombs. 30
It's a violation of nature, and sooner or later, Lygdamus,
I tell you he shall pay the price of these crimes.
His lonely bed will be dusty and draped with spiders' cobwebs
and Venus herself, whenever he calls on that goddess,
will claim to have a headache and prefer to sleep alone."
Is this the kind of thing she's saying, Lygdamus?
If so, and if she means it, then run back at once to tell her
that anger is in my heart but not betrayal.
I suffer the same torments that she endures but I swear
I have not been unfaithful these two weeks, 40
have kept myself woefully chaste, which makes me all the
more ardent.
If this can reconcile us and settle our quarrel,
I, who am her slave, will show how I can be grateful
to you, who have been my slave, and will set you free.

III.7

Therefore, we find you, Money, guilty of all these crimes,
the cause of mankind's suffering, and condemn you.
Because of you we hurry along life's bumpy road
as if we were eager for death, our destination.
Our faults you encourage and foster. Our woes spring from your head
as Athena popped out of Jupiter's aching skull.
For your sake, Paetus my friend braved the raging seas
again and again, and his course was set for Pharos,
Alexandria's harbor, and the dream of wealth, when he drowned
and his body, awash in the waves, is food for the fish. 10
His mother could not perform the funeral rites at his grave
or inter in the family plot his sorry ashes.
Over his bones the only wailing is that of the seabirds
at his tomb, an empty expanse of Carpathian sea.
Wicked Northwind that once raped innocent Orithyia,
what was the loot that you got from the death of my friend?
And you, implacable Neptune, why do you gloat and preen
at the wreck of a ship with its inoffensive crew?

Young he was, and then in an instant ageless, floating
in timelessness with his mother's name on his lips 20
as he tried to swim through the buffets of endless, godless waves.
The anchor lines, frayed, gave way in the storm, and the ship
broke loose near that grim shore where once Agamemnon's fleet
waited for wind. It is said he loved the youth
Argynnas, who also drowned—and the son of Atreus wept
and waited there, and the wind died down, and his grief
was greater, for now the gods required the death of the daughter,
Iphigenia. But at least, she died on land.
One prays to the heaving sea to give back the corpse it took,
to cough it up on the sandy beach on that coast 30
where sailors now who pass may contemplate Paetus' tomb
and curse the sea that can frighten even the bravest.
What madman was it who first imagined the building of ships,
those implements of death with their keels that curve
like knives? Were the ways of arriving at death on land too few?
Are the ties of household gods to be cast off
like dockside hawsers? We ought to be content with our lot,
our plot of land, our country, and not adventure
for greed in fragile vessels to trade in distant ports.
The sea will present itself as smooth and gentle, 40
but it's only a snare to entrap the simple, who trust in their luck
that they will somehow avoid the Capharean rocks
where all those Greeks ships sank on their way back home from
Troy.
For crafty Ulysses, helpless against sheer strength
of the tireless waves in which his crew drowned one at a time,
there was no stratagem left except to weep.

If only Paetus had listened to me and found contentment
behind his father's oxen, plowing his fields,
he might have sat down at the table to enjoy the good things of life
and the blessings of household gods with no cause
for complaint 50
except that he wasn't rich, but still, on dry land and safe,
without the howling storms and those treacherous lines
to which, in his desperation, he clung with hurting hands
who could have been home in bed in a wainscoted room
with inlays of terebinth wood and a soft cushion of goose down
on which he had lain his head. Instead, this torture:
a storm so strong and evil as to pull out his nails by the roots;
a mouth gaping wide for air and instead inhaling
a wall of dull green brine with the salty tang of death;
and then, at the last, and out of reach, a hopeless 60
plank toward which he struggled, knowing it could not help him.
Evil piled upon evil at Paetus' death,
who must have known he was dying, and could not help but
protest:
"You sea-gods who rule the Aegean's waves and winds,
why do you do this to me, snuffing me out in my youth?
My hands that flail in your foam you will dash on the jagged
rocks, but why? Alas! The god of blue water hates me
and raises his trident to strike me. Pity, I beg.
At least let my body be washed ashore on a beach somewhere
in Italy where my grieving mother may find it. . ." 70
A whirling eddy ended his speech with a cruel ellipsis,
and his life, too, as it dragged his body under.
Oh, you hundred sea-nymphs, you daughters of Nereus! Oh,

Thetis. . .You know a mother's love and its grief!
Why could you not have helped him? How much could his poor
head
have weighed in your arms had you borne him up to save him?
Northwind, you're cruel and never will see my sail. Instead,
I'll languish ashore at my mistress' door: it's safer.

III.8a

That squabble we had last night, that candlelight ruckus, I loved,
with the torrent of insults you spat at me. . .How splendid!
Let's do it again. Come at me with your threats to tear my hair out
and attempts with your pretty nails to scratch my face
or burn out my eyes with the torch you've just torn down from the wall
in your fine frenzy. You'll rip my toga to shreds
and strip me naked? Try it! Tipsy from all that wine
you lurch, bump into the table, and pick up a goblet
to hurl it, still full, at my head, a loving cup I duck,
but recognize nonetheless as a sign of ardor, 10
for a woman, if she were indifferent, would never behave this way.
That shine in your eyes is unmistakable passion.
Your raving, your stream of invective is a hymn to the power of Venus,
whose dictates you cannot help but hear and obey.
No matter how many escorts and chaperones you employ,
you're one of her own, a Bacchant, your spirit possessed.
It makes no difference what first set off the tirade—a dream,

or maybe a pretty girl's portrait. The fit comes on,
and it doesn't require a doctor to make the right diagnosis.
The opposite case is what's sick—the unflappable poise 20
of someone who doesn't care and can't be provoked to a quarrel.
Such a woman I'd wish on my worst foe.
My wounds and battle scars I show off as badges of honor
my rivals—poets and lovers—may see and envy.
Those bruises and bites on my neck are serious decorations.
If I don't suffer in love, and you're not in pain,
then something is terribly wrong. I want to see tears, my own
or yours, brimming up when you've sent me a secret message,
a note, or a subtle gesture, a wave of the hand or a look
that nobody else is supposed to be able to notice. 30
To sleep with you in silence without either sighs or groans . . .
What would be the point of a night like that?
I'd rather that we be angry than creatures of boring habit.
And fighting stirs the blood, as Paris discovered
who struggled all day in battle but then at night came home
to delight his Argive wife with his hot bloodlust.
Inside, locked in the sweetest mortal combat, they heard
the clang of thrusting Argive spears on armor
as Hector defended the city. That campaign continues,
and no one, I'm glad to say, is longing for peace. 40
I'll fight with you, or else I'll fight any rivals for you,
as you would fight for me. (Justifiably proud
of how you excel in beauty, you have no cause for concern
that somebody else could ever win me away.)

III.8b

And to you, you son of a bitch, who set your nets and snares
at our bed as Vulcan did to Venus and Mars,
I send no serious curse but only this joke malediction:
a health to your father-in-law; may he thrive to annoy you
as long as you live, and your mother-in-law likewise endure
to carp and criticize for a hundred years. 50
You're proud to have earned a night in bed with my darling?
Consider,
all she was thinking about was her anger with me.

III.9

Maecenas, distinguished knight of noble Etruscan blood
  and kingly descent, and immune, therefore, to ambition,
to what would you aspire? I ask you then to explain
  why you would want my talent to venture forth
on enormous undertakings? My boat is a wherry, a skiff,
  on which to set huge sails would be malapropos.
To attempt to shoulder a burden one cannot possibly carry
  and then to collapse to one's knees is ludicrous, shameful.
It's better that I don't try it. All men are not the same:
  talents are different, as prizes we compete for. 10
The palm they give to the chariot driver is not at all better
  but only different from what other winners receive.
Lysippus' figures in bronze looked as if they might breathe;
  Calamis' horses seemed to be able to run;
Apelles' achievement was painting astonishing pictures of Venus;
  Parrhasius' knack was for delicate miniature;
Mentor's pictures were marvels of narrative explication;
  Mys could do landscape with paths of persuasive acanthus

into which the observer would feel invited to enter;
Phidias teased from ivory Jupiter's grandeur; 20
Praxiteles worked in marble he modeled to supple flesh.
Different talents excel in different events,
but the prizes they give for strength or fleetness of foot are always
splendid, and life as well has its several rewards.
Some are bred for peace and others have gifts we need
in times of war, and each must be true to his nature.
Still, my admiration for you is such that I take
as my model and goal your modest rule of life:
you could if you chose have served as a magistrate of Rome,
hanging symbolic axes and meting out justice 30
in the Forum; or else, you could have accepted a post in the army,
leading our legions against those Parthian spears
and bringing back to your walls trophies of all your engagements.
Your close friendship with Caesar gives you the world,
and the wealth you freely spend flows back to refill your coffers.
There's nothing you cannot have or do or be,
and yet you prefer to remain in the background, a private man.
It's only your own inclination that keeps your sails
so tightly furled. In your wisdom that teaches us all, you equal
Camillus' generous greatness. With his, your name 40
will live for generations in the minds and mouths of men.
I do not direct my vessel into blue water
or set my course on the turbulent waves, but merely dabble,
a day-sailor in estuaries and coves.
I do not attempt to address the tragic or epic subjects.
The Seven against Thebes are too many for me.
(Even the Epigones are far too grand and noble.)

And Troy and the Scaean Gate, and Apollo's temple,
the Greek ships, and their horse, and the tearing down of
the walls?
Thank you, but no. I prefer the gentler mode 50
of Callimachus of Cos. Let nubile girls and boys
delight in my suggestive lines and read
and then let the book drop as they carry out its instructions.
But if you will lead the way, I promise to follow
and do my best to sing of the ancient war of Jove
with Coeus and Eurymedon, those Titans on Phlegra's
bloody plain; I'll celebrate Romulus, Remus, the wolf,
and the sacrifice of the brother that founded Rome.
I'll do whatever noble work you deign to command
as I follow along behind your martial car, 60
rehearsing the many glories of all the campaigns you've led.
Just ask and you'll get Augustus' expedition
in Egypt with Antony's struggle and failure and suicide.
Otherwise, let me continue as I have begun;
bear with me with praise, support, and your patronage I prize.
Whatever I have accomplished, the world will know
how much I owe you, Maecenas, as, with your kind permission,
I follow that good example you set for us all.

III.10

I hadn't yet opened my eyes, but there they were, the Muses
gathered around my bed at the crack of dawn
and clapping their hands three times to get me up to write
a poem to celebrate my darling's birthday.
May it be a perfect day with nary a cloud in the sky,
the winds calm, and the water glassy smooth.
May no one on this day have cause to frown or weep.
Give even Niobe's rock a respite from tears.
Let the halcyon cease its screeching for Ceyx's death,
and just for today may Procne and Philomela 10
suspend their endless dirge for the terrible end of Itys.
On such a perfect day, my dear, rise up,
and thank the gods whose many mercies we must remember.
Then wash your face in cool running water
do up your hair, and put on that pretty dress you wore
the day you caught and held Propertius' eye.
Flowers? Of course! A special garland, and as you adjust it,
remember your prayer of thanks for the gift of your beauty

that will last longer than they, and the awesome power it
gives you.
The altar fire's glow enlivens the house 20
as the tang of the incense wafts through the rooms in which
you dwell.
Let us then turn our thoughts to the dinner table
and its scents of saffron and spices of the evening's dapatical
banquet.
To the notes of the throaty flute we'll dance till we drop,
or we'll fall on the floor with laughter at the wicked stories we tell,
and the neighbors will hear and envy the noise we make
as we play our party games and cast the dice to determine
which is more hopelessly helplessly in love.
And then, when the goblets are empty and the night is spent,
we'll retire
to perform Venus' sacred and solemn rites 30
to which the hours of daylight and darkness have all been sweetly
tending, my darling, to celebrate your birthday.

III.11

Four years now since we won at the battle of Actium. Games
are underway to mark the great occasion,
and still you can ask how it happens that a woman can run
my life?
You charge me with being a shameful and cowardly wretch
because I can't break my bonds and throw off my yoke of
enslavement.
You go to the sailor to learn how winds behave,
and you hear and believe the words of the old soldier who speaks
of what it was like in battle and learn from his wounds
what fear can be. That school experience keeps is hard,
and if, in my youth, I was once like you, I have learned 10
as you, too, may, if you will, and profit from my sad example.
Think how the witch of Colchis tamed those bulls
that breathed fire but still obeyed her command and plowed
for the dragon's seed from which the warriors sprouted.
Think how she shut the jaws of that fierce serpent that guarded
the golden fleece so Jason could bring it home.
The Amazon Penthesilea dared to attack, from horseback,

the ships of the Greeks and shot from afar her arrows.
Achilles killed her but then, when he'd taken her helmet off,
was stricken, was utterly conquered by what remained 20
of her all but immortal beauty. Consider the Lydian queen
Omphale whom Hercules saw as she bathed in the Lake
of Gyges, and he was subdued and became her servant and slave,
turning those mighty hands with which he'd performed
his labors to dainty domestic tasks like the spinning of wool.
Nineveh's Queen Semiramis built the walls
of Babylon, that pile so huge that, up on the top
of the ramparts, two chariots passing each other
do not touch their axles or even come close. She re-dug
the Euphrates, directing its course through her citadel's heart, 30
and the ancient city of Bactra she brought beneath her sway.
But raise your eyes from the mortal world to attend
to the stories of heroes and gods: think of Jove's disgraces
and the shame he brought many times on himself and his house.
There are some who do not give credit to schoolboys' lessons in
myth;
they may be better persuaded by recent events
everyone has to acknowledge—that queen whore in the east
who hump-humped with slaves, they say, and could also enslave
soldiers, generals, men of importance here in Rome,
and the price of that shameful conjunction was nothing less 40
than our army, our walls and safety, the Roman senate itself.
Alexandria's problem? Sensual Egypt, you think?
But that's how it can go in the world, and those sandy expanses
bled from noble Pompey the fruits of his three
triumphant campaigns. A Roman did all this, you will remember,
and Rome is still ashamed. It would have been better

had Pompey's funeral march been here at home on the lava
of Phlegra's barren plain (had he bowed his neck
and deferred to his father-in-law). But no, that queen of sluts
disgraced him and all of Philip of Macedon's line, 50
as she set her dog-headed god, Anubis, yelping threats
at Jupiter's might while the Nile defied the Tiber.
Instead of our legions' trumpets, Egypt's sistrum produced
its barbarous rattles and twangs from the decks of her barges
she discovered could not defend against our Liburnian galleys.
She dreamt of spreading her gauzy pavilions here
on the rock of the Capitol Hill from which she might give
judgments,
there among Marius' statues and trophies, as if
Romans were women's servants who never had earned
independence
by breaking the battle axes of Tarquin the Proud. 60
What does our history mean if it leads to the rule of a woman?
Sing your praises, Rome, for great Augustus,
and pray that his life may be long and that we may enjoy his
protection.
That queen might well have asked in one of her rare
sober moments what Rome had to fear from the likes of her,
while she lurked in the tangled mouths of her turbid Nile.
I saw in the great parade her float as it passed through the streets:
on her pretty wrists she was wearing Romulus' chains,
and higher up on her arms were the marks of the sacred serpent's
venomous bite and drops of blood and poison. 70
On seven lofty hills our city stands, presiding
over the whole world, and it cannot be touched
by any human hand. These walls the great gods have built

they still protect, and Caesar, as long as he lives,
will protect us, too, even from Jupiter's awesome ire.
Do Scipio's mighty ships mean nothing now?
Are Camillus' standards forgotten, or Pompey's recent conquest
of the Bosporus' shores? Behold Hannibal's spoils
or those of his ally, Syphax, Numidia's king.
Pyrrhus' glory lay ruined here at our feet. 80
The earth might have opened up to swallow all our foes
as it did in the Forum here when Curtius sank
into the chasm that opened and then abruptly closed.
Remember such marvels and think of Decius' dream
and how on his horse he charged the enemy's line and died.
Horatius there at the bridge that they cut away
remains a model of valor. When Corvus fought the Gaul,
the raven for which he was named perched on his helmet
terrifying his foe with this sign of the gods' protection.
At Actium, the line of the ships was broken, 90
and that one day's engagement brought an end to the war,
as the vessels we faced came about and ran with the wind.
Sailors, think of these things, whether outward or homeward
bound.
As you plot your course, take heart and remember Caesar.

III.12

Postumus, how could you? Leave your Galla in tears
  and march off under Augustus' snappy standards
to Parthia? What glory, what loot can Parthia offer
  worth her cries and sobs? How could you bear
her doleful imploring that must have rung in your ears?
    Good gods!
  You greedy, brave, ambitious guys are nuts!
You leave the welcoming arms of a beautiful faithful woman,
  and for what? To bivouac somewhere, your cloaks on
    your heads,
and drinking out of your helmets the Araxes' river water . . .
  (Does it taste any different or better than that of the Tiber?) 10
And she, meanwhile, will be wasting away, worried to death
  by rumors of what disasters your valor had brought you
at the hands of some lucky Parthian archer or cavalryman
  high on his horse with his lance that found its target
and waiting for someone to bring her the pitiful urn with
    your ashes
  for which she could mourn and to which she could complain.

That's what happens to soldiers who traipse off to such outlandish
territories to fight. And you, thrice blessed,
are leaving behind a jewel of a girl, lovely and chaste,
a better woman surely than you deserved. 20
But now that you're gone will she change? Will the wanton ways of Rome,
so often seductive, corrupt her? I think not.
No bribes, no expensive gifts will dazzle her eye, still fixed
on you or the empty doorway in which you stood.
All she'll forget will be how cruel you were, how thoughtless
to go away for so long, and whenever the Fates
may bring you safely home, there she will be, still faithful,
still true as she wraps her arms around your neck.
Through Galla will you become a second Ulysses: he suffered
more than anything else in those ten long years 30
from his absence from her, that perfect wife he so much adored.
Compared with that, the Cicones on Mount Ismara,
the Cyclops, the lies of Circe, the drugs of the lotus eaters,
the perils of Scylla and, opposite, Charybdis
were so many episodes, tests of his perseverance and even
faith, but never touched himself, his heart.
The kine of the sun that the nymph, his daughter Lampetie, tended
and Ulysses' crewmen killed and ate to their heavy
cost; or the flight from Calypso's seductive island bower;
that strenuous swimming for days and nights in winter; 40
or even his dread adventure into the world of the dead . . .
Nothing of that came close to the man he was
who only emerged at the end, as if from hiding or sleep

when he picked up the strong bow and bent it and killed
those layabout suitors to claim his throne and his home again—
in joy, for his wife had remained for all those years
true, as Aelia Galla will remain true to you, my friend,
in a show of epic virtue, Penelope's equal.

III.13

Why are girls so greedy that a night in their heavenly beds
costs you the earth? Our purses are drained dry,
and what's the reason? It's clearly excess: there's too much freedom
(which isn't at all free, for you pay, and dearly).
The Indian ant that is trained to mine gold from the earth
brings us its tiny nuggets; the Red Sea offers
Venus' mother of pearl for milady's delectation;
Tyre provides us the tints for her maquillage;
and Arab traders in spices and various attars and perfumes
enliven the food she eats and the air she breathes. 10
These luxuries besiege the citadels of the chaste,
corrupt and corrode the virtue of even the best
who share Penelope's strict morals and temperament,
for proper matrons get dressed to go out these days
with a fortune on their backs, flaunting such wealth as no
honest toil could have ever produced. The fashion
requires this, and the only shame they are liable to feel
is in not being well turned out. There is no disgrace

in asking for these rich baubles or in doing what has to be done
to pay the extravagant price in both gold and honor. 20
We think of ourselves as advanced, as civilized, and look down
with disdain at the primitive others, but look again
at how the women behave, in the east, where the steeds of Dawn
arise. In an Indian village, when husbands die,
the wives stand about with streaming hair and they volunteer
for death to take them, too, and they follow their husbands
in devotion onto the pyre to burn alive in suttee.
Not to be permitted to do this is shameful,
and they offer their breasts to the flames and kiss with their
scorched lips
their husbands' bodies as both are consumed together. 30
What women of ours do this? What girls of ours aspire
to such devotion? Evadne's brave example,
throwing herself on Capaneus' burning pyre,
has not been widely admired, let alone followed.
And the loyalty steadfast Penelope showed is a pretty story,
striking now because it seems so unlikely,
but once, in the youth of the world, we must have been like
that, too,
happy, at peace, content with the earth's riches
of fields and orchards in which one could shake a tree and receive
the delicious gift of quinces, or walk in the woods 40
and come back home with baskets brimming with crimson berries.
What more exquisite gewgaw can one imagine
than a handful of fresh-picked violets, or a nosegay of lovely lilies?
What richer centerpiece could one want than grapes
just off the vine and arranged on a bright green bed of leaves

to show them off to advantage? Or what can dazzle
like the flight overhead of some speckled bird of astonishing
plumage?
These were the baubles that eager swains would offer
demure girls whose delight they hoped might be shown in kisses
in the shade of some bosky dell, or perhaps an embrace 50
on the soft pelt of a fawn the rustic had thrown on the turf.
Imagine the odor of pine pitch and dappled sunlight.
Is there anything more refined at which we would catch our
breath?
Such scenes as this gave rise, no doubt, to the myths
in which some hunter or shepherd espied a naked nymph
or goddess refreshing herself with a dip in a pond.
Back then, the ram came home leading his flock of ewes
on his own accord, without any herdsman watching.
The gods and goddesses watched the herds, the flocks, and
mankind,
with their altars offering hope and help to us all, 60
inviting: "Whoever may come to hunt the hare or bird,
you are welcome here in my wood to pursue your quarry
with hound or fowler's pole. Call upon Pan, your companion,
and I will appear from my crags to serve as your guide."
Those woodland shrines are deserted, abandoned now, and gold
is what we worship. All other gods are displaced.
Gold has undone our faith. For gold is our honor bought
in judgments at law and standards of private conduct.
Think of the scorched gates at Delphi's treasures Brennus
plundered and how Parnassus shook its laureled 70
heights like a roused beast to bring down those storms that
destroyed

the marauding Gauls. Consider the greedy king
of Thrace, that Polymestor who broke his oath and killed
Polydorus, the Trojan prince, for his gold.
Think, too, of how Polynices offered Eriphyla gold
to reveal to him her husband's hiding place,
and she betrayed her husband, and Amphiarius died
at Thebes, where the earth swallowed him and his horses.
But we do not need such remote examples from legend and myth.
Corruption is all around me, and I shall speak out, 80
a seer, to declare that Rome is being destroyed by greed.
It's the plain truth, but no one believes what I say,
and I am another Cassandra telling the world that Troy
is doomed, that Paris should not kidnap Helen,
that the horse is not a gift the city ought to accept. . . .
Nobody paid attention. Her country, her father
would not believe her words or recognize her gift
from the gods who alone knew that she spoke the truth.

III.14

You have to admire those Spartans with their rules for girls'
athletics
I wish we had here and now: naked as jaybirds
they'd do their track and field or even, I swear, wrestle,
with never a note of disgrace or a smile or snigger,
as they watched, begging your pardons, the way they could
handle balls,
agile and fast, or work with stick and hoop,
or fight in that pancratium boxing-and-wrestling combo,
(gouging was out, but otherwise no holds were barred).
I close my eyes and imagine those excellent nubile bodies
in combat, wearing only the heavy cestus 10
on their flailing hands, or hurling the discus, or mounted on horses
(the girl and the beast both barebacked), tearing along
behind the hounds, cross-country, along the Taygetus' ridges,
wearing their helmets, and maybe swords in their scabbards,
but nothing else, and their breasts are bared in the Amazon
fashion
and bouncing in time to the pounding of hooves on the ground.

You'd think you were there at the banks of the Thermodon,
watching maneuvers
or halfway to heaven, with Helen and Castor and Pollux
frolicking naked and shameless as the children they were together.
It followed from this relaxed and sensible custom 20
that lovers might meet at the crossroads without any fear of
gossips,
and wives could go into town without dreading their husbands'
vigilant jealousy, anger, or cruel revenge. They needed
no expensive go-betweens to arrange
a friendly tryst. And the women, without the billowy gowns
in fashion now in Rome, couldn't pretend
to be thinner or fatter or other than what they were in the buff—
which one had already had the chance to inspect.
And they didn't keep you waiting for hours on pins and needles
while they did their hair and sprayed it with rare perfumes. 30
Look what we have these days! A Roman girl steps out
and around her she's got a crowd of servants and guards
so you can't lay a finger on her or manage to slip her a note.
A man has to skulk and sneak around in the dark.
It's a public shame, I say, and erodes our manners and morals,
which should take a page from Sparta's blessed book.

III.15

Now that the storms of love are behind me, never again
will I lie alone at night, tossing and turning.
I'm happy at last, believe me, and smart enough not to risk
all that we have. It's true, I freely confess,
that when I outgrew boy's clothes and changed to the all-white toga
that grown men wear, I learned the ways of love
from Lycinna, generous, sweet, who gave me my first lessons
in how the body's equipment is meant to be used.
But three years have passed since she and I last saw each other,
and the memories fade away. I can hardly recall 10
a dozen words we exchanged. Our love has put that behind me.
My thoughts are only of you. There's no competition,
no other woman who ever was or ever could be.
This being truly the case, you have got to stop
this obsessive talk of Lycinna who isn't at all a threat.
Consider the story of Dirce, insanely jealous,
certain in her belief that Lycus, her faithful husband
had gone to bed with Antiope, Nycteus' daughter.

That pitiful, pitiless queen attacked the innocent woman
she supposed to be her rival, ripped out her hair, 20
clawed her face with her nails, and gave her hard labor to do,
and made her life a hell from morning to night
at which time the innocent girl lay down on cold hard ground
or, worse, was locked away in a foul cellar
with no drop of water to drink nor crust to eat.
This is the girl whom Jupiter loved and who'd borne
the twins of the mighty god. Would he look down at her pain
and not raise a hand to help her, as chains chafe
her arms? It's a shame, a disgrace that one whom the god had chosen
should live as a slave this way, and to whom can she turn 30
but that terrible god? With or without his divine help,
she breaks her bonds and flees to the heights of Cithaeron.
It's dark. It's cold. She falls on the frosty slopes, exhausted.
Her sons attend her: Zethus seems unmoved;
Amphion is sympathetic, but what can he do if the woman
is driven out of a house that is rightfully hers?
Wretched, and yet there comes after storms, no matter how strong,
when Eastwind and Southwind declare a truce,
a moment of calm and the howling subsides and the buffeted shore
is tranquil again: so she sank to her knees, 40
bowed down with fear and grief and anger, and found at last
peace. And the sons perceived their grievous fault,
and filial feelings filled their bosoms when that old man
who'd found them as babes exposed on a hillside to die
and reared them told them the truth—that this was, indeed, their mother.
They found Dirce and tied her up and hitched her

behind an unbroken bull on a rough and rocky beach.
Antiope sees how Jove has imposed his justice
as Dirce is dragged to her messy and ignominious end
in a smear of blood that runs along the shingle, 50
and Zethus' meadows are splotched in a similar red with flowers,
and Amphion's songs of triumph on Aracynthus'
crags ring out and echo. That's what jealousy gets you.
Whatever gossip you hear, pay it no mind.
Dead on my funeral pyre, some part of me, I swear,
would feel the heat of the love I bear for you.

III.16

It's midnight. My mistress' note commands me to set out at once
to Tivoli's twin towers and Anio's pools . . .
What do I do? Will the road's darkness keep me safe
or hide the brigands who wait for passersby?
If prudence—or call it fear—prevents me from showing up,
her tears will wound me worse than a bandit's weapons.
The last time I dared disobey, her anger lasted a year.
The way she manhandles me is most ungentle.
So I tell myself that a lover is safe and the gods protect him:
he can saunter down the middle of Sciron's road, 10
where that famous robber lurked by the edge of the steep cliff
over which he'd throw the bodies of innocent victims,
or wander wherever he will in Scythia's worst badlands,
and no one will give him trouble, no rogue or villain,
as the faithful moon attends him and bright stars twinkle down
to guide his steps past rough spots in the road.
It's as if Amor himself were leading the way with a torch.
The savage mastiff turns away and whimpers.
For a man like that, the road is safe anywhere, anytime.

But suppose the worst, that I'm wrong and I go to my death: 20
she will come with myrrh, will deck my grave with flowers,
will sit by my tomb, and weep and keep her vigil. . . .
Gods, don't let her put me in any common boneyard
or have me interred in a ditch by the side of the road.
Could she do a thing like that? Doesn't a lover deserve
some secluded glade with leafy trees overhead?
Or maybe a mound of sand, unmarked, in the distant desert?
But not the road where the robbers did me in!

III.17

Humbly now at your altar I bow down low, O Bacchus:
grant me, dear god, your peace and let me prosper.
You are the one who can help me, soothing the wounds of love.
In the face of my mistress' rage, I turn to your wine
and its sure anodyne for the sharp pangs a lover endures.
Your liquor serves us at meetings and also at partings,
and whatever my troubles and cares, your decoctions comfort.
You know how it is; you've been there—with Ariadne
whom Theseus left in the lurch and kindly you came to her aid
and raised her up to the stars to make her your bride. 10
Beneath her constellation, lovers in utter despair
can find a measure of hope, or at least that comfort
your wine can bring to the passion that burns in our bones
like fire.
Who, without your help, could endure a single
night of the anguish a lover is likely to feel, cold sober?
In confidence, fear, delight, and despair, one's mind
reels as if he were drunk. Why not, therefore, indulge?
Your gift to men can smooth my furrowed brow

and even allow me a respite, for which I am truly grateful,
from the sleeplessness of these endless and dreadful vigils. 20
How can I repay you? I'll go to the hillsides to tend
your vines and guard your arbors from birds and beasts.
All I ask is your blessing: let my vats be filled
with the purple must that the peasants' feet have trod.
What's left of my ruined life, I'll dedicate to your honor,
wreathing your horned image and singing your praises.
I'll recite the tale of your birth, that miracle Jupiter worked
when Semele, your mother, was burnt by the lightning
and your father snatched you up, inserted you into his thigh,
and as father and mother now awaited your second 30
birth; I shall celebrate the rout of the Indian troops
by Nysa's holy dancers; and recall for all
how Lycurgus, the prohibitionist king of Thrace, opposed
your cult and was driven mad; and Pentheus' story,
I'll tell in gory detail—how he was torn into pieces
by the Maenads in their frenzy, his mother Agave,
and her two sisters, Ino and Autonoë. I'll sing
the chantey that sailors know, of how, on a ship,
the crew proposed to enslave you and sell you off to a dealer,
but you showed them you were a god, and they went mad, 40
leapt overboard and were all turned suddenly into dolphins,
who looked back to see the ship covered in vines.
What strange and wonderful subjects you can provide a poet!
There's a spring on the island of Naxos that gushes wine . . .
But you must stand at the center, your shoulders trailing ivy,
the fox-skin of Bassareus across your chest,
and on your head a Lydian turban you wear like a crown.

Your body is oiled and perfumed, and from under your gorgeous
floor-length robes, your naked feet appear as you walk
or dance to the tambours' beat and the Pan-pipes' tunes, 50
as Cybele, mother goddess, tinkles her finger cymbals
in her sacred Eastern orgies much like your own.
I see the temple doors where a priest is pouring libations
of bright red wine from a shining golden bowl,
and all this I'll celebrate in a loftiness worthy of Pindar—
if you'll come to my aid with wine that will let me sleep.

III.18

Where the arm of the sea, shut out from umbrageous Avernus,
plays
by the hot springs and steaming pools of Baiae;
where Misenus, the Trojan who played the trumpet for pious
Aeneas,
is buried on that shore; where Hercules
built his echoing causeway; where Bacchus' cymbals crashed
as he made his progress into the world of men,
it has all turned bad, as if some hostile god had usurped it,
had stained the place forever with this vile crime—
for here Marcellus died, Augustus' son-in-law
and adopted son, whose gaze has turned to the darker 10
waters of River Styx. His noble spirit is gone
and wanders now by that bleak and distant shore.
What good does his lineage do him now, his brilliant marriage,
and the love of all of Rome and the emperor too?
He cannot hear the applause. He died in his twentieth year,
a woefully brief span in which to contain

such excellence as he showed, such dreams, such impressive
promise.
Imagine the crowd of a theater brought to their feet
to cheer and applaud. Or think of the Roman Games
he hosted when he was an aedile. . .The cloth-of-gold, 20
the gems, the glory, it's all fed now to the greed of the pyre
to which we must all come, the proud and the humble,
as we follow the sad track that so many feet have trod
that leads past the triple heads of the fearsome watchdog
to the old man's skiff that takes us. No one holds out for long,
and death welcomes the young man caution protected,
dragging him out from behind his fortress of iron and bronze.
Nireus, who was said to be Greece's most handsome
soldier at Troy, was not exempt for his looks, nor Achilles
spared for his valor, nor Croesus for all his gold. 30
The ferryman is waiting for each of us, even you,
whose body he brings to the place where shades of the righteous
dwell in bliss. Or perhaps, with a special dispensation
like that enjoyed by Claudius, your forebear,
and by Julius Caesar, you were allowed to rise from the mortal
paths of earth to the starry realm of the skies.

III.19

You complain about men and how we are all disgraceful lechers,
  but, believe me, women are just as bad, or worse.
Whenever you manage to wriggle free of decency's bonds,
  you run wild, minds and bodies quite possessed.
It's a wildfire that sweeps across a farmer's field
  and can't be stopped. It's a river that can't be dammed.
Sooner will waters reverse themselves to flow uphill,
  or sooner will Syrtes' shoals offer safe harbor
to weary sailors, than men will manage sex-crazed women
  when wantonness has seized them and drives them onward. 10
Think what Pasiphaë did with Daedalus' clever contraption
  to fuck the Cretan bull; or consider Salmoneus'
daughter, Tyro, who lusted for Enipeus—so blindly
  that she yielded herself to Neptune, in disguise
as that river-god she was hot for. Or remember the story
    of Myrrha
  smitten with ardor for Cinyras, her father.
To Medea's sorry story, I hardly need refer,
  we know it so well—the furious mother who slew

her own children. Or Clytemnestra, whose faithlessness
brought low the house of Pelops, lords of Mycenae. 20
And Scylla who saw from the walls the handsome warrior Minos,
and for his sake betrayed her father and king,
cutting that sacred lock of purple hair from Nisus'
head to offer up her city as dower.
Cities, even civilizations are all at risk.
On the Cretan ship, the girl is dragged through the sea
at Minos' order—a harsh but correct judgment, for he
is one of the three judges we face in Hades.

III.20

Do you suppose your beauty, great as it is, can remain
vivid and clear in the mind of a man like that
who can leave your bed, get up, walk out, and just sail away . . .
for the love of money? What treasure can Africa offer
to compensate for your loss, or is worth those tears you're shedding?
You're a fool to believe those oaths he swore by the gods.
They were empty words. For all we know, he's berthed elsewhere
and has already found a new honey to cuddle.
What sense does it make? You're gorgeous, clever, accomplished, the equal
of Pallas herself, and a blue blood, too. That learning 10
your grandfather was known for, you have made your own.
All you need for a perfectly happy life
is a faithful lover who's able to recognize your worth.
I volunteer for the job. Come to my bed!

It's the summertime, O Sun, and you draw out the daylight. I pray you,

don't linger so. It's the night I want, and love.
That first night with a woman! There's nothing on earth to match it.
Loiter, O Moon. Hang over our bedroom window.
Dawdle, as do these hours of daylight we have to get through
before we exert ourselves in the lists of Venus. 20
And let us bind ourselves to each other by solemn vows,
for what other recourse is there in sleepless nights
but to pray to the gods by whom we have sworn for justice and vengeance
when the fetters that we assumed and that passion had prompted
begin to chafe or are broken by passion itself? The rite
is serious, solemn. Let the first omens be good.
And whoever shall touch the altar and swear but then prove false,
let him suffer the pains that love can bring.
Let gossips chatter derision. May his mistress never open
her bedroom window to let him in at night, 30
however much he may weep in chagrin and longing. Let him
love but never attain to love's fulfillment.

III.21

I'm off to Athens, learned, lofty, and blessedly distant—
    far enough away to set me free
from love's oppression. My passion, that sickness or, say, addiction
    is worse when I am exposed to the pathogen
I know her to be. I've tried all the other usual cures,
    but the god is unremitting and won't let go.
And she meanwhile is much less attentive and only receives me
    (after I have endured her abuse and insults)
on rare occasions, and then comes to bed in her flannel nightgown
    and keeps to herself at the very edge of the mattress. 10
There's only one prescription: a change of venue. Travel!
    Down to the sea in ships. We'll board our vessel,
draw lots to see who gets which oar, and hoist the sail
    to the top of the mast to catch the auspicious breeze
that will speed us away to a happier healthier life. Farewell
    to the splendors of Rome! Farewell, my friends. And to you,
my not altogether sweet sweetheart, it's no *au revoir*
    this time but a clean and, I hope, a final good-bye.
It's off to the Adriatic, the salt spray and the waves,

and the gods of the sea who can't be any more fearsome 20
than those I've tussled with here. My boat will cross the water
to arrive at last in Corinth's sheltered harbor.
We'll disembark and travel by foot along the Isthmus
to arrive at Piraeus and walk along Theseus' Way
to Athens, Plato's School, and the garden of Epicurus.
There, I'll improve my mind: swot up some Greek,
learn Demosthenes' models of rhetoric, study Menander's
suave wit, or gaze at the works of art,
the painted panels and three-dimensional bronze sculptures.
Diversion, time, and distance may do the trick, 30
and the deep wounds in my heart may heal. . .If I die in Athens,
at least it won't be a sappy lover's demise.

III.22

All this time my friend, in Cyzicus' town, whose name
is a synonym for exotic distance: "out there."
Do the tides of the Propontis please you still, dear Tullus?
Do you seek out the local sights, Cybele's temples,
and the path that the horses of Dis took when he came to abduct
Ceres' distraught daughter? Do the cities of Asia
where Helle went still charm you? But be moved, as well, my friend,
by my longing for you and consider coming home.
It's wild and strange, diverting I have no doubt, to follow
where Perseus went to slay the dreaded Gorgon, 10
or Geryon's lair, or the spot where guides still point out the marks
Hercules made in the earth when he and Antaeus
wrestled. There the Hesperides danced around that tree.
Your oarsman heaves at the water where *Argo* sailed,
those trees that the skill of men had first transformed to a hull
and prow to cut through water and try those clashing
rocks where they followed the dove. Ortygia's there, and Ephesus'
Cayster, and somewhere the Nile. The world is a book

of marvels, but what of man's work or nature's rivals Rome?
Our stories here are of warfare's lawful valor. 20
Thugs and their deeds of random violence are not for us.
We're strong but we're civilized, which is no small thing.
Do you not miss the gorgeous Tivoli waterfall
where the Anio cascades downward, or the clear Clitumnus?
What out there can compare with the Marcian aqueduct,
that marvel of our superb civil engineering?
Here is the Alban lake, and, from the same source, the Nemi's
tranquil expanse, languid, leaf-covered, lovely.
Here at the foot of the Palatine Hill is the healing spring,
the Fons Iuturnae, where Castor and Pollux watered 30
their horses after the battle. What we don't have here is asps
or poisonous hooded vipers that glide on their bellies,
and strange sea monsters that lurk offshore to prey upon maidens
like poor Andromeda, innocent, chained to the cliff
for her mother's impious boasting. Here on Italian soil,
Thyestes' Specialty Meats does not do business,
and the sun needn't turn away in horror at cannibalism.
Here a mother does not dispatch her son
as Althaea did Meleager, or that mad Bacchant Agave
did poor Pentheus, hiding up in a tree. 40
Human sacrifices of the kind Agamemnon performed
on Aulis' shore with Iphigenia as victim
(who may or may not have been changed in the end for a
substitute doe)
are not, I'm happy to say, our practice here.
Out there, it's bizarre and cruel: Juno torments a rival,
puts horns on her head and turns her into a cow!
Here you don't find savage murders like those of Sinis

with his trees that rip men apart, or Procrustes' bed,
or Sciron's plank that led out from the cliff to the rocks below.
This is where you belong, in the land of your birth. 50
Here, Tullus, you'll seek that office your rank deserves,
and your oratory will sway the hearts of the people.
Here, you'll find a suitable bride to bear you children,
with whom you'll live in contentment, I trust, and in love.

III.23

My writing tablets—I can't believe it!—have disappeared.
On them there were so many fine things I'd written.
They weren't sealed but were worn down by the long use of
my hands,
and anyone could recognize them as mine.
I taught them all I knew. They had learned to mollify girls
my inattention had irked, or cajole and persuade
with elegant turns of phrase, the ones I wanted. No golden
gewgaws made them precious. They were cheap wax
on ordinary boxwood, but like old friends they were precious,
priceless, faithful, would do whatever I wanted. 10
I can't even guess what message it was they were trying to carry:
I was angry with you yesterday. Where were you?
Has another girl caught your eye? Do you spread disgraceful stories
and slander me? Or was she more cheerful and friendly:
Come, darling, at once. We'll spend the day together,
and, more important, the whole night, making love,
and such like witty talk a girl in a willing mood
is likely to think of, making a rendezvous.

But they're gone, lost, and some clerk has turned them into
a ledger
writing down tedious numbers, his costs and profits. 20
I'll offer, then, a reward. Such fellows would rather have gold
than modest wood and wax. Go, slave, and post
in large letters, a sign on the public billboards announcing
your master's name and address on the Esquiline Hill.

III.24

You're deluding yourself, woman. You think you're something special,
but it's my admiration, my love, my goddamned poems
you've come to believe in. And I admit it now: I was wrong.
All that praise of your beauty and charm was wrong,
a huge mistake, and I take it back. In my blindness and folly
I said you were like the rosy dawn with its promise
of a splendid day—but the weather is not what I had predicted.
That glow came from my dreams, but now I'm awake.
The warnings of family friends I heard but didn't believe.
Thessaly's witches couldn't have broken the spell 10
by plunging me into the surf to purify my soul,
but somehow I've managed to do it myself. I'm saved
after all that time I wallowed in passion's depths, shipwrecked.
I nearly drowned, but here I am, alive,
if somewhat the worse for wear. Venus was cruel indeed,
like Phalaris with his bull, and tortured her victim—
and I was roasted alive so that she could hear me bellow.
It's over; the sand bank is passed; the ship's in harbor;

her anchor's dropped; and I stagger ashore, a little unsteady,
but I'll be okay. I'm sane. My wounds will heal. 20
Common Sense is the lovely goddess to whom I'll pray,
dedicate myself to her shrine and swear
better, more reliable vows than those empty oaths
to which Olympian Jove turned a deaf ear.

III.25

I was the butt of jokes, a laughingstock at banquets,
  and people I hardly knew would make smart remarks
at my expense. It's five long years I have waited upon you,
  but the hitch is up, and you, who could snap your fingers,
now can bite your nails while you wait for me to show up . . .
  And your tears that always did the trick won't work.
Too many times before, you've turned on those waterworks,
  mostly to cover, at least for the moment, your lies.
You wept, but I was the one who was hurting, and from that pain
  I've learned my lesson at last. This team's ill-matched 10
and won't plow anymore, and you know that it's all your doing.
  Good-bye, old threshold; farewell, familiar door.
No more shall I bang my fists on your unresponsive timbers.
  And good-bye, to you, too, lady. Your future awaits,
the oppression of age, wrinkles, spider-veins, and saggings,
  and you'll hunt for new gray hairs, and tear them out,
but more will come, and the scowl lines will deepen into your
    forehead

from anger, chagrin, and the scorn you have to endure
when what you have done to me gets done in turn to you
by your gigolos, lounge lizards, and such riffraff. 20
This isn't so much my curse as a statement of simple fact,
my prophecy of what lies in wait for your beauty.

IV.1

Welcome to Rome, stranger. I'll be happy to show you around.
All that you see here was grassy hillside
before Aeneas came from faraway Troy. That hill
is the Palatine that's sacred now to Apollo,
the god who helped our ships triumph at Actium's battle.
Evander's cattle are said to have grazed here once.
These splendid golden temples used to be rude huts
but the gods seem not to have minded much. Tarpeian
Jupiter spoke from a simple outcrop of rock, and the Tiber
was what our forebears relied on instead of a wall. 10
That house you see at the top of that flight of steps is the temple
of Romulus great Augustus has just rebuilt.
The hearth at its heart was once the whole of the realm of our founding
brothers. The Curia there, imposing and proud,
is where the senate meets. They used to wear animal skins,
a group of rustics who came together to govern.
They'd blow a horn, and citizens summoned thus would assemble,
a hundred of them, to meet and talk in a meadow

that evolved over the years to become our Roman senate.
Back then there weren't columns or billowing drapes 20
for ceremonial grandeur or incense to sweeten the air.
We didn't feel the need of foreign gods, but the crowds
trembled in awe at our own ancient rituals—fires
they lit of straw in the spring at the old Parilia;
or, in the fall, the sacrifice of a horse to Mars
whose tail they'd docked and whose blood they saved to use
for purification. Or Vesta, in the middle of June, would ride
a peasant's mule that was decked for the day with flowers.
Poor we were but pious. The cattle for sacrifice
were lean and the crossroads narrow that fatted pigs 30
sanctified with their deaths at each year's Compitalia.
To the trilling of pipes of Pan, the shepherds would offer
entrails of sheep, while plowmen in leather jerkins would wave
bullhide whips in the springtime at Lupercal.
The soldiers would go out to fight without burdensome armor
or fancy weapons, but using simple sticks
the sharpened points of which they had burnt hard in their hearths.
Until the Etruscan Lycmon who wore that wolf-skin
helmet, there weren't ranks, let alone captain's tents,
and the wealth of Tatius, fabled king of the Sabines, 40
was mostly his flocks of sheep. From these came the Luceres
and Titienses, two of our oldest tribes,
the third being the Ramnes—from Romulus who drove
that team of four white steeds. Bovillia then
wasn't even a suburb (for Rome wasn't large enough
to make such a grand claim). Back then, Fidenae
was a separate town, far off, a long journey away.
Alba was mighty then, and Gabii, nothing

to speak of today, was important, a thriving populous place.
The only thing that's still the same is the name, 50
Rome, and the people who live here can scarcely believe we came
from someone a she-wolf suckled, nurtured, and reared.
Troy, you did well to find your exiled gods this new
and better home. How splendid the auguries were
for the ship Aeneas sailed when he carried his country's armor
here to triumph again. That wooden horse
with death in its womb was not, after all, the end of the line.
He bore on his strong back his trembling father
and they made their way together through the flames that held
back in awe
from their fateful enterprise. How happy the land 60
where Iulus, Aeneas' son, established those gods. They prospered,
and we did, too, with such noble spirits as those
of Decius who gave his country his life in the Samnite
wars or Brutus, the consul who drove out proud
Tarquin. The moaning Sibyl at Avernus' mouth revealed
how all this would come to pass and how Remus would die
in order to sanctify the walls of Rome he had mocked.
That this had been the gods' plan even Priam
knew, having heard the reports of his daughter Cassandra's
ravings:
"Troy will fall but will rise once more as Rome, 70
and I prophesy her dominion over all the earth and the sea.
Turn back that horse, you Greeks. The triumph you seek
will not endure, but Troy shall live again, her ashes
revived, and Jove will make her great again."
She-wolf of Mars, you splendid nurse of our walls and our power,
I wish my voice were equal to that great task

of celebrating the noble achievements of your great people.
My talents are feeble, but whatever stream may trickle
forth from my heart to the world, I dedicate to my country.
Let Ennius retain his rustic garland. 80
The wreath I ask from Bacchus is the elegiac poet's
ivy in which all Umbria may take pride,
approving my work as that of the Latin Callimachus.
Let anyone who beholds the imposing walls
of Rome remember my poems written to honor and praise
this, our splendid city, and smile on my verse.
Let the omens be fair, and a bird pass on my right side
as a sign of the gods' favor, for I shall sing
the ancient deities' rites and the old place-names. This goal
is that toward which my eager steed drives forward. 90

Horos:
Surely you jest, Propertius! What do you think you're doing?
Have you not thought to consult the oracle, asking
whether the threads spun from this dream distaff are sound?
Apollo's answer may not be what you expect,
and his lyre may not grant those words you attempt to coax
from reluctant strings. But listen to me. I'll tell you
real things with authority you can rely on. You think
I'm a faker, a fraud, not able at all to read
the stars and consult Archimedes' orrery to establish
the movements of Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, and the others, 100
and how they affect mankind for good or for evil? No,
Horos I am, of the ancient line of Horops
of Babylon, of Archytas' house that Conon founded,
and I call the gods to witness that I speak truth.

I have not disgraced my kin. The whole truth and nothing but,
is my motto. Others do this for money,
making a good living from the god business (good heavens!),
consulting the stars and telling lies for gold.
But I'm on the up-and-up. I warned about Arria's sons
and said that she shouldn't outfit them and send them 110
away to fight, for they'd never return alive to their hearth.
And I'm sorry to say it happened as I'd predicted,
or worse—and their two grave-mounds prove how I spoke
correctly:
Lupercus died when his horse was cut in the face
and he tried to tend the beast, slipped and fell, and was trampled;
and Gallus also fell, and his legion's standard
ran him through and its eagle stained its beak in his blood.
Unlucky boys, and their mother thought to get rich
on the loot that they'd bring back, but it wasn't meant to be,
and I told her so, and I'm sorry to say I was right. 120
You want to see endorsements? Testimonials? Listen:
Cinara was having a hell of a time in labor,
and I told her to make a vow to Juno, and when she did,
her problem was over and right away she gave birth,
just as I'd said. I consult the almanacs and the stars,
and can tell you what Pisces will mean to your life, or Leo,
or Capricorn, and more clearly than at Jupiter's Libyan shrine.
I do haruspication with entrails or read
what the flight of birds portends, or do hydromancy with ghosts
that show up in bowls of water to tell the future. 130
The stars and all the planets, the five zones of the earth
are an open book if you know how to read them right.
You don't believe it? Think of such an example as Calchas

who managed at Aulis to get the Greek fleet to sail
that the onshore winds had prevented from putting to sea: he fouled
his knife with the blood of the daughter of Agamemnon,
and Atreus' son shipped out with that blood-guilt staining his sails.
And then, on the way back home, they came to grief
that the Trojans would have rejoiced to see, at the Bay of Euboea,
where Nauplius with his beacons wrecked their ships, 140
wreaking his cruel vengeance for his son Palamades' murder.
Or think of Ajax, Oileus' son, and his rape
of holy Cassandra, for which offense Minerva drowned him.
It's risky, ignoring pronouncements of priests and seers.
But let's get to the point, which is reading your horoscope.
I'll tell you, if you can bear it, your sad story.
You were born in Umbria, right? From well-established people,
known around Assisi. You come from Bevagna,
way down in the lowlands. It's foggy there and it's damp.
You could look up to Assisi's wall which your talents 150
will make even more famous. When you were still young, your father
died, and your lands were confiscated for veterans,
so that you had to move to a smaller home. When your locket,
the *bulla* that proper young men wear, was removed
from around your neck and you put on the toga of manhood, Apollo
first made himself known, taught you to sing,
and told you that law and the rough-and-tumble life of the courts
wasn't for you. You became, instead, a poet,
elegiac, no less, a writer of tricky lines
that can cram in a smallish space a great deal of meaning. 160

What Apollo has in store is that you shall become the model
for others to follow, a pioneer in this genre.
You'll serve your hitch in the trenches in Venus' campaigns, will win
sometimes but then lose big to her cupidon thugs.
One girl will erase your triumphs, will be your undoing.
Morning and night, you'll do her bidding. Her whims
will be your weather. Your tears will flow from your eyes or cease
at her command. You'll fight like a fish on the hook
but to no avail, having been so well and truly gaffed.
Spies you'll employ and informers, but nothing will help. 170
No lock or seal will hold. She'll slip through the cracks to betray you,
defy, enrage, humiliate, over and over.
Your ship will wallow and toss on rough seas at the squall line.
You will go naked against an opponent in armor,
on shifting ground that opens its chasms beneath your feet.
Beware whenever the moon is in Cancer's house!

IV.2

The one substance, but many manifestations? A marvel
for the clarification of which we may turn to the Tuscan
god, Vertumnus, who changed his appearance and yet remained
always the same. A Tuscan I am, from Tuscans
descended, from people who fought with Tatius, ally of Rome,
to crush the Sabine hordes. They saw the rout
when the enemy's wavering line broke and they threw down
their arms and fled. And Rome, to reward my kinsmen,
renamed that street where the Tiber's water had formerly flowed
the Tuscan Way, and built Vertumnus a temple. 10
Let the father of gods bless the Romans who stroll in their togas
along this street and pass the simple temple
that deity much prefers to a more imposing structure
(as long as he has his view of the Roman Forum).
Vert-umnus, then, presides where the waters had been di-verted;
and first fruits to him re-vert in the yearly
harvest rite—in au-tumn, of course. Hear what the god
could be supposed on his own behalf to a-ver:
"My nature allows me to take on any guise I please,

and be persuasive. In silks, I can look like a girl 20
(though not too prim and prudish, but who would complain
about that?).
In a toga I am a man. Or give me a scythe
and a headband of hay and I am your paradigmatic bumpkin.
In arms, I'm your old campaigner. A reaper's basket
becomes me as well—I can pass as your happy paisan. Or, dressy,
I'm one of those courtier types with my smart remarks.
Give me a garland, perhaps a little askew, and I'm drunk,
the tipsy tippler you want to warn your children
not to grow up to become. A turban at once will turn me
eastern, a devotee of Bacchus. A lyre? 30
I am a bard, one of Phoebus' fancy performer fellows.
Or exchanging that for a whip, I'm a charioteer,
or a jockey, a sure thing, on whom you can bet your bundle.
With nets on my shoulder, I hunt. Or else with a fowler's
twig that you've coated with lime, I'm one of those. A hat
with lures stuck on the brim, and a rod and line,
and I catch fish. Or set me up with a peddler's pack,
and I'll sell you what you need. A shepherd's crook,
and I'm ready to call my flock, but give me a tray
of flats, and I can turn horticultural—roses? 40
Or something good perhaps for the table? Cucumbers? Squash?
Cabbage, maybe? Corn is nice. Or grapes?
Cherries? Plums? Mulberries? Apples and pears?
I'm ready at once to con-vert, as my name suggests,
Whatever the cues, I'll take them and improvise, an alumnus
of whatever old school it was that you went to.
A half dozen lines remain, and you look to be in a hurry.
(On your way to court are you, summons in hand,

to defend yourself against the scurrilous charges they've made?)

So I'll give you my big finish, my epitaph: 50

A maple stump I was, that a handy hatchet hacked.

till Numa came along, I was only a poor

godlet making my way in that big town we all admire.

Mamurius made me a statue, in classy bronze

(tough work, and I hope he didn't ruin his hands),

but my form changes as I play different roles,

so the statue is less important than the honor people pay it:

and that's where to find me out — in the hearts of men.

IV.3

Arethusa writes to Lycotas, off at the front
(whatever front it may be—he's away often):
"If anything here is smudged or missing, I beg your indulgence.
It's my tears that have made the mess, or my trembling hand,
for I'm weak and sick at heart, and I languish. The last I heard,
you'd been among the long-bowed Bactrians, Persians
on armored horses, Getae from the frozen north, Britons
who fight in their painted wagons, or even swarthy
Indian hordes who come from that land at the beaches of dawn.
Is this how a husband is faithful? Are these the tokens 10
you pledged when we plighted our troth and I gave myself to you?
Our wedding torch might as well have been lit from a pyre;
instead of the holy water, I could have been sprinkled with
droplets
drawn from the River Styx. My bridal wreath
was cockeyed on my head, and Hymen was nowhere near
when you and I recited our vows together.
My prayers to the gods are posted on every public wall,
but they seem to be of no use, except as jokes.

This is the fourth cloak I've woven, one for each year,
as the homecoming present you never show up to claim. 20
I wanted to be a wife but am only a lonely tailor.
Whoever cut that stake all soldiers carry,
for the legion's palisade, I call down my curse upon him;
whoever sounded that doleful trumpet blast
you are so prompt to answer, he has my malediction.
I wish on him the fate of Ocnus in hell,
who plaits forever that rope of straw the hungry jackass
munches so that he never gets ahead.
Does that heavy breastplate you wear not gall your delicate
shoulders?
Doesn't the spear shaft blister your soft hands? 30
Are there worse marks on your body, hickeys some local bargirl
has left on your neck, perhaps? Are you pale and wan?
And may I allow myself to think it's from missing me?
It's awful here. The evening star portends
wretched nights. I kiss the weapons you left behind.
I fuss with the bedclothes, lumpy, wrinkled, and empty.
At dawn the birds delay their celebratory singing.
Yelper, the puppy, comes in to console and cheer me,
climbs up, and settles himself on your side of the bed.
In the evenings, I work at the weaving of Tyrian wool, 40
making your army cloak, and I read, geography mostly,
so I'll know where the Araxes River flows,
where you these days maneuver, or learn how many miles
those Parthian horses can go without water.
I look at maps to discover which countries the gods have made
hot or damp or cold, and how the winds blow
that will bring you back one day to Italy, safe and sound.

I'm mostly alone. Sometimes my sister visits.
My nurse is here of course, and she does her best to cheer me,
racking her brain to make up plausible reasons 50
to explain your awful delay—the rigors of winter, for instance.
I envy Hippolyta now, that Amazon queen,
who bared her breasts and tucked her long hair into a helmet
to ride into battle—as I, if Rome allowed it,
would join the army, too, so that I could be with you,
wherever you are, attached somehow to your unit.
Of those daunting Scythian mountains the father of gods
has cursed
with ice and snow, I am not at all afraid.
Love is a powerful thing, stronger than fear, and it grows
even stronger when one is deprived of one's mate. 60
Such a flame is fanned by the goddess herself and flares
fiercely hot, and my brow burns as from fever.
My clothes hang in the closet, those expensive silken gowns
I cannot imagine wearing. The jewels remain
tucked in their box. Why deck my fingers with flashy stones?
The house holds its breath in silence. From time to time,
on the Kalends, my sister opens the shrine of the family's gods,
and I offer bouquets of flowers. Outside, at the crossroads,
I offer sprigs of verbena or marjoram sprays on the altars.
I pay attention to all kinds of signs and portents. 70
If an owl on a neighbor's roof hoots in the night, or a lamp
sputters, I pour out drops of wine for luck,
or I go to the temples to offer another lamb. The priests
from my patronage alone are growing rich.
I wish the glory were less of scaling Bactrian walls
or the fun of stripping some eastern nabob naked

in the tumult of battle with lead from the slingshots whizzing past
and the echoing twang of galloping horsemen's bowstrings
alive in your ears. I wish you every success and triumph.
Let them award you the javelin shaft for valor 80
to decorate your chariot in the great parade they'll hold
to mark our victory over the Parthian hordes.
Be true to your marriage vows, and come back home to me, safe.
Is that a lot to ask of you and the gods?
I've promised to offer up your arms at the Capene Gate
inscribed, 'From a grateful girl, for her husband's return.' "

IV.4

Tarpeia's crime and her shameful grave are my story now,
  and how, because of her, Jove's home was captured.
What was Rome like back then when the martial trumpet sounded
  from the cliffs of Cures, the ancient Sabine city?
Instead of a wall there were only the hills we still can see.
  Where buildings now crowd around the Senate House
was a flowing spring where war horses came to slake their thirst,
  and in what is now the Forum, Sabine lances
formed a crude palisade in a wooded glen, and the trees,
  Silenus' abode, rustled their leaves in answer 10
to the gentle splashing sounds of the brooks. The pipes of Pan
  played as the shepherds led their flocks to water.
King Tatius, across from this spot, had fenced his camp
  with a wood stockade reinforced with an earthen berm.
Not far from this was the spring where Tarpeia, the Vestal Virgin,
  came, bearing an earthenware jug on her head
to draw the water for rites of the worship of her great goddess.
  It was there one day that she saw on the plain, on horseback,
wheeling this way and that, holding his weapon high

over the golden mane of his mount, the Sabine 20
king, and was stricken, astonished by his all but unbearable beauty.
From her distracted hands, she let the urn
drop to the ground to shatter. Often, on some pretext,
as to say that the moon in some unusual aspect
required fresh ablutions of the spring water, she'd go
in the hope of another look at him, a glimpse.
She brought to the spring's guardian nymphs bouquets of lilies,
silvery, lovely, and prayed that they not allow
Romulus' sharp spear point to ruin the face of that gorgeous
man she had seen and loved. She would trudge up the hill 30
as dusk fell on the Capitol, careless, her bare arms scratched
by thorns and brambles she hadn't even noticed.
Sitting on her own Tarpeian Hill, she lamented
the pain of her forbidden love to Jove:
"Those bright fires I see below of Tatius' camp,
so beautiful, fill my heart with a dreadful yearning
that I might be a captive there among those tents
so that I could feast my eyes on Tatius' face.
Dear Roman hills, good-bye. To the city, too, I bid
a sad farewell, unchaste, ashamed of myself 40
that Vesta is thus by my disgraceful sin betrayed.
That horse he rides, whose mane he strokes, I envy
and pray I may somehow ride it into his camp and life.
Scylla's story I know, who betrayed her father,
Nisus, for love of Minos, the king of Crete, whom she spied
from her city's walls as I see Tatius now.
And now I understand it and think in pity and horror
of how her loins were turned to a pack of dogs,
barking and snapping. I also think of poor Ariadne

who betrayed, for love, the monster, her half-brother, 50
revealing by the unwinding thread the labyrinth's path.
Am I to share their disgrace and bring on my sisters,
the servants of Vesta's holy hearth, my betrayal's shame?
If the fire goes out on the hearth sacred to Vesta
and Pallas, too, whose image was carried here from Troy,
it will be that the flood from my weeping eyes has doused it.
Tomorrow, sir, the city will celebrate, and its vigil
will be relaxed, and then you must make your move,
climb the ridge of this hill on the slippery path. . .I wish
I had Medea's knowledge of powerful herbs 60
and magical incantations with which I could help you do this,
donning that royal robe that fits you better
than it does the semi-savage waif whom the she-wolf suckled.
Then could I preen, O stranger, as queen in your court,
having brought you the mighty city of Rome as my dower gift.
Or perhaps you could somehow make up for the rape
of the Sabines, avenge its dishonor, and take your reprisal with me.
Have me as your bride. I can part the armies,
and the train of my wedding gown can provide the treaty of peace
that Hymen will bless between our struggling peoples. 70
Instead of the trumpets' blasts, his sweeter music will sound,
and the field of battle will shift to our marriage bed.
The watchman signals the start of the fourth watch of the night,
and dawn approaches. The stars, weary and faint,
sink down below the horizon. I go to my bed to sleep
and will see you again in dreams that I hope will be pleasant."
Thus she spoke and surrendered herself to a fitful slumber
into which new furies advanced, for Venus,
angry still at the ruin of Troy, exploited her weakness

and fanned her fiery longing, the flame of her sin. 80
Tarpeia, crazed, was transformed like a Thracian Bacchant, possessed
and dancing with breasts bared on the Thermodon's bank.
It was, indeed, the feast of Parilia, the celebration
the shepherds hold to mark that time of the year
when the walls of Rome were built, and they eat and drink and dance.
For this occasion Romulus gave the sentries
leave from their vigil. The trumpets were silent. The camp was calm.
This was the moment Tarpeia chose. She went
to the enemy's side to make that bargain her heart had prompted.
The rest of the world was asleep, and only Jove 90
was alert, on watch to impose that penalty crime deserves.
Then was the hill those sentries left unprotected
climbed. Even the watchdogs that might have barked a warning,
Tarpeia slew with a sword. She opened wide
the gate the city had trusted, and offered up her country,
asking him only to set their wedding day.
And Tatius agrees, but he does not feel himself bound to honor
a deal made with a traitor. His words have another
and harsher meaning: "Your bed is made," he says, and the soldiers
fling down their shields that crush her to death with their weight. 100
This was the prize she had earned, her mad love having betrayed
her city, her oath, and Vesta's sacred hearth.
From that treacherous guide and the sorry fate to which she came
through Jove's severe correction, the hill is named.

IV.5

Now that you're dead, you whore, I hope thorns grow on your
grave.
May your ghost feel what you hated most in life—
the need of a stiff drink, with your mouth as dry as your ashes.
May Cerberus, howling in hunger, gnaw your bones.
What a baggage she was! What a piece of able and willing ass.
She could have turned even chaste Hippolytus horny,
maddened with lust. She could cloud men's minds, and women's
too.
Penelope, had she known her, would have forgotten
her absent husband and married one of those layabout suitors—
Antinous maybe. Her talent for mischief was awesome. 10
She could make magnets lose their knack of drawing iron.
Under her spell, a bird would abandon its nestlings.
She could dig herbs from the Colline Gate where they bury
unchaste
Vestals and use their powers to kill your crops
as surely as if they'd been washed away by a flooded river.
She could put spells on the moon. She could change her shape

and prowl the night like a wolf. Savage, selfish, mean,
with her nails she tore out the eyes of innocent ravens
to use in charms to blind the watchful husbands whose wives
were the working girls in her stable. Pet screech owls 20
she consulted at night to ask how she could make me her slave.
It was my blood she was after, but what she used
was the flow of mares in heat to make her powerful potions
to drive men mad. She would work her will in the darkness,
as quiet as those small worms that eat their way through papyri,
or the moles that make their tunnels under your lawns.
The life she led was a model for anyone who is greedy
for chrysolites from the eastern shores, for fancy
purple Tyrian dyes and Coan silks, for expensive
patchwork quilts with insets of cloth-of-gold, 30
or Egyptian bric-a-brac from palmy Thebes, or stemware
from fancy Parthian potters. Do what she did,
break your oaths or forget them, defy the gods, defy
the laws and morals of every decent person.
Learn to please your man and give him whatever he wants.
He feels like singing? Add your drunken voice
to whatever dirty ditty comes out of his mouth. A brute
who pulls your hair or beats you? So much the better.
You'll enter it into your ledger and make him pay for his rage.
The peace he wants—that piece he wants—will cost him, 40
but even then you'll devise some lame excuse. A headache?
That time of the month? Or that month of the year when Isis
demands from someone like you, so pious and so devout,
an abstinence nobody ever thought you could manage?
(When she tried this trick one April, Iole laughed aloud
but Omichle reminded her May was her birthday,

which meant of course another delay for the lust-crazed lout.)
Your ardent admirer's there, begging and pleading?
Sit yourself down at your dressing table, take up your quill,
and let him think that you're writing to some other man 50
you're agreeing to meet. If he trembles with rage, you've won.
Let him see
the love bites someone has left on your neck and shoulders.
Don't let the talk of Medea's terrible end dismay you.
It's Thais you'll take your cue from. Remember Menander's
account of how the clever hooker outsmarts the slave?
You can do that. If you don't have a regular john,
pretend, if only to raise your price. Invent excuses.
Delay, defer, deny. . .He'll keep coming back
his fires of passion hotter. Let your gatekeeper charge,
but get that kickback all smart women demand. 60
If somebody knocks at your door but his hand when it's opened
is empty,
you can't hear it. You're deaf, as dead to the world
as the iron bolt in the lock. And you don't want to pick and
choose.
The ugly soldier or gnarled sailor's redeemed
by a full purse from that long hitch he's done in the service.
Barbarians? Sure, why not? Slaves with their feet
still stained from the chalk where they jumped and danced in
the market?
It's not the hand you care about but what's in it,
the gold that refines all men. They want to read you their verses?
Fine, but words are cheap. You want more substantial 70
tokens of love, the bolts of fabric, the pricey stuff
from the marketplace whose truth you prefer to the lyre.

When your face is still smooth and your blood is young, make money.
Those pink rosebuds in your cheeks won't last forever.
After a storm at Paestum, I've seen how the rose bushes look,
wilted or bare. It's a hard lesson, but vital.
Worship Venus that goddess queen and offer the dove
with its poor throat slit and laid on the altar fire.
When Acanthis was making her pitch, feeding her line to my sweetheart,
I saw the lines in her throat and could count the bones 80
beneath her skin as I noticed the blood she coughed up with the phlegm
she spat through her rotten teeth into that rag.
Her palace was gone. She'd moved into a hovel, a shack,
the fire long ago gone out in its hearth.
And her corpse was something to see. Those few hairs that were left
were tied with a stolen band beneath a cap
that was faded and filthy. Her mourner? Only that vicious dog
that snapped and snarled whenever I came to her door.
Let her tomb be a broken-necked amphora the roots
of a wild fig tree will dig down to destroy. 90
And you that have ever been in love, come to her tomb,
throw stones, and call down the curses she deserves.

IV.6

The priest is about to begin his holy office. Silence!
Let every voice be stilled as the calf is slain
in sacrifice before my altar. The garlands of Rome
must rival Philetas' wreaths, and the ewer must pour
water as clear and pure as what Callimachus served.
Give me ointments, unguents, and pleasant incense,
and three times around the hearth let the fillet be woven.
Asperse me with holy water, and by the altar
music must play in the simple Phrygian mode. The truth
is what we require now. No tricks, no nonsense. 10
Banish all such contrivance to distant skies. We want
a spray of laurel to sprinkle the path this priest
has never before trodden but now undertakes. O Muse,
I celebrate Apollo's splendid temple
on the Palatine Hill. Calliope, give me, I pray, your aid,
for my subject is great and deserving—Caesar's glory.
While I celebrate his great deeds, even Jupiter listens.
There is, near Epirus, an inlet sacred to Phoebus,
a bay where the endless roar of the open sea is gentled.

Actium, it is called (and famous now, 20
a monument to Augustus' victorious fleet of galleys),
a landfall and easy passage sailors long for.
Here took place that battle of the naval might of the world,
when the blue of the sea was covered with forests of pine
over which Fortune's wings fanned an unequal wind.
On one side were ships of Romulus, Troy's heir,
with javelins clenched in the raised fist of a shameless woman.
On the other side was Augustus' flagship, its sails
swelling with Jove's auspicious breeze from the right quarter
and its standards high in the pride of all his conquests. 30
The sea-god had curved the two opposing lines into crescents,
and the water beneath them shone with the glints of weapons,
when Apollo, leaving the island of Delos he loves and protects
(that floated once at the whims of wind and wave),
stood over Augustus' ship and a flame flashed forth three times
in zigzag lightning bolts. The god had not come
in his peaceful aspect with streaming hair and his tortoise lyre
ready to sing, but menacing, black with anger
as he had been at Troy at the wrongs the impious Greeks
had done to Chrysis, his priest, and he sent the plague 40
to the Greek camp that piled their corpses on hungry pyres.
His fury was what it had been when he slew the coiling
Python at Delphi, the dreadful bane of his peaceful Muses.
And the god spoke: "Augustus, server, savior
of all the world, who are sprung from the line of ancient kings
of Alba Longa and Rome, you will this day
prove yourself to be greater than those of your distant forebears
who fought for Troy with Hector. The land of the world
is already yours; you will conquer now with the help of my bow

and my quiver of deadly arrows the sea as well. 50
Free Rome from fear. To you she looks as her champion. Save her.
With your nation's fervent prayers is your ship freighted.
You must demonstrate the truth of the omens Romulus read
in flights of birds long ago on the Palatine Hill.
Look at those vile oars that aspire to monstrous heights.
How shameful for Roman seas to be defiled
by the sails of a queen's armada. Be not afraid of those beating
blades in the sea in their hundreds—like so many wings
of waterbugs that glide on a pond's uncertain surface.
Those centaur figureheads on their fancy prows 60
that threaten to fling their rocks are nothing but wood and paint.
From his righteous cause a soldier takes his strength;
unrighteous, his shame will weaken his arm and his weapons
will drop
from his impotent hand. The time has come. Let your fleet
join in the battle in faith that the hour is in my hand
that guides the prows of the mighty Julian navy."
He spoke and emptied his quiver of holy arrows he shot
from his drawn bow, and along with those missiles there came
the mortal spears of Caesar. Phoebus has kept his promise,
and Rome has won the day, and the woman has lost. 70
Her scepter is broken and drifts on Ionian water like flotsam,
a shattered spar from a beaten vessel that flees . . .
Julius Caesar, divine, looks down from his sacred star
to bless this proof of his godhead and his son's blood.
Triton hails the result, blowing a blast on his conch,
and the nymphs of the sea applaud liberty's standard.
The queen meanwhile is gone, having disappeared in her ship
to her hidey-hole in the Nile to postpone her death.

What a figure she might have made, led through the streets
of Rome
as King Jugurtha was in a splendid triumph. 80
Heaven be praised—as it is with the temple built in thanksgiving
to commemorate Apollo's grace and favor,
for the rain of deadly arrows he shot in Actium's harbor
each of which brought down ten enemy ships.
I've sung enough of war. Apollo now directs
that as he takes off his armor, I use his lyre
for tunes for the dances of peace, as white-robed celebrants come
to perform in the leafy grove—and I comply
with roses around my neck. Pour out the Falernian wine
and perfume my hair with rich Cilician spices. 90
The Muses are kind to the genius of tippling poets, and Bacchus
comes to the aid of his brother Phoebus Apollo.
Let somebody else declaim on the subject of martial exploits,
the Sygambri subjected, the Ethiopians tamed.
Let somebody better suited tell of the Parthian troubles,
how they dragged their feet to the truce to return the standards
they took from Crassus and how, if Augustus does not subdue
them,
it will be to leave his sons the job and its glory.
Crassus can lie in his grave in confidence, waiting for Rome
to cross the Euphrates, performing its pious duty. 100
Meanwhile, I pass the evenings drinking and singing songs
until I can see the sunbeams dance in my glass.

IV.7

Ghosts do, indeed, exist, and after the flames of the pyre
have died away, something remains—the spirit.
I dreamt last night of Cynthia, dead and buried to blaring
funeral trumpets. Returned, she leaned over the bed
in which I lay asleep as soundly as back in those nights
of love's utter exhaustion. I think of those times
and remember how it was. Her hair, her eyes were the same
as when they bore her body away to the grave.
Her dress was scorched at the hem, and the jewel in her ring
was broken
as if the fire's teeth had chewed it. Her lips 10
that Lethe's waters had touched were parched and rough, but her voice
was quite unchanged and loud as life, as she snapped
her bony fingers to make a brittle imperious fillip:
"Traitor!" was how she addressed me. "How can you sleep?
Have you forgotten our strenuous nights on Subura Street?
Does that windowsill over which I used to climb out
mean nothing now? How often did I let down that rope and dangle,

dancing in air, halfway, as hand over hand
I lowered myself to your embraces, and how many times
did we find some place in a turn of the road to make love, 20
eager, breast upon breast, assuming the rest of the world
was as blind as we at that moment were in our passion?
Are the oaths you swore forgotten, their words blown away on
the wind?
No one murmured my name and wept as I closed
my eyes in death. Had you called, I might have lingered another
hour or even a day. No one kept watch
when I lay propped on my bier to ward off evil spirits.
Did you come with your head bowed to my funeral rites?
Were your mourning clothes bedewed by your rivulets of tears?
When my cortege led beyond the city gates, 30
was it too inconvenient for you to continue out to the grave?
Did you follow behind my bier even that far?
Did you call on the winds to fan my pyre? Or sprinkle spices?
Flowers? No solemn bouquet? Not a single rose?
Could you not take the trouble to pour me some drops of wine
and then shatter the bottle as lovers do?
Ask Lygdamus, my slave, and torture him, bring out the brands
white-hot to get at the truth. I knew it was he,
when I drank the poisoned wine. And Nomas was part of it, too.
Let the hot bricks be brought to get her to scream 40
that she was involved as well. She, who was out on the stroll
and turning tricks on the cheap, wears expensive clothing
with her golden hems that sweep the streets she used to work.
And where were you when she melted down that golden
image of me for a dower to buy herself a respectable
husband? That bitch is a lady now, and gives

the dirtiest jobs to the servants who remember me or speak
a good word, or come to my grave with flowers
as old Petale did—she's chained to a workbench now,
or the filthy log they make her use. Or Lalage, 50
hung by her hair and flogged because she invoked my name
to ask for a favor? I know what goes on. It's shameful.
But I don't hold it against you, Propertius. I should, but don't.
I think of those years I reigned in your heart and your poems.
By the riddles of Fate that no man can read, I take my oath,
by the three-headed dog that bays at the gates of hell,
I swear, my love, that I have always stayed true. If I lie,
may a hissing asp make its nest over my grave
and among my decaying bones hatch its disgusting young.
There are in the underworld on the farther shore 60
of the terrible Styx two doors, and the host of approaching shades
enters in through these portals. One is for sinners,
the like of Queen Clytemnestra, adulteress, murderess, traitor,
or Pasiphaë, that queen who had sex with a bull.
The other group glides off in a vessel festooned with flowers
to Elysium's perfumed fields where music sounds
from Lydian lyres and Cybele's cymbals in languid air.
There together, Andromeda, Hypermnestra,
and other such models of virtue and honor exchange their tales
of how they lived and suffered. The one displays 70
the bruises still on her arms from the fetters that bound her fast
to the cliff overlooking the sea; the other weeps
at the crime her sisters committed but she could not bring herself
to do. The tears we shed here prove the love
we felt on earth. (And I still feel in my heart as I hide
from them and even myself your many betrayals.)

But let me give you some words of instruction, or call them requests,
if you still care—if Chloris has not taken over
absolutely and hasn't bewitched you with charms and potions.
See that my nurse Parthenie is taken care of, 80
and let enjoy her feeble old age and not be in need.
She was always decent to you, never took bribes,
and deserves, I think, your kindness. Latris, too, look after,
whose name means 'one who serves,' as she did, well.
Do not force her to work for a new mistress, holding
the makeup mirror before a different face.
And as for all those poems you wrote to and about me,
burn them. Don't use me to get yourself fame.
Plant ivy on my grave so the roots, tendrils, and leaves
will keep my bones together a little while longer. 90
At Tivoli where the bubbling Anio waters the orchards,
where Hercules is worshipped, where air is so pure
that ivory doesn't yellow, set up a pillar for me,
with an epitaph for passersby to read:
'Here in Tivoli's earth, the golden Cynthia lies:
her glory, whatever she had, is the Anio's now.'
Do not dismiss the dreams that come from the gate of horn,
for these have the honest heft of truth. Our shades
waft abroad at night, free for a time from this prison,
and even Cerberus slips his tether and roves. 100
At dawn we are forced to return, recrossing the dark Lethe,
where the ferryman takes his tally as each of us boards.
Other women may have you now, but my time will come,
and my bones shall cuddle and jump again with yours."
Having said this, she fell silent, her complaint concluded at last.
I tried to embrace her shadow, but she was gone.

IV.8

The damnedest dream last night, and literary, from Homer,
right from the *Odyssey*'s pages, but jumbled and gross.
It's the Esquiline Hill, where those three aqueducts cross
and Maecenas built his gardens. An awful brawl
and people are running away. They're clearing out of the taverns.
Something disgraceful is going on—and it's me
that the fuss is about. And there's nothing I seem to be able to do.
You know the story they tell of Lanuvium's serpent
that guards the town? (It's a two-star attraction in any guide book.)
There's a cleft hill with a steep path that goes down. . . 10
(You're taking notes, Doctor?) They used to send virgins here
with baskets of goodies to offer the snake in tribute,
and from deep in the earth the creature would hiss and the girls, afraid,
would tremble in fear and the baskets would shake in their hands
as they hold out the food for the beast to snatch in its jaws and swallow,
and they feel the touch of the serpent's lips on their hands . . .

Those who were telling the truth and truly were chaste survive
and they come back up to embrace their nervous parents,
and the local farmers welcome them warmly and celebrate
their prospects now of a prosperous fruitful year. 20
Here my Cynthia came in my dream in a chariot drawn
by a handsome matched pair of close-cropped horses,
splendid as if she rode on the Appian Way in a triumph,
which this, I suppose, was, for she rattled along
leaning over the traces, laughing and leering. Beside her
was a pretty young man, a boy-toy, dressed in silk,
with a brace of Molossian dogs with fancy leads and collars.
Conspicuous consumption that someday will end,
and before the beard comes in on his cheeks he'll be forced to sell
himself for bread to the Coliseum's promoters. 30
What could I do? I had to get even, for that and for many
other flagrant wrongs my mistress had done me.
I found myself a girl, a couple in fact—Phyllis,
who lives near Diana's shrine on the Aventine Hill
(sober she's fun, and drunk she's even more amusing),
and Teia, who lives on Tarpeia, with tits to die for,
(when she's had a few, she needs more than one man in her bed).
These two, I thought, would make a diverting evening,
another couple of notches on the old gunfighter's barrel.
So there we are, on a couch, outside, in a garden, 40
but decently out of sight. Lygdamus is pouring the wine—
a Lesbian chardonnay—in attractive goblets.
Miletus is playing the pipes and Byblis the tambourine,
and flowers are all around, on the floor, in their hair,
and a dwarf is clapping his hands in time to the song of the flute.
(Another note, dear Doctor? But never mind!)

So I'm rolling in clover, right? I'm farting through silk, but
the omens
are all wrong: the flames in the lamps gutter,
despite the fact that they're full; the serving table falls over
with its feet in the air like some sacrificial victim. 50
We're playing at dice and I throw unfortunate combinations,
again and again. The songs the girls are singing
are not appealing at all—I might as well be deaf.
A bare breast in my hand is so much meat.
I'm thinking about that snake in that cave in Lanuvium's canyon
(I know, Doctor, I know), and I hear this noise,
a racket out at the gate (What gate? I don't know. There's a gate.)
And it's Cynthia, bursting in, like Ulysses come home
in righteous wrath to his palace. She flings open the doors
and her hair is wild and her eyes are blazing with fury. 60
(She looks, I admit attractive, commanding at least.) My cup
falls from my fingers. My wine-soaked lips go dry.
In high dudgeon now, she comes on, on behalf of all wronged
women,
and the scene she makes is dreadful, the sack of a city,
as she claws at terrified Phyllis' face with her fingernails.
Teia cries out for help. "Help, anyone. Fire!"
and her piercing screams awaken the townsfolk for miles around
who are now shouting themselves as they run in the dark
this way and that, and the girls take off (I can hardly blame them)
with Cynthia close behind and they flee to a tavern. 70
Cynthia then, triumphant, returns her attentions to me
slaps my face so hard that she leaves a bruise,
bites my neck and I feel her teeth sink in and the blood
flow from the wound. She tries to poke out my eyes

that I've covered up with my arms. She beats me with blow after blow
until she can hardly lift her arms to strike.
Now she sees Lygdamus, who's hiding behind the couch
and she drags him out and he's whimpering on his knees
and begging to her and me and our guardian angels. (I'm helpless,
can no more save him than I can protect myself.) 80
I'm whipped, in every sense, and hold out my hands in surrender.
I'm prostrate before her, barely touching her toes.
And these are the terms she dictates: "If you want me to pardon your crimes,
you'll have to promise, no more tomcatting at night
in fancy clothes in Pompey's tenderloin colonnade.
No more cruising at festival time in the Forum.
And no more looking around in the theaters for likely prospects
for rumpy-pumpy, or amateur thigh inspections
peeking into the not-quite-closed curtains of litters.
And no more sending Lygdamus out to bird-dog 90
for likely game for the master. He's out of the house tomorrow,
and up for sale on the block to any bidder."
"Whatever you say," I answer. I take the terms she's offered
and promise to keep my word, and she laughs, delighted
not so much with me—the prize—as with having won.
And now she turns her attention to cleaning out
whatever trace there might be of the girls. She scrubs and cleans
and mops, rinses and sweeps and fumigates.
Even the oil in the lamps has to be changed, and with sulfur
she touches my head as if I've been infected. 100
Then she changes the sheets and remakes our dear old bed,
and she lets me in, and we make, if you will, peace.

IV.9

Horace does it, and Virgil, and their ever so uplifting
  accounts of Hercules' great deeds of the past
are somehow supposed to suggest the power of great Augustus,
  but that involves a prettying up of the story.
Hercules shows up (or give him his patronymic,
  Amphitryoniades—which is quite a mouthful)
herding Geryon's stolen cattle from Erythea,
  and he gets to the grazing land on the Palatine Hill
where Velabrum's stream sometimes backs up in swampy pools
  so that men in boats can maneuver about the city. 10
This is where Cacus, the dreadful three-headed ogre, lived
  who could speak with all three mouths, or sing in trios.
Cacus, a villain and thief, rustles the cattle, his plan
  being to pull on their tails so they back into
his cave, and Hercules will be fooled by the hoofprint pattern.
  It's a stupid plan, and it doesn't work. He hears
the cattle mooing in rage and pain and he comes and attacks
  and bops each head with his club, and Cacus is dead,
stretched out there on the ground, and Hercules speaks to the cattle,

wishes them well, and sends them on to graze 20
in the Forum Boarium. (Later, it becomes the Cattle Market.)
End of story, except that Hercules now
is suddenly dry, parched, tortured with thirst. There's water
all around, but none of it seems attractive,
but he hears the lovely liquid sound of women's laughter
coming from some secluded grove, the precinct
of Bona Dea, the mystery goddess women worship
in secret rites from which they exclude all men.
In the heart of that hidden grove, screened off by garlanded doors,
is a crude gazebo in which a small fire burns 30
perfumed with incense. High in a poplar tree, small birds
twitter and sing. There is also a sacred well,
and this what our hero Hercules heads for, thirsting
like mad, his beard caked with the dust of his journey.
"I need," he announces, "a drink. You who amuse yourselves
here in this pleasant glade, be kind to a weary
man. I don't need a cup but can use my palm to scoop
some cool water to quench my terrible thirst.
Is this too much to ask? I am the one who carried
the earth on his back. Alcides, the strong one. 40
Who has not heard of my labors, the brave deeds of my club,
the arrows that never miss when I shoot at beasts
or even supernatural monsters? Who, beside me,
has ever crossed the Styx and returned to the light,
as I did, dragging that watchdog despite the decree of Dis?
And here I come to you, tired, thirsty, and asking
a decent welcome anyone might expect. Let's assume
you meet here to worship my cruel stepmother, Juno . . .

Even so, she allows me to drink from the streams I pass.
Or do I misread your reaction? Do you recoil 50
in fear of my lion-skin cloak or my wild-man's hair the winds
and the hot sun have tangled? Calm yourselves,
and know that I can put on a gentler aspect, have worn
in a pinch (if you'll pardon my putting it that way)
women's clothing and sat at a distaff, Omphale's servant,
and I did, given the roughness and size of my hands,
a passable job, I must say." Thus, Hercules spoke,
but the priestess in charge made him this reply:
"Stranger, be gone. These rites are forbidden to you. Leave,
while it's still safe to do so. Don't try to peek 60
or you'll pay a terrible price for violating the law
that protects our secluded structure. Think of the seer,
Tiresias, who beheld the naked Pallas bathing,
for which offense he lost his eyes forever.
Don't let that happen to you. There are other wells and springs,
but this is sacred, for use by women only."
Hercules could scarcely believe his ears. He ignored
the offensive words of the old woman, pushed her
out of his path, broke through the entranceway with his shoulders,
broke down the door of the hut that surrounded the well, 70
and drank. The heat of his anger had only increased his thirst,
and, gulp after gulp, he drained the wellspring dry.
Then he looked up and announced to the women his stern decree:
"From now on, this altar is mine, rededicated
to the cattle I have recovered by the strength of my two hands,
and the site is now and forever forbidden to women."
This was the price he exacted for the women's display of unkindness,

denying the modest request of a thirsty stranger
who was, after all, the hero who had sanctified the world—
wherefore the Sabines worship him as Sancus. 80
Sanctified Hercules, hail, whom even harsh Juno blesses,
and give your blessing in turn to me and my book.

IV.10

It's not, I confess, exactly my thing. To sing of the greatness
of Feretrian Jove and the three sets of arms in his temple,
those *spolia opima* only commanders can win on the field
in single combat against an opposing commander . . .
Not quite my usual subject, and yet it's the hope of glory
that gives a soldier—and poet, as well—strength.
It's always the highest apple that seems the most attractive,
and the highest crown that's worth the effort and risk.
Let us begin with Romulus, who vanquished the Sabine Acron.
(I don't have to mention the sordid business, that rape 10
we all heard about as children before we knew what rape was.
That, of course, had been Acron's provocation.)
Anyway Acron attacks the gates of Rome on horseback,
and Romulus kills the horse with a well-thrown spear.
Acron is strong and noble, with Hercules as his forebear,
and he comes against Rome in righteous (if I may say so)
wrath, and hoping for spoils, the armor on Romulus' shoulders.
But those on his own shoulders are what he loses,
all covered in his own blood. Romulus goes out to meet him

and makes a vow that everyone can hear, 20
dedicating to Jove the triumph, the victim, his armor,
which will make a win more impressive. (And what's the risk?
What does he care, if he dies, what those who survive him may
think?)
But he does, in fact, kill Acron. He's hardy and fit,
has led a rustic life, plowing and hunting, and rigor
had toughened him up a lot. He must have looked fearsome,
wearing that wolf-skin helmet (cannibalism, nearly?)
tricked out somehow with a shaggy crest (a tail?).
And his shield, it is said, is also pleasantly downscale—pigskin,
in layers, no doubt, instead of the showier bronze. 30
Who's name is next on my list? Aulus Cornelius Cossus,
who met and slew the Etruscan King Tolumnius
and thus conquered Fidenae, or maybe Veii. (Again,
I omit the details, for clearly Rome's aggression
caused that war.) Let's make it Veii, that ancient kingdom
with a throne of gold in its fancy marketplace,
but where is it now? Within those ancient walls, there are
shepherds
calling out on their horns to their sheepdogs,
and farmers now plant crops over their soldiers' graves.
Besieged, Tolumnius stood on a turret and parleyed, 40
playing for time while the ram battered away at his gate,
but Cossus, wise to his trick, suggested a better—
that they should meet out in the open, man to man, and fight
on the level plain. And they did, and again the gods
came to the aid of the Latin fighting man, who defeated
Tolumnius, slashing his neck that gushed forth blood
that splashed grotesquely over both those generals' horses.

(Verisimilitude comes from such details.)
Claudius then—that's Marcus Claudius Marcellus Major—
killed the Insubres' king named Virdomarus, 50
a giant, they say, whose Belgian shield he brought back to Rome.
The Gaul, a descendant of Brennus who fought at Delphi,
drove his chariot, hurling spears as he barreled along,
but he got hit, his pants were stained with blood,
and that fancy collar they wear fell from his severed neck.
Now all three prizes are stacked up there in the temple
(where that of Marcus Licinius Crassus has not been put,
even though he killed, in hand-to-hand combat,
Deldo, Bastarnae's king, the ruling having been made
that he was not Augustus but only a stand-in). 60
Anyway, there they are in Jupiter's temple, where chief
fought against chief and won. Feretrius' name?
It comes, perhaps, from *ferire,* which means "to smite," or maybe
ferre, "to bear" as one bears arms into battle,
and the victors bore back those arms that the vanquished, dead
now and bare,
had born. (I'll stop: I don't want to be boring.)

IV.11

Paullus, stop it: no more weeping over my grave.
No prayers, no wailing will work. The dismal gate,
once one has entered the precincts of hell, remains shut tight.
The traffic is all one way and there's no return.
The gods of the underworld may perhaps have heard you,
but there's nothing they can do. There's no reply.
The silent dirt will drink down the copious tears you shed,
and never answer. The gods take what we offer—
Charon palms his coins from under the tongues of the dead,
who will have no need for money ever again— 10
but the pale gate closes, the baleful trumpets blare, the fire
flares on the funeral pyre, and it, too, dies.
My marriage to Paullus, array of imposing forebears, splendid
children, the pride I took in them. . .All gone,
chips the heartless croupier sweeps off the world's table.
We all lose it all in the end. Cornelia now
is no more than a pile of dust you can hold in your hand.
The darkness has me now, dank, cold, and foul,
as if my feet were caught in a swamp, and before my time,

guiltless, but nonetheless condemned, and I pray 20
Pluto may give my spirit a lenient verdict; the judge,
Aeacus, when he draws my name, may find
something good to say to defend the life I lived
as he consults with Minos and Rhadamanthus.
Let the Eumenides, gentled as their name suggests, show mercy.
Sisyphus, rest from your labor. Ixion, pause
at your turning wheel. And thirsty Tantalus, drink at last
a sip from that elusive and frustrating stream.
Let Cerberus slip from his tether and let his lead hang slack.
I shall speak in my own defense, and if I tell an untruth, 30
let me join the daughters of Danaus, carrying water
forever in their useless leaky jars.
Ours is the proud house of Scipio Africanus
(who defeated famous Hannibal's army at Zama);
at Numantia in Spain, Africanus the Younger
brought the Celtiberian war to an end.
On my mother's side, the Libones are also men of achievement;
one of them was a consul. We hold our heads
high. And I exchanged my girl's *toga praetexta*
for the married woman's *stola* and bound my hair, 40
when I became your wife. Let this stele record
my one marriage—till death us both did part.
By all those illustrious forebears and others as well, I swear
I never misbehaved or embarrassed my husband
who, when he was censor, had to maintain high standards.
I never tarnished our trophies but, rather, shined them,
setting a fine example for other Romans to follow.
Between the time of the wedding torch and the other,
the funeral torch, I was free even from accusation.

My virtue came not from the fear of judges 50
but because it was in my blood. It was, indeed, my nature.
I never had cause to fear the juror's urn.
There was never a woman in Rome ashamed to sit beside me—
not even Claudia Quinta who hauled the ship
ashore that bore Cybele's image and proved herself
not to have been unchaste; nor the Vestal Virgin
Aemelia, likewise vindicated by sweeping the hem
of the dress she wore over the sacred embers,
which burst at once into flame and forever cleared her name.
I have brought no disgrace to the emperor's wife, 60
Scribonia, my mother. What would she have me change
of anything in my life except its shortness?
My mother's tears do me credit, and the city's display of grief.
Caesar himself sighs at the loss he feels
of one whom he had deemed worthy to be his daughter's
half-sister. It was as if a god
had mourned for me! And my accomplished brother lamented,
he who had sat twice in the curule chair,
was promoted to consul, and then was reduced to wretched
grieving
for the sudden loss of his loving, beloved sister. 70
Taken before my time, I still had time to earn
the honorific matron's robe, having borne
the three children I leave behind to condole with their father—
Lepidus, Paullus, my sons and consolations,
and my daughter, too, for whom I wish a like blessing, a life
with a single husband—a woman's greatest glory.
Ah, Paullus, I look to you to care now for our children
and to be for them a mother as well as a father,

bearing upon your shoulders that burden we formerly shared.
When they weep, hug them and give them the mother's
embrace 80
I cannot give. The house and their lives are now in your hands.
When they come to kiss you goodnight, see that your cheek
is dry. Only later, alone in the midnight hours
think of me, or see how your love will prompt
my face to appear in your dreams. Speak to me and imagine
that at any moment I am about to answer.
Or, perhaps you may remarry, in which case I wish you well
and pray that the children may learn to accept your wife,
their new mother, and love her, and be loved by her in turn.
Do not let the children talk of me too much 90
or with such praise of me that she may think herself slighted.
But if you remain a widower, feeling content
with the memory of a wife who loved you and whom you loved,
I trust the children may love you, honor, comfort
in times of sorrow, and care for you at the last in old age.
May the time taken from me be reassigned
to your account and those years bring you peace and the joy
you take in the lives of our children and then in theirs.
If this can come to pass, I am content. For my death
I do not myself mourn. My speech is concluded. 100
The witnesses are dismissed, and the earth will deliver its verdict.
We know how heaven opens its gates to virtue.
I pray my merits may speak on my behalf and my ghost
may be received where my ancestors await me.

NOTES

I.1

3. The opening lines here allude to Meleager, a Greek poet (fl. 100 B.C.E.) who wrote epigrams, many of them erotic; one of these (XII.101 in the *Palatine Anthology*) is to and about a young man named Myiscus and begins similarly by asserting that eyes have wounded the heart of the speaker that, previously, had never been touched by desire.

8. Tullus, who is in effect the dedicatee of this book, was a nephew of Lucius Volcacius Tullus, the Roman proconsul (governor) of Asia, 30–29 B.C.E.

9. Propertius' reference here is to the less well known version of the story of Atalanta, daughter of Iasius, a king of Argos, whom the Centaur Hylaeus tried to rape. Milanion (or, sometimes, Meilanion), her long-suffering suitor, was evidently wounded as he tried to defend her. In the more usual version, Meilanion has to beat her in a footrace in order to win her; he does so by throwing down golden apples with which Venus had provided him and

which she slows down to pick up. The attacks of the Centaurs Rhecus and Hyleus are earlier, and she has repulsed then herself, killing them both. In Propertius' version, it isn't the victory in the footrace but Milanion's suffering for her sake that is effective in winning her.

22. The Latin has *Cytinaeis,* meaning "the woman from Cytae," which is a place in Colchis, the birthplace of Medea, who was famous for witchcraft.

25. The knives and branding irons Propertius mentions are either physicians' implements or those of torturers, and it is likely that the ambiguity is intentional.

I.2

16–17. The story of the rape of Leucippus' daughters, Phoebe and Hilaïra, by Castor and Pollux is told in Theocritus' *Idyll* 22; it was also a popular subject for vase painters.

20. Apollo tried to take Marpessa, daughter of the river-god Evenus, from Idas, the Argonaut. Jupiter intervened and allowed Marpessa to choose for herself: she chose Idas.

23. Oenomaus, king of Elis, promised his daughter Hippodamia to anyone who could beat him in a chariot race. Pelops, son of Tantalus (from Phrygia), won the race and the girl, having bribed Oenomaus' groom to remove a linchpin from the king's chariot.

27. Apelles (4th c. B.C.E.) was a famous painter from Cos.

I.3

1. Ariadne, daughter of Minos, king of Crete, helped Theseus kill the Minotaur, giving him a ball of thread that he could unwind to find his way out of Daedalus' Labyrinth at Knossos. Theseus

took her away with him but then abandoned her and left her on an island (either Naxos or Dia).

3. Andromeda was the daughter of Cepheus, king of Ethiopia, whose wife, Cassiopeia, claimed to be more beautiful than the Nereids. Neptune was angered by this arrogance and demanded the sacrifice of Andromeda to a sea monster. Perseus rode to her rescue on Pegasus, the winged horse.

6. Actually, the Apidanus is not in Thrace but in Thessaly.

18. Argus with his hundred eyes was assigned by Juno to watch Io, Inachus' daughter, whom Jove raped and who was turned into a heifer. In most versions, Jupiter is the one who effects this transformation, but in some versions—including the one to which Propertius alludes in III.22—Juno is responsible.

I.4

1. Bassus was a friend of Propertius and of Ovid as well (see *Tristia* IV.10, lines 47–48).

6. Antiope was the mother of Amphion and Zethus; their father was Jupiter.

I.5

31. Gallus, who is also addressed in I.10, 13, and 20, is not the poet of that name (of whom Virgil writes in *Eclogue* 10); the poet was not of noble birth, as line 23 implies that this Gallus was.

I.6

1. For Tullus, see the note on I.1, line 8.

I.7

1. Ponticus was a friend of Ovid and of Bassus. He was apparently writing an epic about King Oedipus' sons, Polynices and Eteocles, of whom Aeschylus writes in *Seven against Thebes*.

I.8b

37. For Hippodamia, see the note to I.2, line 23.

I.9

6. Dodona had a grove of oaks sacred to Jupiter. The doves there provided prophetic oracles.

12. Mimnermus (7th c. B.C.E.) was a Greek elegiac love poet.

17. Propertius does not mention Tantalus by name but allows the reader to make the connection.

22. Ixion had been king of Thessaly; he was tied to a revolving wheel in Hades as punishment for attempting to seduce Juno.

29. For Ponticus, see the note to I.7, line 1.

I.10

6. For Gallus, see the note to I.5, line 31.

I.11

1. Baiae was a fashionable spa on the Bay of Naples, famous for its hot springs.

1. The causeway between Baiae and Misenum was said to have been put in place by Hercules.

12. Lake Lucrinus was also made by Hercules. It disappeared on September 30, 1538, in a violent earthquake; now a mountain is there.

13. Cumae is a coastal town near Baiae; it was the home of the Cumaean Sybil, who lived in a cave.

I.12

3–4. Propertius uses "Eridanus," which is the Greek name for the Po, and "Hypanis," which is probably the Bug.

10. Prometheus was chained to a mountain peak in the Caucasus because he gave humanity the gift of fire. A vulture tore at him and feasted every day on his entrails, which grew back every night.

11. Medea, daughter of the king of Colchis, was skilled in witchcraft and knew the powers of herbs that she gathered in wild regions.

I.13

24. Tyro, daughter of Salmoneus, loved Enipeus, a Thessalian river-god. Neptune was in love with Tyro and impersonated Enipeus (in much the way that Jupiter impersonated Amphitryon in order to seduce his wife, Alcmena).

26. After Hercules perished on Mount Oeta, having put on the deadly shirt of Nessus, he was resurrected by Jupiter, made a god, and given Hebe, the goddess of youth, as his bride.

32. Leda was the wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta. Jupiter saw her bathing in the Eurotas River, assumed the form of a swan, arranged for Venus to take on the shape of an eagle and pursue him, and came to Leda, ostensibly for protection. He raped her,

however, and fathered upon her the mortal Helen and Clytemnestra and the immortal Castor and Pollux.

I.14

3. Mentor (4th c. B.C.E.) was a famous Greek silversmith.

18. For Tullus, see the note to I.1, line 8.

24. Alcinoüs, the king of the Phaeaceans, appears in the *Odyssey*.

I.15

9. Calypso was a sea-nymph who detained Ulysses for seven years on her island of Ogygia, promising him immortality if he would stay with her there.

14. Jason was the lover of Hypsipyle, queen of Lemnos, on his way to Colchis in his quest for the Golden Fleece.

18. Evadne was the wife of Capaneus, one of the Seven against Thebes.

20. Alphesiboea married Alcmaeon, who was one of the Epigoni (sons of the Seven against Thebes), but he left her to marry Callirhoe. Alphesiboea's brothers then murdered Alcmaeon. In turn, the brothers were killed, some say by the sons of Alcmaeon and Callirhoe; but Propertius prefers the version in which Alphesiboea herself kills them out of loyalty and a love that not even his desertion was able to extinguish.

I.17

25. Doris, wife of Nereus, is the mother of the Nereids.

I.18

22. Pan's fondness for the pine tree may be an allusion to the love he felt for Pitys—or Pithys—which is Greek for pine. She refused Pan's attentions by turning into a pine tree, as Daphne escaped Apollo by turning into a laurel.

I.20

2. The sources for this cautionary tale are Theocritus' *Idyll* 13 and, of course, Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*.

20. The Phasis is a river in Colchis, where Medea lived and where King Aeëtes had the Golden Fleece.

34. "Pege" in Greek means "spring."

I.21

This poem is set in 41 or 40 B.C.E., when Mark Antony's brother Lucius was besieged in Perugia (or Perusia) by the young Octavian. The defenders were ultimately starved out and their leaders—except for Lucius Antonius—were killed.

I.22

6. It is generally and reasonably supposed that we are to identify the kinsman with the Gallus of I.21.

II.1

19. Gaius Cilnius Maecenas was friend and advisor to Augustus Caesar, an amateur author, and a literary patron, even though it

would have been unmannerly to use such a word. He was helpful and generous, especially to Virgil and Horace; and Propertius, having now been accepted as a part of his circle, by implication dedicates this book to him.

20. The war of the Titans and the gods is described in Hesiod's *Theogony.*

21. In the war of the Giants against the gods, Otus and Ephialtes piled Mount Ossa on Olympus and Pelion on Ossa. See the *Odyssey,* book XI.

24. Pergamon is a citadel city on the Turkish coast. It was part of the Troad.

31. Modena—or, in the Latin, Mutina—besieged by Mark Antony, was relieved in 43 B.C.E. by Octavian (later called Augustus Caesar).

32. Philippi was the site in Macedonia of the battle in which Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius in 42 B.C.E.

34. The Sicilian expedition refers to the defeat of Pompey at Naulochus in 36 B.C.E. For the siege of Perugia, see the note to I.21.

35. The Egyptian campaign followed the battle of Actium, at which Augustus defeated Antony and Cleopatra. The triumph in Rome took place in 29 B.C.E.

42. Theseus and Pirithous were legendary friends, as were Achilles and Patroclus. It has been suggested that a couplet has fallen out—which I have restored—that celebrated the friendship of Augustus and Maecenas.

48. Callimachus (ca. 305–ca. 240 B.C.E.) was perhaps the greatest of the Greek elegists upon whose work Propertius models his own.

49. Phlegra, in Thessaly, was a site of one of the battles of the Giants and the gods.

53. This is a compliment to Caesar, whose Julian *gens* was said to be descended from Aeneas through his son Iulus.

65. Phaedra was the wife of Theseus who fell in love with her

stepson Hippolytus. Circe was the sorceress in the *Odyssey,* book X.

66. Medea rejuvenated Jason's father, Aeson, at Iolcus in Thessaly. She then persuaded Pelias' daughters that they could do the same thing for their father, demonstrating the method by butchering an old ram and boiling the pieces in a cauldron. Pelias' daughters thereupon killed him and boiled his body, but Medea had made sure that in this case the procedure was not successful.

72. Machaon was a Greek physician at Troy; Philoctetes had been bitten by a serpent. The Centaur Chiron cured the blindness of Phoenix, son of Amyntor, king of Argos.

73. Aesclepius, son of Apollo, was the god of medicine. He restored many men to life, including Androgeon, son of Minos and Pasiphaë. Pluto, lord of the Underworld, complained to Jupiter, who struck Aesclepius with a lightning bolt.

75. Telephus, king of Mysia, was wounded by Achilles' spear and could be cured only by rust from that same spear.

78. Tantalus' punishment for his betrayal of the gods was that he was made to stand forever in a pool of water with fruit just above his head, with both remaining always out of his reach.

79. The Danaid maidens—the daughters of Danaus—killed their husbands on their wedding day and were condemned to carry water in leaking vessels in the Underworld.

81. For Prometheus, see the note to I.12, line 10.

II.2

7. Juno was both sister and wife of Jupiter.

8. Pallas Athena's aegis was her breastplate, which showed the Gorgon's head.

9. Ischomache was a Lapith girl carried off by the Centaurs who were guests at Pirithous' wedding to Hippodamia.

10. Brimo was a goddess, sometimes identified with Persephone or Demeter. Apparently, she was seduced or raped by Mercury. Lake Boebeis is in Thessaly.

13. The Judgment of Paris on Mount Ida, near Troy, was of the relative beauty of Juno, Venus, and Minerva. Paris chose Venus and she rewarded him with Helen.

16. Apollo offered the Sybil of Cumae eternal youth if she would accept him as a lover. She refused him, and her punishment was an eternity of growing old.

II.3

22. For Ariadne, see note to I.3, line 1.

24. Aganippe is a spring on Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses.

26. Corinna was a Boeotian poet, thought to have been a contemporary of Pindar (i.e., ca. 5th c. B.C.E.). Erinna was a poet of Lesbos, believed in antiquity to be a friend of Sappho (i.e., ca. 6th c. B.C.E.).

57. Melampus, son of Amythaon, was a seer who, for the love of Pero, Neleus' daughter, recovered the cattle that Iphiclus (son of Amphitryon and Alcmena) had stolen from Neleus.

II.4

8. Perimede is a sorceress whom Theocritus pairs with Medea (also of Colchis) in *Idyll* 2.

II.5

19. Juno was goddess of marriage and the guardian spirit of women.

II.6

1. Lais (5th c. B.C.E.) was a famous Corinthian courtesan.

2. Thais (4th c. B.C.E.) was an Athenian courtesan after whom Menander named a comedy. She was Alexander's mistress and eventually married Ptolemy I of Egypt.

3. Phryne was a rich Boeotian courtesan.

19. For the Centaurs at Pirithous' wedding, see the note to II.2, line 9.

24. Alcestis, the subject of Euripides' tragicomic play of that title, gave up her life to save that of her husband Admetus.

25. Penelope was the faithful wife of Ulysses. She was, in fact, emblematic of fidelity and was often contrasted to Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra.

II.7

1. The law, which may have proclaimed just before the battle of Actium, was designed to bring in money Octavian needed and would appear to have imposed a sizable tax on bachelors. If it was in fact enacted (it may simply have been proposed), it was repealed in 28 B.C.E. No other source refers to it.

19. Castor was famous for his horsemanship.

II.8

20. Haemon was the son of Creon; he killed himself when he found that his fiancée Antigone was dead.

33. Briseis was Achilles' prize whom Agamemnon appropriated for a time but later returned.

II.9

10. Briseis was Achilles' mistress; Deidamia, his wife, was mother of their son Neoptolemos.

57–60. These lines about Eteocles and Polynices, who killed each other at Thebes, are related to what has preceded them, but the manuscript is defective and some transitional material may have been lost.

II.10

3. "Haemonian" is a gongoristic way of saying "Thessalian," or, in a roundabout and puffed-up way, "epic," all of which I have tried to convey.

15. In 53 B.C.E., Marcus Licinius Crassus was defeated by the Parthians at Carrhae.

16. "Augustus" is the name Octavian took on January 16, 27 B.C.E.

17. The reference here is to the campaign in Arabia of Aelius Gallus, which was actually a fiasco.

27. Ascra was Hesiod's home; its fountain therefore stands for hexameters and epic poetry.

28. The Permessus, a stream at the foot of Mount Helicon, stands for elegiac love poetry, a "lower" form than the epic.

II.13a

4. For Ascra, see the note to II.10, line 27.

6. The Muses came from Pieria in Macedonia.

7. Ismarus is a mountain in Thrace.

10. Linus is the name for a number of legendary poets who are sometimes conflated. One of these taught Hercules music, but the

hero, in a moment of frustration or anger, hurled the lyre at his teacher's head and killed him.

II.13b

45. Phthia, in Thessaly, was Achilles' birthplace.

53. Nestor, king of Pylos, lived a long time—from the era of Hercules to the time of the Trojan War. Valerius Flaccus makes him one of the Argonauts.

II.15

17. Endymion was a shepherd boy with whom Diana, the moon goddess, fell in love and whom she joined in the times between the old moon and the new.

II.16

44. The "hero" is Mark Antony.

55. Eriphyla was bribed by Polynices to persuade her husband Amphiarius to join him in the expedition against Thebes, even though Amphiarius knew it would mean his death. Their sons avenged him by killing her.

II.17

9. For Tantalus, see the note to II.1, line 78.

11. Sisyphus was a king of Corinth condemned in Hades to roll a huge stone up a hill; because it kept rolling down, he had to do it again endlessly.

II.18b

7. Tithonus was the son of Laomedon, king of Troy. He was beloved by Aurora, goddess of dawn, and was offered one wish. He chose immortality but forgot to ask for eternal youth, and therefore he grew old and decrepit.

16. Memnon was the son of Tithonus and Aurora and was king of the Ethiopians. He was killed at Troy.

II.19

26. The Clitumnus is a river in Umbria, near Propertius' birthplace.

II.20

1. For Briseis, see the note to II.8, line 33.

2. Andromache was Hector's widow; her son Astyanax was killed by the Greeks after the fall of Troy.

5. The nightingale was what Procne was turned into after she murdered her son, Itylus, and fed him to his father, Tereus, in revenge for Tereus' rape of her sister Philomela.

6. Niobe boasted that she had more children than Latona, who was mother of Apollo and Diana. For this proud boast, Apollo and Diana killed all her twelve children with arrows. Niobe was turned to stone on Mount Sipylus in Lydia but continued to weep for them.

11. Danaë was imprisoned in a tower because an oracle had told her father that her son would kill him. Jupiter, smitten with desire for her, reached her through the window as a shower of gold, and begot a son, Perseus; he later, though unintentionally, did kill his grandfather.

31. Aeacus was the son of Jove by Aegina and was king of the island of Oenopia. He was a man of great integrity; after his death, he became one of the judges of hell, along with Minos and Rhadamanthus.

33. Tityus was a giant who tried to rape Latona and was punished in Hades by vultures that fed on his liver.

34. For Sisyphus, see the note to II.17, line 11.

II.21

1. Panthus, a Greek name, is almost certainly a pseudonym for one of Cynthia's lovers who is mentioned only here.

13. The "sorry maiden from Colchis" is, of course, Medea.

II.22a

1. Demophoön is almost certainly a pseudonym. In legend, he was Theseus' son who stopped in Thrace to visit Phyllis on his way home from Troy. He then retired to Athens; and Phyllis, having been forgotten, hanged herself.

21. Thamyras was a Thracian bard who challenged the Muses to a competition. He lost and they blinded him.

27. To seduce Alcmena, Jupiter impersonated her husband, Amphitryon; and, to extend their night together, he stopped the rotation of the Great and Little Bears (the Big and Little Dippers).

46. The odd idea here is that parents with twins, even if they lose one, will at least not be childless.

II.24b

28. Among the Labors of Hercules was the destruction of the Hydra of Lerna (identified with a marsh near Argos).

29. Hercules was also sent to fetch the golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, three nymphs who were daughters of Hesperus. The golden apples had been a wedding present Juno gave to Jupiter.

48. For Ariadne, see the note to I.3, line 1.

49. For Demophoön, see the note to II.22a, line 1.

II.25

14. For Tithonus, see the note to II.18b, line 7. For Nestor, see the note to II.13b, line 53.

15. Perillus was an Athenian who made a brazen bull for Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigento, in which criminals could be roasted alive; from inside the device, they groaned and shrieked so that the bull seemed to bellow. Phalaris made Perillus the first victim of this macabre device.

17. The Gorgon was the snake-haired Medusa whom Perseus was able to kill because he looked not at her but only at her reflection.

18–19. The mention of vultures on the Caucasus' heights refers, of course, to Prometheus.

II.26a

5. Helle was the daughter of King Athamas of Thebes. Persecuted by Ino, her stepmother, she fled with her brother Phrixus and, riding on a magic golden ram, fell while passing over the strait that is now named after her, the Hellespont.

10. Ino, who had persecuted Phrixus and Helle, was attacked by her husband Athamas whom Juno had driven mad; in trying to escape from him, she leapt into the sea. She was turned into a sea-goddess and her name was changed to Leucothea (literally,

"white goddess") or, as Propertius has it, Leucothoë. She is, as the context suggests, a benevolent deity.

13. Glaucus, son of Neptune, was a sea-god.

15. Nesaeë and Cymothoë are Nereids whom Homer mentions in *Iliad* XVIII.40–41.

17. According to Herodotus, Arion was a poet from Lesbos who was forced to walk the plank by sailors who had robbed him; but the music he sang attracted a dolphin that came to him in the water and carried him safely home.

II.26c

43. The Clashing Rocks are the Symplegades, through which the *Argo* sailed after Jason had first dispatched a dove to fly between them.

54. Amymone was a daughter of Danaus, who sent her to find water during a drought.

59. Orithyia, daughter of Erectheus, king of Athens, was carried off by Boreas.

61. Scylla was a sea monster on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina. Charybdis, on the Sicilian side of the strait, was a whirlpool personified as a female monster who swallowed and ejected seawater and sailing ships.

II.28

21. Io (see note to I.3, 18), driven to Egypt, becomes at last the goddess Isis.

23. For Ino, see the note to II.26a, line 10.

25. For Andromeda, see the note to I.3, line 3.

27. Callisto was a nymph in the train of Diana, the virgin goddess. She was raped by Jupiter, and Diana, to punish her, turned

her into a bear. Jupiter promoted her and their son into the heavens and the Great and Little Bears.

33. Semele bore the god Bacchus to Jupiter. She asked to see Jupiter in all his heavenly majesty and was destroyed by lightning.

55. Persephone (sometimes called Proserpine) is the wife of Dis, or Pluto, and is queen of the Underworld.

59. Antiope, ravished by Jupiter, bore twins, Amphion and Zethus, whom she exposed on Mount Cithaeron. She was later married to Epopeus, king of Sicyon, and then to his brother Lycus, whose first wife, Dirce, was jealous. Lycus delivered Antiope into the hands of Dirce, who imprisoned and tortured her. Amphion and Zethus eventually conquered Thebes, put Lycus to death, and tied Dirce to the tail of a wild bull that dragged her to her death. For Tyro, see the note to I.13, line 24.

60. Europa was daughter of Agenor, king of Phoenicia; Jupiter raped her, assuming the shape of a bull. Pasiphaë was a daughter of the Sun who married Minos, king of Crete. She had an unnatural passion for a bull Neptune had given Minos, and with Daedalus' help contrived a means of satisfying her lust for the animal; the Minotaur was the result.

II.30

25. Ganymede was a Trojan prince whom Jupiter abducted in the manner described.

30. Oeagrus was the father of Orpheus.

II.31

6. Danaus and Aegyptus were brothers, grandsons of Io, who had, respectively, fifty daughters and fifty sons. Danaus fled to

Argos with his daughters, but his fifty nephews pursued them and wanted to marry them. Danaus ordered his daughters to kill their husbands on their wedding night, and all of them but one did so. They were punished in the Underworld, where they work forever trying to fill leaky amphorae.

18. Under Brennus, the Gauls tried to sack Delphi, on the southern slopes of Mount Parnassus, in 278 B.C.E.; they were routed both by the exertions of the Delphians and also, as some say, by an earthquake that showered huge rocks down upon them.

II.32

5. Praeneste, a town about 20 miles southeast of Rome, contained a temple of Fortune to which people came to have their fortunes told.

6. Tusculum, about 14 miles southeast of Rome, was supposedly founded by Telegonus, son of Ulysses and Circe.

8. Lanuvium was some 18 miles south of Rome.

10. Trivia, or Diana, had a sacred grove at Nemi on the Appian Way, on the way to Lanuvium.

12. Pompey's court was a rectangular area surrounded by colonnades in the Campus Martius.

15. Maro was the son of Bacchus or of his attendant Silenus. He was possibly sleeping on a wineskin from which water issued.

45. Titus Tatius was a legendary Sabine king who fought Romulus and then shared the kingship of Rome. His name was proverbial for old-fashioned simplicity and virtue.

51. Deucalion, the Greek Noah, was a son of Prometheus. He and his wife Pyrrha survived the flood and repopulated the world.

55. For the wife of Minos, see the note to II.28, line 60.

57. For Danaë, see the note to II.20, line 11.

II.33b

24. Icarius—or, sometimes, Icarus—was a farmer who entertained Dionysus, in return for which the god gave him the vine and the secret of winemaking. He shared his wine with his neighbors, who murdered him, believing that he had given them poison. Dionysus then set him among the stars as Bootes, the Ploughman, to drive the Seven Plowing Oxen.

32. Eurytion was a Centaur who tried to rape Hippodamia at her marriage to Pirithous and thus provoked the legendary battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs that Ovid describes in the *Metamorphoses,* book XII.

33. Ulysses got the Cyclops Polyphemus drunk so that he could blind him and then escape with his men.

II.34a

12. When Jason arrived in Colchis, Medea was engaged to Styrus, the prince of Albania.

14. Lynceus is a pseudonym for a friend of Propertius who is also a poet.

II.34b

38. Epimenides—to whom Propertius refers merely as "Cretaeus," the Cretan—was a legendary sage and poet who is said to have produced a *Theogony* and an *Argonautica*.

41. Philetas, tutor to Ptolemy Philadelphus (3rd c. B.C.E.), was an important scholar-poet. Callimachus was the famous Alexandrian poet who was Philetas' contemporary. His *Aitia* began with an account of a dream.

45. Achelous was the river-god who fought with Hercules over Deianira.

50–51. Adrastus' talking horse, Arion, was the offspring of Ceres and Neptune. According to Statius in the *Thebaid,* it warned Adrastus that the expedition of the Seven against Thebes would fail.

51. Capaneus declared on his way to Thebes that he would triumph even in spite of Jupiter. Such contempt provoked the god, who struck him with a thunderbolt.

55. Antimachus (5th c. B.C.E.) was a Greek poet of Colophon who was reckoned second only to Homer. He fell in love with his mistress Lyde. Homer is said to have fallen in love with Penelope.

91. Tityrus, Corydon, and Alexis are figures from Virgil's *Eclogues*.

99. Varro of Atax (b. 82 B.C.E.) translated Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and wrote love poetry to his mistress Leucadia—which was, presumably, a pseudonym.

101. Catullus probably died in 54 B.C.E.

102. Gaius Licinius Calvus (82–ca. 47 B.C.E.) was an orator and poet. In poem 95, Catullus mentions Calvus' elegy on the death of Quintilia.

104. Gaius Cornelius Gallus (69–26 B.C.E.) was the first Latin love elegist. Only a line or two of Gallus' work survives, but he is memorialized in Virgil's *Eclogue* 10 and, of course, here. Lycoris was the pseudonym for his mistress, Cytheris.

III.1

1–2. For Callimachus and Philetas, see the note to II.34b, line 41.

18. Bactra was a province of the Parthian empire, which is to say absurdly remote.

21. The Sisters are the Muses, and their mountain, of course, is Helicon.

III.2

6. Cithaeron is a mountain—actually, a range of them—near Thebes.

7. The legend was that Amphion's music caused the boulders to leap together to form the walls of Thebes.

8. Theocritus and Ovid both describe the serenade of the Cyclops to the sea-nymph Galatea.

23. The Temple of Zeus with his statue by Phidias was one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

24. The tomb of King Mausolus—from which we get the word "mausoleum"—was another of the Seven Wonders.

III.3

2. Bellerophon's horse was Pegasus.

9. Quintus Ennius (239–169 B.C.E.) was the father of Latin poetry and famous for his epic, *Annales*.

12. In Ennius' *Annales* is the story of the fight between the three Latin Curiatii brothers and the three Roman Horatii brothers.

14. The geese cackled an alarm that saved the Capitol from the Gauls in 387 B.C.E.

16. Fabius Cunctator's delaying tactics were successful in the Second Punic War.

18. Rome was defeated at Cannae in the Second Punic War in 216 B.C.E.

21. Aemilius Regillus defeated Antiochus the Great off Myonnesus in Ionia in 190 B.C.E.

43. The Gorgon's pool is the Hippocrene, out of which Pegasus sprang from the blood of the Gorgon Medusa.

52. Gaius Marius defeated the Teutons in 102 B.C.E. and the Cimbri in 101.

54. The Swabians (Suebi) were defeated by Julius Caesar in 58 B.C.E.

62. For Philetas, see the note to II.34b, line 41.

III.4

11. Crassus' defeat by the Parthians at Carrhae, also mentioned in II.10, was in 53 B.C.E.

III.5

19. Jugurtha was the Numidian king whom Gaius Marius brought to Rome as a prisoner in 104 B.C.E.

22. Irus is the Ithacan beggar in the *Odyssey,* book XVIII.

48. Alcmaeon killed his mother Eriphyle and was punished by the Furies.

49. Phineus, king of Bythnia, was plagued by winged Harpies that robbed him of his food until Jason and the Argonauts drove them off.

50. Tisiphone was one of the three Furies.

51. Cerberus was the three-headed watchdog that stood at the gates of the Underworld.

52. For Tityus, see the note to II.20, line 33.

58. For Crassus, see the note to II.10, line 15.

III.6

1. Lygdamus is a Greek name, here assigned to a slave who is serving as a go-between.

III.7

7. All that we know of Paetus is from this poem.

15. For Orithyia, see the note to II.26c, line 59.

25. Argynnas was a grandson of Athamas of Thebes who was loved by Agamemnon but drowned in the river Cephisus. Agamemnon, in mourning, presumably refused to order the fleet to set sail from Aulis. The fleet was thereupon becalmed and the only way to contrive a fair wind was by the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter.

42. The Capharean rocks in southern Euboea were where Nauplius lit a beacon intended to lure the Greeks to their death so that he could avenge the loss of his son Palamedes, whom Ulysses had falsely accused of treason and put to death.

III.9

1. For Maecenas, see the note to II.1, line 19.

40. Marcus Furius Camillus routed the Gauls after they sacked Rome in 390 B.C.E. and was known as a second Romulus.

56. Coeus was a Titan, the father of Latona; Eurymedon was king of the Giants.

III.10

8. For Niobe, see the note to II.20, line 6.

9. Alcyone (halcyon) mourned the death of her husband Ceyx and, in pity, the gods turned her into a seabird.

10. For Procne and Philomela, see the note to II.20, line 5.

11. Itys was Procne's son whom she killed and served to her husband Tereus.

III.11

12. The witch of Colchis is, of course, Medea.

22. Hercules fell in love with Queen Omphale, who forced him to dress as a woman and spin for her, while she put on his lion-skin.

37 and ff. The reference is to Cleopatra, who did not need to be named but who was an occasion for Roman embarrassment.

50. The Ptolemies claimed kinship with Philip of Macedon, who was the father of Alexander the Great.

51. Anubis is the Egyptian god with the head of a jackal.

53. A sistrum is a kind of metal rattle used in the worship of Isis.

55. Liburnian galleys had armed beaks for ramming other ships.

58. Gaius Marius (b. ca. 157 B.C.E.) was a great Roman general.

60. Tarquinius Superbus—Tarquin the Proud—was the last legendary king of Rome, driven out by Lucius Junius Brutus in 510 B.C.E.

76. The ships are those of Scipio Africanus (236–184/3 B.C.E.), who invaded Africa in the Second Punic War.

77. For Camillus, see the note to III.9, line 40. Pompey's recent conquest is that of Mithridates.

79. Syphax was king of Numidia, was defeated by the Romans in 203 B.C.E., and died in Rome.

80. Pyrrhus was king of Epirus who invaded Italy but withdrew after an indecisive battle in 275 B.C.E.

82. Curtius is said to have leapt fully armed on horseback in 362 B.C.E. into a chasm that appeared in the Forum, soothsayers having told him that this sacrifice would preserve Rome.

84. Decius, having dreamt that he could win if he sacrificed himself, charged the enemy line single-handedly and was killed (340 B.C.E.).

86. Horatius "at the bridge" fended off the Etruscans in 505 B.C.E.

87. Marcus Valerius Corvus defeated a giant Gaul in single combat in 349 B.C.E., helped by the raven that flapped its wings in front of the Gaul and gave him his name.

III.12

9. The Araxes is a river in Armenia.

32. The Cicones, whom Ulysses conquers on his way home from Troy, were in Thrace near the Hebrus River.

III.13

32. For Evadne, see note to I.15, line 18.

61–64. A translation of an epigram from the *Palatine Anthology* (IX.337) by Leonidas of Tarentum.

69. For Brennus, see the note to II.31, line 18.

73. Polymestor, to whom Polydorus, son of Priam and Hecuba, had been entrusted together with a great horde of Trojan wealth, broke his oath and murdered the boy for the gold.

III.14

13. The Taygetus range overlooks Sparta.

III.15

5. The *toga virilis,* which was all white, was assumed when a young man was between fifteen and eighteen.

16. For Dirce, see the note to II.28, line 59.

52. Aracynthus is a mountain between Attica and Boeotia.

III.16

2. The Anio is Tivoli's river.

10. Sciron waylaid travelers, robbed them, and then hurled them over a cliff into the sea. Theseus killed him.

III.17

32. Nysa was a mythical place in India where the god Bacchus was brought up.

33. Lycurgus was king of Thrace; because he drove Bacchus out of his kingdom, Bacchus drove him insane.

34. Pentheus was king of Thebes. He resisted Bacchus and was torn to bits by the bands of Maenads led by his mother Agave and by her sisters.

46. Bassareus was a cult name of Bacchus.

51. Cybele, or Cybebe, was the Great Mother who was worshipped in Phrygia. Her rites, like those of Bacchus, were orgiastic.

55. Pindar (518–438 B.C.E.) was one of the great writers of dithyrambs and epinician odes.

III.18

3. Misenus was trumpeter first for Hector and then for Aeneas with whom he left Troy. He was drowned off the coast of Campania and buried at Misenum, which was named after him.

9. Marcus Claudius Marcellus was son of Augustus' sister Octavia, born in 42 B.C.E. He died at Baiae in 23 B.C.E. when he was aedile. Virgil mourns his death in the *Aeneid* (book VI).

III.19

8. Syrtes' shoals are the shifting sands off Sidra (see II.9, line 37).

13. For Tyro, see note to I.13, line 24.

15. As Ovid vividly describes in the *Metamorphoses,* book X, Myrrha fell in love with Cinyras, tricked him into having sex with her, and was turned into a myrrh tree while giving birth to Adonis.

21. Scylla, daughter of Nisus, king of Megara, fell in love with Minos while looking down at him from the citadel walls; she betrayed her city to him by cutting off her father's purple lock of hair on which Megara's safety depended.

III.20

11. If Apuleius is correct when he tells us in the *Apologia* that Cynthia's real name was Hostia, then her distinguished grandfather may have been Hostius, the epic poet (assuming, of course, that this poem is addressed to Cynthia, which is not clear).

III.22

1. Cyzicus' town was a commercial center on an island off the coast in the Sea of Marmora (the Propontis) named after its eponymous king, whose misadventures are described by Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus. It's a peninsula now, called Artaki.

3. Tullus, the dedicatee of book I; see the note to I.1, line 8.

5. Propertius puts the rape of Proserpine here rather than on the plain of Enna in Sicily.

10. For Medusa and Perseus, see the note to II.25, line 17.

11. Geryon was a giant whom Hercules killed and whose cattle he took.

12. Antaeus was a giant with whom Hercules wrestled. Whenever he touched the ground, he grew stronger, so Hercules had to lift him up in the air and then strangle him.

13. The Hesperides were nymphs who guarded the legendary golden apples.

17. Ortygia is either Delos or possibly Ephesus. The Cayster is, in any event, Ephesus' river.

24. The Clitumnus is an Umbrian river, mentioned also in II.19 (see note to line 26).

25. The aqueduct completed by Quintus Marcius Rex in 140 B.C.E. was a great feat of engineering and its water was thought to be particularly pure.

27. The Alban lake and Lake Nemi are in the Alban hills.

30. The pool of Juturna in the Roman Forum was where Castor and Pollux are supposed to have watered their horses after the battle in which they helped the Romans beat the Latins in 496 B.C.E.

36. Thyestes' children were killed by his brother Atreus, who served them to him in a banquet. (Thyestes had committed adultery with Atreus' wife.)

39. Meleager's life depended on a log that his mother Althaea burnt after he killed her brothers during the hunt for the Calydonian boar.

39–40. For Pentheus and Agave, see the note to III.17, line 34.

46. The reference is to the story of Io, for which see the note to I.3, line 18.

47. Sinis was a robber who bent trees and tied his victims to them in such a way that when the trees sprang upright, they tore the unfortunates apart.

49. For Sciron, see the note to III.16, line 10.

IV.1

6. Evander was an exiled king of Arcadia who established himself on the future site of Rome. He was the one who named the Palatine Hill after his ancestor, Pallas.

8. The Tarpeian Hill, which is part of the Capitoline Hill, is an outcropping of rock about 80 feet high from which condemned criminals were thrown. There was a temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.

11–12. The temple of Romulus was on the Quirinal Hill, Quirinus being Romulus' heavenly name.

24. The Parilia was a shepherds' festival celebrated on April 21, the anniversary of Rome's founding. Pales was goddess of flocks.

38. Lycmon was the Etruscan who helped Romulus fight Titus Tatius and the Sabines.

63. For Decius, see the note to III.11, line 84.

80. For Ennius, see the note to III.3, line 9.

91. It is interesting that Propertius uses the slightly high-flown Greek form, "Horos," rather than the Latin "Horus." It is the name of the Egyptian god, the son of Isis.

102. Horops is not otherwise known but the name may suggest "horoscope," and astrology.

103. Archytas of Tarentum (fl. early 4th c. B.C.E.) was a famous mathematician. Conon of Samos (3rd c. B.C.E.) was also an astronomer and mathematician.

127. Jupiter's Libyan shrine was at Siwa, an oasis in the Sahara.

176. The last line, which some have found mysterious, is, I think, intended to be portentous nonsense of the kind that an astrologer would spout.

IV.2

3. Vertumnus is an Etruscan god whose qualities the poem describes. By using hyphens, I have tried to suggest in English some of Propertius' toying with the etymology of the name.

9. The street where water had flowed was the Vicus Tuscus; it ran through the Velabrum, formerly a shallow lake formed by the Tiber.

IV.3

1. Once again, the Greek names, Arethusa and Lycotas, are pseudonyms, here for a young Roman and his new wife.

19. The Latin is *lacerna,* a military cloak fastened at the shoulder.

22. All Roman soldiers carried a stake that would be used as part of the palisade on top of the rampart around a camp.

26. Ocnus had a spendthrift wife and, as if that weren't enough, was condemned in the Underworld to plait straw into a rope that a donkey continually consumed.

38. The name of the dog Propertius uses is *Craugis,* a Greek word meaning, more or less, "Yelper."

52. Hippolyta, the Amazon queen, married Theseus.

85. The Porta Capena was the gate on the Appian Way through which someone returning from the East would pass.

IV.5

1. This poem is addressed to Acanthis, a prostitute and procurer, who evidently tried to recruit Cynthia and who is named, finally, in line 79. The name is Greek and means "thorny."

10. Antinous is the chief suitor for Penelope's hand in the *Odyssey.*

45–46. Iole and Omichle are Greek pseudonyms, or perhaps the servants were actually Greek.

54. Menander's *Thais* has not survived, but it was famous enough for St. Paul to have quoted a line from it (1 Corinthians 15.33).

IV.6

4. For Philetas, see the note to II.34b, line 41.

9. In the *Republic,* Plato regards the Dorian and Phrygian musical modes as the only manly ones, inspiring courage, endurance, and self-restraint.

43. Apollo killed Python, the huge snake that had terrified the Muses, when he took up residence at Delphi.

80. For King Jugurtha, see the note to III.5, line 19.

94. The Sygambri, after they invaded Gaul and defeated Marcus Lollius, had withdrawn and given hostages in 16 B.C.E. It was in that year that the Romans began a quadrennial festival in honor of Augustus, and this poem may have been composed for that occasion. In 22 B.C.E., a Roman prefect of Egypt defeated an Ethiopian invasion there.

96. The Parthians in 20 B.C.E. returned the standards they had captured from Crassus thirty-three years earlier.

98. In 17 B.C.E. Augustus adopted his grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar, sons of Agrippa and Julia.

IV.7

15. Subura Street, where Cynthia lived, was the tenderloin of Rome.

30. Cemeteries were, by law, outside the city gates.

49. Petale, a Greek name, means "petal."

50. Lalage, also a Greek name, means "prattler."

68. Hypermnestra was the only one of Danaus' fifty daughters who refused to murder her husband on their wedding night.

80. Parthenie is the Greek equivalent of the name Virginia.

83. Latris means, simply, "servant."

97. According to Virgil, true dreams come through the gates of horn and false ones through the gate of ivory (see *Aeneid* VI.893–96).

IV.8

11. The "Doctor" is a translator's intrusion, justified, I trust, by the cleft hill and the dangerous snake, both of which were, even before Freud interpreted them for us, clear enough. This is, after all, a dream poem.

27. The Molossian dogs were a large and impressive breed. The head of such a dog appears on coins from Epirus.

46. The Doctor, having established himself, proves difficult to terminate. The dwarf and the flute seem to be a plausible reason for another visit, however.

85. Pompey's colonnade is recommended by Ovid (in the *Art of Love* I.67) as a good place to cruise for girls.

IV.9

6. "Amphitryoniades," which refers to Hercules (giving him the grandiose patronymic he would have had if Jupiter had not seduced Alcmena and his father had been Amphitryon), was first used by Catullus as the second half of a pentameter line. Propertius uses it as the first half of a hexameter line.

7. Erythea was a legendary island beyond the straits of Gibraltar, where Geryon lived.

9. For Velabrum, see the note to IV.2, line 9.

11. Cacus, son of Vulcan and Medusa, was a famous robber and cannibal, all the more terrifying because he was three-headed and breathed flames. The entrance to his cave was decorated with human bones.

55. For Omphale, see the note to III.11, line 22.

80. There is no identification elsewhere of Hercules with the cult title of this Sabine god.

IV.10

3. The *spolia opima* were spoils of honor that hung in the temple of Feretrian Jupiter on the Capitol, according to rules that Propertius discusses.

33. Veii was an ancient Etruscan city a dozen miles north of Rome.

50. The Insubres lived in northern Gaul. Virdomarus was killed in 222 B.C.E.

52. For Brennus, see the note to II.31, line 18.

57. Marcus Licinius Crassus was proconsul of Macedonia when he killed Deldo in 29 B.C.E., but his claim was disallowed by Octavian.

IV.11

1. Lucius Aemilius Paullus Lepidus was suffect consul in 34 B.C.E. and censor in 22 B.C.E. The speaker in the poem is the shade of his wife, Cornelia, daughter of Cornelius Scipio (whose wife, Scribonia, later married Octavian).

22. Aeacus, son of Jupiter and the nymph Aegina, was one of

the judges of the dead. He draws lots from an urn to decide the order in which cases are to be heard.

24. Minos and Rhadamanthus, sons of Jupiter and Europa, are judges in the Underworld.

57. Aemilia left Vesta's sacred fire in the care of a young Vestal Virgin who allowed it to go out. It blazed up again when Aemilia's robe touched it, and this miracle was interpreted as proof of her chastity and faith.

66. Cornelia and Augustus' daughter Julia were half-sisters. (Julia's reputation was nowhere near so spotless.)

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