

OVID: THE AMORES

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His Epigram

We who were once five books are now three:
The author preferred the work this way.
Now, if it's no joy to you to read us,
still it's a lighter punishment with two books less.

Book I

Book I Elegy I: The Theme of Love

Just now, I was preparing to start with heavy fighting
and violent war, with a measure to fit the matter.
Good enough for lesser verse – laughed Cupid
so they say, and stole a foot away.
'Cruel boy, who gave you power over this song?
Poets are the Muses', we're not in your crowd.
What if Venus snatched golden Minerva's weapons,
while golden Minerva fanned the flaming fires?
Who'd approve of Ceres ruling the wooded hills,
with the Virgin's quiver to cultivate the fields?
Who'd grant long-haired Phoebus a sharp spear,
while Mars played the Aonian lyre?
You've a mighty kingdom, boy, and too much power,
ambitious one, why aspire to fresh works?
Or is everything yours? Are Helicon's metres yours?
Is even Phoebus's lyre now barely his at all?
I've risen to it well, in the first line, on a clean page,
the next one's weakened my strength:
and I've no theme fitting for lighter verses,
no boy or elegant long-haired girl.'
I was singing, while he quickly selected an arrow
from his open quiver, to engineer my ruin,
and vigorously bent the sinuous bow against his knee.
and said, 'Poet take this effort for your song!'
Woe is me! That boy has true shafts.
I burn, and Love rules my vacant heart.
My work rises in six beats, sinks in five:
farewell hard fighting with your measure!
Muse, garland your golden brow with Venus's myrtle
culled from the shore, and sing on with eleven feet!

Book I Elegy II: Love's Victim

How to say what it's like, how hard my mattress
seems, and the sheets won't stay on the bed,
and the sleepless nights, so long to endure,
tossing with every weary bone of my body in pain?
But, I think, if desire were attacking me I'd feel it.
Surely he's crept in and skilfully hurt me with secret art.
That's it: a slender arrow sticks fast in my heart,
and cruel Love lives there, in my conquered breast.
Shall I give in: to go down fighting might bank the fires?
I give in! The burden that's carried with grace is lighter.
I've seen the torch that's swung about grow brighter
and the still one, on the contrary, quenched.
The oxen that shirk when first seized for the yoke
get more lashes than those that are used to the plough.
The hot steed's mouth is bruised from the harsh curb,
the one that's been in harness, feels reins less.
Love oppresses reluctant lovers more harshly and insolently
than those who acknowledge they'll bear his slavery.
Look I confess! Cupid, I'm your latest prize:
stretching out conquered arms towards your justice.
War's not the thing – I come seeking peace:
no glory for you in conquering unarmed men.
Wreath your hair with myrtle, yoke your mother's doves:
Your stepfather Mars himself will lend you a chariot,
and it's fitting you go, the people acclaiming your triumph,
with you skilfully handling the yoked birds.
leading captive youths and captive girls:
that procession will be a magnificent triumph.
I myself, fresh prize, will just now have received my wound
and my captive mind will display its new chains.
You'll lead Conscience, hands twisted behind her back,
and Shame, and whoever Love's sect includes.
All will fear you: stretching their arms towards you
the crowd will cry 'hurrah for the triumph!
You'll have your flattering followers Delusion and Passion,
the continual crew that follows at your side.

With these troops you overcome men and gods:
take away their advantage and you're naked.
Proudly, your mother will applaud your triumph
from high Olympus, and scatter roses over your head
You, with jewelled wings, jewels spangling your hair,
will ride in a golden chariot, yourself all golden.
And then, if I know you, you'll inflame not a few:
and also, passing by you'll deal out many wounds.
You can't, even if you wish, suspend your arrows:
your fiery flames scorch your neighbours.
Such was Bacchus in the conquered land by Ganges:
you drawn by birds, he by tigers.
So since I will be part of your sacred triumph,
victorious one, spend your powers frugally on me now!
Look at Caesar's similar fortunes of war –
what he conquers, he protects with his power.

Book I Elegy III: His Assets as a Lover

Be just, I beg you: let the girl who's lately plundered me,
either love me, or give cause why I should always love her!
Ah, I ask too much – enough if she lets herself be loved:
Cytherea might listen to all these prayers from me!
Hear one who serves you through the long years:
hear one who knows how to love in pure faith!
If no great names of ancient ancestors commend me,
if the creator of my blood was from the equestrian order,
if there aren't innumerable ploughmen to refresh my fields,
my parents are both temperate and careful with wealth –
but Phoebus, his nine companions, the creator of the vine,
they made me as I am, and Amor, who gives me to you,
and unceasing loyalty, sinless morals,
naked simplicity, noble honour.
Not for me to satisfy thousands, I'm not a fickle lover:
you'll be, for me, trust me, my eternal care.
With you, all the years the Sister's thread might grant me,
partaking of life, and you'll grieve at my death!
You'll grant me a happy theme for singing –
reasons for song, worthy of you, will rise.
These have a name in song, frightened Io of the horns,
and she who played by the stream with the adulterous bird,
and she who was carried by that false bull over the waves,
that virgin holding tight to a crooked horn.
I too will be sung likewise through all the world,
and my name will always be linked to yours.

Book I Elegy IV: The Dinner-Party

Your husband too will be present at my banquet –
I pray it's his last meal, that man of yours!
Shall I look at my beloved girl, like any guest?
One of you will be touching what he pleases, and will you
the other, rightly subject, be cherishing your love?
If he wishes, may he throw his arms round your neck?
I cease to wonder that the Centaurs full of wine
snatched up lovely Hippodamia in their arms.
I don't live in the woods, or have limbs like a horse
but I can barely contain my hands when I see you!
Still, know what you must do, and don't let
the east or the south wind go carrying off my words!
Arrive before your husband – not that I see what's do-able
if you do come first, but still come before him.
When he sinks on the couch, as you recline at the table
there be the face of modesty itself – secretly touch my foot!
Watch me and my nods, and loquacious expression:
pick up their secret messages and yourself reply.
Voiceless, I'll speak eloquent words with eyebrows:
my fingers will write words, words traced out in wine.
When the lasciviousness of our lovemaking occurs to you,
touch your radiant cheek with a delicate thumb.
If it's some silent complaint against me you have in mind,
shadow your earlobe with a tender hand.
When what I do, and say, pleases you, light of my life,
keep continually twisting a ring with your fingers.
Touch your hands on the table, in the manner of prayer,
when you wish your husband many well-earned evils.
What he mixes for you, you know, order him to drink:
lightly ask the boy for what you wish, yourself.
What you give up to the boy I'll take again first,
and, where you'll drink from, I'll sip from there.
If by chance he offers you what he's tasted himself,
reject the gift of food from his mouth.
Don't let him drape his arms around your neck,
or lay your gentle head on his firm chest,
or your breasts or convenient nipples accept his fingers.

Don't, above all, be willing to yield a single kiss!
If you surrender kisses, I'll make it clear I'm your lover,
and say 'they're mine!', and take possession.
Still all this I can see, but what the cloth may well hide
that's the cause of my secret fears.
Don't touch thigh to thigh, or mingle legs,
or join the hard and the tender foot to foot.
Wretch, I fear everything, who've boldly done it all,
behold, I'm tormented by fear of my own example.
Often my girl and I, with quick pleasure,
completed the sweet work, the cloth covering us.
You won't do that: but, so you're not thought to have done,
remove that guilty cloth from your table.
Always suggest he drinks – but lips, disappoint his prayers!
While he drinks, if you can, in secret, add neat wine.
If he lies there sedately full of drink and sleep,
the time and place will give us wisdom.
When you and I and all get up to leave for home,
remember to be in the middle of the moving crowd.
I'll find you in that procession, or you me:
whenever you've a chance to touch me, touch away.
Alas for me! I'm reminded, I only gain a few hours:
I'll be separated, on night's orders, from my girl.
The man shuts you in at night, I sad, with welling tears,
as is right, always haunt that cruel entrance.
now he exacts kisses, now not merely kisses,
what you give me secretly, you give him by force of law.
But give them reluctantly –you can do it – as if forced,
hold back blandishments, and let Venus be stingy.
If my prayers have power, I wish no pleasure for either:
if not that, then at least no pleasure for you!
But still whatever fortune brings tonight, tomorrow
to me, with constant voice, deny you gave him anything!

Book I Elegy V: Corinna in an Afternoon

It was hot, and the noon hour had gone by:
I was relaxed, limbs spread in the midst of the bed.
One half of the window was open, the other closed:
the light was just as it often is in the woods,
it glimmered like Phoebus dying at twilight,
or when night goes, but day has still not risen.
Such a light as is offered to modest girls,
whose timid shyness hopes for a refuge.
Behold Corinna comes, hidden by her loose slip,
scattered hair covering her white throat –
like the famous Semiramis going to her bed,
one might say, or Lais loved by many men.
I pulled her slip away –not harming its thinness much;
yet she still struggled to be covered by that slip.
While she would struggle so, it was as if she could not win,
yielding, she was effortlessly conquered.
When she stood before my eyes, the clothing set aside,
there was never a flaw in all her body.
What shoulders, what arms, I saw and touched!
Breasts formed as if they were made for pressing!
How flat the belly beneath the slender waist!
What flanks, what form! What young thighs!
Why recall each aspect? I saw nothing lacking praise
and I hugged her naked body against mine.
Who doesn't know the story? Weary we both rested.
May such afternoons often come for me!

Book I Elegy VI: The Doorkeeper

Doorkeeper – shameful! – bound by a harsh chain,
open that door with the hinge that's hard to move!
What I ask is nothing – make an entrance, a little crack
half-open, that a body gets through sideways.
Love has thinned my body with such long usage,
and given me limbs that lose weight.
He'll show you how to go softly past watchful sentries:
he directs your inoffensive feet.
Now once I was scared of the night and vain phantoms:
I was amazed at anyone who went out in the dark.
Cupid laughed, so I heard, and his tender mother,
and said lightly, 'You too can become brave.'
Without delay, love came – I don't fear clutching hands
in my fate, or the flitting shadows of night.
You, so slow, you I fear: you're the one to flatter:
you keep the bolt that can finish me off.
Look – you can see, then, undo the lock –
the doorway's wet with my tears!
Surely, when you stood quivering, stripped for flogging,
I spoke words to your mistress on your behalf.
So isn't the favour that you once valued – oh what a crime!
- not worth something of equal value to me, now?
Repay the service in kind! You'll easily get what you want.
The night is passing: throw open the door!
Open! Then, I say, you'll be eased of your long bondage,
and you won't drink slave's water for ever!
Like iron you listen uselessly to my prayers, doorkeeper,
the door's barred solidly with tough wood.
Barred gates are of use to a city under siege:
what arms do you fear in the midst of peace?
What will you do to your enemies, who shut out lovers so?
The night's passing: throw open the door!
I don't come accompanied by armies and weapons:
I was alone till cruel Love arrived.
I couldn't dismiss him even if I wanted:
I'd first have to separate myself from my limbs.
So Love, and a modicum of wine going round in my head,

is here with me, dew-drenched hair with a wreath askew.
Who's afraid of an army like this? Who isn't open to them?
The night is passing: throw open the door!
You're slow: or asleep, do lovers who curse you,
throw words to the winds, lost to your ears?
But, I remember, when I wanted to hide from you,
you kept good vigil under the midnight stars.
Perhaps a little friend stays with you now –
alas, your fate is better than mine!
As long as it's so, pass your harsh chains to me!
The night is passing: throw open the door!
Am I wrong, or didn't the door resound with turning hinges,
giving out the strident noise of panels thrown back?
I am wrong – the entrance was struck by an airy blast.
Ah me, how the far-off breeze carries my hopes!
Boreas, if the memory of raped Orithyia, is enough,
come here and beat with your gale on these deaf posts!
All the city's silent, and wet with glassy dewfall
the night is passing: throw open the door!
Or I'm ready now myself with the sword and fire
that I hold, to attack this proud house.
Night and desire and wine don't urge moderation:
She quenches shame, Bacchus and Love the fear.
I've tried it all: neither threats nor prayers
move you, harder than your doors themselves.
It doesn't suit you, guarding lovely girls' thresholds,
you're worthy of some securer prison.
Soon Lucifer moves day's frosted axles,
and the birds rouse poor wretches to their work.
But you, garland removed from an unhappy brow,
lie there, all night, on the cruel threshold!
To my mistress, when she sees you thrown there at dawn,
you'll bear witness of so many evil hours consumed.
Farewell, anyway, and know your duty's over:
it's no disgrace to admit lovers slowly, so goodbye!
You too, cruel doorposts with an inflexible threshold
and the tough wood of fellow-slaves, farewell, you doors!

Book I Elegy VII: The Assault

If there's a friend here, tie my hands –
they merit chains – while my fury wanes!
Just now my fury thoughtlessly struck my girl:
my darling's weeping, wounded by my mad hands.
Then I could have done violence to my dear parents
or savagely taken a scourge to the sacred gods!
Well? Didn't Lord Ajax of the seven-layered shield
lay out the sheep he caught all over the fields,
and didn't lawless Orestes, avenging his father
on his mother, dare to call up a spear for the secret Sisters?
So can't I tear at her done-up hair?
or unravel the girl's flying locks?
She was lovely like that. I'd say like Schoeny's daughter,
Atalanta, hunting game in Maenalian hills:
or like Ariadne weeping as the south wind
blew away perjured promises and Theseus's sails:
or who but Cassandra with sacred ribbons in her hair,
on the ground, in your temple, chaste Minerva.
Who'll not say 'madman, barbarian!' to me?
She said nothing: her mouth slackened by trembling fear.
But her silent face still showed reproof:
she accused me with speechless mouth, in tears.
I'd sooner have wished my arms to fall from my body:
easier to have lost a part of myself.
I had a madman's strength to my cost
and the force of my punishment was in it.
What are you to me, wicked and murderous tools?
Submit to the binding fetters, sacrilegious hands!
If I'd struck the least citizen of the Roman masses,
I'd be punished – had I any more right to hit her?
Tydeus, the wretch, left behind the worst example.
He was the first to strike a goddess – then me!
And he did less harm. I hurt what I professed
to love: Tydeus was cruel to the enemy.
Go, now, Conqueror, devise a great triumph,
wreath your hair with laurel, and give thanks to Jove,
all the surging crowd, following your chariot,

calling 'Bravo! The great man who conquered a girl!'
She'll go ahead, sad dishevelled captive,
all pale, except for her wounded cheeks.
Lips bruised black would have been more apt
and love-bites marking her neck.
Lastly, if I had to act like a swollen torrent,
and my blind anger make her my prey,
wouldn't it have been enough to shout at the frightened girl,
or thunder away with harsh threats,
or shamefully tear her tunic from throat to waist?
- Only her waistband would have felt my strength.
Instead I held her by the hair I grabbed at her brow
marked those delicate cheeks with cruel nails.
She stood there, stupefied, with pale and bleeding face,
as if cut from everlasting Parian marble.
I saw her terrified body, her limbs trembling –
like a breeze blowing through the poplar leaves,
or a soft west wind troubling the slender reeds,
or the tips of the waves touched by a warm southerly:
at length, the brimming tears flowed down her face,
as water runs from the melting snow.
Then for the first time I began to realise her hurt –
the tears I had made her shed were my blood.
Three times I tried to kneel at her feet in supplication:
three times she pushed away those repulsive hands.
Well, don't hesitate, girl – revenge will lessen the grief –
go at my face with your nails straightaway.
don't spare my hair or my eyes:
Anger adds what you will to weak hands:
don't let so much as one sad sign of my wickedness remain,
put your hair back in place like it was before!

Book I Elegy VIII: The Procureess

There's a certain – Listen! Anyone who wants to know
of a procureess! – there's a certain old woman called Dipsas.
She gets her name from the thing – she never saw Dawn with her
rosy horses, mother of dark Memnon, while sober.
She's learnt the Magi's tricks and Circe's Aaeon charms
and her art can make rivers flow back to their source:
She knows what herbs to use, how to whirl the bullroarer
and the value of the slime from a mare on heat.
When she wants, she can make cloud gather in the sky:
when she wants, she brightens the day with a full sun.
If you can believe it, I've seen the stars drip blood:
blood-red was the very face of the Moon.
I suspect she changes, at will, in the shadows of night
and her old woman's body grow feathers.
I suspect it, and that's the rumour. Her eyes shine too
with double pupils, and twin lights come from the orbs.
She calls up ancient ancestors, ghosts from the grave
and with long-winded charms splits solid earth.
She herself set out to desecrate our chaste bed:
nor did she lack an eloquent tongue for doing harm.
Chance made me witness to her speech: her instructions
went just like this – the double doors hid me:
'You know, the other day, light of my life, you pleased
the rich young man? He's always here, hangs on your look.
And why shouldn't he? With beauty second to none:
alas, you lack the training worthy of your body.
I wish you to be as happy as you're lovely –
I'll not be poor if you get rich.
That opposing planet Mars was doing you harm.
Mars transited: now Venus is right for you.
Her move benefits you, come and see! A rich lover
desires you: he's got attentions for you, those you lack.
he's even handsome too, a match for you:
if he didn't want to win you, Venus has fixed it.'
Someone blushed. 'True, modesty suits a pale face,
and good if you simulate it: reality often harms us.
It's well to keep your eyes looking down at your lap,

the response should be according to what he brings.
Perhaps under Tatius's rule the unwashed Sabine women
were unwilling to handle several men:
but now Mars exerts his mind on foreign warfare
and Venus rules in Aeneas's city.
Lovely girls play: she's chaste, whom nobody asks –
she asks herself, if naivety doesn't prevent her.
Look at those too that walk round with serious faces:
lots of crimes arise behind those frowns.
Penelope tested the young mens' strength with the bow:
it was a bow of horn that proved the best.
Secretly gliding, the circling years deceive us
and, quickly sliding, the river's waters go by.
Bronze gleams with use, a nice dress looks to be worn,
a house that's left in a sorry state ages –
Beauty, unless you allow it, withers without exercise.
Just one or two occasions are not enough.
It's better and not so invidious to take from many.
The wolf eats best that preys on the whole flock.
Look, what does that poet of yours give you
but new verses? Choose from a thousand lovers.
Look at the god of poets himself with a golden robe,
he performs on the strings of a gilded lyre.
He who gives should be greater for you than Homer:
believe me, giving is the clever thing.
And don't despise a slave who's bought his freedom:
chalked feet from the market-place are no crime.
And don't let ancestral portraits round the atrium fool you.
Impoverished lover, remove yourself, and your fathers too!
The one, who's handsome, who, gift-less, asks for a night,
ask him in front of his lover, what he'll give!
Don't ask a great reward, while you spread your net,
lest they fly: once captive oppress them with your law!
No harm in pretending love: but, if he thinks himself loved,
beware lest he sets the price of your love at nothing!
Often deny him nights. Pretend you've a headache,
or it's the days of Isis, to give him a reason.
Receive him again soon, don't let him get used to suffering,
lest love slacken through often being repulsed.
Let your door be deaf to prayers: welcome the giver:

let the one you receive hear the words of those outside:
and, as if you were hurt first, sometimes in anger hurt him –
the blame vanishes when you repay with blame.
But never spend too long a time being angry:
often an angry manner makes for quarrels.
Rather learn to cry with forced tears,
and make him, or yourself, end with wet cheeks:
and if you're cheating don't let perjury scare you –
Venus ensures the gods are deaf to her games.
A page or sometimes a clever maid should appear,
who has learned what gifts are fitting for you:
and let them ask little for themselves – if they often ask,
little stalks soon grow to a vast heap.
Your sister and mother and nurse can all fleece a lover:
booty can be gathered quickly by many hands.
When you're lacking in reasons for asking gifts,
swear it's your birthday, and here's the cake!
Beware of letting him love securely, rival-free:
love never lasts if you take away competition.
Let him see signs of activity in your bed,
and show lascivious marks on your bruised neck.
Above all show him the gifts others have given.
If no one's given, get some from the Via Sacra.
When you've taken a lot, so he shouldn't seem to give all,
ask him to oblige with a loan, you'll never repay!
Please him with your tongue and hide your feelings –
hurt him with flattery: foul poison hides under sweet honey.
I offer you all this learning from long experience,
don't let the winds and the breeze blow my words away,
living, you'll often say good things of me, and often pray,
that my bones rest softly after I'm dead.'
Her voice was running on, when my shadow betrayed me,
since my hands could scarcely contain themselves,
ready to tear at those sparse white locks, and eyes
full of drunken tears, and wrinkled cheeks.
May the gods grant her an old age without roof or wealth,
and endless winters and perpetual thirst!

Book I Elegy IX: Love is War

Every lover's in arms, and Cupid holds the fort:
Atticus, believe me, every lover's in arms.
The age that's good for war, is also right for love.
An old soldier's a disgrace, and an old lover.
That spirit a commander looks for in a brave army,
a lovely girl looks for in a love partner.
Both keep watch: both sleep on the ground,
one serves at his lady's entrance, the other his general's.
A long road's a soldier's task: but send the girl off,
and a restless lover will follow her to the end.
He'll go against mountains and bend into stormy rivers,
he'll push his way through swollen snowdrifts,
he'll not rely on excuses, like angry northerlies,
or waiting for suitable stars to take to the waves.
Who but a soldier or lover could endure
cold nights or dense snow mixed with rain?
One's sent out to spy on attacking forces:
the other keeps eye on his rival, his enemy.
This one lays siege to strong cities, that one his harsh friend's
entrance: one breaks down gates, the other doors.
Often it helps to attack a sleeping enemy,
and strike the unarmed mass with armed hand.
That's how Rhesus and his fierce Thracians were killed
and forfeited the leader's captured mares.
Lovers, for sure, will make use of a husband's sleep
and employ their arms while the enemy slumbers.
Getting past watchman's hands, and enemy sentinels
is work for soldiers and wretched lovers.
Mars is chancy, Venus uncertain: the fallen can rise again,
while those you think could never be thrown are beaten.
So if you've called all lovers idlers, forget it.
Love is all experience and ability.
Great Achilles burns for stolen Briseis –
while you can Trojans, smash the Argive wall!
Hector went into battle from Andromache's arms,
it was the wife who placed the helmet on his head.
The great lord Atrides, they say, seeing Cassandra

that Trojan Maenad, was enraptured by her flowing hair.
Mars too, surprised, felt the blacksmith's chain mesh:
there was never a greater scandal in heaven.
I myself was lazy and born to idle leisure:
bed and shade both softened my mind.
Love for a lovely girl soon drove the idler
and ordered him off to earn his pay in camp.
Now see me, active and fighting nocturnal wars.
If you don't want to be idle, fall in love!

Book I Elegy X: The Poet's Gift

Like the woman carried by the ships from Eurotas
to Troy, the cause of war between two husbands:
like Leda to whom the adulterous god made love,
craftily hidden, disguised in white plumage:
like Amymome wandering through arid fields,
with a water-pot on top of her head –
such were you: I feared eagles and bulls, for you,
and whatever else great Jupiter might make love as.
Now all fear's gone, my mind is healed of error,
now your beauty can't captivate my eyes.
Why am I changed, you ask? Because you want gifts.
That's the cause that stops you from pleasing me.
Once you were innocent, I loved you body and soul:
now your beauty's flawed by this defect of mind.
Love is a child and naked: without the shabbiness of age
and without clothing, so he's all openness.
Why tell Venus's son to sell himself for cash?
Where can he keep cash, he's got no clothes!
Neither Venus nor Venus's son carry arms –
unwarlike gods don't merit soldier's pay.
Even the whore who's buyable for money,
and seeks alas to command wealth with her body:
nevertheless curses a grasping pimp's orders,
and is forced to do, what you do by choice.
Think about unreasoning creatures for example:
it's a disgrace, if the beasts are better natured than you.
Mares don't ask gifts of stallions, cows of bulls:
rams don't capture pleasing ewes with gifts.
Only a woman delights in taking spoils from her mate,
only she hires out her nights, comes for a price,
and sells what this one demands, what that one seeks,
or gives it as a gift, to please herself.
When making love pleases both partners alike,
why should she sell and the other buy?
When a man and a woman perform a joint act
why should the pleasure hurt me and profit you?
It's wrong for witnesses to perjure themselves for gain,
it's wrong to open the purse of the chosen judges.

It's a disgrace to defend the accused with a bought tongue:
a disgraceful court makes itself wealthy:
it's wrong to swell family wealth with the bed's proceeds,
or prostitute your good looks for money.
un-purchased, things deserve our thanks, on merit:
no thanks for the evil of a bought bed.
The buyer loosens all bonds: freed by payment
he no longer remains a debtor in your service.
Beware, you beauties, bargaining gifts for a night:
you'll have no good outcome from sordid presents.
Sabine bracelets weren't worth so much
when weapons pressed down on the sacred virgin's head:
and Eriphyle died, her son's sword through her body,
a necklace the reason for her punishment.
Still there's nothing unworthy in asking gifts of the rich:
those who can give have presents demanded of them.
Pick your grapes from the most loaded vines:
Alcinous's fruitful orchard offers its apples!
Count on a poor man for duty, loyalty, devotion:
what a man has, let him gather it all for his lady.
My gift then's to celebrate worthy girls in my song:
those that I wish, are made famous by my art.
dresses crumble, gold and gems are worn down:
but the tribute of song brings eternal fame.
It's not giving, it's being asked for a gift I loathe and scorn:
Stop wanting what I refuse to supply, and I'll give!

Book I Elegy XI: His Note to Her

Skilled at gathering unruly hair and setting it in place
Nape's not just an ordinary lady's maid,
she's known to be useful in the secret service
of night: clever at carrying messages between us:
often exhorting a hesitant Corinna to come:
often faithfully labouring to find things out for me –
here take these wax tablets by hand to my lady
and be sure to avoid obstructions and delay!
There's no stony vein or harsh metal in your breast,
older than the others, there's no foolishness in you.
It's easy to believe that you've felt Cupid's arrows –
see the traces of your battles in me!
If she asks how I am, say I live in hope at night:
you'll carry the rest in your hand, flattering waxen words.
While I speak, time flies. Give her them when she's free,
Make sure though that she reads them straight away.
Watch her eyes and brow as she chews them over:
and know that a silent face may show the future.
When she's read it I need a long reply, and no delay:
I hate it when the clear wax is mostly empty.
Let her squeeze the lines in ranks, and hold my eyes
with letters that graze the edges of the margins.
Why should she weary her fingers holding a pen?
One word can take up the whole tablet: 'Come!'
I won't hesitate to wreath the victorious tablets with laurel
and set them up in the centre of Venus's temple.
I'll write: 'Naso dedicates these loyal servants to Venus,
these tablets that till now were worthless maple-wood.'

Book I Elegy XII: Her Reply

Weep for my misfortune – the miserable tablets returned
with a wretched message saying: ‘Can’t manage today.’
Omens mean something. Just now when she wished to leave
Nape stopped when she stubbed her toe on the threshold.
Remember next time you’re sent out, crossing the doorsill,
pick your feet up, carefully and soberly!
Away with these surly tablets of funereal wood,
and you, wax, filled with your negative message! –
Extracted I bet from honey of long hemlock flowers
made by the infamous Corsican bees.
Just as if you’d blushed, steeped in deep dye –
that colour indeed was truly bloody.
Useless wood, I’ll throw you out at the crossroads,
so the weight of a passing wheel can smash you!
Even the man who carved you for use, from the tree,
I’m convinced the man had impure hands.
That tree held some wretch hung by the neck,
it offered itself as dread executioner’s crosses:
it gave vile shade to the screeching owls,
and carried their eggs and vultures in its branches.
Madman, did I give these to my lady, trusting
my love to them, to carry my gentle words?
This wax is more fitted to garrulous words of bail,
to be read aloud by some hard mouthed attorney:
or better to throw these tablets among the accounts,
where a miser goes weeping for his lost wealth.
So I judge you, two-faced things by nature.
The number itself is in no way auspicious.
How to curse you, in anger, other than crumbling age
might rot you, and whiten your wax in a filthy place?

Book I Elegy XIII: The Dawn

Now she rises over the ocean, come from her aged husband,
the golden girl, who brings day to the frozen sky.
‘Why hurry, Aurora? Wait! – so the bird, Memnon’s shade,
can perform the annual sacrificial rite!
Now I delight to lie in my girl’s soft arms:
now she’s so sweetly joined to my side.
now sleep’s still easy, and the air is cool,
and the bird sings in full flow from a clear throat.
Why hurry, unwelcome to men, unwelcome to girls?
Restrain those dewy reins with rosy fingers!
Before you rise the sailor more easily watches for his stars
and wanders less unknowingly in the deep:
the traveller, however weary, rises at your coming,
and the fierce soldier takes his weapon in hand.
You first see the farmer burdened with his hoe in the field:
you first call the tardy oxen to couple beneath the yoke.
You rob boys of sleep and send them to their masters,
and submit the tender ones to the lash of a savage hand.
You send the heedless guarantor before that court,
where a single word carries a heavy price.
No eloquence for you from pleaders and lawyers,
you force them both to rise to new litigation.
You, when the labours of women might cease,
call back the spinner’s hand to her duty.
I could endure it all – but for girls to rise early,
who’d bring that about but one who’s not a girl?
The number of times I’ve begged night not to yield to you,
and the circling stars not to flee before your face!
The number of times I’ve begged a storm to crack your axle
or your wayward horses to fall through thick cloud!
What, did she never burn for Cephalus?
Does she think that wickedness is unknown?
Hostile one, why hurry? Because your son is black
is that the colour of your maternal heart?
I wish Tithonus would tell the truth about you:
there’d be no more disgraceful tale in heaven.
Now you flee him, who’s so much older than you,

early in mounting the chariot, hateful to the old man.
But if you were leaving Cephalus, caught in your arms,
you'd cry out: "Run slow, O horses of the night!"
Why should I be punished in love, if your husband
faints with age? Did you marry the old man on my advice?
Look what a sleep the Moon allowed her lover! –
And she's not second to you in beauty.
The father of the gods himself, so as not to see you so often,
joined two nights together, in his longing.'
I'd ended the brawl. You'll know I'd dared: she blushed –
but still the day rose as usual, no more slowly!

Book I Elegy XIV: Her Hair

I said: 'Stop dyeing your hair!'
Now you've no hair left to colour.
Since it was so luxuriant, why not have let it be?
It stretched right down, and touched your sides.
Why? - If it was so fine, and you were scared to dress it.
It was like a coloured veil of Chinese silk,
or the slender thread spun by a spider,
when she ties her fine work to some deserted rafter.
It wasn't black: it wasn't golden, however,
not quite either, a colour mixed from both –
like a tall cedar, stripped of its bark,
in a dewy valley of mountainous Ida.
Add that it was docile, and fit for a hundred styles,
and was never a cause of grief to you.
No pin or tooth of a comb ever broke it.
The maid doing your hair kept her skin whole:
often in front of my eyes, no, never a pin
tore your maid's arm with a wound.
Often, with your hair still uncombed
you lay reclining on a bed of purple.
But even neglected like that it was lovely, like a weary Thracian
Maenad's, lying heedless on the emerald grass.
Still, the hairs were fine, like fleece,
alas, what suffering they had to bear!
How they offered themselves patiently to the steel and fire,
as their waves were twisted and tied in ringlets!
I cried: 'That's wicked, wicked to scorch your hair!
It's fine as it is: go carefully with the steel!
Take the pressure away! No one ought to burn it:
your hair itself teaches others how to pin theirs.'
Fear for the lovely hair – that Apollo or Bacchus
would wish to have on their heads!
I might have gathered it, like naked Venus's,
painted, she holding it in her drenched hand.
Why search your neat hair for what's vilely lost?
Silly girl why hold the mirror sadly in your hand?
It's no use contriving to stare at yourself:
you need to forget about yourself, to please.

No mistress of magic herbs has wounded you,
no Thessalian witch soaked you in treacherous water:
no illness's power has touched you – perish the thought! –
No evil tongue has thinned your dense hair.
Your hand did it and you're paying for your crime:
Now you'll send for the hair of German prisoners:
you'll be safe, with the gift of conquered peoples.
O how often you'll blush when someone praises your hair,
and say: 'Now I'm counting the cost of buying it,
I don't know if they praise the Sygambri instead of me.
It's fame will be remembered with mine.'
Alas! She scarcely contains her tears and with her hand
hides her delicate cheeks painted with blushes.
She holds her former hair in her lap, and stares at it,
ah me, a tribute not fitting for that place!
Calm yourself, doing your face! The harm's reparable.
Shortly your natural hair will be seen again.

Book I Elegy XV: His Immortality

Gnawing Envy, why reproach me with an indolent life:
and call the work of my genius idle song?
Is it that I don't follow the custom of the country,
seek the dusty reward of army life while I'm young?
That I don't study wordy laws,
or prostitute my voice in the forum?
The work you seek is mortal. I seek eternal fame,
to be sung throughout the whole world forever.
Homer will live, while Ida and Tenedos stand,
while Simois still runs swiftly to the sea:
Hesiod, as well, while the vintage ripens,
while the crops fall to the curving blade.
Callimachus will always be sung throughout the world:
not because of his imagination, but his art.
The tragedies of Sophocles will never be lost:
nor Aratus as long as there's a sun and moon:
While devious slaves, stern fathers, cruel pimps,
and enticing whores live, so will Menander:
Artless Ennius, and brave-voiced Accius
have names that no time will erase.
What age will not know Varro's tale of the first ship,
and Jason leading the quest for the Golden Fleece?
Then, the works of sublime Lucretius will endure,
while there's a day left till the world's ruin.
Virgil's pastorals, and the Aeneid will be read,
while Rome triumphs over the world:
While Cupid's weapons are still the torch and arrows,
they'll speak your measures, elegant Tibullus:
Gallus will be renowned in the west, Gallus in the east,
and Lycoris will be famous with her Gallus.
So, while granite, while the unyielding ploughshare
perish with the years, poetry will not die.
Leaders and countries yield to the triumphs of song,
and the lavish waters of gold-bearing Tagus yield!
Let the masses gaze at trash: let golden-haired Apollo
offer me a brimming cup of Castalian waters,
and I'll wear a wreath of myrtle, that hates the cold,

and be read by many an anxious lover!
Envy feeds on the living: it's quiet after death,
while everyone who's dead gets their due honours.
So even when I'm given to the final flames,
I'll live, and the better part of me will survive.

End of Book I

Book II Elegy I: The Readership He Desires

I, that poet Naso, born by Pelignian waters,
also composed these, my naughtinesses.
Here too Love commands – go far, stay far, you puritans!
You're not fit audience for the erotic mode.
Let the virgin who's not frigid, who's betrothed, read me,
and the inexperienced boy unused to the touch of love:
and let some other youth, now I'm wounded by the bow,
acknowledge the shared sign of his passion,
and gazing long at it say: 'what betrayal has he learnt,
this poet, that he's written about my misfortunes?'
I remember, I dared to speak about celestial war
and hundred-handed Gyas – that was enough effrontery –
with Earth herself's fell vengeance, and Ossa
and steep Pelion piled on high Olympus.
And I had Jupiter, with thunder and lightning, in hand,
the things he throws with such effect through the sky –
my lover closed the door! I dropped Jove and the lightning:
my genius let fall Jupiter himself.
Jupiter, forgive me! Your weapons were no help:
her entrance was even closed to your mightier bolt.
I resumed my weapons, light flattering elegies:
gentle words can soften harsh doors.
Songs can draw down the blood-red moon,
and call the sun's white stallions from their journey:
Serpents' jaws are forced apart by song,
and fountains flow backwards to their source.
Doors yield to song, and the bolt rammed home,
however hard it is, is conquered at last by charms.
What does it profit me to sing of swift Achilles?
what use to me one or the other Atrides,
whoever that was who wasted years on war and wandering,
or sad Hector dragged behind the Thessalian horses.
but her face often praised, the beautiful girl herself
comes for the poet, the reward for song.
A great prize won! Bright heroic names farewell:
your rewards are not adequate for me!

Songs bring the beautiful girls to my shining face,
songs that Love dictates to me!

Book II Elegy II: Bagoas the Servant

While I'm passing a brief, appropriate, moment with you,
Bagoas, how anxious your mistress is at being watched!
I saw the girl yesterday in the light, walking there
where the portico displays the line of Danaids.
Straightaway, since she pleased me, I sent her a proposition.
She wrote back nervously: 'It's not allowed!'
And, querying why it wasn't, I got the reply
that your excessive annoying care is the girl's trouble.
O watchman, believe me, if you're wise, you'll desist
from incurring hatred: we wish those we fear would vanish.
Her husband's also not wise: why labour to watch
something when nothing's lost if you don't?
But it humours the madman to think that his love
who delights many, is in fact chaste:
let your girl be given liberty in secret,
what you give her, she'll repay you.
You choose to know – then the lady's in debt to the servant:
you're afraid to know – it's alright to dissimulate.
She reads a note by herself – think that her mother sent it!
Some unknown comes – he'll soon become known to you.
She pretends to go to see a friend who isn't ill,
it's fine! Your judgement is she's ill.
If she's late, don't weary yourself waiting forever,
you can snore with your head between your knees.
Don't ask what happens in the temple of linen-clad Isis,
and don't be worried by the theatre's arch!
One in the know constantly takes away gains he gathers –
equally how much less is the labour of the silent?
He pleases and lives in the house and doesn't feel the lash:
he's powerful – the others lie there a squalid crowd.
Concoct idle things to hide true motivations:
and what satisfies her will satisfy them both.
While her husband pulls a face and frowns,
the lovely woman does what she'd like to do.
Still now and then she needs to pick a quarrel with you too,
and simulate tears and call you a scoundrel.
You bring a charge against her, that she can wholly explain,
and with a false accusation you'll hide the truth.

So your esteem and your savings grow.
Do this and you'll be free in no time at all.
You see the informers with chains around their necks?
There's a squalid prison for disloyal hearts.
His garrulous tongue left Tantalus searching
for water amongst the waters and fruit that fled.
Juno's watchman guarded Io too well,
and died before his time: while she's a goddess!
I've seen fetters worn on livid legs,
from a husband's being made to learn of un-chastity.
The crime deserved no less. Bad tongues are doubly evil:
the husband grieves, the girl's reputation is harmed.
Believe me, crimes like this don't please a husband,
they're no help to you, even if he listens.
If he's indifferent, you speak your words to heedless ears:
if he's in love, your officiousness will sadden him.
Most crime however obvious is unproven:
his judgement always comes to favour her.
Though he sees it himself, he'll believe her denials
and condemn his own eyesight, and fool himself.
Seeing the woman's tears, he'll weep himself,
and say: 'Punish that informer!'
Why start an unequal fight? Beaten, you'll be lashed,
and she'll be sitting on the judge's lap.
We're not taking to crime, we're not uniting to mix
poisons, no drawn dagger gleams in my hand.
We're looking for some safe love-making thanks to you.
What could be more innocuous than our prayers?

Book II Elegy III: The Eunuch

Ah me, that you, neither man nor woman, serve the lady
you who can't know the mutual delights of Venus!
Whoever first cut off a boy's genitals, that one,
who made the wound, should suffer it himself.
You'd be more gently compliant, facilitate my requests,
if you'd ever glowed with love before.
You weren't born to ride a horse, or use heavy weapons:
a warlike spear would not be fitting in your hand.
Let men handle that: you can forget manly hopes.
your camp is with your lady.
Work your service there, you'll benefit from her thanks:
What use would you be if you didn't have her?
She's lovely, the right age for play:
a disgrace to waste that beauty through sheer neglect.
She could have deceived you, however irksome you are:
Two, who want to, won't fail to achieve it.
Still as it was fitting to try a request, so I'm asking,
while you've a good chance of gaining a reward.

Book II Elegy IV: His Susceptibility

I wouldn't dare defend my suspect morals
or falsely move to protect my vices.
I confess – if it's any use to confess a sin:
I acknowledge the foolish guilt now in myself.
I hate to desire, but can't not be what I hate:
ah, what a painful burden to throw off what you love!
I lack all power and authority to control myself:
carried away like a boat, swept swiftly through the water.
It's not one kind of beauty that excites my desires –
there's a hundred reasons why I'm always in love.
If it's one with modest eyes cast on the ground,
I burn, and her shyness sets a trap for me:
or if it's one who's bold, I'm taken, sophisticated,
giving hope of being sweetly nimble in bed.
If she looks severe, and strict as a Sabine,
I think she wants it, but hides it, being noble.
If you're learned, you please me with rare arts:
if you're naive, your innocence pleases.
Then there's the girl who says that Callimachus's songs
are rough beside mine – she who I please soon pleases me.
Even she who castigates me and my poems –
I long to endure her critical thighs.
She walks sweetly – I like the motion: another's hard –
but she could be sweeter at a man's touch.
This one who sings divinely and smoothly alters pitch,
I want to give stolen kisses as she sings:
She who strikes plaintive chords with practised fingers –
who could not love such knowledgeable hands?
She who pleases with her postures, and waves her arms
in rhythm, and twists her tender body with sweet art? –
Be silent about me, who's enticed by everything,
but put chaste Hippolytus by her, and he'd be Priapus!
You, who are so tall, are like the ancient heroines
and can lie the full length of the bed.
This one's small size is manageable. I'm ruined by both:
tall and short agree with my desire.
She's not cultured – come, she could take up culture:

she's well-equipped - she can display her gifts herself.
Fair ones capture me: I'm captured by golden girls,
but Venus is still pleasing when darkly coloured.
If dark tresses hang on a snowy neck,
then Leda was famed for her black hair:
If they're golden, Aurora's saffron hair pleases.
My desire adapts itself to all the stories:
Young girls entice me: older ones move me:
she pleases with her body's looks, she with its form.
In short, whichever girls one might approve of in the city,
my desire has ambitions on them all.

Book II Elegy V: Her Kisses

No love is worth this – away, Cupid’s quiver! –
so that death has often been my greatest wish.
Death is my wish, when I recall your deceptions,
O girl born to be my eternal misfortune!
It wasn’t a half-erased tablet that laid bare your acts,
no furtive gifts gave away your crime.
Oh I wish if I were to argue my case I couldn’t win it!
Woe is me! Why’s my story so good?
Happy the man who can strongly defend what he loves,
whose little friend can say ‘I didn’t do it!’
He’s harsh and exercises his grief too much
who seeks the victor’s palm drenched in blood.
I saw your crime myself you wretch, sober,
when you thought I was asleep with wine.
I saw the many messages from those flickering eyebrows:
a good part of your speech was in your nods.
Your eyes never silent, nor letters under your fingers,
writing on the table with your wine.
Effecting secret messages, that go unseen,
the words prescribed meaning definite things.
And then the crowd of guests had left the table:
a few boys there left laid out together.
Then I truly saw her locked in sinful kisses –
tongues were entwined, that was clear to me –
not like a sister greeting her sober brother,
but an eager lover greeting his sweet friend:
It’s not credible that Phoebus would kiss Diana that way,
but Mars often does that with his Venus.
‘What are you up to?’ I cried, ‘spreading my joys around?
I claim jurisdiction over my girl!
What’s yours is shared with me, what’s mine with you –
Why has some third come into our property?’
I said this with a sorrowful tongue:
and a blush of shame came to her guilty face,
as the sky is tinged red by Tithonus’s bride,
or like a young girl seeing her betrothed:
like roses glowing bright among the lilies,

or when the Moon labours with charmed horses,
or as Lydian women stain oriental ivory
so that it's not yellowed by the years.
That was the colour of her face or something like it,
and she had never looked more beautiful.
She looked at the ground – it became her to look down:
Sadness was in her face – sadness was becoming.
It was as if I wanted to tear her hair, all done up as it was,
and tear her tender cheeks, with anger, in my passion –
But I saw her beauty, and the strength of my arm abated:
the girl's the weapon of her own defence.
I who was savage a moment ago, begged her as a suppliant
to give me no worse a set of kisses.
She laughed, and gave them with true spirit – such as can
counter the triple-forked bolt of angry Jove:
I was tormented, unhappy, lest that other felt such joy,
and I wished their quality wasn't as good as it was.
Also these were so much better, where had she learnt?
And something new seemed to be added to them.
What pleases too much is bad, as when your whole tongue
is admitted by my lips, and mine by yours.
Nor do I grieve at that alone – I don't just lament
at mouths being so joined, I lament what else is joined too:
She could have been taught nowhere but in bed.
I don't know which grand master has his reward.

Book II Elegy VI: The Death of Corinna's Pet Parrot

Parrot, the mimic, the winged one from India's Orient,
is dead – Go, birds, in a flock and follow him to the grave!
Go, pious feathered ones, beat your breasts with your wings
and mark your delicate cheeks with hard talons:
tear out your shaggy plumage, instead of hair, in mourning:
sound out your songs with long piping!
Philomela, mourning the crime of the Thracian tyrant,
the years of your mourning are complete:
divert your lament to the death of a rare bird –
Itys is a great but ancient reason for grief.
All who balance in flight in the flowing air,
and you, above others, his friend the turtle-dove, grieve!
All your lives you were in perfect concord,
and held firm in your faithfulness to the end.
What the youth from Phocis was to Orestes of Argos,
while she could be, Parrot, turtle-dove was to you.
What worth now your loyalty, your rare form and colour,
the clever way you altered the sound of your voice,
what joy in the pleasure given you by our mistress? –
Unhappy one, glory of birds, you're certainly dead!
You could dim emeralds matched to your fragile feathers,
wearing a beak dyed scarlet spotted with saffron.
No bird on earth could better copy a voice –
or reply so well with words in a lisping tone!
You were snatched by Envy – you who never made war:
you were garrulous and a lover of gentle peace.
Behold, quails live fighting amongst themselves:
perhaps that's why they frequently reach old age.
Your food was little, compared with your love of talking
you could never free your beak much for eating.
Nuts were his diet, and poppy-seed made him sleep,
and he drove away thirst with simple draughts of water.
Gluttonous vultures may live and kites, tracing spirals
in air, and jackdaws, informants of rain to come:
and the raven detested by armed Minerva lives too –
he whose strength can last out nine generations:
but that loquacious mimic of the human voice,

Parrot, the gift from the end of the earth, is dead!
The best are always taken first by greedy hands:
the worse make up a full span of years.
Thersites saw Protesilaus's sad funeral,
and Hector was ashes while his brothers lived.
Why recall the pious prayers of my frightened girl for you –
prayers that a stormy south wind blew out to sea?
The seventh dawn came with nothing there beyond,
and Fate held an empty spool of thread for you.
Yet still the words from his listless beak astonished:
dying his tongue cried: 'Corinna, farewell!'
A grove of dark holm oaks leafs beneath an Elysian slope,
the damp earth green with everlasting grass.
If you can believe it, they say there's a place there
for pious birds, from which ominous ones are barred.
There innocuous swans browse far and wide
and the phoenix lives there, unique immortal bird:
There Juno's peacock displays his tail-feathers,
and the dove lovingly bills and coos.
Parrot gaining a place among those trees
translates the pious birds in his own words.
A tumulus holds his bones – a tumulus fitting his size –
whose little stone carries lines appropriate for him:
'His grave holds one who pleased his mistress:
his speech to me was cleverer than other birds'.

Book II Elegy VII: Her Jealousy

So I'm always to be accused of some new crime?
Even if I win I hate fighting my case so often.
If I glance up at the heights of the marbled theatre,
you pick someone out, so you can choose to be pained:
If some lovely girl looks at my expressionless face,
secret messages are deduced from its lack of expression.
If I praise someone, you try to tear my hair out:
if I damn her, you think I'm covering up a crime.
If my colour's good, I'm also cold towards you,
if pale, pronounced to be dying for another.
And I wish I had some guilty secret!
Those who merit punishment take it calmly:
but you accuse me rashly and, groundlessly believe it all,
you stop your own anger carrying weight.
Look, pity the long-eared ass's fate,
continually beaten to tame him, he goes slow!
Behold a new crime! With that clever dresser Cypassis,
I'm reproached for defiling the bed of our mistress.
Think better of me than that, if I wronged you in passion,
than to joy in a common girl with a contemptible fate!
What free man would want to take up with a slave,
and embrace the scars on her whipped back?
Added to which she takes pains to dress your hair,
and a well-taught servant is dear to you –
Of course, I'd beg it of a maid so faithful to you!
What! So she could tell you she'd spurned my offer?
I swear by Venus, and the bow of her winged boy,
I won't allow myself to be accused of crime!

Book II Elegy VIII: Cypassis!

Cypassis, expert at setting hair in a thousand styles,
worthy to adorn none but the goddesses,
and in no way naive as I know from our stolen meetings
suited to your mistress, but more suited to me –
who was it informed on our entwined bodies?
How did Corinna know about our union?
I didn't blush? Surely no loose word at all
gave away knowledge of our secret coupling?
Why did I say anyone would be lacking in wits
if he could commit the offence with a maidservant?
Achilles burnt for the beauty of Briseis his slave,
Agamemnon made love to captive Cassandra.
I'm no greater than Achilles or Atrides:
Why should I think what suited those heroes a crime?
Anyway, when she fixed angry eyes on you,
I saw you blush all over your cheeks:
if by chance you recall, it was my great presence of mind,
to swear faithfulness by the vast power of Venus!
You, goddess, prescribe that the perjury of my chaste spirit
be blown out to sea on a warm southerly from the Aegean.
For my service to you repay me, with a sweet reward,
and sleep with me today, dark Cypassis!
Why, ungrateful girl do you refuse, and find new fears?
Only one of us is satisfied with your service.
If you say no, foolish girl, I'll say what we've done before,
and become the betrayer of my own crime,
and the place where we were, and how often, Cypassis:
I'll tell your mistress how many times, and in what ways!

Book II Elegy IXa: A Reproach to Cupid

O nothing can express my indignation enough Cupid,
at the way you idle around in my heart –
Why annoy me, a soldier who's never left your standard,
and let me be injured in my own camp?
Why does your torch blaze, your bow bend against friends?
There's more glory in beating those who fight.
What of Achilles helping Telephus, struck by his spear,
healing his wounds quickly with its power?
The hunter chases what runs: leaves what he's captured
and often searches for another quarry.
It's we, the crowd dedicated to you, who feel your weapons:
your hand's slack against enemies that fight.
What joy has a barbed arrow in being blunted on bone?
Love's left my bones stripped naked of flesh.
There are so many men without love, so many girls! –
There you can triumph with the greatest praise.
If Rome had not spread her power to the wide world
she'd still to this day be just huts roofed with straw,
The weary soldier retires to the fields he's given:
free of the starting line the racehorse is put out to grass:
after long service the warship is secretly beached,
the discharged man's sword is safely laid away.
Me too, who've earned it so often, by loving girls:
time for me to be discharged and live in peace.

Book II Elegy IXb: His Addiction

If a god said 'Live, and set love aside' I'd say 'no'!
Girls are such sweet misfortune.
When I'm truly weary, and ardour has died in my spirit,
I'm driven on by who knows what force in my poor mind.
It's like a hard-mouthed horse carrying off its rider
headlong, as he hauls on the foaming bit in vain:
or a ship, suddenly, on the point of touching land,
when a squall in harbour drags it into the deep –
That's how Cupid's inconstant winds drive me back,
and noble Love takes up his familiar arrow.
Pierce me, boy! I'm offered naked to your weapons:
this is your power, this is what your strength does:
as if your arrows came here now fired by themselves –
their quiver is scarcely more familiar than me!
Unhappy, the man who spends the night in slumber,
and calls sleep itself the greatest of gifts!
Foolish, what's sleep but the image of frozen death!
The grave grants us enough time for sleep.
Now my girl's lying words deceive me:
I still live in hope of great delight.
Now she flatters me: now she contrives to quarrel:
I often enjoy my girl: I'm often shut out.
Mars gets inconstancy from you, Cupid, his stepson:
your stepfather wields his arms by your example.
You're unreliable, far more fickle than your wings,
and give and deny your delights with dubious loyalty.
If you still hear me, Cupid, and your lovely mother,
establish your rule in my un-forsaken heart!
Let girls enter your country, that oh-so-fickle crowd!
Then you'll be worshipped by both your subject peoples.

Book II Elegy X: Two at Once

It was you, Graecinus, you, I remember, for certain,
denied that one man could love two girls at once.
Deceived through you, through you caught defenceless –
behold, disgrace, I love two at the same time!
Both are lovely, the pair are sophisticated:
it's doubtful, between her and her, who's most artful.
She's beautiful: she's also beautiful:
she pleases me a lot, and she does too!
I sway, like a yacht caught by opposing winds,
and desire is divided between the two.
Venus, why endlessly double my problems?
Wasn't there enough trouble with the one girl?
Why leaf the trees, why fill the sky with stars,
why add water you've gathered to the deep sea?
Still this is better, since I'm not despised and love-less –
let the sober life happen to my enemies!
Let my enemies sleep on a couch, bereft,
and relax their limbs in the midst of the bed!
But let wild love shatter my indolent slumber:
let me not be the only one weighing the mattress down!
Don't let my girl spoil it, nothing forbidden –
if one can satisfy, fine, if not, then two!
I'll manage – my limbs are slender but not without strength:
my body's light but not lacking in power:
and pleasure secretly nourishes my forces.
No girl's been disappointed by my performance:
often I've spent the whole night in play,
and was capable and resolute at dawn.
Happy the man, who dies in Love's mutual battle!
Let the gods make that the cause of my death!
Let the soldier's breast oppose the enemy missiles
and buy a lasting name with his blood.
Let the greedy seek wealth, and weary with voyaging,
shipwrecked, let their lying mouths drink brine.
But let me be taken fainting in Venus's act,
when I die: freed in the midst of it, the work half-done:
and someone will say, weeping, at my funeral:
'That death was *so* appropriate to his life!'

Book II Elegy XI: Corinna's Voyage

The worst evil told of was that ship, pine felled on Pelion, amazing
the sea-lanes, among the ocean waves,
tossed about rashly between the clashing rocks
in its quest for the notorious Golden Fleece.
O I wish, if men had to cut the seas with oars, at least,
that Argo, crushed, had drunk funereal waters!
Behold, Corinna's preparing to go on a tricky voyage,
and flee the familiar bed and our shared household gods.
Ah me, how I'll fear, with you, the west and east wind,
the frozen north wind, and the cooling south!
No cities there, no woods for you to gaze at:
only the blue form of the cruel sea.
Mid-ocean has no delicate shells or coloured pebbles:
their natural place is by the thirsty shore.
Girls, imprint the sands with marble feet:
the beach is safe – the rest's a dark journey.
Let others tell you of the battles of the winds:
whom Scylla attacks, and whom Charybdis's waters:
and what rocks jut out from violent Ceraunian coasts:
what large and small bays lie hidden on that of Syrtes.
Let others report it to you: what ever they say
believe! No storms will harm your credulity.
Too late to look back at shore, when the ropes are loosed
and the curved ship sails over the immense sea:
while the worried sailor trembles at adverse winds
and sees the water near, as near as death.
And if Triton provokes the breaking waves,
the colour will drain completely from your face!
Then you'll call on the noble stars of fertile Leda
and say 'Happy, the one who stayed on shore!'
It's safer to stay in bed, read your books,
make your Thracian lyre quiver with your fingers.
But if my words are carried in vain on the winged storm,
let Galatea still favour your ship's sailing!
You'll be guilty of shaking my girl about so much
Nereids, goddesses, and you, father of the Nereids.
Go on remembering me, return with a following wind:
let the breeze more strongly fill your sails!

May great Nereus drive the seas towards this shore:
let the winds blow this way, and the tides run!
Beg, yourself, and a west wind will fill your canvas,
you yourself lend a hand with the swelling sails!
I'll be the first to sight your boat from the shore,
and say: 'It carries my goddess!'
I'll bear you to land on my shoulders, snatch disordered
kisses. I'll offer the sacrifice promised for your return:
and we'll make a couch of the soft sand,
and some dune can be our table.
There you'll sit drinking wine and tell me –
how your ship was nearly wrecked in mid-ocean:
that, hastening to me, you weren't frightened
by iniquitous nights or headlong southerlies.
Let me believe it's all true: fiction's worthwhile –
why shouldn't I please myself with my dreams?
Lucifer, bright in the sky, with your galloping horses,
bring me that moment, as quickly as you can.

Book II Elegy XII: His Triumph

Go wreath my brows with triumphal laurel!
I've won: behold, Corinna, in my arms,
whom husband, watchman, firm doors, all those enemies
guarded: she couldn't be kept prisoner by their art!
Here's a victory worthy of a major triumph,
where, whatever else it is, the gain is bloodless.
Not shallow walls, not some town encircled
with a narrow ditch, my general-ship won a girl!
When Troy fell, conquered after a ten-year war,
how much of the honour was due to Atrides?
But my fine glory's not shared with any soldiers,
no one else has a right to the prize.
I made supreme commander here: I was the soldier,
the cavalry itself, the infantry: I was the standard-bearer.
And there's no good fortune mixed in with my acts –
O triumph of mine you are due to all my care!
Nor is there any new reason for war here. If Helen
hadn't been snatched, Europe and Asia had been at peace.
A woman made the woodland Lapiths, and the Centaurs,
shamefully turn to weapons, in the midst of the wine:
a woman incited the Trojans to a second war
in your kingdom, just Latinus:
Roman women, when it was still new-founded,
let in their fathers-in-law and gave them cruel weapons.
I've seen bulls fighting over a snow-white heifer:
watching, she herself aroused their passion.
Cupid orders me too, with many others,
without shedding blood though, to join his army.

Book II Elegy XIII: The Abortion

Corinna lies there exhausted in danger of her life,
after rashly destroying the burden of an unborn child.
I should be angry: she took that great risk
and hid it from me: but anger's quelled by fear.
All the same it's me by whom she conceived – or I think so:
I often take things for facts that only might be.
Isis, of Paraetionium, and the joyful fields of Canopus,
you who protect Memphis, and palmy Pharos,
and the land where the swift Nile spreads in its wide delta,
its waters flowing through seven mouths to the sea,
by your sistrum I pray, by the sacred head of Anubis –
so may Osiris love your holy rites for ever,
and the slow serpent glide about your altar,
and the horned Apis follow your procession!
Turn your face towards us, and spare both in one!
Then you will grant life to her, and she to me.
Often she's taken pains to attend your special days,
when Gallic laurel crowns your worshippers.
And you, Ilythia, who pity girls struggling in labour,
whose hidden child strains their reluctant body,
be gentle with her and hear my prayers!
It's proper for you to demand gifts for yourself.
I myself, in white, will burn incense on your smoking altars,
I myself will lay at your feet the gifts I vowed.
I'll add an inscription: 'Naso, for saving Corinna!'
Make that occasion soon, for the inscription and the gifts.
If it's still possible to warn you, girl, in such a state of fear,
let it be enough for you to have fought this one battle!

Book II Elegy XIV: Against Abortion

Where's the joy in a girl being free from fighting wars,
unwilling to follow the army and their shields,
if without battle she suffers wounds from her own weapons,
and arms unsure hands to her own doom?
Whoever first taught the destruction of a tender foetus,
deserved to die by her own warlike methods.
No doubt you'd chance your arm in that dismal arena
just to keep your belly free of wrinkles with your crime?
If the same practice had pleased mothers of old,
Humanity would have been destroyed by that violation,
and we'd need a creator again for each of our peoples
to throw the stones that made us onto the empty earth.
Who would have shattered the wealth of Priam, if Thetis,
the sea goddess, had refused to carry her rightful burden?
If Ilia had murdered the twins in her swollen womb,
the founder of my mistress's City would have been lost.
If Venus had desecrated her belly, pregnant with Aeneas,
Earth would have been bereft of future Caesars.
You too, with your beauty still to be born, would have died,
if your mother had tried what you have done:
I myself would be better to die making love
than have been denied the light of day by my mother.
Why rob the loaded vine of burgeoning grapes,
or pluck the unripe apple with cruel hand?
Let things mature themselves – grow without being forced:
life is a prize that's worth a little waiting.
Why submit your womb to probing instruments,
or give lethal poison to what is not yet born?
Medea is blamed for sprinkling the blood of her children,
and Itys, slain by his mother, is lamented with tears:
both cruel parents, yet both had bitter reason
to shed blood, revenge on a husband.
Say, what Tereus, what Jason incites you
to pierce your troubled body with your hand?
No tiger in its Armenian lair would do it,
no lioness would dare destroy her foetus.
But tender girls do it, though not un-punished:

often she who kills her child, dies herself.
She dies, and is carried to the pyre with loosened hair,
and whoever looks on cries out: 'She deserved it!'
But let these words vanish on the ethereal breeze,
and let my imprecations have no weight!
You gods, prosper her: let her first sin go, in safety,
and be satisfied: you can punish her second crime!

Book II Elegy XV: The Ring

Ring, to encircle my beautiful girl's finger,
appreciated only in terms of the giver's love,
go as a dear gift! Receiving you with glad heart,
may she slide you straightaway over her knuckle:
May you suit her as well as you suit me,
and smoothly fit the right finger with your true band!
Lucky ring, to be touched by my lady:
now I'm sadly envious of my own gift.
O if only I could, suddenly, be my present,
by the art of Circe or old Proteus!
Then, when I wanted to touch my girl's breasts
and slip my left hand into her tunic,
I'd glide from her finger, however tight and clinging,
and with wonderful art fall into the loose folds.
Again, so I could seal a secret letter,
the sticky wax not freeing from a dry gem,
I'd be touched first by the lovely girl's wet lips –
so that sealing the work would give me no pain.
If I were to be plunged in your purse, I'd refuse to go,
I'd cling, a shrinking ring, to your finger.
I'll never be an embarrassment to you, mea vita,
so your tender finger refuses to carry the weight.
Wear me, when you drench your body in the hot shower,
and let the falling water run beneath the jewel –
though, I think, your naked limbs would rouse my passion,
and, as that ring, I'd carry out a man's part.
A vain wish? Off you go then little gift:
show her that true loyalty comes with you!

Book II Elegy XVI: Sulmo

I'm at Sulmo, it's a third of Paelignian country –
small, but a region of refreshing health-giving waters.
Though the full sun cracks the earth in season,
and the violent star in Orion's Dog flashes,
clear waters wander through Sulmo's fields,
and lush grass grows green in gentle soil.
The ground's heavy with crops, heavier still with vines:
here and there the land shows an olive-grove:
and where resurgent rivers slide through the meadows
grassy turf casts a shade on the damp earth.
But my flame's absent. One word of that's misleading! –
What kindles the fire is distant. The passion's here.
Even if I were set between Castor and Pollux, I'd
not wish to be anywhere in the heavens without you.
May those who carved the world into long roads,
lie restless, pressed down under uneven ground.
If they were carving long roads through the earth
they should have said girls must travel with their men!
Then if I were crossing the shivering windy Alps,
with my girl there, the road would still be kind.
With my girl, I'd dare to force a way through Syrtes's sands and
spread full sails before the wild south winds.
I'd not fear the monsters yelping from Scylla's virgin groin,
nor would I fear your folds, curved Cape Malea:
nor Charybdis's mouth glutted with wrecked ships
spewing out and sucking back the flooding waters.
But should Neptune's stormy powers triumph,
and the gods that aid us be carried off by the waves,
you'd throw your white arms about my shoulders:
I'd bear your sweet body's burden easily.
Young Leander often swam the waves seeking Hero,
then swam again, but the sea-road was dark.
But without you here, though the busy vineyards
occupy me, though the countryside's flowing with rivers,
and countrymen summon flowing water to their streams,
and cool breezes caress the leafy trees,
I don't think of celebrating Sulmo's healthiness,
that's its my native place, ancestral country –

it's Scythia, with wild Cilician pirates, painted Britons,
or the Promethean rocks dyed red with blood.
Elm loves vines, vines never desert their elm:
why should I be so often parted from my girl?
And you swore that you would stay with me forever –
by me you swore, and by your eyes, my stars!
Vain the words of girls, lighter than falling leaves,
carried off, as we see, by wind and wave.
But if you've still a true care for me, abandoned,
begin to put your promises in action.
First your little chariot and swift Gallic horses,
crack the whip yourself over their galloping manes!
And, as for the ways, you come by, may swelling hills
subside, and the winding valleys be easy!

Book II Elegy XVII: His Slavery

If there's anyone who thinks it's disgraceful
to be slave to a girl, he'll judge me guilty and disgraced!
Disrepute's alright, so long as I'm less scorched
by her who holds Paphos and sea-washed Cythera.
And, since I'm to be a lovely woman's prize,
I wish I was also the prize of a gentler girl!
Beauty brings pride. Corinna's tempestuous with beauty –
Ah me! How does she know herself so well?
No doubt she gets her disdain from her mirror's image,
and never looks at it until she's ready!
If your beauty gives you pride and shows your power –
O beauty born to command my eyes! –
You don't for that reason have to scorn me,
little things go well alongside the great.
The nymph Calypso was captivated by love of a mortal,
and held on to the reluctant man, it's said.
A Nereid of the ocean shared her bed with Peleus,
that's the story, Egeria hers with Numa the Just,
Venus with Vulcan, though when he leaves his anvil,
he's shamefully defective with a crippled foot.
My kind of verse is just as unbalanced: but still fitting,
joining the heroic with the shorter line.
You too - accept me, mea lux, on whatever terms:
you're suited to laying the law down in a public place.
I won't be a reproach to you, one you'd be pleased to lose:
this love of ours will never be one to disown.
Instead of wealth I possess joyful song,
and many a girl hopes for fame through me:
I know one who spreads it around she's Corinna.
What wouldn't she give for it to be so?
But cold Eurotas, far-off poplar-fringed Eridanus
can't both slide between the same shores,
and no one but you will be sung in my verses:
you alone give me a chance to show my wit.

Book II Elegy XVIII: The Death of Tragedy

While in your poem you get to the Anger of Achilles,
and entangle your sworn heroes in a war,
Macer, I'm loitering in Venus's idle shadows,
and sweet Love's spoiling my sublimer ventures.
I've often told my girl 'It's final, off you go' –
straight away she's sitting in my lap again.
Often I've said 'I'm ashamed!' – 'Ah me!' she said,
scarce holding back tears, 'Ashamed now of loving me?'
And wound her arms around my neck,
and gave me a thousand kisses that destroyed me.
I'm conquered, call back my wits from the war I started,
and, you, my lovely verses, gabble about things at home.
Still I grabbed the sceptre, and a tragedy flourished
in my care, and I was as suited as you like to doing it.
Love laughed at my cloak, and high, coloured boots,
and the sceptre I'd quickly grasped in my humble hand.
Here too my girl's unfair power deflected me,
and Love has triumphed over the tragic poet.
I turn instead to what's allowed, the arts of sweet loving –
ah me, burdened by my own precepts, myself! –
or I pen the words Penelope wrote Ulysses
and your tearful ones, deserted Phyllis,
the ones Paris, and Macareus, and ungrateful Jason,
and Hippolytus's father, Theseus, and Hippolytus read,
what poor Dido said with the sword tight in her hand
or that lover from Ionian Lesbos with her lyre.
How soon Sabinus. my poet friend, you returned
carrying replies from lands scattered through the world!
Fair Penelope knew the seal of Ulysses:
Hippolytus's stepmother recognised his script.
Dutiful Aeneas has replied to wretched Dido,
Phyllis, if she's alive, has a note too.
A sad note from Jason reaches Hypsipyle:
the lover of Lesbos offers Phoebus her lyre.
Nor Macer, are you, in the midst of war's martial song
silent, as far as is safe, about Love's splendour.
Paris is there and the adulteress, guilty and famous,
and Laodamia faithful companion to the end.

If I know you, you'd be happier with that than war,
and you'll be coming from your camp over to mine.

Book II Elegy XIX: Make Her Hard to Get

Fool, if you don't want to guard the girl for your own sake,
still, guard her for mine, it makes me desire her more!
What's allowed is no fun: what isn't burns more fiercely.
He's cold who loves what some one else allows:
lovers hope and fear, in equal amounts.
and the occasional rebuff leaves room for prayer.
What use is she to me if she can't be bothered to cheat me?
And I can't love what never causes pain!
Clever Corinna saw that weakness in me,
and knew how to work it craftily to catch me.
Oh, the number of times she invented a headache
and ordered me away when I lingered with tardy feet!
Oh, the number of times, she invented a crime,
however innocent, to give the appearance of hurting!
Then when she'd vexed me, and relit the dying flames,
vowed herself my friend again, that she's right for me.
What flattery, what sweet words she prepared for me,
what quantity and quality of kisses she gave!
You too, who lately drew my eyes to you,
must often pretend to fear, often say no when asked:
and let me lie on the threshold at your entrance
suffering cold frost the whole night through.
So my love will last and grow stronger through the years:
I enjoy it: it's food for my spirit.
Love that's too free and easy makes me weary
and harms me as over-rich food does the stomach.
If Danae had never been shut in the brazen tower,
Danae would never have been impregnated by Jove:
when Juno guarded Io with added horns,
Io was made more pleasing to Jove than before.
What's allowed and easy - if that's what you want
pluck leaves from trees, drink water from the wide river.
If she wants to rule a long time, she must cheat her lover.
Ah me, may my advice not torture me!
Whatever occurs, indulgence only hurts me –
what follows me, I flee: what flees, I follow.
And you, so careless of your lovely girl,
start locking your door at early evening.

Start asking who knocks in secret so often at the window,
and why dogs bark in the silence of night,
what messages the maid carries and brings back,
and why She so often sleeps alone in bed.
Let these worries sometimes pierce your marrow,
and give me space and matter for my deceits.
He's only stealing sand from the empty beach,
the man who makes love to the wife of a fool.
I give you due warning: if you don't start to guard the girl
she'll start to leave off being mine!
I've stood it long enough: often I've hoped there'd be
a time when you guarded well, so I could truly deceive.
You're dull, and allow what no husband should allow:
while for me freedom puts an end to love!
Will I never be stopped from coming, unhappy man?
Will my nights always be vengeance-free?
Will I never be scared? Will I never have nights of sighs?
Will you never give me a reason for wishing you dead?
What use to me is an easy, pandering husband?
His defects are ruining my delight.
Why not find someone who enjoys such forbearance?
If you enjoy having me for a rival, deny!

End of Book II

Book III Elegy I: Elegy versus Tragedy

There's an old wood untouched for many years:
you'd believe a god lives in the place.
There's a sacred spring at its centre and a cave
of overhanging rock, and birds sing sweetly all around.
While I was walking there privately in the wooded shade –
wondering what project my Muse might be engendering –
Elegy arrived, her perfumed hair in a knot,
and with one foot, I think, shorter than the other.
Her form was lovely, her dress refined, her looks loving,
and even the defect of her foot was a source of charm.
And stormy Tragedy appeared with giant strides:
forehead wild with hair, robe trailing the ground:
her left hand waving a royal sceptre about,
high-soled Lydian boots fastened to her feet.
And she spoke first, saying: 'O sluggish poet,
will you ever stop taking love as your subject?
They talk of your worthlessness at drunken banquets,
they talk of it passing the crossroads on every street.
Often someone points out the poet as well,
and says: "That's him, the one wild Love inflames!"
You're the common talk of the whole city, and don't see it,
while you tell of your doings, with their past shame.
It's time you waved your wand to a weightier beat:
you've lazed about long enough – start a mightier work!
Your content cramps your genius. Sing the deeds of heroes.
"This gives me scope for my spirit!" is what you'll say.
Your Muse was playing, singing tender girls,
and the first acts of youth in your verses.
Then I'll be famous for Roman Tragedy through you!
Your spirit will itself discharge my principles.'
At that, balancing on her ornate shoes,
she nodded her head with its weight of hair.
Then Elegy laughed with sidelong eyes, if I recall it –
and was that a myrtle wand in her right hand?
'Why crush me with your weighty words, proud Tragedy?'
she said, 'and why is it you can never take a lighter tone?
All the same you've deigned to speak unequal lines:

you've used my own metre to attack me.
I'd not compare my things with your high song:
your Imperial palace overshadows my little threshold.
I'm light, and my dear Cupid shares my lightness:
I'm no mightier than my theme itself.
The mother of impudent Amor would be innocent
without me, I appear as her companion and go-between.
What your heavy shoes can't break down
is an open door to my blandishments:
indeed I've earned more than you have by suffering
many things your arrogance would not stand.
Corinna learnt from me how to cheat her guard,
and seduce the loyalty that locks the door,
to slip from her bed clothed in a loose dress
and move in the night with noiseless step.
The times I've been left hanging at a hard doorpost,
not afraid to be read aloud by passers-by!
Why I remember hiding between a maid's breasts,
poor me, until the savage porter left.
And when you sent birthday greetings by me,
and she tore me, wild girl, and drenched me with water.
I inspired the first fruits of your mind:
if she's after you now, you've me to thank.'
She finished. I began: 'I ask indulgence of you both,
fearful my words will escape your ears.
One honours me with the sceptre and platform shoes:
just now high song rose to the lips at her touch.
The other gives my love eternal fame –
come then, and add the short lines to the long!
Tragedy grant the poet a breathing space!
Your work is endless: what she wants is brief.'
With a gesture she gave permission – while there's time,
quick, tender Amores: a greater work's pushing on behind!

Book III Elegy II: At the Races

I'm not sitting here studying the horses' form:
though I still pray that the one you fancy wins.
I come to speak to you, and sit with you,
lest you don't notice how my love's on fire.
You watch the course, and I watch you: we'll both
see what delights us, and both feast our eyes.
Happy the charioteer that you fancy!
What's he got, to make him dear to you?
Let it be me, hurled from the starting gate,
I'd be the brave rider pressing the horses onward,
now I'd give rein, now touch their backs with the whip,
now scrape the turning post with my nearside wheel.
If I caught sight of you as I rushed by, I'd falter,
and the slack reins would fall from my hands.
As when the Pisan's spear nearly killed Pelops,
when he glanced at your face, Hippodamia!
Of course he still won because of his girl's favour.
May each of us win through the favour of his lady!
Why edge away, in vain? The rows force us together.
The circus grants something useful from its rules –
you on the right though, whoever you are, be careful
of my girl: the poking of your elbow's hurting her.
You too, sitting behind us, if you've any shame,
draw your legs up, don't press with your bony knees!
But your dress is trailing on the ground too much.
Gather it up – or I'll lift it with my fingers!
You're a jealous dress to hide such lovely legs:
the more you look – you are a jealous dress!
Just like the legs of swift-footed Atalanta,
that Milanion longed to hold in his hands.
Just like the legs of Diana, her dress tucked-up,
chasing the wild beasts, wilder still herself.
I blazed when I couldn't see them: what shall I do now?
you add fire to the fire, water to the sea.
I suspect from these that the rest might please,
what's well hidden, concealed by your thin dress.
Would you like a quick breeze stirred while you wait?
One I can make with the programme in my hand.

Or is the heat more in my mind than in the air,
my captive heart scorched by love of a girl?
While I spoke, a speck of dust settled on your white dress.
Vile dust, away from her snowy body!
But now the procession comes – silence minds and tongues!
Time for applause – the golden procession comes.
Victory's in the lead, with outstretched wings –
approach Goddess, and make my love conquer!
Cheer for Neptune, you who trust the waves too much!
No sea for me: my country captivates me.
Soldiers, cheer for Mars! I hate all warfare:
I delight in peace, and to find love in its midst.
Phoebus for the augurs, Phoebe the huntsmen!
Let craftsmen turn their hands to you, Minerva!
Let farmers honour Ceres and tender Bacchus!
Boxers please Pollux: horsemen please Castor!
I cheer for you, charming Venus, and the boy
with the powerful bow: Goddess help this venture
and change my new girl's mind! Let her agree to be loved!
She nodded, and gave me a favourable sign.
What the goddess promised, I ask you to promise:
don't talk of Venus, you'll be a greater goddess.
I swear to you, by the crowd and the gods' procession,
I want you to be my girl for all time!
But your legs are dangling. Perhaps it would help
to stick your toes on the rail in front.
Now the track is clear for the main event,
the praetor's started the four-horse chariots.
I can see yours. Let the one you fancy, win.
The horses themselves seem to know what you want.
Oh dear, he's taking the turning post too wide!
What are you doing? The next chariot's overtaking.
What are you doing, fool? You'll lose the girl's best hopes.
Curses, pull hard on the left rein with your hand!
We've backed a nobody – call them back, Citizens,
everyone give the signal by waving their togas!
Yes, they're recalled! – But don't let those togas
ruin your hair, hide deep in my cloak, that's fine.
Now the starting gates are open again:
the horses fly out, a multi-coloured throng.

Now take the lead, and fly into empty space!
Make my hopes, and my girl's, a sure bet!
My girl's hopes are certain, mine are unsure.
He wins the palm: my palm's still to win.
She smiled, and promised something with those bright eyes.
That's enough now, pay me the rest elsewhere!'

Book III Elegy III: She's Faithless

Gods exist, go on, believe it – she broke the promise
she made and is still as lovely as she was before!
The long hair she had when she wasn't a liar,
is just as long after she's offended the gods.
Her radiance was whiteness tinged with a rosy blush
before – the blush shines on amongst the snow.
Her feet were slender – her feet are delicately formed.
She was tall and graceful – tall and graceful she remains.
Bright-eyes she had – they are radiant as stars,
with which she so often deceived me with her lies.
No doubt the eternal gods allow girls to swear
falsely too, and beauty has divinity.
I remember she swore by her eyes the other day,
and by mine: look, it is mine that felt the pain!
Tell me, gods, if she cheated you with impunity
why did I deserve punishment instead?
But didn't innocent virgin Andromeda die by your order,
for her mother's crime of boastful beauty?
Not enough for you, that I find you worthless witnesses,
but she laughs at me, and you, playful gods, unpunished?
By my punishment do I redeem her lying:
shall I be victim, deceived by the deceiver?
Either a god's a thing of no account, an idle fear,
stirring the crowd through their foolish credulity:
or if there's a true god, he loves tender girls,
and allows them all excessive liberties.
For us Mars straps on his deadly sword:
for us the hand of Pallas lifts the unfailing spear.
For us the pliant bow of Apollo's bent:
for us Jove's lofty right hand holds the fire.
The gods, offended, are scared to offend these beauties
and, besides, they fear those who don't fear them.
And who should bother to burn incense on their altars?
We men it's true need to show more spirit!
Jupiter blasts his own groves and hills with fire,
and neglects to hurl his bolts at perjured girls.
So many deserved it – but poor Semele was burned!
Her punishment was of her own making:

but if she'd withdrawn from her lover's coming,
no father would have played mother to Bacchus.
Why complain and abuse all of heaven?
The gods too have eyes: the gods have hearts!
If I were a god, I'd let girls with lying lips
deceive my divinity without punishment:
I'd swear, myself, the girls were swearing truly
and I'd not be a god who spoke sourly.
Still, girl, you should use their gift in moderation –
or at least spare these eyes of mine!

Book III Elegy IV: Adultery

Harsh man, it's no use guarding a tender girl:
your best protection lies in her disposition.
She who's chaste without dread, is truly chaste:
she who's not allowed to do it, she does it!
Though you guard the body well: the mind's adulterous:
you can't set a guard on what she desires, at all.
Nor can you guard her body, though all doors are barred:
though everyone's shut out, the adulteress is within.
Who allows the crime, lessens the crime: opportunity
makes the seeds of naughtiness less potent.
Leave off, believe me, denial sparks the sin:
your indulgence is more likely to win her over.
I saw just recently a tight-reined mare,
fighting the bit, bolt away like lightning:
as soon as she felt the reins slacken she halted,
and they lay quiet on her flowing mane!
We always strive for what's forbidden: want what's denied:
so the sick man longs for the water he's refused.
Argus had a hundred eyes, at front and back –
but Love alone often deceived them:
Danae in her room of eternal iron and stone,
was imprisoned, a virgin, yet became a mother:
While, however much she lacked guards, Penelope
remained untouched among the young princes.
What's guarded we want the more, precautions
themselves lure the thief: few love what another allows.
It's not her beauty pleases, but her husband's love:
they believe there's something there that captivates you.
She isn't made good, whom a husband guards: adultery's made
costly: fear more than form makes the prize greater.
Like it or not, forbidden passion delights us:
she only pleases if she can say: 'I'm afraid!'.
Nor is it right to lock up a freeborn girl –
that fear fills the bodies of foreign peoples!
No doubt you want her guard to be able to say: 'I did it.'
her chastity will be to your slave's glory?
He's so provincial who's hurt by his wife's adultery,
and he's not observed the ways of Rome enough,

where Romulus and Remus were born illegitimate,
Ilia's bastard twins begotten by Mars.
Why have beauty, if only chastity pleases you?
There's no way they can go together.
If you're wise, indulge the girl: forgo harsh frowns,
and don't enforce the rights of an inflexible man,
and cultivate the friends your wife will bring you –
she'll bring a lot. So great gifts come with little labour:
and you'll always be able to join the youngsters' revels,
and see lots of gifts, you didn't give her, at home.

Book III Elegy V: The Dream

‘It was night, and sleep drowned my weary eyes:
such a dream it was terrified my mind:
a dense grove of holm-oaks under a sunlit hill,
and many birds hidden among the branches.
a wide lush green space beneath it, grassy meadow,
wet with the sounds of gently dripping water.
I escaped the heat under the leafy trees –
under a leafy tree but it was still burning hot –
Behold! A white heifer appeared in front of my eyes,
searching for grasses among the scattered flowers,
whiter than snow, when it has just fallen,
that lingers, not yet turned to running water,
whiter than milk, that just now was hissing foam,
and in a moment will leave the ewe drained.
A bull was her companion there, her fortunate mate,
and lay beside his bride on the soft earth.
While he lay and slowly chewed the grassy cud
and ate again the food he’d already eaten,
I saw sleep come and steal away his powers,
bowing his horned head to the ground.
Then a light-winged crow slid from the air
and settled cawing on the green turf,
and three times poked the snowy heifer’s front
with impudent beak, tearing away a tuft of white hair.
Lingering a long time, she abandoned bull, and meadow –
but carrying on her chest a black bruise:
and seeing bulls grazing the pasture far away –
bulls do graze rich pastures far away –
she hurried to them, and joined their herd,
and looked for earth with greener grass.
Say now, interpreter of midnight dreams, whoever,
what does this dream mean, if dreams have truth.’
So I spoke: so the interpreter of midnight dreams replied,
pondering over each word in his mind:
‘When you sought shelter under the fickle leaves,
but sheltered uselessly, that was love’s heat.
The heifer is your girl – a fitting colour for your girl:
you were her mate, a bull matched to a heifer.

The crow with sharp beak that pecked her breast,
an old procuress that addled your mistress's wits.
That your heifer lingered a while then left the bull,
means that you'll be left cold in your bed.
The bruise and the black blemish on her breast
says that her heart's not free of adultery's stain.'
His interpretation done, blood fled from my cold cheeks,
and deepest night stood there before my eyes.

Book III Elegy VI: The Flooded River

Stop, you reed-filled river with muddy shores,
I'm hurrying to my girl – wait for a little, waters!
You've neither a bridge, nor a roped ferryboat,
to carry me across, without a stroke of the oar.
I remember you as little, and didn't fear to ford you,
and the tops of your waves barely touched my ankles.
Now you rush by, full of melted snow from the mountain,
and your swollen waters roll on, in murky flood.
What use was my haste, the scant hours given to rest,
that merged the night with daylight,
if I still wait here, if there's no art on offer
to allow me to set foot on the other bank?
Now I need the winged sandals Perseus had,
when he carried the dreadful head wreathed with snakes,
now I want the chariot in which Ceres's seeds
were first sent to reach the untilled ground.
All marvellous untruths told by ancient poets:
things that never existed and never will.
I'd rather you, flooding river with roomy shores –
may you be such forever - flowed within your bounds!
Believe me you'll not be able to endure the hatred,
if it's said, torrent, you by chance barred a lover's way.
Rivers should help young people in love:
rivers themselves have known what love is.
Inachus ran pale for Melie the Bithynian
they say, and his icy waves grew warm.
The ten-year war at Troy was not yet done,
when Neaera dazzled your eyes, Xanthe.
Why? Wasn't it true love for the Arcadian virgin
that drove Alpheus to flow to alien shores?
You too Peneus, spirited away Creusa,
to Phthian country, she betrothed to Xutho.
Why should I recall Asopus, whom Mars's daughter Thebe
captivated, Thebe the future mother of five daughters?
If I ask you, Achelous, where your horns are now,
you'll complain that Hercules broke them off in anger.
Calydon was not worth it, nor all Aetolia,
Deinara alone was worth it, all the same.

Rich Nile that flows through seven mouths,
who hides so well the source of all his waters,
could not conquer the flame Evanthé kindled, they say,
with his swirling flood, she the daughter of Asopus.
Enipeus ordered his waters to abate, to embrace Salmonis,
on dry land: he commanded and the waters receded.
And don't forget Anio, rolling in his stony bed,
bringing water to the orchards of Tibur,
he was charmed by Ilia, though she was so dishevelled,
hair torn by her nails, cheeks marked by them.
She mourned her uncle's crime and Mars's wrongdoing,
wandering barefoot through the wilderness.
Anio saw her from his swift-flowing waters
and lifted himself from the waves, calling loudly:
'Why wear away my banks so anxiously,
Ilia, child of Laomedon's Troy?
Why so dishevelled? Why wandering alone,
with no white ribbon to tie back your hair?
Why do you weep, reddening your wet eyes with tears,
and why do you beat your naked breasts in frenzy?
He who can look with indifference at the tears
on your sweet face, has a heart of iron and flint.
Ilia, have no fears! My palace waits for you,
my waves will cherish you. Ilia, have no fears!
You'll rule over more than a hundred nymphs:
for more than a hundred nymphs live in my waves.
Don't spurn me so, I beg you, child of Troy:
you'll have gifts greater than these I promised.'
He spoke. She cast her modest gaze on the ground
and sprinkled a shower of tears on her tender breast.
Three times she tried to run, three times stood rooted,
by those deep waters, fear robbing her of strength to flee.
Then, at last, tearing her hair with angry fingers,
with trembling mouth, she spoke these words of shame:
'O I wish my bones had been gathered while I was virgin,
and preserved on a bier in my father's tomb!
Why, am I offered marriage, a Vestal, now
disgraced, and denied by Ilium's sacred flame?
Why linger, be pointed out as an adulteress by the crowd?
Let the face of infamy die, that carries the mark of shame!'

With that she held her dress against her swollen eyes,
and threw herself, lost, into the swift flood.
They say the river placed his slippery hands on her breast,
and gave her command over his marriage bed.
I believe you also were warmed by some girl:
but woods and groves hide your crime.
Even as I speak your swelling waves spread wider,
your deep bed can't hold your surging waters.
Why rage at me? Why delay shared delights?
Why rudely interrupt the road I started on?
Why? If you were a true river, if you were a noble stream,
if you were widely known throughout the world –
you're unknown, a gathering of fallen waters,
neither your source nor your springs are certain!
For springs you have the inflow of rain and melting snow,
the riches that slow winter supplies you with:
if it's the days of solstice your course flows muddy,
if it's the arid days you're pressed into dusty earth.
What thirsty passer-by could drink from you?
What grateful voice, say: 'Live for ever'?
Your flow's harmful to herds, more so to farmland.
Perhaps that worries others: I'm worried by my own woes.
Alas for me then! Madly telling the loves of rivers!
A shame to let fall such names disgracefully.
Letting an unknown flood consider Achelous, Inachus,
and, Nile, I've even recalled your name!
For your services, I wish you, unclear torrents,
devouring suns, and ever thirsty winters!

Book III Elegy VII: A Problem!

Not that I think she isn't lovely, and so cultured,
not that I haven't often wished for her in my dreams!
Yet I held her, all in vain, completely slack,
lay there a limp reproach, a burden to the bed:
though I really wanted it, and the girl wanted it too,
I could get no more from my exhausted parts.
She threw her ivory arms around my neck,
arms whiter than the Scythian snows,
struggling, she mingled tongues in eager kisses,
and slipped a wanton thigh beneath my thigh,
and spoke coaxing words, called me her master,
and all those usual words that might help.
Yet my member, as if touched by cold hemlock,
was sluggish and denied my every effort:
I lay an inert body, a sham, a useless weight,
unsure whether I was a body or a ghost.
What old age will come, to me, if it does come,
when youth itself fails me in this way?
Ah, I'm ashamed of my years: why youth and strength
if my girl can't feel my youth or strength?
She rose like a holy priestess going to the eternal flame,
like an elder sister leaving a beloved brother.
Yet I lately had golden Chlide twice, Pitho
the beautiful and Libas, three times without stopping:
I remember Corinna, in one short night, demanded
I keep it up for her nine times together.
Has some Thessalian poison weakened my cursed body?
Do charms and herbs hurt my poor self now,
some witch transfixes my name in scarlet wax
and sticks fine needles right into my liver?
Charms turn the stricken wheat to barren grasses,
charms stop the stricken waters at their source,
through incantations oaks drop acorns, vines their grapes,
and the apples fall down without being shaken.
Why shouldn't I be stopped, and my vigour numbed
by magic arts, my body by that made unable to endure?
Add shame to it: the shame itself, of it, hurt me:
that was the secondary cause of my failure.

But what a girl, whom I only saw and touched!
Just as her slip itself touches her.
At her touch Nestor might be made young again,
and Tithonus stronger in old age.
I held her, but she did not hold a man.
What can I think of now to beg for in prayer?
I think the great gods were sorry they gave the gift
that I've made use of so shamefully.
I wanted to be welcomed – I was truly welcome:
to kiss – I kissed: to be near her – I was.
What was such good luck worth? Why have and not enjoy?
Why eager for wealth and not possess its power?
I'm parched like Tantalus, silent now, in the midst
of fruit and water, he who can never touch it.
Has anyone ever risen early from his girl
so he can go straight to the gods and pray?
No, she's seductive: squandered so many kisses on me:
urged me on with every one of her powers!
She could have moved heavy oak-trees,
stirred hard adamant, or the deafest stones.
She'd have moved all men, all living things for sure:
but I was neither man nor living, as once before.
What joy can deaf ears have when Phemis sings?
What joy can blind Thamyras have in painted things?
But what silent delights my mind invented!
What did I not imagine, all the various ways!
But still my sex lay there prematurely dead,
shamefully, limper than a rose picked yesterday –
Look, now, he's lively at the wrong time, able,
now he's demanding work and service.
Why can't you lie down modestly, worst part of me?
You've caught me like this with your promises before.
You failed your master: I was left weaponless, through you,
enduring sad hurt and great embarrassment.
Not even this did my girl disdain to try,
to rouse me with her gently moving hand:
but when she couldn't make me rise, with her art,
and saw it sink down there, ignoring her,
'Why toy with me, why, if you're sick,' she said,
'did you invite your unwilling body to my bed?'

Either some Circean sorceress has bewitched you,
or you come here wearied by another lover.’
With that, she leapt up, veiled by her loose slip –
and how her fleeing naked feet became her! –
And lest her servants thought that all was chaste,
I scattered water there, to cover the disgrace.

Book III Elegy VIII: The Curse of Money

Does anyone admire the noble arts these days,
or think that talent's displayed in tender verse?
Once genius was rated more than gold:
but now to have nothing shows plain stupidity.
Though my lovely girl's delighted with my books,
where the books can go, I can't go myself:
while she praised them, her door closed as she praised.
Shamefully, clever, I go here and there.
Look, some newly-rich blood-drenched knight
made wealthy by his wounds grazes my pastures!
Can you hug him in your lovely arms, my sweet life?
Life of mine, can you lie there in his embrace?
If you don't know, that head once wore a helmet:
there was a sword bound to that thigh that serves you:
that left hand, that new-won gold suits so badly,
held a shield: touch his right – it was stained with blood!
Can you touch that right hand by which others perished?
ah, where is that tender-heartedness of yours?
See the scars, the marks of former battles –
whatever he has, he earned with his body.
Perhaps he'll tell you how many men he's murdered!
Avaricious girl, can you touch those revealing hands?
Am I, the pure priest of Apollo and the Muses,
to sing idle songs at unyielding doors?
If you're wise, learn, not what we sluggards know,
but the dangers of battle and the rough camp,
forming lines of spears instead of good verses!
Homer, the night can be yours, if you wage war.
Jupiter, realising nothing's more powerful than gold,
turned himself to coinage to seduce a virgin.
Without that wealth, father was harsh, she severe,
the doors were bronze, and the tower was iron.
But when the adulterer knowingly came as cash,
she offered love herself and saying 'give', she gave.
Yet when ancient Saturn ruled the heavens,
Earth covered all her wealth in deep darkness.
She stored the copper and silver, gold and heavy iron,
among the shades, there were no ingots then.

She gave better things – crops without curved ploughs,
and fruits, and honey found in the hollow oaks.
No one scarred the earth with a strong blade,
no measurer of the ground marked out limits.
no dipping oars swept the churning waves:
then the longest human journey ended at the shore.
Human nature, you've been skilful, against yourself,
and ingenious, in excess, to your own harm.
What use to you are towns encircled with turreted walls?
What use to you to add the discord of arms, at hand?
When was the sea yours – land should have contented you!
Why not seek out a third region then in the sky?
Though you honour the sky too – Romulus,
Bacchus, Hercules, Caesar now have temples.
We dig the earth for solid gold not food.
Soldiers possess the wealth they get by blood.
The Senate's shut to the poor – money buys honours:
here a grave judge, there a sober knight!
Let them have it all: let arena and forum serve them,
let them conduct merciless war or manage peace.
So long as they don't bid greedily for our lovers,
and – it'll do – if something's left for the poor!
Now, though she may be as sour as a Sabine,
he, who can give much, rules her like a slave.
The porter shuts me out: for me, she fears her husband:
but if I gave, those two would quit the house!
O if only some god, avenger of neglected lovers,
would turn their ill-gotten wealth to dust!

Book III Elegy IX: Elegy for the Dead Tibullus

If his mother grieved for Memnon: his mother for Achilles,
and sad fate thus can touch the great goddesses,
weep, Elegy, and loose your tight-bound hair!
ah, only too truly from this was your name taken! –
Tibullus, your own poet, your own glory,
burns, a worthless corpse, on the tall pyre.
Look, Venus's boy carries an upturned quiver,
his bow is broken, his torch without its flame:
see, how he goes sadly with drooping wings,
and how he beats his naked breast with fierce hand!
His tears are caught in the hair scattered about his neck,
and break in resounding sobs from his mouth.
So he looked, they say, at his brother Aeneas's funeral,
when it left your palace, glorious Iulus:
and Venus is no less grieved by Tibullus's death,
than when the wild boar gashed Adonis's thigh.
And poets are called sacred, and beloved of the gods:
there are also those who grant us divine inspiration.
Yet greedy death profanes all sacred things:
of all things his shadowy hands take possession!
What help were his divine parents to Thracian Orpheus,
or his songs that overcame the astonished creatures?
And Apollo, father of Linus also, in the deep woods,
cried 'aelinon!' they say, as he struck the reluctant lyre.
And Homer, by whom poet's mouths are moistened
as if by an eternal stream from the Muse's fountains –
he also at day's end sank down to dark Avernus.
Poetry alone escapes the greedy pyre:
The poets works survive, the tale of Troy's sufferings
and the nocturnal guile that un-wove the tardy web.
So Nemesis, and Delia, will have a name forever,
the last your recent worship, the other your former love.
What use are your rituals? What use the Egyptian
sistrum? What use those nights sleeping in an empty bed?
When evil fate drags down the good – forgive my words! –
it incites me to believe there are no gods.
Live piously – you die: obey the rites piously, obeying
death drags you from the temple's echo to the hollow tomb:

Place your faith in poetry's truth – look, there, Tibullus lies:
of all there hardly remains what might fill a little urn!
Did the funeral fires consume you, sacred poet,
that had no fear of feeding on your heart?
Flames that could commit such wickedness
would burn the golden shrines of the sacred gods!
Venus, who holds the heights of Eryx turned away her face:
some say she could not hold back her tears.
But still it is better so, than that Corfu's earth
had covered you, unknown, with common soil.
Here, your mother closed your wet eyes in death
and paid the last rites to your ashes:
Here your sister, with torn and unkempt hair,
came to share her sorrowing mother's grief,
Your Delia said: 'I am lucky, to have been loved by you,'
stepping from the pyre: 'you lived when I was your flame.'
while Nemesis said: 'Why is my hurt your grief?
His failing hand held me as he died.'
Yet if anything is left of us but a shadow and a name
Tibullus lives in some valley of Elysium.
You come to meet him, ivy wreathing your young brows,
learned Catullus, with your Calvus:
and you, also, Gallus, too free with your blood and life,
if that charge is false of violating Caesar's friendship.
Your spirit will accompany them: if the body ends as spirit,
gracious Tibullus, added to the numbers of the blessed.
I pray that your bones rest, at peace, in their protecting urn,
and that the earth lies lightly on your grave!

Book III Elegy X: No Sex- It's the Festival of Ceres

Here comes the annual festival of Ceres:
my girl lies alone in an empty bed.
Golden Ceres, fine hair wreathed with ears of wheat,
why must your rituals spoil our pleasure?
All peoples, wherever, speak of your bounty, Goddess,
no other begrudges good to humanity less.
Before you, the bearded farmers parched no corn,
the word threshing-floor was unknown on the Earth,
but oak-trees, the first oracles, carried acorns:
these and tender herbs in the grass were our food.
Ceres first taught the seeds to swell in the fields,
and first with sickles cut the ripened sheaves:
first bowed the necks of oxen under the yoke,
and scarred the ancient earth with curved blade.
Can anyone believe she delights in lovers' tears
that right worship lies in torment and lonely beds?
Still, though she loves fertile fields, she's no rustic,
nor does she have a heart bereft of love.
The Cretans are witness – Cretans' don't always lie.
Crete was proud to nurse the infant Jove.
There, he who steers the world's starry courses,
sucked milk, with tender mouth as a little child.
Proof from a mighty witness: witnessed by his praise.
I think Ceres might confess to the charge I make.
She saw Iasus on the slopes of Cretan Mount Ida,
slaughtering the game with unerring hand.
She saw him, and flames pierced her to the marrow,
from there, love, partly drove out her shame.
Shame quelled by love: you could see parched furrows
and the sowing itself gave the least of returns.
Though the fields were struck with well-aimed mattocks,
and the soil was broken with the curving plough,
and the seed scattered evenly over wide acres,
the farmers were cheated of their useless prayers.
Deep in the woods the goddess of fertility lingered:
the garland of wheat-ears slipping from her long hair.
Only Crete was enriched by a fruitful year:
Wherever the goddess showed herself, there was harvest:

Ida itself, home of forests, was white with crops,
and the wild boars reaped corn in the woods.
Minos the law-giver prayed for more such years:
he should have wished for Ceres's love to last forever.
Because you were sad on lonely nights, golden goddess,
why should I be forced now to endure your rites?
Why should I be sad, when your daughter's found again,
her fate to rule a kingdom second only to Juno's?
This festive day calls for loving, and poetry, and wine:
these are the gifts it's right to carry to the gods.

Book III Elegy XIa: That's Enough!

I've endured too much, too long: my patience is defeated
by her offences: heart dead with weariness, vile love!
There's no doubt I'm free now and have slipped my chain,
and what I wasn't ashamed to bear, I'm ashamed I bore.
I've won and love is tamed, trampled under my feet:
at last true horns have appeared on my head.
Endure it and stand firm! This pain in the end will help you:
often bitter medicine brings strength to the weary.
So why did I endure it, so often shut out from your gate,
laying my delicate body on the hard floor?
So why did I keep watch, for him you held in your arms,
like a slave outside your closed door?
I saw, when your lover appeared weary, at your door,
found wanting, and his body all exhausted:
but it's still worse that I was seen by him –
let that shame happen to my enemies!
When did I not cling patiently to your side,
your true guardian, your lover, friend?
And of course you pleased people through my friendship:
my love was the reason for your many lovers.
What, shall I say now, of your vile lies, your idle tongue,
and the gods perjured to harm me?
What of the silent nods of youths at parties,
and the deceptive words of secret messages?
They told me she's ill – I ran, in a hurry, a madman:
I arrived, and she wasn't too ill for my rival!
I'm hardened by this: by things unsaid I've often suffered:
find someone instead of me, who can endure it.
Now my vessel's crowned with votive wreaths
calmly braving the ocean's swelling waves.
Leave off your flatteries and your once powerful words,
forget them – now I'm not the fool I used to be!

Book III Elegy XIb: The Conflict of Emotions

I struggle, and my fickle heart is pulled both ways,
now by love, now hate, but I think love wins.
I'll hate if I can do: if not, I love unwillingly.
No ox loves the yoke: yet he still suffers what he hates.
I flee your wickedness – your beauty draws me back:
I loathe your guilty ways – I love your body.
So I can't live with you or without you,
and don't seem to know my own mind.
I wish you were less beautiful or less wanton:
such a lovely form doesn't go with such bad ways.
Actions worthy of hatred, a face that begs for love –
ah me, she's worth so much more than her vices!
Oh, spare me, by the shared promises of our bed,
by all those gods who so often let you cheat them,
by your face that to me approaches the divine,
by those eyes of yours that ravished mine!
Be what you will, you will be mine for ever:
you choose then, shall I love freely too or be constrained!
Let me spread sail and enjoy the flowing breezes,
or, if I may not, to want what I'm forced to love.

Book III Elegy XII: It Serves Me Right!

What day was it, dark bird, when you sounded
your omen for this eternally melancholy lover?
What star should I believe has opposed my destiny,
what god should I complain of, warring against me?
She who was once spoken of as mine, whom I loved,
first, alone, I fear, along with many others, I consider mine.
Am I mistaken, or have my books made her famous?
so it shall be – she'll be advertised by my art.
And it serves me right! For didn't I trumpet her beauty?
It's my fault if the girl's been rendered marketable.
It pleased me to be go-between, guide to lovers I attracted,
the entrance was thrown open by my hand.
And I doubt the use of verse that's always harmed me:
it made men envious of my success.
Despite Thebes, and Troy, and Caesar's actions,
only Corinna inspired my genius.
I wish a hostile Muse had struck my verse,
that Apollo had forsaken my works' beginnings!
Yet it's not the custom to listen to poets as witnesses:
I'd rather less weight was given to my words.
Through us Scylla stole her father's precious lock of hair,
and set rabid dogs at her thighs and groin:
we granted feet wings, and hair snakes:
and Perseus, the hero, a winged horse.
Tityus too we stretched out over vast spaces,
and made the snaky Cerberus three-headed:
we made thousand handed Enceladus throw spears,
captured heroes with the songs of bird-footed virgins.
We shut the winds of Aeolus in Ulysses's bag:
showed Tantalus parched in the midst of water.
Made a bear of a girl, a rock out of Niobe.
A bird, once Thracian Philomela, sang for Itys:
Jupiter transformed himself to bird or gold,
or cut the waves, as a bull, with a girl on his back.
Shall I speak of Proteus, the teeth the Theban sowed:
bulls there were breathing flames from their mouths:
Charioteer, your sisters with eyes weeping amber:
what were once ships, now sea goddesses:

the sun turning away from Atreus's vile feast,
and solid stones following the sounding lyre?
The poet's creative licence embraces everything,
nor are his words obliged to be true to history.
and you ought to have seen that my praise of the woman
was fiction: now your credulity has hurt me.

Book III Elegy XIII: The Festival of Juno

My wife and I came to fruitful Falerii, where she was born,
the town you conquered once, Camillus.

Priests were preparing Juno's chaste festival,
the celebrated games, and sacrifice of a local heifer:
despite the difficult mountain ways this road offers
to witness the rites was worth the delay.

There stood the ancient gloomy grove dense with trees:
look at it – and you'll agree there's a goddess in the place.
The altar receives prayers and votive incense from the pious
an altar made by ancient hands, without high art.

Here the annual procession passes through garlanded ways,
where the flute sounds out, with solemn chants:
white heifers are led by, to the crowd's applause,
that browse Falerian grass in their own fields,
and horned bullocks, whose foreheads don't threaten yet,
and lesser victims, pigs from humble sties,
and rams, with curving horns on their solid brows.

Only the she-goat's hateful to the great goddess:
They say one came upon her in the deep woods,
and betrayed her, aborting her incipient flight.

Now the informer's attacked by boys with spears,
and she's given as a prize to the one who wounds her.

When the goddess comes, youths and timid girls
go before her, with robes that sweep along the streets.

The girls' hair is burdened with gold and jewels,
and noble gowns brush their gilded feet:

Veiled in white clothes in the ancient Greek fashion
they carry the sacred vessels on their heads.

The crowd is hushed when she comes with golden pomp,
drawn along behind her priestesses.

The style of the procession is from Argos: Halaesus fled
from sin, and his father's wealth, at Agamemnon's murder,
then wandering in exile, over land and sea,
he founded these high walls, with fortunate hand.

He taught the rites of Juno to his Falerians.

Let her always be a friend to her people, and to me!

Book III Elegy XIV: Discretion Please!

I don't say 'don't sin', since you're beautiful,
but there's no need for me, poor fool, to know:
and no censure of mine demands that you're chaste,
it only asks that you try and conceal it.
She didn't sin, if she can deny she sinned,
only confession makes crimes notorious.
What madness to expose, by day, what midnight hides:
why make what's secret into a well-known fact?
Some whore who couples with a nameless citizen
moves away from the crowd before it's too late.
Will you prostitute your sins for worthless fame
and talk about what you've done to fuel opinion?
Improve your ways: at least pretend you're chaste,
and I can approve, thinking you what you're not.
What you do, keep doing it: just deny it,
and don't be ashamed to speak modestly in public!
If there's a place demands naughtiness: then fill it
with all delights, let shame be far away!
Likewise when you leave off, straightaway forget
all lasciviousness: leave the sin there, in your bed.
There, don't let your slip make you over-shy,
or not allow your thigh to press against a thigh:
there, let my tongue be buried between your rosy lips,
and let desire shape a thousand ways to love:
there, don't let your words and sounds of delight cease,
let the naughty bed tremble at your agility!
Then, with your dress, put on the face that fears sin,
and let shame disown the works of obscenity:
Tell me, tell people anything: let me err without knowing,
and let me enjoy a fool's credulity!
Why do I see so many notes received and given?
Why are the pillow and the sheet wrinkled?
Why do I have to see such obvious love-bites on your neck,
and your hair disturbed by more than sleep?
You only hide the sin itself from my eyes:
If you hesitate to spare your reputation, well spare me!
My mind's gone, I'm dying, when you confess your crimes,
and the blood runs cold in my whole body.

Then I love, and hate, in vain, what I have to love:
then I wish, with you, that I was dead!
For my part I'll not enquire, not seek to know
what you hide, and treat deception as a gift.
But if I catch you in the guilty act,
and your shame's visible to my eyes,
deny I've really seen what I've really seen –
I'll accept your words and not my sight.
It's easy for you to win the palm if I want to be beaten,
just remember to say the words: 'I didn't!'
While you succeed in winning with those two words,
though you've no case, you'll conquer the judge too!

Book III Elegy XV: His Fame to Come

Find a new poet, mother of gentle Love!
My elegies have scraped past the last turning-post:
I composed them, child of Pelignian country –
and my pleasures have not led me astray –
For what it's worth, I'm heir to an ancient line,
not a knight fashioned by the whirlwind of war.
Mantua celebrates Virgil, Verona Catullus:
I'll be known as the glory of Peligni's people,
who won honourable freedom with their arms,
when Rome was fearful of their collective force.
And some stranger, seeing the walls of watery Sulmo,
and how small a measure of land it occupies,
will say 'What a great poet you were able to bear:
I'll call you great, however small you are.'
Graceful boy, and, you, the graceful boy's Cyprian mother,
take away your golden standard from my field!
Horned Bacchus rebukes me with his weightier rod:
there's a greater space beaten by greater steeds.
Unwarlike elegies, joyful Muse, farewell,
this work that will still stand forever, when I'm dead.

End of The Amores

