

OID  
THE HEROIDES



Translated by A.S. Kline

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I: Penelope to Ulysses

Your Penelope sends you this, Ulysses, the so-long-delayed.

Don't reply to me however: come yourself.

Troy lies in ruins, an enemy, indeed, to the girls of Greece - Priam, and all of Troy, were scarcely worth this!

O I wish, at that time when he sought Sparta with his fleet, Paris, the adulterer, had been whelmed beneath angry seas!

I would not have lain here, cold in an empty bed, nor be left behind, to complain, at suffering long days, nor my hand, bereft, exhaust me, working all night long to cause deception, with my doubtful web.

When have I not feared dangers worse than all realities?

Love is a thing full of anxious fears.

I imagined the Trojans' violent attacks on you:

often I grew pale at Hector's name:

if someone told of Antilochus defeated by Hector,

Antilochus was the reason for my fears,

if of Patroclus, dying in Achilles's armour,

I wept that tricks might fail of success.

Tlepolemus warmed the spear of Sarpedon with blood,

Tlepolemus's death is then a new cause of anxiety to me.

In short, whoever of the Greek camp was killed,

the heart of a lover was chilled like ice.

But the god, who favours pure love, truly gave protection:

Troy is turned to ashes: by a hero who's unharmed.

Our generals return to Greece, the altars smoke,

barbarous gifts are set before the country's gods.

Wives give thanks, for the gift of living husbands:  
who sing in turn of their Troy conquered by fate:  
upright old men and trembling girls marvel,  
the wife hangs on her husband's words as he speaks.  
And one seated at table describes the fierce battle  
and draws all of Troy in a little wine:  
'Here was Simois, here Sigeon ground,  
here stood aged Priam's towering palace:  
here Achilles camped, here Ulysses,  
here mangled Hector scared the galloping horses.'  
Indeed Nestor related it all to your son Telemachus,  
sent to enquire about you, then he to me.  
And he told of Rhesus and Dolon dead by your sword,  
so that one was betrayed by sleep, the other by guile.  
It was brave, oh you, who are more and more forgetful of  
your own,  
to enter the Thracian camp, with night's deception,  
and kill so many men, with the help of one!  
Then you were truly cautious, and thinking first of me!  
My heart shook all the time, with fear, while my dear hero  
was depicted, riding through the army on Ismarus's horses.  
But what benefit to me if Troy's cast down, by your arms,  
and the walls that it possessed are razed to the ground,  
if I wait here, as I waited while Troy still stood,  
and my husband away, with no end in sight?  
Destroyed for others, Troy remains, for me alone,  
where the victor lives to plough with captive oxen:  
there are fields now, where Troy once was, and the earth,  
beneath the scythe, crops densely, rich with Phrygian  
blood:

half-buried bones of heroes are struck by the curving  
plough,

and grass conceals the ruined houses.

The victor is absent, and I am not allowed to know,  
the reason for his delay, or in what land he cruelly hides.

Whoever turns his wandering vessel towards this shore  
departs weary of being questioned by me, about you:

and what he'll deliver to you, if he sees you anywhere,  
will be letters surrendered to him, written by my hand.

I sent to Pylos, to the Nelean fields of ancient Nestor:  
doubtful rumours returned from Pylos:

and I sent to Sparta: no known truth from Sparta either.

What land do you live in, or with whom do you delay so  
long?

It would be better if Apollo's walls still stood:

alas I'm angered myself by my thoughtless prayers!

I might have known where you were fighting, and only fear  
the war,

and my complaints would then have been joined with many  
others.

I don't know what to fear: I fear everything, insanely,  
and my anxieties are open to wide speculation.

Whether the sea contains the danger, or the land,  
such long delays equally cause me to suspect.

While I foolishly fear it, that is your wilfulness,  
you could be captive now to a foreign love.

And perhaps you tell her, that your wife's an innocent,  
considered to be almost like raw wool.

Let me be deceived, and let this charge vanish in thin air  
and let your returning sails not be wilfully absent.

My father Iscarius forces me to leave my empty bed,

and rebukes me for my continual, endless waiting.  
It's all right for him to rebuke me continually! I'm yours, I  
should  
be spoken of as yours: I'll be Penelope, wife to Ulysses,  
always.

Yet he weakens knowing my piety, and my chaste prayers,  
and he moderates the force of it himself.

An insistent crowd of suitors comes to ruin us,  
from Dulichium and Samos, and those who hold high  
Zacynthus,

and they rule in your palace, without restraint:  
they tear your possessions to pieces, and my heart.

What should I say of how you, shamefully absent, nourish  
Pisander, Polybus, cruel Medon, the greedy hands of  
Eurymachus, and Antinous, and others: all of them, with  
your blood?

Irus and Melanthius driving in the flocks to be slaughtered  
add the final insult to your ruin.

The unwarlike ones are three in number: a wife with no  
strength,

old Laertes, and Telemachus your son.

He, recently, was almost taken away from me by trickery,  
when he prepared to go to Pylos, against their will.

I pray the gods decree that, in the natural order of things,  
he will close my eyes in death, and yours!

The faithful guardian of the filthy sty makes up another  
three,

along with the herdsman, and your very ancient nurse:

but Laertes, has no power to hold his own among enemies,  
he whose weapons are useless to him.

Telemachus, if only he lives, will become stronger with age:  
now he ought to be protected with his father's help.  
I have no strength to drive these enemies from the house:  
you must come quickly, to your harbour and refuge!  
You've a son, and I pray he'll be one who, in his tender years,  
will be educated in his father's arts.  
Consider Laertes: who keeps death back to the very last day,  
so that you might close his eyes.  
You'll find that I, in truth, a girl when you went away,  
though you soon return, have become an aged woman.



## II: Phyllis to Demophoon

Phyllis, your Thracian friend, complains to you,  
Demophoon,  
for being absent beyond your promised time.  
When the moon's horns had touched once more, at the full,  
you agreed to anchor by our shores.  
Four times the moon has hidden, four times waxed to the  
full,  
without the Thracian sea bringing Athenian ships.  
If you measure hours closely, as lovers measure,  
my complaint does not come before due time.  
Hope too was long drawn out. We're slow to believe what  
wounds  
us, when we do: now you seem guilty, reluctantly, to your  
lover.  
I often deceived myself, for you, often I imagined  
storms from the south brought back your white sails.  
I cursed Theseus, because he did not wish to let you go:  
or perhaps could not remember your course.  
Now and then I feared lest, heading for Hebrus's shallows,  
the ship was wrecked, sunk in the white waves.  
Often I have begged, impiously, of the gods that you be  
well,  
have wished for it in prayer at incense-burning altars:  
often, seeing favourable winds from sea and sky,  
I said to myself: 'If he's well, he will come,'  
Lastly, love supposed you faithful, whatever prevented  
haste,  
and I was imaginative as to the reasons.

But you are indifferent, in your absence! No oaths to the gods  
bring you back, nor do you return moved by my love.  
Demophoon, you gave words, and sails, to the wind:  
I long for the sails' return, lacking faith in the words.  
Tell me what I have done, except to love unwisely?  
Could I have deserved you, through some crime of mine?  
There is only one sin in me, that I pledged myself to you,  
wicked man, but it has the weight and likeness of justice.  
Where now is the pact of loyalty, hand linked to hand,  
and how were so many oaths in one lying mouth?  
Where is that Hymen now, who, through long years of  
friendship,  
was sponsor and guarantor to me of marriage?  
You swore to me by the sea, all stirred by winds and waves,  
over which you surely travel, over which you were to go,  
you swore by Neptune, your grandfather, unless that too is  
a lie,  
who calms the waters roused by the winds,  
by Venus, and those weapons, made so much so to me,  
one weapon the bow, the other the torch,  
and by Juno, whose kindness presides over the marriage  
bed,  
and by the mystic rites of the torch-bearing goddess:  
if each of these many injured gods took vengeance with  
their powers,  
your life alone would not be enough, in punishment!  
Ah, like a madwoman, I even had your damaged fleet  
rebuilt,  
so that there was a sound ship ready for your desertion:  
I gave you oars so that you might abandon me in flight.

Alas! I suffer wounds from weapons I created!  
I believed the flattering words, of which you had a store:  
I believed in your breeding and your titles:  
I believed your tears. Or might even they be taught to  
deceive?  
Might they have arts as well, to flow when commanded?  
I believed them, too. Where now those many pledges of  
ours?  
Any one of them was enough to imprison me.  
I am not disturbed that I helped you with harbour and  
shelter:  
but that should have been the end of my kindnesses!  
I regret that friendship was shamefully crowned  
by the nuptial bed, and body was entwined with body.  
I would rather the night, before that night, had been my  
last,  
while Phyllis could still die virtuously.  
I hoped for better things, and thought I deserved them:  
whatever hope comes from kindness, is just.  
I cannot believe that to cheat a girl is anything  
to boast of: my innocence deserved friendship.  
The lover and the woman were deceived by your words:  
may the gods let this be the one thing you are known for!  
And let your statue be set up in the midst of the city,  
among the sons of Aegeus: Theseus, your great father,  
his honours before him: Sciron with his bed, grim  
Procrustes,  
and Sinis, and the Minotaur, man and bull joined together,  
and Thebes conquered in war, and the Centaurs routed,  
and the blind, shattered kingdom of Pluto, the dark god:  
your statue inscribed with its title after theirs:

‘Here’s he who stole love from a stranger by a trick.’  
Of all your father’s many deeds and affairs  
only the abandoning of Ariadne sticks in your mind.  
The thing in him needing to be excused, is the one thing  
you admire:  
your father’s heir, deceiver: you act out his sin.  
She – I don’t begrudge it – is blessed with a better husband  
and rides high above Bacchus’s team of harnessed tigers.  
But the Thracian men I despised flee from marriage with  
me,  
because I allowed a man strange to me to be preferred.  
And some said: ‘Let her go to learned Athens:  
there will be someone else to rule armed Thrace.  
Outcomes justify actions.’ I hope that anyone who thinks  
what I did is wrong because of its result, also lacks success.  
But if our water does foam under your oar,  
they’ll say now I look out for myself, then my people.  
But I have not looked to myself, and you will not touch  
my shore, or bathe your limbs in Thracian water.  
My eyes cling still to the sight of your going,  
when your departing fleet sat in harbour.  
You dared to embrace me, and, clinging to my neck,  
poured out a lover’s slow kisses, through long moments,  
and, as your tears mingled with my tears,  
you complained at the favourable wind in your sails,  
shouting to me, as you left, at the top of your voice:  
‘Phyllis, make sure you wait for your Demophoon!’  
Should I wait, for you who are absent and never wish to see  
me?  
Should I wait for the sails that are denied my seas?  
And still I wait. Only return, though late, to your lover,

seeing that your promise might lapse through time alone!  
Why should I beg, miserably? Perhaps another wife  
has you, and that love which served me so badly, now:  
How I'm forgotten by you, I think: a no-body, the Phyllis  
you knew.

Ah me! If you ask what Phyllis this might be, and from  
where,

I'm she who gave you shelter and friendship in Thrace:  
you, Demophoon, driven by long wanderings:

I who added my wealth to you, to whom, rich in effect,  
I gave many gifts, many that I was given:

she who brought you the wide kingdom of Lycurgus,  
scarcely fit to be ruled in a woman's name,  
where sacred Hebrus extends, from icy Rhodope  
to shadowy Haemus, and drives out the gathered waters,  
you, who took my virginity, with sinister omens,  
and loosed my chaste ties, with a deceiving hand.

Tisiphone, in attendance, howled at this marriage,  
and the gloomy bird gave its solitary cry.

Allecto was there, entwined with tiny snakes,  
and the lights were changed to funeral torches.

Though I am gloomy, I walk the cliffs and tangled shore:  
wherever the wide sea is open to my gaze.

Whether the earth is warmed by day, or the cold stars shine,  
I look to see what wind stirs the waves.

And whatever sails I see far-off, approaching,

I take them straight away as a sign from the gods.

I rush into the fickle sea, struggling with tenacious waves,  
there, where the ocean breakers extend.

As the sails grow larger, I am less and less able to stand,  
I faint and fall into my servants' arms.

The bay is drawn in a faintly scythe-shaped arc:  
the ends of its horns rise in a sheer cliff.  
Here I had a mind to hurl myself into the swelling waves  
- and since you will go on failing me, I will.  
The tide will carry me, abandoned, to your shore  
and your eyes will meet with my unburied body.  
so that, though iron, and steel, and you, excel in hardness,  
you will say: 'Phyllis, this was not the way to follow me!'  
Often I thirst for poison, often I'd like to die  
a bloody death, pierced by a sword.  
My neck too, since faithless arms offered to encircle it,  
I'd like to entangle in a noose.  
Mature thought upholds tender honour by dying:  
there is little point in delaying the choice of death.  
Inscribe the hateful reason on my tomb,  
you'll be known by these or similar lines:  
'Demophoon, the guest, gave loving Phyllis to death:  
he offered her reason to die, by her own hand.

### III: Briseis to Achilles

The letter you read comes from Briseis, a captive:  
its Greek, hardly written well by a barbarian hand.  
Whatever you read, will be blotted with tears:  
but still even tears carry the weight of my voice.  
If it's right to complain, a little, of you my lover,  
and master: of master and lover, a little, I complain.  
It's not your fault I was quickly ordered to be handed over,  
to King Agamemnon – however this is your fault:  
when Eurybates and Talthybius both called to take me,  
I, your companion, was given to Eurybates and Talthybius.  
Glancing at each other's face, they questioned,  
silently, where our love might be.  
I could have delayed: delayed punishment might have been  
welcome.

Ah me! I gave you no kiss in leaving!  
But I shed tears endlessly and tore my hair:  
I am unhappy finding myself, once more, a prisoner.  
I have often wished I might return, deceiving my guard:  
but whoever might catch this timid girl, is an enemy.  
If I could get right away, however, I feared I'd be caught at  
night,  
to be sent as a gift to some woman of Priam's household.  
But I may be given back, since I was given. I've been  
absent  
so many nights, and no recall. You are idle, and slow to  
anger.

Patroclus himself, when I was handed over, whispered  
in my ear: 'Why cry, you'll be here again in a little while.'  
Scarcely thought of: you disagree with my return, Achilles.

Go, now, and keep your name as a fond lover!  
Ajax and Phoenix came to you, Telamon and Amyntor's  
sons,  
the one related to you by blood, the other a friend,  
and Ulysses, Laertes's son: I might be returned through  
them:  
they added many valuable gifts to their entreaties:  
twenty cauldrons made of yellow bronze,  
and seven tripods of equal weight and art.  
Added to that were ten talents of gold,  
and twelve horses, always accustomed to winning.  
And, what were superfluous, girls of outstanding beauty,  
captured when their island of Lesbos was overthrown:  
and with all this – but you don't need a bride –  
a bride, one of Agamemnon's three daughters.  
If I might have been ransomed to you by Atrides, at a price,  
why did you refuse to accept what you ought to have  
given?  
For what fault of mine did I deserve to become worthless to  
you, Achilles? Where has gentle love gone, fleeing so  
swiftly, from us?  
Or does sad fortune press hard on the wretched,  
and no sweeter hour may come to my endeavours?  
I saw you destroy the walls of Lyrnessus by your warfare  
and I was an important person in my country.  
I saw three brothers fall, who were born and died together,  
whose mother was my mother also.  
I saw my husband, how dear to me, spilled on the cruel  
earth,  
his bloodstained chest heaving.  
Yet, with so many lost, you alone made up for them:



you were lord, you were husband, you were brother to me.  
Swearing by your mother the sea-goddess Thetis's power,  
you said to me that to have been a captive was useful in  
itself –

no doubt, so that though I came with a dowry, you might  
reject me, and shun me, and what might have given wealth  
to you!

Indeed it's even said you'll set full sails to the South wind,  
that brings the cloud, when tomorrow's dawn shines clear.  
What a crime that the fearful winds of misery touched me,  
and the heart of life was empty of feeling.

You'll go - O pity me! – to what violent man do you  
abandon me?

Who will comfort my tenderness when I'm deserted?

I pray that I might be swallowed by some sudden crack in  
the earth,

or be burned by red fire hurled out by the lightning,  
before Phthian oars whiten the waves without me,  
and I see your ships sail, leaving me behind.

If it's your return and your father's gods that please you  
now,

I'll be no great burden to your fleet.

I'd follow the victor as his captive, not a husband as his  
wife:

I could work the wool: its fitting for my hands.

Far off among the Greek women the most beautiful bride  
will enter your bed, and she'll be worthy to be a daughter-  
in-law

to her father-in-law Peleus, descendant of Jove and Aegina,  
of whom old Nereus well might wish to be a grandfather to  
the wife.

I'll be a humble servant spinning out the day's work  
and thinning the full distaff into my threads.

I beg you not to let your wife scold me too much,  
not knowing if she will be at all kind to me,  
nor suffer my hair to be pulled out in your presence,  
with you saying lightly: 'She too was mine.'

Perhaps suffering's better, since I'm indeed contemptible,  
forsaken:

here fear shakes my bones – alas the wretchedness!

Still, what do you wait for? Agamemnon regrets his anger  
and lays out all Greece, in mourning, before your feet.

Conquer your feelings and anger, you who've conquered  
all else!

Why should Hector actively destroy the Greek forces?

Take up your arms, Aeacides –but take me back first –  
and overcome those troublesome men aided by Mars!

Your anger was stirred because of me: through me let it  
fade,

and let me be the cause, and end, of your sorrows.

Don't think it shameful to yield to my prayers:

Meleager was turned towards war by his wife's prayer.

It's a tale I've heard, one known to you: bereaved of her  
brothers

by her son, her hope and heir, the mother cursed him.

There was a war: he proudly withdrew, refusing battle,  
and, stubborn of mind, refused aid to his country.

Only his wife could persuade the man – happier was she! –  
but my words fail, and carry little weight.

Yet I'm not displeased that I've not performed as a wife,  
as a slave I was summoned more often to my master's bed.

I remember once some captive called me mistress –

I said: 'The weight of that name adds to the slavery.'  
Yet I swear by my husband's bones, scarce buried  
in a hasty grave: they are always sacred, to my judgement:  
and by the three spirits of my brave brothers, gods to me,  
who died well, for and with their country,  
and by your body and mine that we joined as one,  
and by your swords known to our weapons,  
no Mycenaean has shared the bed with me:  
you might wish to abandon one who deceived.  
If I now said to you: 'Bravest, you too swear to me  
you've never made love without me' – you'd refuse.  
Now the Greeks think you're grieving – but you play  
music,  
a sweet friend clasps you to her warm breast.  
and if anyone asks why you decline to fight –  
fighting's harmful, while Venus, and nights with the lyre,  
delight.  
It's safer to lie there in bed, holding a girl tight,  
strumming the Thracian lyre with your fingers,  
than bearing a shield and a sharp-pointed spear in your  
hands,  
and a helmet that presses down on your hair.  
Yet, instead of safety, conspicuous action pleased you,  
and a glorious part in the fighting was sweet.  
Or was it merely that while you might still capture me,  
you approved of fierce war, and your glory died with my  
country?  
May the gods alter that! And I pray, that the spear from  
Pelion,  
hurled from a strong arm, pierces Hector's side!  
Send me to him, you Greeks! As delegate, I'll beg my lord,

and mingle many kisses with your requests.  
I'll achieve more than Phoenix, more than eloquent  
Ulysses,  
more than Ajax, Teucer's brother, believe me.  
It's something to have been embraced by familiar arms  
and to have recalled his eyes to oneself in person!  
Though you may be harsher, and fiercer than your mother's  
waves,  
I'll suppress my tears in order to stay silent.  
Now too – so that your father Peleus may complete long  
years,  
so your son Pyrrhus might take up arms under your  
auspices! –  
have regard for anxious Briseis, mighty Achilles,  
don't oppress the miserable girl, cruelly, with long delay:  
but if your love has turned to loathing of me,  
force me to die, who am forced to live without you!  
Yet you do force me. My flesh and colour fade:  
the one hope I still have left is that of your feelings.  
If I lose that, I'll join my husband and my brothers:  
why even order it? Attack my body with your naked sword,  
I have blood that should flow from my pierced breast.  
Attack me with that sword, which, if Thetis had allowed,  
would have entered Agamemnon's breast!  
Ah! Rather, save my life, your gift to me!  
What the conqueror granted his enemy, I ask as a friend.  
You can destroy better things, those that Neptune gave  
to Troy: seek matter in the enemy you kill!  
Only, order me, on my lord's authority, to come: whether  
you prepare your fleet to be driven by oars, or whether you  
stay!

#### IV: Phaedra to Hippolytus

The Cretan girl, who lacks health unless he grants it her,  
wishes good health to the man who's an Amazon's son.  
Read what is here. How could reading a letter harm you?  
There might even be something in it that pleases you.  
My secrets are carried, by these letters, over land and sea:  
even enemies read letters received from their enemies.  
I've tried to speak to you three times, three times my  
tongue  
clung to my mouth, three times the sound died on my lips.  
It's right and natural that shame is mingled with love:  
love ordered me to write, to say what shames me.  
Whatever love commands cannot be wholly denied:  
he rules and is a law among the gods.  
He told me to pen words, in my first confusion:  
'Write! Having conquered, he'll give his cruel hand.'  
He helps me, and, seeing that he heats my marrow with  
greedy fire,  
he may also fix your affections as I wish.  
I would not break my marriage contract through sin –  
you can enquire – my reputation's free of any stain.  
Love that comes late is deeper. We burn within: we burn:  
and our feelings suffer the secret wounds:  
I suppose that, as a young ox is chafed by the yoke,  
and a horse captured from the herd scarcely suffers the  
harness,  
so with great difficulty, with rawness, the heart suffers new  
love.  
and this burden does not lie easy on my spirit.  
When guilt's fully learnt in early years, it becomes an art:

love that comes with the claims of time, loves less easily.  
You will enjoy a new libation, one that has been guarded  
from sin,  
and both of us will become equally guilty.  
What's plucked from the loaded branches in the orchard  
is valuable, and the rose first gathered by slender fingers.  
But even if that first purity, that I bring you free of sin,  
were to be marked by this unaccustomed stain,  
then I would still accept being burnt by a worthy fire:  
a vile adulterer is more harmful than the adultery.  
If Juno yielded me Jupiter, her husband and brother,  
I'd consider Hippolytus preferable to Jove!  
Now too – you'll scarcely believe this – I take up new arts:  
I have the urge to be among wild creatures:  
now my chief goddess is Diana, known for her curved bow:  
in following her I follow your preference:  
I love to pass through the woods and drive deer into my  
nets,  
urging my swift hounds over the tops of the hills,  
or launch a quivering spear from my trembling arm,  
or throw my body down on the grassy earth.  
often I delight in driving a light chariot through the dust,  
and twisting the bit in the mouth of a fleeing horse,  
Now I'm swept away, like the Maenads roused by Bacchic  
frenzy,  
like those who beat their drums on the slopes of Mount Ida,  
or those semi-divine Dryads, and twin-horned Fauns,  
who are stunned, touched by his power.  
And then others relate it all, when the madness abates:  
I silently burn, conscious of love.  
Perhaps by my fate I'm paying for the passions of my race,

and Venus may be seeking a tribute from all the tribe.  
Jupiter loved Europa, as a bull, hiding his godhead,  
she was the first origin of our people.  
A burden and a reproach was born from the womb  
of my mother, Pasiphae, mounted by a bull she tricked.  
Traacherous Theseus, following the guiding thread  
escaped the labyrinth with the help of Ariadne, my sister.  
Indeed, I now, lest I might be thought no child of Minos,  
am the latest to be subject to the common rules of my tribe.  
This was destined too: one House pleased both of us:  
your beauty captivated me, your father's my sister.  
Theseus and his son have seized on two sisters:  
build twin memorials to us then in your house!  
At the time when I entered Ceres's Eleusis –  
the soil of Crete should have held me back –  
then you above all pleased me (though you had before):  
fierce love clung to me in the depths of my bones.  
You were clothed in white, your hair surrounded by  
flowers,  
a modest blush tinged your golden cheeks:  
others call your face grim and severe,  
in Phaedra's judgment that severity is strength.  
let men who are adorned like women stay far from me:  
beauty loves the masculine, adorned in moderation.  
That severity of yours suits you, hair placed without art,  
and the light dust on your distinguished face.  
I admire it if you struggle with the arched necks of fiery  
horses,  
forcing them to turn their hooves in a tight circle:  
or if you calmly hurl the javelin with your strong arm,  
your warlike face turned towards your shoulder:

or grasp the wide-bladed hunting spear of cornel wood –  
in the end whatever you do delights my eyes.  
Only expend your harshness on the wooded hills:  
I'm not a fit subject to be destroyed by you.  
Why delight in the study of high-girt Diana's occupation,  
and avoid what you owe to Venus?  
What lacks rest now and then, will not last:  
rest renews the powers, and restores weary limbs.  
The bow (indeed, your weapons imitate Diana's)  
which never ceases to be strung, grows slack.  
Cephalus was distinguished in hunting, and many creatures  
were killed, among the grasses, by his blows:  
yet he didn't do badly in yielding to Aurora's lovemaking:  
the discreet goddess went to him from her aged husband.  
The grass beneath the oak trees often held  
Venus and Adonis, both, lying there relaxed.  
And Meleager was on fire for Arcadian Atalanta:  
she had the wild boar's hide as a token of his love.  
We too could soon be numbered in this throng!  
If you take Love away your woods are uncivilised.  
I'll come myself as your companion, the hidden rocks  
don't worry me, nor fear of the boar's curving tooth.  
Two seas pound the Isthmus with their waves,  
and the slender stretch of land hears both their waters.  
There I might live with you, in Troezen, Pittheus's  
kingdom:  
it's now a country dearer to me than my own.  
Theseus, Neptune's son, has been away a while, and will  
be, longer,  
Pirithous keeps him there in his country.  
Theseus, unless we deny what's obvious,



prefers Pirithous to Phaedra, and Pirithous to you.  
That is not all: injury comes to us from him:  
we have both been wounded deeply, in fact.  
Breaking my brother's bones with his three-knotted club,  
he scattered them over the soil: left my sister a prey to wild  
beasts.

Your mother, worthy, by her energy, of her son, bore you,  
she the most courageous of the axe-wielding Amazon girls.  
If you ask where she is, Theseus pierced her body with his  
sword:

not even such a child as you guaranteed her safety!  
Indeed she was not even a bride, experiencing the wedding  
torch –  
why, if not that you, a bastard, mightn't hold your father's  
kingdom?

Brothers he took from me, he gave to you. Yet I was not  
the reason for taking them all away, he was.

O I wish the harm done you, in your heart's core,  
might be ended by the most beautiful of actions!

Come now, show your respect for your worthy father's bed  
like this:

he who fled, and himself disowned his deeds.

Nor, because I'd be seen as a stepmother coupling with her  
stepson, should you let your mind fear those empty names.

That old morality was held to be dying, as far as future  
ages,

were concerned, by Saturn, in his primitive kingdom.

Whatever might give Jupiter pleasure he declared lawful,  
and divine law allows any sister to be married to her  
brother.

The tie is firm that's made by procreation,

those bonds that Venus herself imposes.  
It's no effort to hide them, though! Seek the gift from her  
of being able to mask guilt by known kinship.  
Let someone see us embrace: we'll both be praised,  
I'll be said to be a stepmother loyal to her stepson.  
Not for you the unbarring of a harsh husband's gate,  
in the shadows, nor the deceiving of a guardian:  
the house will hold as one, what it held as two.  
Open kisses you gave, open kisses you'll give.  
You'll be safe with me, and guilt will earn praise,  
even if you are observed in my bed.  
Rid yourself of delay, and join quickly in a compact!  
Love will spare you, then, that which rages in me now!  
I don't scorn to be a suppliant, or beg humbly of you.  
Ah! Where are pride and noble words now? Lost!  
And I was certain I'd struggle for a long time –  
if Love can be certain – and not submit to sin.  
Conquered, I beg you, and clasp your knees with royal  
arms.  
No lover thinks about what's fitting.  
I have no shame, and shame, fleeing, relinquishes its  
standards.  
Acknowledge the favour given and conquer your hard  
heart!  
For Minos, who is my father, rules the seas,  
the lightning comes from one grandfather, Jupiter's raised  
hand,  
the other, Sol, his forehead fenced with sharp rays,  
drives his gleaming chariot through the heat of day –  
Nobility lies here subject to love: pity my forefathers  
and if your power cannot spare me, spare them!

The land of Crete, Jupiter's island, is my dowry:  
all my kingdom would serve Hippolytus.  
Cruel man, change your mind! My mother could seduce a  
bull:  
will you be more savage than that wild bull?  
Spare me, I beg you, by Venus who's closest to me:  
and so may you never love, what scorns you:  
may the nimble goddess be with you in secret glades,  
may the deep woods offer you creatures for plunder:  
may the Satyrs and the Pans, mountain gods, favour you,  
and the wild boar fall, pierced by your opposing spear:  
may the nymphs, though you're said to hate the girls,  
give you that water which quenches parching thirst!  
I add tears also to these prayers. You who read  
words of prayer, imagine that you can also see my tears!

V: Oenone to Paris

The Nymph sends words you ordered her to write,  
from Mount Ida, to her Paris, though you refuse her as  
yours.

Will you read them? Or does your new wife forbid it?  
Read! This is not a letter created by a Mycenaean hand.  
I, Oenone, the fountain-nymph, famous in Phrygian woods,  
wounded, complain of you, who are my own if you allow  
it.

What god opposes my prayers with his divine will?  
Might I be suffering from some crime of yours that harms  
me?

Whatever one deserves to suffer should be borne lightly:  
what comes undeservedly, comes as bitter punishment.  
You were not important as yet, when I was happy  
with you as my husband, I, a nymph born of a mighty river.  
You who now are a son of Priam, (let fear of the truth be  
absent)

were a slave: the nymph endured marriage with a slave!

We often rested our flocks, hidden among the trees,  
leaves, mingled with grass, offered us a bed.

Often lying on straw, and in the deep hay,  
a humble roof sheltered us from the hoar frost.

Who showed you the glades that suit the quarry,  
and where the wild beast hides her cubs among the rocks?

Often, as your companion, I've set the wide-meshed nets,  
often I've led swift hounds over the long slopes.

The beech trees guard my name, cut there by you,  
and I read 'Oenone', written there by your knife:

And as the trunk grows, my name grows the same:

grow, and rise straight, in honour of my name!  
I remember, a poplar, rooted by a flowing stream,  
on which letters are carved, testaments to us.  
Live, poplar, I pray, which rooted on the edge of the bank,  
that holds this verse in your wrinkled bark:  
'If Paris breathed while Oeneone were forsaken,  
Scamander's waters would flow backwards to their source.'  
Scamander, rush backwards, turn your streams around!  
Paris allows Oenone to be deserted.  
That day spoke my miserable fate, on that evil day  
winter began to transform our love,  
when Venus and Juno, and Minerva, who is more comely  
armed,  
came, naked, to receive your judgement.  
My stunned heart trembled, and a cold tremor,  
ran through solid bone, as I heard that being told.  
I took council (not afraid of much as yet) with old women  
and age-old men: they agreed it was wrong.  
Fir-trees were felled, and timbers cut, a fleet prepared,  
and the blue waves received the new-caulked vessels.  
You wept on leaving. Don't deny that, at least:  
your love is more shameful to you than in the past.  
You wept and saw my eyes filled with tears:  
we both mixed our grief and tears together.  
The elm's not smothered, by the vine, more closely  
than I, your arms entwined with my neck.  
Ah how many times, when you complained the wind  
was feeble, your companions laughed – it was fine.  
How many times you dismissed me repeatedly!  
How your tongue could scarcely bear to say: 'Farewell!'  
The light breeze stirred slack sails on the firm mast

and the oars whitened the swirling water.  
Unhappy I followed the departing sail with my eyes,  
as is right, and my tears wet the sand,  
and I begged the sea-green Nereids that you might come  
back soon –  
so, no doubt, you could return quickly to my harm.  
Did you return at my prayers, returning with another?  
Ah me, my flattering speech was for a rival!  
A vast natural cliff looks down onto the deep,  
(once part of the mountain) and meets the ocean tide:  
Here I was first to recognise the sails of your ships  
and I desired to rush into the waves.  
While I hesitated, I became afraid of royal-purple robes  
that gleamed towards me from the height of the prow:  
to wear that was no fashion of yours.  
It grew nearer, and the boat touched shore with the swift  
breeze:  
with trembling heart I saw a female face.  
As if that was not enough – why did I still wait there  
madly? –  
your vile mistress clung to your chest!  
Then truly I tore my clothes, and beat my breast  
and scratched my wet cheeks with sharp nails,  
and filled sacred Ida with howls of complaint  
I carried my tears there among the rocks.  
So may Helen grieve and weep, abandoned by her lover,  
let her suffer what she first brought me!  
Now those women suit you, who leave their rightful  
husbands  
to follow you over the open sea.

When you were a poor man, and a shepherd driving the flock,  
the poor man had only his wife Oenone.  
I'm not amazed by wealth, nor does your palace move me,  
nor to be spoken of as one of Priam's many daughters:  
however Priam would not refuse to be father-in-law to a nymph,  
nor would that daughter-in-law be concealed by Hecuba.  
I am worthy, and wish, to become the wife of a powerful man:  
I have hands that might grace a sceptre.  
Don't despise me, because I lay with you among the beech leaves:  
I'm more suited to a bed of royal purple.  
In the end my love is safe: here no war's prepared  
the waves carry no vengeful ships.  
The fugitive daughter of Tyndareus needs dangerous weapons:  
she comes to your bed with a magnificent dowry.  
Ask your brother Hector, or Deiphobus or Polydamas,  
whether she should be returned to the Greeks:  
consult as to what grave Antenor, or Priam himself, would urge,  
who have been in command for many years.  
It's shameful to start preferring a stolen woman to your country.  
It's a cause of shame to you: a just husband takes up arms.  
Don't expect the Spartan to be loyal to you, if you're wise,  
she who fell so quickly into your embrace.  
Like Menelaus who cries out at the desecration of his marriage bed,

and wounded grieves at this love for a stranger,  
you will also cry. Wounded chastity is restored  
by no art: it remains lost for ever.

She's on fire with your love: just so, she loved Menelaus;  
now, too trusting, he lies there in an empty bed.

Happy Andromache is truly married to a good husband:  
take your brother's wife as an example.

You are lighter than leaves, without weight of sap,  
flying along, dried by the fickle winds.

And there's less weight in you than a fragile ear of wheat,  
that stiffens, parched by the continual sun.

Your sister Cassandra once chanted, (now I recall)  
prophesying to me, with her hair unbound:

'What are you doing, Oenone? Why sow seed in the sand?  
Ox, you plough the shore in vain!

The Greek heifer comes, who will destroy your house and  
lands!

Oh prevent her! The Greek heifer's coming!

While you can, sink the obscene vessel in the sea!

Alas! How much Trojan blood she carries!'

She spoke: her servants led her away, her madness in full  
flight,

but my yellow hair stood on end.

Ah, prophetess, you were only too right about my woes:  
see, the Greek heifer occupies my field!

Though her beauty is distinguished, she's truly adulterous:  
captivated by a guest, abandoning her husband's gods.

Theseus (unless the name's wrong, I'm unsure which  
Theseus)

stole her away from her country before.



A young man, and passionate, do we believe she returned a virgin?

How did I learn all this, you rightly ask? I love!

You might call it violence, and hide her crime, by a word: but she who gets raped so often, offers herself to rape.

Oeonone remains chaste, though betrayed by her husband – and you might have been betrayed yourself, by your rules:

The swift Satyrs, with hasty foot, an insolent crowd, searched for me (I hid secretly in the woods)

and horned Faunus, his head crowned with bristling pine, there, where Mount Ida swells up in vast ridges.

Noble Tros, who built Troy, loved me truly:

he took the prize of my virginity.

By a struggle too: all the same, his hair was torn, and his face was scratched, by my fingernails.

I didn't ask gold and gems for the price of my unchastity: it's shameful for gifts to buy a free-born body.

He entrusted me with his arts of medicine, certain I was worthy,

and allowed my hands to use his gifts.

I know every useful herb, with power to aid, and every healing root, growing in the world.

Alas for me, that love's not curable with herbs!

The skill in that art's lacking from my arts.

The creator of these gifts himself they say herded Thessalian cattle: and was wounded by my passion.

What neither the fruitful earth with its herbs, nor a god, can create, that help you can bring to me.

You can and I deserve it. Pity this worthy girl!

I don't bring Greeks and bloodstained weapons.

But I am yours, and I was yours in our tender years,

and I pray I might be yours, while time endures.

VI: Hypsipyle to Jason

Hypsipyle of Lemnos, born of the people of Bacchus,  
speaks to Jason: how much of your heart was truly in your  
words?

You're said to have reached Thessaly's shore in your  
returning ship,

rich with the fleece of the golden ram.

I give thanks for your safety, as much as you might allow:

yet surely the letter itself should have come from you.

For though you might not have had the winds, as you  
wished,

so as not to be driven beyond the kingdoms I granted:

however adverse the wind, Hypsipyle was worthy  
of being sent a sealed letter of greeting!

Why does rumour reach me, with news, before a letter:

the sacred bulls of Mars going under the yoke,

a crop of warriors growing from scattered seed

and their deaths not requiring your efforts,

the watchful dragon guarding the hide of the ram

yet the golden fleece snatched by your brave hand?

If I could say this timidly to the doubters: 'He himself

wrote this to me', how fine that would be!

Why complain at the sense of duty of an indifferent  
husband?

If I'm still yours, I've been shown great indulgence.

It's been said that a barbarous sorceress came back with  
you

to be welcomed to that half of the bed you promised me.

Love's a credulous thing. If only it's thoughtless speech  
that has charged a man with false crimes!

Recently a guest came to me from Thessalian shores,  
and had scarcely crossed the threshold when I said:  
'How is my Jason faring?' He hung there,  
shame-faced, his eyes fixed on the ground.  
I leapt up immediately, and tearing my tunic from my  
breast,  
I shouted: 'Does he live, or does death call me, also?'  
'He lives,' he said timidly: I forced that timid man to swear  
it.

I scarcely believe you live even with a god as witness.  
As my reason returns, I begin to inquire about your deeds:  
He tells of your ploughing with the bronze-footed bulls,  
the dragon's teeth sown in the earth instead of seed  
and the sudden warriors bearing arms,  
an earthborn people killed in civil war  
fulfilling their life's destiny in a day.

The dragon defeated. Again, I ask if Jason lives:  
belief alternates with hope and fear.

While he relates each tale, he reveals, by his ability,  
in the eagerness, and the flow of his story, my wounds.  
Oh, where's the loyalty promised? Where's the marriage  
oath,  
and the torch better fitted to plunge beneath my funeral  
pyre?

I was not known to you secretly. Juno was present at the  
wedding

and Hymen, his brow was crowned with garlands.  
Yet neither Juno nor Hymen, but dismal bloodstained  
Erinyes

carried her torches of ill-luck before me.

What are the Minyans to me? Or ships and Tritons?

Or Tiphys the Argo's helmsman, and my country, to you?  
There's no ram here with a remarkable golden fleece,  
nor was Lemnos the kingdom of old Colchian King Aeetes.  
True, at first – but my evil fate drew me on –  
I intended to drive the stranger away with my army of  
women

and they know how to overcome Lemnian men – too much  
so!

His life was protected by such a resolute army!

I saw that man into my city, admitted him to my house and  
heart.

Here two summers and two winters passed you by.

It was the third harvest when you contracted to sail,  
mixing words like these with your tears:

'I'm dragged away from you Hypsipyle. May fate only let  
me return:

I leave here as your husband, your husband I'll always be.

But that of mine that's hidden in your pregnant womb,  
will live, and we should both be parents to it!'

So you spoke. And, tears falling from your lying cheeks,  
I remember you could say nothing more to me.

Of the comrades you embarked last on the sacred Argo:  
it sped away, the wind took your billowing sails.

The dark-blue waves well up from your driving keel:

The land's gazed at by you, the sea by me.

A wide tower, open on all sides, surveys the waves:  
there I suffer and tears wet my face and breast.

I gaze through tears, and my eyes see further  
than they used to do, sharpened by loving feelings.

Now, also, add to them chaste prayers for your safety,  
mingled with anxious vows, to be fulfilled by me.

Shall I fulfil the vows? Medea may enjoy the fruits of sacrifice!

My heart grieves, and overflows, with anger mixed with love.

Shall I take gifts to the temples because Jason lives who I've lost?

Should some victim die at a blow because of the harm to me?

I was anxious, and always afraid, lest your father might arrange for a daughter-in-law from a city of Argolis. I feared the Argolid – yet it's a barbarian rival that harms me!

I never expected to suffer this wound from your enemy. It's not her face or merits that enchant you, but the charms she knows

and the herbs, cut, with fearful incantations.

She could labour to draw the reluctant moon from her course

and hide the horses of the sun in darkness:

she could hold back the waters, and halt the falling streams, she could move woods, and natural rocks, from their place.

She wanders through the tombs, clothes loose, hair dishevelled,

and collects particular bones from tepid funeral pyres.

She bewitches absent folk: she pierces wax effigies, and forces fine needles into their wretched livers.

And what it might be better for me not to have known: wrongly, love's sought, and its nature's to be bought, by magic practices.

Can you embrace her, without fear, in the one bed, enjoying sleep, in the silence of the night?

I suppose she forced you to bear the yoke, like those bulls:  
and like cruel dragons, you too are lulled by her powers.  
Add that she favours attributing your long list of deeds to  
herself

and that the wife's name harms the husband's.

Someone of Pelias's party could ascribe your successes to  
poisons,

and there are people who might believe him, saying:

'It wasn't Jason, but Medea of Phasis, Aeetes's daughter  
who stripped the golden fleece from the Phrixean ram'

Alcimedea, your mother, doesn't approve – seek her  
council! –

nor your father: she's a daughter-in-law come from the  
frozen pole.

Let her find a husband from the Don, or the damp Scythian  
marshes,

or even from her homeland of Phasis, for herself.

Fickle son of Aeson, more uncertain than a spring breeze,  
why do your words of promise lack substance?

You who'd gone from here my husband, didn't return so  
from there –

if I might be restored as your wife, I'd be as before your  
going.

If high birth and a noble name move you:

see, I was born the daughter of Thoas and of Ariadne.

Bacchus was my grandfather: as Bacchus's wife she wears  
a crown,

and her constellation outshines the lesser stars.

Lemnos will be my gift to you: a land ripe for cultivation:  
and you shall have me too with the rest of my dowry.

Now I have given birth, also. Rejoice for us both, Jason –

sweetly it's author had made a burden for my womb.  
I'm happy in their number, as well, and produced twin  
boys,  
favoured by Lucina with a double pledge.  
I you ask who they are like, you'll be able to identify them:  
they don't know how to pretend they have any other father.  
I nearly gave them up to be seen as ambassadors for their  
mother,  
but a cruel stepmother stood in the way of that undertaking.  
I feared Medea – a stepmother indeed –  
Medea's hands are made for every wickedness.  
She who could scatter the torn limbs of her brother,  
Absyrtus,  
over the fields, would she spare my children?  
O you, maddened and confused by Colchian drugs,  
do you still say she's preferable to Hypsipyles in bed?  
Shamefully that girl knew a man in adultery:  
chaste marriage gave me to you, and you to me.  
She betrayed her father – I snatched my Thoas from death.  
She abandoned Colchis – I have my Lemnos.  
What does matter, then, if wickedness overcomes piety,  
if she is endowed by crime itself, and it earns her a  
husband?  
Jason, I don't admire the crime the Lemnian women  
committed!  
However indignation grants itself a coward's weapons.  
If hostile winds as they ought had forced you and your  
friends  
to enter my harbour, and I'd come out to meet you with  
young twins – surely you'd have asked the earth to swallow



you! – say, wretch, with what look would you have gazed at me, and your children?

What death would have been fitting reward for such treachery?

In fact you would have been safe and sound because of me, not because you deserved it, but because I am kind.

I would have drenched my face with my rival's blood, and yours that she stole with her magic arts.

I would have been Medea to Medea. Why, if he who is on high, Jupiter the Just, himself, assists my prayers, let her grieve herself for what Hypsipyle bewails, a rival in my bed, and feel the effect of her own laws,

and as I am forsaken, a wife, and mother of two children, may she be bereaved of similar children, and her husband!

May she not keep her evil place for long, and forsake worse:

may she be exiled, and search the whole world for refuge.

What the sister was to the brother, the daughter to the unlucky father,

let that harsh woman be to her husband and her children!

When she's exhausted sea and land, let her try the air:

may she wander helpless, hopeless, bloodied by her crimes.

I, daughter of Thoas, cheated of my husband, beg this:

'Live man and bride in an accursed bed!'

VII: Dido to Aeneas

Dardanian, receive this song of dying Elissa:

what you read are the last words written by me.

At fate's call, the white swan, despondent on the grass,  
sings, like this, to the waters of Maeander.

I do not speak because I hope to move you with prayers:

I offer up my prayers to a hostile god!

But since I may have wholly wasted my reputation for  
merit,

and for chaste body and spirit, the waste of words is  
nothing.

You're still determined to go, abandoning wretched Dido,  
and the same wind will carry off your sails and promises.

Aeneas, you're determined to break your pledge, loose  
your ships, to seek domains in Italy, where, you do not  
know.

You are not moved by New Carthage, its growing walls,  
or the supreme power entrusted to you by the sceptre.

You flee what's done, you seek what is to do: yet searching  
for another kingdom in the world, it's already found.

If you reach that country who'd surrender it to you?

Who'd give possession of his fields to an unknown?

Another love's in store for you, another Dido,  
and another pledge being given, you'll again deceive.

Where might you create a city as good as Carthage,  
and look out on your people from its high fortress?

If it all came to pass, and the gods did not delay your  
hopes,

where would you find a wife, to love you like this?

I am scorched like wax torches dipped in sulphur,

like holy incense added to smoking pyres.  
My sleepless eyes cling, always, to Aeneas:  
I've Aeneas in my mind day and night.  
It's true that he's ungrateful, and silent about my gifts,  
and if I weren't a fool, I'd wish to be free.  
yet I don't hate Aeneas, though he might think badly of me,  
though I complain of his treachery, still I love him more.  
Venus, spare your daughter-in-law, and Love, my brother,  
embrace your hard-hearted brother: let him serve in your  
ranks.

So I, who began this love – I don't scorn indeed to say this  
–

might offer him the substance of my affections.  
I'm cheated and this is a false idea I speak of:  
he differs from his mother in disposition.  
Begotten by stones, or hills, or native oaks  
on tall cliffs, by savage beasts, or by the sea  
such as you now gaze on, stirred by the winds:  
why do you still prepare to battle with adverse tides?  
Where do you flee to? Storms obstruct you. The storms' aid  
will benefit me! See how the wind excites the crashing  
waves.

The storm I wished for you, comes to pass without me:  
wind and wave are more just to me than your heart.  
I'm not worth so much that you should perish, unjustly,  
by not being stopped from fleeing me over the wide seas.  
You'd be cultivating constancy and hatred too lavishly,  
if, though free of me, you met a common fate,  
Soon the winds will die, and, evenly, over the level waves,  
Triton will drive his dark-green horses through the waters.  
I wish that you too might be altered like the winds,

and you will, unless you're harder than an oak.  
Why, unless you're ignorant of how furious the seas can be,  
do you so often, so wrongly, trust the waters you've tried?  
Even, when you loose the hawsers, persuaded by the tide,  
still the wide sea holds many sorrows.  
It's no use tempting the waves, when faith's been violated:  
there punishment's demanded for treachery,  
especially when love is wounded, because, Venus, it's said,  
the mother of Love, was born naked from Cythera's waters.  
Lost, I fear lest I lose, and harm the one who harmed,  
lest my enemy, shipwrecked, drink the salt breakers.  
Live, I beg you! Thus I'd curse you more harshly than if  
you died,  
you'd be more widely known as the cause of my death.  
Come, imagine, if you were snatched up by a swift  
whirlwind –  
let there be no weight to that omen – what would be in your  
mind?  
Immediately the perjury of your false tongue will strike you  
and Dido, forced to die by Phrygian deceit:  
the image of the wife you cheated would stand before your  
eyes,  
in sorrow, and with loosened bloodstained hair.  
However many times you say: 'Forgive me, I deserved it  
all!'  
you'll find each one a thunderbolt falling on you!  
Grant a little space to your cruelty, and the sea:  
a safe path in future will be the great reward for your delay.  
If you've no care for me: spare your child Iulus!  
It's enough for you to bear notoriety for my death.

Why do that son, Ascanius, and your household gods  
deserve this?

Shall the waves bury those gods you rescued from the fire?  
But you did not bring them with you, as you told me,  
traitor,

nor did your sacred father straddle your shoulders.

You lied about it all: for your lying tongue did not  
start with me, nor am I the first one to be punished:

if you ask where Creusa is, the lovely mother of Iulus –  
she died alone, abandoned by a hard-hearted husband!

You told me this, but in winning me you suppressed it.

From that minor fault, came my future punishment.

I've no doubt that your gods condemn you:

storm-ridden for seven years, by land and sea.

Spewed up by the waves, I received you to a safe harbour  
and, scarce having heard your name aright, gave you a  
kingdom.

Yet I wish I'd been contented with those services  
and my reputation not buried by our union!

That day harmed me, when a sudden dark rainstorm  
forced us to shelter under the roof of a cave.

I heard a voice: I thought it the nymphs' wailing:

it was the Furies giving warning of my fate.

Exact my punishment, wounded Honour, and by the  
violated

laws of my marriage-bed leave no reputation to my ashes.

And you ghost, and spirit, and ashes of my Sychaeus  
to whom, alas for me, filled with shame I go.

Sychaeus is honoured by me in a marble shrine:

covered by shadowing branches, with their white strands of  
wool.

From it, four times, I heard his familiar voice, calling me  
by name:

his tones, faintly, saying: 'Elissa, come!'

No delay: I come: I come to you, a wife in debt –  
yet still I am late through confessing to my shame!

Grant forgiveness of my sin: he was worthy, he who  
deceived me:

that it was him removes the evil from my offence.

His divine mother, Venus, and the son's pious burden, his  
old father, Anchises, gave me hope he'd be a true husband  
to me.

If I was mistaken, the error had an honest cause:

add my loyalty, and nothing's to be regretted.

The course of my fate holds true to the end,  
and runs clear to the last day of my existence:

My husband, Sychaeus, died at the altar of his house  
and my wicked brother, Pygmalion, has the spoils.

Exiled from Tyre, I left my country, my husband's ashes,  
and endured harsh journeys, pursued by enemies.

Escaping my brother and the sea, I was brought to  
unknown lands,

and I won this shore, that I granted to you, faithless man.

I founded Carthage, and laid out wide walls on every side,  
a cause of envy to the neighbouring peoples.

War broke out. A stranger, and a woman, they tested me by  
war,

and I'd barely prepared the weapons and defences of my  
new city.

I was flattered by a thousand suitors, plaintive to wed me,  
and I don't know which of their marriage beds I preferred.

Why hesitate to surrender me in chains to Iarba, of the Gaetuli?

I will have offered my arms up to your wickedness. There is my brother, too, whose impious hand demands to be sprinkled with my blood, already stained by my husband's.

Set aside the gods, and the holy things you profane by touching!

It's not well for an impious hand to worship the heavens. If you were their future supporter escaped from the fire, it's a shame that the gods themselves escaped the flames.

Wicked man, you abandon both pregnant Dido and that part of you hidden enclosed by my body.

You add the infant's death to the unhappy mother's, and you'll be author of the funeral of your unborn child.

Iulus's brother will die with his mother, and one punishment will destroy the two of us.

'But the god orders me to go.' I wish he had prevented your coming to Carthage, its earth from being touched by a Trojan.

Led by this god, are you not driven by adverse winds, and endlessly scoured by ravaging seas?

Returning to Troy had scarcely been so much effort for you if it were as great as when Hector was alive.

You don't seek your father's Simois, but Tiber's streams, surely, when you reach the place you wish, you'll be an enemy.

While the land, you force yourself on, hides and shuns your ships,

you'll hardly be able to touch what you seek until you're old.

Rather you should accept this nation, without quibbling,  
as my dowry, and the riches of Pygmalion I brought here.  
Transform this happier Phoenician city into Troy,  
and rule this place, and hold the sacred sceptre!  
If your mind's eager for war, if Iulus asks, what victorious  
part  
might fall to him in battle, we'll have no lack of enemies  
to offer him, for him to overcome: here he can cultivate  
the conditions for peace, here too a place for arms.  
Only – by your mother Venus, and your brother's arms, his  
arrows,  
and the sacred Trojan gods companions of your flight! –  
may whoever of your race you brought, so conquer,  
and cruel Mars bring an end to your troubles,  
and Ascanius fulfil his years in happiness  
and old Anchises's bones rest in peace!  
I beg you, spare this house that surrenders ownership to  
you!  
What crime could you say was mine except having loved?  
I was not born in Greece, in Phthia, or great Mycenae,  
my husband and father did not depend on you.  
If it's shameful to marry me, call me friend not wife:  
so long as Dido is yours, she'll endure anything.  
I know how the waves strike the African shore:  
and grant or deny a passage at certain times:  
when the wind grants you way, you may unfurl your sails:  
then fickle weeds enclose your grounded boat.  
Trust me to watch for the right time: you'll leave more  
certainly,  
and even if you wish it, I won't let you stay.  
And your companions need rest, and the sails of your ships,



half-repaired, require some further delay.  
By my kindnesses, if I am destined for you, beyond this,  
by those hopes of union I beg a little time:  
while the seas grow calmer, while love's eased by  
familiarity,  
I learn to bear my sorrows more firmly.  
If not, I have the courage to pour away my life:  
your harshness cannot endure within me long.  
I wish you could see my appearance as I write:  
I write, and a Trojan sword lies in my lap:  
and tears fall from my cheeks onto the naked blade,  
which will soon be stained with tears of blood.  
How truly fitting your gift is for my death,  
you prepare my funeral at little cost.  
Nor is this the first wound, from a weapon, my heart  
suffers:  
that place bears the wound of cruel love.  
Anna, sister, sister Anna, sadly conscious of my crime,  
soon you must give the last offerings to my ashes.  
Do not write 'Sychaeus's Elissa', when I'm consumed by  
fire,  
let this verse, alone, appear on my marble tomb:  
'Aeneas offered a reason to die, and the sword.  
Dido killed herself by her own hand.'

## VIII: Hermione to Orestes

Hermione speaks to one lately her cousin and husband,  
now her cousin. The wife has changed her name.  
Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, proud, in his father's image,  
holds me imprisoned contrary to piety and justice.  
I have refused what I could, so as not be held against my  
will,  
a woman's hand has not the power to do more.  
'Scion of Aeacus, what are you doing? I'm not without a  
champion'  
I said, 'to you, Pyrrhus, this girl is under his command!'  
Deaf as the sea, he dragged me under his roof,  
my hair unbound, and I calling on Orestes's name.  
How could I have endured worse, as a slave in a captured  
Sparta,  
if a barbarian horde were to seize a daughter of Greece?  
Andromache was less abused by victorious Achaia,  
when Greek flames might have burnt the wealth of Troy.  
But you, Orestes, if my affectionate care for you moves  
you,  
take possession of me, without cowardice, as is your right!  
You'd surely take up arms if someone snatched your cattle  
from the closed stable, will you be slower for a captive  
wife?  
Let your father-in-law, Menelaus, be your example in  
reclaiming  
a lost wife, a girl who was the cause of a just war:  
if my father had wept in his empty palace like a coward,

my mother would be married to Paris as before.

Don't ready a thousand ships with swelling canvas

or hosts of Greek warriors: come yourself!

Yet if I too were won back in this way, it's no shame for a husband to have endured fierce war for his dear marriage bed.

Why, since Atreus, Pelop's son, is our mutual grandfather, even if you weren't my husband, you'd still be my cousin.

Husband, I beg you, aid your wife, cousin aid your cousin: both titles urge you to perform your duty.

Tyndareus gave me to you, he, my ancestor, heavy with experience,

and years: the grandfather decided for the grand-child.

But Menelaus, my father, made a promise of me, unaware of this act:

yet a grandfather has more power than a father, being first in rank.

When I married you, my wedding harmed no one:

if I unite with Pyrrhus, you'll be hurt by me.

And my father, Menelaus, may know nothing of our love: he himself succumbed to the arrows of the swift-winged god.

The love he allowed himself, he should pardon in a son-in-law.

My mother appears as an example to him.

You are to me as my father was to Helen, my mother. The part

that Paris, a Trojan stranger, once played, Pyrrhus performs.

He may boast endlessly about his father's, Achilles's, deeds,

you also have your father's actions to speak about.  
Agamemnon, Tantalus's scion, ruled over all, even  
Achilles:

the latter a soldier, the former was lord of lords.

You too have Pelops and his father, Tantalus, as ancestors:  
if you counted carefully, you'd be the fifth from Jove.

Nor do you lack worth. You bore the weapons of hate:  
but why might you have done so? Your father's fate  
endowed you.

I wish you might have had better reasons for courage:  
the work was not of your choosing, the cause was forced on  
you.

You still fulfilled your duty: Aegisthus, from his open  
throat,

stained the house with blood, as your father had before.

Pyrrhus, scion of Aeacus, speaks against you, turns praise  
to blame, and still maintains it to my face.

I am violated, and my face swells with feeling,  
and my inflamed emotions grieve me with hidden fires.

Who has not taunted Orestes in Hermione's presence:

I have no power, there's no cruel sword here!

Truly I can weep: I diffuse anger in weeping,  
and tears flow like streams over my breast.

I have only these, always, and always I pour them out:  
they wet my neglected cheeks, from a perennial fountain.

Surely, by the fate of my race, that tracks us through the  
years,

the mothers of Tantalus's line are suited to be prey?

I'll not repeat the lies of the swan of the river to Leda,  
or complain of Jupiter hiding under its plumage.

Far off where the long Isthmus divides two seas,

Hippodamia was carried off by the stranger's, Pelops's, chariot.

Two sisters, Phoebe and Hilaeira, were brought back to the city of Taenarus, from Messene, by Castor and Pollux, of Amyclae.

Helen was taken from Taenarus, across the sea to Ida, by a stranger, Paris, on account of whom the Greeks turned to their weapons.

Of course I can scarcely remember it. Yet I remember: everyone grieving, everyone full of anxious fears. Grandfather cried, and aunt Phoebe, and the Twins, Leda prayed to the heavens and her Jupiter. Even then I cut my hair that was not yet long calling: 'Without me, mother, why do you go without me?' Now a husband will leave. Lest I may be thought not Pelops's scion, see I was prepared as a prize for Pyrrhus, this Neoptolemus.

I wish Apollo's bow had avoided Achilles, son of Peleus! The father would condemn the son for his violent deed. A bereaved husband crying for his abducted bride didn't please Achilles then, nor would it have pleased him now.

Why do the hostile heavens cause me injury?  
Why must I complain that a troubled destiny harms me?  
My childhood was motherless: father was at the war:  
and while both lived, I was bereaved of both.  
Not for you, my mother, the charming lispings of those tender years,  
spoken by your daughter's uncertain mouth.  
I did not clasp your neck with tiny arms,

or sit, a welcome burden, on your lap.  
You didn't tend my dress, nor on my marriage  
did I enter a new marriage bed, prepared by my mother.  
When you returned I came out to meet you – I confess the  
truth –  
my mother's face was not familiar!  
Yet I knew you were Helen, as you were the most  
beautiful:  
you yourself asked which child was your daughter.  
This alone is mine: that Orestes is happily my husband:  
he too will be taken from me, if he doesn't fight for his  
own.  
Pyrrhus has a prisoner, though my father returns victorious:  
and this is the gift to me from Troy's destruction!  
When the Sun with his radiant horses holds the heights,  
I still enjoy, unhappily, my little freedom:  
when night shuts me in my room, with crying and bitter  
groans,  
and I sink down on my sorrowful bed,  
tears instead of sleep are made to spring up in my eyes  
and I shrink from my husband as if from an enemy.  
Often I'm stupefied by my ills and forgetful of things,  
and where I am, and, unaware, I touch a limb from Scyros:  
and I feel the wrong, and draw away from the body I  
touched,  
in error, and I think my very hand to be polluted.  
Often Orestes's name escapes me rather than Neoptolemus,  
and I love the error in my speech as if it were an omen.  
I swear by my unhappy tribe and Jove, the father of that  
tribe,  
who shakes the seas and lands and his own realm:

by your father's, my uncle's, bones, who requires of you  
that he might lie beneath his mound bravely avenged:  
that either I shall die early, and be lost in my first youth,  
or I, descendant of Tantalus, shall be wife to his  
descendant.

IX: Deianira to Hercules

A letter, that shares her feelings, sent to Alcides  
by your wife, if Deianira is your wife.  
I give thanks that Oechalia is added to our titles,  
I lament that the victor succumbs to his victory.  
A sudden rumour spreads through the Pelasgian cities  
tarnishing, and denying, your deeds:  
you, whom neither Juno nor her succession of mighty  
labours  
could crush: Iole has placed the yoke on you.  
King Eurystheus would enjoy this, the Thunderer's sister  
too,  
that stepmother delighting in the blemish to your career.  
But Jupiter would not, for whom (if it's to be believed)  
one night was not sufficient to father so great a child.  
Venus has harmed you more than Juno: the latter, burdened  
you,  
and raised you up, the former holds your neck beneath her  
foot.  
Behold, a world pacified by your protective strength,  
where sea-green Nereus circles the wide earth.  
The lands owe their peace to you, the oceans their safety:  
your merits fill the sun's two horizons.  
The sky where you will live, you once bore:  
Hercules, replacing Atlas, held up the stars.  
What will you have gained except notoriety for your sad  
disgrace  
if you add a known unchastity to your former deeds?  
Do you insist on what is said, that, in your tender cradle,



you squeezed two snakes tightly, and were once worthy of Jove?

You started better than you finish: the end's inferior to the beginning: this man differs from that child.

What a thousand wild beasts, Sthenelus your enemy, and Juno, could not conquer, Love has conquered.

But they say I married well, since I'm called Hercules's wife,

and my father-in-law is he who thunders through the heights.

The ox that comes to the plough unequally yoked is weighed down like the lesser wife of a greater husband.

It's a burden not an honour to endure a flawed splendour, if you wish to be well married, marry an equal.

My husband's always away, more like a guest than a husband,

and he chases after vile monsters and wild beasts.

I, occupied with my chaste prayers in this empty house, torment myself that he's downed by some aggressive enemy:

I'm troubled by serpents, wild boars, hungry lions, and hounds that cling to him with their triple jaws.

I'm worried by sacrificial entrails, vain dream phantoms, and secret omens searched for in the night.

Unhappy, I try to catch the murmurings of uncertain rumour:

I'm made fearful by wavering hope, and hope is killed by fear.

Your mother Alcmena is absent, and grieves that she pleased the god,

neither your father Amphitryon nor your son Hyllus are here.

I suffer Eurystheus, your judge through the cunning of unjust Juno,

and I suffer the endless anger of the goddess.

That is enough to bear: but you add foreign lovers, and whichever girl wishes to can become a mother by you.

I won't mention Auge, violated in the valleys of Parthenius, or your child Tlepolemus by the nymph Astydameia:

it wasn't your fault, that crowd of Thespius's daughters, of whose company not one was left alone by you.

There's one recent sin, reported to me, Omphale, the adulteress,

by whom I'm made a stepmother to your Lydian Lamus.

Maeander, which wanders about so greatly through that same land,

often returning his weary waters back on themselves,

saw a necklace hanging from Hercules's neck,

that neck to which the heavens were a small burden.

Weren't you ashamed, your strong arms circled with gold, and jewels placed on your bulging muscles?

Surely the breath of the Nemean lion was expelled by those arms,

that pestilential beast whose skin you wear on your left shoulder.

You dare to crown your long hair with a turban! White poplar leaves are more fitting for Hercules. Aren't you ashamed at having been reduced to circling your waist with a Maeonian belt like an impudent girl?

Don't you recall the memory of cruel Diomede, that savage who fed his horses on human flesh?

If Busiris had seen you dressed like this, surely he'd have been ashamed to have been conquered by such a conqueror!

Antaeus would tear the bands from your strong neck, lest he regret surrendering to such a weakling!

They say you held a basket among the Ionian girls and were frightened by your mistress's threats.

Did your hand not draw back, assigned its smooth basket, Alcides, conqueror of a thousand labours,

and did you draw out the thread with your strong thumb, and was an equally handsome weight of wool returned?

Ah! How often, while your rough fingers twisted the thread,

your over-heavy hand broke the spindle!

Of course you'll have told of deeds, hiding that they were yours:

squeezing savage snakes by their throats, entangling your infant hands in their coils:

how the Tegaeon boar would lie in Erymanthian cypress woods

and damage the earth with his great weight:

you wouldn't be silent about those heads hung on Thracian houses,

nor Diomedes's mares fattened on human bodies,

nor the triple monster, rich in Spanish cattle,

Geryon, who was three monsters in one:

and Cerberus the hound with as many bodies split from one,

his hair entangled by a threatening snake:

the fertile serpent born again from her fecund wound,

and she herself enriched by her losses.

and he who hung between your left arm and left side,  
a weary weight as you crushed his throat,  
and the Centaurs' battered troop on the heights of Thessaly,  
trusting wrongly in their speed and dual form.

Can you speak of that, marked out by Sidonian dress?  
Shouldn't your tongue fall silent curbed by your clothing?

Iole, the nymph, daughter of Iardanus, also wears your  
arms

and bears a familiar trophy from her captive hero.

Go on then, excite your courage and review your great  
deeds:

swear by that she's the hero you should be.

By as much as you are the less, greatest of men, so much  
the greater her victory over you, than yours over those you  
conquered.

The measure of your goods goes to her, give up your  
wealth:

your mistress is the inheritor of your worth.

O shame! The rough pelt stripped from the ribs  
of a bristling lion covers her tender flank!

You are wrong and don't realise: her spoils aren't from a  
lion,

but from you: you're the creature's conqueror, she's yours.

A woman bears the black shaft with Lernean poison,  
one scarcely fitted to carry the heavy distaff of wool,  
and lifts in her hand the club that tamed wild beasts,  
and gazes at my husband's arms in her mirror.

Yet I still had only heard this: I could ignore the rumours,  
and grief came to the senses gently on the breeze.

Now a foreign rival is brought before my eyes,  
and I cannot hide from myself what I suffer!

You won't let me avoid her: she walks like a captive  
through the middle of the city to be seen by unwilling eyes.  
But not with unbound hair in the manner of a captive:  
she confesses her good fortune by her seemly looks,  
walking, visible far and wide, covered with gold,  
just as you yourself were dressed in Phrygia:  
showing her proud face to the crowd like Hercules's  
conqueror:

you'd think Oechalia still stood, with her father living:  
and perhaps Aetolian Deianira will be beaten off,  
and Iole will be your wife, dropping the label of mistress,  
and wicked Hymen will join the shameful bodies  
of Iole, Eurytus's daughter and Aonian Hercules.  
My mind shuns the idea, and a chill runs through my body,  
and my listless hand lies here in my lap.

You have loved me too among others, but without sin:  
don't regret I was twice a reason for you to fight.

Achelous, weeping, lifted his broken horn from the wet  
bank,

and immersed his maimed head in the muddy waters:  
Nessus the Centaur sank into the fatal Evenus,  
and discoloured its waves with his equine blood.

But why do I recall this? Written news comes,  
rumour that my husband's dying from the poison in his  
tunic.

Ah me! What have I done? What madness has my love  
caused?

Impious Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?  
Or shall your husband tear himself apart on Mount Oeta,  
and you, the cause of so much wickedness, survive?  
If I have had reasons till now why I should be thought

Hercules's wife, let my death be a pledge of our union.  
You will recognise a sister of yours in me too, Meleager!  
Impious Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?  
Alas for my accursed house! Agrius sits on Calydon's high  
throne:  
defenceless old age weighs on forsaken Oeneus:  
Tydeus, my brother, is an exile on an unknown shore:  
the other, Meleager, was burned by the fatal flame.  
Althaea, our mother, pierced her breast with a blade.  
Impious Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?  
This one thing I plead, by the most sacred law of the  
marriage-bed,  
lest I appear to have plotted for your death:  
Nessus, when his covetous breast was struck by the arrow,  
whispered: 'This blood has power over love.'  
Oh, I sent you the fabric smeared with Nessus's poison.  
Impious Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?  
Now farewell my aged father, and you, my sister Gorge,  
and my land, and my brother wrenched from that land,  
and you the last day's light to meet my eyes: and my  
husband –  
but O can he still be - and Hyllus my son, farewell!

X: Ariadne to Theseus

Even now, left to the wild beasts, she might live, cruel  
Theseus.

Do you expect her to have endured this too, patiently?  
The whole tribe of creatures contrive to be gentler than  
you:

not one have I had less confidence in than you.

Theseus, what you read has been sent to you from this land,  
from which your sails carried your ship without me,  
in which my sleep, and you, evilly betrayed me,  
conceiving your plans against me while I slept.

It was the time when the earth's first sprinkled with glassy  
frost,

and the hidden birds lament in the leaves:

waking uncertainly, and stirring languidly in sleep,

half-turning, my hand reached out for Theseus:

there was no one there. I drew back, and tried again,

and moved my arm across the bed: no one there.

Fear broke through my drowsiness: terrified, I rose

and hurled my body from the empty bed.

Straight away my hands drummed on my breast, and tore at  
my hair, just as it was, on waking, from my confused sleep.

There was a moon: I looked and saw nothing but the shore:  
wherever my eyes could see, there was nothing but sand.

I ran here and there without any sense of purpose,  
the deep sand slowing a girl's feet.

Meanwhile I called: 'Theseus!' over the whole beach

your name echoing from the hollow cliffs

and as often as I called you, the place itself called too:

the place itself wished to give aid to my misery.  
There was a hill: a few bushes were visible on its summit:  
a crag hangs there hollowed out by the harsh waves.  
I climbed it: courage gave me strength: and I scanned  
the wide waters from that height with my gaze.  
Then I saw – now the cruel winds were also felt –  
your ship driven before a fierce southerly gale.  
Either with what I saw, or what I may have thought I'd  
seen:

I was frozen like ice and half-alive.

But grief allowed no time for languor. I was roused by it,  
and roused, I called to Theseus at the top of my voice.

'Where are you going?' I shouted 'turn back, wicked  
Theseus!

Work your ship! You're without one of your number!'

So I called. When my voice failed I beat my breast instead:  
my blows were interspaced with my words.

If you could not hear at least you might still see:

I made wide signals with my outstretched hands.

I hung a white cloth on a tall branch,  
hoping those who'd forgotten would remember me.

Now you were lost to sight. Then finally I wept:

till then my cheeks were numb with grief.

What could my eyes do but weep at myself,  
once they had ceased to see your sails?

Either I wandered alone, with dishevelled hair,  
like a Maenad shaken by the Theban god:

or I sat on the cold rock gazing at the sea,

and I was as much a stone as the stones I sat on.

Often I seek again the bed that accepted us both,

but it shows no sign of that acceptance,



and I touch what I can of the traces of you, instead of you,  
and the sheets your body warmed.

I lie there and, wetting the bed with my flowing tears,  
I cry out: 'We two burdened you, restore the two!  
We came here together: why shouldn't we go together?  
Faithless bed, where's the better part of me now?  
What am I to do? Why endure alone? The island's  
unploughed:

I see no human beings: I can't imagine there's an ox.  
The land's encircled by the sea on every side: no sailors,  
no ship to set sail on its uncertain way.

Suppose I was given companions, winds and ship,  
where would I make for? My country denies me access.  
If my boat slid gently through peaceful waters,  
calmed by Aeolian winds, I'd be an exile still.

I could not gaze at you, Crete, split in a hundred cities,  
a land that was known to the infant Jove.

But my father and that land justly ruled by my father,  
those dear names, were both betrayed by me.

while you, the victor who retraced your steps, would have  
died

in the winding labyrinth, unless guided by the thread I gave  
you,

Then, you said to me: 'I swear by the dangers overcome,  
that you'll be mine while we both shall live.'

We live, and I'm not yours, Theseus, if you still live,  
I'm a woman buried by the fraud of a lying man.

Club that killed my brother, the Minotaur, condemn me  
too!

The promise that you gave should be dissolved by death.  
Now I see not only what I must endure,

but what any castaway would suffer.  
A thousand images of dying fill my mind,  
and I fear death less than delay in that penalty of death.  
At every moment I dream it, coming from here or there,  
as if wolves tore my entrails with eager teeth.  
Perhaps this land breeds tawny lions?  
Who knows if this island harbours savage tigers?  
And they say that the ocean throws up huge sea-lions:  
and who could prevent some sword piercing my side?  
If only I might not be a captive, bound with harsh chains,  
nor draw out endless threads with a slave's hand,  
I whose father is Minos, whose mother is the Sun's  
daughter,  
because of that I remember the more, that I was bound to  
you!  
If I see the ocean, the land and the wide shore,  
I fear many things on land, many on the waves.  
The sky remains: I fear visions from the gods:  
I'm forsaken, a prey and food for swift beasts.  
If men live here and cultivate this place, I distrust them:  
I've thoroughly learned to fear wounds from strangers.  
I wish my brother Androgeos lived and you Athens, land of  
Cecrops,  
hadn't paid with your children's deaths for his impious  
murder:  
and that you, Theseus hadn't killed the Minotaur, half man,  
half bull,  
wielding a knotted club in your strong hand:  
and that I hadn't given you the thread that marked your  
way back,  
the thread so often received back into the hand that drew it.

I'm not surprised that victory was yours, and the monster,  
prone, lay groaning on the Cretan earth.

His horns could not pierce your iron heart:  
though you might fail to shield it, your breast would be  
safe.

There you revealed flints and adamants,  
there you've a Theseus harder than flint.

Cruel sleep, why did you hold me there, senseless?  
Rather I should have been buried forever in eternal night.

You too cruel winds, you gales, all too ready  
and officious in bringing tears to me:

cruel right hand that causes my death, and my brother's,  
and offered the promise I asked, an empty name:

Sleep, the breeze, the promise conspired against me:  
one girl, I'm betrayed by three causes.

So it seems I'll die without seeing my mother's tears,  
and there'll be no one to close my eyes.

My unhappy spirit will vanish on a foreign breeze,  
no friendly hand will anoint my laid-out body.

The seabirds will hover over my unburied bones:  
these are the ceremonies fit for my tomb.

You'll be carried to Athens, and be received by your  
homeland,

where you'll stand in the high fortress of your city,  
and speak cleverly of the death of man and bull,  
and the labyrinth's winding paths cut from the rock:  
speak of me also, abandoned in a lonely land:

I'm not to be dropped, secretly, from your list!

Your father's not Aegeus: Aethra, daughter of Pittheus,  
is not your mother: your creators were stone and sea.

May the gods have ordained that you saw me from the high  
stern,  
that my mournful figure altered your expression.  
Now see me not with your eyes, but as you can, with your  
mind,  
clinging to a rock the fickle sea beats against:  
see my dishevelled hair like one who is in mourning  
and my clothes heavy with tears like rain!  
My body trembles like ears of wheat struck by a north wind  
and the letters I write waver in my unsteady fingers.  
I don't entreat you by my kindness, since that has ended  
badly:  
let no gratitude be owed for my deeds.  
But no punishment either. If I'm not the cause of your  
health,  
that's still no reason why you should cause me harm.  
These hands weary of beating my sad breast for you,  
unhappily I stretch them out over the wide waters:  
I mournfully display to you what remains of my hair:  
I beg you by these tears your actions have caused:  
turn your ship, Theseus, fall back against the wind:  
if I die first, you can still bear my bones.

XI: Canace to Macareus

An Aeolid, who has no health herself, sends it to an Aeolid,  
and, armed, these words are written by her hand.

If the script is full of errors, with its dark blots,  
the letter will have been stained by a woman's blood.

My right hand holds a pen, my left a naked sword  
and the paper's lying loosely in my lap.

This is the image of Aeolus's daughter writing to her  
brother:

it seems in this way I can appease our harsh father.

I could only wish that he were here to see my death

and the eyes of its author contemplate the act

though he's uncivilised, and more ferocious than his east  
wind,

he would gaze at my wounds with dry cheeks.

How can anything good come of living with savage  
winds,

that nature of his matches his subjects.

He governs south, and west winds, and Thracian  
northerlies,

and your wings, violent easterlies.

Alas he governs the winds! He cannot govern his swollen  
anger,

and his kingdom is smaller than his faults.

What's the use of my bandying my ancestor's names about  
the sky,

that Jupiter can be mentioned among my relatives?

Is this blade, my funeral gift, any less dangerous

because I hold it, not yarn, in my woman's hand?

O I wish, Macareus, the hour that made us one

had come later than the hour of my death!  
Brother, why did you love me more than a brother should,  
and why was I not merely what a sister should be, to you?  
I also burnt with it, in a way I used to hear about,  
I don't know what god I felt in my loving heart.  
The colour fled from my face, my slender body grew thin,  
I took the least food, forced it into my mouth:  
I couldn't sleep easily, and the night was a year to me,  
and, wounded by no pains, I gave out groans.  
Nor could I give a reason for why I acted so,  
nor knew what a lover was, but I was one.  
My nurse was the first to sense it, with an old woman's  
acuteness:  
my nurse first said: 'Canace, you're in love!'  
I blushed, and shame sent my eyes down to my lap:  
that was enough of a confession, that silent signal.  
Then the burden swelled in my sinful belly,  
and the secret load weighed on my weak limbs.  
What herbs, what remedies did my nurse not bring  
and she applied them with her rash hand,  
in order – I hid this one thing from you – to expel  
the growing burden from my womb!  
Ah! The child, too much alive, resisted the arts she tried,  
and was safe from its secret enemy.  
Now Phoebus's most beautiful sister had risen nine times,  
and the new Moon drove her light-bringing horses:  
I didn't know what caused my sudden pains,  
and I was a new soldier, raw to the part.  
I couldn't lessen my cries. 'Why betray your sin?'  
my knowing nurse said covering my wailing mouth.  
What can I do, in my misery? Pain forces me to groan,

but fear and my nurse and shame forbid it.  
I contain my cries, take back the words that escape me,  
and force myself to swallow the tears I've shed.  
Death was before my eyes, and Lucina denied her help  
and, if I died pregnant, death too would be a crime:  
when bending over me, tearing open my tunic, parting my  
hair,  
and pressing my breast to yours, you revived me,  
and you said to me: 'Live, sister, o dearest sister,  
live so that two aren't lost in one body. Let a fine hope  
give you strength: now you'll be your brother's bride.  
he through whom you'll be a mother and a wife.  
Though I was dead, believe me, I still revived at your  
words  
and my burden was laid down, the crime of my womb.  
Why do you give thanks? Aeolus sits mid-palace:  
our crimes must be hidden from our father's eyes.  
My diligent nurse hides the child among fruits,  
and grey olive branches, and light sacred ribbons,  
and pretends she's making a sacrifice, says words of  
prayer:  
the people give worship, the father himself steps aside.  
Now she was nearly at the door. A cry reached our father's  
ears  
and that betrayed signs of the child.  
Aeolus snatched up my baby and revealed the false  
sacrifice.  
The palace echoed to his furious voice.  
As the sea trembles, when touched by a mild breeze,  
as the ash twig shakes in a warm south wind,  
so you might have seen my pale limbs quiver:

the bed was shaken by the body lying on it.  
He forced his way in, and broadcast my shame by his  
shouts,  
and scarcely kept his hands from my poor face.  
I could do nothing but modestly pour out tears.  
My tongue was frozen, numbed by icy fear.  
And then he ordered that his little grand-child should be  
given  
to the dogs and birds, abandoned in a lonely place.  
The child began to scream with misery – could he have  
understood –  
as though he could beseech his grandfather with his voice.  
What do you think my feelings were, then, my brother,  
(now you can collect your feelings yourself)  
when my child was carried off by my enemy into the deep  
woods,  
to be eaten by wolves from the mountains?  
He left my room, then at last I beat my breasts  
and proceeded to run my fingers through my hair.  
Meanwhile one of father's attendants came, with a  
mournful face, and his mouth uttered shameful words:  
'Aeolus sends you this sword' – he delivered the sword –  
'and orders you to know his wish from its purpose.'  
I know, and will use the violent weapon bravely:  
I will sheathe father's gift in my breast.  
Do you give me this gift for my marriage, father?  
Father, will your daughter be rich in this dowry?  
Hymen, betrayed, take your marriage torches far from here,  
and flee this impious house with troubled feet!  
Furies bear the black torches you bear, to me,  
and from those fires light my funeral pyre!



My happy sisters wedded to a better fate:  
be lost to me but still remember me!  
What did the child commit, in so few hours of life?  
Scarcely born, by what act could he harm his grandfather?  
If he can have merited death, he merited consideration:  
ah, poor thing, punished for what I committed!  
Child, your mother's grief, a prey to devouring beasts,  
ah me, your day of birth tears you apart,  
child, sad pledge of my less than auspicious love,  
this is your first day, this has been your last.  
I could not let my rightful tears drench you,  
nor cut a wisp of your hair to bear to the tomb:  
I could not bend over you, and snatch an icy kiss:  
ravenous wild beasts tear apart my baby.  
I too, wounded, will follow the shade of my child:  
I will not be called 'mother' or 'bereaved' for long.  
Yet you, vain hope of your unhappy sister,  
gather I beg you the scattered limbs of your son,  
and bring them to their mother, place us in a shared tomb,  
and let the narrow urn have whatever there is of us both!  
Live on, remember us, and weep tears over my wound:  
lover, do not shun the body of your lover.  
You, I beg, obey the requests of the sister you loved too  
well!  
I myself will obey our father's order.

XII: Medea to Jason

Scorned Medea, the helpless exile, speaks to her recent husband,  
surely you can spare some time from your kingship?  
Oh, as I remember, the Queen of Colchis found time  
to bring you riches, when you sought my arts!  
Then, the Sisters who spin mortality's threads,  
should have unwound mine from the spindle:  
Then you might have died well, Medea! Whatever  
life's brought since that time's been punishment.  
Ah me! Why was that Pelian ship driven forward  
by youthful arms, seeking the ram of Phrixus?  
Why did we of Colchis ever see the Thessalian Argo,  
and your Greek crew drink the waters of Phasis?  
Why did I take more pleasure than I should in your golden  
hair,  
and your comeliness, and the lying favours of your tongue?  
If not, once your strange ship had beached on our sands,  
and had brought your brave warriors here,  
Aeson's son might have gone unmindful, unprotected by  
charms,  
into the fiery breath, and burning muzzles, of the bulls!  
He might have scattered the seed, and sown as many  
enemies,  
so that the one who sowed fell prey to his own sowing!  
What great treachery would have died with you, wicked  
man!  
What great evils would have been averted from my head!  
There's some kind of delight in reproaching your  
ingratitude

for my kindness: I'll enjoy the only pleasure I'll have from you.

Ordered to turn your untried ship towards Colchis, you entered the lovely kingdom of my native land.

Medea was, there, what your new bride is here: as rich as her father is, my father was as rich.

Her father holds Corinth, between two seas, mine all that lies to the left of Pontus, as far as the Scythian snows.

Aeetes welcomes the young Greek heroes as guests, and Pelasgian bodies grace the ornate beds.

Then I saw you: then I began to know what you might be: that was the first ruin of my affections.

I saw and I perished! I burnt, not with familiar fires, but as a pine torch might burn before the great gods.

And you were handsome, and my fate lured me on: the light of your eyes stole mine away.

You sensed it, faithless one! For who can, easily, hide love?

its flame is obvious, displaying the evidence.

Meanwhile rules were laid down for you: to yoke the strong necks,

first, of fierce bulls to the unaccustomed plough.

They were the bulls of Mars, more cruel than just their horns,

also their exhalations were terrible with fire,

their hooves were solid bronze, and bronze coated their nostrils,

and these too were blackened by their breath.

Besides that, you were ordered to scatter seed to breed a nation,

through the wide fields, with dutiful hands,

who would attack your body with co-born spears:  
a harvest hostile to the farmer.

Your last labour, by some art, to deceive the guardian  
that knows no sleep, and make its eyes succumb.

So said King Aeetes: all rose sorrowfully,  
and the shining benches were pushed from the high table.  
How far, from you, then was the kingdom, Creusa's dowry,  
and your father-in-law, and that daughter of great Creon.  
You leave, downcast. My wet gaze follows you as you go,  
and my tenuous voice murmurs: 'Fare well!'

Though I reached the bed, made up in my room, stricken  
grievously, how much of that night for me was spent in  
tears.

Before my eyes were the brazen bulls, the impious harvest,  
before my sleepless eyes was the serpent.

Here is love, here fear – fear itself increased my love.

It was morning and my dear sister entered my room  
and found me, with scattered hair, lying face downwards,  
and everything drenched in my tears.

She prays for help for the Minyans: one asks, the other  
obtains:

what she requests for Aeson's son, I give.

There's a wood, dark with pine and oak branches,  
the sun's rays can scarcely reach there:

in it, there is – or was for certain – a temple of Diana:

there a golden goddess stood made by barbarian hands.

Do you know it, or has the place been forgotten, along with  
me?

We came there: you began to speak first, with false words:  
'Fortune indeed has given you the means of my salvation  
and my life and death are in your hands.'

It's enough to destroy me if you were to delight in that:  
but it will be more honour to you to help me.  
I beg you by our troubles, which you can lighten,  
by your race, and the divinity of the all-seeing Sun,  
your grandfather, by Diana's triple face and sacred  
mysteries,  
and if my people's gods have worth, those too:  
O Virgin, take pity on me, take pity on my men,  
grant me your services for all time!  
If, perhaps, you do not scorn to have a Pelasgian husband –  
but can it be so easily granted me, and by which of my  
gods? –  
let my spirit vanish into thin air, if any bride  
enters my bed, unless that bride be you.  
Let Juno share in this, who oversees holy matrimony,  
and that goddess in whose marble shrine we stand!  
This passion – and how much of it was words? –  
moved a naive girl, and our right hands touched.  
I even saw tears – or were they partly lies?  
So I quickly became a girl captivated by your words.  
And you yoked the brazen-footed steeds, your body un-  
scorched,  
and split the solid earth with the plough, as you were  
ordered.  
You filled the furrows with venomous teeth, instead of  
seed,  
and warriors were born, armed with swords and shields.  
I, who gave you the charms, sat there pale of face,  
when I saw these men, suddenly born, take up arms,  
until the earth-born brothers – marvellous happening! –  
with drawn swords, joined battle amongst themselves.

Behold the sleepless guardian, coated with rattling scales,  
hissed, and swept the ground with his writhing body.  
Where was the rich dowry then? Where was the royal bride  
for you then, and that Isthmus splitting the waters of twin  
seas?

I, the woman who has come to seem, at last, a barbarian to  
you,

who am now poor, who am now seen to be harmful,  
subdued those burning eyes, with sleep-inducing drugs,  
and safely gave you the fleece you carried away.

My father is betrayed, kingdom and country forsaken,  
for which, it is right, my reward's to suffer exile,  
my virginity becomes the prize of a foreign thief,  
my most dearly beloved sister, with my mother, lost.

But Absyrtus, my brother, I did not abandon you, fleeing  
without me.

This letter of mine is lacking in one thing:

what I dared to do my right hand cannot write.

So should I have been torn apart, but with you!

Yet I had no fear – what was to be feared after that? –  
believing myself a woman at sea, already guilty.

Where is divine power? Where are the gods? Justice is near  
us

on the deep, you punished for fraud, I for credulity.

I wish that the clashing rocks, the Symplegades, had  
crushed us,

so that my bones might cling to your bones!

Or ravening Scylla might have caught us, to be eaten by her  
dogs!

Scylla is destined to harm ungrateful men.

And Charybdis, who so often swallows and spews out the  
tide,  
should also have sucked us beneath Sicilian waters!  
You return safe to the cities of Thessaly:  
the golden fleece is placed before your gods.  
Why speak of the daughters of Pelias, piously harming him,  
and carving their father's body with virgin hands?  
Though others blame me, you must praise me,  
you for whom I was forced to be so guilty.  
You dared – oh words fail themselves, in righteous  
indignation! –  
you dared to say: 'Depart from Aeson's house!'  
As you ordered, I left the house, accompanied by our two  
children,  
and, what will pursue me always, my love of you.  
When suddenly the songs of Hymen came to my ears,  
and the torches shone with illuminating fire,  
and the flutes poured out the marriage tunes for you,  
but a mournful funeral piping for me,  
I was afraid, I hadn't thought till now so much wickedness  
could be,  
but still I was chilled through my whole body.  
The crowd rushed on, continually shouting: 'Hymen,  
Hymenae!'  
the nearer they came the worse it was for me.  
The servants wept apart, and hid their tears –  
who wants to be the bearer of such evil news?  
It would have been better for me not to know what  
happened,  
but it was as if I knew, my mind was sad,  
when the younger of our sons, ordered to be on the lookout,

stationed at the outer threshold of the double doors, called to me:

‘Mother, come here! Jason, my father, is leading the procession,  
and he’s driving a team of gilded horses!’

Straightaway, tearing my clothes, I beat my breasts,  
nor was my face safe from my nails.

My heart urged me to go, in procession, among the crowd,  
and to throw away the garlands arranged in my hair.

I could scarcely keep myself from shouting, my hair  
dishevelled,

‘He’s mine!’ and taking possession of you.

My wounded father, rejoice! Colchians, forsaken, rejoice!

My brother’s shade, in me find offerings to the dead!

I abandon my lost kingdom, my country, my home,  
my husband, who alone was everything to me.

Thus, I could subdue serpents and raging bulls,  
but I could not subdue this one man.

And I’ve driven off wild fires with skilful potions,  
but I’ve no power to turn the flames from myself.

My charms and herbs and arts forsake me,  
nor does the goddess, sacred Hecate, act with power.

The day does not please me: I’m awake through nights of  
bitterness,

and gentle sleep is absent from my miserable breast.

What cannot make me sleep made a dragon sleep.

My cures are more use to others than myself.

My rival clasps that body that I saved  
and she has the fruits of my labours.

Indeed, perhaps when you wish to mention married  
foolishness,



and speak in a way that suits unjust ears,  
you invent new faults in my face, and my manner.  
Let her laugh, and lie there, lifted up on Tyrian purple –  
she'll weep, and, scorched, she'll surpass my fires.  
While there are blades, and flames, and poisonous juices,  
no enemy will go unpunished by Medea.  
If by chance my prayers move your breast of steel  
now hear these humble words from my heart.  
I'm as much a suppliant, to you, as you often were to me,  
nor do I hesitate to throw myself at your feet.  
If I'm worthless to you, consider the children we have:  
a dread stepmother, in my place, will be cruel to them.  
And they're so like you, and touched by your semblance,  
and as often as I see them, my eyes are wet with tears.  
I beg you, by the gods, by the light of the Sun, my  
grandfather's fire,  
by my kindness to you, and by our two children, our  
pledges,  
return to the bed for which I, insanely, abandoned so many  
things!  
Add truth to your words, and return the help I gave you!  
I don't beg your help against bulls, or warriors,  
or that a dragon sleeps conquered by your aid:  
I ask for you, whom I deserve, who gave yourself to me,  
a father by whom I was equally made a mother.  
You ask, where's my dowry? I numbered it on that field  
that was ploughed by you, in taking the fleece.  
My dowry's that golden ram known by its thick fleece,  
that you'd deny me if I said to you: 'Return it.'  
My dowry is your safety: my dowry's the youth of Greece.  
Cruel man, go: compare this to the wealth of Corinth.

That you live, that you have a wife and powerful father-in-law,

that you can even be ungrateful, all that's due to me.

Indeed, what's on hand – but why should I be concerned to warn you of your punishment? Great anger teems with threats.

I'll follow where anger takes me. Perhaps I'll regret my deeds:

I regret having been concerned for an unfaithful husband.

Let the god see to that, who now disturbs my heart.

Assuredly I do not know what moves my spirit most.

### XIII: Laodamia to Protesilaus

She, who sends this, wishes loving greetings to go to whom  
it's sent:

from Thessaly to Thessaly's lord, Laodamia to her  
husband.

Rumour has it you're held at Aulis by delaying winds:

ah! when you left me, where were those winds then?

Then the sea should have obstructed your oars:

that would have been a useful time for raging waters.

I might have given my husband more kisses, and more  
requests,

and there was much I wanted to say to him.

You were driven headlong from here and there was a wind  
that might have been summoned for your sails, that the  
sailors loved, not I.

It was a wind fit for a sailor, not one fit for a lover:

I was freed from your embrace, Protesilaus, and my tongue,  
commissioning you, left the words unfinished:

it could scarcely say a sad: 'Farewell.'

The North Wind leaned down, and filled your departing  
sails,

and soon my Protesilaus was far away.

While I could still see my husband, I delighted in watching  
and your eyes were followed, all the way, by mine:

when I could no longer see you, I could see your sail,  
your sail held my gaze for a long time.

But once I could not see you, or your vanishing sail,

and I could look at nothing except the waves,

the light went with you too, and suffocating darkness  
rising,

they say that, my knees failed, and I sank to the ground.  
Your father Iphiclus, and mine, aged Acastus, and my  
mother  
could scarcely revive me, with icy water, in my misery.  
They went about their kind action, but vainly for me:  
I'm angry I wasn't allowed to die in my distress.  
When consciousness returned, my pain returned with it:  
a rightful affection hurts my chaste heart.  
I take no care about displaying my hair neatly combed,  
nor does it please me to cover my body with golden  
dresses.  
I run, here and there, like one you'd think had been touched  
by the rod of the twin-horned god, just as madness drives  
me.  
The women of Phylace gather round, and they call to me:  
'Put on your royal garments, Laodamia!'  
Of course she should wear clothes steeped in purple,  
while he wars beneath the walls of Troy!  
She to comb her hair? A helmet to weigh his down?  
She should bear new dresses, her husband heavy armour?  
Let them say, that as I can, I imitate your hardships, with  
harshness,  
and, by my circumstances, act out the sad war.  
Paris, son of Priam, harmful to your people through your  
beauty,  
be as cowardly an enemy as you were an evil guest!  
I wish you'd reproached your Spartan bride for her  
character,  
or that she'd been displeased with yours.  
Menelaus you suffer too much for the one you lost,  
alas! with what grieving you'll avenge her.

Gods, I beg you, keep all dark omens from us  
and let my husband dedicate weapons to Jove, on his  
return!

But I'm afraid whenever the miserable war comes to mind:  
my tears flow like snows melting in the sun.

Troy and Tenedos, Simois, Xanthus, Ida, are names  
that almost scare me by their very sound.

That guest would not have dared to take her, unless  
he could defend himself: he knew his strength.

He came, as rumour has it, remarkable with all that gold,  
bearing the wealth of Phrygia on his back,  
powerful in men, and ships, to wage a war –  
and what part, and how much, of his kingdom follow him?

I suspect these things conquered you, sister of Leda's  
Twins,

I think these things may bring disaster on the Greeks.

I do not know this Hector whom I fear: Paris said that  
Hector

wages war with a blood-stained sword in his hand:

If I'm dear to you, beware Hector, whoever he might be:  
have the memory of that name stamped on your heart!

When you shun him, remember to shun the others,  
and imagine there are many Hectors there,  
and make sure you say, when you prepare to fight:

'Laodamia herself ordered me to forbear.'

If it's possible for Troy to fall to the Greek army,  
let it fall without you receiving any wounds.

Let Menelaus fight and strain against the enemy:  
among enemies, let the wife be sought by the husband.

Your cause is different: fight so as to live,  
and be able to return to your wife's loving breast!

I beg you, Trojans, spare this one of all your enemies,  
don't let my blood flow from his body!  
He's not one to charge into battle with naked blade  
and bear savage feelings towards men.  
He's better suited, by far, to making love than fighting.  
Let others make war: let Protesilaus love!  
Now I confess: I wish I'd called you back, and shown my  
feelings:  
my tongue was stilled, for fear of evil omens.  
When you wished to leave your father's door,  
your feet showed signs of stumbling on the threshold.  
When I saw, I groaned, and said, secretly in my heart:  
'I pray this might be a sign of my husband's returning!'  
I tell you this now, so you aren't too brave in battle.  
Make sure all my fears vanish on the wind!  
Also I know not what unjust death fate promises,  
to the first Greek who touches Trojan soil:  
unhappy the woman who grieves for the first man slain!  
I wish the gods might not make you over-eager!  
Among the thousand ships let yours be the thousandth,  
and the last to be wrecked by the tormenting waters!  
This also I forewarn you of: be the last to leave the vessel!  
Where you land is not your father's country.  
When you return sail your ship with canvas and oars  
together,  
and reach your own shore with all speed!  
Whether Phoebus hides, or stands high above the earth,  
come quickly to me by day, or come to me by night:  
All the better if you come at night. Night is pleasing to  
girls,  
whose necks have arms to embrace them.

I try to grasp deceitful dreams in my empty bed:  
while I'm without true joys, false ones must give me  
pleasure.

But why does your pale image appear to me?

Why do so many plaintive sounds rise to your lips?

I shake off sleep, and revere these phantoms of the night:  
no altar in Thessaly's free from the smoke of my gifts:  
I offer incense, with tears too, that blazes as it's scattered,  
so that the flames sputter, as they do when wine's poured  
on.

When will I lead you home again, clasped in my loving  
arms,

to free my joy from this listlessness?

When will it be, that, truly joined with me in the one bed,  
you'll recall the splendid deeds of your battles?

While you tell me of them, while listening delights,  
you'll still snatch many kisses, and give many in return.

rightly, in their retelling, the words are stopped:

the tongue's more easily refreshed by sweet delay.

But when Troy comes to mind, so do the winds and seas:  
firm hope fails, overcome by anxious fears.

It troubles me too, that the winds prevent your ship from  
leaving:

you prepare to go with the waves against you.

Who would return to his country, obstructed by the wind?

You sail, from your country, though the sea denies you!

Neptune himself offers no road, to his own city, Troy.

Where do you rush to? Go back to your homes!

Where do you rush to, Greeks? Heed the winds' denial!

This is no sudden chance – this is divine delay.

What do you seek by such warfare but a shameful  
adulteress?

Ships, from the Inachus, back your sails while you may!

What do I say? Do I call you back? Let the omen at your  
going

be recalled, and gentle winds might favour calm seas.

I'm envious of the Trojan women, who, though they see  
the tearful funerals of their people, though the enemy are  
nearby,

the new bride herself, with her own hands, places the  
helmet

on her brave husband's head, and gives him his Trojan  
weapons:

gives him his weapons, and while she does so, snatches a  
kiss –

that kind of service will be sweet for both –

and she leads her husband out, and gives him orders to  
return,

and says: 'Be sure you bring Jove's weapons back!'

Bearing his lady's recent orders with him,

he'll fight with caution, and see their home again.

Leading him back, she takes his shield, loosens his helmet  
again,

and takes his weary body to her breast.

We are unsure: troubled, everything hems us in:

whatever might happen, fear thinks it fact.

While you bear arms, a soldier in a remote world,

your wax image recalls your face to me:

I speak endearments to it, words that I owe to you,

and it receives my embrace.

Believe me this image is more than it seems:



add sound to wax, and it would be Protesilaus.  
I gaze at it, and hold it to my breast, in place of my true  
husband  
and I complain to it, as if it might answer back.  
By your return, by your body, by my gods, I swear,  
and by the twin torches of our love and our marriage,  
and by your head, itself, that you might bring back to me  
again,  
so that I might see its grey hairs grow in time to white,  
wherever you call from to me, I will come to accompany  
you,  
whether what – alas! – I fear might be, or whether you  
survive.  
Let this letter end with a last small request:  
if you care for me, let your care be for yourself!

#### XIV: Hypermestra to Lynceus

Hypermestra sends this letter to her one cousin of many,  
the rest lie dead because of their brides' crime.

I'm held prisoner in this house, confined by heavy chains:  
that's my punishment because I was virtuous.

Because my hand was afraid to plunge a blade into a throat,  
I'm guilty: I would be praised if I'd dared to be wicked.

Better to be guilty, than to have pleased a parent so:

I don't regret my hands are free of blood.

Father might burn me, with the fire I didn't violate,  
and hold in my face the torches, that were present at my  
rites.

or cut my throat, with the sword he wrongly gave me,  
so that I might die the death my husband did not –

he still won't make my dying mouth say: 'I repent!'

It's not possible to regret being virtuous!

Wicked Danaus, my father, and my savage sisters should  
repent:

that's the customary thing that follows wicked deeds.

My heart trembles, remembering the blood of that shameful  
night,

and a sudden tremor binds together the bones of my right  
hand.

The woman, you might think had the power to perform the  
murder

of her husband, is afraid to write of deeds of murder not her  
own!

But I'll still try. Twilight had just begun on earth,  
it was the last of light, and the first of night.

We, scions of Inachus, are led beneath Pelasgus's noble  
roof,  
and there the father-in-law welcomes the armed daughters.  
Everywhere lamps, encircled by gold, are shining:  
and incense is impiously offered to unwilling flames.  
The crowd of men shout: 'Hymen, Hymenae!' He flees  
their shouts:  
Juno herself abandons her city of Argos.  
See how, fuddled with wine, to the cries of many friends,  
their drenched hair crowned with flowers,  
they're carried to the joyful bedrooms – rooms to be their  
graves –  
and weigh down the beds, worthy to be their biers.  
So they lay there, heavy with food, and wine, and sleep,  
and there was deep peace throughout carefree Argos.  
I seemed to hear around me the groans of dying men  
and I did indeed hear, and what I feared was true.  
My colour went, and mind, and body, lost their warmth,  
and I lay there, chilled, in my new marriage bed.  
As slender stalks of wheat quiver in a mild west wind,  
as cold breezes stir the poplar leaves,  
I trembled so, and more. You yourself lay there,  
and were drowsy, as the wine had made you.  
My cruel father's order drove away my fear:  
I rose, and grasped the weapon with shaking hand.  
I won't tell a lie. Three times I lifted the sharp blade,  
three times my hand lowered the sword it wickedly raised.  
I confess the truth to you despite myself: I pointed it  
at your throat: still overcome by cruel terror of my father,  
I pointed my father's sword at your throat:  
but fear and piety hindered the cruel act,

and my chaste hand fled the work demanded.  
Tearing my purple robes, tearing at my hair  
in a whisper I spoke these words:  
‘You father’s cruel towards you, Hypermetra: act out  
his order: let your husband join his brothers!  
I’m female and a young girl, gentle by age and nature:  
fierce weapons are no use in tender hands.  
Why not act while he lies there, imitate your brave sisters:  
it’s possible all the husbands have been killed?  
If this hand had any power to commit murder,  
it would be bloodied by the death of its mistress.  
They deserved to die for taking their uncle’s kingdom:  
but suppose our husbands deserved to die, we who  
were given to strangers: what have we ourselves done?  
What crime have I committed that I’m not allowed to be  
virtuous?  
What have I to do with swords? Or a girl with warlike  
weapons?  
My hands are more suited to the distaff and wool.’  
So I whispered. While I lamented, tears chased my words,  
and fell from my eyes onto your body.  
While you seek my embrace, and, still asleep, stir your  
arms,  
your hand is almost wounded by my weapon.  
And now I feared my father, his servants, and the light.  
These words of mine dispelled your sleep:  
‘Rise and go, scion of Belus, sole one of many cousins!  
This night will be yours eternally, unless you hurry!’  
You rose in terror, shaking off all the weight of sleep,  
you saw the sharp sword in my timid hand.  
You ask why: I say: ‘Flee, while the night allows!’

While night's darkness itself allows, you flee, I remain.  
It was dawn, and Danaus counted his sons-in-law lying  
dead,  
One's missing from the tally of crime.  
He takes it badly, downcast by one among these dead  
relations,  
and complains that the acts of blood are unfinished.  
I'm dragged by my hair, from my father's, feet to prison –  
is this the reward I deserve for my virtue?  
No doubt Juno's anger lasted from the time when Io was  
changed  
from girl to heifer, till a goddess was made of that heifer –  
but Jove's punishment was enough, that a tender girl  
bellowed,  
her beauty in no way able to please him.  
The new heifer stood on the banks of her father's stream  
and saw horns not hers, in her father's waves,  
and, lowing, tried to lament with her mouth,  
and was frightened by her form, and by her voice.  
Why are you maddened, unhappy one? Why gaze at  
yourself  
in the water? Why count the feet formed from your new  
limbs?  
A rival, feared by that sister of mighty Jupiter,  
you ease your great hunger with leaves and grass:  
you drink from springs, and, stunned, see your shape,  
and fear lest the weapons you bear might kill you.  
You were once rich enough to be fit to be seen even by  
Jove,  
naked you lie on the naked earth.  
You wander by the sea, and the lands, and their rivers:

the sea, the streams, the land grant you a way.  
What's the reason for your flight? Oh, Io! Why wander vast  
straits?

You can't escape from your own features.

Daughter of Inachus, where do you hasten to? The same  
form

flees and follows: you're guide to a follower, follower to a  
guide.

The Nile flowing to the sea through seven gates  
drove out the maddened heifer from the girl's face.

Why recall these earliest things, sung to me by ancient  
authors?

Behold, my own life gives me things to lament.

My father and my uncle wage war: we're expelled from  
home

and from our kingdom: driven to inhabit furthest places.

That warlike one, alone, is master of solitude and power:  
while we wander a helpless crowd, with a helpless old man.

Of the horde of cousins the least part remains:

I weep for those given death, and those who gave it.

For as many cousins as I lost, I lost as many sisters:

let both groups of them receive my tears.

But I, because you live, am kept for punishment's torment:  
what becomes of guilt, when I'm tormented for things men  
praise?

Unhappy, I may die with only one cousin left, I once  
a hundredth of a crowded family.

But you, Lynceus, if you care for your virtuous cousin  
and are worthy of the gift I gave you,

bring me help or bring me death: and add my body,  
when life is gone, to the secret fires,

and bury my bones, drenched with your loyal tears,  
and let these brief lines be carved on my tomb:  
'Hypermetra, an exile, bore the unjust price of virtue,  
she who averted death from her cousin.'  
I'd like to write more to you, but my hand's dragged down  
by the weight of chains, and fear itself drains my strength.

XV: Sappho to Phaon

When these letters, from my eager hand, are examined  
are any of them known to your eyes, straight away, as  
mine?

Or would you not know where this work came from  
in short, unless you'd read the name of its author, Sappho?

Indeed, perhaps you ask why my lines alternate,  
when I'm more suited to the lyric mode:

my love is weeping: it's elegiac verse that weeps:

I don't set any of my tears to the lyre.

I'm scorched, as a cornfield burns, its rich crop set alight  
by a wild south-easterly, bringing lightning.

Phaon frequents the far fields of Typhoeus's Etna:

passion grips me no less fiercely than Etna's fire.

Songs to the well-tuned strings don't rise in me:

song is the work of a mind at leisure.

Nor do the girls of Pyrrha, or Methymna delight me,  
nor the rest of the Lesbian throng.

Worthless is Anactoria, lovely Cydro's worthless, to me,  
while Atthis isn't pleasing to my eyes,

nor a hundred others that I've loved guiltily.

Cruel man, one alone has what was a multitude's!

Beauty is yours, years suited to loving,

oh, treacherous beauty to my eyes!

Take up the lyre, and archery – you'll surely become  
Apollo:

add horns to your head – it's Bacchus that you'll be.

And Phoebus loved Daphne: Bacchus loved Ariadne,  
neither she nor she knew the lyric mode.

But the Muses compose the sweetest songs for me:



now, my name is sung throughout the world:  
Alcaeus is not more praised, who shares the lyre  
and my country, even though he may sound more grand.  
If nature, being difficult, denies me beauty,  
my genius repays beauty's loss.  
I'm small. But mine's a name that fills every country:  
I reveal the measure of the name itself.  
If I'm not pale, Andromeda pleased Perseus,  
dark with the colour of her father Cepheus's land.  
and often white pigeons mate with other hues,  
and the dark turtledove's loved by emerald birds.  
If nothing but what's possessed by beauty will seem worthy  
to you,  
none will be yours in future, none will be yours in future!  
But when I read my poems, I seemed beautiful enough,  
indeed  
you swore I was the only one, fit to speak for ever.  
I sang, I remember (lovers remember everything),  
and, while I sang, you gave me stolen kisses.  
Those too you praised, I pleased you in all ways  
but especially there, where Love's work was done.  
Then you enjoyed my playfulness more than ever  
and endless teasing, appropriate laughing words,  
and when we were both abandoned to pleasure,  
that deepest languor of our weary bodies.  
Now Sicilian girls come to you as new prizes.  
What is Lesbos to me? I wish I were Sicilian.  
Oh you Nisean mothers, and Nisean daughters,  
send back the wanderer from your shores!  
Don't let the lying endearments of his tongue deceive you:  
what he says to you, he said before to me.

You also Venus, Erycina, who frequents Sicilian hills  
(since I am yours) look to your poet, goddess!  
Or must my painful fate fulfil its tender beginning,  
and always be bitter in its course.  
Six birthdays had gone when my father's bones, gathered  
before his time, drank of my tears.  
Helplessly, Charaxus, my brother, captivated, burnt with  
love  
of a whore, and suffered disgraceful losses, mixed with  
shame.  
He wanders, poverty stricken, over the blue sea, with fast  
oars,  
and sinfully seeks now, the wealth he sinfully lost.  
He hates me too, because, from great loyalty, I warned him,  
clearly:  
that's what frankness, and conscientiousness brought me.  
And just as what I miss torments me, endlessly,  
so a young daughter adds to my cares.  
You give me a final reason for complaint:  
our ship's not driven by favourable winds.  
Look, my scattered hair lies lawlessly about by neck,  
no bright jewels clasp my fingers.  
I'm covered by cheap cloth, no gold's in my hair,  
my tresses hold no perfumed gifts of Araby.  
Unhappy, for whom should I dress, for whom labour to  
please?  
The sole author of my adornments has gone.  
My heart's easily vulnerable, and to slender weapons,  
and often the cause is that I often love,  
Either the Fatal Sisters uttered it as a law, at my birth,  
and no thread of discipline was granted to my life,

or inclination becomes habit, and my muse Thalia,  
my instructress in art, made my genius prone to love.  
Why wonder if men in their first youth captivated me  
and those years in which a man's first able to love?  
I should fear lest you steal him away, Aurora, in place of  
Cephalus!  
(and you would, but your first love holds you!)

If the Moon goddess should see him, she who sees  
everything,  
it's Phaon, not Endymion, who'll be ordered to remain  
asleep.  
Venus might have carried him off into the sky, in her ivory  
chariot,  
but she might think he'd please Mars, himself.  
Oh lovely years: not yet a man, nor still a boy,  
Oh honour and great glory of your age,  
come to me, handsome one, sink into my arms again:  
I don't ask you should love, only let yourself be loved!  
I write, and my eyes are wet with rising tears:  
look at the many blots here in this place.  
If you were so certain of leaving, you might have behaved  
better,  
and at least have said: 'Woman of Lesbos, farewell!'  
You carried away no tears, no kisses of mine:  
in short I felt no fear of the pain that was.  
Nothing of you is left me, only injury. Nor have you  
any token of love to remind you.  
I gave you no requests. Nor truly should I have given any,  
except that you should not be unmindful of me.  
I swear, by Love who is never far from you,  
and by the Nine Muses, my divinities,

when whoever it might be said to me: ‘Your joys depart’,  
I couldn’t cry for ages, nor could I speak:  
tears indeed failed my eyes, words failed my tongue,  
my heart was frozen by an icy chill.  
When grief came to itself, I was not ashamed  
to beat my breast, and howl as I tore my hair,  
no differently than that holy mother who carries the body,  
of her dead son, empty of life, to the heaped-up pyre.  
My brother Charaxus delights in, thrives on, my misery,  
and he reappears and fades before my eyes,  
And that the reason for my grief might seem shameful,  
he says: ‘Why grieve at this? Surely her daughter lives!’  
Shame and love do not come together: all the crowd saw:  
I was there with torn clothes and naked breasts.  
You’re my care, Phaon: you’re restored to me in dreams –  
dreams brighter than the beauty of the day.  
There I find you, though you’re far from this sphere:  
but the joys of sleep don’t last for long enough.  
often your arms feel the weight of my neck,  
often I seem to place mine beneath yours.  
I recognise the kisses you engaged in with your tongue,  
and used to be ready to take, and to give.  
Now and then I caress you, and speak words that are almost  
real,  
and my lips alone guard my thoughts –  
I blush to tell more, but everything takes place –  
and I please – and I’m not allowed to thirst.  
But when the Sun shows himself, and all things along with  
him,  
then I complain that sleep’s quickly left me:  
I seek the caves and woods, as if the woods and caves

might help me: they have shared my pleasures.  
Then I suffer a vacant mind that resembles fearful Enyo's,  
goddess of war, with hair loose about her neck.  
I see rough tufa that hangs from the caves,  
that to me was the equal of Phrygian marble:  
I find the grove again, which often offered us a bed,  
and hid us with a host of shadowy leaves.  
But I do not find the lord of woods and me,  
the place itself is worthless – he was its dowry.  
I recognise crushed herbs in the familiar turf:  
the grass was bent by our weight.  
I've lain down, and touched the place where you were:  
a herb, that welcomed me before, drinks my tears.  
Indeed the very branches seem to mourn with falling leaves  
and there are no birds sweetly singing.  
Only Procne, grief-stricken mother, unholy punisher of her  
husband,  
as a bird now, sings of Thracian Itys of Daulis.  
The bird sings of Itys: Sappho of forsaken love:  
so far, they're, otherwise, as silent as midnight.  
There's a sacred fountain, shining, clearer than any crystal:  
many think a divine spirit lives there.  
Over it water-lotus unfolds its branches, itself a grove,  
the earth is green with tender turf.  
Here, when, weeping, I laid down my weary limbs,  
a Naiad stood before my eyes:  
she stood there and said: 'Since you burn with the fires of  
injustice,  
Ambracia's the land to be sought by you.  
Apollo on the heights watches the open sea:  
summoning the people of Actium and Leucadia.

Here Deucalion, fired by love of Pyrrha, cast himself down,  
and struck the sea without harming his body.

Without delay love turned and fled, from his slowly sinking  
breast: Deucalion was eased of his passion.

The place obeys that law. Seek out the Leucadian height  
right away, and don't be afraid to leap from the rock!

As she as instructing me, she vanished, with her voice. I  
rose,

chilled, and the tears ceased flowing from my eyes.

I'll go, oh Nymph, and seek the rock you've shown me:

let fear be far from me, conquered by frantic love.

Whatever comes will be better than what is. Breeze,  
support me – indeed, my body has no great weight.

You also, sweet Love, lift me on your wings as I fall,  
lest my death be charged to Leucadia's waters.

Then I'll set up my lyre to Phoebus, the gift we share,  
and beneath it this pair of verses, one below the other:

'The grateful poetess, Sappho, sets up this lyre, to you,  
Apollo:

appropriate to me, it is appropriate for you.'

Still, why do you send me, unhappy, to Actium's shore,  
when you yourself could turn your wandering feet back to  
me?

You'd be better for me than Leucadia's waves:

and you could be Phoebus to me, in beauty and kindness.

Perhaps if I die, oh you, fiercer than any cliff or sea,  
might bear the infamy of my death?

Ah how much better to join my thoughts to yours,  
than that they should be given to the rocks in headlong fall!

These are they, Phaon, which you used to praise  
and seemed to you to be so ingenious.

I wish I was eloquent now! Pain obstructs art  
and my ills put paid to every talent.

My old powers of song won't awaken for me:  
the plectrum falls silent through grief, and silent the lyre.  
Lesbian women of the waves, those to be married: those  
married,

Lesbian women, names sung to the Aeolian lyre,  
Lesbian women, beloved women, who made me infamous,  
cease to come, in a crowd, to the melodies of my lyre!

Phaon has stolen what pleased you so before,  
ah me! I nearly said, as once I did: 'My Phaon.'  
Make him return. Your singer too will return.

He gave my genius power: he snatched it away.  
Do I rouse his savage heart moved by my prayers, or does  
it freeze, and the west winds carry away my fleeting  
words?

I wish those that carry them would bring back your sails:  
That, if you only knew it, sluggard, would be the right thing  
to do.

If you are returning, and prepare a votive offering for the  
stern,

why torment my heart by your delay?

Loose your ship! Venus, born from the sea, offers the sea to  
lovers.

The winds will give you way – only loose your ship!  
Cupid himself will pilot it, settled on the stern:  
he'll furl and unfurl the sails himself, with his delicate  
hand.

If you wish to flee far from Sappho of Greece,  
(you'll still find no reason why I'm worthy of being  
shunned)

a harsh letter might at least speak that misery,  
so that death might be sought by me in Leucadia's waters.



XVI: Paris to Helen

Daughter of Leda, I, the son of Priam, send you health,  
which I allow that only you can grant me.  
Shall I speak out, or is there no need to signal known  
passion,  
and is my desire now visible, perhaps more than I wish?  
In fact I'd prefer it hidden, until the time is granted  
when fear might not be mixed with joy.  
But I dissimulate badly: who in truth could have hidden a  
fire  
that always betrays itself by its own light?  
Still if you expect it, I'll add my voice also to the fact:  
I burn – now you own the word that declares my heart.  
Spare me for confessing it, I beg you, and don't read the  
rest of this  
with a harsh expression, but rather one suited to your  
beauty.  
I've long been grateful: since the fact that you accepted my  
letter  
gave me hope that, by that token, you might also accept me.  
Let it be so: I hope Venus, Love's mother, hasn't promised  
you  
to me in vain, she who's urged me to take this course.  
And now I sail, by her divine command – you shouldn't sin  
not knowing this – and her great power is with me from the  
start.  
I ask a great reward it's true, and not one that is due me:  
Cytherea's promised you for my bed.

Guided by this, I've made my uncertain way over the wide  
sea,  
from Sigeum's shore, in the ship Phereclus built.  
She brought me a helpful breeze, and a following wind –  
born from the sea, she no doubt has power at sea.  
May she continue, the passion in my heart exhorts me,  
so that I might reach your harbour, and my wish.  
I brought these desires with me: I didn't find them here.  
They were the reason for so long a journey.  
For neither a wretched storm, nor some error brought me  
here:  
Sparta's land was what my fleet sought out.  
Don't think I divided the waves with my ship carrying  
goods –  
the wealth I have the gods can keep.  
Nor have I come just to visit the towns of Greece:  
my kingdom's cities are far richer.  
I seek you, whom lovely Venus drives towards my bed:  
I wished for you before you were known to me.  
Your face was in my mind before I saw you with my eyes:  
news of your fame first brought me the wound.  
Still it's no wonder I love, just as if I'd been struck a blow  
by the arrows from a bow, fired from a distance.  
So the Fates are pleased: lest you try to shy away from  
them,  
accept the words I tell you, in true honour.  
My birth delayed, I was yet held in my mother's womb:  
by now her belly was swollen with my full weight.  
In the form of a dream, she saw herself delivered  
of a flaming torch from her pregnant belly.  
She woke terrified, and told the fearful vision of deep night

to old Priam, and he in turn to his seers.

One prophesied that Troy would be burnt by Paris's fire –  
the torch in my heart, such as there is now.

The beauty and vigour of my spirit, though I might have  
seemed

to have been low-born, were signs of my secret nobility.

There's a place in the midst of the valleys of wooded Ida,  
solitary, crowded with pines and holm-oaks,

where placid sheep, and she-goats that love the rocks,  
and slow oxen, with open mouths, won't graze:

There I was, leaning against a tree, gazing down  
on the walls, and high roofs of Troy, and the sea –  
behold, the earth seemed to me to shake, at the tread of  
many feet –

I speak the truth, scarcely having had faith it was true –

Mercury, the grandchild of mighty Atlas and Pleione,

appeared before my eyes, driven on his swift wings –

it was lawful to see it, let it be lawful to say what I saw –

and there was a rod of gold in the god's fingers.

And at that same moment three goddesses, Venus, Athene,  
and Hera, set down their tender feet on the grass.

I was stunned, and icy terror raised my hair on end,

when the winged messenger said to me: 'Have no fear!:

you're a judge of beauty: end the goddesses' quarrel,

one beauty is worthy of conquering the other two.'

Lest I refuse, he commanded it in Jupiter's name,

and took himself off right away, on the sky-path to the  
stars.

My spirits recovered, a sudden courage came to me,

and I wasn't afraid to observe each one with a look.

They were all worthy of winning, and as judge I lamented

that all of their cases couldn't succeed.  
But even then one of them pleased me more,  
she, as you might guess, is the one by whom love's stirred.  
They so much wanted to win: they were fired up  
to tempt my judgement with powerful gifts.  
Jupiter's consort mentioned kingdoms: his daughter valour:  
I might wish to think about power or being brave.  
Sweet Venus laughed: 'Don't let either of their gifts fool  
you,  
they're filled with anxious fear,' she said:  
I'll give you, what you should love, the lovelier daughter  
of lovely Leda will indeed enter your embrace.'  
She spoke, and, with her gift and her beauty both approved,  
victorious, she retraced her steps to the sky.  
Meanwhile, I believe, the Fates turned to my prosperity,  
I was acknowledged a son of the king, by proven signs.  
The joyful house increased, accepting a long lost child,  
and also, because of it, Troy had a day of festival.  
Just as I desire you, women desire me:  
you alone can have what many pray for.  
Not just the daughters of kings and lords seek me,  
but I am cared for and loved by nymphs.  
What beauty greater than Oeneone, in the world, is worthy,  
after you, to become a daughter-in-law of Priam?  
But, Helen, the whole crowd have become loathsome to  
me,  
since I've had hopes of making you my bride.  
Waking, my eyes see you: by night, my mind,  
when my eyelids lie conquered by tranquil sleep.  
How can your beauty, which I've not had pleasure in  
seeing,

be present to me? I was alight, though the fire was far from me.

I could no longer deny myself that hope of mine,  
rather I sought out my wish, by the dark-blue roads.

Phrygian pine fell to the axes of Troy  
and wood fit for the ocean waves:

The tall groves were stripped from high Gargara,  
and Ida yielded me timbers without number.

Oak is curved for the foundations of my swift ships,  
and their ribs are pinned to the curving keel.

Yards are added to masts, and receive the hanging shrouds,  
and the raked sterns receive pictures of the gods:

so that the captain sails, an ornate goddess standing there  
as sponsor of his union, accompanied by a little Cupid.

After the last hand had finished work on the fleet,

I was happy to leave ,right away, for Aegean waters.

but father and mother stopped me, asking for my prayers  
and delaying my going by their pious intent:

and my sister Cassandra, just as she was, with hair  
unbound,

cried out, as our ships were ready to sail:

‘Where are you rushing to? You’ll bring fire back with  
you!

You don’t know how great the flames are you seek in those  
waters!’

The prophetess was right: I found the fires she spoke of,  
and savage love blazes in my tender heart.

I left the harbour and carried by helpful winds

I landed on your shores, bride, scion of Oebalus.

Your husband welcomes me as a guest: this too  
didn’t happen without the counsel and will of the gods.

In fact he showed me whatever in all of Sparta  
is worthy and distinguished enough to be shown:  
But I desired to see your much-praised beauty,  
there was nothing else that could captivate my eyes.  
When I saw you, I was stunned, and, astonished,  
I felt new love swell in my deepest heart.  
As far as I could remember, you had such looks  
as when Cytherea came to me for judgement.  
Equally, if you'd been in that competition,  
Venus winning the palm would have been in doubt.  
Fame in fact has greatly commended you,  
and no land is ignorant of your beauty.  
No other beauty has a name like yours,  
anywhere from Phrygia to the place the sun rises!  
Do you trust me in this? – Your fame is less than the truth  
and fame's almost unkind to your beauty.  
I find more here than She promised me,  
and your reality exceeds your fame.  
So Theseus, who knew all this, deserved to be on fire,  
and you were seen to be a prize worthy of such a hero,  
when, according to your people's custom, you exercised,  
naked,  
in the gleaming gymnasium, a woman among the naked  
men.  
I praise the fact he took you: I'm amazed he ever returned  
you.  
a prize so great should have been held forever.  
My head would have been severed from my blood-stained  
neck  
before I'd have seen you taken from my bed.  
Do you think my hands could ever wish to let you go?

Do you think that while I lived I'd let you leave my side?  
If you'd had to be given up, still, before I produced you,  
Venus would not have been entirely idle,  
Either I'd have taken your virginity, or I'd have snatched  
what I could, leaving you still intact.

Only give yourself: so you'll know Paris is faithful:  
the flame of my funeral pyre alone can end these flames.  
I preferred you to kingdoms, that the great wife,  
and sister, of Jupiter once offered me,  
and, while I can encircle your neck with my arms,  
the power of Pallas's gift's contemptible to me.  
I've no regret, nor does anything I chose seem foolish:  
my heart remains firm in its desire for you.

I only pray my hope is not allowed to die, oh you,  
so worthy, I seek with so much labour!

I'm not a low-born man choosing a noble wife,  
it would not, trust me, be shameful to be mine.

If you ask you'll find Electra the Pleiad, and Jove in my  
line,

to say nothing of my later ancestors.

My father rules Asia, there's no richer region,  
with immense borders that can scarcely be surveyed.

You'll see endless cities, and golden palaces,  
and temples you'd say were fit for the gods.

You'll see Troy, and its strong walls with high turrets,  
built by the music of Apollo's lyre.

What can I tell you of the crowds, and the host of warriors?  
The earth can scarcely sustain so many people.

The Trojan women will come to meet you in a dense  
throng,

and our halls will not hold all the daughters of Phrygia.

O how often you'll say: 'How poor our Achaia is!'  
One house will display the wealth of a city.  
But it wouldn't be right for me to condemn your Sparta:  
the land where you were born is rich for me.  
But Sparta's tiny, you're worthy of a wealthy culture:  
that place is not beneficial to your beauty.  
That beauty should enjoy copious adornments, without end,  
and it's fitting that new delights overflow for you.  
When you see the refinement of our race of men,  
what will you consider the daughters of Greece possess?  
Grant only that you won't reject a Phrygian husband too  
easily,  
girl born in Therapnaean country.  
It's a Phrygian, Ganymede, one born of our race,  
who mixes nectar now for the gods.  
It's a Phrygian, Tithonus, who's Aurora's husband: the  
goddess  
carried him off, she who prescribes the final border of  
night.  
Anchises, is Phrygian too, whom the mother of the winged  
Cupids  
loves to lie with on the ridges of Mount Ida.  
Nor do I think Menelaus will be preferred to me, in your  
mind,  
when we're compared in age and beauty.  
I'll certainly not give you Atreus as a father-in-law, who  
banishes  
the light, who makes the Sun's terrified horses shy from the  
feast:  
nor is Priam's father red, with his wife's father's murder:  
a Pelops, who stained the Myrtoan waters with his crime:



Nor is Tantalus my ancestor, snatching fruit in Styx's waters,  
and seeking moisture in the midst of the stream.  
Shouldn't it concern me that one born of those has you?  
To think that Jove's the father-in-law of this house!  
Ah, the crime of it! All the night that man who's unworthy  
of you  
holds you in his embrace, and enjoys you to the full:  
but I, in short, scarcely see you when the tables are set,  
and that time too is full of things that wound me.  
May my enemies experience such feasts as ours,  
that I often suffer when the wine goes round.  
I'm sorry I'm a guest, when I see that boor  
put his arms round your neck, as I watch.  
I swell with anger and envy – why shouldn't I tell all –  
when he fondles your limbs beneath your clothes.  
Truly, when you grant him gentle kisses in my presence,  
I place the cup I've lifted in front of my eyes:  
I drop my gaze when you take his arm,  
and the food sticks in my unwilling throat.  
Often I give a groan: and you, impudent girl, I noticed,  
you can't hold back your laughter at my groans.  
Often I'd have drowned my passion in wine, but it grew,  
and drunkenness was a fire added to a fire.  
Many times, not to see you, I reclined with my face  
averted:  
but my eyes were immediately called back to you.  
I'm not sure what I'll do: it's a grief to see you,  
but a worse grief to be absent from your face.  
As I can and might, I struggle to hide my passion,  
but though I pretend, my love still shows.

I'm not lying to you: you feel my wounds, you feel:  
and I hope they are only known to you.  
Ah, how often I've turned my face away when tears came,  
so he might not see the reason for my tears.  
Ah, how often in drink I've told of some love affair,  
repeating every word that troubles you,  
and expressing my judgment under cover of my tale:  
truly I was that lover, if you didn't realise.  
Indeed, so that I might use lascivious words,  
more than once my drunkenness was feigned.  
I remember your breasts were exposed, betrayed by your  
dress,  
and gave my eyes an opening to your nakedness,  
breasts whiter than pure snow, or milk  
or Jove, that swan, who embraced your mother.  
While I was stunned, gazing – as I held a cup tightly –  
the handle slipped from my curving fingers.  
If you gave your daughter, Hermione, kisses, I delighted  
right away in taking them from her tender lips.  
And now, reclining there, I sang of ancient loves,  
and now, by nods, I gave you secret messages.  
And I dared to address your close friends recently,  
Clymene and Aethra, in flattering tones:  
who said no more to me than that they were frightened,  
and left me, in the middle of stating my requests.  
The gods should make you the prize in some great contest,  
and the victor might have you, for his bed,  
as Hippomenes took Atalanta, Schoeney's daughter, in the  
race,  
as Hippodamia came to Phrygian Pelops's breast,  
as Hercules broke Achelous's horn,

while he sought your embrace, Deianira.  
My courage might have passed boldly through these trials,  
and you would have been needful of my efforts.  
Now there's nothing left for me but to beg, my lovely one,  
and clasp your ankles, if you allow it.  
O beauty, O present glory of the Twins,  
O woman worthy of Jove for a husband, if you were not his  
scion,  
either I'll return to Sigeum's harbour with you my bride  
or, exiled, I'll be covered by the earth here, in Taenaria!  
My heart's not been lightly grazed by the arrow's point:  
the wound has penetrated to my bones!  
Now I recall, that to be pierced by a heavenly arrow  
was the truth that my sister prophesied.  
Helen, forebear to deny the love we're given –  
so that the gods will be ready to hear your prayers.  
Many things come to mind: but, to say more in person,  
take me to your bed in the silence of the night.  
Perhaps you're ashamed, and fear to desecrate the marriage  
bond  
and betray the chaste rights of your lawful bed?  
Ah, I won't speak crudely, or too frankly Helen,  
but do you think beauty can ever be free from sin?  
You must either alter your beauty or be less harsh:  
Chastity conflicts with great loveliness.  
Jupiter delights in these intrigues, and lovely Venus:  
such an intrigue surely gave you Jove for a father.  
If the forces of love are in the seed it could hardly be  
that the daughter of Jove and Leda could be chaste.  
Still you'd be chaste while you kept to my Troy,  
and I ask that I might be your only crime.

Now we'll offend in what our hour of marriage will set  
right,  
if only Venus made me no idle promises.  
But indeed your husband persuades you to this, voicelessly:  
he's away, that his guest's intrigue might not be hindered.  
he found no time more fitting, to see his Cretan kingdom –  
oh, what a wonderfully cunning man!  
'Wife, run my affairs, and as I've asked you,' he said on  
leaving,  
'take care of my guest, in my place.'  
I'm a witness, you'll slight your absent husband,  
if your every care's not for your guest.  
Do you hope this thoughtless man, my Tyndaris,  
might sufficiently understand your gift of beauty?  
You're wrong: he's ignorant: if he thought that what he  
held  
was some great good, he wouldn't trust it to a stranger.  
Even if you're not stirred by my voice or my ardour,  
I'm compelled to seize the advantage:  
if not I'd be as foolish as indeed he is himself,  
in letting such a carefree time be idly lost.  
Your lover's almost been led to you, by his hand:  
use your husband's mandate in all innocence!  
You lie alone in your empty bed, through such long nights:  
on my empty couch indeed I too lie alone.  
Let's join in shared delights, you with me, and I with you:  
midnight will be brighter than the day.  
Then I'll swear to you by whatever gods  
and I'll be bound by my words according to your rites:  
then, unless our pledge is false,  
I'll make ready for you to travel to my kingdom.

If you're ashamed, and fear lest you're seen to go with me,  
I'll be the sole culprit in our crime.

I'll imitate the deed of Theseus, and your twin brothers:  
I can touch on no more appropriate example.

Theseus snatched you, the Twins took the daughters of  
Leucippus:

I'll be numbered there too, as a fourth example.

The Trojan fleet is here, equipped with arms and men:  
soon wind and oar could send them on their way.

A mighty queen you'll go, through the Dardanian cities,  
and people will think you're a new goddess there,  
as you take your course the flames will burn with  
cinnamon,

and a victim falling will strike the blood-stained earth.

My father will bring you gifts, and my brothers, mother,  
sisters,

all the daughters of Ilium, the whole of Troy.

Ah me! I can scarcely speak a tiny part of what will be,  
more will be given to you than my letter mentions.

Don't fear if you're snatched away fierce war will pursue  
us,

and mighty Greece rouse its armed men.

Of all the abducted have any been brought back by armies?  
Trust me, that thought's full of idle fear.

The Thracians seized Orythia, Erectheus's daughter,  
in Boreas's name, and Bistonias was safe from war.

Jason of Pagasa took Phasian Medea, in the first ship, the  
Argo,

and the land of Thessaly wasn't harmed at Colchian hands.

Theseus who also took you, snatched the Minoan, Ariadne:  
yet Minos did not call on the Cretans to take up arms.

The fear's often greater than the risk in these things:  
who's afraid ends up ashamed, for what they might have  
lost.

Still, imagine, if you wish, a mighty war's begun:  
I have warriors, and my weapons can do harm.

Asia is no less wealthy than your country:  
she has a wealth of men and horses.

Nor does Menelaus, son of Atreus, have more courage  
than Paris, nor is he superior in arms.

When only a boy, I recovered our stolen herds, slaying the  
enemy, and for that reason bear the name, Alexander,  
'defender'.

When only a boy, I conquered youths in varied  
competition,

among whom were Ilioneus and Deiphobus.

Lest you think I'm only to be feared in hand-to-hand  
combat,

I can pierce with my arrow whatever place you choose.

Can you show me deeds like these, in his early youth:  
can you train the son of Atreus in my arts?

If you grant all that, can you grant him Hector for a  
brother?

He alone would be like having innumerable soldiers.

You don't know my worth, and my strength's deceptive:  
you, who'll be his future bride, don't know the man.

So they'll either demand you back, without the tumult of  
war,

or the Greek force will fall to my army.

Yet I'd not be displeased to take up arms for such a wife:  
great prizes arouse competition.

You too, if all the world contends because of you,

you'll bear a famous name, to all posterity.  
Only trust me: fearlessly departing, with the gods we  
favour,  
claim my service, as we swore, in complete faith.

## XVII: Helen to Paris

Paris, if only I might have not read what I've read,  
I might indeed retain your good regard as before.  
Now that my eyes have been troubled by your letter,  
I take pride in not replying lightly.  
A chance stranger to our sacred hospitality you've dared  
to tamper with the rightful loyalty of a wife!  
When Taenarus's shore welcomed you, driven by stormy  
seas,  
to its harbour, and, our kingdom held no doors shut against  
you, though you come of a foreign people,  
is insult then to be the reward for such great services?  
You who so enter, are you friend or enemy?  
No doubt, in your judgement, my reproach,  
though just, might indeed be called naive.  
Let me be naive, then, as long as I'm not smeared with  
shame,  
and the course of my life is free of blemish.  
If there's no sad expression on my face,  
and I don't sit grimly with a frown on my brow,  
still my reputation's spotless, and as yet, without sin,  
I entertain myself, and no adulterer has my approval.  
I'm the more surprised you've confidence in your attempt,  
and that it's given you reason to hope to share my bed.  
Perhaps because Neptune's hero, Theseus, took me by  
force,  
once taken I'm thought worthy of being taken twice?  
If I'd been seduced, the crime would have been mine:  
since I was forced, what was I but unwilling?  
He still didn't get from his deed the fruits he sought:



I returned untouched except by fear.  
The insolent man only stole a few kisses:  
he had nothing further from me.  
Your wickedness mightn't have been content with that.  
The gods help me! He wasn't like you.  
He returned me intact, and his restraint lessened the crime,  
and it's obvious the young man repented of his actions.  
Did Theseus repent, so that Paris might succeed him,  
so that my name would always be on men's lips?  
Yet I'm not angry – who's angered by a lover? –  
If only the love you show for me isn't false.  
Indeed I doubt that too, not because assurance is lacking,  
or that my beauty's not well-known to me,  
but because credulity's usually harmful to girls  
and they say your words lack truth.  
It may be said others sin, and a chaste woman's rare.  
Why is my name forbidden to be among the rare ones?  
Or that my mother seems suited to you, by whose example  
you may think you can sway me too: it's an error: my  
mother  
accepted love-making while under a false illusion:  
the adulterer was hidden by a swan's plumage.  
I can't pretend ignorance, if I sin: nor would there be any  
error  
that could screen the fact of my crime.  
She erred in good faith, and the wrong was redeemed by its  
author.  
For what Jove could I be said to be happily at fault?  
And you mention your race, forebears, your royal name:  
this house is distinguished enough in its nobility.

Not to speak of Jupiter, my husband's ancestor, and all the  
glory

of Pelops, Tantalus's son, and of Tyndareus:

Leda, deceived by the swan, gave me Jupiter for a father,  
she who trustingly fondled the illusory bird in her lap.

Now go on telling me of the distant origin of the Phrygian  
race

and of Priam and his father Laomedon!

I admire them: but he who's your greatest glory is fifth in  
line

from you: Jupiter, who would be first in line from my  
name.

Though I suppose your sceptre to be a power in your land,  
yet I don't think ours is less mighty.

If indeed the place outdoes this one in wealth and numbers  
of men,

certainly yours is a barbarous country.

It's true your letter offers such rich gifts

that they might move the gods themselves.

But if I wished now to cross the bounds of modesty,  
you yourself would be a better reason for my sin.

Either I'll keep my name forever without stain

or I'll follow you rather than your gifts.

While I don't reject them, gifts are always the most  
acceptable

when the author of them has made them precious.

It's more that you love me, that I'm the reason for your  
labours,

that you come in hope, over such wastes of water.

Also, persistent man, I notice what you do now

when the tables are laid, though I try to pretend –

when you only look at me with your eyes, impudent, bold,  
the gaze which my eyes can scarcely bear,  
and now you sigh, and now you take the cup nearest me,  
and where I drank from, you drink from that place too.  
Ah, how many times I've seen your fingers, how many  
times,  
giving secret signals, and your eyebrows almost speaking!  
And often I've been fearful lest my husband might see it,  
and I blushed at the signs you didn't sufficiently hide.  
Often I've whispered or, not even aloud, I've said:  
'This man has no shame!' nor did that voice deceive me.  
Also I've read, on our corner of the table beneath my name,  
what the letters, composed with wine, spelt: 'I love.'  
I still refused to believe it, giving a look of denial.  
Ah me, now I've learnt how to speak in that manner!  
These are the blandishments, if I'd been sinful, that might  
have deflected me: these might have captured my heart.  
It's also I confess your rare beauty: and a girl  
could want to fall into your embrace.  
But some other might be made happier, without sinning,  
rather than that my honour fall to a foreign lover.  
Only, learn by example to be able to do without beauty:  
virtue is to refrain from self-indulgent pleasures.  
How many young men, do you think, wish for what you  
wish for?  
Are they wise, or is Paris the only one with eyes?  
You see no more than them, but you dare more rashly:  
you've no more judgement, but less composure.  
I wish that your swift ship had come then,  
when a thousand suitors sought my virginity.  
If I'd seen you, you'd have been first among the thousand:

my husband himself will pardon my opinion.  
You come late, to delights already taken and possessed:  
you hope was tardy: what you seek another has.  
Though I chose to become your bride in Troy,  
Menelaus does not hold me here unwillingly.  
I beg you, stop tearing my heart apart sweetly with your  
words,  
don't hurt me, whom you say you love:  
but allow me to keep the situation fate has granted,  
and don't shamefully make a prize of my honour.  
But Venus agreed this, and in the deep valleys of Ida  
three naked goddesses showed themselves to you:  
and while one offered a kingdom, and another fame in  
battle,  
the third said: 'Helen will be your bride!'  
It's hard to believe, for my part, that those heavenly bodies  
were presented to you for judgement on their beauty:  
if it were true, certainly the rest is fiction,  
that I was said to be the prize for your judgement.  
I don't have enough confidence in my body to think that I  
might have been the finest gift the goddess could call on.  
I'm content that men's eyes approve my beauty:  
Venus praising me would be a cause of envy.  
But I won't refute a thing: I favour your praise too:  
For, heart, why reject the voice that is desired?  
Don't be angry if my belief in you comes only with great  
difficulty:  
trust in important things usually builds slowly.  
My prime pleasure is to have so pleased Venus:  
the next, that you saw me as the greatest prize,  
and preferred neither Hera's nor Athene's offerings

to the charms of Helen you had heard of.  
So I'm excellence to you, I'm a noble kingdom?  
I'd be made of iron, if I didn't love your heart.  
Believe me, I'm not of iron: but I resist loving  
he whom I think could scarcely be mine.  
Why plough the wet sands with curving blade,  
or try to chase hopes that this situation denies?  
I'm innocent of the affairs of Venus, and I never –  
may the gods be my witness! – play tricks on my husband!  
Now too, as I entrust my words to the silent page,  
this letter performs a new service.  
Happy, those who are used to these things! I know nothing  
of them,  
I suspect the path of sin is difficult.  
Fear is itself wrong: I'm confused now,  
and I think all eyes are on my face.  
Nor do I think it false: I sense the hostile murmurs of the  
people,  
and Aethra brings me news of what they say.  
But hide your love, unless you prefer to end it?  
Why end it? You can dissimulate.  
Indulge, but secretly! I'm given more freedom  
though not total, because Menelaus is away.  
In fact business required him to travel abroad,  
there was a great, and valid, cause for his sudden journey:  
or so it seemed to me. When he hesitated about going,  
I said: 'Go, and return quickly!' Pleased by this  
he kissed me, saying: 'Care for the house,  
and business, and for the Trojan guest.'  
I could scarcely hold my laughter, which, with a struggle,  
I suppressed, and could say nothing except; 'It shall be.'

It's true he sailed for Crete with a following wind:  
but don't think everything is as you'd wish!  
When my husband's away like this, absent he still guards  
me,  
or don't you realise a king's hands have a long reach?  
Also beauty is a burden: now I'm constantly praised  
by your people's mouths, he's rightly more anxious.  
That same glory I delight in, as it now is, harms me,  
and it would have been better to have foregone fame.  
Don't be amazed that he's gone, leaving me with you:  
he trusts my virtue and my way of life.  
He fears my looks, relies on my habits:  
my goodness makes him feel secure, my beauty scares him.  
You anticipate a later time beforehand, lest it's lost,  
so as to take advantage of my foolish husband.  
And I both desire and fear, and my inclination's not yet  
clear  
enough: my mind hesitates, with doubt.  
And my husband's away, and you sleep without a partner,  
your beauty captivates me, mine in turn captivates you:  
and the nights are long, and now we meet to talk,  
and you, ah me! flatter, and we share one house.  
And let me perish if everything does not invite my sin:  
I don't know why I delay, but for the fear itself.  
I wish you could rightly compel, what you wrongly  
persuade!  
My awkwardness should have been overcome by force.  
Sometimes a wrong benefits those who suffer it.  
so I might have been compelled to be happy.  
While it's new, we should fight love's inception the more!  
A fresh flame dies sprinkled with a little water.

Love's not certain in a guest: it wanders, like himself,  
and, when you think nothing's more certain, vanishes.  
Hypsipyle's a witness, and Ariadne, the Minoan virgin:  
both of them dallied in illicit beds.

You also, unfaithful man, have abandoned Oenone,  
they say, your delight for many years.

You have still not denied it: and if you don't know  
it was my first care to search out everything about you.  
Added to which, if you wished to stay true in love,  
you couldn't. Your Phrygians are readying your sails:  
while you speak to me, while you arrange the hoped-for  
night,  
a breeze will come, to carry you soon to your homeland.  
you'll abandon complete delight in the midst of its  
newness:

our love will be gone with the wind.

Or should I follow, as you argue, and see the Troy you  
praise,

and be the granddaughter-in-law of great Laomedon?

I wouldn't take the noise of rumour's wings so lightly,  
if the countries were full of my unchastity.

What would Sparta say of me, all Achaia,  
the peoples of Asia, and your Troy?

What would Priam and Hecuba feel about me,  
and all your brothers, and Trojan daughters-in-law?

You too, how could you hope for me to be faithful  
and not be anxious at your own example?

Every stranger entering a Trojan port,  
would be a source of troublesome fear to you.

How often, angry with me, you'd cry: 'Adulteress!'  
forgetting my guilt also belongs to you!

You'd become at once the author and critic of the offence.  
Before that may the earth cover my face!  
But I'll enjoy Troy's wealth and rich culture  
and I'll bear gifts more copious than you promised:  
I'll be offered purple-dyed and precious fabrics,  
and I'll be rich in heaped weights of gold!  
Forgive this confession! Your gifts aren't worth that much  
to me:  
I don't know this land that would hold me at all.  
Who will rush to help me, if I'm hurt, on Phrygian shores?  
Where will I find a brother or father's aid?  
Jason, the deceiver, promised Medea everything:  
wasn't she driven out, no less, from Aeson's house?  
There was no Aeetes, to whom, scorned, she might return,  
no mother, Idyia, no sister, Chalciope.  
I fear nothing like that, but nor did Medea fear:  
often hope's deceived by its own presentiments of good.  
You'll find the sea in harbour was calm for every ship  
that's now tossed about in the deep.  
That torch of blood terrifies me too, that your mother saw  
born to her, before your day of birth:  
and I fear the seer's warning, who prophesied, it's said,  
that Troy would be burnt by a Pelasgian fire.  
And as Venus favours you, because she triumphed, and  
holds  
the double trophy through your choice (the apple and her  
beauty),  
so I am afraid of those other two, if your boast is true,  
who, through your decision, lost their cause:  
I've no doubt, if I followed you, war would be prepared.  
Our love would travel among weapons, alas!



Perhaps Hippodamia of Atrax was the cause that forced  
the Thessalian warriors into savage war with the Centaurs:  
do you think Menelaus would be slow to righteous anger  
or the Twins, his brothers-in-law, or Tyndareus?  
For all your talk and tales of brave deeds  
your beauty conflicts with your words.  
Your body's fitter for Venus than Mars.  
Let the brave wage war, you, Paris, always love!  
Command Hector, whom you praise, to fight for you:  
your skills are in another kind of battle.  
If I were to taste of them, and were a little braver,  
I might enjoy them: if any girl tastes them, she might.  
Or perhaps, abandoning shame, I might taste them  
and, hesitation conquered by time, give you my hand.  
I know what you seek: to tell me this, privately, in person:  
what you might attempt to win, and invite in conversation:  
But you're too hasty, and as yet green shoots are your  
harvest.  
Perhaps a fond delay would be to your liking.  
Enough: now let these words, which share the mysteries  
of my secret heart, cease with my weary fingers.  
I'll speak the rest through my friends Clymene and Aethra,  
who are my two companions, and my counsel.

## XVIII: Leander to Hero

Hero, accept, from Leander's hand, while he himself  
comes,  
what he'd have wished to bear through the customary  
waves.

From one of Abydos, greetings, girl of Sestos, which he'd  
prefer  
to bring to you, if only the waves would abate.

If the fates are good to me, if the gods accompany me with  
love,  
you'll read these words with indifferent eyes.

But the fates aren't kind: why now would they delay my  
pledge,

not allowing me to hurry to you through familiar waters?

You yourself can see the sky blacker than pitch, and the  
strait

troubled by winds, and ships hardly venturing the deeps.

One boatman, and he's daring, by whom my letter  
is delivered to you, makes his way from harbour.

I'd have embarked with him, except that when he cast off  
the lines from the stern, he was in view from all Abydos.

I wouldn't have been masked from my parents, as before,  
and the love we wish to conceal wouldn't have been  
hidden.

As soon as I wrote this, I said: 'Go, happy letter!

now she'll reach out her lovely hand for you.

Perhaps she'll even touch you, with her snow-white teeth,  
bringing you to her lips, when she wishes to break your  
seal.'

I spoke these words to myself in a low murmur,

while the rest of the sheet was indicated by my right hand.  
But how I'd prefer that this hand, that writes, might swim  
and carry me faithfully through familiar waters!  
However apt it is as a servant of my feelings,  
it's better in fact at making strokes in the placid sea:  
For seven nights, a space of time longer to me than a year,  
I've been disturbed, as the troubled ocean raged with cruel  
waves.

If my mind has seen gentle sleep through those nights,  
may this delay caused by the raging straits be a long one.  
I'm sitting on a rock, sadly gazing at your other shore  
and I'm carried in mind to where my body cannot go.  
Indeed my keen watchful eye either sees  
or thinks it sees the summit to your tower.  
Three times I've left my clothes on the dry sands:  
three times, naked, painfully, I've tried to swim the roads:  
the swollen sea opposed my youthful undertaking,  
and, swimming against the waves, my head was  
submerged.

But you, wildest of the swift winds, why do you,  
with fixed purpose, wage war against me?  
If you don't see it, Boreas, you rage against me not the  
waves.

What might you do if love was not known to you?  
Icy though you may be, cruel one, still, can you deny  
that you once glowed with Greek fire?  
What joy in plundering would you have known  
if the airy approaches had wished to shut you out?  
Spare me, I beg you, and release a more gentle breeze!  
And let Aeolus not command anything offensive to you!  
I beg in vain: he roars in answer to my prayers

and holds in check no part of the waters he's stirred.  
Now I wish Daedalus might give me bold wings!  
Though the shores of the Icarian Sea are not far from here.  
I'd suffer whatever might be, if only my body, that often  
hangs  
above the uncertain water, might be lifted into the air.  
Meanwhile, while winds and waves deny all,  
I agitate my mind with the first moments of my secret  
affair.

Night was falling – indeed I remember the pleasure of it –  
when, a lover, I slipped from my father's door.

Without delay, shedding my clothes, and with them my  
fear,

I calmly slid my arms into the flowing water.

The moon offered only a trembling light, to my going,  
like an obliging companion on the road.

I looked up to her, and said: 'Favour me, bright goddess,  
and let the cliffs of Latmia suggest themselves to your  
mind.

Endymion would not allow you to be hard-hearted:

I beg you, turn your face to my secret enterprise!

Goddess, you came down from the sky to seek a mortal:  
may I speak truth! – She whom I follow is herself a  
goddess.

Without calling to mind her virtues, worthy of the gods,  
her beauty doesn't appear except among true goddesses.

There's no greater loveliness than hers, after yours and  
Venus's:

if you don't believe my words, look for yourself!

By as much as all the stars yield to your fires  
when you shine out, silver, with clear rays,

so much more beautiful than all the beauties is she:  
if you doubt it, Cynthia, your eye is blind.’  
I spoke these words or ones not unlike them,  
the waters I shouldered parting before me, of themselves.  
The waves shone with the image of the reflected moon  
and it was bright as day in the silent night.  
There was no voice anywhere: nothing came to my ears,  
except the murmur of the waters, parted by my body.  
Halycons alone appeared, lamenting to me,  
sweetly, remembering dear Ceyx.  
Then, both my arms growing weary, at the shoulder,  
I raised myself strongly, high above the waves.  
Seeing a distant light, I said: ‘My fire is in that fire:  
that is the shore that holds my light.’  
And sudden strength returned to my weary arms,  
and the waves seemed calmer to me.  
Love aids me, warming my eager heart,  
so I will not be chilled by the deep cold.  
I am more vigorous and the shore comes nearer,  
as the distance grows less, my joy increases.  
When I can see you clearly, your watching  
gives me strength, and adds to my courage.  
Now, to please my lady, I labour to swim,  
and lift up my arms to catch your sight.  
Your nurse can hardly stop you plunging into the deep.  
This I saw too, it was not something I was told of.  
Though she held you from going, she could not stop you,  
nor prevent your feet being wet by the wave’s edge.  
You embrace me, and join in happy kisses –  
kisses, great gods, worth seeking over the sea!  
Then you surrender to me the shawl from your shoulders,

and dry my hair drenched by the showers of brine.  
The rest night knows, and we, and the tower that sees,  
and the light that showed me a path through the sea.  
The joys of that night can no more be counted  
than the seaweeds in the waters of Hellespont:  
how brief the time granted us for that secret passion,  
how great the care that it was not wasted.  
Soon Aurora, Tithonus's bride, would chase away the  
night:  
Lucifer paving the way, was in the sky:  
we shower hasty kisses, quickly, without thought,  
and complain how little the night lingers.  
And so, delaying until the nurse's cross warning,  
leaving the tower, I seek the cold shore.  
We part weeping, and I re-enter virgin Helle's waters,  
looking back at my lady, when I can, all the way.  
If truth be known, coming to you from here I was a  
swimmer,  
when I returned, I seemed to myself like a drowning man.  
This too, if you would believe it: to you the way seemed  
smooth:  
from you returning, a hill of inert water.  
I return, unwillingly, to my country: who would believe it?  
Now truly I linger in my city unwillingly.  
Ah me! Why are our hearts that joined severed by the  
waves,  
two of one mind but not of one country?  
Your Sestos should take me, or my Abydos you:  
your land pleases me, as much as mine pleases you.  
Why am I troubled, when the sea is troubled?  
How can a slight cause, the wind, oppose me?

Now the curved dolphins know of our affairs,  
nor do I think I'm unknown to all the fish.  
Now my worn path through the solitary waves is familiar,  
no different to a road traversed by many wheels.  
Before, I complained that this was the only way for me:  
but now I also complain that I fail because of the wind.  
Helle's waters whiten with unruly waves,  
and scarcely a boat remains safe at its moorings.  
I think this sea was found like this, when first  
it took its name from the drowned virgin.  
This place is infamous enough from Helle's loss,  
and though it spares me, it has an evil name.  
I envy Phrixus, carried safely over stormy seas,  
on the golden ram, with its woolly fleece:  
nevertheless I don't need the services of a ram, or a boat,  
provided these waters are given me, that my body parts.  
Nothing's done by artifice: only by the means to swim,  
riding the waves, I'm both sailor and ship,  
I don't follow, Helice, the Great Bear, or Arctos, the Little  
Bear  
that men of Tyre use: my love needs no visible stars.  
Some other can gaze at Andromeda, or bright Corona  
Borealis,  
or Callisto's Bear shining at the frozen pole:  
But it does not please me for the loves of Perseus,  
Bacchus, or Jove, to be the judges of my dangerous path.  
Another light's more certain for me: my love,  
that guides me, doesn't wander in the darkness.  
While I gaze on it, I might swim to Colchis, furthest  
Pontus,  
and where the Thessalian ship, the Argo made its way,

and I might outdo young Palaemon, and Glaucus  
whom a bite of grass made suddenly a god.  
Exhausted, I can scarcely drag myself through the vast  
waters,  
and often my arms are wearied by the endless motion.  
When I tell them: 'The reward for your labours will not be  
small,  
soon it will be granted you to embrace your lady's neck,'  
they gain strength right away, and strain for the prize,  
like swift horses of Elis, released from the starting gate.  
So I serve my passions, with which I'm burnt,  
and follow you the more, girl worthy of the heavens.  
True you are worthy of the heavens, but linger still on  
earth,  
or tell me which is indeed the way to the gods!  
You are here, and have only a wretchedly small part of  
your lover,  
and when the sea is stirred, my mind is stirred.  
What good is it to me that no great width of sea divides us?  
Does so narrow a stretch of water obstruct me less?  
I wonder if I'd prefer to be a whole world distant,  
when the hope I have of my lady is also far away.  
Now, because we are nearer, I burn with a nearer flame,  
and the hope, but not the thing itself, is always near me.  
I almost touch what I love with my hand: it is so near:  
but often, alas, that 'almost' moves me to tears!  
How is it different, I say, to snatching at intangible fruit,  
or chasing the hope of vanishing water with one's mouth?  
In that way, am I never to hold you, unless the waves wish  
it,  
and is the storm never to see me happy,



and, when nothing's less permanent than wind or wave,  
are my hopes always to be with wind and water?  
It is still summer. What when the Pleiades, and Bootës,  
and Capella's Kids wound me and the waters?  
Either I haven't learnt how rash I might be,  
or, then too, incautious Love will send me into the sea:  
If you think I vow it only because the time is not yet ripe,  
I'll give you an assurance of my promise without delay.  
Let the tides be still as high as now for a few nights more,  
and I'll try to cross the uninviting waters.  
Either I'll reach happiness, through courage, in safety,  
or death will make an end of anxious love.  
I wish nevertheless to be thrown on that shore  
and my drowned body reach your harbour.  
For you'll weep, and think my body worthy to be touched  
and you'll say: 'I was the cause of this man's death!'  
No doubt you might be grieved by an omen of my death,  
and this part of my letter might be hateful to you.  
Enough: refrain from complaint. But let your prayer  
agree with mine, I beg, that the sea indeed ends its wrath.  
A brief lull is needed for me to cross to you:  
when I touch your shore let the storm rage on!  
There is the right harbour for my keel,  
and no better waters exist for my vessel.  
There let the North Wind shut me in, where delay is sweet:  
There I'll be reluctant to swim, there I'll be cautious,  
I'll not cry out against the unheeding waves,  
nor complain the sea is harsh for swimming.  
Let both the winds and your tender arms hold me equally,  
and I'll be hindered by both causes.  
When I've suffered the storm, I'll use my arms as oars:

only always keep your light in sight.

Meanwhile let this stay with you, all night, instead of me, this letter, that I pray, myself, to follow, with the least delay.

XIX: Hero to Leander

Come! That I might have, in fact, the greetings  
that you sent to me in words.

All waiting is long to us, that delays our joy.

Forgive my confession: I'm not patient in my love.

We blaze with equal fire, but I'm unequal to you in  
strength:

I suspect that a man is stronger by nature.

Like their bodies, the wills of tender girls are weaker:

add a little more time for delay, and I'll fail.

You men, now hunting, now farming pleasant country,  
spend many hours in various pastimes.

Either the market occupies you or, oiled, you're bent at the  
skills

of wrestling, or you guide your horse's neck with a bridle:

now you trap a bird, now draw a fish to your hook,

now dilute the wine that circles in the twilight hours.

These are denied me: even if I were less fiercely on fire,  
nothing remains for me but to do what I do, to love.

What I do remains, and you, o my sole delight, I love,  
more too than you may be able to give back to me.

I whisper about you with my white-haired nurse,  
and ponder the reason for your delayed passage:

or I watch the sea stirred by hostile winds

reproving the waves almost with the words you use:

or when the waves slacken their weight of savagery a little,

I complain, it's true, that you can come, but don't want to:

while I complain tears trickle from my loving eyes,

and the old nurse, who knows, dries them with trembling  
hand.

Often I look to see if your footprints might mark the shore,  
as if the sand might retain the marks traced there:  
and to ask about you and write to you, I search out, if  
anyone  
might be coming from Abydos, or going to Abydos.  
Why recall how many times I kiss the garments  
that you left when you plunged into the Hellespont's  
waters?  
So when day's done, and night's more friendly hour  
shows its bright stars, driving away the daylight,  
straight away I set out the unsleeping lights in the tower's  
top,  
signs and tokens of your familiar path,  
and we beguile the long wait with feminine art,  
twisting the threads drawn from the turning spindle.  
Meanwhile I search for what to talk of in those long hours:  
nothing but Leander's name is on my lips.  
'Nurse, do you think my joy has left his house now,  
or perhaps they are all awake, and he's afraid of them?  
Now do you think perhaps he slips the clothes from his  
shoulders,  
and rubs olive oil now over all his limbs?'  
She gives a nod: she doesn't care about my kisses,  
but moves her head, sleep stealing upon the old woman.  
After the slightest pause, I say: 'Now he's swimming, for  
sure,  
and his slow arms are cleaving the water.'  
And, while the few threads I've finished fall to the floor,  
I ask if you can have reached mid-strait perhaps.  
And now I look out, and now I pray in a fearful voice,  
that favourable winds grant you an easy passage:

I hear uncertain cries and I think that every noise  
might be the sound of your arrival.  
So as the larger part of the night passes for me in illusion,  
sleep stealthily overcomes my weary eyes.  
Perhaps, cruel one, you'll still sleep with me, unwillingly,  
and though not wishing, yourself, to come, you'll come.  
Now you seem to be nearer, now I see you swimming,  
now my shoulders bear your briny arms,  
now, as I do, I give the clothes from my breast to your wet  
limbs,  
now, joined to you, I warm you with my heart,  
and much besides is concealed, by the modest tongue,  
that's ashamed to speak of things it delights in doing.  
Alas! It's brief and pleasure is untrue:  
for you always leave me, as sleep does.  
Oh, let's bind our eager passions more firmly,  
so that our joys lack nothing of faith and truth.  
Why do I spend so many cold, empty nights?  
Why are you so often, lingering slowly, absent from me?  
I grant the sea's not fit for swimming:  
but last night the wind became more gentle.  
Why did you neglect it? Why didn't you dare to come?  
Why did such a moment die, and you not seize the time?  
May you soon be given many similar chances,  
though this one was surely better than those before.  
But the shape of the peaceful deep changes quickly.  
When you hurried, you often came in less time than that.  
I think if you were to be caught here you wouldn't  
complain  
and, with me holding you, the storm would do you no  
harm.

Then I'd joyfully listen to the sounding winds  
and I'd pray for the waters never to be calm.  
What's happened then, why are you more fearful of the  
waves,  
and are afraid now of the straits you despised before?  
Now I remember, when the sea was no less, or a little less,  
savage and threatening, you came:  
when I cried to you: 'You are so reckless,  
I'll be mourning your courage in misery.'  
Where's this new fear from, and that courage fleeing to?  
Where is that great swimmer scorning the tides?  
Still, be rather as you would be, than as you used to be  
before,  
and make your way here safely in a calm sea –  
Provided that you're the same: let us love, so, as you write,  
and may its flame never become cold ashes.  
I don't greatly fear that the winds will delay my prayers,  
but I fear lest your love strays like the wind,  
or that I be not worthy, and the risk will outweigh my  
cause,  
and the reward appear less to you than your labour.  
At times I'm afraid lest my race harms me, and a Thracian  
girl  
be considered unfit for marriage to Abydos.  
Still, I could bear all things patiently, so long as I knew  
you didn't spend your time with a rival, captive, in  
idleness,  
and no other's arms came about your neck,  
and no new love was ending our love.  
Ah, let me rather die, than be wounded by that crime,  
and my fate be charged with guilt before yours!

I don't say this because you've shown signs of it  
happening,  
or because I'm distressed by some new rumour.  
I fear everything! Who has ever been secure in love?  
And distance creates more fear, for the absent.  
Happy are they, whose presence commands knowledge  
of true guilt, and prevents fear of falsehood.  
So many vain things move me, wrong that's done deceives,  
and the sting of both errors equally rouses me.  
Oh I wish you would come! Or let the cause of your delay  
be the winds, for sure, or your father, and not some woman!  
If I were to know that grief, I'd die, believe me:  
sin at once if you seek my death.  
But you will not sin, and I fear it foolishly,  
also you don't come because you fight a hostile storm.  
Ah me! What a tide pounds this shore,  
and the day is hidden, buried by a dark cloud!  
Perhaps Nephele, Helle's devoted mother, may have come  
to the straits, and weeps for her drowned child, with the  
water's flow:  
or Ino, the stepmother, now a sea-goddess, stirs the sea,  
that's called by the name of her hated step-daughter?  
As it is, this place is not kind to tender girls:  
here Helle perished, here I'm wounded by the waters.  
But remember your love-flames, Neptune,  
and love won't be hindered by the winds:  
if the tale of your crimes against Amymone, and Tyro,  
most praised for her beauty, are not vain,  
and bright Alcyone, and Calyce, and Hecate's daughter,  
and Medusa before her hair was knotted with snakes,

and golden-haired Laodice, and Celaeno, received in  
heaven,  
and other names I remember that I've read of.  
Surely, the poets sing of these and more, Neptune,  
who have joined their sweet flanks to yours.  
So why have you, who so often felt the power of love,  
closed the familiar path to us, with storms?  
Spare us, proud one, and embroil yourself in battle out at  
sea:  
this short passage separates our two lands.  
You are suited to hurling about great ships with your might,  
or even being fierce towards a whole fleet:  
It's shameful for the god of the sea to terrify a young  
swimmer,  
and the glory's less than that of the god of a pond  
somewhere.  
In fact he's noble and of a distinguished family,  
but he draws nothing from Ulysses's race, that you  
mistrust.  
Take pity, and guard us both. He swims: but the same wave  
carries the body of Leander and my hopes.  
The light splutters in fact – for I write where it's placed –  
it splutters, and thereby gives me a favourable sign.  
See, onto the auspicious flame my nurse drops wine:  
'Tomorrow,' she says, 'there'll be more of us', and drinks  
the rest.  
Make us more, gliding through the defeated waves,  
oh you, received deep within me, by my whole heart!  
Return to this camp, deserter from mutual love:  
why should my body be left in the centre of the bed?



What I might fear: is not! Venus herself blesses you with  
courage,

and, born from the waves, she smoothes the sea-lanes.

Often I want to travel the midst of the waves myself,  
but these straits are usually safer for men.

Why, if Phrixus and his sister Helle were carried over them,  
did only the girl give her name to the desolate waters?

Perhaps you fear there'll not be time for you to return,  
or you won't be able to endure the effort of a double  
journey.

But let us meet, from opposite directions, in mid-strait,  
and exchange kisses, as we touch, on the crest of a wave,  
and each return, once more, to the cities we came from:  
that would be little, but better than nothing at all.

I wish this shame, that forces us to love in secret,  
would end, or our love, fearful of reputation!

Now, the thing's badly joined: passion and propriety  
conflict.

Which to follow's in doubt: one is proper: the other gives  
joy.

When Jason, of Pagasa, once entered Colchis

he swiftly carried Medea away from Phasis, in his ship:

When Paris, of Ida, once came as an adulterer to Sparta,  
he soon returned with Helen, his prize.

You, who so often seek whom you love, as often leave her,  
and whenever it's difficult for ships to sail, you swim.

In this way, o youth, conqueror of the swollen waters,  
you scorn what the straits may do, though you fear them.

Ships built with skill can be sunk by the waters:

do you think your arms are more capable than oars?

What you desire: to swim, Leander: is what the sailor fears:

it's usually the result for him of his ship being wrecked.  
Ah me! I want to persuade you not to do as I urge,  
and pray you're stronger than my admonishments:  
provided you'd come and throw those weary arms,  
battered often by the waves, around my shoulders.  
But whenever I turn towards the dark-blue waves  
my fearful heart's possessed by some unknown chill.  
And I'm troubled no less by last night's dream,  
though I've propitiated the gods with holy rites.  
Just before dawn, when the lamp was sinking,  
a time when true dreams are often experienced,  
the slackened thread fell from my hands in sleep,  
and I laid my head on the supporting pillow.  
In it, without doubt, in true vision, I saw a dolphin  
swimming along through the stormy waves:  
then, when the flood had dashed it against the thirsty sands,  
life, and the tide, together, abandoned the wretched  
creature,  
Whatever it means, I'm frightened: don't mock my dream  
and don't trust yourself to the sea unless it's tranquil.  
If you don't spare yourself, spare your beloved girl,  
who can never be safe unless you're safe too.  
Yet there's hope of peace near in the weakening waves:  
then you must divide the calm waters with your breast.  
Meanwhile, since the straits are not passable by swimming,  
let the letter I send ease the hateful hours of waiting.

XX: Acontius to Cydippe

Cydippe, come now, receive despised Acontius –  
he who deceived you with the apple.

Don't fear! You won't swear another oath of love because  
of this: it's enough that you once promised to be mine.

Read on! So may the illness vanish from your body:  
that any part of it is grieved, is grief to me!

Why blush before you start? Since I suspect your noble  
cheeks

have reddened, as they did in Dian's temple.

I ask not sin of you, but marriage and a true contract:

I love as one bound in marriage, not an adulterer.

You might recall the message, that the fruit from the tree  
brought to your chaste hands, when I threw it to you:  
there you'll find you promised that which I'd wish for you,  
virgin, rather than that which the goddess remembers.

Now it's just the same (I fear), but yet the same in being  
stronger:

it grows in power, and the flame increases with delay,  
and what was never small, is now vast with time,  
and love is nurtured by the hope you've given me.

You gave me hope: my passion trusted you in this.

You can't deny the fact, as the goddess is my witness.

There, and in person, as she was, she noted your words,  
and the movement of her hair seemed to allow them.

You can say you were deceived, by my trick,  
as long as love's shown to be the reason for it.

What did my offence seek except to be made one with you?

What you complain of is capable of uniting us.

Neither by nature or custom am I so cunning:

I believe that you make me clever, girl.  
If I've achieved anything, ingenious Love,  
joined you to me, binding you with my words.  
I made the betrothal with words he dictated,  
and was a lawyer, advised by devious Love.  
Let the name of the action be fraud, and let it be called  
crafty,  
if to desire what you love is held to be craft.  
Look, I again write, and send you, words of pleading!  
This letter's another offence, and what you complain of,  
you hold.  
I confess, if my love for you hurts you, I'll hurt you  
endlessly,  
and I'll seek you continually, though you beware my  
seeking.  
Other men have snatched lovely girls at sword-point:  
is this letter I've written, thoughtfully, to be called a crime?  
May the gods allow me to impose more ties on you,  
so that your honour is in no way free.  
A thousand wiles remain: I toil at the base of the hill:  
my passion won't let anything go untried.  
Let it be unsure whether you can be caught: you'll be  
caught for sure.  
the outcome's with the gods, but it's still captivity.  
Though you flee some you can't escape all the nets,  
many more than you think, that Love spreads for you.  
If art is not enough, I'll turn to arms,  
and snatch you away, borne on my loving breast.  
I'm not one who's accustomed to criticise Paris's actions,  
nor any man who played the husband to become one.

I too – but I say no more. Though death might be the punishment  
for taking you, it would be better than not having you at all.  
If you were less beautiful, then you'd be sought with restraint:

I'm driven to daring by your charms.

You've done this, and your eyes, whose fires the stars  
yield to, you who are the cause of my passion:

your golden hair has done this, and your ivory throat,  
and your hands, that I pray will come about my neck,  
and your comeliness, and your modest, and refined  
appearance,

and your ankles, such as I suppose Thetis's scarcely to be.

I would be happier still, if I might praise the rest,

I don't doubt, indeed, the whole is itself of equal art.

It's no wonder, with this compelling beauty,

that I wished to hear you speak that pledge.

When you're finally forced to confess you're caught,  
then, be a girl captured by my trickery.

I'll suffer, if the suffering's granted its prize.

Why should such a crime fail of its reward?

Telamon took Hesione: Achilles took Briseis:

certainly each of them followed her victorious lord.

As much as you may accuse me and be angered,

your anger would be allowed, as long as you enjoyed my  
company.

In the same way as I cause your anger, I'll ease it,

a little of you might bring much reconciliation.

Let me weep before your eyes,

and add words to those tears,

so that, like a slave who fears a savage lashing,

I may stretch my submissive hands out at your feet!  
Forgo your anger: summon me! Why condemn me in my  
absence?

Order me now to come at my lady's whim.

Be pleased to tear my hair imperiously,  
and let my face be bruised by your fingers.

I'll endure anything: I only fear that your hand  
might be wounded by striking my body so furiously.

But don't restrain me with fetters and chains:

I'm enslaved to you by true love.

When you've satisfied your anger as much as you wish,  
you'll say to yourself: 'How patiently he loves!'

You'll say to yourself, when you see I endure it all:

'He who serves so well, he may serve me!'

Now unhappily I play the accused in my absence,  
and my cause, though good, is lost, with no defence.

Also, let my letter have injured you as much as you wish,  
you shouldn't only complain of what you receive from me.

Diana doesn't merit being disappointed as well: if you  
don't wish to repay your promise to me, repay the goddess.

She was there and she saw, how you blushed, deceived,  
and the memory of your words remains in her ears.

Let the omens lack reality! None is more violent than her  
when she sees, what I do not wish, her divinity offended.

The fierce Calydonian Boar is witness, though Althaea, that  
mother,

will be found to have been fiercer against Meleager, her  
son.

And Actaeon is witness, once taken to be a wild creature,  
when granted the death himself, that he'd granted creatures  
before.

and also that proud mother, Niobe, her body rising as rock,  
stands weeping, now, on the soil of Lydia.

Ah me! Cydippe, I fear to tell you the truth,  
lest my cause appear a false one to you:

Still it should be said. I believe, you're often ill,  
thinking about the moment of marriage.

She protects your interests, she's anxious lest you perjure  
yourself, and the goddess wishes you intact, your promise  
intact.

So that whenever you try to be unfaithful,  
she then rectifies your error.

Beware of provoking the proud virgin's cruel bow:  
she can still be gentle, if you'll allow it.

Beware, I pray, of wasting your tender body with fevers:  
guard your beauty for my enjoyment.

Let the face, born to inflame me, be preserved,  
and the slow blush of modesty entering snowy cheeks.

And if any of my enemies opposes your becoming mine,  
let him be as you, in your weakness, are to me.

I'm tormented equally whether it's your marriage or  
sickness:

I can't say now which of them I least desire:

meanwhile I'm distressed, that I might be a cause of your  
pain,

and consider you to have been hurt by my cunning.

I pray that my lady's perjury falls on my head:

let her be safe from my punishment!

Lest I'm ignorant what's happening, I often, secretly,  
in my anxiety, pass here and there, before your door:

I follow your maid and serving-boy, stealthily, asking  
if sleep or food has benefited your health.

Alas for me that I can't implement the doctor's orders  
or take your hand, or sit by your bed!  
And more misery, that when I'm far away from there,  
perhaps some other, whom I'd least wish, is present.  
He takes your hand and, hated by the gods, and by me  
as well as the gods, he sits by you in your illness,  
and while he checks the pulse in your vein with his finger,  
under this pretext, he holds your white arm,  
and perhaps he touches your breast, and kisses you:  
that reward is too much for his services.  
Who allowed you to gather in my crops before time?  
Who made a path for you to another's hedge?  
That breast is mine! You shamefully steal my kisses!  
Take your hand from the body that was meant for me!  
Wretch, take your hand away! What you touch is to be  
mine:  
If you do that, shortly, you'll be an adulterer.  
Choose another from the single girls, one not yet claimed:  
if you don't know: this object has an owner.  
You don't have to believe me: have the terms of our  
contract read:  
let her read them, lest you should say they're false.  
Stranger to our bed I say, I say to you, leave!  
What do you want here? Leave! This bed's not free.  
Though you have another contract now with identical  
words,  
your cause is not for that reason equal to mine.  
She first settled this with me, herself, her father settled with  
you:  
but she's surely closer to herself than her father.  
Her father promised it, she swore herself to be in love:



in once case a man, in the other the goddess is witness.  
He fears to be called a liar, she a perjurer:  
do you doubt that the latter's a greater fear than the first?  
And if you should compare the risk to each,  
look at their state: she lies sick, and he's well.  
You and I too come to this struggle with different feelings:  
our hopes are not equal, are fears are not the same.  
You venture in safety: to me rejection's worse than death,  
and I love her, now, whom you perhaps might.  
If justice, or what is right, was your care,  
you'd have conceded to my greater love.  
Now that this cruel man, Cydippe, fights for his unjust  
cause,  
to what theme should my letter return?  
It's he who made you ill, and mistrusted by Diana: given  
that,  
if you're wise, you won't let him approach your threshold.  
that you plunge into so many cruel risks to your life is his  
doing,  
and I wish he who caused them might die instead of you!  
If you immediately shun one whom the goddess condemns,  
and don't love him, I will be surely be fine.  
Virgin, cease to fear! Only respect your firm promise, make  
sure  
you worship in the temple that shares our knowledge:  
the gods don't delight in sacrificial oxen,  
but loyalty that's shown, and needs no witness.  
Others to be well suffer steel and flame,  
others endure the dismal aid of bitter juices.  
You need none of these: shun such perjury and you'll save  
yourself, and me, and the pledge you gave!

Your ignorance of it will forgive your past sin:  
the agreement you recited slipped from your mind.  
Now you're warned by my voice, now by this sickness,  
that you're accustomed to suffer whenever you try to  
deceive.

Do you think you might avoid calling on her in childbirth,  
pleading that she might bring you her shining hands?  
She'll hear, and recalling what she's heard, she'll ask  
what husband's given you this child.

You'll promise gifts: she knows your promises are false.  
You'll swear: she knows that you betray the gods.  
I'm not anxious for myself: I labour at a greater task.  
My anxieties are caused by your love.

Why do your parents, doubtful for you, just weep in fear,  
ignorant of what constitutes your sin?  
And why are they ignorant? You might tell your mother all.  
Your actions, Cydippe, should cause no blushes.  
Make sure you tell her, in order, how you were first known  
to me  
while she performed the rites of the quiver-bearing  
goddess:  
how suddenly seeing you, if you clearly noticed,  
I halted, my eyes gazing at your limbs:  
and while I marvelled at you greatly, a sure sign of passion,  
my cloak slipped from my shoulder and fell to the ground:  
Presently an apple came rolling from I know not where,  
bearing artful words in cunning letters:  
which, being read out loud, in sacred Diana's presence,  
made your pledge binding, with her as divine witness.  
Lest your mother's still unsure how vital the words might  
be,

now also repeat what was once written to you.  
She'll say: 'I beg you marry whoever the good gods joined  
you to:

whom you were sworn to, he'll be my son-in-law.  
Whoever he is, he'll please us, since he pleased Diana  
before.'

So your mother will say if she's truly your mother.  
But see to it she enquires who I might be and what:  
let her discover the goddess is looking out for you.  
An island encircled by the Aegean Sea, is named Cea,  
once celebrated for the Corcyrian nymphs.  
That's my native land: nor can you condemn my ancestors  
as ones to be despised, if you approve a noble name.  
And they are rich, and their morals without stain:  
and if there were nothing more, Love joined me to you.  
You might have desired such a husband, even without your  
oath:

having sworn it, even if he were not such, he must be  
accepted.

Diana the huntress, in dream, ordered me to write these  
words:

Love, awake, ordered me to write them to you:  
I'm already wounded, by the second one's arrows,  
you, beware lest the first one's shafts harm you!  
Our well-being is linked – take pity on yourself, and on me:  
Why hesitate to bring one relief to both?

If you'll do this, when the signal's sounded,  
and Delos is drenched with sacrificial blood,  
a golden image of the fortunate apple will be offered,  
and the reason for the offering will be written in two short  
lines:

‘With this likeness of an apple, Acontius bears witness that what may have been written on it, has been done.’  
Let your fragile body be wearied no longer by this letter, and let it be closed with the usual ending: ‘Farewell!’

XXI: Cydippe to Acontius

Your writing reached me Acontius, as it is wont to do,  
and indeed it almost set a trap for my eyes.  
I was fearful, and read your letter without a murmur,  
lest my tongue unknowingly swore by some god.  
And I think you might have set out to trap me again, except  
that,  
as you confess yourself, you know one promise is enough  
for me.  
I wouldn't have read it: but if I'd been harsh to you,  
perhaps it might have increased the fierce goddess's anger.  
Though I do everything, though I burn sacred incense to  
Diana,  
she still takes your part more than is right, and as you want  
it  
to be thought, mindful of you, protects you with her anger:  
She scarcely did more for Hippolytus himself.  
But she might do better to favour my virgin years  
which I fear she intends will be all too few.  
Yes, weariness clings to me for no apparent reason,  
and my fatigue's not helped by any doctor's cure.  
Would you believe with what difficulty I write this meagre  
letter  
to you now, or ease my pale limbs from lying in my bed?  
Now an added fear, lest someone other than my knowing  
nurse  
thinks that there's a conversation between us.  
She sits outside my door, and on being asked how I am,  
within,  
says: 'She's sleeping,' so that I can write in safety.

Soon, when sleep, the best reason for extended privacy,  
lacks credibility as an excuse, through the lengthy delay,  
and she sees those arriving whom it would be hard not to  
admit,  
she coughs and gives me the sign we agreed on.  
So it goes: I hurriedly leave off my unfinished words,  
and hide the letter I've started, against my anxious breast.  
Then I weary my fingers again with repetition:  
how much effort these words of mine are that you read.  
May I die if you were worthy of my speaking truthfully:  
but I'm more just to you than you deserve.  
So, is it because of you my health is so uncertain  
and I'm punished, and have been punished, for your deceit?  
Is this the reward that comes, by your praise of marvellous  
beauty,  
and harms me for having pleased you?  
How I'd prefer it if I'd seemed deformed to you,  
my blameworthy body would not have needed help:  
now I grieve that I was praised, now you destroy me  
with your rivalry, and I'm wounded by my own charm  
itself.  
And you won't concede, nor does he think himself inferior,  
you obstruct his wishes, he obstructs yours.  
I'm tossed about like a boat, that the unerring North Wind  
drives out into the deep, carried back by tide and surge.  
And when the day's here, that was chosen by my dear  
parents,  
at the same time unruly passion's in my body.  
Now cruel Persephone beats harshly on my door,  
at the very moment of my marriage.

Now I fear, and am ashamed, though not conscious of any  
guilt,

I don't seem to have merited the gods being offended.

Some say this happened by chance, and others  
deny that my husband's acceptable to the heavens:  
and lest you think there's nothing of you too in the talk,  
some of them think it was caused by your poisons.

The cause is hidden, my illness is obvious: you two  
drive away peace, stir bitter conflict, I'm punished.

Tell me now, and don't deceive me, as is your usual  
custom,

what might you do in hate, when you hurt me so with love?

If you wound one you love, you'd be wise to love your  
enemy:

I pray that, to save me, you might want to destroy your  
wish!

Either you've, now, no care for the girl you hoped for,  
whom you cruelly allow to die from a shameful illness,  
or, if you've asked the fierce goddess for me in vain,  
why throw yourself at me? You'll have no thanks.

Choose, as you've wrought: don't try to appease Diana.

You don't care about me: you can't – she's on your side.

I'd rather Delos, in Aegean waters, had never been known,  
or at least had not been known then, to me.

Then my ship was launched in troubled waters,  
and an unlucky hour saw my journey start.

Why did I take a step? Why did I cross the threshold?

Why did my feet touch the painted fabric of that swift  
vessel?

Yet twice the sails were backed, in an opposing wind:

I tell a lie, ah foolish! It was a favourable one.

It was favourable in reversing my departure  
and hindering that scarcely fortunate journey.

And I wish the sails had been always set against me!  
But it's stupid to complain about the fickleness of the  
breeze.

I hurried to see Delos, stirred by the fame of the place,  
and the journey seemed to be made in an idle boat.

How often I protested at the slowness of the oars,  
and complained that too little sail was set for the wind.

And I'd already passed Andros, Tenos and Myconos,  
and bright Delos was there before my eyes:

when I saw it in the distance, I said: 'Island, why do you  
flee me,

do you wander, as long ago, on the mighty waters?'

I stood on the island, as day was nearly done,  
and the sun desires to unyoke his bright horses.

When as usual that same sun returned to the east,  
my mother arranged my hair as prescribed.

She put rings on my fingers, gold in my hair,  
and herself placed the robes on my shoulders.

We went straight to the gods to whom the isle is sacred,  
making offerings of golden incense and wine:

and, while my mother drenched the altar in sacrificial  
blood,

and threw the divided entrails on the smoking fires,

my diligent nurse led me to the high temple also,

and we wandered with errant feet through the holy place:

and now I walk in the colonnades, and now wonder  
at the regal gifts and statues set up everywhere.

I marvel at the altar made of countless horns,

and the tree near to which the goddess in labour gave birth,



and whatever else Delos displays – and I can't remember,  
and I'm unable to speak of, all I saw there.  
Perhaps as I gazed at this, I was gazed at by you, Acontius,  
and my innocence was seen to be capable of capture.  
I turn back into the temple by its high flight of steps –  
can any place be safer than this?  
An apple was thrown at my feet with this verse on it –  
ah me! Now too I almost swore that oath to you!  
My nurse bent down and, marvelling, said: 'Read this'.  
I read your deceitful lines, mighty poet.  
Reading the word 'marriage' I blushed with shame,  
I felt the whole of both cheeks had reddened,  
and I held my gaze on my lap as if it were fixed there.  
Cruel man, why do you rejoice: what glory is there for you?  
And why should you have praise, a man cheating a virgin  
girl?  
I didn't stand there armed with shield and axe,  
as Penthesilea was armed on Trojan soil:  
nor were you given the prize of an embossed girdle,  
of Amazon gold, like Hippolyte's.  
Why exult in your words if they deceived me,  
I a girl, taken in, scarcely aware of trickery?  
An apple caught Cydippe, an apple Atalanta:  
surely now you're a second Hippomenes?  
But it would have been better, if the Boy held you,  
whom you say has all those torches, to behave  
in the way good men do, not to ruin hope by fraud:  
better if winning by entreaty had been yours, and not  
snatching.  
Why, when you sought me, did you think it unnecessary  
to declare what required you to be sought by me too?

Why did you wish to use force, rather than persuasion,  
if I was able to be trapped by only hearing the word  
marriage?

Why is the law of use to you now, my needing to swear by  
rote,  
my tongue needing to call the goddess in person to vouch  
for it?

It's the mind that swears the oath. I swore nothing to her:  
she alone can impart truth to what's been said.

Intention, and the mind's thoughtful judgement, swear  
oaths,

and unless there's judgement the contract has no value.

If you think I wished to promise you marriage,  
then demand the rights of the promised bed by law.

But if I gave voice to nothing unless it was without thought,  
you have only idle words bereft of power.

I did not swear, I read the words of an oath:  
my husband is not to be chosen that way.

Deceive others so, let your letters follow apples:  
if it's valid, carry away the riches of the wealthy:  
make kings swear they'll give their kingdoms to you,  
and let whatever on earth pleases you be yours!

Believe me, this is far superior to Diana herself,  
if your writing really has such ready power.

Yet though I've said all this, though I've firmly rejected  
you,

though the reason for my promise has been fully rehearsed.  
I confess, I'm afraid of the anger of Leto's fierce daughter,  
and I suspect my body's troubled because of her.

Why, whenever the ceremonies of marriage are being  
prepared,

do the weary limbs of the destined bride give way?  
Three times now Hymen, coming to the altars raised for  
me,  
has fled, and turned his back on the wedding threshold,  
and the slowly flickering light in his hand is barely rising,  
his torch is barely alight with quivering flame.  
Often perfumes have dripped from his garlanded hair,  
and his dragging robe has been bright with saffron.  
When he reaches the threshold, and finds tears and terror of  
death,  
and everything alien to his customs,  
he throws away the wreathes, tearing them from his brow,  
and wipes the thick spices from his shining hair:  
and he's ashamed to stand there, joyful, among the  
mournful crowd,  
and the yellow of his robe transfers to his blushing cheeks.  
But I, alas, am so wretched! My body burns with fever,  
and the ordinary sheets on my bed feel heavier.  
I see my weeping parents, by my head,  
and the funeral torch, not the wedding torch, is here.  
Spare my suffering, goddess, who delights in the ornate  
quiver,  
and grant me now your brother's healing aid.  
It's shameful to you, if he averts the cause of death,  
while you bear the responsibility for my dying.  
Is it that you may have wanted to bathe in a shaded pool,  
and my face, unaware, came upon you bathing?  
Have I neglected your altars, of all the deities: is it that  
my mother's ancestress, Niobe, scorned your mother, Leto?  
I've not sinned at all, except that I read a false oath aloud,  
and was fluent in a verse that brought me little luck.

You, too, Acontius, if you're not lying about your love,  
bring incense: let the hands, that harmed me, help me!  
Why, if you're angry that the girl sworn to you is not yet  
yours,  
do you act in such a way that she can never be yours?  
All your hopes depend on my living: why should the cruel  
goddess  
take away my life from me, your hope of me from you?  
Don't think that he, who's intended for my husband,  
fondles my fevered limbs, placing his hands there.  
Rather he sits here, as long as he's allowed to:  
but he remembers that mine is a virgin bed.  
Now too something of what he has felt appears:  
now often tears fall from some hidden cause,  
and he praises me less boldly and gives me fewer kisses,  
and calls me his with a humble expression.  
I'm not surprised he felt that: I'm betrayed by obvious  
signs:  
I turn on my right side, un-speaking, when he comes,  
and pretend to be asleep with eyes closed,  
and, catching his hand when he touches me, I push it away.  
He groans, and sighs secretly from his heart, and has  
me as a cause of offence, though it's undeserved.  
Ah me, how you delight in me, how this wish of yours  
gives you joy!  
Ah me, how I feel I've revealed my feelings to you!  
You were worthy of me if anyone was, you, more justly  
an object of indignation, who spread the nets for me.  
You write that you'd like to see this wasted body:  
you're far from me, and you might still harm me by it.  
I wondered why your name was 'Acontius':

that blade which wounds from far off, has 'acuteness'.  
Certainly I've not recovered from that wound,  
that spear of your letter hurled from a distance.  
Why would you still come here? You'd see a body  
in ill health, a glorious prize for your skills!  
I'm enfeebled by emaciation: my colour is bloodless,  
just like your apple was, I recall to mind.  
My face shines white, unmixed with red.  
a statue of fresh marble looks like this:  
the silver set out on the table is the same,  
pale, touched by the chill of iced water.  
If you saw me now, you'd deny you'd seen me before:  
you'd say: 'This was not what my cunning sought.'  
And you'd return my pledge of faith, lest I be joined to you,  
and wish the goddess had forgotten it.  
Perhaps indeed you might make me swear a contrary oath,  
and you might send me other words to read.  
But I still wish you might see me, as you yourself asked,  
and see your promised bride's weakened limbs!  
Even if your heart were harder than iron, Acontius,  
you would indeed seek to forgive my words.  
But don't ignore me: I seek from the god of Delphi, who  
foretells  
our fate, the aid through which I could be made well again.  
Also someone complains, now that vague rumour whispers  
it,  
that the witnessed promise has been neglected.  
This the god, this his seer, this his oracle declare:  
ah, no power is lacking to support your wishes!  
How have you found such favour? Unless perhaps a new  
choice text

has been discovered, that harnesses the great gods.  
And I follow the will of the gods, gods you are master of,  
and willingly give my captive hands to your wishes:  
and full of shame, with my eyes fixed on the ground,  
I told my mother of the promise my deceived tongue made.  
The rest is your concern, and more than a virgin should do:  
with you I'm not afraid of what my letter declares.  
Now I've wearied my sick body with this pen:  
and my hand denies further service, in my illness.  
Nothing remains, since I now desire to join myself with  
you,  
except for me to add, to my letter, this: 'Farewell!'

The End of the Heroides