

PROPERTIUS

TRANSLATED BY A. S. KLINE, ©2001-2008

[Dr. D's note: These poems and others by Propertius are taken from [Poetry in Translation](#), where the text has a number of helpful explanatory hyperlinks. If possible, read the poems on that web site, and use this version (1) to note the poems we will discuss and (2) print out for reference in class.]

Book I.3:1-46 After a night's drinking

Just as Ariadne, the girl of Cnossus, lay on the naked shore, fainting, while Theseus's ship vanished; or as Andromeda, Cepheus's child, lay recumbent in her first sleep free now of the harsh rock; or like one fallen on the grass by the Apidanus, exhausted by the endless Thracian dance; Cynthia seemed like that to me, breathing the tender silence, her head resting on unquiet hands, when I came, deep in wine, dragging my drunken feet, while the boys were shaking the late night torches.

My senses not yet totally dazed, I tried to approach her, pressing gently against the bed: and though seized by a twin passion, here Amor there Bacchus, both cruel gods, urging me on, to attempt to slip my arm beneath her as she lay there, and lifting my hand snatch eager kisses, I was still not brave enough to trouble my mistress's rest, fearing her proven fierceness in a quarrel, but, frozen there, clung to her, gazing intently, like Argus on Io's new-horned brow.

Now I freed the garlands from my forehead, and set them on your temples: now I delighted in playing with your loose hair, furtively slipping apples into your open hands, bestowing every gift on your ungrateful sleep, repeated gifts breathed from my bowed body. And whenever you, stirring, gave occasional sighs, I was transfixed, believing false omens, some vision bringing you strange fears, or that another forced you to be his, against your will.

At last the moon, gliding by far windows, the busy moon with lingering light, opened her closed eyes, with its tender rays. Raised on one elbow on the soft bed, she cried: 'Has another's hostility driven you out, sealing her doors, bringing you back to my bed at last? Alas for me, where have you spent the long hours of this night, that was mine, you, worn out now, as the stars are put away? O you, cruel to me in my misery, I wish you the same long-drawn-out nights as those you endlessly offer to me. Till a moment ago, I staved off sleep, weaving the purple threads, and again, wearied, with the sound of Orpheus's lyre. Until Sleep impelled me to sink down under his delightful wing I was moaning gently to myself, alone, all the while, for you, delayed so long, so often, by a stranger's love. That was my last care, amongst my tears.'

Book I.5:1-32 Admonishment to Gallus

Envious man, quiet your irksome cries at last and let us travel the road we are on, as one! What do you wish for, madman: to feel my passion? Unhappy man, you're hastening to know the deepest hurt, set your footsteps on hidden fire, and drink all the poison of Thessaly. She's not like the fickle girls you collect: she is not used to being mildly angered. Even if she does not reject your prayers, by chance, how many thousand cares she'll bring

you! She'll not let you sleep, now, or free your eyes: she's the one to bind the mind's uncivilized forces. Ah, how often, scorned, you'll run to my door, your brave words turning to sobs, a trembling ague of bitter tears descending, fear tracing its hideous lines on your face, and whatever words you wish to say, lost in your moaning, you, you wretch, no longer able to know who or where you are.

Then you'll be forced to know my mistress's harsh service, and what it is to return home excluded. You'll not marvel at my pallor any more, or at why I am thin all over. Your high birth will do you no good in love. Love does not yield to ancient faces. But if you show the smallest sign of guilt, how quickly your good name will be hearsay! I'll not be able to bring you relief when you ask, while there's no cure for my malady: rather, companions together in love and sorrow, we'll be forced to weep on each other's offered breast.

So stop asking what my Cynthia can do, Gallus, she comes not without retribution to those who ask.

Book I.8A:27-46 Cynthia's journey abandoned

She's here! She stays, she promised! Discontent, vanish, I've won: she could not endure my endless entreaties. Let eager Envy relinquish illusory joy. My Cynthia's ceased to travel strange roads. I'm dear to her, and she says Rome's best because of me, rejecting a kingdom without me. She'd rather be in bed, though narrow, with me, and be mine, whatever its size, than have the ancient region that was Hippodamia's dowry, and the riches that the horses of Elis won. She did not rush from my breast, through avarice, though he's given a lot, and he'd give her more.

I could not dissuade her with gold or Indian pearls, but did so by service of flattering song. I rely, like this, on the Muses in love, nor is Apollo slow to help us lovers. Cynthia, the rare, is mine! Now my feet tread the highest stars: night and day come, she's mine! No rival steals my certain love from me: this glory will crown my furthest age.

Book I.9:1-34 Ponticus struck down by Love

I told you love would come to you, Derider, and words of freedom would not be ever yours. Behold, you're down and come, a suppliant, at a mistress's behest, and now some girl, bought a moment since, commands you. Dodona's oracular doves can't outdo me in prophesying what young men each girl will tame. A service of pain and tears has made me expert: though I wish I could forgo knowing, be called an innocent in love!

What use is it now, you wretch, to recite your serious poem, or weep for the Theban citadel of Amphion's lyre? Mimnermus's lyrics are worth more than Homer in love. Gentle Love seeks out sweet song.

I beg you, go put away those learned books, and sing what every girl wants to know! What if access to her wasn't so easy? Yet you, you madman, seek for water mid-river. You are still not pale, even, truly untouched by the fire: this is only the first spark of evil to come. Then you'll prefer to seek Armenian tigers, or feel the bonds of the infernal wheel, than know the frequent darts of the Boy in your marrow, and be powerless to deny your angry one a single thing.

Love grants no one an easy passage, driving them back with either hand. And don't be deceived if she's ready to satisfy you: if she's yours, Ponticus, she'll attack you more

fiercely. Love won't let you remove your gaze at leisure, nor keep watch in another's name, Love, who doesn't appear till he's touched you to the bone.

Whoever you are, flee those endless charms! Flint and oak would yield to them, more so you, yourself a frail spirit. So, if there's honour, confess your error quick as you can. In love it often helps to spell out whom it is you die for.

Book I.10:1-30 Educating Gallus

O sweet dream, when I saw your first love: witness, there, to your tears! O what sweet pleasure for me to recall that night, O the one so often summoned by my longing, when I saw you dying, Gallus, in your girl's arms, uttering words between long pauses! Though sleep pressed on my weary lids, though the Moon blushed, drawn through mid-heaven, I still could not draw back from your play; there was so much ardour in your exchanges.

But, since you weren't afraid to allow it, accept your reward for the joy of trust. I've not only learnt to be silent about your pain, there's something greater in me, my friend, than loyalty. I can join parted lovers again, and open a mistress's reluctant door. I can heal a lover's fresh wounds: the power of my words is not slight. Cynthia repeatedly taught me what one should look for or beware of: Love has not been idle.

Beware of picking a fight with your girl when she's angry, don't speak in pride; don't stay silent for long; and if she asks something, don't say no while frowning, and don't let kind words shower on you in vain. She'll come in a temper when she's ignored and, wounded, she won't remember to drop her justified threats. But the more you are humble, and subject to love, the more you'll enjoy a fine performance. He'll be able to endure one girl gladly, who is never found wanting, or free of feeling.

Book I.12:1-20 Faithfulness in separation

Why don't you stop inventing charges of apathy, Rome, the 'knowing', saying it grips me? She's separated from my bed by as many miles as Russia's rivers from Venice's River Po. Cynthia doesn't nourish familiar love in her arms, nor make sweet sounds in my ear. Once I pleased: then there was no one to touch us who could compare for loyalty in love. We were envied. Surely a god overcame me, or some herb picked from Promethean mountains shattered our bond?

I am not who I was: distant journeys alter girls. How quickly love flies! Now I'm forced to endure long nights alone, for the first time, and be oppressive to myself. He's happy who's able to weep where his girl is: Love takes no small joy in a sprinkling of tears. Or he who, rejected, can change his desire: there is joy in a new slavery as well. But it is impossible for me ever to love another, or part from her. Cynthia was love's beginning: Cynthia will be its end.

Book I.18:1-32 Alone amongst Nature

Truly this is a silent, lonely place for grieving, and the breath of the West Wind owns the empty wood. Here I could speak my secret sorrows freely, if only these solitary cliffs could be trusted.

To what cause shall I attribute your disdain, my Cynthia? Cynthia, what reason for my grief did you give me? I, who but now was numbered among the joyous, now am forced to

look for signs of your love. Why do I merit this? What spell turns you away from me? Is some new girl the root of your anger? You can give yourself to me again, fickle girl, since no other has ever set lovely foot on my threshold. Though my sorrow's indebted to you for much grief my anger will never be so fierce with you that rage could ever be justified in you or your weeping eyes be disfigured with falling tears.

Is it because I show few signs of altered complexion, and my faith does not cry aloud in my face? Beech-tree and pine, beloved of the Arcadian god, you will be witnesses, if trees know such passions. Oh, how often my words echo in gentle shadows and Cynthia is carved in your bark!

Oh! How often has your injustice caused me pains that only your silent threshold knows? I am used to suffering your tyrannous orders with diffidence, without moaning about it in noisy complaint. For this I win sacred springs, cold rocks, and rough sleep by a wilderness track: and whatever my complaint can tell of must be uttered alone to melodious birds.

Yet whatever you may be, let the woods echo 'Cynthia' to me, and let not the wild cliffs be free of your name.

Book I:20:1-52 The story of Hylas: a warning to Gallus

For your loyal love, Gallus, take this warning (Don't let it slip from your vacant mind): 'Fortune often attacks the imprudent lover': so might the River Ascanius, harsh to the Argonauts, tell you.

You have a lover, like Hylas, Theodamas's son, no less handsome, not unequal in birth. Take care if you walk by sacred rivers in Umbrian forests, or the waters of Anio touch your feet, or if you wander the edge of the Phlegrean plain, or wherever a river gives wandering welcome, always defend your loving prey from the Nymphs (the Ausonian Dryads' desire is no less) lest rough hills and cold rocks are yours, Gallus, and you enter eternally untried waters. The wretched wanderer Hercules suffered this misery, and wept by the wild River Ascanius, on an unknown shore.

They say that the Argo sailed long ago from Pagasa's shipyard, and set out on the long voyage to Phasis, and, once the Hellespont's waves slid past, tied her hull to Mysia's cliffs. Here the band of heroes landed on the quiet shore, and covered the ground with a soft layer of leaves. But the young unconquered hero's companion strayed far, searching for the scarce waters of distant springs.

The two brothers, Zetes and Calais, the sons of the North Wind, chased him, pursued him, both above him, with hovering grasp, to snatch kisses, and alternately fleeing with a kiss from his upturned face. But he hangs concealed beneath the edge of a wing and wards off their tricks in flight with a branch. At last the sons of Orithyia, Pandion's daughter, cease: ah! Sadly, off goes Hylas, off to the Hamadryads.

There lay the well of Pege, by the peak of Mount Arganthis, the watery haunt dear to Thynia's Nymphs, over which moistened apples hung from the wild fruit-trees, and all around in the water-meadows white lilies grew, mixed with scarlet poppies, which he now picked with delicate fingers, childishly preferring flowers to his chosen task, and now bent innocently down to the lovely waves, prolonging his wandering with flattering reflections.

At last with outstretched palms he prepared to drink from the spring, propped on his right shoulder, lifting full hands. Inflamed by his whiteness, the Dryad girls left their usual throng to marvel, easily pulling him headlong into the yielding waters. Then, as they

seized his body, Hylas cried out: to him Hercules replied, again and again, from the distance, but the wind blew his name back, from the far waters.

O Gallus warned by this, watch your affairs, entrusting handsome Hylas to the Nymphs.

Book I.21:1-10 Gallus speaks his own epitaph

'You who rush to escape the common fate, stricken soldier from the Etruscan ramparts, why turn your angry eyes where I lie groaning? I'm one of your closest comrades in arms. Save yourself then, so your parents might rejoice, don't let my sister know of these things by your tears: how Gallus broke through the midst of Caesar's swordsmen, but failed to escape some unknown hand: and whatever bones she finds strewn on Etruscan hills, let her never know them for mine.'

Book II.4:1-22 His mistress's harshness

First you must often grieve, at your mistress's wrongs towards you, often requesting something, often being rejected. And often chew your helpless fingernails between your teeth, and tap the ground nervously with your foot, in anger!

My hair was drenched with scent: no use: nor my departing feet, delaying, with measured step. Magic roots are worth nothing here, nor Colchian witch of night, nor herbs distilled by Perimede's hand, since we see no cause or visible blow anywhere: still, it's a dark path such evils come by.

The patient needs no doctor, no soft bed: it's not the wind or weather hurts him. He walks about – yet suddenly his funeral startles his friends. Whatever love is, it's unforeseen like this. What deceitful fortune-teller have I not been victim of, what old woman has not pondered my dreams ten times?

If anyone wants to be my enemy, let him desire girls: yet delight in boys if he wants to be my friend. You slide down the tranquil stream in a boat in safety: how can such tiny waves from the bank hurt you? Often his mood alters with a single word: she will scarcely be satisfied with your blood.

Book II.5:1-30 Sinful Cynthia

Is it true all Rome is talking of you, Cynthia, and you live in unveiled wantonness? Did I expect or deserve this? I'll deal punishment, faithless girl, and my breeze will blow somewhere else. I'll find one of all those deceitful women who want to be made famous by my songs, one who won't taunt me with such harsh ways: she'll insult you: ah, so long loved, you'll weep, yet it's too late.

Now my anger's fresh, now's the time to go: if pain returns, believe me, love will too. The Carpathian waves don't change in the northerlies as swiftly, nor the black cloud in a shifting southwest gale, as lovers' anger alters at a word. While you can, take your neck from the unjust yoke. Then you won't grieve at all, except for the very first night. All love's evils are slight, if you are patient.

But, by the gentle laws of our lady Juno, *mea vita*, stop hurting yourself on purpose. It's not just the bull that strikes with a curving horn at its aggressor, even a sheep, it's true, opposes the foe. I won't rip the clothes off your lying flesh, or break open your closed

doors, or tear your plaited hair in anger, or dare to bruise you with my hard fists. Let some ignoramus look for quarrels as shabby as these, a man whose head no ivy ever encircled. I'll go write: what your lifetime won't rub away: 'Cynthia, strong in beauty: Cynthia light in word.' Trust me, though you defy scandal's murmur, this verse, Cynthia, will make you pale.

Book II.8:1-12 She's leaving him

She's being torn away from me, the girl I've loved so long, and, friend, do you stop me shedding tears? No enmities are bitter but those of love: cut my throat indeed and I'll be a milder enemy. Can I watch her leaning on another's arm, she, no longer called mine, called mine a moment ago?

All things may be overturned: surely, love's affairs may be so: you win or lose: this is the wheel of love. Often, great leaders, great tyrants have fallen: and Thebes stood once, and there was noble Troy. Many as the gifts I gave, many as the songs I made: yet she, the cruel one, never said: 'I love.'

Book II.8A:13-40 Propertius scorned

So, cruel girl, through all the years now, have I, who supported you and your household, have I ever seemed a free man to you? Perhaps you'll always hurl scornful words at my head?

So, will you die, like this, Propertius, you who are still young? Then die: let her rejoice at your death! Let her disturb my ghost, and harass my shade, insult my pyre, and trample on my bones! Why! Didn't Haemon of Boeotia, his flank wounded by his own sword, fall by Antigone's tomb, and mingle his bones with those of the luckless girl, not wishing to return to the palace of Thebes without her? But you, also, man, will not escape: you should die with me: both our blood will trickle from this same blade. However much my coming death shames me, shameful though it be indeed, you will die it too. The Theban princes fell in no less dire a war for a kingdom, their mother torn between them, than if we fought, my girl between us, I, not fleeing my own death if I could achieve yours.

Even Achilles, left alone, his mistress taken, let his sword rest there in his tent. He saw the Achaeans fleeing, then mangled on the beach, the Dorian camp ablaze with Hector's torch: he saw Patroclus hideous with sand, stone dead, blood in his outspread hair: and he suffered that because of fair Briseis. Grief rages, so deeply, when love is torn away. Then when his captive girl was given back in retribution, he dragged that same brave Hector behind his Thessalian steeds.

No wonder that Amor triumphs over me, since I am so much the lesser in birth or arms.

Book II.11:1-6 'Let other men write about you'

Let other men write about you, or yourself be all unknown. Let the man who sows his seed in barren soil praise you. All your gifts, believe me, that dark funeral day will be borne away with you, on the one bed: and he'll despise your dust, the man who passes by: he'll not say: 'This ash was once a learned maid.'

Book II.22:1-42 His philandering

You know that before today many girls have equally pleased me: you know, Demophoon, many troubles come my way. No crossroad's traversed by my feet in vain. O, and the theatre was made to be my constant downfall. Whether some girl spreads her white arms in tender gesture, or whether she sings in various modes! And then, our eyes search out their own wound, if some beauty sits there, her breast not veiled, or if drifting hair strays over a chaste forehead, hair that an Indian jewel clasps at the crown: such that, if she says no to me, perhaps with a stern look, cold sweat falls from my brow.

Demophoon, do you ask why I'm so soft for them all? Love has no answer to your question: 'Why?'

Why do some men slash their arms with sacred knives, and are cut to pieces to frenzied Phrygian rhythms? Nature at birth gave every man his fault: fate granted that I'd always desire someone. Even though the fate of Thamyras the bard came upon me, I'd never be blind to beauty, my jealous friend.

And you're wrong if I seem small to you, thin bodied: worshipping Venus has never been a trouble. It's all right to ask: often a girl has found my attentions effective all night long. Jupiter, for Alcmene, halted both the Bears, and the heavens went two nights without their king: yet he still didn't take up his lightning wearily, even so. What about when Achilles left Briseis's arms? Did the Trojans flee the Greek javelins less? When fierce Hector rose from Andromache's bed, did the Mycenaean fleet not fear the battle? One and the other destroyed ships or walls: in this I am Achilles, in this I am fierce Hector.

See how now the sun, and now the moon serve in the sky: well one girl's not enough for me. Let another girl hold and fondle me in passion's embrace: yes, another, if *she* will not grant me space: or if by chance *she's* made angry by my attentions to *her*, let her know there's another who would be mine!

For two cables protect a ship at anchor better, and an anxious mother's safer rearing twins.

Book II.23:1-24 The advantage of a bought woman

I was persuaded to keep away from the streets, yet water fetched from the lake now tastes sweet to me. Should any freeborn man have to give bribes for another man's slave to bring him the message his mistress promised? Or ask so many times: 'What colonnade shades her now?' or: 'Which direction did she take on the Plain of Mars?'

Then when you've carried through the Labours the story tells of, for her to write 'Have you any little thing for me?' so you can face a surly guard, or often, imprisoned, lurk in some vile hole. What it costs us, the night that comes just once in a whole year! Let them perish, those who take pleasure in closed doors!

In contrast, isn't she pleasing, that girl who goes with her cloak thrown back, not fenced in by a threatening guard, who often abrades the Sacred Way in dirty slippers, and brooks no delay if any want to approach her: she never puts you off, nor chatters aloud, demanding what your stingy father often complains at having given you, nor will she say: 'I'm scared, get up, be quick, I beg you, wretched man: my husband comes to day, to me, from the country.' Let the girls Iraq and Syria have sent delight me. I can't bear shamefaced robbery in bed. Now that no freedom's left to any lover, he who'd be free let him wish for no more love.

Book II.29A:23-42 Waking Cynthia

It was dawn; I wanted to see if she slept alone: and alone she was there, in her bed. I was stunned: she'd never looked lovelier to me, not even when she went, in her purple shift, and told her dreams to virginal Vesta, lest they threatened harm to her or me. So she looked to me, shedding recent sleep. Oh, how great is the power of beauty in itself! 'Why,' she said: 'you're an early spy on your mistress, do you think my morals then are yours? I'm not so easy: it's enough for me, one man, either you, or someone who'll be truer. There are no traces deep in the bed, signs of writhing about, or mutual slumber. Look, no breath panting from my whole body, confessing to some adultery.' Speaking, she pushed my face away with her hand, and leapt up, loosened sandals on her feet. Thus I ceased my spying on such chaste love: since then I've had not one happy night.

Book III.8:1-34 His mistress' fury

Our quarrel by lamplight last night was sweet to me and all those insults from your furious tongue, when frenzied with drinking you pushed the table back, and threw full glasses at me, with angry hand. Truly bold, attack my hair, you, and mark my face with your lovely nails, threaten to scorch my eyes, set a flame beneath them, rip my clothes and strip bare my chest!

You grant me the certain signs of love: no woman is in pain unless from deep passion. This woman who hurls abuse with raving mouth, she rolls around at mighty Venus' feet, she packs guards round her in a crowd, or takes the middle of the road like a stricken Maenad, or demented dreams terrify the frightened girl, or some woman in a painting moves her to misery.

I'm a true augur of the soul's torments: I've learnt these are always the certain signs of love. There is no constant faithfulness that won't turn to quarrelling: let cold women be my enemies' lot. Let my friends see the wounds in my bitten neck: let the bruises show my girl has been with me.

I want to suffer with love, or hear of suffering: I'd rather see your tears or else my own, whenever your eyebrows send me hidden messages, or you write with your fingers words that can't be spoken. I hate those sighs that never shatter sleep: I'd always wish to turn pale at an angry girl.

Passion was dearer to Paris when he cut his way through Greek ranks to bring pleasure to Helen, daughter of Tyndareus. While the Danaans conquered, while savage Hector held them, he fought a nobler war in her lap. I'll always be fighting with you, or a rival for you: you at peace will never satisfy me.

Book III.20:1-30 A new contract of Love

Do you think the man you've seen set sail from your couch remembers your beauty now? Cruel the man who could exchange his girl for riches! Was all Africa worth as much as those tears? But you, foolish girl, think idle words are gods. Perhaps he wears out his heart on another passion.

Beauty is your power, the chaste arts that are Minerva's, and brilliant glory reflects on you from your grandfather's learning. Your house is fortunate, if only your lover is true. I'll be true: run, girl, to my bed!

My first night has come! Grant me the space of a first night: Moon, linger longer over our first couch. You also Phoebus, who prolongs the fires of summer, shorten the path of your lingering light.

First the terms must be laid out, and the pledges sealed, and the contract written for my new love. Amor with his own seal binds these tokens: the witness, the whirling crown of Ariadne, starry goddess.

How many hours must give way to my discourse, before Venus urges sweet battle on us! For, if the bed's not bound round with certain terms, nights without sleep have no gods to avenge them, and passion soon loosens the chains it imposed. Let the first omens keep us loyal.

So then, who breaks the pledges sworn on the altars, and dishonours the nuptial rites on a strange bed, let him know all the miseries love is used to: may he offer his person to sly gossip, and may his mistress' window not open to his weeping at night: may he love forever, and forever lack love's fruition.

Book III.25:1-18 The End of the Affair

I was laughed at among the guests seated for the banquet, and whoever wished was able to gossip of me. I managed to serve you faithfully for five years: you'll often grieve for my loyalty with bitten nails.

Tears have no effect on me: I was ensnared by those wiles: Cynthia you only ever wept with guile. I will weep, in departing, but insult overcomes tears: you would not allow the yoke to move in harmony.

Now goodbye to the threshold weeping at my words: to the entrance never hurt by my hand in anger. But let age's weight burden you with secret years and luckless lines furrow your features! May you long then to tear out your white hairs by their roots, ah, when the mirror rebukes you with your wrinkles, and may you in turn, rejected, suffer proud arrogance, and, changed to an old woman, regret your deeds!

These are the dread events my pages prophesy: learn to fear the fate of your beauty!

Book IV.3:1-72 A wife's letter

'Arethusa sends this message to her Lycotas: if you can be mine, when you are so often absent. Still, if any part you wish to read is smeared, that blot will have been made by my tears: or if any letter puzzles you by its wavering outline, it will be the sign of my now fading hand.

A moment ago Bactra in the east saw you again, now the Neuric enemy with their armoured horses, the wintry Getae and Britain with its painted chariots, and the dark-skinned Indians pounded by the eastern waves.

Was this the marriage oath and the night sealed with kisses, when, an innocent, I yielded to the urgency of your conquering arms? The ill-omened torch, carried before me by those who led, drew its dark light from a ruined pyre: and I was sprinkled with Stygian waters, and the headband was not set right upon my hair: the god of marriage was not my friend.

Oh, my harmful vows hang from every gate: and this is the fourth cloak I weave for your camp. Let him perish who tore a stake from an innocent tree, and made mournful trumpets from shrill horns, he is more worthy than Ocnus to lean on, and twist the rope, and feed your hunger, mule, to eternity!

Tell me, does the breastplate cut your tender shoulders? Does the heavy spear chafe your unwarlike hands? May they sooner hurt you than some girl's teeth cause me tears, by marking your neck! They say your face is lean and drawn: but I pray that pallor's from desire for me. While I, when evening leads on the bitter night, kiss the weapons you have left behind. Then I moan by starlight that your cloak doesn't clothe the bed, and that the birds that bring the dawn don't sing.

On winter nights I labour to spin for your campaigns, to cut Tyrian cloth for the sword: and I learn where the Araxes flows that you must conquer, and how many miles a Parthian horse travels without water: I'm driven to study the world depicted on a map, and learn what kind of position the god set up there, which countries are sluggish with frost, which crumble with heat, which kindly wind will bring your sail to Italy.

One caring sister sits here, and my pale nurse swears that the winter's a time of delay. Fortunate Hippolyte! With naked breasts she carried weapons, and barbarously hid her soft hair under a helmet. If only the Roman camps were open to women! I would have been a loyal burden on your campaign. Scythian hills would not hinder me, where the mighty god turns water to ice with deeper cold. Every love is powerful, but greater in an acknowledged partner: this fire Venus herself fans into life.

Why then should robes of Phoenician purple gleam for me now, or clear crystals decorate my fingers? Everything's mute and silent, and the Lares' closed shrine is barely opened, through custom, by a girl, on the infrequent Calends. The whimpering of the little puppy Craugis is dear to me: she's the only one to claim your share of the bed.

I roof over the shrines with flowers, cover the crossroads with sacred branches; and the Sabine herb crackles on ancient altars. If the owl hoots perched on a neighbouring beam, or the flickering lamp merits a drop of wine, that day proclaims the slaughter of this year's lambs, and the priests readied, burning for fresh profits.

I beg you not to set so much glory in scaling Bactra's walls, or the plunder of fine linen torn from a perfumed chieftain, when the lead shot scatters from the twisted sling, and the cunning bow twangs from the wheeling horse! But (when the land of Parthia's brood are overcome, may the headless spear follow your triumphant horses) preserve unsullied the pact of our marriage-bed! That is the sole condition on which I'd have you back: And when I've carried your votive armour to the Capene Gate, I'll inscribe there: A GRATEFUL WOMAN'S THANKS FOR HER HUSBAND'S SAFETY.'

Book IV.7:1-96 Cynthia: From Beyond the Grave

There are Spirits, of a kind: death does not end it all, and the pale ghost escapes the ruined pyre. For Cynthia, lately buried beside the roadway's murmur, seemed to lean above my couch, when sleep was denied me after love's interment, and I grieved at the cold kingdom of my bed. The same hair she had, that was borne to the grave, the same eyes: her garment charred against her side: the fire had eaten the beryl ring from her finger, and Lethe's waters had worn away her lips. She sighed out living breath and speech, but her brittle hands rattled their finger-bones.

'Faithless man, of whom no girl can hope for better, does sleep already have power over you? Are the tricks of sleepless Subura now forgotten, and my windowsill, worn by

nocturnal guile? From which I so often hung on a rope dropped to you, and came to your shoulders, hand over hand. Often we made love at the crossroads, and breast to breast our cloaks made the roadways warm. Alas for the silent pact whose false words the uncaring South-West Wind has swept away!

None cried out at the dying light of my eyes: I'd have won another day if you'd recalled me. No watchman shook his split reeds for me: but, jostled, a broken tile cut my face. Who, at the end, saw *you* bowed at my graveside: who saw *your* funeral robe hot with tears? If you disliked going beyond the gate, you could have ordered my bier to travel there more slowly. Ungrateful man, why couldn't you pray for a wind to fan my pyre? Why weren't my flames redolent of nard? Was it such an effort, indeed, to scatter cheap hyacinths, or honour my tomb with a shattered jar?

Let Lygdamus be branded: let the iron be white-hot for the slave of the house: I knew him when I drank the pale and doctored wine. And crafty Nomias, let her destroy her secret poisons: the burning potsherd will show her guilty hands. She who was open to the common gaze, those worthless nights, now leaves the track of her golden hem on the ground: and, if a talkative girl speaks of my beauty unjustly, she repays with heavier spinning tasks. Old Petale's chained to a foul block of wood, for carrying garlands to my tomb: Lalage is whipped, hung by her entwined hair, since she dared to offer a plea in my name.

You've let the woman melt down my golden image, so she might have her dowry from my fierce pyre. Still, though you deserve it, I'll not criticise you, Propertius, my reign has been a long one in your books. I swear by the incantation of the Fates none may revoke, and may three-headed Cerberus bark gently for me, that I've been faithful, and if I lie, may the vipers hiss on my mound, and lie entwined about my bones.

There are two places assigned beyond the foul stream, and the whole crowd of the dead row on opposing currents. One carries Clytemnestra's faithlessness, another the monstrous framework of the lying Cretan cow: see, others swept onwards in a garlanded boat, where sweet airs caress Elysian roses, where tuneful lutes, where Cybele's cymbals sound, and turbaned choirs to the Lydian lyre.

Andromeda and Hypermestre, blameless wives, tell their story, with accustomed feeling: the first complains her arms are bruised, with the chains of her mother's pride, that her hands were un-deserving of the icy rock. Hypermestre tells of her sisters daring, her mind incapable of committing such a crime. So with the tears of death we heal life's passions: I conceal the many crimes of your unfaithfulness.

But now I give this command to you, if perhaps you're moved, if Chloris' magic herbs have not quite entranced you: don't let Parthenie, my nurse, lack in her years of weakness: she was known to you, was never greedy with you. And don't let my lovely Latris, named for her serving role, hold up the mirror to some fresh mistress.

Then burn whatever verses you made about my name: and cease now to sing my praises.

Drive the ivy from my mound that with grasping clusters, and tangled leaves, binds my fragile bones; where fruitful Anio broods over fields of apple-branches, and ivory is unfading, because of Hercules' power.

Write, on a column's midst, this verse, worthy of me but brief, so the traveller, hurrying, from the city, might read:

HERE IN TIBUR'S EARTH LIES CYNTHIA THE GOLDEN:
ANIO FRESH PRAISE IS ADDED TO YOUR SHORES.

And don't deny the dreams that come through sacred gateways: when sacred dreams come, they carry weight. By night we suffer, wandering, night frees the imprisoned spirits, and his cage abandoned Cerberus himself strays. At dawn the law demands return to the pools of Lethe: we are borne across, and the ferryman counts the load he's carried.

Now, let others have you: soon I alone will hold you: you'll be with me, I'll wear away the bone joined with bone.'

After she'd ended, in complaint, her quarrel with me her shadow swiftly slipped from my embrace.

Book IV.8:1-88 Cynthia in a fury

Hear what caused a headlong flight, through the watery Esquiline, tonight, when a crowd of residents rushed through New Fields, and a shameful brawl broke out in a secret bar: though I wasn't there, my name was not untarnished.

Lanuvium, from of old, is guarded by an ancient serpent: the hour you spend on such a marvellous visit won't be wasted; where the sacred way drops down through a dark abyss, where the hungry snake's tribute penetrates (virgin, be wary of all such paths!), when he demands the annual offering of food, and twines, hissing, from the centre of the earth. Girls grow pale, sent down to such rites as these, when their hand is rashly entrusted to the serpent's mouth. He seizes the tit-bits the virgins offer: the basket itself trembles in their hands. If they've remained chaste they return to their parents' arms, and the farmers shout: 'It will be a fertile year.'

My Cynthia was carried there, by clipped horses. Juno was the pretext, but Venus was more likely. Appian Way, tell, I beg you, how she drove in triumph, you as witness, her wheels shooting past over your stones. She was a sight, sitting there, hanging over the end of the shaft, daring to loose the reins over foul places. For I say nothing of the silk-panelled coach of that plucked spendthrift, or his hounds with jewelled collars on their Molassian necks, he who'll offer himself for sale, fated for filthy stuffing, while a shameful beard covers those smoothly shaven cheeks.

Since harm so often befell our couch, I decided to change my bed by moving camp. There's a certain Phyllis, who lives near Aventine Diana. When she's sober nothing pleases: when she's drunk anything goes. Teia is another, among the groves of Tarpeia, lovely, but full of wine, one man's never enough. I decided to call on them to lighten the night-time, and refresh my amours with untried intrigue.

There was a couch for three on a private lawn. Do you want to know how we lay, I between the two. Lygdamus was cup-bearer, with a set of summer glassware, and Greek wine that tasted Methymnian. Nile, the flute-player was yours, Phyllis was castanet dancer, and artless elegant roses were nicely scattered. Magnus the dwarf, himself, tiny of limb, waved his stunted hands to the boxwood flute. The lamp-flames flickered though the lamps were full, and the table sloped sideways on its legs. And I looked to throw Venus with lucky dice, but the wretched Dogs always leapt out at me. They sang, I was deaf: bared their breasts, I was blind. Alas, I was off alone by Lanuvium's gates.

When suddenly the doors creaked aloud on their hinges and a low murmur rose from the entrance by the Lares. Immediately Cynthia flung back the folding screens, with hair undone, and furiously fine. I dropped the glass from between my loosened fingers, and my lips paled though they were slack with wine. Her eyes flashed lightning, how the woman raged: a sight no less dire than the sacking of a city.

She thrust her angry nails at Phyllis: Teia cried out in terror to the local waters. The raised torches disturbed the sleeping neighbours, and the whole street echoed with midnight madness. The first tavern in a dark street swallowed the girls, with loose dresses and dishevelled hair.

Cynthia exulted in the spoils, and ran back victorious to strike my face with perverse hands, put her mark on my neck, drew blood with her mouth, and most of all struck my eyes that deserved it. And then when her arms were tired with plaguing me, she rooted out Lygdamus lying sheltered by the left-hand couch, and, dragged forward, he begged my spirit to protect him. Lygdamus, I couldn't do a thing: I was a prisoner like you.

With outstretched hands, and only then, it came to a treaty, though she would barely allow me to touch her feet, and said: 'If you'd have me pardon the sins you confess, accept what the form of my rule will be. You're not to walk about, all dressed up, in the shade of Pompey's colonnade, or when they strew the sand in the licentious Forum. Take care you don't bend your neck to the back of the theatre, or give yourself over to your loitering by some open carriage. Most of all let Lygdamus be sold, he's my main cause for complaint, and let his feet drag round double links of chain.'

She spelt out her laws: I replied 'I'll obey the law.' She smiled, with pride in the power I had granted. Then with fire she purified whatever the alien girls had touched, and washed the threshold with pure water. She ordered me to change all my clothes again, and touched my head three times with burning sulphur, and so I responded by changing the bed, every single sheet, and on the familiar couch we resolved our quarrel.