

## OVID'S HEROIDES

### I

#### PENELOPE TO ULYSSES

This letter comes from your Penelope,  
Laggard Ulysses; writing back to me  
Is pointless – come yourself! Troy, we all know,  
Hated by Grecian women, now lies low.  
All Troy and Priam were not worth the cost.  
Would that the faithless Paris had been lost  
Beneath the raging waves while on his way  
To Sparta! Then each passing, creeping day  
I'd not bewail as, desolate and chill,  
I lie in bed, nor would I seek to fill 10  
The endless night and weave thread after thread.  
When were there threats not causing me more dread  
Than what was real? Love is a thing that's filled  
With anxious fear. I dreamt you would be killed  
By furious Trojans; ever was I pale  
At Hector's name. Should someone tell the tale  
Of Antilochus's death, then he would be  
My terror's cause, or, should one tell to me  
Of Patroclus cut down in armour owned  
By someone else – Achilles – then I moaned 20  
That tricks could lack success. Then when I'd hear  
Tlepolemus had warmed the Lycian spear  
With his own blood, *his* downfall would renew  
My care. In short, it didn't matter who  
Told of a Grecian death – your darling's heart  
Was cold as ice. A god, though, took my part  
For my chaste love: Troy's levelled to the ground,  
And my Ulysses is secure and sound.  
The Grecian chiefs are back, the altars' smoke  
Is seen; the gods of our ancestral folk 30  
Receive the alien spoils. Young women bring  
Thank-offerings for their men's delivering;  
Those men sing of the fate of vanquished Troy.  
Just elders, girls a-tremble, all with joy  
Look on; young women, as their men recite  
Their tale, hang on their lips, while someone might  
Upon the table draw the savage fray

(All Troy in drops of wine!): "Here," he might say,  
 "Flowed Simois; here's the Sigeian land;  
 Old Priam's lofty palace – see it stand 40  
 Right here, while over yonder Peleus' tent  
 Was pitched, there Ulysses', and here, hell-bent  
 With mangled Hector, steeds went hurtling."  
 For old Nestor related everything  
 To your Telemachus whom I, to track  
 His whereabouts, had sent. When he came back,  
 He told it me. He also told to me  
 How, one through, one through duplicity,  
 Rhesus and Dolon fell. Oblivious  
 To all your kin, you had he recklessness 50  
 To brave the Thracian camp by stealth at night  
 And, with but one accomplice, take the light  
 From many eyes! So cautious and of me  
 So mindful! With how much anxiety  
 Did my heart leap until I heard that you  
 With the Ismarian steeds had ridden through  
 The friendly lines in triumph. Ilion  
 Is scattered by your strength hither and yon,  
 Its walls now flat, but what's the use to me,  
 Who still remain as I was formerly 60  
 When Troy endured, my husband far away  
 Forever. For me Trojan walls yet stay,  
 Though smashed by other, where the victor still  
 Ploughs with his spoil, the ox. Now settlers till  
 The fields where Troy once stood, and the rich soil,  
 Fattened with Phrygian blood, must face the toil  
 Of sickles. Half-hid corpses feel the blow  
 Of ploughs; above the ruined houses grow  
 Fresh grasses. Conqueror, you stay away  
 And I may not be told why you delay 70  
 Nor whereabouts you hide, unfeeling one!  
 When strangers touch these shores, when I am done,  
 Will leave much-questioned of your fate, and he  
 Is handed an epistle penned by me  
 To give you should you anywhere be found.  
 I've send to Pylos, the ancestral ground  
 Of old Nestor – uncertain word came back.  
 I've sent to Sparta – they, too, showed a lack  
 Of news. Where are you? Where do you delay?  
 Would that Apollo's walls yet stood today – 80  
 Alas, I'm fickle, and my vows cause me  
 Much anger! Then I'd know unerringly  
 Where you were fighting, and the war alone

Would be my fear, and others would make moan  
 As well as I. I don't know *what* to dread  
 Yet dread all as I rave, my cares outspread  
 In all directions. Threats on land and sea  
 I think the cause of your long truancy.  
 While silly fears possess me, you perchance  
 Are captivated by a new romance 90  
 (Such are the hearts of men). You, I may guess,  
 Speak of a rustic wife fit just to dress  
 Raw wool. May I be wrong, this charge I lay  
 Lost in the air; may you not wish to stay  
 Away though able to come back to me.  
 Icarius, my father, says, "Be free  
 And quit your widowed bed," and lays great blame  
 That I hold out so long. But all the same  
 Let him chide on – I'm yours, and yours should I  
 Be called. I'll be the wife, until I die, 100  
 Of Ulysses. Sapped by my piety  
 And all my modest prayers, however, he  
 Is slowed. Now suitors from Dulichium,  
 High Zacynthus and Samos, lewdly come  
 In throngs to woo me In your hall their sway  
 Is total; now your goods get torn away,  
 My own life, too. What good is it to tell  
 Of cruel Medon, Pisander as well,  
 Polybus and the grasping Eurymachus,  
 Antinous and the rest, who come to us 110  
 And, through your shameful absence, are sustained  
 By what you by your own bloodshed have gained?  
 Irus, the beggar, and Melanthius who  
 Drives in your flocks to be consumed bring you  
 The ultimate disgrace in your downfall.  
 Unused to war, we are but three in all –  
 A powerless wife, Laertes, an old man,  
 And young Telemachus. When he began  
 Of late, against their wishes, to set out  
 For Pylos, he was almost set about 120  
 And taken from me. Gods, I pray, decree  
 That Nature's order be maintained and he  
 Close both my eyes and yours. Our guardian  
 Of cattle, our old nursemaid and the man  
 Who keeps the filthy sty help to sustain  
 Us three. Laertes can no longer reign  
 Over these foes, a warrior no longer.  
 Our son, should he live on, will grow much stronger;  
 His father, though, should shield him – as for me,

I cannot oust these foes. Come speedily, 130  
 Our haven and our altar! I bore you  
 A son (Gods, keep him safe and sound!) whose due  
 It was to learn your ingenuity  
 From you while young. Respect the dignity  
 Of Laertes, who holds off his final day  
 That you may close his eyes. You went away  
 While I was still a girl. Even if you came  
 Back home forthwith, you'd find an aged dame.

## II

### PHYLLIS TO DEMOPHOON

Demophoon, Phyllis, who welcomed you  
 To Rhodope, grieves that you're overdue  
 In your return. For we were to watch for  
 Your vessel's anchor clinging to our shore  
 Once the moon's horns had joined again. She waned  
 Four times and then four more times she regained  
 Her fullness, yet still the Tithonian Sea  
 Does not bring Acte's ships back home to me  
 Just count the days – which lovers count with skill –  
 You'll find I'm not complaining of this ill 10  
 Too soon. Hope too, was loath to leave, for slow  
 Are we to credit what would hurt us so.  
 Your lover is reluctant to believe  
 You guilty. Lying, I'd often conceive  
 The stormy South Winds bringing back to me  
 Your white sails. I cursed Theseus, thinking he  
 Would not release you But your course was stayed  
 By someone else perhaps. I was afraid  
 Sometimes that, as your ship was sailing home  
 Upon the Hebran Sea, the spumy foam 20  
 Had shipwrecked you. With frankincense and prayer  
 I'd often beg the gods to have a care  
 To keep you well. O cruel one. When sky  
 And sea showed favourable winds, then I  
 Would say, "If he is well, he comes to me."  
 My constant love, then, in a word would see  
 All bars to those in haste, and dexterous  
 Was I to find them. Yet you're ponderous  
 In your delay; the gods by whom you swore  
 Don't bring you back. You do not seek our shore 30

Moved by my love. You gave both words and sail  
 To the winds but there are two lacks I bewail –  
 Conviction in the former, in the latter  
 Your safe return home. Tell me what's the matter  
 With what I've done except my lunacy  
 In loving you. By this deficiency  
 I might have won you. My fault, reprobate,  
 Was just to take you, but it has the weight  
 And likeness of desert. Where's faithfulness  
 And trust and clasping hands and truthfulness 40  
 And god, forever on *your* lips? Where, too,  
 Is Hymen's bond that promised me to you,  
 My surety of wedded bliss? You swore  
 By the raging sea you sailed and would once more,  
 By your grandfather, too – unless he be  
 Another lie – who clamed the savage sea,  
 By Venus and the weapons which have so  
 Distressed me – both the torch and Cupid's bow –  
 And Juno who with kindness oversees  
 The bride-bed and the sacred mysteries 50  
 Of the torch-bearing goddess. If each one  
 Of the gods avenges all the wrongs you've done  
 Against them, your one life won't satisfy.  
 Even your shattered ships in folly I  
 Repaired – to brace the keel that then withdrew  
 And left me! – giving you the oars that you  
 Might flee from me. My own weapons now bring  
 Me pain. I trusted all your wheedling,  
 Your lineage, its names, your tears – can these  
 Be taught to feign, concealing trickeries 60  
 And going where you would? The gods that you  
 Swore by to me I placed my trust in, too.  
 What end, however, has each surety?  
 One small part could have captivated me.  
 I don't regret my giving you somewhere  
 To settle, but the height of all my care  
 Should have been that! It was to my disgrace  
 A bed was added as I took my place  
 Beside you. Would the night before I lay  
 With you had been my last that folk may say 70  
 That Phyllis died a maid. I had relied  
 Upon a better fate – it's justified,  
 I thought. Hope grounded in desert is fair.  
 It is a glory that is hard to bear  
 To cheat a trusting maid. My chastity  
 Deserved your favour. Your words cozened me,

A woman and in love. This be the crown  
 Of all his praise, you gods. Within this town  
 Build your statue among the Aegides  
 And first set up, with written words of praise, 80  
 Your mighty father's likeness. Of Sciron,  
 Grim Procrustes, Thebes in war overthrown,  
 Sinis, mixed man and bull, the Centaurs' fall,  
 The knocking at the dark god's gloomy hall  
 You'll read – and then beneath your effigy  
 Let there be written: BY HIS TRICKERY  
 HIS HOSTESS LOVER WAS BY HIM BETRAYED.  
 His dereliction of his Cretan maid  
 Impressed you most of all the deeds that he  
 Performed. One deed that needs apology 90  
 From him you prize; of your father's deceit,  
 False one, you act the heir. Now on your seat  
 Above your tethered tigers you sit high,  
 Loving a better husband – not that I  
 Feel envy – but the Thracians I disdained  
 Won't want my hand, since it will be maintained  
 That I preferred a foreigner. They say,  
 "To learned Athens let her make her way;  
 Armed Thrace will have another sovereign.  
 Its end approves the deed." Let him attain 100  
 No luck who thinks not so! But if the sea  
 Is quickened by your oar, they'll say of me  
 My counsel for myself and for the men  
 Of Thrace was excellent – but then again,  
 It wasn't so, nor will my halls receive  
 You more, nor in this sea will you relieve  
 Your wearied limbs. There two sights which cling  
 Still to my very eyes – you vanishing  
 And your fleet in my port in readiness  
 To leave. You had the impudence to press 110  
 This lover's neck and kiss in long delay,  
 Commingling your tears with mine, and lay  
 Your accusation on the favouring breeze,  
 And as you left, your final words were these:  
 "Wait for me, Phyllis!" Wait? Forsaking me,  
 You planned on no return. Wait for the sea  
 To bring you back? And yet I wait for you –  
 Should you return to me, though overdue,  
 It's only time that proves your faithlessness!  
 Why do I beg, wretch that I am? I guess 120  
 Another holds you now with adoration,  
 A thing which causes me abomination.

Now you forget me; my identity  
 I barely know, alas. You ask of me  
 Who Phyllis is and whence – she is the one  
 Who, when your lengthy wandering was done,  
 Gave you a port and hospitality  
 In Thrace, Demophoön. My property  
 Enriched your own, I gave you in your need  
 So many presents and I would indeed 130  
 Have given many still; I then bestowed  
 To you Lycurgus' broad, broad realms, not owed  
 Sway in a woman's name, where Rhodope,  
 All ice, spreads far into the shadowy  
 Haemus, and sacred Hebrus speeds ahead.  
 Amid dire signs my maidenhood lay dead;  
 Your guileful hand my virgin zone released!  
 Tisiphone was at that bridal feast,  
 Its screeching minister; its requiem  
 The gloomy raven sang, and, joining them, 140  
 Allecto, wreathed with little snakes, was there,  
 While torches from the tomb lit up the air!  
 I tread the rocks and thicket-covered strand,  
 Grief-struck, wherever I behold the sand  
 Stretched out before my eyes. Whether the ground  
 Is warm or stars shine coldly, I'll be found  
 Checking to see what wind blows in the sea;  
 Whatever sails I see approaching me  
 From far off, then at once I prophecy  
 That my entreaties have been answered. I 150  
 Run through the water, scarcely hindered where  
 The sea is rolling on. The strength I bear  
 Grows less the closer that they come to shore.  
 I topple, fainting, and I feel no more,  
 Caught by my maids. There is a bay which bends  
 Gently into a sickle shape; its ends  
 Rise rigid to a rocky mass. I long  
 To throw myself between those horns headlong;  
 Since you prolong your guile, thus it shall be  
 To your shores may the current carry me 160  
 And cast me up so that your eyes may lock  
 On me unburied. Harder than a rock  
 And iron and yourself, yet you'll declare,  
 "Phyllis, to have this so was not my care!"  
 I often yearn for poison; often, too,  
 To have a bloody dagger run me through  
 I pine. I offered to your false embrace  
 My neck, but now I have a lust to place

It in a noose. My tender modesty  
 Must meet an early death, and rapidly 170  
 I'll choose the method. As its hateful spring  
 You'll be inscribed. This verse, or some such thing,  
 Will seal your infamy: PHYLLIS'S END  
 WAS CAUSE BY HER OWN LOVER AND GUEST-FRIEND,  
 DEMOPHOON, THE REASON FOR HER DEATH.  
 HER HAND IT WAS THAT TOOK AWAY HER BREATH.

### III

#### BRISEIS TO ACHILLES

You read a note from stolen Briseis,  
 Written in broken Greek, words all amiss;  
 These blots are tears which carry, all the same,  
 The weight of words. May I attach some blame  
 To you, my lord and lover? Then I'll do  
 Exactly that. I may not censure you  
 That I was swiftly given to the king  
 At his command – and yet that very thing  
 You *should* be censured for. An embassy,  
 Eurybates and Talthybius, came for me 10  
 To take me from you. Mute, with downcast eye,  
 Each asked if we still loved each other. I  
 Might have delayed; a respite from my woe  
 Would have been welcome. Yet I had to go,  
 Alas, with no fond kiss; incessantly  
 I wept and tore my hair – it seemed to me  
 I'd been twice-seized! I often wished to dare  
 To dupe my guards and fly away, but there,  
 To seize a timid girl, the foe stood by.  
 Should I have left by night, I feared lest I 20  
 Be taken and presented then to one  
 Of Priam's daughters-in-law. I could not run –  
 It was decreed. So long I've been away  
 And not demanded back, while you delay,  
 Your anger slow. Patroclus said to me,  
 When I was handed over, "You will be  
 Back soon. Why weep?" It's but a little thing  
 Not to have been returned. You're countering  
 That action, though, Achilles! Go now, earn  
 The name of ardent lover! Now, in turn, 30  
 Came Telamon and Amyntor's sons – one who



Was just a friend, the other kin to you –  
 And Telemachus. For in their company  
 I was to go along (authority  
 Was given force to all their coaxing pleas  
 By generous gifts – twenty repositories,  
 Bronze-wrought, and seven tripods, both in skill  
 And weight their counterpart, more bounty still –  
 Ten golden talents and a dozen steeds,  
 All victors, plus, superfluous to needs, 40  
 Twelve Lesbian maids, each one a stunning belle,  
 Seized when their houses were torn down; as well –  
 Though you require no wife – a wife they brought,  
 One of the king's three daughters. Had you bought  
 Me back, how much would you have had to proffer  
 For what you turn away from, though they offer  
 It gratis! What, Achilles, did I do  
 That I'm believed so second-rate by you?  
 Where has your scanty love so hastily  
 Fled from me? Or does gloomy destiny 50  
 Keep wretches woeful? Once bad times are here,  
 Will no more pleasing hours then appear?  
 I've seen my city by your martial hand  
 Torn down – for I was of my father's land  
 A goodly part; I've witnessed brothers three  
 Dispatched; I've seen, in heaving agony,  
 My husband stretched out on the bloody ground.  
 With all these losses you alone I found  
 As recompense – lord, husband, brother, too =  
 And by your sea-born mother's godhead you 60  
 Swore that my captive's lot would bring me gain –  
 Though I am dowried, maybe you'll disdain  
 The riches that I bring! Indeed, they say  
 That when tomorrow's Dawn lights up the day  
 You plan to sail before that southern blast  
 That brings the clouds. Once this foul tale had passed  
 Inot my fearful, wretched ears, my heart  
 Was void of blood and sense. You will depart,  
 Alas. Who then will have me, cruelty?  
 What amiable solace shall there be 70  
 For me, then cast aside? Before that day  
 May I be swallowed suddenly, I pray,  
 By yawning earth or by a thunderbolt  
 Be shrivelled up beneath its fiery jolt –  
 Before you plough with oars the Phthian foam  
 Without me and I see you sailing home,  
 Abandoned as I'll be! If you must see

Your household gods once more, I will not be  
 A burden to your fleet, but, by your side,  
 Be captive to my victor, not his bride; 80  
 I'm expert at the loom. Yes, you shall wed,  
 I pray, and take into your marriage-bed  
 By far the fairest Grecian dame, and she  
 Will show the perfect suitability  
 As daughter-in-law to Peleus (Jupiter  
 And Aegina were his grandparents), and her  
 Old Nereus as his grandson's bride will hail.  
 Your lowly slave, I'll tend the loom's travail.  
 I'll draw the threads and cause to shrink in weight  
 The full distaff, but may I supplicate 90  
 You not to let your wife bedevil me -  
 I feel she will - or let my tresses be  
 Torn by her in your presence while you say,  
 "She, too, was mine!" Indeed, though, act this way  
 So long as I'm not left behind in hate -  
 \My wretched bones shake at this likely fate!  
 Why do you still delay? His wrath the king  
 Regrets and at your feet Greece, sorrowing,  
 Lies prone. So quell *your* wrath just as you quell  
 All things else. Why does Hector rage pell-mell 100  
 Against the Trojans? Take up arms, but first  
 Take up myself and with a warlike burst  
 Subdue them with the help of Mars! For me  
 Your wrath was stirred - through me, then, let it be  
 Allayed. Let me be both the origin  
 And measure of your gloom. Think it no sin  
 To yield to my entreaties. Through the prayers  
 Of his wife Meleager took on him the cares  
 Of war. I heard this but *you* know it well.  
 His mother, reft of brothers, cast a spell 110  
 Of curses on his head. War was declared;  
 In rage he put aside his arms and spared  
 His country succour with obduracy.  
 Only his wife could move him. Happy she!  
 My words, though, have no weight and fall in vain.  
 Yet I'm not Angry - though time and again  
 Called to your bed, a slave, I have not played  
 The wife. I can recall a captive maid  
 Calling me mistress. "Thus addressing me,"  
 I said, "you merely burden slavery." 120  
 But by my lord's bones, barely consecrated  
 In hasty burial and venerated  
 By me forever; by my brothers, too,

Three gallant souls, now holy spirits, who  
 Died nobly for their country and now lie  
 Nobly within it; by your head and by  
 My own, which have lain close and lovingly;  
 And by your sword, something my family  
 Knows well – the Mycenaean, I assert,  
 Has never shared my bed. You may desert 130  
 Me now if I speak false! If, valiant man,  
 I said, “Swear that no other woman than  
 Myself has lain with you,” you would decline.  
 The Danaï, however, think you pine  
 For me. You clasp, while plucking at your lyre,  
 Your tender mistress. Should someone desire  
 To find out why you have refused to fight,  
 Well, war is danger but there is delight  
 In playing, song and love. A safer way  
 Is to lie with your sweetheart and to play 140  
 The Thracian lyre than to take in hand  
 The shield, the sharpened spear, the helmet’s band  
 Pressing one’s locks, but you preferred a feat  
 Of glory to your safety – fame was sweet  
 To you through war. Or was fierce butchery  
 Loved by you only till you captured me  
 While your renown lies subjugated here?  
 Heavens! I pray your Pelian ash spear,  
 Aquiver in your strong arm, pierce straight through  
 The side of Hector! Send me, Greeks. To you 150  
 I’ll come as legate, with my embassy  
 Commingling many kisses. I will be  
 Better than Phoenix, eloquent Ulysses,  
 Than Ajax – better, yes, than all of these.  
 That I have clasped you close to clearly show  
 That I exist is of some help. Although  
 You’re cruel, fiercer than your mother’s sea,  
 And though I speak no word, yet shall you be  
 Demolished by the cascade of my tears.  
 Even now – this may your father’s span of years 160  
 Be met, may Pyrrhus earn the eminence  
 In war that you did! – give some reverence  
 To anxious Briseis, and do not be  
 A cruel laggard, thus tormenting me!  
 Or if I weary you, compel the death  
 Of her whom you compelled to draw each breath  
 Without you! You’ll compel what now you do –  
 My flesh, my colour’s gone; my hope in you  
 Is all that still sustains me. If I lose

That, too, my brothers and my lord I'll choose 170  
 To join - no glory lies in ordering  
 A woman's death. Wherefore do such a thing?  
 Impale me on your sword; some blood will flow  
 Once you have struck. Allow that sword to go  
 Through me, which would have pierced Agamemnon's heart  
 Had not Athena taken the king's part.  
 No, save my life – your gift. What you gave me  
 As conqueror I seek in amity.  
 Troy offers better prey; go seek the foe  
 To slaughter. But, whether you plan to go 180  
 Across the sea or stay, as is your due  
 As my commander, let me come with you.

#### IV

#### PHAEDRA TO HIPPOLYTUS

The Cretan maid sends wishes for success  
 To her Amazonian which she, unless  
 You give it her, will lack. Read it straight through –  
 What damage can a perused letter do?  
 There's something here may please you, for my hand  
 Disguises secrets sent by sea and land.  
 Foes read each other's missives. I to you  
 Tried thrice to speak and thrice my tongue, like glue,  
 Stuck to my mouth; my words thrice silently  
 Stayed on my very lips; where modesty 10  
 May follow love, they should be coalesced;  
 What's base to speak I write at love's behest.  
 It isn't safe to spurn what Love demands;  
 He governs and exacts righteous commands  
 Over the mighty gods. He ordered me  
 To write and quelled early dubiety:  
 That heartless one will yield, so write!" His aid  
 I need. As with keen fire he has made  
 My marrow warm, so may he hear my prayer,  
 Piercing your heart. I'll not in baseness tear 20  
 My marriage-bond in two; my fame is free  
 Of taint – and you may ask. Love came to me,  
 More deeply through its lateness. I'm ablaze  
 With love within - a hidden anguish plays  
 About my heart. Young steers, when first they're tied,  
 Are wounded by the yoke; steeds scarce abide

The reins when taken from the herd – so, too,  
 My untried heart can, by my love for you,  
 Scarce bear the pain. This weight upon my heart  
 Does not sit well. Though love becomes an art 30  
 When learned from early years, a fiercer sting  
 Comes with late love. The new-made offering  
 Of my long-kept repute of purity  
 You'll take and thus the culpability  
 We'll share. Upon the heavy boughs to close  
 One's fingers round its fruit, the early rose  
 To pluck with tender nail can gratify,  
 But if that former purity that I  
 Was blessed with, free of blame, were to endure  
 An unaccustomed stain, then, to be sure, 40  
 I would be blessed in burning with a fire  
 That's worthy. Wicked lovers are more dire  
 Than faithless love. If Juno should award  
 Me him who is her brother and her lord,  
 I'd choose you over Jove! Now, too, I go  
 To seek out interests I do not know  
 You'll scarce believe it; wild beasts call to me.  
 My first goddess, she whose supremacy  
 Is bowmanship, is Delia. I heed  
 Your own pursuits. My inclinations lead 50  
 Me to the wood where I may catch the deer  
 And urge my hounds from the high ridge; my spear  
 Quivering on my arm I may propel  
 Or whirl the lightweight chariot pell-mell  
 Along the dusty course or with rein  
 Contort the swift steed's mouth, and now again  
 I'm borne, like Bacchae by their lunacy  
 Impelled, and those who beat the tympani  
 At Ida's foot, or those who are made mad  
 By two-horned Fauns and half-divine dryad 60  
 Creatures (I'm told all when delirium  
 Has left me, but, love-tortured, I am mum).  
 This love perhaps is a remuneration  
 For my kin's lot and from us compensation  
 Is sought by Venus. My kin's origin  
 Is from Europa whom, appearing in  
 A bull's form, Jupiter loved. Pasiphaë,  
 My mother, brought forth the iniquity  
 And burden in travail, for she was won  
 By the deluded bull. The faithless son 70  
 Of Aegeus traced the thread and, with the aid  
 My sister gave, his getaway he made

Out of that tangled house. But now, just see,  
 Lest I be thought not of the family  
 Of Minos, I'm the latest of my kin  
 To keep the worldwide laws! This, too, has been  
 A fateful thing: one house has won us two;  
 Your father love my sister, I love you.  
 Theseus and Theseus' son have captivated  
 Two sisters – let us be commemorated 80  
 In a monument! When on my odyssey  
 To Eleusis, would that Crete had hampered me!  
 Then most of all did keen love in my core  
 Stick deep (though you'd delighted me before).  
 You were in white, with flowers in your hair,  
 Your tanned cheeks blushing modestly, and where  
 Others would call your face hard and severe,  
 I thought it showed a strength. Stay far from here,  
 Young man arrayed like women! – Handsomeness  
 Prefers a modest bound. Your ruggedness, 90  
 Your artless locks and on your comely face  
 A brush of dust gave you a fitting grace.  
 You rein a game, resisting steed – I take  
 Delight in those small circles that you make  
 In turning him; your pliant spear you fling  
 With your strong arm – that arm can always bring  
 My gaze to it, or when your broad, horn-spear  
 You grasp on hunts. All that you do is dear  
 In my eyes. Only cast that ruggedness  
 Aside out in the hilly wilderness; 100  
 I'm no spoil for your campaign. Why do you  
 The ways of girded Diana pursue  
 And steal Venus's rights? What does not choose  
 To find repose won't last, for rest renews  
 Your strength and weary limbs. For if you never  
 Put down that bow – Diana's arms should ever  
 Be used – it will grow slack. Conspicuous  
 In fame for woodland ways was Cephalus,  
 And countless beasts fell on his piercing spear,  
 Yet he lost naught in yielding to his dear, 110  
 Aurora, who with prudence would repair  
 To be with him from her old spouse. Somewhere  
 Beneath the ilex trees time and again  
 Adonis would, upon a grassy plain,  
 Have intercourse with Venus. Oeneus's seed  
 For Atalanta burned with passionate need,  
 His pledge of love the spoil of a wild boar.  
 May there be very soon added two more

To that assembly – us! Mere countryside  
 Is the wood if love is gone. I will abide 120  
 With you. The hidden rocks won't trouble me  
 Nor the dread boar's dire teeth. The double sea  
 Assails the isthmus and the slender land  
 Hears both. In Troezen we'll live hand-in-hand,  
 The realm of Pittheus, dearer now to me  
 Than my own land. Theseus is gone, and he  
 Will not soon come back, for his Pirithous  
 Detains him on his shores. It's clear to us  
 That Thesues turned down both Phaedra and you  
 For him. That's not the only harm we two 130  
 Have borne. With his three-knotted club he shattered  
 My brother's bones which afterwards he scattered  
 Upon the ground, while to wild creatures he  
 Left them as booty. Chief in bravery  
 Of axe-bearers was she who gave you birth.  
 If you should ask me where upon this earth  
 She is now – Theseus stabbed her in the side:  
 Her great son's pledge yet failed her and she died.  
 She was not married, no solemnity,  
 No bridal torch had she. Why should this be 140  
 Unless, a bastard, you could not take over  
 Your father's throne? My brothers he, moreover,  
 Bestowed on you, and yet it was not I  
 Who was to rear them, only he. Oh, why  
 Could not this bosom, you fairest of men,  
 Which was to harm you, not have splintered then  
 In its distress? Go then, revere the bed  
 Of your so worthy father – which he fled  
 And spurned by his misdeeds! Should I appear  
 As one who'd sleep with her stepson, don't fear 150  
 Abortive names. Such old, doomed piety  
 Was rustic in Saturn's supremacy.  
 For Jove decreed that what may cause delight  
 Be based in virtue and that all is right  
 When sister marries brother. Bonds are strong  
 When Venus forges them. Though we do wrong  
 In loving, we may hide our love. Our blame  
 Is able to be screened by kinship's name.  
 We'll both be praised should anybody see  
 Us kissing; faithful I'll be said to be 160  
 To my stepson. For you there'll be no need  
 To unfasten a door to do the deed  
 With some dour husband's wife; there'll be no guard  
 To dodge; we'll live together yet, not barred

From open kissed still; yes, you'll be free  
 From harm with me, your culpability  
 Meriting praise, even if somebody spies  
 You on my bed. Just do not temporize;  
 Be quick and bind our bond – may Love which scarred  
 Myself and does so still, yet be not hard 170  
 Upon you! Humbly now I beg and pray  
 In all humility. Alack the day!  
 Where lie my pride, my lofty words? My mind  
 Had been resolved, if Love could only find  
 Resolve, to struggle long and not to yield  
 To fault. I pray (now I grant you the field),  
 My queenly arms outspread,, and clasp your knees.  
 No lover thinks of the proprieties!  
 My modesty is gone, and as it fled  
 It left its standards. Pardon what I said, 180  
 Curb your hard heart. My father rules the sea –  
 Minos himself – and to my ancestry  
 Belongs the god who sends the lightning-blow,  
 And my grandfather, with his brow aglow  
 With pointed rays, is he who brings the light,  
 Still tepid, in a chariot so bright –  
 And yet, love-burdened, my nobility  
 Lies prostrate. Yet forgive my ancestry  
 And, if you cannot spare me, spare my line.  
 The Cretan isle of Jupiter is mine, 190  
 My dowry. Let Hippolytus have sway  
 Over it all! And let your will give way,  
 O cruel one! My mother could subdue  
 The bull; this savage creature surely you  
 Could not outdo in cruelty! Spare me,  
 Venus, my chief goddess! May there not be  
 A woman ever who will turn away  
 Your love; and may the swift goddess, I pray,  
 Within your secret glades keep you secure  
 And may the deep wood savage beasts procure. 200  
 The Satyrs and the mountain-gods be nigh  
 To you and may the wild boar, as you ply  
 Your spear, be felled. Though you are said to spurn  
 All females, may the Nymphs relieve the burn  
 Within your throat with water. My tears, too,  
 I add to all the prayers I send to you;  
 And while you read the contents of my plea,  
 Imagine that these very tears you see.



V

OENONE TO PARIS

You'll read my letter? Or has that been banned  
 By your new wife? No Mycenaean hand  
 Has written it, so read it! Oenone,  
 The fountain-nymph of great celebrity  
 In Phrygian woods, complains, by you upset,  
 Should you allow these words. What god has set  
 His will against my prayers? What guilt impedes  
 My yet remaining yours? We all must needs  
 Bear calmly our deserts; the innocent  
 Must tolerate with grief their punishment. 10  
 When I would wed you, you had less esteem –  
 I, the nymph-daughter of a mighty stream.  
 Though now you're Priam's son – respect must cede  
 To truth! – you were a slave. A nymph agreed  
 To wed a slave! Beneath a shady tree  
 We'd often lie on leafy greenery  
 Among our flocks. Often upon deep hay  
 And straw we'd lie, the hoar-frost kept at bay  
 By our poor hut. Who showed to you back then  
 Groves fit for hunting and which rocky den 20  
 A wild beast chose to hide her progeny?  
 I'd stretch the meshed nets in your company;  
 Along the leafy ridges I would guide  
 The speedy hounds. My name may be descried  
 Upon the beeches, fashioned by your blade.  
 As grow the trunks, likewise my name is made  
 The bigger. Grow, rise straight that I may be  
 Thus dignified. Live, poplar – that's my plea –  
 As there you stand upon the riverside  
 And on your seamy bark these words reside: 30  
 OENONE'S SPURNED, YET PARIS LIVES? IF SO,  
 MAY THE WATERS OF THE XANTHUS BACKWARDS FLOW.  
 Hate backwards, Xanthus – Paris has renounced  
 Oenone and endures. That day announced  
 My wretched doom; from thence the awful squall  
 Of love that's changed began to alter all –  
 When those three goddesses all came to you,  
 Venus and Juno and Minerva, who  
 Was unadorned (more beautiful to see  
 Had she been armed), to witness your decree. 40  
 My heart leapt in amazement when you told

Me of it and through my hard bones a cold  
 Vibration ran. I then interrogated  
 Some elders, dreadfully intimidated.  
 The firs were felled, the timbers hewn, your fleet  
 Prepared; your waxed ships now set sail to meet  
 The blue sea. As you left, you wept – agree  
 To this at least! – we shared our agony  
 In tears; the elm is not more closely squeezed  
 By vines than was my neck which now you seized 50  
 Within your arms. Your comrades often smiled  
 When you lamented that the wind beguiled  
 Your going, for that wind was blowing west!  
 You'd come back to me often in your quest'  
 For one more kiss. You scarce could say the word  
 "Farewell". The rigid mast's canvas was stirred  
 By a light zephyr, and the sea turned white,  
 Made frothy by the oars. I kept in sight  
 Those sails in anguish till they could be viewed 60  
 No more; the sand was with my tears bedewed.  
 Sea-green Nereids, please come speedily!  
 I'm lost! You vowed that you'd come back to me,  
 Yet is it for another? O my prayer  
 Was for a cruel rival's gain! Out there  
 A mass of native rock is in the sea –  
 A mountain, there it stands perpetually.  
 Upon your sails there first my eyes were laid;  
 I longed to rush to you; as I delayed,  
 Upon the highest prow I saw the ray 70  
 Of purple and took fright – that's not the way  
 You dressed. The ship, borne by a rapid breeze,  
 Drew near and touched the shore. In ecstasies  
 Of trembling I saw a woman's face.  
 But this was not enough – in your embrace  
 The hussy clung (it was insanity  
 To stay and watch). In actuality  
 I tore my bosom, beat my breast and rent  
 With rigid nails my wet cheeks, then I sent  
 Through sacred Ida wails of agony,  
 Yes, to those rocks of mine. May Helen be 80  
 So grieved when she's abandoned in her turn,  
 And what she cast on me may she, too, learn!  
 Your pleasure now is those who cross the sea,  
 Leaving their husbands, so that they may be  
 With you; Oenone was your only wife  
 When you were living a poor shepherd's life.  
 Your wealth does not impress me, I'm not stirred

By your palatial home nor would be heard  
 As one more princess inside Priam's hall –  
 Although the king would not disdain at all 90  
 To be a nymph's kin and Hecuba too  
 Would not shrink from such kin; I have the due  
 To be a great man's wife; my hands are apt  
 To grasp a sceptre; just because you wrapped  
 Me in your arms beneath a beech-tree's shade,  
 Do not despise me; I am better made  
 To grace a purple bed. My love, what's more,  
 Will cause no harm – it won't incite a war  
 Nor bring avenging ships. Troy's refugee  
 Is now demanded by the enemy - 100  
 She brings *that* dowry with her in her pride!  
 Should she once more on Greece's shores reside?  
 Ask Hector, Polydamas, Deiphobus!  
 Find out what Priam or the serious  
 Antenor thinks (they're old and therefore wise)!  
 It is a base beginning now to prize  
 A captive over Troy. A shameful cause!  
 Her husband's, though, is just. Be wise! Give pause!  
 Don't think her faithful – she who quickly turned  
 To your embrace. As at that contract spurned 110  
 Menelaus groaned, pained by the injury  
 Of love turned to another, equally  
 Shall you, too, cry. No purity can heal  
 Once wounded – no, it's gone. Does she now feel  
 Love for you? Well, she had that feeling, too  
 For Menelaus, who trusted in you  
 But on a now-abandoned wedding-bed  
 He lies. Happy Andromache, who wed  
 A constant mate! I should have been like her,  
 Your brother's wife. But you are flimsier 120  
 Than leaves which, dry and juiceless, flit about  
 Upon the shifting air. You are without  
 Such weight as is upon the very crown  
 Of one light grain, baked to a golden brown  
 By constant sun. Your sister sang to me,  
 As I recall, one time in prophecy,  
 Her locks let loose: "What's this? Why plough the sand,  
 Oenone? You are sowing on the strand  
 With fruitless oxen. A heifer from Greece  
 Is coming to annihilate your peace, 130  
 Your land, your home! Avert her! While you may,  
 Sink in the sea your ship. Alack the day!  
 She holds much Phrygian blood!" In full career

Her slaves took off the raving girl. In fear  
 My fair locks stood on end. You proved, alas,  
 Too true – that beast now pastures in *my* grass!  
 Fair, certainly, yet an adulterer;  
 Her marriage-gods she, by a foreigner  
 Seduced, deserted. Once before there came  
 One Theseus – if I don't mistake the name – 140  
 And took her from her native-land. Could we  
 Believe that she'd kept her virginity  
 From such a young and eager lover? No!  
 How can I know all this so well? I know  
 Because I love. You may, if you prefer,  
 Call it brute force, but I would label her  
 A willing victim, being swept away  
 So often. Yet Oenone to this day  
 Has to her fickle husband stayed true-blue –  
 Yet by your own example even you 150  
 Might have been cuckolded! As I lay screened  
 Within the woods, the Satyrs all careened  
 In a promiscuous rout to smoke me out,  
 And Faunus, horned head garlanded about  
 With sharp pine-needles, looked for me as well,  
 Where the huge ridges of Mt. Ida swell.  
 He who built Troy, the famous deity  
 Of the lyre, was my lover, showing me  
 His secret gifts. Each potent herb, each root  
 That healers use, such plants as those which shoot 160  
 Up anywhere on earth are mine. No plant  
 Can cure my fated love! Though skilled, I want  
 The art for this. No god can succour me  
 Nor can the fruitful earth, but you can be  
 My saviour. Pity this deserving maid –  
 I've earned your help. I am on no crusade,  
 I bear no bloody armour, I'm not here  
 With any Grecian troops. I am your dear  
 And was throughout our childhood and to be  
 So till the end of life – that is my plea! 170

## VI

### HYPsipyle to Jason

They say you touched the shores of Thessaly,

On you return home, in prosperity  
 Thanks to the Golden Fleece. I am content  
 That you are safe, so far as you consent  
 To this. Yet I should have been made aware  
 Of this by your own hand. Winds that are fair  
 Might have bypassed you, although you yet burned  
 To see me; thereby you'd not have returned  
 And passed your realms (my dowry). Contrary  
 Weather can't stop your pen. Hypsipyle 10  
 Deserved your greetings. Why did word of you  
 Come first, that Mars's sacred bulls went through  
 The curving yoke, and, at the scattering  
 Of seeds, there sprang a human harvesting  
 Whose doom did not necessitate your might,  
 The booty never from the dragon's sight,  
 Though boldly you purloined the fleece? How proud  
 Would I have been if I had said out loud  
 To doubters, "He has written me"! Why do  
 I grieve your duty has impeded you? 20  
 Greatly am I indulged should I remain  
 Your own. An alien poisoner in your train  
 Has come, they say, who shares your bed as I  
 Was meant to do. Love soon believes a lie;  
 So ma it prove I acted recklessly  
 In thinking you are false. From Thessaly  
 A stranger came who, barely had he gone  
 Across the threshold, when, "My confidant,  
 My Jason, how is he?" he said. Tongue bound,  
 Face red, he stood, his eyes fixed on the ground. 30  
 I ripped my tunic off me as, then and there,  
 I leapt up. "Does he live, or do I share  
 His doom? I said. "He lives," said he. Yet dread  
 Exists where love is. "Swear it, then," I said.  
 Even a god could scarce make me believe  
 You lived. When calm again, I begged for leave  
 To ask about you. How those bulls had ploughed  
 He told, and how at once there was a crowd  
 Of armed men, sprung up out of the earth,  
 Born out of dragons' teeth – and those whose birth 40  
 Had been above ground were obliterated  
 In one day, that beast, too, eradicated.  
 Again I asked if Jason lived, both dread  
 And hope in turn as prompts, and, as he said  
 Each thing, in avid eagerness to share  
 The facts with me his latent art laid bare  
 My wounds. Alas! Where is the pledge you swore,

The marriage-bonds, the torch more fitting for  
 My funeral pyre? It was not secrecy  
 Through which we met to wed – an attendee 50  
 Was Juno, Hymen, too, her temples bound  
 With wreaths. But neither one I later found,  
 But gloomy Erinyes, all stained with gore,  
 Conveyed the hellish torch, held out before.  
 What had the Minyae to do with me,  
 Or yet the *Argo*? What affinity  
 Had you, Tiphys the helmsman, with my land?  
 Here is no ram with golden fleece so grand,  
 Lemnos was not old Aeëtes' estate.  
 I was resolved at first – though cruel fate 60  
 Withheld me - to drive out that alien pack,  
 I and my women; for there is no lack  
 Of knowledge in our women – for they know  
 This all too well – of how to overthrow  
 Their men. I should have left so brave a crew  
 To guard our country. I protected you  
 With my own city. There you were embraced  
 By both my home and heart! And thence there raced  
 Two summers and two winters. The third year  
 Compelled to set sail. Wirth many a tear 70  
 You said: "I'm taken hence, Hypsipyle;  
 If I but be allowed by destiny  
 To come back, I leave as your own but stay  
 Yours ever. What lies in your womb, o may  
 It live and be our child!" Down your false cheek  
 Tears fell, and I recall you could not speak  
 More words. You are the last of your allies  
 To board the sacred *Argo*. Off she flies;  
 The sails are bellied; through the azure main  
 The keel glides on. We both of us maintain 80  
 Our gaze, I on the sea, you on the land.  
 Both face and breast awash, I go and stand  
 Upon a tower which on every side  
 Looks every which way on the ocean's tide.  
 Through all my tears I gaze about, and soon  
 My eyes grant to my eager heart a boon  
 To see much more that they are wont to do.  
 I make chaste prayers and fearful vows to you.  
 These vows, because you're now out of harm's way,  
 I must fulfil. But – so Medea may 90  
 Enjoy them? Should I? I am in distress,  
 My anger mixed with surging tenderness.  
 Am I to gift the temples since you live,

Although now lost to me? Am I to give  
 The final scapegoat-strike? Never secure,  
 I always feared your father would procure  
 A bride from Argolis. I feared them all,  
 Those maids of Argolis, yet my downfall  
 Has been an alien whore! The wound I feel  
 Is from a startling source, while her appeal 100  
 For you is neither an integrity  
 Nor beauty but familiarity  
 With charms – the baneful herb out of the soil  
 She'll pull with magic blade and she will toil  
 To draw the grudging moon out of her course  
 And screen the horses of the sun and force  
 The waters to stand still; the woods and rocks  
 She animates and, with her flowing locks  
 And tunic loose, she wanders all around  
 The sepulchres and from the still-warm ground 110  
 Collect specific bones. She'll seal the fate  
 Of absent ones and images create  
 Of wax and drive the slender needle through  
 Each wretch's heart – and other things I'd do  
 Well not to know. Love should by probity  
 And grace be won and not by sorcery.  
 Can you embrace her and enjoy night's rest  
 In the same chamber, wholly undistressed  
 By fear? Just like her bulls, she has compelled  
 You, too, to bear the yoke, I think, and quelled 120  
 You as she did the vicious snake, and she  
 Would like to be set in the inventory  
 Of your and all your heroes' deeds and cloak  
 Your glory. Some one of the Pelian folk  
 Imputes your exploits to her charms and they  
 Believe her: "Jason did not steal away  
 Phrixus's golden fleece but the issue  
 Of Phasis, Aeëtes' child." This I tell you -  
 She who gave birth to you, Alcimede,  
 Is not benevolent to her – for she 130  
 Will tell you so – and she gains no acclaim  
 From Aeson either, whose son's consort came  
 From the frozen North. So let the Tanais show  
 A husband for her turn, or let her go  
 To Scythian marshes or to Phasis' shore!  
 O fickle son of Aeson, who are more  
 Uncertain than spring breezes, what you say  
 Carries no guarantee! You went away  
 As mine: why have you not returned to me

As mine? Let me be wed in harmony 140  
 To you now that you're back as I was proved  
 To be when you departed. If you're moved  
 By noble blood – see, then, that I am known  
 As child of Monoan Thoas and my own  
 Grandfather was Bacchus, whose bride outshines,  
 Her brows encrowned, the lesser heavenly signs  
 With her own stars. The dowry I'll endow  
 Is Lemnos, kindly-natured to the plough,  
 Myself as well. I've proved productive, too:  
 Rejoice for both of us! This burden you 150  
 Have rendered winsome to my teeming weight.  
 The number, too, I love – by kindly fate  
 Lucina gave me twins. Should you inquire  
 Whom they resemble, why, it's you, their sire.  
 They're like you in all but deceitfulness.  
 I almost sent them as ambassadress  
 To you but thought then of the savagery  
 Of their stepmother. How she frightens me!  
 She's more than that. Her hands fit every wrong.  
 She who could mangle and then strew among 160  
 The fields her brother's limbs, how could she deign  
 To spare my pledges? She drove you insane  
 With Colchian poisons; to Hypsipyle  
 They say you chose that woman. Shamefully  
 That jade took you; our bond was pure. But her! –  
 Her father she betrayed; from massacre  
 I snatched Thoas. My Lemnos has me still;  
 She left the Cochians. It seems that ill  
 May conquer loyalty, and she may gain  
 Her man through sin! Jason, I don't complain 170  
 About the Lemnian women, nor am I  
 Surprised at it; such eagerness can fly  
 In cowards to take arms. Come, tell me true,  
 If, driven by contrary tempests, you  
 Had reached my harbours, you and all your men,  
 As was appropriate, and I had then  
 Set out to meet you with my progeny,  
 My twins – and how you would have prayed to be  
 Devoured by the earth! – o what a sight  
 Would you have been, vile man! What death's *not* right 180  
 For your deceit? You'd have been safe and sound  
 If you had stayed with me, for you'd have found  
 Me merciful. The blood, though, of your whore  
 Would I have shed, in front of you, what's more,  
 Whom through her poisonous arts she took! Thus I



Would outMedea her! If from on high  
 My prayers are heard by Jupiter, may she,  
 This marriage-thief, share all my woes with me  
 And suffer her own laws; as I'm bereft,  
 A mother of two babes, may she be left 190  
 By husband and two babes! May what she gained  
 By wicked means not be for long retained  
 But lost more woefully. A refugee,  
 May she throughout the world seek sanctuary!  
 A cruel sister, daughter, mother, wife,  
 When over sea and land she's spent her life  
 In exile, may she then seek out the air,  
 Redhanded, destitute, full of despair!  
 Robbed of my husband, this is now my plea:  
 May you both live conjoined in purgatory! 200

## VII

### DIDO TO AENEAS

The white swan, when the fates call out, will sing  
 On the moist grasses by the rippling  
 Maeander. Writing you, I hardly dare  
 I'll move you -God's against me as I bare  
 My soul, but since the wretched deprivation  
 Of my deserts and of my reputation  
 And of my soul's and body's purity  
 The loss merely of words is light to me.  
 Will you abandon wretched Dido still?  
 Will the same winds both snatch your vows and fill 10  
 Your sails? Will you break from both vows and strand  
 And sail to the unknown Italian land?  
 Does new-constructed Carthage not move you,  
 Its rising walls, its supreme power, too,  
 Which would be yours? New deeds you seek yet flee  
 What's done; you go to find new territory,  
 Leaving what's gained. But even if you find  
 That land, who'll give it you? Who'd be inclined  
 To give land to a stranger? Possibly  
 There'll be another Dido, one who'll be 20  
 Loved and betrayed by you. When will you raise  
 A city like Carthage and fix your gaze  
 Down on your own folk? If there's no delay

Of all your prayers for all your aims, whence may  
 A loving wife appear? I burn, as though  
 I were a waxed and sulphured fire aglow  
 Or pious incense on an altar's flame.  
 Your image haunts my waking hours, the same  
 Is in my heart at night. You're an ingrate,  
 Deaf to my gifts, and I would quit you straight 30  
 Were I not fond; but, though you're sick of me,  
 I do not hate you, yet your perfidy  
 I fault. O Venus, spare your niece; embrace  
 Your cruel brother; make him take his place,  
 Cupid, within your camp! I loved before  
 You did (it is no shame), so let me store  
 Some fuel for my love. O I am blind –  
 A spurious fancy flits before my mind.  
 Your mother's heart's so different from your own.  
 You were begot of mountains and of stone, 40  
 Of oaks on rocky cliffs, wild beasts, the sea –  
 You see its angry winds yet plan to flee  
 Despite its adverse floods. Where is the place  
 You seek? The storm will stay you – may its grace  
 Assist me. See, the rolling sea is stirred  
 By the East Wind. Let what I had preferred  
 To owe you be owed to the storms; the sea  
 And wind outdo your heart in honesty.  
 I am not worth enough - ah why do I  
 Not give you reprimands? – to have you die 50  
 When fleeing far. Yours is a costly hate,  
 And dearly-bought as well, that you can rate  
 Your death as cheap now you are rid of me.  
 The winds will cease and on a tranquil sea  
 Will Triton drive his blue steeds. O that you  
 Would change just like the winds, and this you'll do  
 Unless you're harder than the oak. O why,  
 As though you did not know what forces lie  
 Within the raging seas, imprudently  
 Trust in the waves which you have frequently 60  
 Encountered? Even though you liberate  
 Your ropes when all seems clear, yet many a fate  
 Awaits upon the broad sea. It bodes ill,  
 When one has broken faith, to venture still  
 Upon the sea, when one's inconstancy  
 Will suffer punishment, especially  
 In matters of the heart, because they say  
 The mother of the Loves out of the bay  
 Of Kythera rose naked. I'm undone

And yet I shudder to undo the one 70  
 Who ruined me and have my enemy  
 Drink of the deep. Then live! – that is my plea.  
 Thus may you be undone by something worse  
 Than death. It will be said you were my curse.  
 Think you are caught up in a rapid squall –  
 Though let the omen have no weight at all –  
 What will you think of? Your own perjury  
 And Dido, forced by Phrygian perfidy  
 To die; your cheated wife will then arise,  
 Sad, bloodstained, hair unkempt, before your eyes. 80  
 What gain have you to say “This is but fair.  
 Forgive me, gods” and think that through the air  
 All thunderbolts are aimed at you? Allow  
 The ocean’s and your mercilessness now  
 To dwindle: your safe passage will repay  
 Your waiting. Though you spurn all this, yet may  
 Young Iulus live! You caused my death, so let  
 This be enough. Ascanius owes no debt  
 Nor your Penates, who, saved from the flame,  
 Should not now be shipwrecked. Yet, all the same, 90  
 You do not take them with you. You pretend  
 That all those sacred rites on you depend;  
 They never did, nor Priam. Untruths all!  
 Moreover, I was not the first to fall  
 A victim to your lies and feel the blow  
 That you delivered. Should you wish to know  
 Where Iulus’ pretty mother is – she’s dead,  
 Abandoned by her cruel lord! You said  
 All this to me – warning enough! Burn me:  
 I have deserved it. But my penalty 100  
 Is less than was my fault. I have no doubt  
 That all your gods condemn you. You’ve been out  
 For seven years upon the sea and land.  
 I took and kept you safe when on this strand  
 You were fetched up and, barely knowing who  
 You were by name, I gave my throne to you.  
 Yet would this goodwill had contented me  
 And that the news of our confederacy  
 Had been entombed! I died that dreadful day  
 When deep-blue heaven drove us to delay, 110  
 Through sudden rain, in that steep cave. I caught  
 A vocal sound – “nymphs crying out,” I thought –  
 It was the Furies, who were dooming me!  
 Impose your punishment, lost purity;  
 O broken marriage-vows, o you hearsay

That stays among my ashes to this day,  
 You spirits of my people, and the soul  
 And ashes of Sychaeus, who's my goal  
 As I leave full of shame. For there stands he  
 Within a marble shrine, sacred to me – 120  
 Leaves and white wool protect him all around.  
 Four times I heard his well-known voice's sound  
 Within the shrine. I heard him faintly say,  
 "Elissa, come!" I come without delay,  
 I come, your bride by right, yet tardily  
 Through shame of my admission. Pardon me  
 My fault! He's worthy who induced my fall,  
 For from my sinfulness he withdraws all  
 Its hate. There was a hope he would remain  
 My own – his aged father, a great strain  
 Upon his loyal son, a mother, too,  
 Who was divine both promised this issue. 130  
 If error was my fate, its agency  
 Was honest; should he keep his vows to me,  
 I'll have no cause for grief. My fate of old  
 Endures and to the last will keep a hold  
 On me. My husband fell, covered in gore,  
 Before the altars in his house and for  
 This monstrous crime my brother bears the fruit.  
 Now forced to flee, my foe in hot pursuit,  
 I leave my husband's ashes and my land  
 And wander unknown ways. I buy this strand, 140  
 Which I gave faithless you; fled from the sea  
 And that cutthroat, to this locality  
 I came. I raised a city: far and wide  
 I built its walls, envied on every side  
 By neighbouring folk. Wars loom; unused to strife  
 And female, I'm assailed. Not for my life  
 Could I prepare rough gates and arms. I had  
 A thousand suitors, uniformly mad  
 That I preferred to theirs a stranger's hand.  
 Why not give me to Iarbas, from the land 150  
 Of Gaetulia, bound in chains? I'd yield to you  
 My arms in this vile deed. My brother, too,  
 Would cause my blood to flow, malicious one,  
 The same as to my husband he has done.  
 Lay down those gods and sacred things – you'd be  
 Profane to touch them! If your destiny  
 It was to laud the gods who shunned the fire,  
 They now regret that. Soon it may transpire,  
 Vile man, that you will leave a pregnant wife,

Thus leaving in my womb another life 160  
 As part of you He'll share his mother's doom  
 And you will kill a babe that from my womb  
 Has not yet been delivered. With his mother  
 Will be exterminated Iulus' brother –  
 One punishment, two souls. "But I must go –  
 The gods ordain it." My desire, though,  
 Is that you'd never come and that this land  
 Had felt no Teucrian foot upon its strand!  
 Was this the god that led you through rough seas  
 And stormy blasts for many years? With ease 170  
 You could repair to troy were it the same  
 As when Hector drew breath. You do not aim  
 At your own Simoeis but Tiber's stream.  
 Should you achieve your wish, you now will seem  
 A stranger there; the land you seek, concealed,  
 Will spurn your keels and hardly be revealed  
 Even in your dotage. Cease your travelling  
 And take these people and the wealth I bring  
 From my Pygmalion and relocate  
 A happier Troy to Tyre; the kingly state 180  
 Take up. If you want war, if Iulus sees  
 A need for martial triumph, enemies  
 Enough shall we provide; both weaponry  
 And laws of peace are fitting here. Yet see,  
 By Venus, by your brother's arms, I pray,  
 And by your comrades as you sailed away,  
 The Trojan gods, whatever savage war  
 Saved from your race, may they live that no more  
 Affliction follows you. May Iulus fill  
 Your happy years and may the bones lie still 190  
 Of old Anchises! – only spare, I pray,  
 The house I offered you! You cannot say  
 My crime is more than having loved. I'm not  
 Born out of Phthia nor was I begot  
 In great Mycenae; you've no enemy  
 In Sychaeus or my father. Should you be  
 Ashamed to wed me, call me not your bride  
 But your hostess. While I am by your side,  
 I'll be what you desire. The waves that break  
 Upon these shores I know: they give and take 200  
 Good passage in due seasons. When the wind  
 Is fair, you'll use it; now your ship is pinned  
 By flimsy seaweed. Let me watch the sky,  
 For you will sail more safely thus, and I  
 Won't hold you back. Your comrades beg for rest,

Your shattered ships, but half-repaired, request  
 Some small delay; for your past kindness  
 And what I still may owe you I must press  
 You for some time because I yet desire  
 Our marriage – while my love is less afire 210  
 And while the seas are calm, while time and wont  
 Teach me to ache in patience. If you don't  
 Intend to yield, I aim to die; to me  
 You'll not be cruel long. Would you could see  
 My face as I pen this! Across my thighs,  
 As now I write, a Trojan steel blade lies  
 Unsheathed and drenched in tears, soon to be dyed  
 With blood as well as tears. Well qualified  
 Appear your gifts for my sad fate! You spend  
 But little in arranging my life's end. 220  
 Not for the first time do I feel the force  
 Of weaponry. A love without remorse  
 Has wounded me before. Last legacy  
 Of death my sister will bestow on me,  
 Poor Anna, who well knew my fault. Decayed,  
 I'll not be written where my bones are laid  
 SYCHAEUS' WIFE, ELISSA – no, the stone  
 Of marble will display these words alone:  
 THE REASON AND THE BLADE BY WHICH SHE DIED  
 AENEAS GAVE TO DIDO'S SUICIDE. 230

## VIII

### HERMIONE TO ORESTES

Pyrrhus, the image in obduracy  
 Of Achilles, who begat him, here holds me  
 Against all laws. To this I have denied  
 Consent. My woman's hands, though, can't provide  
 More aid. "What are you at? A counsellor  
 I do not lack," I said. "A governor  
 This woman, Pyrrhus, has!" As I cried out  
 Your name, he dragged me, hair tossed all about,  
 Into the palace, deaf as is the sea.  
 What worse distress could have been laid on me 10  
 Had Sparta fallen and I'd have been made  
 A slave as in a mad barbarian raid  
 Greek maids were borne away? More sparingly

Did conquering Greece torment Andromache.  
 If you'd take care of me, then claim your due  
 With fearless hand. If someone took from you  
 Your stabled cattle, would you therefore fight  
 Or be but tardy to uphold the right  
 Of one whose wife's been seized? As precedent  
 Recall my father who in vengeance went 20  
 To bring back home his wife, the righteous spring  
 Of war! If he had kept on slumbering  
 In empty halls, my mother would still be  
 Paris's wife. Yet don't prepare for me  
 A thousand billowing sail, a host of men  
 From Greece. I should, however, even then  
 Have been brought back – it is not base to do  
 Fierce battle for a wife. Remember, too,  
 Atreus, our grandfather (for you would be  
 My cousin if you had not married me). 30  
 Then, husband, aid your wife; cousin, support  
 Your cousin! Of this charge both bonds exhort  
 Your undertaking. Tyndareus gave me  
 To you, a counsellor of gravity;  
 Atreus controlled my fate, yet, ignorant  
 Of this, my father was prepared to grant  
 Me to Aeacus' son, yet in degree  
 Aeacus outranked him. When you married me,  
 The union hurt no-one; should unite  
 With Pyrrhus, that to you would be blight. 40  
 Menelaus would condone our love – he fell,  
 Subdued by winged Cupid's darts as well.  
 The love conceded for himself will he  
 Concede to us. With her authority  
 Will his loved wife assist us. He's to her  
 As you to me. What once the foreigner  
 From Troy was, Pyrrhus is. Let him pursue  
 His boasts about his father's deeds. You, too,  
 Could do the same. The son of Tantalus  
 Excelled Achilles, ruling all of us, 50  
 Supreme, yet but a limb of soldiery  
 Was Achilles. After Jupiter you'll be  
 The fifth, through Tantalus and then his son,  
 Your grandfather, your father – the next one  
 Is you. A fearlessness you do not lack.  
 With hateful arms you mounted an attack,  
 And yet your father – what were you to do? –  
 Had placed them in your hand. I would that you  
 Had better matter for your valorous act;

The reason was a predetermined fact, 60  
 Not chosen, and yet you obeyed the call.  
 Aegisthus' slitted throat besmirched the hall  
 Once stained, too, by your father's blood. Your name  
 Pyrrhus assails and turns your praise to blame  
 Yet holds my gaze with his. This angers me,  
 Both face and heart inflamed; my agony  
 Is caused by fires hidden in my heart.  
 Has any in my presence cast a dart  
 Of rudeness at you while my power to act  
 In vengeance and a savage sword I lacked? 70  
 I can at least shed tears, which let me spill  
 My rage in streams across my breast, for still  
 I have these only; hideous to see  
 Are my moist cheeks through this eternity  
 Of weeping. Has some fate through many a day  
 Made Tantalid women such an easy prey  
 To rape? I will not speak the white swan's lies  
 And grieve about Jove's feathery disguise.  
 Where the isthmus parts the sea, stretched far away,  
 Hippodamia was carried away. 80  
 On foreign wheels. Taken across the sea  
 By Paris, Helen roused a company  
 Of soldiers to her cause. This I recall,  
 Though barely. Grief and anxious fear was all  
 There was; my grandfather dissolved in tears,  
 My twin brothers, sharing their span of years,  
 My sister Phoebe. Leda sent a prayer  
 To the gods and her own Jove. I, too, was there,  
 Tearing my still-short locks; in misery  
 I cried, "Mother, will you abandon me?" 90  
 For her husband was gone! Lest I'm supposed  
 No Pelopid, lo, here was I, exposed  
 As prey for Neoptolemus! I rue  
 The day Apollo's arrow darted through  
 Achilles' heel! His son's atrocious act  
 Would Priam have condemned. Achilles lacked  
 The hate to watch with pleasure anyone  
 Who mourns his stolen wife. What have I done  
 To cause the gods' contempt, what constellation  
 Should I grieve hates me (o the desolation!). 100  
 I was a motherless child, whose father left  
 To fight, and, though they lived, I was bereft  
 Of them. Back in those days you never heard  
 My winning, stumbling prattle – not a word;  
 My wee arms never held your neck to me



Nor did I ever sit upon your knee,  
 A tender burden. It was not your care  
 To bring you up and you could not prepare  
 My new apartment when I was to wed.  
 When you returned – the truth has to be said - 110  
 I went to meet you and I did not know  
 The countenance of my own mother, though  
 Your wondrous beauty told me patently  
 That you were Helen; yes, you asked of me,  
 “Who is this?” My one benefit of fate  
 Is that Orestes is my wedded mate.  
 He, too, will disappear, though, if he will  
 Not fight for me. I am a captive still  
 Of Pyrrhus, though my father has returned  
 A victor – we have gained, since Troy was burned, 120  
 This bounty! But when Titan drives on high  
 His radiant steeds, then, though unhappy, I  
 Rejoice in such a freer misery;  
 When night has fallen, though, and banished me  
 In wretched tears to bed and I have lain  
 On my sad couch, my eyes have felt the stain  
 Of tears, not sleep, and, as if from a foe,  
 I shrank from him in every way I know.  
 Distracted with grief and mindless of my fate  
 And where I was, I touched, in this sad state, 130  
 His body. When I sensed this sinful act  
 My hand I withdrew from this base contact  
 As though polluted. Often, too, your name  
 I said instead of his and this I claim  
 A sweet mistake. By our sad line I swear,  
 And our first ancestor, who’s everywhere –  
 He shakes his realm, he shakes the land, the sea –  
 And by your father’s bones, uncle to me,  
 Those bones you must intrepidly requite  
 As there they lie. I’ll see the endless night 140  
 Too soon or, being kin to Tantalus,  
 I’ll form a match that is incestuous!

## IX

### DEIANEIRA TO HERCULES

I’m grateful that Oechalia has been

Appended to our honours, but my spleen  
 Is focussed on the fact the conqueror  
 Has yielded to the conquered woman. For  
 A dirty rumour mushroomed suddenly  
 Through all Pelasgian cities, which may be  
 Dispelled by you, whom Juno never broke  
 With endless labours, yet you bear the yoke  
 Of Iole, it seems. This fact would please  
 Eurystheus and Jove's consort – although she's 10  
 Your stepmother, she would enjoy this stain  
 Upon your life, though Jupiter would gain  
 No such delight, for he – if it be true –  
 Had needed, to beget one such as you,  
 More than one night of love. You had more woe  
 From Venus than from Juno, for Juno  
 By her oppression raised you up and yet  
 Upon your neck Venus's foot was set.  
 Your strength protects a peaceful world where the sea  
 Winds round the broad land. The serenity 20  
 Of land and sea depends on you; you warmed  
 Both east and west with brave deeds you performed.  
 The sky which was to bear you was upon  
 Your back; with Atlas' help the stars all shone.  
 You'll merely spread the knowledge of your shame  
 If you should add to former deeds this blame.  
 Did you indeed clutch twin snakes as you lay,  
 A baby, in your cradle, as they say,  
 Already worthy of great Jupiter?  
 You are not in your deeds what once you were; 30  
 The man is not the boy. You did not yield  
 To a thousand beasts or on the battlefield  
 Of Sthenelus, and Juno could not bring  
 You down, but love did! "A good coupling,"  
 They said. "The wife of Hercules!" And he  
 Who'll be my father-in-law has mastery  
 Up high with his swift steeds. Like steers ill-mated  
 At ploughing-time, a bride is subjugated  
 To a spouse who's stronger. This is no acclaim  
 But merely pretence that is bound to maim 40  
 One overwhelmed. If you'd wed fittingly,  
 Marry an equal. My lord constantly  
 Abandons me – a guest and not a wife –  
 And hunts wild beasts and monsters, while my life  
 I spend at home, both widowed and distraught  
 And chastely praying that you'll not be brought  
 Low by some enemy. I'm agitated

By snakes, wild boars, lions which must be sated,  
 Three-throated hounds, and empty fantasies,  
 Entrails of victims and vain auguries 50  
 Sought in dark night oppress me. Wretchedly  
 I snatch at murmurs of uncertainty.  
 Fear's lost in wavering hope and hope in fear.  
 Your absent mother grieves she's ever dear  
 To the potent deity; Amphitryon  
 Your father's absent, too, as is your son,  
 Hyllus; the ruler through the trickery  
 Of Juno, Eurystheus, is pinching me -  
 And Juno's lasting wrath! Too slight for me  
 To bear? Then factor in uncertainty 60  
 Of who is going to be your mother, plus  
 The loves of strangers. I will not discuss  
 Auge in Parthenius's vales betrayed  
 Or Astydameia, now no more a maid  
 But a mother, nor will I incriminate  
 You for the fifty sisters' cruel fate  
 (You spared not one!). One new charge I'll make known  
 Whence Lamus's stepmother I must own  
 I am. Meander there was wandering,  
 His weary waters often circling 70  
 Upon themselves, and saw bejewelled chains  
 Upon the neck of Hercules whose pains  
 In carrying the sky were only small.  
 Did you not suffer any shame at all  
 To bind with gold your strong arms and to set  
 Those gems upon your solid frame? And yet  
 The wild pest of Nemea was brought low  
 By those same arms – and now that savage foe  
 Cloaks your left shoulder! *And* without a care  
 You wore a coif upon your shaggy hair! 80  
 A snow-white poplar would be more germane.  
 Like some loose wanton you did not disdain  
 To wear a Maeonian girdle. Didn't you  
 Think of the cruel Diomedes who  
 Savagely fed his mares on human meat?  
 Even Busiris would have felt the heat  
 Of shame for you – yes, he you overthrew.  
 Antaeus would remove those bands from you,  
 A strong man, lest he feel humiliated  
 That he bowed to a girl! It is related 90  
 That you among the Ionian maidens kept  
 A basket filled with wool and that you leapt  
 In fear at your harsh mistress. Hercules,

Do you not shrink at labours such as these,  
 The victor in a thousand toils; you drew  
 Coarse threads with your strong fingers, didn't you?  
 And, when you had an honest portion weighed,  
 Into your vicious mistress' hands you laid  
 The work. How often, as you spun the strands  
 With your tough fingers, did your heavy hands 100  
 Ruin the spindle! Of your deeds you told  
 Your mistress – you should not have been so bold –  
 How monstrous serpents in your infant hand  
 You throttled as they coiled and how the land  
 Was crushed by the Tegean boar's great magnitude  
 In cypress Erymanthus; you include  
 In your report the skulls that you may find  
 Nailed up in Thracian homes and mares that dined  
 On human flesh; and triple prodigy  
 Geryones, though he was one of three, 110  
 A Spanish cattle baron; and that hound  
 Cerberus, split into three, hair twined around  
 With the threatening snake; the fertile serpent that  
 Sprang from the fruitful lesion and grew fat  
 From its own loss; him whose prodigious weight  
 Hung under your left arm to meet its fate  
 By strangulation; those steeds whose swift feet  
 Are dual form were not able to meet  
 Your valour in the hills of Thessaly.  
 Dressed out in that Sidonian finery 120  
 Could you recount these deeds? Are you not sworn  
 To silence by such garb? Your arms were worn  
 Even by Omphale – over her foe  
 She was victorious. And so now go,  
 Recount your fearless exploits pompously;  
 You could not be a man in ways that she  
 Has proved to be. You are inferior  
 To her in that her trouncing you means more  
 Than your own conquests. Thus to Omphale  
 Goes all the measure of each victory 130  
 Of yours – yield all your goods, for the acclaim  
 Has passed now to your mistress. O for shame!  
 Stripped from a shaggy lion a rough hide  
 Have overlaid a woman's delicate side!  
 The lion, though (and this you never knew),  
 Did not provide the spoil - she conquered you  
 As you the beast. A woman it was who bore  
 Darts black with Lerna's poison, barely more  
 Able to bear a wool-filled spindle. She

Took up the club that claimed a victory 140  
 Over wild beasts, and in the mirror's sheen  
 Espied my husband's arms! Yet this had been  
 Mere hearsay: men's words I could disbelieve;  
 Into my ears those sounds that made me grieve  
 Would softly creep – a mistress now appears  
 From overseas and I can't hide my tears!  
 I can't *not* look as through the city's core  
 She strides along, a prisoner-of-war,  
 As I, averse, look on. She does not share  
 A captive's attitude – no unkempt hair – 150  
 But with her comely face she tells her fate  
 To all, dressed all in gold as you of late  
 Were dressed in Phrygia. So haughtily  
 She stares as though she'd scored a victory  
 Over Hercules; you'd think Oechalia stood,  
 Her father yet alive. Perhaps you would  
 Drive Dianeira out and then, instead  
 Of mistress, be a wife, Iole wed  
 In shame to Heracles. My thoughts all flee  
 At that and chills sweep over all of me, 160  
 Hands nerveless on my lap. You loved me, too,  
 With many more: I did not censure you.  
 Have no regrets – twice you have fought for me.  
 Achelous in his tearful misery  
 Gathered his horns upon the moist bankside  
 And bathed his wounded brows in that soiled tide.  
 The half-man Nessus in Evenus filled  
 With lotus sank and equine poison spilled  
 Into the stream. Why mention this? For flying  
 Rumour comes even now – my lord is dying 170  
 Inside my poisoned cloak. O misery!  
 What have I done? What force has driven me  
 In my mad passion? Why do you delay  
 To die, foul Dianeira? Shall you stay  
 Upon this earth while he is lacerated  
 In Oeta? If some deed of mine be rated  
 Enough to be his wife, let my death show  
 The earnest of our union. You will know  
 Me as your sister, Meleager. Cry  
 Alas for our devoted house! On high 180  
 Sits Agrius. Bereft of all, Oeneus  
 Is weighed down by sterile old age. Tydeus  
 My brother's exiled in an unknown land,  
 My other brother's life snuffed by a brand  
 Of fire; my mother stabbed herself, so why

Do you, foul Dianeira, wait to die?  
 By the most sacred laws of the marriage-bed  
 I shame to have conspired to have you dead.  
 Nessus, his lustful heart transfixed, said, "See,  
 This blood of mine contains love's potency." 190  
 I sent a robe stained with that blood to you.  
 Why do I wait to die? So, then, adieu,  
 Old father, sister Gorge, land of my birth,  
 My brother taken thence and, on this earth  
 Shining, the very last light I shall see;  
 Farewell – o that this possibility  
 Could be! – o Hercules, farewell, my son.  
 Hyllus, my child, farewell to everyone.

X

ARIADNE TO THESEUS

All beasts I've found have more placidity  
 Than you. In them there is more constancy.  
 Theseus, the letter which you read today  
 I send from where your ship took you away  
 Without me, where both sleep and you betrayed  
 Me wretchedly, for wicked plans you laid  
 Against me as I slept. It was the time  
 When first the earth was strewn with crystal rime  
 And birds complained beneath the leaves. I tried,  
 Half-waking, dull from sleep, upon my side 10  
 To clasp my Theseus – there was no-one there!  
 I drew back. Once again, taking great care  
 With both my arms to probe the couch – again  
 No-one was there! Fears banished sleep, and then  
 I rose, alarmed, and from the abandoned sheets  
 I threw myself, feeling my own heartbeats  
 Upon my palms and tearing at my hair,  
 Which was disturbed by sleep. The moon was there:  
 I look to see if anything but shore  
 Can be descried, but there is nothing more 20  
 As far as I can see. With nothing planned,  
 I scurry here and there. The deep, deep sand  
 Retards my girlish feet. I cry your name  
 Across the shore: the hollow rocks proclaim  
 It back to me; as often as I shout

Your name, so often does the place give out  
 That name, seeming to wish to succour me  
 In my distress. A mountain I could see  
 With bushes growing sparsely here and there  
 Upon is peak, while, hanging in the air, 30  
 Eroded by resounding waves, a cliff  
 Is hanging. Up I climb – a spirit stiff  
 With resolution gives me strength; the sea  
 Below me I can scan extensively.  
 Circled by cruel winds, your sails I spied  
 Stretched out by headlong south winds on the tide.  
 Unfit, I thought, to look on such sight,  
 I was half-dead and cold as ice. My plight  
 Afforded no long brooding. It roused me  
 To yell to Theseus. “Whither do you flee?” 40  
 I cry out; “come back, you deceiver, you.  
 Turn back your ship – she hasn’t all her crew!”  
 That’s what I cried aloud; I beat my breast  
 When words did not avail. Thus coalesced  
 Were blows and words. That you at least might see  
 Though not hear me, I signalled frantically.  
 I placed upon a long branch my white veil –  
 Reminding those memories were frail!  
 You were snatched from my sight. Then finally  
 I wept; until I wept, with misery 50  
 My soft eyes had been dull. What could they do  
 But weep since they no longer noted you  
 Or your sails? Hair disarrayed, I ranged about  
 Like some mad Bacchant or sat, gazing out  
 To sea, benumbed, upon a rock which I  
 Resembled, stony-still. I often fly  
 Back to my couch, which held us in the past  
 But will no more. On your imprints I cast  
 A touch (in lieu of you) and on the spread  
 Once warm beneath your limbs, and on the bed 60  
 I lie, bedewing it with tears. “We two,”  
 I cry, “Lay on you – please, I beg of you  
 Return that number! We together came  
 To you; why can’t we leave you just the same –  
 Together? Faithless bed, o where is he,  
 The greater part of my identity? “  
 What should I do? Where, all forsaken, can  
 I go? The isle’s untilled. No trace of man  
 Or beast can I espy. On every side  
 Is sea. Nowhere across a dangerous tide 70  
 Will ship or sailor come. Should friends avail

And breezes and a ship, where should I sail?  
 My father's realm won't offer me access.  
 Should I on peaceful sail with success  
 As Aeolus calms, still shall I be  
 An exile. Crete, o you miscellany  
 Of five score citied, island so well known  
 To infant Jove since my dear father's throne  
 And he himself, by my duplicity  
 Were overcome. Lest, after victory, 80  
 You perish in that maze I gave a thread  
 To you as guide, and then to me you said:  
 "By all my perils this to you I vow  
 That you'll be mine while we still live." So now  
 We live yet you're not mine – but is there a reason  
 To say I live when I'm entombed by the treason  
 Of my forsworn mate? Just as fittingly,  
 O treacherous one, might you have slaughtered me  
 The way you did my brother whom you slew  
 With a club; my death would have acquitted you 90  
 From your contract. What is shall undergo  
 And all the abandoned maids who suffer so  
 I contemplate. A thousand ways that I  
 May leave this world I ponder, for to die  
 Gives me less torment than does death's delay.  
 I see already wolves from day to day  
 Coming to tear my vitals greedily.  
 Who knows but lions here are bred, maybe  
 Tawny tigresses, too? People assert  
 The sea brings up sea-dogs! Who shall avert 100  
 My death by sword? Let me not be enchained  
 With cruel fetters or else be constrained  
 To spin eternal threads – I who was born  
 Of Minos and Pasiphaë and sworn  
 To be your bride – that I remember well!  
 I look upon the land, the ocean's swell  
 And the long shoreline, and both land and sea  
 Warn of a thousand menaces to me.  
 The sky remains – I fear the gods. I'm prey  
 To ravening beasts. If there are folk who play 110  
 And work here, I don't trust them – injuries  
 Taught me to fear all men from overseas.  
 Would Androgeos still lived and butchery  
 Of your children had not paid the penalty  
 For Athens' evil deeds, and would that you  
 Had not upraised the club with which you slew,  
 Theseus, the Minotaur, and would that I



Had not produced the thread to guide you by  
 Out of the maze. I'm not surprised to know  
 You were the victor and the beast, laid low, 120  
 Crashed to the Cretan earth. Those horns could lunge  
 But into your hard heart they could not plunge.  
 Though unprotected, it was safe. You're all  
 Of flint, of adamant; you may we call  
 Harder than any flint. O cruel dreams,  
 Why did you hold me still? Better, it seems,  
 Had I been crushed by cruel night's death knell  
 Once and for all. You winds were harsh as well,  
 All too prepared, and breezes, which were keen  
 To start my tears. Your right hand, too, has been 130  
 Harsh – you've slain my brother and me, too,  
 And your pledge, such an empty word, that you  
 Gave me at my demand! I was betrayed  
 By slumber, winds and treachery – one maid,  
 Three treasons! Shall I die and never view  
 My mother's tears, will there be no-one who  
 Shall close my eyes while through an alien land  
 My sad soul travels, with no friendly hand  
 To settle my remains and on them spread  
 Their unguent? Rather sea-birds in their stead 140  
 Shall stand on my unburied bones. And so  
 Are these the thanks I get in death? You'll go  
 To Cecrops' port; back in your native land  
 With your adherents proudly will you stand  
 And chronicle the Bull-Man's death and tell  
 About the stony, winding halls as well.  
 Tell of me, too, left on alien strand!  
 I should not from your accolades be banned.  
 Of Aegeus you are not the progeny  
 Nor Aethra; you were born of rocks and sea! 150  
 Would that the gods had caused you from on high  
 Upon your prow to see me; for then I,  
 A sad sight, would have moved your heart. Now, too,  
 Look, not with eyes – for this you cannot do –  
 But with your mind, as to that rock I clung,  
 Waves crashing round it, as my tresses hung  
 As one who mourns the death of someone dear,  
 My robe, as though with rain, with many a tear  
 Bedewed. I tremble like cornfield stirred  
 By northern blasts, while every written word 160  
 Shakes in my quivering hand. I plead with you  
 Not on behalf of my now-vanished due.  
 For what I've done for you don't favour me.

Yet don't inflict on me some penalty!  
If of your safety I am not the source,  
Yet neither should you be the one to force  
My death. To you I stretch my hands out wide,  
Unhappy maid, across the ample tide –  
Hands tied with beating my sad breast; I show  
My locks – such as remain – in constant woe!  
I beg you by these tears of mine which spring  
From your achievements, Theseus, that you bring  
Your ship around and glide back speedily!  
Should I die first, you'll bear my bones for me!

170

## XI

### CANACE TO MACAREUS

If some of what I write escapes your eye,  
The reason is the page is blotted by  
Its mistress' blood. The pen is in one hand,  
An unsheathed sword is in the other, and  
The unrolled sheet is in my lap. Thus see  
Your sister writing you, for so I'll be  
Pleasing to my harsh father. Would my death  
Were seen by him, the sound of my last breath  
Witnessed by him who orders it! Yet he  
Would look on dry-eyed, his ferocity  
Greater than are his East Winds – the effect  
Of all those savage blasts, I would suspect;  
He's like his subjects, for he dominates  
The South, West, North Winds, and he regulates  
Your wings, rash East Wind, yet he can't control  
His swelling anger. No, his wicked soul  
Holds sins greater in scope than his domain.  
What good for me, through family rolls, to gain  
The skies by counting Jove among my kin?  
Is this, my funeral gift, I'm holding in  
My woman's hand, this sword, less venomous?  
Would that the hour that united us  
Had happened after death had taken me!  
My brother, why did you more zealously  
Love me than should a brother, and wherefore  
Did I love you considerably more  
Than should a sister? I, too, was on fire

10

20

And sensed a sort of god in my desire  
 (I knew him from reports). My colour fled,  
 My limbs were shrunken and I rarely fed 30  
 Myself or slept, one night a year to me;  
 I groaned though pain-free. Why all this should be  
 I could not say; unversed in love, yet I  
 Did love. My ancient nurse was first to spy  
 With her old woman's insight my distress;  
 She said, "You're in love!" and a ruddiness  
 Came to my cheeks; I dropped my eyes in shame,  
 A mute admission. To my womb there came  
 The weight of my misdeed. In secrecy  
 The load pressed on my weakened limbs, and she 40  
 Brought to me many herbs and remedies  
 And with bold hand anointed me with these  
 That from my body she might expurgate  
 (We kept but this from you) that growing weight.  
 Too full of life, the infant fought each one,  
 Safe from its hidden foe. Now the fair sun  
 Had nine times risen, and a new moon now  
 Stirred her light-bearing steeds. I don't know how  
 These sudden pangs appeared, to childbirth new,  
 A raw recruit. I cried out, "Why do you," 50  
 She said, "betray your sin" and silenced me,  
 Knowing my secret. In my misery  
 What should I do? I am compelled by pain  
 To groan, yet fear, nurse, shame would all restrain  
 My cries. I hold them in and try to keep  
 My words from slipping out, and, as I weep,  
 I'm forced to drink my tears. Before my eyes  
 Was death, Lucina spurning all my cries –  
 And great had been my sin if I had died –  
 You tore my tunic and my hair aside  
 And warmed me back to life with your own heat. 60  
 "Dear sister, lie. Lie, sister," you'd repeat.  
 "Don't lose two lives in one, for hope should be  
 A source of strength, since you will marry me,  
 Your brother, father of your child." It's true  
 That, dead already, I sought life anew  
 At this. I brought my womb's reproachful weight  
 To birth. But why rejoice? For still in state  
 Sits Aeolus. We must take from his sight  
 The signs of that reproach. With branches white 70  
 With olives, fruits and headbands and great care  
 The dame tries to conceal the child. In prayer  
 She feigns rites, while my father and the crowd

Of folk give way. Now near the door, a loud  
 Wailing reaches his ears – the child's betrayed  
 BY his own crying. Aeolus then laid  
 His hands upon the child and showed to all  
 The feigned rites, shouting madly through the hall.  
 As with slightest breeze the sea will quake  
 Or as an ashen branch will start to shake 80  
 With the warm South Wind, thus might you have caught  
 The sight of my pale, trembling limbs, which brought  
 The couch to shaking, too. Then speedily  
 He comes in, shouting out my infamy,  
 And scarcely kept his hands from my sad face.  
 I merely shed hot tears in my disgrace.  
 My tongue was paralyzed with chill dismay.  
 He ordered his grandchild to be the prey  
 Of dogs and birds in some secluded spot.  
 The infant wailed – you'd think he'd got 90  
 A grasp of things – and in his childish way  
 Begged his grandfather. What, then, could you say  
 I felt then, brother – this you may surmise  
 From your own heart – when right before my eyes  
 My darling child was by my enemy  
 Assigned to some deep forest, thence to be  
 Consumed by mountain wolves? He left me, when  
 I beat my breasts and tore my cheeks, but then  
 One of his guards with downcast features came  
 To me, pronouncing these few words of shame: 100  
 "Aeolus sends this sword to you – and so  
 He gave it me – "and orders you to know,  
 By your deserts, its meaning." Certainly  
 I know and shall apply courageously  
 Its violent blade. My father's gift I'll lay  
 Into my bosom. For my wedding-day,  
 Father, is this your gift? I'm rich indeed  
 With such a dowry! Leave with all due speed  
 These dreadful halls, deceived divinity  
 Of marriage, take your torches, timidly 110  
 Flee far. Bring me, you Furies of the night,  
 Your torches, let my funeral pyre burn bright.  
 My sisters, marry more auspiciously,  
 But, though I've come to grief, remember me!  
 How could my child, so briefly on this earth,  
 Do wrong? How could he, hours from his birth,  
 Harm his grandfather? If his death is right,  
 Let it be proved. Poor wretch, his dreadful plight  
 Is linked with my misdeed. Alas, my child,

Your mother's grief, prey to beasts of the wild, 120  
 On the same day both born and lacerated –  
 My son, pledge of a love unvenerated,  
 Your first day was your last. Fate hindered me  
 From shedding tears and the solemnity  
 Of bearing to your tomb your locks of hair.  
 Not bending over you, I did not share  
 A frozen kiss Wild beasts now tear asunder  
 My body's harvest. I, too, shall be under  
 The earth soon, and I will discharge the blow,  
 No mother nor bereaved for long. But o! 130  
 In vain I hoped for you in misery,  
 So gather all your son's strewn arms for me  
 And place them on the tomb we'll share and let  
 One tiny urn possess us both. Forget  
 Me not and live, on my wounds shed a tear  
 And do not shrink from her that you hold dear.  
 Do what your too-loved sister wants you to  
 While what my father wants myself shall do.

## XII

### MEDEA TO JASON

Yet I, the queen of Colchis, would be free  
 To give you succour when you came to me,  
 As I recall. The should the Fates have planned  
 To wind out for all time my mortal strand.  
 Thus had I ended well! Mere punishment  
 Has dogged me since that time. Why was it sent,  
 Alas, that ship from Pelion's woods, steered by  
 Young arms, to seek the Phrixan ram? And why  
 Did ever we of Colchis have a view  
 Of the Megarian *Argo*? Why did you 10  
 Drink Phasiacan water with your band  
 Of Greeks? Why did that false tongue of your land,  
 Your grace, your golden locks so capture me?  
 Had they not, once to this locality  
 Your ship had brought its daring band of men,  
 Unmindful Jason would have ventured then  
 All unanointed to the bull's breathed flame,  
 And when you'd sown the seeds – which were the same  
 In number as your foes – your industry

Would have destroyed you. How much perfidy 20  
 Would have died with you, and how much distress  
 Would I have dodged? There is some happiness  
 In chiding heedless men for favours done.  
 This pleasure I'll enjoy – the only one  
 I'll gain from you. Bidden to turn around  
 Your untried craft to Colchis, there you found  
 My happy realm. I was your bride as she  
 Is here your bride; the man who fathered me  
 Is rich, as is her father (he whose realm  
 Is Corinth-of-Two-Seas). My father's helm 30  
 Is snowy Scythia on the left coast  
 Of Pontus. Father greets the Grecian host,  
 Assigning them his painted beds. Then I  
 Saw and began to know you: this was my  
 First step to ruin. That one look became  
 My downfall. Nor was it a common flame  
 But like the gods' pine-torch; your beauty haled  
 Me to my doom; through your eyes my eyes failed.  
 You noticed – who can hide her love? That heat  
 Betrays itself. Meanwhile you must compete 40  
 To tame wild bulls with a plough they've never known.  
 Mars owned them – fierce not with their horns alone,  
 They breathed out cruel flames. Bronze were their feet,  
 Their nostrils, too, and blackened by the heat  
 Of their own breath. There was one more command –  
 To scatter seeds across the ample land,  
 Fated to bring forth men who were to fight  
 You with the spears born of them. Such a blight  
 For their own yeoman! By some artifice  
 To hoodwink eyes unused to slumber – this 50  
 Was your last labour. This was the decree  
 Of Aeëtes. You all rose mournfully.  
 From the high board the couches, purple-spread,  
 Were taken off. How far then from your head  
 Was Creusa's dowry and your bride-to-be  
 And mighty Creon! In anxiety  
 You left; with moistened eyes I watched you go  
 And whispered, "Farewell" I was tortured so  
 That all night long I wept, in my mind's eye  
 Bulls, dread crop, watchful serpent. There was I, 60  
 Beset by love and fear: fear amplified  
 My love. When morning came, to my bedside  
 Came my dear sister, who discovered me  
 Face-down, hair mussed, all tears. For remedy  
 She begged the Minyae. Help at my hand

Young Jason won. There is some wooded land,  
 Black with oak-leaves and pines and so close-knit  
 That the sun's rays can scarcely enter it.  
 There is a shrine – at least there used to be –  
 Raised to Diana, a gold effigy 70  
 Built by an alien hand. Do you recall  
 The place? Perhaps you have forgotten all  
 You've seen, along with me! Thither we came.  
 The first to speak, you uttered, to your shame:  
 "Fortune has given you the right to choose,  
 Or not, to rescue me. Whether I lose my life  
 Depends on you. If you enjoy  
 The power, to be able to destroy  
 Someone is quite enough, but saving me  
 Brings greater fame. By my adversity, 80  
 Which you may modify, by your line, by  
 Your all-seeing grandfather in the sky,  
 Three-fold Diana's holy mysteries  
 And all the gods in your ancestry – if these  
 Exist – on me and mine show clemency,  
 O maid. Be kind and for eternity  
 Make me you own. If you should not disdain  
 Pelasgian suitors – yet how could I gain  
 The gods' support? – my soul shall disappear  
 Into thin air before any bride comes here 90  
 But you! O ward of wedlock, witness be,  
 Juno, and you, the chaste divinity  
 Of this smooth shrine. These words – how very few  
 Will you find here! – and the right hand which you  
 Clapsed tight in mine inspired a simple maid.  
 Tears, too, I saw – in this deceit they played  
 A part. How quickly was I caught! Unscarred,  
 You yoked the bronze bulls and the ploughed the hard  
 Terrain, as you were bid. With poisoned teeth  
 The fields were seeded and from underneath 100  
 The soil an armoured troop sprang up, while I,  
 Who had supplied you with the herbs, sat by,  
 With ashen face. I saw the wondrous sight  
 Of earthborn brothers drawing arms to fight  
 Each other. Then behold! a-bristling  
 With rattling scales, its belly slithering  
 Along the ground, the sleepless guard is seen.  
 Where was your dowry then? Where was your queen  
 And consort? Where the Isthmus of two seas?  
 Now I was guilty of barbarities, 110  
 It seems, a hostile pauper, yet those eyes

Of flame I drugged and granted you the prize –  
 The golden fleece. Yes, by my treachery  
 I duped my father, and my dynasty  
 And native land I left. And what's my pay?  
 Exile! My innocence is now the prey  
 Of a pirate from elsewhere, and I forsook  
 Dear mother, darling sister; yet I took  
 You, brother, with me! Now in this one place  
 My pen fails. My bold deed I cannot face 120  
 With words. No, I should have been torn apart  
 Along with you. And yet with fearless heart –  
 For what then could I fear? – I put to sea,  
 No longer guiltless. Where is sanctity?  
 Where are the gods? The penance we are due  
 Let's leave to Neptune – for your treachery you,  
 I for my trust. Would we had both been smashed  
 By the Symplegades, our bones all mashed  
 Together, or would that we had been doomed 130  
 By ravenous Scylla, drowned and then consumed  
 By dogs – she's fit to visit misery  
 On ingrates; she who vomits forth the sea  
 And sucks her back – would she have drowned us, too,  
 In the Trinacrian Sea. Unharm'd, though, you  
 Return, a victor, to your native Greece  
 And Thessaly. You place the golden fleece  
 Before your father's gods. Why should I broach  
 Pelias' daughters who deserved reproach  
 Through piety, and how a maiden act  
 Lopped off their father's limbs? Others detract 140  
 But you should praise me – you who constrained me  
 To crime so often. Such audacity  
 You had – words fail my righteous wrath! – to say,  
 "Leave my ancestral home!" I went away  
 With our two sons, still loving you. Then I  
 Suddenly heard a wedding-song nearby,  
 Saw glowing torches, heard the pipers' strain  
 (To you a wedding-song, to me a bane  
 Worse than a funeral trump). In fear, I thought  
 No-one could be so cruel, yet it brought 150  
 A dread into my heart. The rushing crowd  
 Repeated, "Hymen!" and as it grew loud,  
 I hated it the more. Turning away,  
 My slaves in secret wept. Who could convey  
 Freely such dreadful news? I would know more  
 Of what it was, but I was woebegone  
 As though I really knew. There stood before



The outer threshold of the double door  
 Our younger son (perhaps agog to see  
 Or else by accident) and said to me, 160  
 “Come hither, mother; there’s a cavalcade  
 And Father leads it, looking like he’s made  
 Of gold, and drives a team of steeds!” When he  
 Said this, I tore my clothing instantly  
 And beat my breast and I could not prevent  
 My nails from clawing at my cheeks. Intent  
 On rushing through their midst and from my hair  
 Tearing the laurels, I could scarcely bear  
 Not to cry out, my locks all disarrayed,  
 “He’s mine!” and grasp you. O my brother’s shade, 170  
 Receive your rites. Hurt father, Colchians, too,  
 Whom I forsook, rejoice, each one of you!  
 I’m lost, my kingdom, country, royal hall,  
 All gone, o husband, who have been my all!  
 Serpents and vicious bulls I could defeat –  
 One man alone I could not; I who beat  
 Back fierce fires with my herbs could not evade  
 My passion’s flames. The agents of my trade –  
 My chants, herbs, skills – have all abandoned me;  
 The rites I make to potent Hecate 180  
 And my goddess won’t aid me. No delight  
 May I take in the day; each bitter night  
 Brings me no sleep; sweet slumber will not come  
 To me in my distress; I who benumb  
 The dragon can’t benumb myself. There’s none  
 That all my efforts cannot cure but one.  
 A whore embrace him whom I set free –  
 The fruits of all my labour. It could be  
 That, while you boast to your dim wife and say  
 Things apt for her so-biased ears, you may 190  
 Invent new sins against me. Let her smile,  
 Enjoying all these sins, and lie meanwhile  
 Aloft on Tyrian purple – tears shall fall,  
 The flames consuming her surpassing all  
 My own! While I have sword, fire, poison, no  
 Foe of Medea shall unpunished go!  
 But should your iron heart attend my plea,  
 Then hear my words (too humbling for me)!  
 As you have often been my suppliant,  
 Now I am yours, nor am I hesitant 200  
 To grovel at your feet. If your regard  
 Of me is cheap, respect our sons, for hard  
 Will be their stepmother. They’re so like you

That they affect me deeply and bedew  
 My eyes with tears. By our ancestral beam  
 I beg you, by the gods, by the esteem  
 You owe me, by our sons – our bond – take me  
 Back to the couch I left dementedly;  
 Respect your oath, aid me! It's not my will  
 That you should tackle bulls and men nor still 210  
 Benumb the dragon; you I seek, whom I  
 Have earned, who gave yourself to me, and by  
 Whom I became a mother. You demand,  
 "Where is the dowry?" Well, upon the land  
 I counted it, where you were forced to plough  
 Before you could remove the fleece. Well, now  
 That deep-flocked golden ram's my legacy –  
 Should I request it, you'll deny it me.  
 Now you are safe and sound, it's also you;  
 My legacy's your Grecian army, too! 220  
 Compare this to Sisyphus' prosperity!  
 Because you have your bride's patrimony,  
 Because you live, because your thanklessness  
 Is able to be seen, you must confess  
 You owe me. Instantly I'll – but why state  
 The penance now? Great menaces gestate  
 Within my wrath. I may repent. I do  
 Repent condoning such a wretch as you.  
 Let's leave it to the god who wrecks my soul.  
 My mind is working to an ominous goal! 230

### XIII

#### LAODAMIA TO PROTESILAUS

Greetings and health to you, lord, I convey.  
 The winds hold you in Aulis, so they say.  
 Where was this wind when you abandoned me?  
 Your oars should then have stood still in the sea.  
 The straits should then have raged – more time to plant  
 More kisses and to be your suppliant.  
 I'd much to say. You were snatched hence, but I  
 Did not desire the wind that called on high  
 Upon your sails – oh no, it was your crew.  
 Sailors it suits, not lovers. This from you 10  
 And your embrace I'm severed. Words half-spoken

Are left behind; I hardly said a broken  
 "Farewell!" The North Wind swooped down and stretched tight  
 Your sails – and now you were far from my sight.  
 I joyed to watch you while I could, and still  
 When I saw you no more I had my fill  
 Of looking on your sails. Then I, bereft  
 Of all but sea, saw that the light, too, left.  
 The night arose about me and then, wan  
 And stumbling, they say, I fell upon 20  
 The ground. With difficulty Iphiclus,  
 Your father, and my own, old Acastus,  
 And my sad mother could rekindle me  
 With ice-cold water; in their loyalty  
 They ministered to me – to no avail.  
 How shameful in my misery to fail  
 To own the right to die! When consciousness  
 Returned to me, likewise did my distress.  
 My wifely love tore at my constancy.  
 I did not care to groom my locks or be 30  
 Dressed all in gold. I wander all about,  
 A mad Bacchant. Our matrons come and shout:  
 "Put on your royal robes!" Should I, then, don  
 Clothes dyed in purple while my lord is gone  
 To fight the Trojans? Should I titivate  
 My hair while he's taxed with a helmet's weight?  
 Shall I wear new apparel while my man  
 Is wearing heavy armour? As I can  
 They'll say I imitate your drudgery  
 In mean attire. I'll live in misery 40  
 While this war lasts. O Paris, so star-crossed,  
 A handsome man but at your loved ones' cost,  
 Be such an idle foe as you have been  
 A faithless guest. O would that you had seen  
 The fault in Helen's face or else that she  
 Took no delight in yours! You overly  
 Grieve, Menelaus, for that theft. Alas,  
 For your revenge what pain shall come to pass!  
 Divinities, eradicate, I pray,  
 This sinister omen that my man now may 50  
 Hang up his arms to Joe the Saviour!  
 I fear, though, every time this wretched war  
 Comes to my mind; my tears like melting snow  
 Gush forth. There are some names that frighten so  
 Merely be hearing them pronounced – Ide,  
 Troy, Tenedos, Simois, Xanthus. He,  
 That stranger, had he not enjoyed the skill

To defend himself, would not have caused us ill  
 Through theft – he knew the strength that he possessed. 60  
 Laden with gold, in Phrygian riches dressed,  
 He came, they say, with countless ships and men  
 Who deal in war – how many were there then  
 Attending him? By all this, I suppose,  
 Were you defeated, Helen. Thus our woes  
 Began. Beware, if you should cherish me,  
 Of Hector, whosoever he may be  
 And keep that name forever in your heart.  
 When you've avoided him, then you may start  
 To shun yet more; think many Hectors there  
 Are fighting, say, "My lady said 'Beware'", 70  
 When arming for the fight. If Troy should yield,  
 You'll be unblemished. So into the field  
 Let Menelaus go and fight the foe  
 And seek his wife among them. Your case, though,  
 Is not the same. Fight only to remain  
 Alive. And to your faithful wife again  
 Return. Dardanidae, spare one, I pray,  
 Of all your foes lest my blood ebb away  
 Out of that frame! To fight with naked blade  
 Does not befit him nor, quite unafraid, 80  
 To face the foe; he loves more mightily  
 Than he can fight. So let hostility  
 Be others' care, but let him love! But now  
 That I'd have called him back I will allow.  
 My spirit strove, my tongue, though, rooted stood  
 In fear of evil auspice. When you would  
 Have left home, bound for Troy, ominously  
 You stumbled at the door, and inwardly  
 I said, though with a groan, "May this, I pray,  
 Predict your coming back!" Again, today 90  
 I tell you lest great ardour in the fight  
 Take you, make sure my fears flee from my sight  
 Unto the winds! There is a prophecy  
 That he who first hits Trojan soil shall be  
 Ordained for death. Unhappy she who'll weep  
 For her slain lord! I pray the gods to keep  
 You less than keen. Your ship must not be first  
 But last of all those thousand ships to burst  
 Into the wearied sea! I warn you, too,  
 To be the last to leave the ship, for you 100  
 Do not haste to your father's land. With sail  
 And oar, when you come back, move fast, but fail  
 To hurry on your shore! Come speedily,

Whetehr the sun is hidden or we see  
 Him rise up high; by night is better, though,  
 For girls with a supporting arm below  
 Their necks welcome the night. In my cold bed  
 False dreams invade my sleep, for I am fed  
 False joys instead of true. Why are you pale  
 In all those dreams? Why do you always rail? 110  
 I shake off sleep and to the shades of night  
 I pray. No altar lacks a smoky light  
 In Thessaly for me. Incense I spill –  
 And tears – the flame then brightens, as it will  
 When wine-sprayed. When will I, on your return,  
 Embrace you in my eager arms and burn  
 In wantoning delight When shall it be  
 That, lying with me, you shall tell to me  
 Your warring exploits? Though they'll surely please  
 My heart, yet many kisses will you seize 120  
 And give back as you speak. A fair narration  
 Is always stopped by such procrastination;  
 Such sweet delay will urge the tongue again  
 To speak. But when I think of Troy, why, then  
 I think, too, of the wind and of the sea,  
 Fair hope thus vanquished by timidity.  
 I dare to hope when tempests say you nay,  
 And yet you plan departure anyway.  
 Who'd wish to sail back home when winds forestall?  
 Yet you leave home in spite of any squall! 130  
 Neptune himself precludes you from his sphere!  
 Where are you rushing? Turn around and hear  
 The adverse winds. No chance fortuity  
 Delays you but a god. A debauchee,  
 And nothing else, is what you will pursue  
 In this great war. While it's allowed to you,  
 Turn back those ships! Yet do I call you home?  
 That's ominous! Across the peaceful foam  
 Let gentle breezes blow! I envy so  
 The spouses of the Trojan men, who, though 140  
 They weep their dead, the foe not far away,  
 Yet with their very hands will they array  
 Their valiant husbands, simultaneously  
 Taking their kisses – something that will be  
 A service sweet to both – and she will guide  
 Him out and bid him come back to her side  
 And say: "Return your arms to Jupiter!"  
 With these commands in mind, he'll minister  
 To caution in the war, his family

Held in respect. When he returns, then she 150  
 Will loose his shield and helmet and embrace  
 His weary body. I, however, face  
 Uncertainty and am compelled to fear  
 Each possibility. While far from here  
 You fight, I keep a waxen effigy  
 Of you to which I whisper lovingly  
 While clasping it. The effigy, I swear,  
 Is more than it appears. If you should care  
 To add a voice, it's you! I hold it tight  
 After I've gazed on it, just as I might 160  
 My husband and, as though it may reply,  
 I make complaint to it. I promise, by  
 Your coming home, yourself, a god to me,  
 The torches both of our confederacy  
 And wedding that, whenever you may call,  
 I'll be there whether you, alas, should fall  
 Or live. A brief instruction finally:  
 Care for yourself if you have care for me.

#### XIV

#### HYPERMNESTRA TO LYNCEUS

To the one brother left of such a horde  
 I write – the rest lie slaughtered by the sword,  
 Their brides' victims. I'm in captivity  
 Within the house. The cause? Fidelity!  
 I spurned to cut your throat – a crime, they say.  
 If I had done it, praise would come my way.  
 Better to be accused than satisfy  
 My father; I do not regret that I  
 Am free of murder's guilt; Father may burn  
 Me with the marriage-flame I did not spurn, 10  
 Or spurn the sword he falsely gave to me  
 Against my throat that by the butchery  
 My husband did not suffer I may die,  
 But my doomed lips will never utter "I  
 Repent!" That woman has no faithfulness  
 If she repents it. Rather sorriness  
 Should for their murders torture Danaus  
 And his fierce sisters; the iniquitous  
 Are wont to suffer so. Thoughts of that night

Profaned with blood beset my heart with fright; 20  
 My right hand shakes; she who you think could slay  
 Her husband dares not even to essay  
 To write of others' murders! Even so  
 I will. Twilight approached, the final glow  
 Of day merged into night, when we were led  
 In great Pelasgus' halls, we who were bred  
 Of Inachus. Aegyptus welcomed there  
 His daughters-in-law, all armed, while everywhere  
 Shone lamps of gold. On the loath altar-flame  
 Incense was spread. Then from the people came 30  
 "Hymen!" The god rejected it; Juno,  
 His mate, deserted her own city. Lo,  
 Amidst their comrades' shouting, drunk and crowned  
 With fresh flowers, into the chambers they all bound  
 (Not chambers! Tombs!) and on their beds recline –  
 Their funeral beds – then, full of food and wine,  
 They sleep. Repose now, deep and free of care,  
 Took Argos. Then around me everywhere  
 I heard the dying groan, it seemed to me;  
 I heard indeed, and my anxiety 40  
 Was justified. Of blood I now was drained;  
 No warmth in body or in mind remained;  
 On my new couch, chilly with cold, I lay.  
 As slender stalks of grain are made to sway  
 By gentle zephyrs, as a frigid breeze  
 Shakes poplar leaves, like these - and more than these –  
 I trembled. Sleep that was wine-generated  
 Now held you. My fear was eradicated  
 By a cruel father's rules. I rose, my blade  
 Grasped in my trembling hand. I won't be swayed 50  
 By falsehood – three times did I raise it high,  
 Thrice dropped it. Then – I must not tell a lie! –  
 I brought up to your throat my father's sword,  
 But fear and duty were of one accord –  
 I could not do that evil deed. My hand  
 Stayed chaste, repudiating his command.  
 I tore my purple robes, my tresses, too,  
 And said these brief words: "Hypermnestra, you  
 Have such a savage father. His decree  
 Now execute and let your husband be 60  
 With all his brothers! I am young and mild,  
 A maid, with gentle hands unfit for wild  
 Weapons. But while he lies there, go and do  
 As your brave sisters did! It's surely true  
 That they have killed them all! If I could shed

A human's blood, my hand would now be red  
 With my own. For seizing their own uncle's land  
 They have deserved this end. A penniless band,  
 With our old penniless father far and wide  
 We roam. If they deservedly have died. 70  
 What have *we* done? What is my felony?  
 What have the tools of war to do with me?  
 The wool and distaff suit me more." I said  
 These words and, while lamenting, tears I shed  
 Which fell upon you. While you groped for me,  
 Moving sleep-heavy arms, I practically  
 Wounded your hand. I drove your sleep away,  
 Fearing your father and the light of day,  
 His servants, too, with these words: "Lynceus, rise,  
 The one surviving brother, for your eyes 80  
 Will close forever if you should delay!"  
 You rise in fright; sleep's dullness flies away.  
 Within my timid hand a blade you see;  
 You ask the cause: "While night allows it, flee,"  
 I say. You do, while I myself delay.  
 At dawn, the brothers, slaughtered where they lay,  
 Danaus counted. You alone weren't there  
 To make the crime complete. He scarce could bear  
 The loss of one son's death – there should be more  
 Bloodshed, he wailed - - then, picked up from the floor 90  
 Before my father's feet, dragged by the hair –  
 The payment for the piety I bear! –  
 I'm gaoled. It's clear that Juno's wrath has stayed  
 Ever since a heifer from a mortal maid  
 Was changed, becoming a goddess – penalty  
 Enough that such a tender girl could be  
 A lowing beast, and, now a beauty, could  
 Not yet retain Jove's love. Now there she stood,  
 A new-born cow, beside her father's brook  
 And in those very waters took a look 100  
 At her own horns. Attempting to bewail  
 Her plight, she lowed instead. It made her quail –  
 That form, that sound! Why rage, unhappy maid?  
 Why gaze at yourself in the water's shade?  
 Why count your feet (now four)? You're great Jove's mate,  
 His sister's nemesis. You mitigate  
 Your raging appetite with greenery,  
 You drink from fountains, stupefied to see  
 Your shape, afraid those arms will cause you pain  
 Which now you bear. Your former wealth will gain 110  
 Even Jove's love, it seemed, yet now you lie



Naked upon the naked earth. You fly  
 Over the sea, the lands, the streams which you  
 Are sprung from, and the all three allow you through  
 Their realms. Why do you fly? Why do you run  
 Across broad oceans? You can never shun  
 Your own face. Whither haste? The selfsame thing  
 You follow *and* avoid. You're shepherding  
 Yourself while *being* shepherded. The Nile,  
 Flowing through seven harbour-mouths, meanwhile 120  
 Strips from the maddened cow the qualities  
 Of mistresses. Why do I speak of these  
 Things from the past old authors told to me?  
 My own years give me cause for misery:  
 Father and Uncle are at war. Away  
 From realm and home I'm sent, an émigré  
 In distant lands. A tiny part survives  
 Of all those brothers. I weep for the lives  
 That have been lost, their wives, too, for they're dead –  
 I've lost them all. So let the tears I shed 130  
 Be *for* them all! Because you are alive,  
 They punish me. Will guiltiness survive  
 When I'm accused of praise and sadly fall,  
 One brother still alive, the last of all  
 My sisters? Lynceus, if you have a care  
 For your kind sister and you are aware  
 Of what you owe me for my gift, help me  
 Or give me up to death and secretly  
 Commit my body to the funeral heap;  
 Inter my bones as faithfully you weep, 140  
 And these concise words on my grave impress:  
 "Hypermnestra, exiled for her piousness,  
 Rescued her brother from the death that she  
 Herself sustained." To write more would please me:  
 My hand, though, sinks beneath the weighty chain  
 And fear itself has caused my strength to wane.

## XV

### SAPPHO TO PHAON

Viewing my eager words, would you have been  
 Aware at once of whose thoughts you had seen –  
 Or, had you not below read Sappho's name,

Would you still wonder whence these brief words came?  
 You ask me why in elegiac fashion  
 I write when lyric is an apter passion  
 For me? My love must sound in tearfulness:  
 That mode befits it. No lyre can express  
 My tears. I burn like fertile fields ablaze  
 In harvest as the untamed East Winds raise 10  
 That heat. You live in Aetna, so remote,  
 Whose heat's no less than mine is. Not a note  
 Can I devise to suit the tuneful lyre!  
 Such work needs calm. No charm can I acquire  
 From Pyrrha's and Methymna's girls or all  
 The maidens of Lesbos, for now they pall –  
 Anactorie and Cydro, although she  
 Is gorgeous; Atthis no more pleases me,  
 No do a hundred others whom I here  
 Once purely loved; wretch, you alone are dear 20  
 To me as once so many maids have been.  
 Your face is comely and your years still green –  
 Your beauty ambushed me! Phoebus you'll be  
 With lyre and quiver; but if we should see  
 Horns on your head, you're Bacchus! In his heart  
 He loved the Gnosian maid, while for his part  
 Phoebus adored Daphne – but neither maid  
 Knew lyric verse. My sweetest songs were played  
 Through Pegasus's daughters. Now my name  
 Is sung throughout the world. No greater fame 30  
 Has Alcaeus, who shares my aptitude  
 And land, although his verses are imbued  
 With loftier words. If charm's denied to me  
 By cruel nature, weigh my faculty  
 For song instead. Though I am small, my name  
 Fills every land; the vastness of my fame  
 Is my true measure. I'm not fair, it's true,  
 Yet Perseus loved Andromeda, whose hue  
 Was African. White doves oft copulate  
 With different-coloured birds; black turtles mate 40  
 With green parrots. If no maid may procure  
 You by her beauty, you'll have none. Yet, sure,  
 I read my songs to you and then I seemed  
 Pretty enough: my speaking voice you deemed  
 The only one with true grace. I recall  
 I sang to you – lovers remember all –  
 You kissed me as I sang; those kisses, too,  
 You praised: in every way I gladdened you  
 But in the act of love especially;

My playfulness you more than commonly 50  
 Adored, the quick embrace, the timely jest  
 And the deep languor when we took our rest  
 After our mingled joys. Now Sicily  
 Sends you new prey. What is Lesbos to me?  
 I want to be Sicilian. Therefore  
 Send me my wanderer back home from your  
 Domains, Nicaean women young and old:  
 Don't let that bland tongue dupe you. What he told  
 Me once he now tells you. Venus, you, too,  
 Who haunt Sicanian mountains – it's to you 60  
 That I belong – protect your bard, I pray,  
 Goddess! Can heavy fate maintain the way  
 It first began, proceeding bitterly  
 Upon the same course? When I was twice three,  
 My father's bones drank up his daughter's tears  
 Where I plucked them – he lived for too few years –  
 My unenlightened brother was aflame  
 For a whore and suffered loss and noisome shame;  
 Made poor, he plied the blue seas while he sought  
 By evil means the wealth that he had bought 70  
 Likewise. He hates me since in loyalty  
 I urged him well. This my sincerity  
 And candour brought me. I bear added stress  
 As Cleis' mother, lest such weariness  
 Seem insufficient. You're the very last  
 Cause for my grievances. My craft sticks fast  
 In adverse winds. No precious jewels rest  
 Upon my hands, my hair's unkempt; I'm dressed  
 In mean attire, no gold adorns my hair  
 Which lacks Arabian spice. Why should I care 80  
 To dress for anyone, whom should I try  
 To please? The only person for whom I  
 Would deck myself is gone! Soft is my heart  
 And vulnerable to Cupid's flimsy dart.  
 There's always cause for me to love – maybe  
 This was decreed at my nativity  
 By the Fates or my desires became my bent  
 And I was given a soft temperament  
 By my Thalia, mistress of my art.  
 What wonder if young men capture my heart 90  
 As they stir those off their own sex? My fear,  
 Aurora, was you'd take him for your dear  
 In place of Cephalus and, but that he,  
 Your first prey, holds you yet, you certainly  
 Would so have done! If Phoebe were to view

That man – and she sees all – she'd order you,  
 Phaon, to sleep still. In her ivory car  
 Would Venus have borne you into the far  
 Heavens but that she knows you could allure  
 Even Mars. Nor youth nor boy – an age that's sure 100  
 To please – a beauty and celebrity  
 Of your own time, sail hither now to me  
 And my embrace, fair one! Now you I sue –  
 Don't love me but allow me to love you.  
 My tears like dew spring from me as I write;  
 See how upon the page there's many a blight!  
 Resolved to go, you could more amiably  
 Have left – you might at least have said to me:  
 "My Lesbian girl, farewell." You did not take  
 My kisses and my tears with you; the ache 110  
 I'd bear I did not fear. Your injury  
 Is all I'm left; no memory of me  
 Do you possess. Behests I gave you none,  
 Nor would I have except that, when I'm gone,  
 Not to forget me. By our love – o may  
 That love be never very far away! –  
 And by the Muses, too, I testify,  
 When someone said, "Your joys all from you fly",  
 It was an age before my tears could flow  
 Or I could speak, my heart restricted so 120  
 With icy chill. Grief found itself, then I  
 Was not ashamed to beat my breast and cry  
 Out loud my misery and tear my hair,  
 Just as a mother would with loving care  
 Carry her son's corpse to the funeral heap.  
 My brother Charaxus joys to see me weep,  
 Goes back and forth before me and, that he  
 May make my grief seem base, says, "Why does she  
 Lament? Her daughter lives!" Quite different  
 Are love and baseness. Now my robe I rent 130  
 And bore my breast in sight of all that pack.  
 You're all my care; my dreams still bring you back,  
 Dreams more effulgent than the beauteous day.  
 I find you there, though you are far away;  
 Yet sleep affords too little ecstasy.  
 Often your arms against my neck I see,  
 My arms against *your* neck. I recognize  
 The kisses from your tongue – these sweet supplies  
 I bandy with my own. I fondle you  
 Meanwhile and utter words that seem quite true; 140  
 My lips act for my senses. This takes place

(I blush to tell it) and, to my disgrace,  
 I'm wet. At dawn, that sleep has been so brief  
 I grieve, Then, as if they could bring relief,  
 I seek caves in the wood – they have a share  
 In my sweet secret. Mindless, I fly there  
 Like someone lusting for hostility,  
 Hair hanging loose. The rugged caves I see –  
 Just like Mygdonian marble to my eye –  
 I see the wood where often we would lie, 150  
 Shaded by many leaves – not to be found  
 Is my – and the wood's – master. But mean ground  
 Is all there is. He was its legacy.  
 I saw the green turf so well-known to me,  
 Curved by our weight; I touched where you had lain;  
 The place I loved before now bears the stain  
 Of tears. The boughs have shed their greenery  
 And seem to weep. In deepest misery  
 Only the Daulian bird sang pitifully  
 For Itys, having acted vengefully 160  
 And cruelly against her son. Sappho  
 Likewise sings of desertion's tragic woe –  
 That's all. All else is silent as midnight.  
 There is a sacred fountain shining bright,  
 Clearer than any glass – many have said  
 A spirit lives therein – and there is spread  
 Above the boughs a watery lotus-tree,  
 A grove all in itself, while one may see  
 A tender turf. Weary and weeping, I  
 Lay down upon it, where I saw close by 170  
 A naiad. "Since with unrequited fire  
 You burn, " she said, "the place you should desire  
 Is Ambracia. On that large expanse of sea  
 Phoebus looks down (this its community  
 Calls Actian-Leucadian). Mad with love  
 For Pyrrha, Deucalion dropped from high above,  
 Unharm'd, into the sea. Without delay  
 His passion for his lover turned away  
 And from its fires he was liberated.  
 This is the way that place is legislated. 180  
 Now go to that high cliff and have no dread  
 To leap down from that rock!" All this she said,  
 Then ceased. I rose, still weeping in dismay.  
 Nymph, I will go and seek that rock. Thus may  
 My ardour cast out fear. My present state  
 Will be improved! Come, breeze, and take my weight  
 (No heavy burden)! Tender love, bear me

Beneath your wings lest I bring to the sea  
 Dishonour for my death! The harp we share  
 I'll then give to Apollo. It shall bear 190  
 Two lines: SAPPHO THE BARD INDEBTEDLY,  
 PHOEBUS, HAS BROUGHT YOU THIS – IT SUITS BOTH ME  
 AND YOU. But why send me to Actium  
 In misery when you can surely come  
 Back here? You'll bring to me more benefit  
 Than will the Leucadian waves, a Phoebus fit  
 For me in grace and kindness. You who are  
 Harder than rocks and any sea by far,  
 Could you, if I die, bear the infamy  
 Of killing me? Much better would it be 200  
 To join my breast with yours than to be thrown  
 Headlong onto the rocks! You used to own  
 You loved that bosom, often calling me  
 Genius. Would I now had the faculty  
 Of eloquence! My grief impedes my skill.  
 My earlier strength to song conforms but ill.  
 My instrument by grief lies quieted.  
 Women of sea-girt Lesbos, those to wed  
 And those already married, you whose name  
 My lyre has glorified, whom, to my shame, 210  
 I've loved, cease coming here to hear me play!  
 All that you liked before was swept away  
 By Phaon. Sadly did I nearly pen  
 "My Phaon!" See that he comes back again  
 That I, your bard, may come back, too. Such force  
 He gave my genius, but that selfsame source  
 Snatched it away. Does he attend my plea?  
 Or is his callous heart moved? Or is he  
 Still cold, the zephyrs carrying away  
 My idly-falling words? I would that they 230  
 Blew back your ships; that deed, if you were wise,  
 Sluggard, would be becoming in your eyes.  
 If you return and on your stern prepare  
 Your votive gift, why do you tear  
 My heart with your delay? Set sail today!  
 For him she loves sea-borne Venus makes way.  
 Do but set sail; the wind will give you speed.  
 Upon the stern Cupid himself will lead  
 The way; with tender hand he'll spread and furl  
 The sail. But if you'd rather leave your girl – 240  
 Unworthy to be jilted, nonetheless,  
 As you must find – at least you should address  
 Me in a cruel letter that I may

Seek out my fate in the Leucadian bay.

XVI

PARIS TO HELEN

The son of Priam begs prosperity,  
Helen, which rests on your gratuity  
Alone. Shall I speak, or need I declare  
A flame well-known, and is the love I bear  
More than I'd wish? I would it were concealed  
Until I'm joyful with my fears all healed.  
But I dissemble badly; for who might  
Conceal a fire which by its very light  
Betrays itself? Shall I to certainty  
Add words? – I burn! Thus do you hear from me 10  
The dictates of my heart. I pray condone  
My words nor read the rest with face of stone  
But one that suits your charm. Long now content,  
I've hoped, since you welcomed the words I sent,  
That you would welcome me. Venus's will  
I hope is carried out and that she still  
Means you for me (for she persuaded me  
To make this journey); a divinity  
Has sent me hither – lest you unaware 20  
Should sin – no trifling godhead has my care  
In mind. It's no mean prize, and yet my due,  
That I require. Venus has promised you  
To me. Through dangerous and endless sea  
On Pherecles's ship She guided me.  
She favoured me with kind winds – she's created  
Out of the sea, which thus is dominated  
By her. May she still comfort me as she  
Becalmed the sea and bring to sanctuary  
My prayers. It was not here I found that flame –  
I brought it hither: that is why I came 30  
So far – no random trek nor gloomy gale  
Drives us; to Taenaris we now make sail.  
My vessels do not carry merchandise –  
May the gods keep the goods I have! My eyes  
Don't long to see the Grecian towns – they are  
Less wealthy than by own domains by far.  
It's you I seek, whom Venus for my own

Has promised; for, before you were yet known  
 To me, I chose you and, before my eyes  
 Looked on you, still could I conceptualize 40  
 Your features. Hearsay first gave me a scar.  
 That I was struck by arrows from afar  
 Is no surprise with such a potent bow.  
 Now I'm in love. The fates decreed it so.  
 Lest you deny this, hear the truth I say.  
 In Mother's womb a long time did I stay,  
 Weighing her down. A mighty brand of flame  
 She dreamt shot from that womb. She rose and came  
 In fright to tell old Priam of the sight;  
 He told the seers – that Troy would be alight 50  
 With Paris' flame one sang. That flame in me  
 Now burns my heart. I have a dignity  
 Shown by my agile spirit and my face,  
 Though I seemed merely common. There's a place  
 You'll find within tree-covered Ida's vales  
 Where pine and ilex far from trodden trails  
 Stand tall, and in that place no placid flocks  
 Of sheep, no nanny-goats that love the rocks,  
 No slow-poke, wide-mouthed cows graze; on a tree  
 I leaned while looking out upon the sea 60  
 And Troy's high roofs and walls – it seemed the ground  
 With footfalls shook – my words have scarce the sound  
 Of truth and yet the truth I'll speak – right there  
 I saw, with his swift wings beating the air,  
 The grandchild of great Atlas and his mate,  
 Pleione – may it be just to relate  
 What it was just for me to see! – a rod  
 Of gold clasped in the fingers of the god;  
 As well did Venus, Juno and Pallas  
 Advance their tender feet upon the grass. 70  
 I did not speak a word: a chilly dread  
 Raised up my hair. The winged herald said:  
 "Put off your fear; you are the referee  
 Of beauty; and the goddess' rivalry.  
 Decide which is the victor!" Then, lest I  
 Refuse him, in the name of Jove on high  
 He ordered me and flew immediately  
 Towards the stars. Relieved, I suddenly  
 Grew bold, now unafraid to turn my face  
 And look at each of them. All had the grace 80  
 To win the prize and I, as referee,  
 Complained that only one the victory  
 Must gain. One pleased me more already, though –



You'll know that it was she who makes love grow.  
 They were all keen to win, each desperate  
 To sway me with great gifts. Jupiter's mate  
 Owed loudly power, Pallas martial might;  
 Dominions or bravery in fight?  
 I wavered. Venus sweetly smiled and said,  
 "Paris, don't let these gifts invade your head -  
 They're full of anxious fear! My gift shall be  
 The gift of love, for Leda's progeny,  
 Fairer than her fair mother, you'll embrace!"  
 With gift and grace approved, she took her place  
 Back in the skies, a victor. Destiny  
 Had turned itself around to prosper me,  
 And therefore, I imagine, I'm perceived  
 By blessed signs as royalty, received  
 Back home with joy after so long, a son  
 Of Priam; of festal days another one  
 Is added now by Troy. As I crave you  
 So maids craved me. Alone you have the due  
 That many longed for! Many wanted me,  
 Not only kings' and chieftains' progeny  
 But nymphs as well. Whom could I more esteem  
 Than Oenone? No-one. After you, could deem  
 One worthier for me. But apathy  
 For all those other maids pervaded me  
 Once I gained hope to win you. In my mind,  
 When waking or in placid sleep I'd find  
 Your face before me. When within my sight  
 How would you be when you gave such delight  
*Unseen?* I burned but with the fire so far  
 Away from me; I could no longer bar  
 Myself from you, and so to seize what's mine  
 I set out on the sea. The Trojan pine  
 Was felled by Phrygian axe, indeed all trees  
 That aptly travel on the billowy seas.  
 High Gargara is raided, while to me  
 Ida gives from her great prosperity  
 A wealth of beams. The sturdy oak is bent  
 To frame swift ships, the curving keel is blent  
 With rib-like sides; sails, yards we add to these;  
 On the curved stern we paint divinities;  
 Portrayed upon the ship that carries me,  
 With little Cupid, stands the guarantee  
 Of our espousal – Venus. When at last  
 The final touch was made, I longed to cast  
 The anchor – yet my parents from my aim

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120

Stall me with pious prayers, while, just the same, 130  
 Cassandra, hair awry, against our yearning  
 Cries out, "Where are you rushing? Such a burning  
 Will you bring back! What great flames you pursue  
 Across the seas are yet unknown to you!"  
 True prophetess! I found those fires she named.  
 My hapless heart with fierce love was inflamed!  
 I leave the port, and favouring winds bring me  
 To you, nymph of Oebalian ancestry.  
 Your husband greeted me – that, too, agreed  
 Upon in counsel by the gods. Indeed 140  
 He showed me everything on Sparta's shore  
 Worth seeing; but I longed for nothing more  
 Than seeing your famed beauty. When I spied  
 Your face, I was struck dumb and deep inside  
 I felt new cares, amazed. Venus possessed  
 Such features, I recall, when I assessed  
 The goddesses. If you, too, had been there,  
 Her conquest would have been in doubt, I swear!  
 Rumour made much of you, your comeliness  
 Known everywhere; no other could possess 150  
 Such beauty in my land and even far  
 Into the east. Believe me that you are  
 More glorious than they all say, and fame  
 Almost maligns your beauty. Venus' claim  
 Falls short of it, for more here do I see  
 Than she had promised; your sublimity  
 Is vanquished by its source. Thus was it apt  
 That Theseus, who had all your features mapped,  
 Burned for you – you were such a worthy prey  
 For such a man, for, in your race's way, 160  
 The women on the shining wrestling-ground  
 Mixed naked with the naked men. I'm bound  
 To praise his theft; I marvel yet that he  
 Ever returned her, for with constancy  
 Should such a prize have been retained. My head  
 I'd have cut off sooner than from my bed  
 You had been dragged. Could I have let you leave  
 At any time? Could anyone believe  
 I'd let you quit my presence? Anyhow,  
 If you *had* to be rendered up, a vow 170  
 I would have taken from you so that we  
 Would not have loved in vain. Your purity  
 I would have broached or taken what I could  
 Without a stain upon your maidenhood.  
 Only give me yourself and you shall know

My constancy; love's flames I shall let go  
 When I'm a funeral flame, for I preferred  
 You to the realm Juno would have conferred  
 On me; while I could hold you close to me,  
 I turned my nose up at the bravery 180  
 Athena offered. No regrets! I still  
 Will deem my choice a good one, and my will  
 Is fixed. You're worth my toil, therefore, I pray,  
 Don't let my hopes to gain you fall away!  
 Above my rank I do not seek to wed,  
 Nor will you be disgraced to share my bed.  
 A Pleiad and a Jupiter you'll see,  
 If you should seek them, in my ancestry,  
 To say naught of those later in my line.  
 My father governs Asia's land, a mine 190  
 Of matchless wealth and measureless in size.  
 Innumerable towns will greet your eyes,  
 And golden dwelling, shrines in harmony  
 With their gods. High walls and lofty towers you'll see  
 In Troy, built by Apollo's lyre. Why tell  
 Of the great hordes of people who there dwell?  
 They scarce can be withheld within that land.  
 The Trojan women in a solid band  
 Shall rush to you. Our halls can scarce contain  
 All Phrygia's maidens. Again and again 200  
 You'll say: "My native land is penniless!"  
 Any house you choose will show our wealthiness.  
 Yet on your Sparta I will pour no scorn;  
 That land is rich to me where you were born.  
 Yet Sparta is a poor land; you should be  
 Maintained in wealth; such a locality  
 Does not befit your beauty. It is right  
 That you are ever decked out and delight  
 In new-found pleasures. When you see how men  
 Within our land are dressed, what will you then 210  
 Think of our women's garb? Give way; do not  
 Disdain a Phrygian husband – you, begot  
 In rural Therapnae. Our ancestry  
 Includes a Phrygian, now fit to be  
 The servingman of gods up in the sky,  
 Mixing their nectar for them when they're dry.  
 Aurora's mate was Phrygian; nonetheless  
 Taken away by her who is goddess  
 Of night. Phrygian, too, was Anchises,  
 Who loved to lie in the proclivities 220  
 Of Ida with the goddess who had bred

The winged .Loves. I think it may be said  
 That you'd not choose your husband over me  
 In form or years. I will not, certainly,  
 Give you a father-in-law who put to flight  
 The sun and turned his horses in their fright  
 From the feast. My father's father did not slay  
 My father-in-law and mark the Cretan bay  
 With his crime; nor did an ancestor of mine  
 Seek fruit in Stygian waves nor ever pine 230  
 For moisture in those waters. What's my gain  
 If you're possessed by someone of that strain  
 And Jove's your father? O such crime! For he  
 Is with you every night unworthily,  
 Enjoying your embrace; and yet your face  
 I see but when at meals we take our place,  
 And even then I suffer. Meals like these  
 Should be encountered by our enemies!  
 My presence as a guest there I deplore  
 When seeing you caressed by such a bore. 240  
 I'll tell you all – I burst with jealousy  
 When he covers your body tenderly  
 With his cloak. When you give him a tender kiss,  
 I hold my cup, to escape seeing this,  
 Before my eyes, and when he holds you tight,  
 Against my will my food, at every bite,  
 Grows large within my mouth. Time and again  
 I groaned out loud, and you could not contain  
 Your laughter, wanton! To suppress the flame  
 I often wished but greater it became, 250  
 Drink adding to the fire, and, lest I see  
 Too much, I turn away, yet instantly  
 You draw my gaze again: I hesitate,  
 I'm pained to see all this, but just as great –  
 No, greater – is the pain to lack the sight  
 Of you. However I'm allowed, I fight  
 To hide my fury – my love nonetheless  
 Still shows. All this is no deceitfulness;  
 You know my wounds! Would that by you alone,  
 And no-one else, these wounds of mine were known! 260  
 How often, when I wept, I turned aside  
 In case that man should ask me why I cried.  
 How often, too, while in my cups, I spoke  
 Of some affair meant solely to invoke  
 My passion through a made-up name. The beau  
 I spoke of was myself, should you not know.  
 Indeed, that I may speak more wilfully

,  
 I never feigned my insobriety.  
 Your breasts were once by your loose robe betrayed,  
 As I recall, before my sight arrayed, 270  
 Quite naked – shining with more brilliancy  
 Than purest snow or milk or Jove when he  
 Embraced your mother. As at these I gaped,  
 The handle of the cup I held escaped  
 My grasp. If you had kissed Hermione,  
 Your child, I stole those kisses joyfully  
 From her own lips. Now I would sing some odd  
 Love-song, while lying back, now I would nod  
 With tactless signs. Aethra and Clymene,  
 The first of your comrades, with flattery 280  
 I dared to flirt with - they said not a thing  
 But that they feared and left me floundering  
 In my entreaties. May the gods devise  
 That you may be a mighty contest's prize,  
 The victor's consort! – as Hippomenes won  
 The child of Schoeneus, whom he could outrun,  
 As Achelous' horns were cracked straight through  
 By savage Hercules when wooing you,  
 Deianeira. I'd have faced toils of that size  
 So that the object of my enterprise 290  
 Might know is she herself. There's nothing more  
 For me to do, fair one, than to implore,  
 To clasp your feet, if you'll allow it me.  
 Twin brothers' present fame and dignity,  
 Worthy to be the wife of Jove unless  
 You had not been his child, I shall progress  
 To the port of Sigeum with you as wife  
 Or on Taenarian soil conclude my life!  
 My Cupid-wound's not light: deep down inside  
 It sticks! My truthful sister prophesied, 300  
 As I recall, that I would be run through  
 With a heavenly dart. Helen, I beg of you,  
 Don't spurn a love ordained by destiny –  
 Your prayers, then, shall the gods treat graciously!  
 I've much to say but so that more we might  
 Discuss together, welcome me at night  
 Onto your couch. Do you feel shame and dread  
 To violate your lawful marriage-bed?  
 Too simple, nay, too rustic! Can it be  
 You think such charm of yours could be guilt-free? 310  
 Alter that charm or be less pitiless;

For modesty has much contentiousness  
 With beauty. Joe and golden Venus savour  
 Such secret sins. Indeed you had the favour  
 Of birth through Jove's own sin. If mastery  
 Of nature's in one's seed, it cannot be  
 That Jove's and Leda's child is chaste. And yet  
 Be chaste when Troy shall hold you if you'll let  
 Your sin be me alone. Let our misdeed  
 Now be the one which shall be remedied 320  
 By marriage just so long as Venus' word  
 Was not in vain! Your husband has inferred,  
 By deed if not by word, there was no bar  
 To theft, for he left home. How shrewd you are  
 Not to have found a better time to see  
 The realms of Crete, Menelaus! "Wife, now be  
 The governor of my affairs and tend  
 On my behalf to our Idaean friend,"  
 He said on going. You ignore, I swear,  
 Your absent husband's orders, for you care 330  
 Not one whit for your guest. Could you suppose  
 That such a heartless man as that one knows  
 All your allure? You're wrong – he can't. If he  
 Though his possessions good, he'd hardly see  
 Then trusted to a foreigner. The course  
 He offers I must take since neither force  
 Of words nor passion moves you – What an ass  
 I'd be, though besting him, if I let pass  
 A chance like that. He's almost brought you me  
 With his own hands; use his simplicity! 340  
 You lie alone all night, and I do too.  
 Let communal delights join me to you.  
 Brighter than any day shall that night be. I'll swear,  
 By any gods you wish, to have a care  
 To heed your rites. Then, if my confidence  
 Is not misplaced, I'll hold a conference  
 With you to urge you here to Troy. If dread  
 And sham beset you that it seems I led  
 You thither, I shall meet this accusation  
 Without you, which shall be an imitation 350  
 Of Theseus and your brothers – no ideal  
 More closely apt than these can make you feel  
 Compliant. Leucippus' twin girls those two  
 Carried away, Theseus abducted you;  
 I'll be the fourth. Our Trojan argosy  
 Is ready, decked with arms and soldiery;  
 Both oars and winds shall speed us on our way.

You'll travel like a queen with mighty sway  
 Through Trojan towns, and people looking on  
 Will think you a new goddess. Cinnamon 360  
 Shall be consumed by flames as on you tread,  
 And sacrificial victims shall fall dead  
 Upon the bloody earth. My family –  
 My siblings and those who created me –  
 Troy's maids, indeed all Troy, shall then supply  
 You with their gifts. Alas! Your future I  
 Have barely touched. You'll benefit much more  
 Than what I write. Nor must you fear that war  
 Should follow from this theft and mighty Greece  
 Should rally. Of earlier thefts has peace 370  
 Been breached by warfare? So don't be afraid.  
 The Thracian shore was free from any raid  
 When Theseus in the name of Aquilo  
 Captured Erechtheus' daughter, and, although  
 The Pagasaeon Jason took that miss  
 Of Phasis in his new craft, yet through this  
 No Colchians attacked Thessalian land.  
 Minos did not call up a Cretan band  
 Despite the fact that Theseus, who stole you,  
 Stole Ariadne also. It is true 380  
 The very fear is greater than the threat,  
 And people shame always to fear. And yet  
 Imagine, if you wish, a mighty war –  
 For I have power and deadly weapons. Nor  
 Is Asia more well-stocked than where you dwell;  
 In manpower she is rich, in steeds as well.  
 And Menelaus will not show more zest  
 Nor be in weapons more greatly assessed  
 Than Paris. While almost a boy, my foes  
 I slew and saved our herds, and thus arose 390  
 My name; young gallants, while almost a boy,  
 I beat in various contests back in Troy  
 (Ilioneus and Deiphobus were two);  
 My dart is fixed in any place that you  
 May choose, lest you should think that in a fray  
 I am not to be feared. Well, could you say  
 Your husband in his youth has done the same?  
 Had he such skill, you think? If you could claim  
 All this, had he a brother Hector? He  
 Alone is to a countless soldiery 400  
 The equal! You don't know my strength, you've seen  
 Nothing of my prowess, still have you been  
 Unschooled in who your bridegroom is. Therefore

Either you'll be resought without a war  
 Or else the Spartan soldiers will submit  
 To mine. I'll not disdain, though – not a bit –  
 To fight for such a wife as you. Discord  
 Is instigated by a great reward.  
 Should all the world contend for you, your name  
 Shall be exalted in eternal fame.  
 Hope boldly with gods' solidarity;  
 Go and exact the promise dauntlessly.

410

## XVII

### HELEN TO PARIS

Now that your letter has profaned my sight,  
 The glory of not writing back seems slight.  
 A stranger, you have dared to violate  
 The true vow of a guest and agitate  
 A wife's allegiance. That's why, certainly,  
 Our port, when you had crossed the windy sea,  
 Received you; nor, though from another land,  
 Were you then from our royal palace banned.  
 Yet you repaid our grace with injury.  
 Did you come here as friend or enemy?  
 I don't doubt my complaint will seem naïve  
 To you, though it is just. Well, give me leave  
 To be naïve while I do not forget  
 My honour and my course of life is yet  
 Free of defect. I sadness I don't feign  
 And sternly crease my brow, there is no stain  
 Upon my character, my life guilt-free,  
 And no-one boasting of adultery  
 With me. I wonder more that you surmise  
 That you'll conclude a fruitful enterprise  
 And gain my bed. Since Theseus employed force  
 To carry me away, should I endorse  
 A second theft I should have been reproved  
 If lured away, but since I was removed  
 By force, I could but protest. All the same,  
 He didn't reap the fruit he sought. I came  
 Home, having suffered merely fright. I strained  
 Against the brute until he had attained  
 A few mere kisses. That was all he seized!

10

20



Such villainy as yours would not be pleased 30  
 With that – help me, you gods. He's not the same  
 As you. His moderation shrank his blame –  
 I was restored intact. It's evident  
 The young man rued his deed. Did he repent  
 That Paris might succeed him, lest my name  
 Be heard no more to propagate my fame?  
 But I'm not angry – who could ever be  
 Riled at a beau? – if your testimony  
 Is unfeigned. For I doubt as well – although  
 I don't lack confidence and surely know 40  
 My beauty – that too quick belief can mar  
 A girl, and that it's said that your words are  
 Not honest. Other women sin. Virtue  
 Is rare in matrons. Why, though, could not you  
 Include me in that rare group? You esteemed  
 My mother to be sinful – thus I seemed  
 A likely sinner, too, but there you err,  
 For in false dawn did her adulterer  
 Cause her to fall. But I, if I should sin,  
 Cannot claim ignorance nor factor in 50  
 An error to obscure the crime, which she  
 Committed well, for her iniquity  
 Was repaid by her beau. What Jupiter  
 Can make me fortunate in where I err?  
 But breeding, blood, a royal house you claim.  
 My house is noted, too, with noble fame.  
 To speak no word of Jove, who had begot  
 Atreus, or all the fame that was the lot  
 Of Pelops and Tyndareus. I became  
 Jove's progeny since as a swan he came 60  
 To Leda, who caressed a spurious bird.  
 Go, let your ancestry be heard  
 In every street, tell of Laomedon  
 And Priam, too: these men I look upon  
 With reverence; fifth in your ancestry,  
 A glorious fame in you, you'll find will be  
 The first in ours. Though I believe your land  
 Is strong, I do not think we are less grand.  
 Although we are surpassed in soldiery  
 And wealth, your land displays barbarity. 70  
 Your words assure such gifts as would impress  
 The goddesses themselves; should I transgress  
 My modesty, your reason for a wrong  
 Would top my own. My glory shall be strong  
 Forever or instead I'll follow you

And not your gifts; and if these gifts I do  
 Not spurn, it is because perpetually  
 They will be very welcome, for to me  
 They, like their giver, are invaluable.  
 But that you love me is more meaningful, 80  
 That I am why you struggled, why you came  
 So far for me. Now what you do – for shame! –,  
 The table spread, I note, although I try  
 To feign – wanton, you look me in the eye  
 Which I can barely meet, then sigh, then hoist  
 The cup nearest to me and, where it's moist  
 From my own lips, drink too. How frequently  
 Have I discerned your fingers secretly  
 Sending me signs, your brows, too, which well nigh  
 Spoke. Lest my husband should these things espy 90  
 I feared, at ill-hid signals reddening.  
 Often in silence or just murmuring,  
 I'd say, "He's shameless." That was not a lie.  
 On the round table's surface, too, did I  
 Read underneath my name, in wine traced out,  
 I LOVE. I signalled with my eyes my doubt –  
 Alas, I learned that I could speak this way!  
 These blandishments could have caused me to sway  
 From modesty, had I so wished. My heart  
 Could have been captured by young Cupid's dart. 100  
 Your beauty, too, is rare, I must confess;  
 A girl could in your arms find happiness  
 But let another find it honestly  
 Rather than I, my maiden modesty  
 Seized by a foreign loe. Learn to refrain,  
 Of me, from beauteous ones, for to abstain  
 From pleasure is a virtue. Of the wise  
 How many young men want, do you surmise,  
 The same as you? Or do your eyes only see,  
 Paris? You see no more perceptibly 110  
 Yet dare more rashly: you have no more fire  
 But too much insolence. My heart's desire  
 Is that your rapid ship's arrival here  
 Had been when my chaste maiden's hand was dear  
 To a thousand suitors; if you I had seen,  
 You'd have been first. My husband would have been  
 Able to pardon me himself. Your foe  
 Was time – already I'd been seized - , too slow  
 Your hope; you sought what someone else possessed.  
 Though I would be your Trojan wife, yet rest 120  
 Assured my husband is not holding me

Against my will. Desist – that is my plea –  
 From shredding with your words my fluttering heart;  
 You say you love me – don't tear me apart,  
 But leave me to my lot and do not crave  
 To shame my honour! To you Venus gave  
 Her word for this, you say; goddesses three  
 Displayed themselves in total nudity  
 To you in Ida's yawning vales. One swore  
 To give you power, one prowess in war, 130  
 The third the hand of Helen. Truthfully,  
 I scarce can credit each divinity  
 Would have you judge her beauty. This is true –  
 They did – and yet that other part where you  
 Were given me as prize is fantasy,  
 Surely. I do not have such certainty  
 About my bodily charms that I could deem  
 That I am, in the goddesses' esteem,  
 The greatest gift. My beauty is content  
 That men admire it, but the consent 140  
 Of Venus would arouse resentfulness.  
 Yet I will not deny it; I confess  
 I love your praise – for why should I gainsay  
 What I desire? Do not be angry, pray,  
 That I to credit you was over-slow;  
 In great affairs conviction tends to show  
 Itself a laggard. First, accordingly,  
 Was I pleased with the partiality  
 Of Venus; next, that you deemed me the prize  
 Which was the worthiest and in your eyes 150  
 The others were inferior to me  
 Once you had heard of Helen's symmetry.  
 So valour and great power I imply  
 To you! I should be made of iron if I  
 Did not love such a heart. I'm not, however.  
 I fight this love of him whom I can never,  
 I think, claim as my own. Why should I part  
 The sea and seek the object of my heart  
 When the place itself rejects me? I am green  
 In love-theft, and the gods have never seen 160  
 Me dupe my husband. Even now my quill  
 Writes on the silent page as I fulfil  
 An untried office. Happy, then, are they  
 Who are not raw! Naïve myself, I'd say  
 The path of guilt is hard. I am oppressed  
 With fear; confused, I feel that all eyes rest  
 On me. In this I'm justified; I've caught

The mob's mean murmurs, and Aethra has brought  
 Me gossip. Feign, or, if you would, refrain!  
 Yet why do that when you have power to feign? 170  
 Flirt carefully! I have more liberty,  
 Yet not the most, with my lord's truancy.  
 On urgent business he's gone far away –  
 The cause of his swift going, I would say,  
 Is great and just. For while he'd hesitate,  
 I said, "Set sail, but at your earliest date  
 Come back!" Glad at my blessing, he kissed me  
 And said, "I leave to you the custody  
 Of my affairs, my household and our guest  
 From Troy." Scarce was my laughter then repressed, 180  
 And while I tried, I could say nothing more  
 Than "Yes, I will." With helpful winds our shore  
 He left for Crete, but don't, accordingly,  
 Think you're allowed complete immunity!  
 He's far away and yet keeps me intact –  
 Or are you heedless of the well-known fact  
 That rulers' hands reach far? Anxiety  
 Attends my beauty, for each eulogy  
 Affrights my lord the more. Though my renown  
 Is pleasing to me, now it casts me down – 190  
 Would I had cheated fame! Don't be nonplussed  
 He's left me here with you, for he has trust  
 In my integrity and in my way  
 Of life. My features cause him much dismay,  
 My life assures him; while my righteousness  
 Makes him secure, he fears my loveliness.  
 You bid me grasp the opportunity  
 Made by a simple husband and that we  
 Should take advantage. Though that gives delight  
 I fear; my mind's not yet made up; I fight 200  
 Within myself. My husband is elsewhere,  
 You sleep alone, and each of us is fair  
 In one another's eyes. The nights are long,  
 We chat together, and, alas, the song  
 You sing cajoles me, and we share one roof.  
 May I expire if all things are not proof  
 That I *shall* fall; but some fear hinders me!  
 Would that your base inveiglement could be  
 High-minded! Would that you had wrested out  
 Of my ingenuous heart my every doubt. 210  
 One sometimes garners gain from sinfulness.  
 Thus would I have by force bought happiness.  
 Let's fight this love we feel while it is green!

New-kindled flames die down when they have been  
 But sprinkled. Love in strangers is not sound:  
 Like them, it roams, then, when you think you've found  
 Nothing as sure, it flees. Hypsipyle  
 And Ariadne prove this certainty,  
 Both mocked in secret unions. You, too,  
 To Oenone for many years were true, 220  
 They say, then left her – you admit the deed.  
 I've constantly applied myself to heed  
 Your every move. You long to keep your vow  
 In love yet are unable. Even now  
 The Phrygians man your sails. You chat with me,  
 Preparing for a night of ecstasy;  
 Meanwhile the wind to carry you to Troy  
 Will now be here. You'll leave your new-found joy  
 Mid-course; the winds shall carry from our shore  
 Our love. Or should I leave, as you implore, 230  
 See high-famed Troy and form a union  
 With eminent Laomedon's grandson?  
 I would not have swift gossip propagate  
 Ill-fame of me. What would the Spartan state,  
 All Greece, the Asian people say of me?  
 Or your own Troy? What would the judgment be  
 Of Priam, or his wife, your many brothers,  
 Or all the wives of Troy and all the mothers?  
 How may you hope my love is permanent  
 When discomposed by your own precedent? 240  
 Each stranger to your port will cause for you  
 Dreadful anxiety. How often, too,  
 In anger shall you say, "Adulteress!"  
 Having forgotten your own wickedness  
 Is linked to mine! You will at the same time  
 Be censor and prime mover of my crime.  
 May I be buried first! But I'll enjoy  
 A happy life and all the wealth of Troy  
 And gifts more splendid than your guarantee,  
 You say; rich, purple garments shall there be 250  
 And I'll be rich in gold. Your gifts aren't worth  
 So much – forgive me; yet the Grecian earth  
 Still holds me back somehow. If I'm distressed,  
 What Phrygian will answer my request  
 For help? Where can I seek a brother's aid,  
 Or else a father's? False Jason once made  
 To Medea promises of all the world –  
 Did that prevent her, though, from being hurled  
 From Aeson's house? She had no family,

Scorned maid, to take her – no Chalciope, 260  
 No father, mother; I've no trepidation  
 Of such things. Nor did *she*! Fair expectation  
 Often beguiles itself. You will perceive  
 All ships tossed on the high seas always leave  
 The port in calm. The torch, too, frightens me –  
 The one that before your nativity  
 Your mother brought forth; and I shrink from dread  
 At warnings of the prophets, since it's said  
 That they predict for Troy a fiery end.  
 And just as Cytherea is your friend 270  
 For her two-fold award through your decree,  
 I fear the others of that trinity,  
 Who, if your boast be true, suffered defeat.  
 If I go with you, we will feel the heat  
 Of war, I'm sure. Our love will, tragically,  
 Advance with swords. The men of Thessaly  
 Were urged by Hippodamia to combat  
 Against the Centaurs – and do you think that  
 Menelaus and my brothers would not heed  
 At once their righteous anger, or indeed 280  
 Tyndareus? Your boasts of bravery  
 Evince that there exists hostility  
 Between your face and what you speak. You're more  
 Apt in your character for love than war.  
 ;Let brave men fight but, Paris, be always  
 A lover. Summon Hector, whom you praise,  
 To fight *for* you. Your own abilities  
 Are for that other campaign, and it's these  
 I would employ if I were only wise  
 And somewhat braver. Maids will utilize 290  
 These traits indeed, if wise – or I shall lose  
 My modesty perhaps and learn to choose  
 Wisdom and finally capitulate.  
 You seek close discourse – what you contemplate  
 I know. But you're too fast, with your produce  
 Still in the ground. Delay may be of use  
 To you. Enough, and let these words which share  
 The secrets of my heart break off their care,  
 The rest assigned Aethra and Clymene,  
 The two companions who counsel me. 300

## LEANDER TO HERO

Fond greetings from Abydos, Sestian maid,  
That I would bring myself were I not stayed  
By ocean. If the gods were kind to me  
And blessed my love, you'd read unwillingly  
These words. Yet they're not kind, for why do they  
Not let me cleave known waters and delay  
My vows? You yourself see skies pitchy-black  
And wind-blown tracts of water that should lack  
Most hollowed ships. Just one bold sailor went  
From port to take the letter that I sent; 10  
I would have joined him but, as he untied  
The cables from the prow, the harbourside  
Was seen by all. I could not, as before,  
Evade my parents, and the love we swore  
And hoped to camouflage would come to light.  
At once I wrote these words and said, "Take flight,  
Blithe letter! Soon she'll stretch out her fair hand.  
Perhaps her lips will touch you as your band  
She seeks with snow-white teeth to break in two."  
I murmured this – the rest I wrote to you. 20  
I'd rather have it swim and carry me  
In haste across the customary sea!  
It is more fit to ply the tranquil deep  
And yet a fit envoy for what I keep  
Within my heart. It's been a week (nay more!  
Surely a year!) since with a dreadful roar  
The sea has rumbled. If these days have brought  
Sweet sleep to me, then may the ocean, fraught  
With madness, keep me long from you. With grief  
I watch your coastline, sitting on a reef, 30  
Thoughts flying where my body may not fly.  
Indeed, upon your topmost tower I  
See, or I think I see, a vigilant ray  
Of light. Three times my garment did I lay  
On the dry sand; three times the heavy sea  
I entered, naked – but it challenged me  
In my raw venture and the fronting surge  
Immersed my head. Why are you keen to urge  
War on me, most ungentle wind of all  
The rapid gusts? Boreas, you northern squall, 40  
That's me it is you savage, not the sea!  
If you did not know love, how would you be?  
Base wind, cold as you are, you felt a fire

From Acte, didn't you? In your desire  
For joy, if one should block your airy way  
How would you suffer it? Have mercy, pray,  
And stir a gentler breeze - no stern decree  
Let Aeolus impose on you. My plea  
Is all in vain; he mumbles at my prayer  
And all the waves he tosses up nowhere  
Does he restrain. O would that Daedalus  
Could give me his bold wings – though close to us  
Is the Icarian shore! For I would bear  
What may occur if up into the air

50

I could suspend my frame, which oft inclined  
On perilous waters. Meanwhile, in my mind,  
While winds and sea denied me everything,  
On the first time I came soliciting  
Your love I mused. It then was early night –  
A pleasant memory: with love's delight  
In mind I left our house. Without delay,  
Shucking both clothes and fear, into the bay  
With pliant arms I bounded. Luna sent  
A barely tremulous beam, as on I went,  
My duteous minister. Lifting my head,  
"O favour me, bright deity," I said,  
"And let the Latmian rocks come to my mind.  
Endymion would not have you be unkind.

60

Help me in my intrigue, I pray! For you  
Slipped from the skies and sought a mortal, too;  
The truth must out – she too is a goddess  
I seek. She has a heavenly worthiness,  
Her beauty quite divine. Her lovely face,  
After your own and Venus', takes third place.  
Look for yourself – no need to credit me!  
As all the stars bow to your purity  
And silver beams, all beauties must submit  
To her. Your light, if you discredit it,  
Is blind." These words, or words like these, I spoke  
As waves submitted to my every stroke.

70

80

These waves shone with the moon's reflected light  
And daylight splendour gleamed in silent night.  
The Halcyons only, ever dedicated  
To their beloved Ceyx, ululated,  
It seemed to me, in sweet lament. Then I,  
With arms and shoulders weary, rose up high  
Atop the waves. When I saw, far away,  
A light, I said, "My love is in that ray;  
Your shores contain my light!" Then suddenly



My tired arms were strong. It seemed to me 90  
 The waves were gentler than before. Lest I  
 Should feel the frigid waters, love stood by  
 And warmed my loving breast, and, as the shore  
 Loomed closer while I swam, so all the more  
 Did I rejoice to hasten on. When I'm  
 Beheld myself, then at that very time  
 You give me heart and strength and, as I go,  
 I strive to please my mistress as I throw  
 My arms about that I may catch her eye.  
 Your nurse can scarce contain you as you try 100  
 To brave the waves – for I perceived this too  
 Assuredly – and, though she hindered you,  
 She could not stop your foot upon the strand  
 From getting wet. You hold me tightly and  
 Give me sweet kisses – a great accolade  
 For challenging the deep – and then you laid  
 Your own robe on my shoulders, and you dried  
 My hair, all dripping from the raging tide.  
 We and our secret tower and the night  
 Know all the rest, as does my guiding light 110  
 Across the strait, whose weeds are numerous –  
 No more, though, than the joys that greeted us  
 That night. The briefer space for our love-play  
 The greater care not to fritter away  
 Our time we took. Now Lucifer arose  
 To fetch Aurora, who brought to a close  
 The night. We madly kiss confusedly,  
 Complaining of our one night's brevity.  
 Your nurse made bitter hints while I delayed;  
 Abandoning your tower then I made 120  
 My way to the frigid shore. Weeping, we part  
 And to the maiden Helle's strait I start  
 To go and look back at my mistress constantly  
 While I am able and it seems to me  
 I left you as a swimmer but, it's true,  
 Returned a shipwreck. This is certain, too:  
 The route to you sloped down, I thought, and yet  
 On my return it seemed a hilly, wet  
 And shiftless thing. I sought unwillingly  
 My native land – can you think this of me? 130  
 Unwillingly, as well, in my own state  
 I stay. Why do the waters separate  
 Two people joined in love, both of one mind  
 But in two lands. Let Sestos leave behind  
 Yourself or let Abydos let me go.

We like each other's lands. Why am I so  
 Distressed, just like the sea? Why can the squall –  
 Light cause! – prevent our meeting? After all,  
 The dolphins and the fishes realize  
 That we're in love, and open to all eyes 140  
 Is my well-trodden path, as any way  
 Open to all. I grieve in my dismay  
 This was the only route. I fear the swell  
 Of winds has now prevented this as well.  
 The waves of Hellespont that madly foam  
 Scarce keep the vessels in their harbour home.  
 This sea, I think, since it acquired the name  
 Of the drowned maiden, has remained the same.  
 Ill-famed enough from Helle's loss, yet still,  
 Though it saves me, its name incites ill will. 150  
 I envy Phrixus – through the stormy sea  
 The golden ram bore him successfully;  
 I need no ram nor ship so long as I  
 Am given tracts of sea to travel by.  
 Nothing I lack; while I may ply the sea,  
 Ship, sailor, passenger – I'll be all three!  
 By Tyrian Arcton I'll not be led,  
 Nor Helice; our love's not interested  
 In common stars. On that bright Coronet  
 Or on Andromeda let others set 160  
 Their eyes or yet on the Parrhasian Bear  
 Which glitters in its frozen pole up there.  
 I do not care to use each lady-love  
 Of Perseus, Joe or Bacchus up above  
 To light my perilous way. Another star,  
 To me far surer than the others are,  
 Will keep our love unerring through the night;  
 I could swim on to Colchos by that light,  
 Or furthest Pontus, or the destination  
 Of the Thessalian craft; in my natation 170  
 I'd outstrip young Palaemon or that man  
 Who ate a herb and turned Olympian.  
 Often through constant strokes my arms became  
 So heavy I could hardly drag my frame  
 Along."The prize," I told them, "won't be slight  
 For all your toil, for you shall fasten tight  
 Around my mistress' neck." Immediately  
 They're strong and strain with the rapidity  
 A racehorse has when from the gate he speeds  
 At Elis. So I watch my burning needs 180  
 And follow you, so worthy of the sky –

Yet tarry still on earth or say how I  
 May journey to the gods! Though you are here,  
 This miserable man who holds you dear  
 Has little of you; with the turbid sea  
 My heart is turbid, too. What's it to me  
 A narrow channel parts us? Do we lose  
 One hindrance even so? I'd almost choose  
 To be a world away, my hopes and you  
 Far off. The nearer you, the nearer, too, 190  
 Are flames that kindle me; never away  
 Is hope, although I surely cannot say  
 The same of you. You are so near that I  
 Can well-nigh touch you, although that "well-nigh"  
 Will often make me weep! That man who caught  
 At those elusive fruits and ever thought  
 He'd reach the retreating stream is just like me.  
 Unless, then, with fiat of the sea,  
 Shall I not ever hold you close? Or can  
 A storm ever find me a happy man? 200  
 Shall winds and sea, the chanciest of all,  
 Be my one hope? But it is not yet fall.  
 I've yet to suffer, then, the Pleiades,  
 Arctos's watchman and the penalties  
 Of Olenus's Goat. Either I don't know  
 How rash I am or even then I'll go,  
 Inspired by a reckless love, to sea.  
 And lest you think I give this guarantee  
 Because that time's ahead, a winged vow  
 I'll give. So let the ocean even now  
 Be swollen these few nights and nonetheless  
 I'll brave the waves. A happy fearlessness 210  
 Shall keep me safe or else my death shall be  
 The closure of my anxious love! My plea  
 To be to be cast up upon that strand  
 So that my shipwrecked body reach your land.  
 You'll weep and touch my corpse and then you'll say,  
 "I was the agent of your death!" You may  
 Be hurt by omens of my end, this part  
 Of my love-letter angering your heart.  
 I cease – no more complaining! That the sea  
 May terminate its anger, here's my plea – 220  
 Append your prayers to mine. Some little space  
 Of calm I need until I reach that place.  
 Once I have crossed, then let the storm still fume.  
 You have a shipyard granting ample room  
 To my keel! There is no more security

In any water for my ship. Let me  
 Be penned by Boreas, where I shall find  
 Sweet sojourn. Slow to swim, I'll turn my mind  
 To safety, and I'll no more castigate  
 The heedless waves, complaining that the strait  
 Will prove rough for my swim. May equally  
 The winds and your embraces hinder me  
 From leaving you - a double cause! I'll ply  
 My arms like oars while storms permit. Keep by  
 You still, that I may see, your beacon-light!  
 Meanwhile, instead of me, throughout the night  
 You'll have my letters with you, and I pray  
 That I shall be with you without delay!

## XIX

### HERO TO LEANDER

That I may have indeed what you have sent  
 In words, Leander, come! All postponement  
 Is long to me that causes joy's delay.  
 My love's not patient – pardon what I say!  
 Alike we burn; in strength, though, we're apart:  
 I think men are more powerful. The heart  
 In frail girls, like the frame, is weak - should I  
 Be waiting any longer, I shall die!  
 Men hunt and plough their pleasant lands and face  
 Prolonged toil everywhere. The market-place  
 Detains them or in wrestling they contend  
 Or else the pliant horse's neck they bend  
 As they apply the bit; now in their net  
 They snare a bird, now fish, and, later yet,  
 Drink wine. Denied all this, were I to burn  
 Even less fiercely, what's to serve my turn  
 But love? So that I do. My sole delight,  
 I love you much more than you could requite!  
 I whisper with my old nurse, stupefied  
 By your delay; at other times I chide  
 The wind-blown, hateful waves, as at the main  
 I gaze, in words almost like yours; again,  
 When the sea a little stops its savagery  
 I grumble that, though you *may* come to me,  
 You won't; while I complain, tears trickling

From my fond eyes, her hand a –trembling,  
 My aged confidante will wipe away  
 Those tears. Often I seek upon the bay  
 Your prints, as if the sand could yet contain  
 Such marks. That I may write to you and gain 30  
 Some knowledge of you, I enquire still  
 If one's come from Abydos and one will  
 Be going there. Why tell how often I  
 Plant kisses on your clothes which you lay by  
 When primed to cross the Hellespontic Sea?  
 When daylight's fled and night, more comradely,  
 Drives off day and her brilliant stars presents,  
 At once upon our topmost battlements  
 I place the watchful lamps to light your way  
 And in my woman's craft your long delay 40  
 Beguile with whirling rod and twisted thread.  
 You query what meanwhile by me is said.  
 Leander's name – no more. "Is it your view,  
 Nurse, that my love has left his home or do  
 They all keep watch so that he fears his kin?  
 His robe shucked off, does he now rub his skin  
 With oil?" She nods, although she doesn't care  
 For all my kisses but, quite unaware,  
 Sleep sneaks on her and makes her nod. I say,  
 After the slightest pause, "He's on his way, 50  
 Strong arms parting the waters of the sound."  
 Work done, I throw my spindle to the ground  
 And wonder whether he is half-way here.  
 Sometimes I gaze out, sometimes in my fear  
 I pray your swim will have a helpful breeze.  
 I catch uncertain sounds – at each of these  
 I think you're here. When, thus duped, I have passed  
 Most of the night, a drowsiness at last  
 Steals up and takes my weary eyes. Maybe,  
 False one, you sleep with me reluctantly, 60  
 Swimming against your will. For now I seem  
 To see you in the sea, and now I dream  
 I feel wet arms about my neck and fling  
 Your usual clothes on your wet limbs and cling  
 Against your bosom. Doing more beside  
 That gives me joy but should be kept inside  
 My head – I blush to tell it. O alas!  
 Brief joy and spurious, for sleep shall pass  
 And you with it. With more stability  
 Let our keen loves be knit in loyalty 70  
 And live in truth! Why, so benumbed, do I

Spend many nights in desolation? Why,  
 You waverer, are you so far away  
 So often? True, the sea, I have to say,  
 Is now unfit for swimmers; last night, though,  
 The breeze was calmer. So why let it go?  
 Why fear what wouldn't happen? Why reject  
 So fair a night? Although you may expect  
 Another, that was better for indeed  
 It happened earlier. With lightning speed, 80  
 You'll say, the tranquil deep transformed its face.  
 Yet often do you sooner reach this place  
 In haste. You'd have no reason to complain  
 If stranded here; no tempest in the main  
 Would harm you in my arms. So joyfully  
 I'd hear the winds and pray they'd never be  
 At rest. But why do you more greatly fear  
 The waves you once despised? You once came here,  
 I can recall, when seas were perilous  
 And not less (or not much less) murderous; 90  
 I cried: "Be reckless lest your dauntlessness  
 Cause me to weep!" Whence this new fearfulness?  
 Where has your boldness gone? Where is that great  
 And powerful swimmer who once spurned the strait?  
 No, be yourself, not as you were before;  
 Wait for calm seas and make it safe to shore –  
 That you may be the same and, as you write,  
 We still be lovers and our blazing light  
 Not turn to frigid ash. I've less dismay  
 From winds that stall my vows than that you may, 100  
 Just, like the winds, meander and be less  
 In love – that I'll decrease in worthiness,  
 Dangers outweighing cause, and that I'll be  
 Too light a prize for all your industry.  
 Sometimes I fear my land will cause me woe  
 And I, a Thracian maid, they'll say am no  
 Match for one from Abydos. Yet I can  
 Bear all this with more stoicism than  
 Some wench ensnaring you and clasping you  
 About the neck and with a love that's new 110  
 Ending our own, May I, before I face  
 Such grief, expire. Not that there's a trace  
 Of future woe nor has some new-heard tale  
 Caused me to fret. At everything I quail,  
 However – for who ever was secure  
 In love? When they're apart, lovers endure  
 Yet more. Happy those girls who, being near

Their love, fear true wrongs while they need not fear  
 False ones! Imagined misdeeds make me grieve,  
 Who don't know true ones; every one will leave 120  
 My heart in pieces. Come! Would that I knew  
 The wind or else your father hindered you –  
 But, please, no woman! I'd die of heartache  
 If I heard that it was. If you would make  
 This happen, go astray immediately!  
 You'll not, though – my fears are nugatory;  
 For it's resentful storms that keep me back;  
 Our shores are lashed with massive waves, alack!;  
 The day is covered in obscurity  
 By gloomy clouds. Perhaps into the sea 130  
 Has Helle's pious mother come, lamenting  
 Will full tears her drowned child; or p'raps, tormenting  
 The sea is her stepmother, who became  
 A sea-goddess, because she hates the name  
 Of her stepchild. This spot's not neighbourly  
 To tender girls, for here is where Helle  
 Expires, where I, too, feel much distress.  
 Neptune, recalling your own eagerness  
 In love, you shouldn't let a tempest bar  
 Love's progress – if those idle stories are 140  
 Quite true about Amymone and you,  
 And, much-praised for her beauty, Tyro, too,  
 And bright Alcyone and Calyce,  
 Hecataeon's daughter, and, while still to be  
 Wreathed with her snakes, Medusa and also  
 The fair-haired Laudice and Calaeno  
 And others I have read of. Poets sing  
 Of these and many more, encircling,  
 Neptune, their tender forms round you. Wherefore,  
 Then, having felt the power of love before 150  
 So often, do you close Leander's way  
 With whirling storms? Spare me, brawl far away,  
 O savage one, upon the open sea!  
 Scant is the strait that sunders him from me  
 Better that, great yourself, you agitate  
 Great ships or even whole fleets aggravate.  
 The Sea-God fights a swimming youth? For shame!  
 To vex some stagnant pond would bring more fame.  
 He's noble, of good stock, but does not trace  
 His roots from Ulysses, whom you think base. 160  
 Pardon and save us both! It's he who swims,  
 But on the selfsame sea depend his limbs  
 And all my hope. My lamp has sputtered – see!

(I keep it close! – a hopeful sign for me.  
 My nurse upon this flame, so prosperous,  
 Pours wine and says, “There will be more of us  
 Tomorrow,” then she drinks. Let there be more,  
 Conquer the waves and drive across to shore  
 And fill my inmost heart! You renegade  
 Of love, return to camp. Why am I splayed 170  
 Within the middle of the bed? No need  
 For you to fear! Venus herself indeed  
 Will favour your attempt. Born of the sea,  
 She’ll smooth your watery way. The waves tempt me  
 Often to swim, though men are safer there –  
 These straits the name of just one maiden bear,  
 Though Phrixus and his sister rode this way.  
 Perhaps a lack of time brings you dismay  
 Of swimming back or you cannot withstand  
 A double journey. Let’s swim from each strand, 180  
 Embrace halfway and then swim back to shore  
 And our own towns: a little thing but more  
 Than nothing! Would that shame that causes us  
 To hide our love or that love, timorous  
 Of gossip, would surcease! Which of these two –  
 Honour and lust, ill-matched – should I pursue?  
 One’s seemly, one delights. To Colchis’ bay  
 Pegasean Jason sailed and bore away  
 The Phasian maid on his swift ship. Also,  
 To Lacedaemon came the Trojan beau 190  
 And made off with his prize immediately.  
 You seek me, then you leave me. When the sea  
 Is hardly safe for ships, you swim. Yet o,  
 Young victor of the swelling waves, even so,  
 Disdain the sea, although it causes you  
 To fear! Well-fashioned crafts get shipwrecked too;  
 Your arms in strength top oars, do you suppose?  
 Well, sailors fear to do what you propose  
 To do – and swimming’s always consequent  
 After a wreck. Alas! I’ve no intent 200  
 To have you do what I compel you to;  
 Be strong, don’t yield to what I urge on you –  
 Just so you come and round my shoulders cast  
 Your weary arms so often by the blast  
 Of waves bedashed! When I look out to sea,  
 However, some unknown frigidity  
 Benumbs my fearful heart. No less upset  
 Am I by last night’s dream, though I have met  
 That sign with expiation. Near sunrise,



My lamp now dying down, when dreams disguise  
 Themselves as true, my fingers in repose  
 Relaxed, the threads dropped from them, as I chose  
 To hug my pillow for a restful sleep,  
 Distinctly I beheld a dolphin leap  
 Across the windy waves; when it was thrown  
 Upon the thirsty sands, now, left alone  
 Upon the shore, the poor wretch passed away.  
 Whatever it may mean, I feel dismay.  
 Don't smile at what I dreamt of and confide  
 Your arms in nothing but a tranquil tide!  
 If you don't spare yourself, I beg you, spare  
 The maid who loves you, who will never fare  
 In safety while you are in jeopardy.  
 And yet I hope the waters' lethargy  
 Will soon bring peace to us, and therefore part  
 The waves when they are calm with mighty heart!  
 Meanwhile, since Hellespont now bars your way,  
 Read this and ease the hours of delay.

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## XX

## ACONTIUS TO CYDIPPE

Allay your fears! A second oath to me  
You need not give, for a sufficiency  
Lies in the first! Read on! May all your woe  
Be gone – your pain hurts me! Why redden so  
At this? As at Diana's shrine, I guess  
Your modest cheeks are tinged with ruddiness.  
Marriage I ask of you, and loyalty,  
No crime. You see a future spouse in me,  
Not an adulterer. Perhaps you may  
Recall the words I wrote down on that day  
Upon an apple which I plucked and threw  
To your chaste self; you'll find that on it you  
Made pledge to me (I hope *you* can recall,  
Not the goddess). My passion does not pall  
But grows much stronger, waxing with delay;  
Though never scanty, after many a day  
And by the hope you gave me, it's grown great.  
My ardour trusted you. You can't negate  
Something the goddess witnessed. She was there

And marked the words you spoke and shook her hair 20  
 As in approval. I'll give my consent  
 For you to say that I was fraudulent  
 And you were duped as long as you profess  
 Love was the reason. My deceitfulness  
 Sought but one thing – your union with me.  
 Your charge can lead to this confederacy.  
 By nature I'm not skilful and the art  
 Of cunning I don't practise. You impart  
 That talent, maid, in me. My words to you –  
 If I've achieved *something* – are now the glue 30  
 Sly Love has used to bind us. What I said,  
 Dictated by himself, has warranted  
 Our marriage; my forensic cleverness  
 Is thanks to him. Call it deceitfulness,  
 Call me a shyster if to wish to be  
 A lover may be called chicanery.  
 Again I write and I entreat – again!  
 Another plot – you've reason to complain!  
 If I wrong you in loving you, then I  
 Confess I'll love you ever; though you try 40  
 To shun me I'll seek you eternally.  
 Others have snatched away through butchery  
 The maids they loved; could judiciousness  
 As here you read be called a wickedness?  
 O gods, would I had power to ordain  
 More bonds so that you never would again  
 Be free of them! There are remaining still  
 A thousand tricks – at the foot of the hill  
 I sweat; my ardour will not suffer me  
 To leave a thing untried. Though you agree 50  
 My snaring you is doubtful, I shall try  
 Nevertheless. The gods decide, but I  
 Shall triumph. Part perhaps you shall evade  
 Yet won't dodge every net that Love has laid  
 For you (more than you think!). If mastery  
 Won't serve, then I'll resort to soldiery  
 And bear you off, clutched to my passionate breast.  
 I do not censure Paris nor the rest  
 Who, that they might be wed, showed bravery.  
 I, too – no, I am mum! The penalty 60  
 Of death is fit for what I plan to do,  
 Yet worse will be the pain of losing you.  
 Less fair, you'd be pursued more modestly;  
 Your beauty forces my audacity.  
 Your eyes, which cause the fiery stars to cede

To you, have made my passion burn indeed;  
 Your ivory throat, as well, your golden hair,  
 The arms I crave about my neck, your fair  
 Features, demure and yet not unrefined,  
 And feet that even Thetis, to my mind, 70  
 Could scarcely equal. I'd be happier  
 If I could praise the rest: I'll not demur,  
 However – that whole work's identical  
 In all its parts. Then it's no miracle  
 That, driven by such beauty, I would want  
 Your pledge. In brief, if you were forced to grant  
 You're captured, let it be my treachery  
 That captured you. I'll bear your obloquy,  
 But give me my reward. A charge like this  
 Should not have its requital go amiss. 80  
 Hesione by Telamon was gained,  
 Briseis by Achilles: each attained  
 Her victor. Be as angry as you will  
 And chide, as long as, while you're angry still,  
 I may enjoy you. So, similarly,  
 I'll quell the wrath I stirred so you'll give me  
 Some slight chance to appease you. Give me leave  
 To stand before your face and, weeping, grieve,  
 Adding befitting words, and, as slaves do  
 When fearing savage blows, hold out to you 90  
 Submissive hands to fasten on your knees!  
 You do not know your rights; command me, please!  
 Why am I charged though absent? Instantly  
 Summon me like a mistress. Haughtily  
 Tear at my hair and bruise my face. I will  
 Bear all of this; perhaps the only chill  
 I'll feel will be lest any injury  
 You suffer thus. Do not enshackle me –  
 My love for you will bind me anyway!  
 When you have satisfied your rage, you'll say: 100  
 "How patient is his love" and, when you see  
 My bearing all, "Let him be slave to me  
 Who is so good a slave!" Now they accuse  
 Me *in absentia*, alas – me, whose  
 Outstanding cause, since no-one speaks for me,  
 Is lost. Though you may call an injury  
 My wrong to you, it's not just me that you  
 Should carp at. No, indeed Diana, too,  
 Did not deserve betrayal, for, although  
 You won't keep faith with me, yet even so 110  
 Keep faith with her. She saw it – she was there

When, duped, you turned quite red, and she took care  
 To keep in mind your words. Unfounded be  
 Your omens! There is no more savagery  
 Than when she sees her godhead is maligned –  
 May this not be! A witness you shall find  
 In the boar of Calydon, so murderous  
 (And yet a mother was more barbarous  
 To her own son). Actaeon's witness, too,  
 Once thought a wild beast by those hunters who 120  
 Killed wild beasts with him; also Niobe,  
 Who proudly boasted of her progeny  
 And was converted into rock, all tears,  
 In Mygdonia. Ah! I'm beset with fears  
 To tell the truth to you in case your guess  
 Is that I'll lie because of selfishness.  
 And yet it must be told. Believe you me,  
 This is the reason why some malady  
 Imprisons you so often in your bed  
 The day before we are about to wed. 130  
 Diana's working for you and aspires  
 To keep you from a false oath and desires  
 To keep your oath and you intact. Therefore  
 The more you try to break your oath, the more  
 She tries to right it. Please do not entice  
 The spirited virgin's bow; she can be nice  
 If you'll allow it. So this is my plea –  
 Do not enfeeble with infirmity  
 Your tender limbs; those charms of yours sustain  
 For my delight. Your features, please, maintain, 140  
 For they were born to kindle love; also,  
 Maintain your snowy cheeks' untroubled glow.  
 And may my foes and any who would try  
 To keep me from you suffer as do I  
 When you are ill! I'm tortured equally  
 Whether you're wed or have some malady  
 Nor know which I would rather have be less;  
 Sometimes I waste with grief that your distress  
 Is caused by my deceit. Your perjury  
 Be laid upon my head! The penalty 150  
 Be mine! Thus you'll be safe. Nevertheless,  
 In secrecy, since I can only guess  
 Your plight, I often by your threshold walk,  
 Concerned; in secret, too, I often talk  
 With maid or lackey, asking what relief  
 Has sleep or food provided in your grief.  
 Alas, that every medical command

I could discharge while fondling your hand  
 Beside your bed! With me so far away,  
 That one whom most of all I'd keep at bay 160  
 Perhaps is there! By your sick-bed he can  
 Caress those hands (the gods all hate the man  
 As rootedly as I). Your throbbing vein  
 He feels, caressing again and again  
 Your snowy arms as if anxiety  
 Moves him, touches your breast and then maybe  
 Adds kisses. O, too costly a commission  
 For service rendered! Who gave you permission  
 To reap my harvest first? Who showed the sign  
 To someone else's fields? That bosom's mine! 170  
 My kisses you usurp! Remove your hand  
 From her who's pledged to me – this I command,  
 Vile man! You're fondling my bride-to-be;  
 In future you'll commit adultery  
 If you do that. Elect some other maid  
 Whom none lays claim to, for a claim's been laid  
 For this one (don't you know?). Don't take my word  
 But let the details of the pact be heard;  
 Lest you say that it's false, let it be read  
 Aloud by her. Go, leave another's bed! 180  
 What are you doing here? Her bed's not free!  
 Be off! Because your pact purports to be  
 The twin of mine, your case is not the same.  
 She pledged herself to me, you have the claim  
 From her father, yet she's more herself than he.  
 Her father promised her to you, but she  
 Swore loyalty to me; men testified  
 For him. For her a goddess. On his side,  
 He feared the name of liar, while the name  
 Of perjurer, on hers, with equal shame, 190  
 She feared. Which dread is greater of these two?  
 Can you have any doubt? Even if you  
 Could balance these two threats, the issue then  
 Is that she's ill, he's strong. Thus we two men  
 Prepare to clash with different points of view  
 And different hopes and fears; what you pursue  
 Is risk-free, while rejection's crueller  
 Than death to me. Already I love her  
 While you may later on. If you had held  
 Right in esteem, you would have been compelled 200  
 To give way to my passion. His hard heart  
 Fights for an unjust cause – then, for my part,  
 How shall these lines end? Your indisposition

And why you're under Diana's suspicion  
 Is down to him; if you are wise, forbid  
 Your doors to him. Because of what he did  
 You face great, fatal dangers - would that he,  
 In place of you, could meet calamity!  
 If you'll not love him, sending him away,  
 Then I'll be safe. Don't let your fears hold sway! 210  
 You'll have rude health so long as you revere  
 The shrine that heard your pledge; the gods hold dear  
 Not butchered oxen but true loyalty  
 Which must be kept though there is none to see  
 The promise made. To win their health some maids  
 Bear fire and steel, while others seek the aids  
 Of bitter juices. There is no need of these;  
 Only shun perjury and safeguard, please,  
 Your pledge, and thus yourself, and also me!  
 An excuse for your past delinquency 220  
 Oblivion will give you – what you said  
 To forge your pledge had slipped out of your head.  
 You've just been warned by me, and also by  
 The ill health that you suffer when you try  
 To shun your oath. Even if you elude  
 These ills, in childbirth surely you'll include  
 Diana in your prayers and crave relief  
 From your light-bringing hands; she'll hear your grief  
 And ask what husband caused these pangs you bear.  
 You swear you'll give a votive gift – you swear 230  
 Falsely, she knows; you'll make an oath – that you  
 Can dupe the gods she knows. That's nought to do  
 With me; I wrestle with a greater stress.  
 It is yourself who causes me distress.  
 Just now when you were trembling at death's brink  
 Why did your parents weep? (You did not think  
 To tell them you were false). And why should they  
 Be left in ignorance? You surely may  
 Tell to your mother everything. There's no  
 Disgrace attached to what you've done. Then go 240  
 And tell in order how you first were known  
 To me while sacrifices of her own  
 She made to the Quivered One; how suddenly  
 I noticed you and looked most fixedly  
 Upon your beauty (did you notice this?)  
 And, while love's madness held my eyes in bliss,  
 My cloak fell from my shoulders; how I threw  
 The apple with its treacherous words to you –  
 A clever trick; and how those words you read

There in Diana's presence; being said 250  
 They bound you to a pledge; and then, for fear  
 She does not know the import, say right here  
 The words you used. "Marry the man," she'll say,  
 "To whom you're joined by the good gods, I pray;  
 Him whom you swore to wed; thus may he be  
 My son-in-law, and, since he formerly  
 Was chosen by the goddess, come what may  
 Be he your choice! This will your mother say,  
 If she be such. See that she has a mind  
 To know me and my character. She'll find 260  
 Diana's on our side. The Aegean Sea  
 Surrounds an island that once used to be  
 Thronged with Corycian nymphs – Cea's its name.  
 That's where I'm from; my lineage bears no shame  
 If you prize high-born names. We're wealthy, too,  
 And spotless, and I'm bound in love to you.  
 If you had never sworn, yet such a one  
 As me you would have sought; since this you've done,  
 Though I weren't such a one, you should choose me.  
 In dreams Phoebe, the Darter-Deity, 270  
 Bade me write this, while Love did just the same  
 During my waking hours; one's arrows came  
 To injure me already. So take care  
 The other's arrows don't fly through the air  
 And hurt you! Safety links us both together.  
 Pity the pair of us. Don't wonder whether  
 You should save both. When this you shall have done,  
 The signs will sound and we'll see Delos run  
 With votive blood; an apple cast in gold  
 I'll offer up, the reason being told 280  
 In these two verses: BY THIS EFFIGY  
 ACONTIUS DECLARES THAT FITTINGLY  
 ITS OATH WAS CARRIED OUT. In your weak state  
 A longer letter may quite enervate  
 Your frame; as it is usual, then, I  
 Shall bring it to an end and say: "Goodbye."

## XXI

### CYDIPPE TO ACONTIUS

Fearful, I read your letter silently

Lest I should swear by some divinity  
 By chance. You would have tried, I think, even now  
 To capture me had you, as you allow,  
 Not known once is enough. I was amiss  
 To read your words at all but I say this:  
 Had I been harsh with you, the savage tide  
 Of Diana's wrath might have been amplified.  
 Though I do all I can and offer her  
 Due incense, yet to you she's friendlier 10  
 Than is your due. You wish to be thought true,  
 So she with mindful rage avenges you.  
 To her Hippolytus less charity  
 She showed. She should more partiality  
 Have given to a maiden of my years  
 (A span she plans to end quite soon, one fears).  
 I'm weak through unclear causes; healing skill  
 Can't help me. How thin, almost now too ill  
 To write you, do you think I am, how white  
 The limbs I scarce can lift? Another fright 20  
 Is that, besides my nurse who knows my woe,  
 Someone our correspondence gets to know.  
 Before my door she sits and tells each one  
 Who asks about me, "She's asleep"; this done,  
 I write you safely Soon that fine excuse  
 For my long refuge cannot be of use,  
 Being suspect, and she'll see coming here  
 Folk whom it's hard not to admit and clear  
 Her throat – a sign agreed on. Hurriedly  
 I'll break off and my letter anxiously 30  
 I'll hide against my breast. When I resume  
 My writing, I will get no breathing room.  
 See how you harrow me! O may I die  
 If you are worth the pain. Kinder am I  
 Than what you have deserved or what is right.  
 It is because of you, then, that my plight  
 Has often been unsure, your trickery  
 Causing both then and now my penalty?  
 And has my beauty, proud in your acclaim,  
 Earned this reward? And thereby must you maim 40  
 Me for delighting you? If the gods had made  
 Me plain to you, I'd not have needed aid.  
 Now praised, I groan, pained by your rivalry,  
 You two, my beauty causing injury  
 To me. Neither will yield, each hindering  
 The other's prayers. I'm tossed, a helpless thing,  
 Just like a ship propelled into the main



By steadfast Boreas and yet again  
 Thrown backwards by the tide, and when the day  
 Longed for by my dear parents, comes my way, 50  
 Great passion seizes me – Persephone  
 That day knocks at my door unmercifully!  
 In shame, though feeling only innocence,  
 I fear lest to the gods I've caused offence.  
 One says that chance has caused me my distress,  
 One that the gods possess no friendliness  
 Towards my future husband; and, lest you  
 Think gossip does not touch you, yet some few  
 Say this comes from your poisons. They don't know  
 Their source, although my sins stand out. And so, 60  
 You stir up cruel war, forsaking peace,  
 And I receive its blows! Come on, then, cease  
 Your customary guile and tell me straight:  
 If your love harms me, what, then, will your hate  
 Achieve? You harm your mistress -thus some day  
 You'll love a foe. To rescue me, I pray,  
 Wish for my death! You have no fondness now  
 For her you hoped for, her that you allow  
 To waste away, or, if you pray in vain,  
 For me to the cruel goddess, you shall gain 70  
 No boon o boast of. Choose your case from these:  
 Diana you do not wish to appease –  
 You have forgotten me; no mastery  
 Within Diana's realm have you – for she  
 Has now forgotten you! Would I had never,  
 Or in the time back then, known Delos ever!  
 I had set sail upon a troubled sea,  
 The hour ill-omened. O how eagerly  
 I left my home and on the swift ship walked  
 The painted decks. But twice my canvas balked, 80  
 Turned back with adverse winds – I lie! I'm mad!  
 It was a favourable wind I had  
 In going back which caused me sad delay!  
 Would it have constantly hindered my way –  
 To carp, though, at the winds' capriciousness  
 Is futile. Moved by the illustriousness  
 Of Delos, I was hastening to see  
 The place, although the ship seemed slow to me.  
 How often did I chide each tardy blade,  
 Complaining that too little sail was laid 90  
 Out to the wind! I'd now passed Myconos,  
 Now Tenos, now Andros; now bright Delos  
 Shone out before my eyes. "Why flee me, isle?"

I said. "Why are you floating, as erstwhile,  
 On the great sea?" I now had gone ashore,  
 The sun, when daylight almost was no more,  
 About to yoke her shining steeds. Now when,  
 As was his wont, he bade them rise again,  
 I dressed my hair as Mother ordered me.  
 She set gold in it and placed jewelry 100  
 Upon my fingers and, upon my frame,  
 A robe. At once to the deities we came,  
 Whose isle this is, and there, as devotees,  
 Offered gold incense to these deities  
 And wine; with votive blood the shrines were splattered  
 By Mother and the sacred entrails were scattered  
 Upon the smoky flames; then busily  
 My nurse to that high temple ushers me  
 And we roam round it. Through each colonnade  
 I walk and marvel at the largesse laid 110  
 In them by kings, and all the statuary,  
 The altar built of countless horns, the tree  
 That bore the goddess in her throes, and all  
 That Delos holds – indeed I can't recall  
 Nor wish to tell all that I saw – maybe,  
 While I was gazing. You too gazed at me  
 And thought me easy prey. Now I retrace  
 My steps to the temple – is there any place  
 That should be safer? You roll at my feet  
 That apple with that verse – I shan't repeat 120  
 The oath (alas, I almost did just that!)  
 My nurse picked up the fruit and wondered at  
 The verse and said, "Read it!" What poetry  
 You wrote! I read aloud your treachery!  
 At "marriage" I was baffled and ashamed  
 And sensed that both my cheeks were quite inflamed  
 And firmly fixed my eyes upon my breast,  
 Those eyes that catered to your interest.  
 Why revel, wretch? What glory have you gained?  
 What praise for this duped maid have you attained? 130  
 I had no buckler or axe in hand,  
 Like Penthesilea in the Trojan land,  
 As I stood there before you; I had on  
 No sword-belt fashioned by an Amazon  
 In gold as spoil, like some Hippolyte.  
 Why take delight in having cozened me,  
 An untaught girl? An apple, too, beguiled  
 The maid Cydippe – also, Scohoeneus' child.  
 You'll be one more Hippomenes for sure!

If you had truly suffered the allure 140  
 Of Cupid, it were better far for you  
 To act as worthy men are wont to do  
 And not to cheat your hope by treachery;  
 Instead, persuasion might have captured me.  
 When you pursued me, why did you not hold  
 It apt to say those things which might unfold  
 My love to you? Why did you use duress  
 When you could have, instead, achieved success  
 By courting me? How is a formal vow  
 And calling a god to be its witness now 150  
 Be any use to you? It is the mind  
 Which testifies; with this I have declined  
 To swear; and it alone adds confidence  
 To words; it's careful counselling and sense  
 That swear, and nothing other is of aid  
 But judgment's bonds. If I a promise made  
 To marry you, exact its proper due;  
 Except my voice, though, I have given you  
 Nothing – my heart is absent – you possess,  
 Therefore, words devoid of effectiveness. 160  
 I swore no oath, words only that include  
 An oath – no way to win a wife. Delude  
 In this way other maids - a letter should  
 Succeed an apple! Should you thus make good,  
 Despoil the rich; make every monarch swear  
 He'll yield his throne to you, and everywhere  
 Take what you will! Diana you outshine  
 In this if in your words something divine  
 Exists. This said, refusing fervently  
 Myself to you and finishing my plea, 170  
 I fear Diana's fierce wrath, I confess,  
 Suspecting that my physical distress  
 Is due to her. For why is it that I  
 Decline each time the wedding-day is nigh?  
 Three times did Hymen from the shrines take flight,  
 Leaving the wedding-chamber, while the light,  
 Replenished each time by his lazy hand,  
 Scarce rose again, the torches scarcely fanned.  
 Often the perfume from his wreathed hair  
 Drips down, his mantle sweeping, passing fair, 180  
 With ample saffron. From the door he spies  
 My weeping face, my dread of my demise  
 And things not of his sphere; the wreaths that lay  
 Upon his brow he's doffed; he wipes away  
 The unguent from his shining locks; to show

A happy face among a crowd so low  
 With grief seems shameful, and his mantle's hue  
 Goes to his cheeks. O what am I to do?  
 My febrile limbs are parched. My bedspread lies  
 More heavy than it should. Before my eyes 190  
 My weeping parents sit, and here at hand  
 No wedding-torch – instead, a funeral brand.  
 Relieve my toil, o goddess whose chief thrill  
 Is in the painted quiver, if you will,  
 And grant your brother's succour, he whose fame  
 Is bringing health to us. You suffer shame  
 That he should oust death's causes while, instead,  
 The reason for my death's attributed  
 To you. Could it be by chance that I laid  
 My eyes on you as in a fountain's shade 200  
 You bathed? Did I your shrine fail to revere  
 Among so many? Did my mother sneer  
 At yours? I've done no wrong but that I read  
 Out loud a false oath and was talented  
 In unpropitious verse. So, then, you too  
 Should offer frankincense for me, if you  
 Don't lie about your love; you injured me  
 With hands that could aid me. How can you be  
 Soangry that your promised maid is still  
 Not yours when you make sure she never will? 210  
 While I am living, every happiness  
 Could yet be yours; why does a fierce goddess  
 Take life from me and thus from you take me?  
 Do not believe the man whose destiny  
 Is wedding me takes into his embrace  
 My sickly limbs. Indeed, he takes his place  
 Beside me, when he may, recalling, though,  
 This is a virgin couch. He seems, also,  
 To doubt me, often weeping – although he  
 Won't say why – flattering me less fearlessly, 220  
 Kissing me rarely and with timid force  
 Calling me his. I'm not surprised, of course,  
 Since I betray myself quite openly;  
 I turn away when he calls in on me,  
 Won't talk, pretend to sleep and cast aside  
 His reaching hand. He groans and sighs inside  
 His silent breast and suffers my disfavour  
 Without deserving it. Ah this you savour!  
 Alas that I told of my love to you!  
 You more deserve my anger, for you threw 230  
 Your net to catch me. Now you ask of me

If you may gaze upon my malady,  
 Though far away, in this you wound me still.  
 I wondered at your name, which can cause ill  
 With its sharp point from afar. I'm not yet better,  
 Anyhow, from such a wound, pierced by your letter  
 As by a dart. Why come? For all you'll see  
 Is the great prize of your dexterity –  
 My wretched frame! I waste away. My hue  
 Is bloodless, like that fruit propelled by you, 240  
 As I recall, no redness in my face,  
 So pale. Such is a new-hewn marble's grace,  
 Or silver at a banquet table, wan  
 With icy water. Should you look upon  
 Me now, you'll say you've not perceived  
 My face before nor ever have deceived  
 A maid like me and give me back my vow,  
 Lest I be yours, now hoping that somehow  
 The goddess will forget it all. Maybe  
 You'll make me swear the opposite and see 250  
 That I speak other words. But all the same,  
 As you beseeched, sit here and see the frame  
 Of your sick bride-to-be! Though hard of heart  
 You be, they ask Apollo to impart  
 How I may convalesce. They say he too –  
 As gossip goes – carps of a pledge still due,  
 Marked by his sister. The divinity,  
 The prophet and the published augury  
 Concede that – a! there are no deities  
 Who won't aid you. Why, then, such boons as these? 260  
 Perhaps another letter has been found  
 That even those mighty deities confound.  
 You honour them and to them I comply  
 And gladly yield my hands. To Mother I  
 Confessed the oath my tongue was forced to swear,  
 Eyes fixed upon the ground in shame. Your care  
 Must do the rest; it's more than any maid  
 Should do that this dispatch was not afraid  
 To contact you. Already with my pen  
 I've wearied my sick limbs – to write again 270  
 Is now a task my weary hand declines  
 To do. There's nothing that these written lines  
 May add, since I so yearn to be with you,  
 Except to send to you s fond adieu.









