

Irus the beggar and the herdsman Melanthius
add to your ruin the last touch of shame.

There are three of us, none of us warriors: your weak wife,
old Laertes, the boy Telemachus.
I almost lost him to an ambush recently
when he bucked their will and went to Pylos. 100
I pray to the gods that our deaths come in order,
that he closes my eyes, and then closes yours.
The cowherd is with us, and the old nurse too;
third is the faithful keeper of the sty.

But Laertes is weak because of his years
and cannot rule surrounded by foes.
Telemachus will become strong, provided he lives,
but now he needs a father's help and guidance.
I have no strength to drive enemies from our house. 110
Please hurry, O our altar and haven!

You have a son, and I pray you always will,
who should have been trained in his father's ways.
Think too of Laertes, who is holding off death
so that you might close his eyes in the end.

And I—I was a girl when you left. Even if
you come at once, I will seem to be old.

HEROIDES II: PHYLLIS TO DEMOPHOON

Demophoon has left Thrace and Phyllis, his new bride and the king's daughter, to complete his journey home from Troy. After too much time has passed, Phyllis begins to suspect that her husband will not return.

Your hostess, Demophoon, your Rhodopeian Phyllis
laments your absence, longer than planned.
When the horns of the moon touched each other, globe swollen,
your anchor should have sunk in our sands.
Four times the moon has hid, four times her globe rebloomed,
no Sithonian wave brings Actaeon ships.
If you had been counting the days—a talent of lovers—
you would know my laments aren't premature.
Hope, too, has been slow. Late do we believe that which pains us.
You are guilty now against your lover's will. 10

How often I deceive myself on your behalf, how often
thinking Notus's squalls bring your white sails back.
I curse Theseus! He couldn't bear for you to leave him . . .
but maybe it's not he who slows your course.
Now and then I am afraid. What if when you steered for Hebrus's waves
your ship was wrecked, drowned in froth-white sea!
How often I beg the gods that you are safe (bastard!), mouthing prayers,
I make sacrifice sooty with incense.
How often I see promising winds on the deep or in heaven
and say to myself, "If he is safe, he will come." 20
My steadfast love has thought of every obstacle a man in a hurry
could face. Excuses are my strength.
But, slow, you're still not here, the oaths you swore by gods don't bring
you back
and you don't return stirred by my love.
You gave to the winds both your word and your sails, Demophoon.
Your sails don't come back, your word lacks faith.

Tell me: What have I done wrong except to love you naively?
 I could have earned your affection through such a fault.
 Only one crime is mine: that I welcomed you, you bastard,
 but even this crime has virtue's likeness, its weight. 30

Where now are your oaths and your faith, and our hands joined together?
 And the god ever-present on your lying tongue?
 Where now is my promised Hymenaeus, the years shared together,
 and your guarantee, pledge of our union?
 By the sea often tossed by the waves and the flurries,
 by which you once passed, by which you would pass again;
 By your grandfather you swore (unless he, too, was a fable),
 he who hushes with his winds the rattled deep;
 By Venus and the weapons causing me far too much trouble
 (one weapon the bow, the other the torch); 40
 and by Juno, who presides over marriage beds sweetly,
 and the torch-bearing goddess's mystic rites.
 If just one of these gods sought vengeance for injury . . .
 your one life alone won't pay the price.

What madness! I fixed your mangled ship so the keel would hold true—
 the same keel that abandons me now!
 I gave oarage to you, and you used it to flee me.
 Oh! I suffer wounds I made myself!
 I believed your flattering words (of which you had plenty),
 I believed in your people and your name, 50
 I believed in your tears—or can these, too, be taught to mimic?
 Do tears master their craft? Gush on command?
 I believed in the gods . . . Why make so many promises?
 You could have caught me with just one.

I am not upset that I offered you my home and harbor.
 Those should have been the limits of my service.
 But heaping hospitality in the bedroom most foully—
 this I regret: flesh on flesh intertwined.

I'd rather that the night before that had been my last,
 while I could have died as "Virtuous Phyllis." 60

I had hoped for better because I thought I deserved better.
 Whatever hope comes from merit is fair.
 To deceive a trusting girl is an ill-won glory.
 My innocence deserved your goodwill.
 I was deceived by your words as a lover and as a woman.
 May the gods make this the height of your praise!
 Among the Aegides and in the center of town may they erect you,
 and your father before you, by his titles supreme.
 When Sciron has been read and savage Procrustes and Sinis,
 and that hybrid form, taurine and man, 70
 and Thebes conquered in war, and the double-limbed creatures
 splayed out,
 and the black god's blind kingdoms struck down—
 may your image follow these and bear this title:

THIS MAN TOOK HIS LOVING HOSTESS IN DECEIT.
 Of all the many deeds of your father, only Ariadne
 stays with you, the abandoned Cretan girl.
 His one deed you admire is the one deed that needs defending.
 You are heir to your father's deceptions, you cheat.
 She—I do not envy her—takes joy in a better husband
 and sits high on the harnessed backs of tigers. 80
 But the Thracians I once disdained refuse to marry me,
 for they say I preferred a stranger over my own.
 "It is time that she leave us for learned Athens," one mutters,
 "someone else can rule battle-worn Thrace;
 the end proves the means." I hope he never succeeds,
 whoever thinks action must be judged by results!

But if our sea were to be churned up in froth by your oarage,
 they'd say I'd planned well for myself and my own.
 But I had no plan, and my palace will not touch you,
 and you won't wash your skin in Bistonian waves! 90
 The sight of you leaving still clings to my eyes, your fleet here sitting
 in my port, but about to set sail.
 The gall. Draping from the neck of the girl who loves you,
 joining lips in long-lingering kisses pressed hard,
 mingling our weeping together teardrop on teardrop,
 you cried when a sweet breeze found your sails.

You are stepping away, you are saying last words,
"My Phyllis, wait for your Demophoon!"

Am I to wait for you who left never to see me again?
Am I to wait for sails turned away from my sea? 100
Well, I'm waiting! If only you would return late to your lover,
your promise would be broken by its timing alone.
But why do I pray, wretched? Now another wife holds you,
perhaps, and Love, who once cruelly chose me.

And now I'm dead to you, I think. You've forgotten the name Phyllis.
Oh god! If you ask who I am, where I'm from . . .
I am she, Demophoon, who gave Thracian ports and hospitality
when you were dragged on long wanderings, lost,
she whose help, my help, built you up, she whose wealth gave many
presents
when you had nothing, she who would have given much more. 110
I am she who yielded the broad kingdoms of Lycurgus,
hardly fit to be ruled under the name of a girl,
where icy Rhodope lies open against the shadows of Haemus,
and sacred Hebrus guides galloping flood,
whose virginity, mine, was sipped at with omen-birds circling,
whose chaste girdle false fingers unclasped!
The maid of honor, Tisiphone, howled in our chambers,
and in the corner, some bird sang requiem.
And Allecto was there, her neck collared in serpents,
the light twitching in sepulcher torchfire. 120

I despair, yes, but still tread the rocks and thicketed shoreline,
and the shoreline lies wide before my eyes.
Whether day softens the earth or icy starlight is shining,
I look out, watch for wind to stir the straits;
And whenever I see sails approaching from far off,
in a brief moment, I augur them gods.

I run into the surf, the waves scarcely restrain me
where the fickle sea reaches first waves.

As the sails draw closer, I am less able to stand,
I leave my body, slip into slave girls' arms. 130

There is a bay shaped like a bow drawn taut, like a sickle,
at the horns on each end, a broken cliff.
In my mind I toss my body into the low-biding waters;
And I'll do it since you continue your deceit.
Let the waves carry me to your shores, hurtling forward,
let me bob unburied before your eyes.
You may be harder than iron, than adamant, than your own self, but
you'll say:
"You shouldn't have followed me, Phyllis! Not like this!"

How often I thirst for poison, how often wish to perish,
to be skewered by the sword, to die a bloody death. 140
My neck! Which offered itself to be circled by arms so disloyal . . .
I want my neck to be tangled in a noose.
Now that my death is ripe, I must consider my modesty.
I will not delay in choosing my death.
On my tomb you'll be written, bitter cause of my passing.
You will be known by this verse or the like.
AS HER GUEST, DEMOPHOON GAVE LOVING PHYLLIS HER
EXIT;
HE OFFERED DEATH'S CAUSE, SHE ITS HAND.