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# The 'Truth' about Latin Love Poetry

Rede uitgesproken door

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bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar  
op het vakgebied van de Latijnse taal- en letterkunde  
aan de Universiteit Leiden  
op vrijdag 16 mei 2003



Mijnheer de rector magnificus, Excellency, dearest Father, friends, vrienden, beste collega's en studenten, dames en heren, ladies and gentlemen,

### *Quaerere uerum*

Adiecere bonae paulo plus artis Athenae,  
scilicet ut uellem curuo dinoscere rectum  
atque inter siluas Academi quaerere uerum.

Good Athens added a little more in the way of education – the encouragement, I suppose, to distinguish the straight from the crooked and in the groves of Academe to search for truth.

So said the Roman poet Horatius (Horace) within a kind of 'short CV' written *ca* 19 BC.<sup>1</sup> The last clause of that quotation, out of context and in conventional, slightly manipulated English translation, has more resonance and *grauitas* than it does in the original Latin, where 'the woods of Academus' refer with some irony<sup>2</sup> to Plato's Academy in a public park on the edge of ancient Athens. My own Athens was London, and my Academy Bedford College, the first British academic institution to be founded (in 1849) expressly for the higher education of women. But the idea of 'searching for truth' I had met long before that – in the form of a legend, in an initially mysterious language, on the badge of my school: *quaerere uerum*. At my London Academy, the legend was different, but the message essentially the same. It was indebted to the sententious verdict of the first-century BC Roman historian Sallustius (Sallust) on one of his heroes, M. Porcius Cato:

esse quam uideri bonus malebat: ita, quo minus petebat gloriam, eo magis illum sequebatur.<sup>3</sup>

He preferred to *be* rather than to *seem* a good man, and accordingly the less he sought glory, the more it followed him.

'To be, rather than to seem' was what Bedford College urged: *esse quam uideri*. And, uncannily, I still had not heard the last of it. Another legend, in an even more mysterious language, awaited me at the first Academy in which I was a teacher: *Goreu awen gwirionedd*, proclaims the University of Wales: 'The best inspiration is truth'.<sup>4</sup> To say nothing, then, of seeking truth, I have in a sense been pursued by it throughout the whole course of my own blundering around in the woods up to now. So today, in this other Academy on the banks of the Rijn, with a famous *Hortus* as its *siluae* – en misschien de meest mysterieuze taal van allemaal<sup>5</sup> – I think for once I must take the hint and speak about 'truth'. Or, at any rate, about some faces of it in relation to the corpus

of Latin literature which has long claimed my special interest: the love poetry of the first century BC by Catullus and the Augustan elegists, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovidius (Ovid).

### Then and now: a brief history of ‘truth’ and the Latin love-poets

For the Victorian age the ‘truth’ about these poets – about what they ‘meant’ – was very simple. They meant – on the whole – what they said. And what they said was, typically, that they were spurred to intense sexual passion (sometimes satisfied, but more often not) and accompanying spiritual devotion by a named woman (or in one case by two<sup>6</sup>). This the late nineteenth-century critics, empirical humanists of the most fundamental kind, took entirely at face value. In the words of W.Y. Sellar, for example, the love poets ‘were impelled to write of ... the passion and romance of their own lives ... it was the outlet in literature of the emotional and sensuous element in the Italian temperament’<sup>7</sup> (end of quotation, which in its turn, I am afraid, is an example of the patronising element in the British temperament!). Tibullus’ elegies on his passion for a boy were judged an unfortunate aberration and best forgotten. The female beloveds’ names were taken to be pseudonyms for real women of doubtful social status and even more doubtful morality, though, arguably, Catullus’ Lesbia might be identified as Clodia, widow of Metellus Celer. Ovid’s Corinna, on the other hand, was almost certainly a composite figure – did not Ovid himself say as much?<sup>8</sup> Indeed, so relatively frivolous and lacking in genuine feeling was Ovid’s account of his love-life in his *Amores* that he might, it was conceded, just possibly have made it up.<sup>9</sup>

And, apart from a few comparatively minor modifications,<sup>10</sup> so remained ‘the truth’ until the last quarter of the twentieth century. Since then it has apparently changed: they *all* made it up. The first-person speakers and their love affairs in the poems are *not* to be identified with the persons and experiences of the poets themselves. Their beloveds – Propertius’ Cynthia and Tibullus’ Delia and Nemesis no less than Ovid’s Corinna – are, *of course*, entirely fictitious, with their social status, personalities and behaviour invented and varied to serve the ends of poetic virtuosity.<sup>11</sup> Even Catullus’ Lesbia no longer enjoys unchallenged ‘reality’: there is now the startling suggestion that the name, far from being a pseudonym for an exceptionally merry widow, is a *nom parlant* for a fictitious prostitute specialising in oral sex (so argues Niklas Holzberg, on the strength of play on the Greek word for that activity, *lesbiazein*).<sup>12</sup> In the terminology of Paul Veyne, one of the adherents of the French literary theory which was the mainspring of the reappraisal, the new ‘truth’ is that the Latin love poets were not in the business of mimesis but of semiosis.<sup>13</sup> In everyday language, they were all participating competitively in a literary game, which had little or nothing to do with emotional or social reality and everything to do with humorous pastiche, pose and subversion, words and wit. In fact, although Veyne in his ‘ground-breaking’<sup>14</sup> book *L’élégie érotique romaine* gives the impression of God-given insight into the rules of the poets’ ‘game’ (with God doubtless going through a structuralist

period at the time), his approach is in its way just as unobjectively reader-constructed as that of the Victorians.

### A test-case for pluralism: Propertius 1.19

I shall not debate today the respective validity of these two polarised versions of the ‘truth’ about Latin love poetry nor, indeed, of any positions between these poles or beyond the margins of the more recent and more radical view.<sup>15</sup> That debate has run long enough. I would like rather to demonstrate on a fairly simple level how it is possible to read Latin love elegy ‘truthfully’ from more than one set of interpretational premises, using a specific example that, I think, has not been so treated before. This is the elegy printed on the handout<sup>16</sup> with translations into English verse by Guy Lee<sup>17</sup> and into Dutch by W.A.M. Peters<sup>18</sup> (the only modern Dutch version that I know to exist, but one which, I am afraid, is in some places not helpful, as I will explain). The poem’s essential theme is a literary perennial<sup>19</sup> and one of potential interest to every mortal man and woman: the impact of death upon love.

Non ego nunc tristis uereor, mea Cynthia, Manis,  
nec moror extremo debita fata rogo;  
sed ne forte tuo careat me funus amore,  
hic timor est ipsis durior exsequiis.  
non adeo leuiter nostris puer haesit ocellis,  
ut meus oblito puluis amore uacet.

It’s not that I am scared, my Cynthia, of the Underworld  
Or mind fate’s debt to the final pyre,  
But the fear that when dead I may lose your love  
Is worse than the funeral itself.  
Not so lightly has the Boy clung to our eyes  
That with love forgotten my dust could rest.

The two elements central to the poem are already here in the first six lines: one is the fear of the speaker (that is, the character who calls himself Propertius in the poems) that in death he will be deprived of Cynthia’s love (*tuo ... amore*, line 3); the other is the claim that *his* love for *her* will endure after his own death.

Let me take a few moments to draw out the main threads in what follows too (the handout layout of the Latin text in sections, incidentally, is editorial rather than authorial, but it helpfully highlights the poem’s structure). In the second six-line section (7-12) the Thessalian hero Protesilaus (here called *Phylacides*) is introduced as a precedent for man’s love for woman enduring after death. To fill in a little of the background for future reference, Protesilaus, according to the Homeric *Iliad*, had to leave his bride Laodamia (the *iucundae coniugis*, ‘lovely wife’, of Propertius’ line 7)

after only one night to join the expedition to recover Helen from Troy. On disembarkation he was immediately killed.<sup>20</sup> In later versions, probably derived from a lost tragedy by Euripides,<sup>21</sup> the gods of the Underworld, in response to Laodamia's distress, granted Protesilaus a few hours' leave of absence, so to speak, to revisit her on earth. When his time was up, Laodamia killed herself rather than lose him again. Propertius' version is unusual in making the enduring love which motivated the return Protesilaus' rather than Laodamia's and in insisting on Protesilaus' phantom state during his post-mortem excursion (so *falsis ... palmis* and *umbra* in lines 9-10; elsewhere he is fully, if only temporarily, restored to life). One might perhaps expect Propertius to follow this up with *explicit* assimilation of *himself* to Protesilaus, but he does not.<sup>22</sup> He offers only (in lines 11-12, underlined on the handout) the somewhat cryptic 'There, whatever I am, I shall ever be called your shadow; / Great love can cross even the shores of fate' (*illuc, quidquid ero, semper tua dicar imago: / traicit et fati litora magnus amor*). More of that shortly.

The third six-line section (13-18) reaffirms the endurance of Propertius' love for Cynthia beyond death, but this time via a mythological scenario in which he imagines himself participating and which works negatively. A whole 'troop of beautiful heroines' (*formasae ... chorus heroinae*, 13) might approach him in the Underworld (rather, perhaps, as the line of ghosts approached the Homeric Odysseus<sup>23</sup>), yet none will he find more attractive (*gratior*, 16) than Cynthia; *even if* she should live long into old age – which, pray God (or rather 'Earth', *Tellus*, 16), she will – her 'bones' (*ossa*, 18) will still claim his affection (*cara ... futura*, 18). The Latin syntax in these lines is markedly loose (and Peters' translation is even looser – I have italicised the most wayward lines as a warning). The sentence beginning in line 13 'Let them come (i.e. 'even if they should come') 'in troops, the beautiful heroines ...' is never in fact completed with the expected 'I should still not be tempted by any of them'. Instead the thought peters out in the relative clause of lines 15-16 (*quarum nulla ...*, literally 'the beauty of none of whom I would find more attractive than yours ...').<sup>24</sup> A separate, if related, thought then begins in lines 16-17 with *et ... quamuis*, 'Indeed ... though fate remand you to a long old age ...'; and this second concessive clause is completed with *cara tamen lacrimis ...* (18), 'Yet to my tears ...'.<sup>25</sup>

In the last of the six-line sections (19-24) the lover looks for comfort in death from the thought that Cynthia in life (*uiua*, 19) will lavish reciprocal love on him when he is 'ash' (*fauilla*, 20). He fears, however, that she may be deflected from her mourning by *iniquus Amor* (22, Love which is 'uneven', 'iniquitous', in the sense, I think, that it does not affect the two of them to the same extent): in other words, a new lover could displace him.

'So', he concludes in the final couplet (lines 25-6):

... while we may let us delight in loving:  
No love is ever long enough.

quare, dum licet, inter nos laetemur amantes:  
non satis est ullo tempore longus amor.

(a) Humanist *angst*

‘Ebullient’ is how the American commentator Richardson describes that conclusion,<sup>26</sup> and just one or two scholars have detected in lines 21-4 an undertone at odds with the rest of the poem: there is, according to Robert Baker,<sup>27</sup> a rueful irony or, according to A.J. Boyle,<sup>28</sup> a ‘quasi-’ (but note *only* ‘quasi-’) ‘humorous’ irony in the pseudo-naïve idea of some third party being responsible for Cynthia’s defection (this is envisaged happening only ‘against her will’ (*inuitam*, 23) and with her subjected to ‘constant threats’ (*assiduis ... minis*, 24). But otherwise, despite the interpretative revolution of the later twentieth century and beyond, which I sketched earlier, there is a remarkable degree of scholarly agreement about the ‘truth’ of this poem. It is ‘a poem of feeling’, says W.A. Camps;<sup>29</sup> one of ‘echter Liebe die “wir alle mitempfinden” können’ (Eckhard Lefevre<sup>30</sup> quoting Reitzenstein); one in which ‘Propertius artfully achieves a convincing impression of unadorned sincerity’ (the same Baker who detected a moment of rueful irony!<sup>31</sup>). In no other elegy, according to the Italian commentator Fedeli, has Propertius so clearly expressed ‘il sentimento dell’amore quale unica ragione di vita e ne ha affermato, al tempo stesso, il valore eterno’.<sup>32</sup> It is a poem, according to Oliver Lyne, ‘of grim internal struggle’, ‘a dense and morbid dialectic’.<sup>33</sup>

All entirely possible, too – *if* you make certain assumptions. *If*, for instance, you assume that rather cryptic couplet 11-12 (underlined on the handout) to reflect Propertius-the-lover’s determination to extract hope and comfort from *his* version of the Protesilaus precedent – despite the fact that it highlights the frustration as well as the endurance of love after death. *If* you assume that the speaker’s unstable conception of the nature of existence beyond the funeral pyre (mere dust at one moment, semi-sentient ghosthood the next) must indicate either a magnificent indifference to the matter (so Gordon Williams<sup>34</sup>) or a deep-seated anxiety about it (so Theodore Papanghelis<sup>35</sup>). *If* you assume that what Camps calls the ‘confused and breathless passage’<sup>36</sup> lines 13-18 (i.e. the third six-line section) is designed, as Baker puts it, ‘to create the effect of impromptu and unadulterated expression of feelings deeply held’.<sup>37</sup> *If*, with Volker Eckert, you assume the coyness of lines 21-4 to be motivated by ‘Takt und Diskretion’.<sup>38</sup> *If* you assume the final couplet to be a deeply poignant, if also spirited, reminder of the shortness of human life, and hence of human love.

In sum, the view of this poem as one of ‘echter Liebe’, true love, depends on a filling in of all the lacunae in its expression and sequence of thought, all the spaces for the imagination, on humanistic premises.<sup>39</sup> That is, on the assumption that the lover who speaks in the poem, even if not necessarily identical with Propertius the man and the poet, as the Victorians would have had it, is nevertheless *one of us*. And ‘Ons kent ons.’ ‘We’ – thinking, feeling human beings – regard the impact of death upon love as no subject for foolery: hence the ‘truth’ will be that this poem is – must be – serious.



## (b) Structuralist fun

But I would like to suggest that it can, just as ‘truthfully’, be rather funny throughout – if one starts from the *other* interpretational premise: that the Propertius of the poems is *not* one of us, a flesh-and-blood individual, but just a created character in what Holzberg has aptly called the *Liebesroman*,<sup>40</sup> the comic novel that is Roman elegy. A character who in every chapter makes himself look laughable or the poet, his creator, look witty rather than moving. In Propertian elegy, the lover’s clownish side is frequently detectable in the mythological analogy which does not quite work.<sup>41</sup> And so it is in the present poem – at one step removed, as it were. For his implied self-identification with Protesilaus, in all his devotion and frustrations, is humbug: the precedent of real interest, conspicuous by its very suppression, is Laodamia. Now *there* is the brilliant, foolproof solution for him to the envisaged loss of Cynthia’s love after death: *she* can kill herself as well! Only, she won’t, will she? Not *this* one. For this is not Laodamia: this is Cynthia, a different proposition altogether, as every reader who has read the *Liebesroman* so far will well remember. In particular, the scenario in lines 9-10 of man entering house eager to lay his hands on sexual pleasures (*gaudia*, ‘delight’, is a euphemism for exactly that<sup>42</sup>) recalls a memorable earlier stage in the Propertius-and-Cynthia story, when the living lover, coming home late one night after a party, staggered drunkenly into Cynthia’s bedroom with thoughts of rape on his mind and his hands eager for sexual contact as she slept – only to have her wake up suddenly and give him a good cursing!<sup>43</sup> So, whatever happened in Protesilaus’ case, no elegiac *Propertius* visiting from the far side of the Styx could even be sure of a civil reception from this lady, let alone a romantic *Liebested*. On this reading, lines 11-12 look rather less like a bold attempt at self-consolation than a prudent withdrawal: he had better settle for being known as a ghost with a steady girlfriend ‘on the other side.’<sup>44</sup> ‘Wondrous love’<sup>45</sup> (*magnus amor*) may indeed cross the shores of fate – but only in one direction (incidentally, here is a neat stroke of wit: the two words *fati litora*, the ‘shores of fate’, actually straddle the caesura, the strong rhythmic break in the middle of a Latin pentameter). Solution number one, then, a non-starter.

But, having effortlessly rehabilitated himself (via *quidquid ero*, ‘whatever I shall be’) from mere ‘dust’ at least to the status of a ghost, in that syntactically rambling section 13-18 Propertius the elegiac lover warms to *second-best*: that is, keeping faith with Cynthia for his part, in the face of all temptation, until she joins him in the normal course of events. But wait a minute! After posing as a ghost with an eye for beautiful women, had he not better reassure her immediately in the beauty department (where she always had a sensitive spot, as again earlier poems testify<sup>46</sup>)? Hence that almost tangential relative clause (15-16), which peters out when he resumes the real point: his promise to wait for her faithfully. But wait a minute again (and this is the moment at which the Dutch translation goes crazy)! It could be – and in all decency *should* be – a very long time before the arrival of her bones. The syntactical

subject *ossa* is postponed and hence emphatic: ‘Bones? Yes, come to think of it, that’s all there would be to look forward to: *old bones*’. My rather bold attempted projection here into the mind of a comic *amator* I hope may suggest how the disturbed syntax can reflect, just as well as agony of the soul, an amusing disintegration of the lover’s second-best solution. What is more, his ‘tears’ – a subject about which in general, incidentally, I have learned much from the ‘afscheidscollege’ of my predecessor, Professor Schrijvers<sup>47</sup> – his tears point to a curious role reversal in this case: the dead mourning the living.<sup>48</sup> And therein lies another alarming thought for him: if she is going to be *both* very much alive *and* incomparably beautiful during the long years of separation, who knows to whom *else* she may be incomparably attractive? Temptation is, after all, so much easier for the dead to resist than for the living! Solution number two, then, also on the rocks.

Still, if the prospects for immediate *suttee*<sup>49</sup> are nil and for lifelong fidelity not much better, *even Cynthia*, in surviving him (*uiu*a in line 19 seems retrospectively to confirm the anxiety underlying the previous lines), might manage to maintain her love at least for the immediate aftermath of his funeral. I might draw attention in passing here to one of those witty pieces of word-play which betray Propertius’ interest in cleverness as opposed to emotion. The sixth/seventh-century AD etymologist Isidore of Seville claims that *mors*, ‘death’, is so called precisely because it is *amara*, ‘bitter’.<sup>50</sup> Propertius’ own collocation *non ... mors sit amara* in line 20 itself arguably hints at such a fanciful derivation and so makes the facetious between-the-lines suggestion that a possible etymology of *mors* would be proved wrong if he could be sure of Cynthia’s love at his funeral. But in fact the chances are that it will not even last until his ashes have cooled, for the Latin *fauilla* suggests *warm* ashes, ‘embers’ in English: she will succumb to a new lover straightaway (the unnamed rival, perhaps, often in the background in the earlier parts of the *Liebesroman*<sup>51</sup>). Not Cynthia, then, but Propertius, is really the one under ‘threat’. With thoughts of solution number three, it is as good as over already.

The ‘dense and morbid dialectic’ has evaporated – or perhaps, rather, metamorphosed into a self-satirising soliloquy. On *this* reading, the final couplet looks more like a version of ‘What the hell?’ ‘Therefore’ (*quare*, 25) – that is, ‘since this line of thinking is getting me nowhere’ – ‘let’s get on with *making* love now, while the going’s good (*dum licet*): at no time (or at any rate, for none of those times I have just tried out – eternity, a lifetime or a few hours) does love endure long enough’.

### Beyond pluralism: in defence of philology

Now, in positing such an interpretation of this Latin love poem as ‘truthful’, I do not suggest that it invalidates, or is necessarily *more* truthful than, the humanistic one. But I do suggest that it reveals the limits of humanistic truth, as indeed might other ‘alternative’ interpretations: the feministic,<sup>52</sup> say, or the metapoetic (that is, the kind of

interpretation which sees the poem as an expression of Propertius' anxiety about what will happen to his own poetry after his death<sup>53</sup>). Under constraint of time, however, I cannot exemplify these further different lines of approach now.

Argument for a pluralist attitude to seeking 'truth' in Latin love poetry is doubtless not what some of you who know me would have expected of me, nor indeed what some of you may want to hear, but, then, telling people what they want to hear is hardly what professors are for. All the same, my own endorsement of inclusiveness is not unlimited: in particular, it does not extend to certain extreme forms of post-modernism which take no account of the norms of Latin grammar, syntax and linguistic usage. I have time for just one small example (passage 2 on the handout<sup>54</sup>). You have the first few lines, with translations, of a puzzling poem (Propertius 1.10) in which Propertius the elegiac lover claims to be speaking as one who has been a 'witness' (*testis*) to his friend Gallus' love-making. Ellen Oliensis, writing in 1997, claims that (and I quote) 'Embedded as it is in this scene of sexual intercourse, *testis* in line 1 bears a trace of its anatomical meaning' [i.e. 'testicle']; it is as if Propertius had been transformed into an adjunct of Gallus's love-making equipment'.<sup>55</sup> Well, the idea has won some support.<sup>56</sup> But it is wrong. I reject it not out of prudery (the unnerving experience of realising that people have been reading a text for the best part of two thousand years and that you are apparently the first to have discovered an obscene joke in it has been my own too often for that). Nor do I reject it simply on grounds of common sense, though the invitation to do so would seem pressing. The male member, the penis, in Latin poetry is capable of remarkable things, including animation and even speech, as a celebrated instance in Horace's *Satires* reveals,<sup>57</sup> but a speaking *testicle* arguably strains credulity. The decisive objection, however, is that *it is just the one*. For apart from medical and veterinary contexts, Latin writers were not much interested in anatomical *testes* – except in pairs. All indecent puns on the vestigially juridical and the biological sense of *testis* (and also, incidentally, on the Greek equivalent *parastatês*) are dependent on the presence of the plural form.<sup>58</sup>

My rejection then is ultimately based on philology, and I make no apology for that. Philology is not a theory: it has been tested and proved valid. Just because in relatively recent times interesting new dimensions have been uncovered in the way that Latin writers operated, classical philology, the one indispensable tool for distinguishing sense from nonsense, must not lose its nerve. And especially not here, in Leiden – the Leiden of Lipsius and Scaliger and Burman, where it has flourished for nearly half a millennium. I say this not in automatic homage to the past, but out of real concern for the future. Without philology the search for truth cannot even begin, and I shall do everything in my power to ensure that it can always continue to begin here, in Leiden.

And that brings me to more personal things. 'Leiden!' said one of my former colleagues on hearing the news of my appointment, 'What a place for a Latinist!' And it is so – despite all the bureaucratic distractions of a modern professor. Of Scaliger

(whom I have learned to call S-kalig-her) the story is often told (I use here the words of Reynolds and Wilson<sup>59</sup>) that ‘when offered [in 1593] the chair at Leiden vacated by Lipsius [in fact the chair of history] his eminence as a scholar was such that he was allowed to accept the chair but decline the customary duties attached to it’. Well, I confess that I have wondered many times during the last year how he would have got on with the BaMa!<sup>60</sup> But it is indeed the fingerprints, in some cases even in an almost literal sense, of Scaliger and all the other local giants of Latin scholarship on the texts that I read in the place that I am now privileged to read them (when not distracted by the BaMa) which remain an exceptional and an awesome inspiration. Not least for that reason I would like to thank the College van Bestuur and the Bestuur of the Faculteit der Letteren for honouring me with appointment to this ancient chair and so entrusting me with the stewardship in Leiden of the subject I love. For stewardship is how I regard it: a responsibility to see that Latin in this most distinguished university is handed on in the best possible shape to those who come after me.

Dames en heren, there are two persons owed an enormous debt of gratitude for whom this day comes twenty years or more too late. One is my dearest mother, who thought her only child a little strange, but nevertheless loved me with a deep and steadfast love as long as she lived. The other is Professor Frank Goodyear, *my* Professor of Latin, who first opened my eyes to what it was all about and whose fierce exterior cloaked a kindness and a loyalty as great as his scholarship. But rather than grieve today for what is not, let me rejoice for what is – for the fact that so many of you whose love, support and guidance have helped to bring me to this position are present to receive my thanks. There are more of you than I can ever address by name, though a few I must. Father, Norman, you especially I thank, for your unfailing support for my somewhat counter-cultural aspirations; whenever I have wavered, you have urged me on. Averil, Rosemary, David, *rarissimi amici*, you can never know how much your love and laughter, but above all your listening, have sustained me in good times and in bad. All of you, my dear teachers and mentors – Mrs Gunson, Gloria, who started it all over 40 years ago in that Yorkshire grammar school which urged us *quaerere uerum*, Professor Hall, Barrie, my ‘promotor’, my research supervisor, who had a lot to put up with, Mr Lee and Professor Rudd, Guy and Niall, two of my ‘three wise men’ (the third, Professor Ted Kenney, who to his regret could not be here in person, I also address in spirit) – for your wisdom and learning, for your patience and kindness, I am enduringly and affectionately grateful.

Beste collega’s van de sectie Latijn: beste Rudi, Karl en Florence, dank jullie voor de positieve, open manier, waarop jullie mij in je midden hebt opgenomen en voor het geduld waarmee je de nieuweling haar gang hebt laten gaan bij het ontwerpen van een nieuw onderwijsprogramma. Samen kunnen we veel, en dat zullen we ook.

Beste collega’s van de Faculteiten der Letteren, Archeologie en Wijsbegeerte, in het bijzonder Ineke, Manfred, Luuk, Remke, Wim, John en Frans, van harte bedankt, niet alleen voor je deskundig advies, maar ook voor jullie warm menselijke vriendschap.

Dames en heren studenten, niet in de laatste plaats voor ú ben ik hier. Als ik erin zal slagen u te laten zien dat Latijnse teksten meer te bieden hebben dan je op het eerste gezicht zou verwachten en u iets over te dragen van het plezier dat ik zelf heb bij het lezen ervan, zal ik mij gelukkig voelen.

Ten slotte, tegen al mijn nieuwe Nederlandse vrienden en collega's wil ik zeggen: hartelijk dank voor de warme en ruimhartige manier waarop u mij in uw land en in uw cultuur hebt willen opnemen. 'Fremd bin ich eingezogen ...'. Inderdaad: maar ik zal niet als een vreemdeling vertrekken. Dat weet ik nu al!

But enough. For I am only too conscious of how perilously close to the real truth can come, minimally adapted, that couplet of Ovid, which is last on the hand-out:<sup>61</sup>

uerba *professorum* foliis leuiora caducis  
inrita qua uisum est uentus et unda ferunt.

'Professors' words, lighter than falling leaves ...'!

Dames en heren, ik heb gezegd.

## APPENDIX: LATIN TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

### 1. PROPERTIUS 1.19

Non ego nunc tristis uereor, mea Cynthia, Manis, nec moror extremo debita fata rogo; sed ne forte tuo careat me funus amore, hic timor est ipsis durior exsequiis. non adeo leuiter nostris puer* haesit ocellis, ut meus oblito puluis amore uacet.	5
illic Phylacides** iucundae coniugis heros non potuit caecis immemor esse locis, sed cupidus falsis attingere gaudia palmis Thessalus antiquam uenerat umbra domum. <u>illic quidquid ero, semper tua dicar imago:</u> <u>traicit et fati litora magnus amor.</u>	10
illic formosae ueniant chorus heroinae, quas dedit Argiuis Dardana praeda uiris, quarum nulla tua fuerit mihi, Cynthia, forma gratior – et (Tellus hoc ita iusta sinat) quamuis te longae remorentur fata senectae, cara tamen lacrimis ossa futura meis.	15
quae tu uiua mea possis sentire fauilla! tum mihi non ullo mors sit amara loco. quam uereor, ne te contempto, Cynthia, busto abstrahat a nostro puluere iniquus Amor, cogat et inuitam lacrimas siccare cadentis! flectitur assiduis certa puella minis.	20
quare, dum licet, inter nos laetemur amantes: non satis est ullo tempore longus amor.	25
It's not that I am scared, my Cynthia, of the Underworld Or mind fate's debt to the final pyre, But the fear that when dead I may lose your love Is worse than the funeral itself. Not so lightly has the Boy* clung to our eyes That with love forgotten my dust could rest.	5

There in the unseen world, Phylacides\*\* the hero  
Could not forget his lovely wife,  
But eager to clutch delight with disappointed hands  
Came as a ghost to his old home Thessaly. 10  
There, whatever I am, I shall ever be called your shadow;  
Great love can cross even the shores of fate.

There let them come in troops, the beautiful heroines  
Picked by Argives from the spoils of Troy,  
No beauty of theirs for me could match yours, Cynthia – 15  
Indeed (may Mother Earth in justice grant it)  
Though fate remand you to a long old age,  
Yet to my tears will your bones be dear.

If only the living you could feel this for my ashes,  
Then death, wherever, for me would have no sting. 20  
Ah Cynthia, how I fear that love's iniquity  
Scorning the tomb may drag you from my dust  
And force you, though loth, to dry the falling tears;  
A faithful girl can be bent by constant threats.

So while we may let us delight in loving: 25  
No love is ever long enough.

translation by GUY LEE

Niet het macabere schimmenrijk, Cynthia, is wat mij bang maakt,  
dat die crematie mij wacht, daar sta ik niet zo bij stil.  
Nee, vooral dat ik, gestorven, de liefde voor jou zal verliezen,  
dát is de angst die mij veel meer dan de dood zelf benauwt. 5  
Amor\* deelde royaal zijn lokzalf toe aan mijn ogen,  
zodat mijn stof, dat vergaat, niettemin liefde behoudt.

Daar in het Rijk zonder licht bleek ook destijds Protesilaüs\*\*  
voor zijn bekoorlijke vrouw niet onverschillig te zijn.  
Maar, onstoffelijk, kon de Thessaliër, hoe hij ook wenste,  
haar in het vroegere huis naderen slechts als een schim. 10  
Wat ik daar ook moge zijn, ook als schaduwbeeld heet ik de jouwe.  
Amors macht overschrijdt ook zonder Charon de Styx.

Komen daar zelfs in koor de mooiste Trojaanse heldinnen,  
ooit legendarische buit voor winnaar, de Griek,  
voor mij, Cynthia, kan geen van al deze jou evenaren: 15  
jij bent de mooiste en als – Tellus, sta haar dat toe –  
lange tijd leven op aarde jouw lot is, *ik jammer – geloof me –*  
*dan op het dierbare graf, ween daar, al ben ik een schim.*

Heb jij, levend na mij, voor mijn botten ook zulke gevoelens,  
dan zou het sterven voor mij nergens meer smartelijk zijn. 20  
Toch ben ik, Cynthia, bang dat, zonder respect voor mijn schaduw,  
Amor – zo vals is hij – jou losrukken wil van mijn as  
en je verplicht, zelfs tegen je zin, je tranen te drogen.  
Ook een fidele vriendin zwicht voor herhaald dreigement.

Laat ons zo lang het nog kan als een feest onze liefde beleven; 25  
hoe lang liefde ook duurt, lang genoeg zal het nooit zijn.

translation by W.A.M. PETERS

\* *puer*, translated as ‘Boy’ by Lee and as ‘Amor’ by Peters, refers to Cupid, the personified Love, who works upon and through the eyes of lover and beloved respectively.

\*\* *Phylacides* is a patronymic, literally meaning ‘scion of Phylacus’. Phylacus was the grandfather of Protesilaus, whose own name does not appear anywhere in the Latin.

## 2. PROPERTIUS 1.10.1-6

O iucunda quies, primo cum testis amori  
affueram uestris conscius in lacrimis!  
o noctem meminisse mihi iucunda uoluptas,  
o quotiens uotis illa uocanda meis,  
cum te complexa morientem, Galle, puella 5  
uidimus et longa ducere uerba mora!

O the delicious peace, after witnessing first love  
As an accomplice of your tears!  
O the delicious pleasure in remembering that night,  
To be asked for – O how often! – in my prayers,



When I watched you, Gallus, dying in a girl's embrace  
And breathing intermittent words!

5

translation by GUY LEE

Ach, wat een heerlijke nacht, toen ik bij je eerste beminnen  
letterlijk bij je gesnik ooggetuige mocht zijn.  
Zeldzaam genoeg beleef ik als ik mij die nacht herinner;  
waard dat ik haar – ach hoe vaak! – oproep weer als in een droom.  
Toen ik je wegwijnen zag, vriend Gallus, omhelsd door het meisje  
– na een zucht of een woord bleef het soms lange tijd stil ...

5

translation by W.A.M. PETERS

3. OVID, *Amores* 2.16.45-6

uerba puellarum foliis leuiora caducis  
inrita qua uisum est uentus et unda ferunt.

'Girls' words, lighter than falling leaves, / wind and wave, at their whim, carry off null  
and void.'

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## Notes

- 1 Horace, *Epistles* 2.2.43-5.
- 2 See Rudd 1993, 66-7.
- 3 Sallust, *Catilina* 54.6.
- 4 This is well known as a Welsh proverb. It is in 'cyghanedd' (literally 'harmony'; a special type of metrical principle in Welsh poetry), and, as it is a line of seven syllables, it may well have originated in a poem in the 'cywydd' or 'englyn' form, both of which use lines of that length.
- 5 My Dutch is less good than it may seem: I am much indebted to my colleague Dr Manfred Horstmanshoff for help with it in this lecture.
- 6 Delia and Nemesis in Tibullus, Books 1 and 2 respectively.
- 7 Sellar 1899, 210.
- 8 Ovid, *Amores* 2.17.29-30 *noui aliquam quae se circumferat esse Corinnam: / ut fiat, quid non illa dedisse uelit?* ('I know some woman who is putting it about that *she* is Corinna: what would she not give for it to be so?').
- 9 Sellar 1899, 326-7.
- 10 Some examples: denial of necessarily autobiographical 'sincerity' on the elegists' part (Allen 1950 and 1958); rehabilitation of Ovid as a 'playful' love poet (Wilkinson 1955, 44-82); interpretation of the elegists' anti-militaristic, counter-cultural stance as discreet political dissidence (Sullivan 1972); claim for school rhetoric as the key influence on the forms and motifs of elegy (Cairns 1972).
- 11 See e.g. Veyne 1988, 58-64; Wyke 1987.
- 12 Holzberg 2000. See also Holzberg 2002, 16, 36-7.
- 13 Veyne 1988, especially 1-14, 85-100.
- 14 So Holzberg 2000, 28, n.1.
- 15 Griffin 1985, 26-8, 48-64, exemplifies an intermediate position (cf. the judicious review by Nisbet 1987) and Kennedy 1993, 83-100, an ultra-radical one.
- 16 = Appendix, item 1.
- 17 Lee 1994, 23-4.
- 18 Peters 1991, 43-4.
- 19 A wide range of examples from classical antiquity and later is supplied by Griffin 1985, 142-62, Eckert 1985, 338, n.6 and Müller 1995, 132, n.1.
- 20 Homer, *Iliad* 2.695-701.
- 21 See Lyne 1998, 203; Whitaker 1983, 128; Enk 1946, *ad loc.*
- 22 Pace Boyle 1974, 902-3.
- 23 Homer, *Odyssey* 11.225 ff.
- 24 Enk, 1946, *ad loc.* extracts *harum tamen* from *quarum*, but without obvious warrant.
- 25 This is how *I* at any rate construe the passage, punctuating the Latin accordingly, but commentators *ad loc.* offer various alternatives: see especially Camps 1961, and cf. Butler and Barber (1933), Baker 2000.
- 26 Richardson 1977, 199.
- 27 Baker 2000, 172 (on line 23).
- 28 Boyle 1974, 907.
- 29 Camps 1961, 91.
- 30 Lefevre 1966, 143.

- 31 Baker 2000, 169 (on line 11).
- 32 Fedeli 1980, 439.
- 33 Lyne 1998, 211.
- 34 Williams 1968, 768-70.
- 35 Papanghelis, 1987, 12-13.
- 36 Camps 1961, 92 (on lines 13-18).
- 37 Baker 2000, 170 (on line 15).
- 38 Eckert 1985, 157.
- 39 Defined and discussed in Rudd 1996.
- 40 Holzberg 1998, 55; see also Holzberg 1997, 12-15.
- 41 Arguably the technique is signalled by Propertius' statement in the programmatic opening poem of the book: 'in my case ... Love ... forgets to follow his accustomed ways, as of old' (*nec meminit notas, ut prius, ire uias*, 1.1.18). In other words, love for him is *not* like it is in the fairy tales. See further Booth 2001, 73.
- 42 See Uría Varela 1997, 382-3; Adams 1982, 197-8.
- 43 Propertius 1.3.11-20 and 31 ff.
- 44 Some scholars see in *imago* an indirect allusion to the wax image of Protesilaus which, according to some versions of the myth, Laodamia kept by her to embrace after his death (see Boyle 1974, 903, Lyne 1998, 203, 211-12). The idea does not, however, assist the immediate scenario here, since the image was allegedly taken from her and burned when discovered by her father.
- 45 Shackleton Bailey (1956, 55-6) legitimates this interpretation of *magnus amor*.
- 46 See e.g. Propertius 1.2.1-8, 1.4.25-6, 1.15.5-8.
- 47 Schrijvers 2001.
- 48 There is no justification for the interpretation of *lacrimis* here as 'tears of welcome' (so Lyne 1980, 144, following Rothstein 1966, *ad loc.*; *contra* Eckert 1985, 155).
- 49 A practice apparently admired by the Propertian lover: see 1.15.21-2.
- 50 *mors dicta, quod sit amara* (Isid. *orig.* 11.2.31 *ap.* Maltby 1991, s.v. *mors*). The proffered 'etymology' is based on nothing more than the vague assonance of the two words.
- 51 See e.g. Propertius 1.3.30, 1.8.3-4, 45-6, 1.11.7-14, 1.15.5-8, 39-40.
- 52 Such is the essential approach of e.g. Wyke 1994, though it is not there applied to this particular poem.
- 53 See especially Flaschenriem 1997, 261-7.
- 54 = Appendix, item 2.
- 55 Oliensis 1997, 160.
- 56 Janan 2001, 43
- 57 Horace, *Satires* 1.2.68-71 *huic si muttonis uerbis mala tanta uident / diceret haec animus 'quid uis tibi? numquid ego a te / magno prognatum deposco consule cunnum / uelatumque stola, mea cum conferbuīt ira?'*. See also Adams 1982, 62-3.
- 58 E.g. Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus* 1426: *si posthac prehendero ego te hic, carebis testibus*. More examples and discussion in Adams 1982, 66-7, Uría Varela 1997, 58, 336.
- 59 Reynolds and Wilson 1991, 176.
- 60 That is, for those from outside the Netherlands, the current reconstruction of the traditional Dutch first-degree programme (the 'doctoraal') on Bachelor-Master lines.
- 61 = Appendix, item 3.