

Ovid Amores 1.1

Arms, and the violent deeds of war, I was making ready to sound forth—in weighty numbers, with matter suited to the measure. The second verse was equal to the first—but Cupid, they say, with a laugh stole away one foot.

“Who gave thee, cruel boy, this right over poesy? We bards belong to the Pierides; we are no company of thine. What if Venus should seize away the arms of golden-haired Minerva, if golden-haired Minerva should fan into flame the kindled torch of love? Who would approve of Ceres reigning on the woodland ridges, and of fields tilled under the law of the quiver-bearing Maid? Who would furnish forth Phoebus of the beautiful locks with sharp-pointed spear, and let Mars stir the Aonian lyre? Thou hast an empire of thine own—great, yea, all too potent; why dost lay claim to new powers, ambitious boy? Or is everything, wheresoever, thine? Thine are the vales of Helicon? Is even the lyre of Phoebus scarce longer safely his own? My new page of song rose well with first verse in lofty strain, when that next one—of thy making—changes to slighness the vigour of my work; and yet I have no matter suited to lighter numbers—neither a boy, nor a maiden with long and well-kept locks.”

Such was my complaint—when forthwith he loosed his quiver, and chose from it shafts that were made for my undoing. Against his knee he stoutly bent moonshape the sinuous bow, and “Singer,” he said, “here, take that will be matter for thy song!”

Ah, wretched me! Sure were the arrows that yon boy had. I am on fire, and in my but now vacant heart Love sits his throne.

In six numbers let my work rise, and sink again in five. Ye iron wars, with your measures, fare ye well! Gird with the myrtle that loves the shore the golden locks on thy temples, O Muse to be sung to the lyre in elevens!

1.2

What shall I say this means, that my couch seems so hard, and the coverlets will not stay in place, and I pass the long, long night untouched by sleep, and the weary bones of my tossing body are filled with ache?—for I should know, I think, were I in any wise assailed by love. Or can it be that love is stolen into me, and cunningly works my harm with covered art? Thus it must be; the subtle darts are planted in my heart, and cruel Love torments the breast where he is lord.

Shall I yield? or by resisting kindle still more the inward-stealing flame that has me? Let me yield! light grows the burden that is well borne. I have seen flames flare up, when fanned by movement of the torch and die down again, when no one waved it more. Oxen, who are not yet broken in, refusing the first yoke endure more blows than those that pleasure in their toil. The mouth of the restive horse is bruised by the hard curb, and he feels the bridle less that yields himself to harness. More bitterly far and fiercely are the unwilling assailed by Love than those who own their servitude.

Look, I confess! I am new prey of thine, O Cupid; I stretch forth my hands to be bound, submissive to thy laws. There is no need of war—pardon and peace is my prayer; nor will it be praise for thine arms to vanquish me unarmed. Bind thy locks with the myrtle, yoke thy mother’s doves; thy stepsire himself shall give thee fitting car, and in the car he gives shalt thou stand, while the people cry thy triumph, and shalt guide with skill the yoked birds. In thy train shall be captive youths and captive maids; such a pomp will be for thee a stately triumph. Myself, a recent spoil, shall be there with wound all freshly dealt, and bear my new bonds with unresisting heart. Conscience shall be led along, with hands tied fast behind her back, and Modesty, and all who are foes to the camp of Love. Before thee all shall tremble; the crowd, stretching forth their hands to thee, shall chant with loud voice: “Ho Triumph!” Caresses shall be at thy side, and Error, and Madness—a rout that ever follows in thy train. With soldiers like these dost thou vanquish men and gods; strip from thee aids like these, thou wilt be weaponless.

All joyously as thou dost pass in triumph, thy mother shall applaud from Olympus’ heights and scatter upon thy head the roses offered at her altars. With gems to deck thy wings, with gems to

adorn thy hair, thyself golden, on golden wheels thou shalt ride along. Then, too, shalt thou touch with thy flame no few, if I know thee well; then, too, as thou passest by, shalt thou deal full many a wound. Thine arrows could not cease, even shouldst thou so wish thyself; thy fervid flame brings dole with its heat as thou comest near. Such was Bacchus, the land of the Ganges overcome. Thou wilt be dread with thy span of birds; with tigers dread was he.

Since, then, I am thine to be part of thy sacred triumph, spare to waste upon me, O victor, thy power! Look but on the fortunate arms of thy kinsman Caesar—the hand that has made him victor, he uses to shield the vanquished.