

BELLARIA LXVII



UNFAMILIAR LATIN POETS V

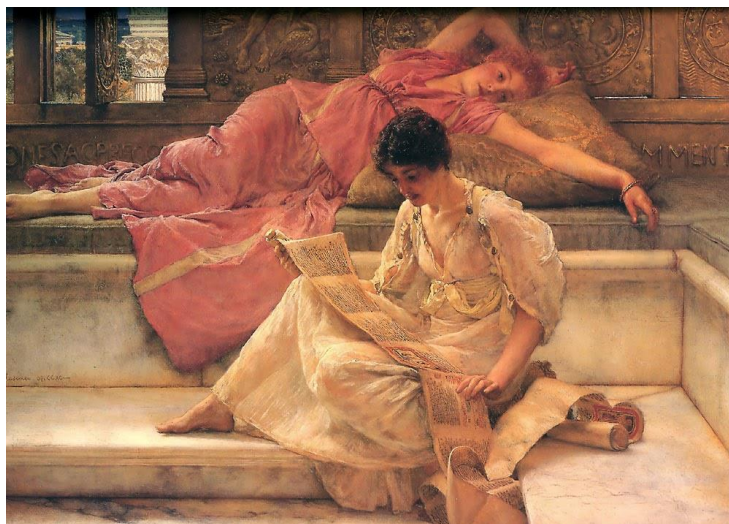
SULPICIA

Introduction

Sulpicia (b. c. 40 BC) is of great interest because hers is the only work of a female poet that survives from the classical period. Her father Servius Sulpicius Rufus was a close friend of Cicero; her uncle Messalla was consul with Augustus in 31 BC.

Six of her poems, forty lines in all, survive as part of the work of Tibullus (3.13-180). In this one, flouting moral conventions like so many Roman male poets, she publicly rejoices in her lover Cerinthus (a Greek name, presumably not his real name). Some scholars have argued that this cannot issue from the *stilus* of a female poet, but there is plenty of evidence for the work of the *docta puella* from the ancient world.

My lover Cerinthus



One of Sulpicia's early efforts at a poem for Cerinthus

At last love has come, a passion that rumour would make more shameful
for me to have hidden than to have uncovered to anyone.

Cytherean Venus, won over by my Muses,
has brought him and placed him in my embrace.

5 Venus has answered my prayer; let anyone trumpet my joys instead,
if they are not said have a love of their own.

I would not want to entrust anything to sealed letters,
so that nobody can read it before my man.

10 No, I rejoice in my boldness, as keeping a downcast stare
tires me out; may I be said to have been worthy of a worthy man.

*tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori
quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.*

*exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.*

5 *exsoluit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,
dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.*

*non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,
ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, uelim.*

sed peccasse iuuat, uultus componere famae

10 *taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.*

DISTICHS OF CATO



Introduction

As observed in Bellaria LXVI, many easy guides to right behaviour were collected and published under Cato's name. This rather appealing selection of hexametric two-liners, published in the 3^d-4th CAD, was known to Chaucer and Erasmus and translated into French and Spanish. This is the final book of a four-book collection.

Preface

If you wish to lead a life free from cares, cling not to faults which injure character. Remember that these precepts must be read often by you. You will find in them a teacher through whom you will be able to transform yourself.

Praefatio

*securam quicumque cupis perducere uitam,
nec uitis haerere animos, quae moribus obsint,
haec praecepta tibi semper relegenda memento;
inuenies, quo te possis mutare, magistrum.*

1. Would you be happy, scorn wealth. Those always seem to beg it greedily who wealth esteem.

1. *despice diuitias, si uis animo esse beatus,
quas qui suscipiunt, mendicant semper auari.*

2. Nature her favours never will deny
if what your needs require will satisfy.

2. *commoda naturae nullo tibi tempore deerunt,
si contentus eo fueris quod postulat usus.*



Fortuna

3. When to poor judgment you do failure owe,
say not that Fortune's blind, for it's not so.

3. *cum sis incautus nec rem ratione gubernes,
noli fortunam, quae non est, dicere caecam.*

4. Love nard, but use it sparingly; refrain from perfumes which all decent men disdain.

4. *dilige denarium, sed parce dilige formam, quam nemo sanctus nec honestus captat habere.*

5. When rich, well for your body care. One's wealth is of but small avail if he lack health.

5. *cum fueris locuples, corpus curare memento; aeger diues habet nummos, se non habet ipsum.*

6. Since you at school your teacher's blows have known, you'll better bear your father's angry tone.

6. *uerbera cum tuleris discens aliquando magistri, fer patris imperium, cum uerbis exit in iram.*



Roman coin hoard

7. What certain profit brings, let that be done; uncertain risks and unsafe projects shun.

7. *res age, quae prosunt, rursus uitare memento in quibus error inest, nec spes est certa laboris.*

8. Give as you can to those who ask, for know you did well gain when you did well bestow.

8. *quod donare potes, gratis concede roganti; nam recte fecisse bonis in parte lucrosum est.*

9. Seek quick the truth when once you do suspect, dangers grow large when nourished by neglect.

9. *quod tibi suspectum est, confestim discute, quid sit; namque solent, primo quae sunt neglecta, nocere.*

10. When hurtful lust hath hold of you, refrain from giving to your appetites free rein.

10. *cum te detineat Veneris damnosa uoluptas, indulgere gulae noli, quae uentris amica est.*

11. Your fear of beasts declares their rule o'er thee;

know you that man alone should be dreaded.

11. *Cum tibi proponas animalia cuncta timere,
unum praecipue tibi plus hominem esse timendum.*



Hercules

12. Not strength alone, but wisdom, too, possess;
thus you can gain a name for manliness.

12. *cum tibi praeualidae fuerint in corpore uires,
fac sapias; sic tu poteris uir fortis haberi.*

13. When sick, from friends seek you relief. Be sure
your trusted friend can give you certain cure.

13. *auxilium a notis petito, si forte labores;
nec quisquam melior medicus quam fidus amicus.*

14. Why for your guilt should guiltless victims bleed?
It's vain to think their blood doth cleanse your deed.

14. *cum sis ipse nocens, moritur cur uictima pro te?
stultitia est morte alterius sperare salutem.*

15. Whene'er a trusty friend you do desire,
not of his wealth but of his life enquire.

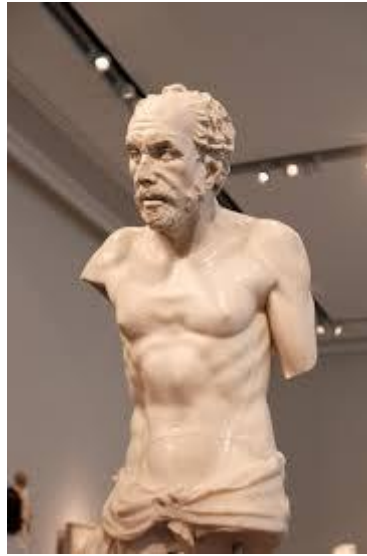
15. *cum tibi uel socium uel fidum quaeris amicum,
non tibi fortuna est hominis sed uita petenda.*

16. Employ your gains; the name of miser flee;
what good is wealth when want still lives with thee?

16. *utere quaesitis opibus, fuge nomen auari;
quid tibi diuitiae prosint, si pauper abundes?*

17. If through your life you wouldst a good name save,
be not to pleasure base an abject slave.

17. *si famam seruare cupis, dum uiuis, honestam
fac fugias animo, quae sunt mala gaudia uitae.*



Aged Roman fisherman

18. Flout not old age while you do sense possess;
age ever brings to all some childishness.

18. *cum sapias animo, noli ridere senectam;
nam quicumque senet, sensus puerilis in illo est.*

19. Learn you a trade lest wealth may fly away;
for skill, once gained, shall ever with you stay.

19. *disce aliquid; nam cum subito fortuna recessit
ars remanet uitamque hominis non deserit unquam.*

20. What's said to you with caution ponder well;
men's practice words may hide as well as tell.

20. *prospicito cuncta tacitus, quid quisque loquatur;
sermo hominum mores celat et indicat idem.*

21. Practice with zeal the skill you've learned. You'll find,
use trains the hand as study does the mind.

21. *exerce studium, quamuis perceperis artem,
ut cura ingenium, sic et manus adiuuat usum.*



22. Let not death's sure approach you terrify;
who life despises doth not fear to die.

*22. multum uenturi ne cures tempora fati;
non metuit mortem, qui scit contemnere uitam.*

23. Learn only of the learned : teach the untaught;
knowledge of truth must to all men be brought.

*23. discite, sed a doctis; indoctos ipse doceto;
propaganda etenim est rerum doctrina bonarum.*

24. If you would sanely live, take this to heart—
avoid excesses; thence diseases start.

*24. hoc bibe quod possis, si tu uis uiuere sanus;
morbi causa mali nimia est quaecumque uoluptas.*

25. Condemn not you with inconsistency
what once you have approved full publicly.

*25. laudaris quodcumque palam, quodcumque probaris,
hoc uiue, ne rursus leuitatis crimine damnes.*

26. When fortune smiles, forget not she may frown;
when fortune frowns, be not too much cast down.

*26. tranquillis rebus semper aduersa timeto,
rursus in aduersis melius sperare memento.*



Romans at school

27. Cease not to learn; wisdom's through study gained;
by lapse of years alone it's ne'er attained.

*27. discere ne cesses; cura sapientia crescit;
rara datur longo prudentia temporis usu.*

28. Praise not o'er much: one day's enough to show
if he, oft claimed your friend, is really so.

*28. parce laudato; nam quem tu saepe probaris,
una dies qualis fuerit ostendet amicus.*

29. To wish for knowledge is no cause for shame;
to have it merits praise; to scorn it, blame.

29. *non pudeat quae nescieris te uelle doceri;
scire aliquid laus est, culpa est nihil discere uelle.*



30. With love and wine pleasure and strife are knit;
cleave to the good in these; the bad omit.

30. *cum Venere et Baccho lis est et iuncta uoluptas;
quod lautum est animo complectere, sed fuge lites.*

31. Who silent is and melancholy, shun;
perchance the quiet rivers too deep run.

31. *demissos animo et tacitos uitare memento;
quod flumen placidum est, forsan latet altius unda.*

32. When fortune's favour seems not thine, take thought
of him to whom Dame Fortune less hath brought.

32. *cum tibi displiceat rerum fortuna tuarum
alterius specta, quo sis discrimine peior.*

33. Begin what you to finish cannot fail;
safer near shore than on the deep to sail.

33. *quod potes id tempta; nam litus carpere remis
tutius est multo quam uelum tendere in altum.*

34. Break not against the righteous man the laws,
for God's the avenger of the righteous cause.

34. *contra hominem iustum praue contendere noli;
semper enim deus iniustas ulciscitur iras.*



35. When wealth takes wings you should not then repine;
rejoice the more that anything is thine.

35. *ereptis opibus noli maerere dolendo,
sed potius gaude, si te contingat habere.*

36. Sad is the fate to lose one's hard-won gains,
but much is saved if only health remains.

36. *est iactura grauis quae sunt amittere damnis;
sunt quaedam, quae ferre decet patienter amicum.*

37. Count not on life: howe'er your way may wend,
death shadowlike will everywhere attend.

37. *tempora longa tibi noli promittere uitae;
quocumque ingrederis sequitur mors corporis umbra.*



Incense-burning

38. The calf's the plough's; incense does heaven please;
think not the god by slaughter to appease.

38. *thure deum placa, uitulum sine crescat aratro;
ne credas placare deum, cum caede litatur.*

39. If you are beaten, cease then to resist;
who could o'ercome will able be to assist.

39. *cede locum laesus fortunae, cede potenti;
laedere qui potuit, prodesse aliquando ualebit.*

40. When you have sinned, at once yourself chastise;
to cure the hurt your grief will well suffice.

40. *cum quid peccaris, castiga te ipse subinde;
uulnera dum sanas, dolor est medicina doloris.*

41. To your old friend never unfriendly prove;
though he be changed, forget not former love.

41. *damnaris nunquam post longum tempus amicum,
mutauit mores, sed pignora prima memento.*

42. To show your gratitude take every care,
lest on you fall the shame that ingrates bear.

42. *gratior officiis, quo sis mage carior, esto,
ne nomen subeas quod dicitur officiperdi.*

43. A life of naught but dread cannot be sweet:
for those by terror held, death is most meet.

43. *suspectus caueas ne sis miser omnibus horis,
nam timidis et suspectis aptissima mors est.*



44. When servants you have bought, remember then,
although you termed them slaves, they still are men.

44. *cum fueris proprios seruos mercatus in usus,
et famulos dicas, homines tamen esse memento.*

45. Secure your chance when first it be at hand.
Lest that once scorned you do in vain demand.

45. *quam primum rapienda tibi est occasio prima,
ne rursus quaeras quae iam neglexeris ante.*

46. In bad men's sudden death take not delight.
Those only die well who have lived aright.

46. *morte repentina noli gaudere malorum:
felices obeunt quorum sine crimine uita est.*

47. Having a wife, be watchful of your friend,
lest false to you, your fame and goods he spend.

47. *cum tibi sit coniux, ne res et fama laboret,
uitandum ducas inimicum nomen amici.*

48. When you at last from study have much lore,
recall there's much to learn from life's vast store.

48. *cum tibi contigerit studio cognoscere multa,
fac discas multa, uita nil discere uelle.*

49. Do you ask why I this form of verses choose?
Know brevity did bid me couplets use.

49. *miraris uerbis nudis me scribere uersus?*
hoc breuitas fecit, sensus coniungere binos.

PRIAPEA



Introduction

The *Priapea* is a collection of Latin poems of unknown authorship, dedicated to Priapus, an unfeasibly well-endowed minor deity of fertility. Statues of him were placed in gardens to alert thieves to what they would get if they broke in, and to encourage the fertility of the crops. Paradoxically, one story told of Priapus was that it, when it came to it, he could never perform.

A Priapic take on Homer

No scholar I, but country-bred, so pardon me
If I be crude: trees is my trade, not books, you see.
Yet I know this bloke Homer, for my master proud
Spends all his time out here a-reading him out loud.
I hear, for instance, what we rustics call a prick
5 Is *psolenta kheraunos* in that chap's Greek,
And arse is *khouleos*, and *merdaleos*—'foul'
It means—what you'd expect of prick that's been in bowel.
If Trojan cock had not brought Grecian cunt such fun,
10 This Homer fellow's book could not have been begun.
If bloody Agamemnon's prick had been less stout,
He'd given old Chryses damn nowt to moan about;
Nor would he then have snatched the maiden from his friend,
And she'd have been Achilles' own until the end:
15 Who now upon his Pelethronian lyre must sing
A woeful tune, himself stretched tenser than its string.

*rusticus indocte si quid dixisse uidebor,
da ueniam: libros non lego, poma lego.
sed rudis hic dominum totiens audire legentem
cogor Homereas edidicique notas.*

5 *ille uocat, quod nos psolen, ψολόεντα κεραυνόν,
et quod nos culum, κουλεόν ille uocat.*

*μερδαλέον certe si res non munda uocatur,
et pediconum mentula merdalea est.*

quod nisi Taenario placuisset Troica cunno

10 *mentula, quod caneret, non habuisset opus.*

*mentula Tantalidae bene si non nota fuisset,
nil, senior Chryses quod quereretur, erat.*

*haec eadem socium tenera spoliauit amica,
quaeque erat Aeacidae, maluit esse suam.*

15 *ille Pelethroniam cecinit miserabile carmen
ad citharam, cithara tensior ipse sua.*



Athene intervenes to prevent Achilles attacking Agamemnon

And so began the hero's noble rage, the same
That's the chief matter of the *Iliad's* tale of fame.
The other book's about Ulysses and his treks,
20 And, truth to tell, here too the cause of all was sex.
You read about a beauteous blossom, 'molyhock',
But when they speak of 'moly' they're really meaning 'cock.'
What else we read? How Circe—and Calypso too—
Dulichian Ulysses for his fine tool they woo.
25 Alcinous' daughter wondered at it next; its size
Was such that leafy bough could not its bulk disguise.

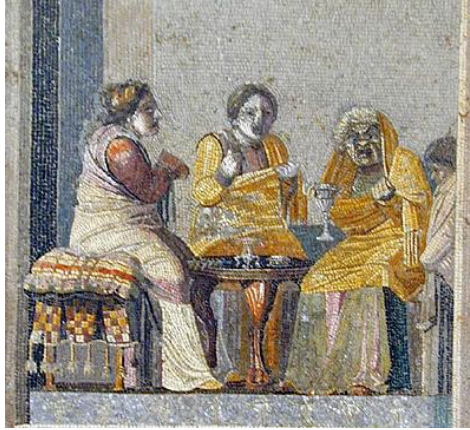
*nobilis hinc nata nempe incipit Ilias ira
 principiumque sacri carminis illa fuit.
 altera materia est error fallentis Ulixei:*
20 *si uerum quaeras, hanc quoque mouit amor.
 hic legitur radix, de qua flos aureus exit,
 quam cum μωλυ uocat, mentula μωλυ fuit.
 hic legimus Circen Atlantidemque Calypson
 grandia Dulichii uasa petisse uiri.*
25 *huius et Alcinoi mirata est filia membrum
 frondenti ramo uix potuisse tegi.*



Yet, all the same, to his old woman back he goes:
 His mind is in your cunt, Penelope, who chose
 To remain true, yet you'd invited many a guest,
30 So with a crowd of would-be fuckers you were blessed;
 The idea being, I dare say, to find out who
 Was best at doing it of all that eager crew.
 'To firmer member', says she, 'no one could lay claim
 Than Ulysses, in strength and skill a master at the game.
35 I need to know, now he has gone and left no trace,
 Which one of you is man enough to take his place.'
 I should have been the one, Penelope to fuck
 In your mate's stead. But I was not yet made, worse luck.

*ad uetulam tamen ille suam properabat, et omnis
 mens erat in cunno, Penelopea, tuo:
 quae sic casta manes, ut iam conuiuia uisas
30 utque fututorum sit tua plena domus.
 e quibus ut scires quicumque ualentior esset,
 haec es ad arrectos uerba locuta procos:
 'nemo meo melius neruom tendebat Ulixē,
 siue illi laterum siue erat artis opus.
35 qui quoniam periit, uos nunc intendite, qualem
 esse uirum sciero, uir sit ut ille meus.'
 hac ego, Penelope, potui tibi lege placere,
 illo sed nondum tempore factus eram.*

EPITAPH ON VITALIS THE MIME-ACTOR



Mime actresses

Introduction

This charming jeu d'esprit was attached to the Distichs (it was ascribed to the son of Cato!). Vitalis was a mime-actor of the 5th C AD (apparently).



How shall I treat you, Death, who sparest none?
Thou knowst not mirth, knowst not the love of fun:
Yet all the world in these my merit knew—
Hence came my mansion, hence my revenue.
5 I always wore a smile: if smiles be lost,
What boots a world in wayward trickery tossed?
At sight of me wild frenzy met relief:
My entrance changed to laughter poignant grief.
None felt the canker of anxiety
10 Nor worried mid this world's uncertainty.
O'er every fear my presence won success;
An hour with me was ever happiness.

*quid tibi, Mors, faciam, quae nulli parcere nosti?
nescis laetitiam, nescis amare iocos.
his ego praeualui toto notissimus orbi,
hinc mihi larga domus, hinc mihi census erat.
5 gaudebam semper. quid enim; si gaudia desint,*

*hic uagus ac fallax utile mundus habet?
me uiso rabidi subito cecidere furores;
ridebat summus me ueniente dolor.
non licuit quemquam curis mordacibus uri
10 nec rerum incerta mobilitate trahi.
uincebat cunctos praesentia nostra timores
et mecum felix quaelibet hora fuit.*



Tragic and comic masks

In tragic role my word and act could please,
Cheering in myriad ways hearts ill at ease:
15 Through change in look, mien, voice I so could run
That many seemed to use the lips of one.
The man whose double on the stage I seemed
Shrank, as my looks his very own he deemed.
How oft a woman whom my gestures played
20 Saw herself, blushed, and held her peace dismayed!
So parts which I made live by mimicry
Dark death hath hurried to the grave with me.
To you who with compassion read this stone
I utter my request in saddened tone:
25 Say sadly: 'Glad, Vitalis, did you live:
Such gladness may the Gods and fates thee give!'

*motibus ac dictis, tragica quoque ueste placebam
exhilarans uariis tristia corda modis.
15 fingebam uultus, habitus ac uerba loquentum
ut plures uno crederes ore loqui
ipse etiam, quem nostra oculis geminabat imago,
horruit in uultus se magis isse meos;
o quotiens imitata meos per femina gestus
20 uidit et erubuit totaque muta fuit!
ergo quot in nostro uiuebant corpore formae,
tot mecum raptas abstulit atra dies.
quo uos iam tristi turbatus deprecor ore,
qui titulum legitis cum pietate meum
25 'o quam laetus eras, Vitalis, dicite maesti,
sint tibi di tales, sint tibi fata modo!'*

Next week: Greek Epigrams