



Selections from *The Greek Anthology*

Seventh-Fourth Century B.C.

Seven couches and as many tables
spread with poppy cakes and linseed and
sesame, and among the wooden flagons
were honey cakes for the young
— Alkman (7th Century)

If you are a simple mortal,
do not speak of tomorrow
or how long this man may be
among the happy,
for change comes suddenly
like the shifting flight
of the dragonfly.
— Simonides (6th Century)

I do not like the man who sits by his bowl
and sobs about sad wars,
but the rake who loves to rave about fine
feats
in the arts and art of love
— Anakreon (6th Century)

Let us drink
Why wait for the lighting of the lamps?
Night is a hair's breadth away.
Take down the great goblets
From the shelf, dear friend,
For the son of Seleme and Zeus
gave us wine to forget our pains.
Mix two parts water,
One wine
and let us empty the dripping cups--
Urgently
— Alkaios (6th Century)

I am Lais. My pride of face
Once laughed at all the Grecian race.
At my door, lovers stood ten deep—
Goddess of Love, my mirror keep...
As I am now, I shun the glass,
And I cannot look on who I was.
— Plato (4th Century)

Catch the apple that I throw,
If you love me. Give me now
Your maidenhead; or if your will
Is set against me, catch it still
And think that beauty soon shall go.
— Plato (4th Century)

Third Century B.C.

Let's drink up:
With wine, what original
What nuanced, what sweet fancy speech
I might hit on!
Soak me with a jug of Chian
and say,
"Haven fun, Hedylos."
For I hate wasting time unless I'm drunk.
— Hedylos

Remember, do you remember
those solemn words—
Springtime is loveliest,
time most elusive,
quicker than the quickest bird in the sky--
Look, your blossoms
all scattered on the earth.
— Thymokles

Why grudge your useless maidenhead?
For Hades holds no lover's bed.

Love in our lives does very well,
But virgins are mere ash in hell.
— Asclepiades

At play, Hermione caught and drove me.
She wore a belt of many colors
With golden letters, saying: “Love me,
And don’t you mind if I’m another’s.”
— Asclepiades

Sit down in the shade
of this fine spreading laurel,
draw a welcome drink
from the sweet flowing stream,
and rest your breathless limbs
from the harvesting—
here, where the West wind
blows over you.
— Anythe

Drink down the strong wine:
Dawn’s but the span of a finger.
And shall we wait for the lamp
that brings good night?
Drink, drink to joy, dear friend:
for soon we’ll have
A lonely night for sleeping,
and that’s for ever.
— Asclepiades

Second Century B.C.

According to the astrologers,
I Seleucus have few years
To live. But I don’t care, for if
My way to Hell is rather brief,
It’s the same way for us all.
I’ll just pay death an earlier call.
Water-drinkers walk the course,
But wine-guzzlers take a horse.
— Antipater of Sidon

Remember, remember, my holy words—
‘Fairest beauty is most fleet.’

Beauty outstrips the swiftest birds.
Your blossoms lie about your feet.
— Thymocles

First Century B.C.

Let us undo these buttons my lovely,
and lie to gether naked, interlaced.
Put your long arms round my shoulders,
with nothing between our bodied, not
even those maddening flimsy pieces of
underwear.
Let our breasts rub and our lips meet.
Let our murmurs throb into languid silence.
Don’t use your tongue for talking, for a
moment.
— Paulos

I came across her, delightsome,
relaxed, stretched out, dreaming
in the heat of the afternoon
one arm stretching behind her head
overcome with audacity I approached her
bed
taking advantage of her state
I was halfway there
before she came to her senses
struggling with her little white hands
to free herself
in spite of her resistance
we achieved the task of desire
and she burst into tears bewailing:
miserable man, you have satisfied your
desire
which I have so often refused
your payment to have
and now you will leave straight
to take another girl in your arms
you are never satisfied
you wicked pilgrims of desire
— Paulos

O Morning Star, you enemy of love!
How lazily do you creep
round the world tonight,
this night, while another lies warm
beneath her cloak!
But when she lay, my slim love, in these
arms,
then you did come—how quickly O Star—

To stand over us,
drenching is in your light that laughed
at our loss.
O morning Star, you enemy of love!
— Meleager

The lip of the wine-cup is sweet.
It tells of the touch of the mouth
Of Zenophila, prattling of love.
Happy cup! If she could set
Her lips to my lips, she would quaff
My soul in one swallow of love.
— Meleager

First Century A.D.

I do not wish to marry hag or child.
The young I pity, and revere the old.
A sour grape or raisin won't be mine,
Only a beauty ripening on the vine.
— Honestus

Her breast against my breast,
Her skin on mine,
Her lips against my lip, with nothing in
Between Antigone and me, we lay.
I say no more.
The rest the lamp can say.
— Marcus Argentarius

Isias my love,
with your scented breath
sweeter than any perfume:
wake up.
Here is a symbol for you:
this garland
is in full, fresh bloom now;
but towards morning
you will see it wither.
Take it in your hands;
and think of your beauty.
— Marcus Argentarius

Psyllus brought a whorish stable
To entertain young men in style.
He preyed on weakness, and was able
To deal in flesh and make his pile.
He lies dead here. But don't throw stones,

Traveller, nor urge on others.
Spare the complacent pander's bones—
He kept young men from seducing mothers.
— Marcus Argentarius

I loved a girl called Alcippe,
And talked her round, and secretly
Brought her to bed. We hid and feared
Our loving might be overheard.
Her mother soon popped in her head,
“My daughter, we go halves,” she said.
— Marcus Argentarius

I refuse to become a shower of gold,
A bull or swan as in days of old.
Let Zeus do tricks.
Corinna's more than willing,
If I remain human and give her a shilling.
— Bassus

Second Century A.D.

a silver-ankled girl
was bathing in a brook,
letting the water flood down
on the golden apples of her milky breasts.
When she walked,
her round hips rolled and flowed
more liquid than water.
Her arm reached down
to shield her swelling belly,
not all—
but all her hand could hide
— Rufinus

Let us wash each other's body
Prodiakē
and crown ourselves
and swill neat wine
from bigger jugs
life's joy is miniscule
then age mars
the residue
and at last death
— Rufinus

I send this wreath, my Rhodoclea,

Made by my hands from every flower.
Lily and rose and anemone,
Narcissus and violet woven lie.
Wear it, and put off your pride.
The wreath and you both bloom and fade.
— Rufinus

Prodiqe, I warned you, age is coming,
Love is lagging and dissolving.
Wrinkles like harpies hold you in,
Crab mouth, gray hair, tired flesh, dry skin....
Who wants you now, my haughty one--
We pass you like a roadside tomb.
— Rufinus

I am provoked
by the delicious boy next door.
His laugh of complicity is not
that of a novice.
He is twelve years old.
Green grapes my be touched, but his ripe
chastity will be guarded.
— Strato

Meeting a lovely boy face to face
I may strive to avert my eyes—
I may succeed,
but must at once glance back.
— Strato

I like all young men, I will not choose
A brother from a brother
For his beauty. One for one charm I use,
Another for another.
— Strato

Third-Sixth Centuries A.D.

Once while plaiting a wreath
I found Eros among the roses.
I grabbed him by the wings
and dipped him in the wine
and drank him down.
Now inside my limbs
he tickles me with his wings.
— Julianus, Prefect of Egypt (6th c)

This is life and nothing else is.
Life is pleasure. Damn dull care!
Man shall live no more than this.
Now, there's wine and women fair,
Flowers and dance. Live well today:
What comes tomorrow none can say.
— Pallas (5th c)

The Tomb of Anakreon

I have sung this often,
even in the grave will I shout it:
Drink:
for you must put on this mantle of dust.
— Julianus, Prefect of Egypt (6th c)

Bees do not plough nor dig their honey;
They bribe the flower of the spring,
So I work at Love with money,
Which culls the sweetest offering.
— Macedonius the Consul (6th c)

Sweet, my friends, is Lais' smile,
Sweet the tears that milk her eye.
Yesterday, she put awhile
Her head on me and gave a sigh.
I asked, "Why do you weep?" She said,
"Men lie and leave. I am afraid."
— Paulus Silentarius (6th c)

But the brief pleasure of life!
But the headlong fuge of time passing!
Waking, sleeping, playing, contriving
With time against us,
Marching always against us,
Swerving us to our end—
And that's nothing.
— Pallas (5th c)

Anonymous Sources

Bring Homer's lyre but mute
the cords of savage war.
Bring wine cups and the laws
of proper revelry.
I shall get drunk and dance
at our party, and even

roar on my tanging lyre.
yet with a tempered fury.
Bring Homer's lyre but mute
the cords of savage war

and be lost in love.

I wish I were the wind, and you
walking along the seashore,
would uncover your breasts,
and let me touch them
as I blow.

How good it is to roam
on the ripe grassy meadows
where the sweet wind drifts;
look at the grapevines,
and lie under the leaves
with a soft girl in my arms
who is willing and warm.
Boy, hold my wreath for me.
The night is black, the path is long,
And I am completely and beautifully drunk.
Nevertheless I will go
To Themison's house
And sing beneath his window.
You need not come with me:
Though I may stumble,
He is a steady lamp for the feet of love.

Perfume sweet I send you,
gracing not you but the perfume:
You are yourself
the perfume of the perfume.

If gold could buy life,
I would guard my wealth
with jealous desire,
and when death came
he would take some
and leave me alone.
Yet being mortal
I cannot prolong
my life, so why
should I cry or moan?
If we must die,
what good is gold?
So bring sweet wine,
and when I've drunk
bring my good friends.
I'll lie on a soft bed