

The Power of Performance in Propertius' Love Elegies

1. Prop. 2.13.9-12

non ego sum formae tantum mirator honestae,
nec si qua illustres femina iactat avos;
me iuuat in gremio doctae **legisse** puellae,
auribus et puris scripta **probasse** mea.¹

I am not as much an admirer of true beauty, nor if any woman boasts famous ancestors; it delights me **to have read** in the lap of a learned girl, and for her **to have approved** of my writings **with pure ears**.

2. Prop. 1.2.24-30

ergo ego nunc uereor ne sim tibi uilior istis:
uni si qua placet, **culta puella sat est**;
cum tibi praesertim Phoebus sua carmina donet
Aoniamque libens Calliopea lyram,
unica nec desit iucundis gratia uerbis,
omnia quaeque Venus, quaeque Minerua probat.

Therefore, I fear now that I might be more worthless to you than those things: if any woman is pleasing to to one man, **the girl is cultivated enough**, especially since Apollo gives his own songs to you, and gladly Calliope gives you her Aonian lyre, and there is not a single grace absent from your pleasant words, [but you have] everything, whatever Venus approves of and whatever Minerva approves of.

3. Prop. 1.8b.1; 39-40

Hic erit: hic iurata manet; rumpantur iniqui! ...
hanc ego non auro, non Indis flectere conchis,
sed potui **blandi carminis obsequio**.

She will be here: she is staying here as promised; let the unjust men be broken!...

I was able to persuade this girl neither by gold nor by Indian conchs, but I was able to **by the flattery of a charming song**.

4. Prop. 2.26a.20-26

...nunc admirentur quod tam mihi pulchra puella
seruiat et tota dicar in urbe potens.
non, si gaza Midae redeant et flumina Croesi,
dicat 'de nostro surge, **poeta**, toro'.
nam mea cum **recitat**, dicit se odisse beatos:
carmina tam sancte nulla puella colit.

...Now let them admire that so beautiful a girl serves me and that I am said to be powerful in the whole city. Not even if the wealth of Medes or the rivers of Croesus should return would she say "get up out of our bed, **poet**." For, whenever **she recites** my poems, she says that she hates rich men: no girl cherishes poems so reverently.

6. Prop. 1.11.19-20

ignosces igitur, si quid tibi triste **libelli**
attulerint nostri: culpa timoris erit.

Forgive me, therefore, if our **little books** bring anything unhappy to you: the blame will be on fear.

7. Prop. 2.25.1-4

Cynthia, nata meo pulcherrima cura dolori
(excludi quoniam sors mea saepe fuit),
ista meis fiet notissima forma libellis,
Calve, tua venia, pace, Catulle, tua.

Cynthia, the most beautiful care born for my pain (since it often was my fate to be shut out) **that beauty will become most known by my little books**, Calvus, with your permission, Catullus, with your peace.

¹ For the text, I use Heyworth's 2007 edition. Translations are my own.

8. Prop. 3.2.17-18

fortunata meo si qua es celebrata libello:
carmina erunt formae tot monumenta tuae.

You are lucky if you are any girl celebrated by my
little book: **the poems will be so many
monuments** of your beauty.

9. Prop. 2.8.11-12

...munera quanta dedi vel **qualia carmina feci!**
illa tamen numquam ferrea dixit 'amo'.

...How many gifts I gave or **how nice the poems I
made!** That girl, nevertheless, iron-hearted, never
said 'I love you.'

10. Prop. 3.23.1-6

Ergo tam doctae nobis periere **tabellae,**
scripta quibus pariter tot periere bona!

Therefore our so learned **writing tablets** are gone,
equally so, so many of their good writings are gone!

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