

EX PONTO III

I

First ploughed by Jason, lacking neither snow
Nor fierce foes, Pontus, will there ever be
A time when I leave you, enjoined to go
To a less hostile land? Or constantly
Must I live in barbarity right here
And be interred in Tomis? Peace with you
(Could peace, o Pontic land, ever appear
In you, when neighbouring enemies ride through
Your regions on swift horses endlessly?)...
Well anyway, the worst of my exile 10
Is that you aggravate my misery.
You never see the springtime flowers' smile
Nor reapers' naked bodies. Nor does fall
Bring you grape-clusters; no, chill that's extreme
Reigns always, while your sea is held in thrall
By ice; under a roof fish often seem
To swim. You have no springs but what the sea
Mostly provides: drink them and there's some doubt
Whether they quench your thirst at all. A tree
Is rare, while unproductive, standing out 20
In open fields, and land's another type
Of sea. No bird is heard except, afar
In woods, one croaking with its raucous pipe
And drinking brackish water. Here there are
Fields bristling but with wormwood (very tart!
A fitting harvest, then!). Plus: here there's fear,
Assailed walls, many a death-discharging dart
That's tipped with poison; traffic's far from here;
On foot, by boat, you'll never go secure.
It is not strange, then, that, as I pursue 30
An end, I'm always trying to ensure
Another place to live, more strange that you
Do not prevail in this and can restrain
Your tears, dear wife, amidst my misery.
What should I do? You ask. Ask it again
Of your own self – the answer you will see
If you would truly know. It's not sufficient
To wish: you must be passionate to gain
Your end, and this will render you deficient
In sleep. Many folk want this, I maintain: 40

For who would hate me so that he'd desire
 My exile to lack peace? With all your heart
 Both night and day you should strive and perspire
 For me. To coax more men to take my part,
 Win over friends of ours and take the lead
 Yourself. In what I write your role is great –
 A model wife! Don't fail in this, take heed.
 That I have spoken truly, contemplate
 And guard the poetry that fame has wrought.
 I don't myself complain, and yet my fame 50
 Shall do so, as it should if you do nought
 To aid me. Fortune gave a greater name
 To me than formerly, so I was shown
 By her to the people. Capaneus was made
 More famous through a lightning-bolt: more known
 Was Amphiaraus once his steeds were laid
 Beneath the earth. Less famed would Ulysses
 Have been if he had wandered less, while fame
 By his own wound came to Philoctetes.
 Some glory by my own misfortune came 60
 To me, if lesser men may claim a grade
 Among such great ones. You in many a page,
 No less than Coan Bittis, are displayed
 In fame by me. You're seen on a great stage,
 Whatever you shall do, and you shall be
 A loyal wife in many people's eyes.
 When in my verse you're praised, believe you me,
 The reader will ask if I eulogize
 With justice. Just as many will respect
 Your worth, so many women will be keen 70
 To criticize your deeds. You must effect
 That you may never justify their spleen
 With "That's the woman who but sluggishly
 Aided her distressed husband." Since I'm frail
 And cannot drive the chariot, then see
 That you support the spent yoke without fail.
 Weak and with fading pulse I turn my eyes
 On my physician: as I fade away,
 Assist me: what I cannot realize
 In such a weakened state grant me, I pray, 80
 As you are stronger now. Our marital pact,
 Our mutual love demands this, as do you
 By virtue of your worth. You owe this act
 To the house, which values you: and this is due
 As much to virtue as to loyalty.
 Do all of this, yet if you are not seen

As a worthy wife, you'll be no devotee
 Of Marcia in people's eyes. I've been
 Deserving, worth some thanks for all my work. 90
 You've given them with plenteous interest,
 And even if it wished to, rumour's smirk
 Can't harm you. But add this to all the rest:
 You want redress for me, so, if you sweat
 To place me in a better land, not a bit
 Of what you do will limp. I want much yet
 Nothing that hurts me. If you fail in it,
 Your loss involves no danger. I beg you,
 Don't grouse that often in my verse I plead
 That you continue doing what you do.
 A trumpeter has been well-known indeed 100
 To aid the brave, and generals foment
 With their own voice a dauntless company.
 Your goodness is well-known, a testament
 For all time; let your goodness, then, not be
 Inferior to your courage. Do not wield
 The Amazonian axe for me, don't take
 In your frail hand the crescent-contoured shield.
 You must appeased a god, yet to not to make
 A friendship with me but that he may be
 Less angry than before. If you should fail 110
 To move him, weep and that will guarantee
 His grace. By this alone will you prevail
 With gods. My own misfortune will effect
 That you'll not fail: as your tears' origin,
 I bring you ample store and, I suspect,
 As things now stand with me, year out, year in
 You'll weep still. All this opulence my fate
 Gives you. If to redeem my death you'd lose
 Your own – perish the thought! – you'd emulate
 Alcestis. If with chaste deceit you'd choose 120
 To cheat keen swains, you'd be Penelope.
 Along with your dead spouse across the Styx,
 Laomadia's your epitome.
 On Iphias your eyes you'd have to fix
 If you would bravely cast your very frame
 Upon the pyre. No need for death, no need
 For Penelope's weapons. You must make the same
 Appeal to Livia who has guaranteed
 Through virtue that, in praise of chastity,
 Our age is not outdone by days gone by. 130
 With Venus' form and Juno's quality,
 She's shown that she alone is fit to lie

In that celestial bed. Why quake and fear
 To meet her? You're not trying to impress
 Impious Procne or Medea here,
 No cruel Danaid, no murderess
 Like Clytaemnestra, nor the Scylla who
 Shook with her loins the seas of Sicily,
 Nor Circe with her power to endue
 Men's bodies with diverse appearances, 140
 Nor yet Medusa with snake-knotted hair
 But the First Lady who has proved that sight
 In Fortune dwells indeed, than whom anywhere
 From sunrise to sunset none so bright,
 Caesar excepted. Choose your moment well,
 Often assayed, lest you in angry seas
 Should venture forth. Gods do not always tell
 Their sacred oracles. For auguries
 The shrines are sometimes closed. So when the state
 Is as I augur, no grief to be seen, 150
 Augustus' house, which we should venerate
 Just like the Capitol, blithe and serene
 (As now, as may it ever be), then may
 The gods grant you the opportunity:
 And may you then believe that on that day
 You will prevail with her. If she should be
 Involved in greater things, procrastinate:
 Too much hate may obliterate my hope,
 And yet I urge you not to seek a date
 When she is wholly free: she scarce can cope 160
 With her toilette, so full is her timetable.
 You should pursue her when she's occupied.
 When to see Juno's features you are able,
 Con your part well. An ill cause one must hide
 In silence; so do not defend my deed.
 Let what you say be anxious pleas, no more.
 Then weep, sink to your knees while you still plead
 And stretch your arms out. Nothing more implore
 But to remove me from this savage nation.
 May only Fortune be my enemy. 170
 More comes to mind but, full of trepidation,
 This, too, you'll scarcely stammer. This will be
 No harm to you, I think. She'll feel her state
 Alarms you. Broken sobs will not distress you.
 Tears sometimes stand for words. A lucky date
 Choose, too, an apt hour, omens that will bless you.
 Ignite the scared altar, pour pure wine,
 Add incense to the gods; primarily,

And far beyond the rest, adore divine
 Augustus and his pious family, 180
 The consort of his bed. May they, I pray,
 In their accustomed mode, be generous
 And view your weeping in a kindly way
 And may their features lack all animus.

II

Cotta, I send you “health” - I pray this letter
 Arrives and you indeed are flourishing.
 For, should you be, this makes me somewhat better,
 And something of me you are nourishing.
 When others fall and lose their storm-tossed sails,
 To my smashed bark you are the sole mainstay.
 Your loyalty, then, thankfully prevails.
 I grant reprieve to those who ran away
 Along with Fortune. Thunderbolts that zap
 One man shock many more and make the many 10
 Around him quake. In anxious fear the gap
 Of a wall about to fall is rocked. Does any
 Faint-hearted man seek contiguity
 With the sick, not fearing catching a disease?
 Some of my friends, through excess fear of me,
 Not hate, abandoned me, yet none of these
 Was faithless, lacking duty: rather they
 Feared adverse gods. They may be thought to be
 Too cautious and too timid, yet they may
 Not fairly be called bad. My charity 20
 Excuses my dear friends – I bear no blame.
 May this content them, may they proudly state
 That even I release them from all shame.
 You few are better, you who estimate
 That not to succour me in my distress
 Would be unseemly. Thus my gratitude
 Will do when I’m reduced to nothingness,
 Mere ashes. Yet here I myself delude –
 It will outlast my life if I’m perused
 By future readers. Bodies that have died 30
 Must greet the sombre tomb: fame is excused
 The high-built pyre. Their praises yet abide
 Though Theseus and Pylades passed away.
 You will be praised by future generations.
 Your glory shall be bright for many a day

Within my verse. Here, too, the savage nations
 Know you and praise your spirit. Recently,
 When I acclaimed your goodness (for I can
 Speak both their languages) in company
 With others, when he heard me, one old man 40
 Replied, "Good stranger, we too know the trait
 Of friendship though the Hister and Black Sea
 Yet hold us far from Rome. There is a state
 In Scythia, called Tauri formerly,
 Not far from Getic soil. The light of day
 I first saw there (this fact I do not rue).
 Its people worship Phoebus' spouse. Today
 A massive-columned temple meets one's view,
 With forty entrance-steps. Report maintains
 That once the image of a god there stood: 50
 To banish doubt, the pedestal remains:
 The shrine, once white, is now stained red with blood.
 An unwed maid performed the liturgies,
 The noblest of all girls. It was dictated
 Once that the form of these solemnities
 Should be – she with her sword assassinated
 A stranger. Thoans ruled then in that land,
 Famed in Maeotia, none near the Black Sea
 More so. They say that, while he held command,
 One Iphigeneia made an odyssey 60
 Through the clear ether. Borne by a light breeze,
 Hidden beneath a cloud, she was inducted,
 It's thought, by Phoebe there. Those liturgies
 For many years she duteously conducted,
 Performing gloomy rites unwillingly.
 Two youths arrived by ship and stepped ashore,
 Alike in age as well as amity,
 Orestes and Pylades: glory's store
 Preserves them. They're escorted straightaway
 To Trivia's cruel altar, both hands lashed 70
 Behind their backs. That the long fillet may
 Surround their golden locks, the priestess splashed
 The lustral water over them. While she
 Prepared the rite and bound their brows and found
 Excuses for delay, she said, 'In me
 You see no cruel maid, young men. I'm bound
 To rites more savage than their very home.
 Forgive me. It's the nation's rite. But where
 Have you come from? Ill-starred, why do you roam?'
 When they had made reply, right then and there 80
 She knew they were her fellow-countrymen.

She said, 'One now must take his final breath,
 The other one must journey back again
 To give the news.' Pylades, bent on death,
 Bade his Orestes leave. But he declined;
 In turn they fought to die. On this one thing
 They disagreed: in all else they inclined
 To harmony and brooked no wrangling.
 While these fair youths continued this debate,
 She to her brother set a note to pen. 90
 The man to whom she gave it (cruel fate
 Of humans!) *was* her brother, and right then
 Diana's statue they snatched from the shrine
 And sailed away upon the trackless sea.
 The wonder of men's love!: their names still shine
 In Scythia, though since antiquity
 So many years have passed." When he had told
 This common tale, all praised such faithfulness.
 Even this place, it seems, whose regions hold
 An unsurpassable bloodthirstiness, 100
 Has alien hearts which cherish loyalty.
 What should *you*, born in Rome, then try to do
 When these Getae, inured to savagery,
 Approve such deeds as these? Your mildness, too
 Is always present, and a character
 Which indicates your high patrician class
 And which Volesus, your famed ancestor
 And founder of your kin could not bypass,
 Nor yet could Numa, on your mother's side,
 Not recognize your virtues as his too, 110
 Nor could the Cottae who are all now tied
 To your natal name (their lineage, if you
 Were not still on this earth, would cease to be).
 A gentleman who's worthy of the breed,
 Think it's in chime with such integrity
 To be the helper of a friend in need.

III

O Maximus, star of the Fabiae,
 If you've some time to give a refugee,
 Then lend an ear unto your friend, while I
 Tell what I've seen – a ghost? a fantasy?
 A real-life thing? This was at night: the moon
 Shone through my double-windows, luminous

With mid-month sheen, and sleep, the common boon
 To cares, possessed me, limbs in weariness
 Outspread upon my couch, when suddenly
 The air with wings was vibrant, a slight creak 10
 Was heard, the window moved, thus causing me
 To rise upon an elbow, rendered weak
 With fright, all sleep gone. Love stood sadly there,
 His left hand resting on the maple post,
 No necklace at his throat and on his hair
 No ornament: his countenance was most
 Bizarre, his locks, too, not, as previously,
 Well-combed - they drooped across his unkempt face,
 His wings unkempt as well, it seemed to me,
 Like a dove's back which many stroke to trace 20
 Its feathers. I knew him (for none is more
 Well-known to me). My tongue I freed and said:
 "Boy, you who caused the banishment of your
 Master, you whom I never should have fed
 With my tuition, have you come here, too,
 Where harmony's unknown year after year,
 Where the wild Hister freezes? Unless you
 Desire to see my grief, why are you here?
 If you don't know my grief, it brings reproach
 To you: you were the first to read to me 30
 My poems when I was young. With you as coach,
 I made resolve to write in elegy.
 You would not have me write in epic verse,
 Singing the deeds of famous chiefs. Your fire
 And bow weakened my gift (slight, yet not worse
 Than some are). Your and Venus's empire
 I sing, no thought of greater themes. What's more,
 You lost your know-how through my foolish *Art*.
 Exile was my reward, and on a shore
 Both bellicose and very far apart 40
 From Rome. Not thus Eumolpus of Chios
 Treated Orpheus; Olympus in that way
 Did not treat Marsyas; not such a loss
 Achilles had at Chiron's hands; they say
 Pythagoras was not discomfited
 By Numa. There is no-one else I'll cite
 From history – no, I alone was led
 To ruin by a pupil. Armed for fight
 And taught by me, you gave, you wanton one,
 This gift! You know, and may swear that it's true, 50
 That I disturbed no legal union.
 I had composed my *Art* for women who

Possessed no modest locks to be contained
 Within a fillet nor a foot-length gown.
 Tell me, I pray, if you were ever trained
 By me to cozen brides and bring them down
 By bastardy? Or is not every dame
 Whom law forbids adultery excluded
 Completely from those books? Yet all the same,
 What good is that if people are deluded 60
 And think I penned instructions for a deed
 Severest laws forbid? But may you still
 Have darts which shake all and may swift flames feed
 Your lamp forevermore. So may you kill
 The greater wrath of Caesar (may his sway
 Continue in his realms, who through your brother
 Aeneas is your kin) and have him say
 That my chastisement should be in another
 And better place” That’s what I thought I said
 To the winged boy, and then he answered me: 70
 “I by my torch and darts, by Caesar’s head,
 By Venus, I swear no iniquity
 Was in your teachings or your *Art* . Would I
 Could plead the rest! A greater agony
 Is caused by something more. You can’t deny
 Your guilt nor may you speak your grief to me.
 Whatever it is, although your crime you screen
 Under the guise of “error”, nonetheless
 Not too oppressive was your judge’s spleen.
 But to behold you and aid your distress 80
 I’ve hither flown. I first descried the clime
 When with my darts Medea I ran through
 At Venus’ suit. Now for a second time
 After so long I’m back because of you,
 My fellow-soldier. Therefore have no fear,
 Augustus’ wrath will ease; a happier hour
 Your prayers will have, and it will soon appear:
 Dread no delay, for triumph has the power
 To fill all things with joy. The progeny,
 The house, their mother Livia, and you, 90
 Great father of the realm, with gaiety
 Will smile, all Rome will be delighted too
 In self-congratulation; everywhere
 Will altars smoke and temples will be free
 To all, and we may hope our every prayer
 Will have effect.” Into infinity
 He then took wing or else my faculties
 Began to be restored. Should I suspect

You wouldn't lend your friendliness to these
 My words, I'd think a swan black. Don't expect 100
 That milk will turn from white to pitchy tar
 Or terebinth from shining ivory
 Emerge. Condignly noble as you are,
 You're virtuous with simplicity
 Of Hercules. A towering mind will take
 No cowardice or envy, which both creep,
 Hidden, beneath the earth, just like a snake.
 Even above your birth, your thoughts will keep
 Their lofty path – your very name is less
 Magnificent than all your qualities. 110
 Therefore leave other people to oppress
 The wretched, and desire to cause unease
 In other folk and carry in their hand
 Their poisoned barbs" your household anyway
 Is used to aiding suppliants. In that band
 Include this further suppliant, I pray.

IV

Your Naso sends you "health" (no empty plea)
 From Tomis, trusting you to cultivate,
 Should you, Rufinus, take delivery,
 His Triumph, small and disproportionate
 With your and others' verse: whatever its due,
 Please be its guardian. Strong things have power
 And need no doctor. Sick men hurry to
 Physicians. Gifted bards want no recourse
 To favouring readers: ofr they interest
 The loath, the hard-to-please. Age-old torment 10
 Lessened my gift – or maybe I possessed
 No gift before – though all my strength is spent,
 I'm strong in your benevolence: if you
 Take this away, all's gone, it seems to me!
 My work's dependent on the revenue
 Of favours, but a special leniency
 Attaches to this book. Others have penned
 A triumph they have seen - it's good to write
 A faithful sketch – but I am forced to send
 What's snatched from dubious hearsay; thus my sight 20
 Comes via rumour. What's been heard, what seen
 Arouses equal zeal! I don't lament
 The high rank or the gold and silver sheen

That you, not I, acquired: what would have lent
 A fire to my verses are the places,
 The varied masses, the hostilities
 Themselves, and then the captured chieftains' faces,
 Which most betray their personalities
 Would have somewhat availed my poem maybe. 30
 Applause, joyful approval could have fired
 My wit; those cheers could have enlivened me
 Exactly as a soldier, newly hired,
 Is stirred up be the trumpet. Though my core
 Be icy cold, much colder than this place
 Which I endure, that ice forevermore
 Would be hacked out if I beheld the face
 Of Caesar in his car of ivory.
 Lacking all this, my sources dubious,
 I come to you for help, and rightfully. 40
 Of those kings' names I am oblivious,
 The places' too. I had nought to apply.
 What little part of such great deeds was there
 For rumour or a Roman to supply
 By letter? If I've slipped up anywhere
 Or left some things unsaid then pardon me
 The more, kind reader. Add, too, that my lyre,
 Musing its master's woes, could scarcely be
 A source of happy songs. They scarce could fire
 My quest after so long. Thus happiness 50
 Seemed so unusual, and, as my eyes
 Shrink from a rare-seen sun, my mind was less
 Jocund. For novelty's a special prize
 In all things and if such a work's delayed,
 There is no favour. Others, I think, have vied
 In writing of that mighty accolade
 And folk have long had them at their bedside.
 Thirsty, they drank them: in satiety
 They took *my* cups; their drink was fresh, my drink
 Will be lukewarm. No sloth retarded me, 60
 I lost no time. The vast sea's distant brink
 Confines me. From the rumours to my verse
 Being quickly written and then conveyed
 To you a year could pass. It's clear what's worse -
 To be the very first one to invade
 The virgin rose-plot or, somewhat behind,
 To pluck the near-neglected fruits. What wonder
 If a wreath unworthy of our chief were twined
 After the plot has undergone our plunder?
 Poets, don't think I write against your art!

My Muse speaks for herself. Some rites we share, 70
 If wretches in your guild may be a part.
 Friends, you have been a great part of my care:
 Even out here I cherish you. Acclaim
 The verse I may not plead for. After death
 Some works shall please, for spitefulness can maim,
 Biting unjustly, those who still have breath.
 If wretched life's a kind of death, the ground
 Delays - a grave's my sole deficiency.
 Though all will blame my *Art*, there will be found
 No-one to blame my duty. I may be 80
 Exhausted, yet my will earns your acclaim.
 The gods for this, I'm sure, give me esteem.
 At shrines, the poor, too, please, and, just the same
 As slain bulls, lambs are well-received. This theme
 Was great enough to add a heavy weight
 To Vergil's wit. Moreover, elegy
 Could not bear such a load. I hesitate
 To say what metre now is right for me.
 For you've another triumph close at hand,
 O Rhine. Some use have skilful prophecies: 90
 While it's still green, give Jove the laurel band.
 You don't read me - I'm far across the seas
 Near the Hister, imbibed by the wild Getae -
 No, that's a god's voice. Deep within my heart:
 Under a god's spur this I prophesy.
 Why hesitate o Livia, to start
 To deck the chariot and pave the way
 For this parade? The wars no stay permit.
 The rebel Germany has cast away
 Its hated spears. So now you will admit 100
 My augury has weight. Proof's close at hand -
 Believe. Your son will double this renown
 And, as before, with harnessed steeds will stand
 Upon his car. Then drape the purple gown
 Round his victorious frame. The very wreath
 Will know that head. Let shields and leggings glow
 With gold and jewels; to the men beneath,
 Those fettered captives, let the triumphs show:
 May ivory ring the turreted walls and may
 Fiction seem real, and may the filthy Rhine 110
 Beneath the broken rushes now display
 His locks all bloody as they intertwine.
 Barbarian ornaments the captured kings
 Demand, a garb too sumptuous for their fates;
 There are, moreover, many other things

Your sons' unconquered worth precipitates
Your care of, now and in the future, too.
You gods, whose counsel prompts my prophecy
Of things to come, approve, I beg of you,
These words I speak, and with alacrity.

V

You ask whence is this letter you peruse.
From her, where Hister meets the azure sea.
So now, the author...? Poet Naso whose
Own work of art provoked his injury.
So greetings (I'd prefer them face-to-face)
From shaggy Getae, Cotta Maximus.
To your innate rhetoric no disgrace,
Youth, I have read your words mellifluous
Out of the crowded forum. Hurriedly
For many hours I spoke them all aloud 10
And often, yet my gripe will always be –
They're few! Yet they became a larger crowd
By frequent reading and they've never been
More pleasing. And though they lose not a jot
Of sweetness when they're read so much, they win
Through force, not freshness. What a happy lot
They have who hear them spoken and delight
In eloquence like that! Though water's sweet
When served to you, it gains a greater height
Of sweetness when you give yourself a treat 20
Straight from the spring. To take right from the tree
An apple tops eating it from the table.
If my own Muse had not deported me,
If I'd been guiltless, your own voice was able
To read me what I've read. I would have been,
As I'd been to want to be, a centumvir
To judge your work: a pleasure much more keen
Would fill my captured heart with approving cheer.
Since I must dwell among the wild Getae,
Far from both Rome and you, send me, I pray, 30
Continual pledges of your work that I
May read them (for you can) and thus I may
Feel closer to you. Use my precedent,
Unless you spurn it, one you could give me
(More justly). Though long dead, by my own bent
I leave no stone unturned that I may be

Not dead to *you*. In turn, for my delight
 Send countless samples of your work. But say,
 Young man sparked by my verse, if you just might
 Through them remember me in some small way. 40
 When reading friends my recent verse, or when
 You urge them to recite, as you so do,
 I ask you, though you are oblivious then
 Of what is absent from your mind, do you
 Feel *something's* gone and, as when I was there,
 You often spoke with me, yet even now
 The name of Naso's on your lips? I swear:
 May a Getan bow destroy me (you know how
 That may be so if I prevaricate)
 If I don't think about you every day, 50
 Though absent. We should all appreciate
 The heart goes where it will. When in this way
 I enter Rome, unseen, I talk with you
 And relish what you say. It's hard for me
 To say how glad I am, how shining, too,
 That hour is, for then I seem to be
 In heaven itself (if this you may believe)
 And sojourn with the blessed deities.
 And when I have arrived back here, I leave
 Both heaven and gods, for these localities 60
 Around the Pontic Sea are hardly far
 From Styx. If on my effort to be free
 To go back home Destiny puts a ban,
 Then, Maximus, take this fruitless hope from me.

VI

I send my friend (I almost wrote his name!)
 A brief note from the waters of Euxine.
 If carelessly I'd jotted down the same,
 Through such respect some censure would be mine.
 But why, when others think it safe, do you
 Alone forbid it in my poetry?
 If you don't know great clemency shines through
 Augustus' wrath, then learn it now from me.
 I, also, from this penance that I bear
 Would withdraw nothing were I arbiter 10
 Of my deserts. For Caesar does not care
 If I speak of a friend and won't deter
 Our letters. It would be no wickedness

To comfort a companion, lightening
 His cruel fate with words of gentleness.
 Why, fearing what's no danger, do you bring
 Discredit on Augustan gods this way?
 We've seen men hit by bolts who are revived
 With Jove's assent. Leucothea, the day
 That Ulysses's vessel had been rived 20
 By Neptune, was not sluggish to support
 Him as he swam. The gods, believe me, spare
 Poor wretches, nor do they always resort
 To endless persecution. Nor is there
 A god more moderate than is our prince:
 Justice tempers her own strength, for he
 Within the new-made temple not long since
 Placed her, although it's far from recently
 He placed her in his heart. Jove has propelled
 Rash bolts at guiltless humans. What small part 30
 Of all the countless people Neptune felled
 Deserved to drown in savage seas? The heart
 Of Mars decries the bravest soldiers slain
 In battle. Ask us all, though, and there'll be
 None saying that we don't deserve the pain
 We feel. Those killed by fire, war or sea
 Can't be restored. But many were the men
 Restored by Caesar, who reduced their fate
 Ill pray I'll be one of them. And again,
 Do you believe that to alleviate 40
 An exile under such an emperor
 Spells danger? Under Busiris, yes, maybe,
 Or under Phalaris the torturer
 Whose victims met a fiery destiny
 In the bronze bull. Don't blame with empty fear
 His tender heart. Why fear a savage reef
 In placid waters? Since my letter here
 Is penned without your name, it's my belief
 I'm scarcely pardonable. But my reason
 By such a blow was snatched away from me: 90
 All powers of thought were stolen in this season
 Of further woes: fearing my destiny,
 Not my avenger's wrath, *my* name I fear
 Within my book. Admonished now, allow
 Your poet friend to write your name so dear.
 Pals for so long, we'll both be shamed if now
 You're not part of my book. But lest this fright
 Robs you of sleep, I'll not show loyalty
 More than you wish: I'll keep from others' sight

Your name unless you grant the liberty. 100
I'll not force anyone to have my praise.
But, though you might in safety, openly,
Show your devotion to me, then in days
Of jeopardy, love me clandestinely.

VII

Words fail me as I make the same appeal
So often; I'm ashamed my idle prayer
Is endless. My stale poetry, I feel,
Now wearies you. You're all too well aware
Of what I seek. You know the theme although
The wax is still intact. So let me shift
The purport of my letter lest I go
Too many times against the fast stream's drift.
Friends, pardon my good hopes of you: I'll err 10
No more thus. It will never be maintained
That I encumber my dear partner:
Though timid and inactive she's remained
As true to me. This, too, I'll bear, for I
Have suffered worse. There is no care can sway
You now. Brought from the herd, the bull won't try
To pull the plough but jerks his neck away,
A greenhorn, from the harsh yoke. Misery
Has long been with me, so there's no distress
I'm not inured to. Let them bury me
Among the Getae. Let my Fate progress 20
Straight to the end. Hope's good – though useless ever
And empty – as you think you will achieve
Your goals. Next step is knowing that you'll never
Find safety; then you truly may believe
You're doomed. There are some wounds made worse, we see,
By treatment, better left untouched. He dies
A milder death who drowns quite suddenly
Than him who in the swelling waters tries
With weary arms to stay afloat. Oh why
Did I imagine leaving here to be 30
In better pastures? Why have hope that I
Could live a milder life? Accordingly
Did I discern my fate? Worse pain to speak
Of Scythia once more, showing the fate
Of cruel exile. Better you don't seek
To aid me that that my prayers have no weight.

The thing you dare not's serious indeed:
Were you to ask, there's one who may aid me.
Should Caesar's anger not forbid the deed,
I'll bravely die here by the Euxine Sea.

40

VIII

I wondered what from Tomis I should send
To show my long devotion. You are worth
Silver or gold, but presents like these tend
To please you when you *give* them. But the earth
Round here has not one mine: the enemy
Won't let the farmer dig. Your robe is dyed
In purple often, but Sarmatia's sea
Does not possess it. Local flocks provide
Coarse fleeces: Tomis' daughters do not know
The art of Pallas. Rather they grind grain,
With heavy pails on heads they come and go;
The elm's not cloaked with vines, no trees contain
A hefty load of apples. Ugly plains
Produce grim wormwood, showing that the ground
Is very bitter. Nought in these domains
For all my circumspection can be found.
I've sent you Scythian arrows even so,
Enclose within their quivers; I beseech
That they will with the life-blood of your foe
Be stained. Such are the pens, the books this beach
Provides. This Muse, then, prospers on this shore.
Though such a gift betrays my shameful heart
Because it seems so small, yet I implore
That you receive it, Maximus, in good part.

10

20

IX

Because my verse holds no new argument,
Brutus, you say someone is censuring
The poems: nothing but pleas that I be sent
Closer to Rome, reports that enemies ring
Closely around me. Why pick out one sin
From many? If my Muse sins only thus,
All's well. For I myself see defects in
My books, though every man makes too much fuss

Of his own verse: he'll praise his work" maybe
 Thus Agrius once called Thersites fair. 10
 I'm not misled by such a fallacy –
 Each poem, when penned, I do not then and there
 Adore it. Why, then, if I do perceive
 My faults, do I still stray and tolerate
 More crimes in verse? To feel and to relieve
 Disease are different things: sense is innate
 In all, but curing ills requires some skill.
 I'd often wish to change a word, yet I
 Would leave it. Often it would make me ill
 To make corrections (for why should I lie 20
 To you?) and undertake yet further stress.
 The toil of writing pleases and in fact
 Lessens itself and glows with vividness
 With its own heart and grows. The very act
 Of emendation's harder (similarly
 Homer topped Aristarchus), wearing down
 The author's mind with care's frigidity,
 Curbing the steed that strives to gain the crown.
 O may the lenient gods assuage the spleen
 Of Caesar; may I in a peaceful land 30
 Be buried; sometimes while I laboured, keen
 To use all care, my bitter fate would stand
 Before me: and then I seemed hardly sound
 To be a poet or to ever care
 To change one word with fierce foes all around.
 There's nothing more excusable anywhere
 Within my verse than that it but possesses
 One thought: bright songs I sang when I was bright,
 Now sad, I sing sad songs: each stage addresses
 Its own fit theme. What is there else to write 40
 But of a bitter land's malignity
 And prayers that I may be allowed to die
 Somewhere more pleasant? Since eternally
 I say these things, it's scarcely ever I
 Am heard: or they feign not to understand
 My words, which lose their purpose. What I write
 Is all the same, yet I have tried my hand
 With different folk. From many do I fight
 For aid with my one voice. Should I then use
 But you for all my friends? Not worth it! Please excuse 50
 What I confess, wise ones: my fame to me
 Means less than does my safety. What I write
 Could many a bard in his own way create.
 My Muse shows honestly the savage bite

Of my distress and all too well. Of late
My goal was not to publish but convey
A letter to each friend. When this was done,
To gather them en masse in such a way
That you may not believe that any one
Of them has been selected consciously.
Then pardon me these letters – their intent
Was not renown but benefit for me
And praise for others – that's why they were sent.