

## EX PONTO IV

### I

Pompey, accept a poem from one who owes  
His life to you. If you allow your name  
To be set down here, thus your merit grows:  
But if you frown, I'll own that I'm to blame  
Although the cause is laudable. My heart  
Is full of gratitude. Do not, I pray,  
Be angry for the fealty I impart  
To you. I thought myself, for many a day,  
Ungrateful that you in my poetry  
Did not appear. How often, too, when I 10  
Would write to someone else, unconsciously  
Your name slipped in! I liked that very lie  
And scarce could bear erasing it. I'd say,  
"Well, let him see it, though he may complain.  
I'm sorry that such blame before today  
Has not been earned." Let Lethe numb all pain  
Within my heart, if such a stream there be,  
I still will not forget you. Please allow  
My plea, don't spurn it with contumely  
Or think that in my praise there is somehow 20  
A sin, and please accept this gratefulness,  
Though slight, for such great service: should you say  
Me nay, I'll still be grateful nonetheless.  
Your grace, when I was poor, would never stray,  
Your coffers ever open wide for me.  
Now, too, your clemency, not terrified  
By sudden fate, provides facility  
And will continue, too, so to provide.  
Whence, do you ask, have I such confidence  
In future help? All oversee the aid 30  
They've wrought. As Venus is the magnificence  
And work of Apelles, smoothing locks sea-sprayed:  
Also as Phidias's war goddess  
Stands sentinel, in bronze or ivory,  
Over the Attic citadel: no less,  
As Calamis upholds celebrity  
For the steeds he fashioned: as the vivid cow  
Is Myron's work: I'm not the final fraction  
Of all you own, o Sextus; you endow  
Me with the name of guardian's benefaction. 40

## II

You read, of mighty kings the greatest bard,  
Verse from the land of the unshorn Getae.  
To tell the truth, Severus, it goes hard  
With me that as yet from my writings I  
Omit your name. Yet my communication  
In prose has never ceased. Just poetry,  
The witness of your kind consideration,  
I have not sent. Why give what you to me  
Have sent yourself? Who'd give to Bacchus wine,  
To Aristaeus honey, who'd give grain 10  
To Triptolemus, to Alcinous consign  
Fruit? You with a productive heart were born:  
There is no crop of those who cultivate  
Helicon that's larger. Sending poetry  
To you is sending leaves to groves. I'm late  
Because of this, Severus. Formerly  
My wit was sharper, though, but now I till  
A barren shore with sterile share. In fact,  
As silt clogs up the strata in a rill  
And, outraged, water in a spring silt-packed 20  
Stands still, the silt of woes have bruised my core,  
My verse now flowing with a scantier vein.  
Were Homer himself transplanted on this shore,  
A Getan he'd become, it's very plain.  
Forgive me but the bridles of my art  
I've slackened, rarely writing anymore,  
The sacred force that feeds a poet's heart  
No longer present as it was before.  
My Muse's acts are scarce, so slack is she,  
Hardly, as by coercion, succouring 30  
My work. Small joy, or none, in poetry  
Is mine, no pleasure now in marrying  
My words to metre, whether my woes have been  
Started through little profit from my verse  
Or making rhythmic gestures, quite unseen,  
Or writing poetry that you'll impart  
To none are both the same. A listener  
Arouses zeal, and worth, when lauded, grows,  
While exaltation has a mighty spur.  
Whom would I read to here except for those 40  
Blond-haired Coralli and the other clans

Around the barbarous Hister? What should I  
Do on my own and what should be my plans  
To make my sombre leisure hurry by?  
Nor wine nor treacherous dice can interest me  
(Though others find thus time will pass away)  
Nor can I lose myself in husbandry  
(I'd love to but fierce wars would say me nay).  
What's left for me but the Pierides,  
Cold consolation, not well justified  
By me? Still cherish those activities  
Which bring you profit, gladly satisfied  
To quench your thirst with the Aonian spring  
And duly pay the Muses adoration  
And for my reading pleasure send something  
Created from your recent application.

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### III

Complaint or silence? Nameless accusation  
Or telling all your name? I won't proclaim  
Your name lest you should win some commendation  
By my complaint and through my verse seek fame.  
While I'd a sturdy keel beneath my bows,  
You were the first to wish to sail with me,  
But now that my Fortune contracts her brows,  
You're gone, because I need your loyalty.  
Dissembling, too, you'd have nobody know  
That you know me, thus, when you'd hear my name  
You'd say, "Who's he?" And yet from long ago  
In boyhood we'd been friends, though you'd disclaim  
The fact: I was the first to hear you speak  
On serious themes and hear the jokes you'd crack.  
We both dwelt in the same household, quite cheek  
By jowl, you called me your sole Muse. You lack  
The urge to ask about me; traitor, you  
Don't know if I still see the light of day.  
It's clear you were pretending if we two  
Were never close: if you were not, they'll say  
You were unfaithful. Come, confess to me  
The wrath that changed you: if your accusation  
Is not just, mine *is*. What iniquity  
Of mine has caused in you this transformation?  
Or do you find some trespass in my plight?  
If you give me no aid, you might have sent

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Three scribbled words. They say you even slight  
 Me in my anguish, waxing eloquent  
 (I can't believe it!). Madman, Fortune may  
 Desert you - why of tears do you divest 30  
 Your own shipwreck? She shows her fickle sway  
 By her own fickle wheel, whose very crest  
 She stands on. Like a leaf, a breeze is she:  
 It's you alone can match her transience,  
 Vile one. All humankind activity  
 Hangs by a slender thread. Chance providence  
 Can ruin what was strong. Who does not know  
 Of wealthy Croesus? Yet an enemy  
 Caught him and gave to him his life. Although  
 That Dionysius caused anxiety 40  
 In Syracuse, he barely kept at bay  
 Harsh hunger later by a lowly trade.  
 Pompey the Great topped all, yet, sent away,  
 He humbly begged a client for his aid.  
 Though Marius was renowned for victory  
 Over Jugurtha and the Cimbrian,  
 A consul often showing mastery  
 He suffered woes unfit for such a man,  
 Lying in slime and marsh grass. We're derided  
 By godly dominance: the present day 50  
 Is hardly fixed. Had somebody confided  
 In me, "You'll got to Euxine far away  
 And cringe from Getan bows," I would have stated,  
 "Go drink a potion that will clear your brain  
 (Whatever Anticyra has created)."  
 Yet that indeed occurred to cause me pain.  
 I might have dodged a mortal dart and yet  
 Could not avoid a matchless god's sharp blow.  
 What makes you glad have fear may soon be set  
 Against you, while you speak, and turn to woe.

#### IV

No day is moist with such humidity  
 From southern clouds that it may pour non-stop,  
 No place so fertile that you may not see  
 A useful plant mixed with a hardy crop  
 Of brambles. Fortune's never so severe  
 That joy will not reduce in some small way  
 The woe it causes. Look at me out here,

No home, land, loved ones, shipwrecked on this bay.  
 I've found, though, how to smile and never mind  
 My fate – while walking on the tawny sand 10  
 I heard a rustling and I looked behind.  
 I saw no-one but heard: "I'm here to hand  
 Good news to you – from far away I flew.  
 Through Pompey's consulship (your dearest friend)  
 Next year will be a happy one for you.  
 I am Report." Then, having made an end  
 Of words, while Pontus filled with happiness,  
 She turned to other folk. Cares were dispelled  
 Amid new joy, the harmful ruggedness  
 Was gone that this locality once held. 20  
 Then, two-faced Janus, when the lengthy year  
 You have unsealed and holly January  
 Ensues, so that his every debt he'll clear  
 The purple, badge of highest dignity,  
 Will Pompey don. I seem to see your hall  
 Quite bursting with the mob, the lack of space  
 Bruising them all and (your first task of all)  
 Tarpeia's shrine; each god's propitious face  
 Attend your prayers; white oxen then extend  
 Their necks to the unerring axe (the leas 30  
 Of Falerri has nourished them): you send  
 The gods your wish for favour – of all these  
 Caesar and Jove especially – you walk  
 Into the senate-house, the fathers, called  
 By custom, pay attention to your talk,  
 Your eloquent lips keeping them all enthralled;  
 Propitious words, as usual, shall be  
 Expressed. You'll thank the gods, and Caesar too  
 (Who'll give you cause to thank him frequently),  
 Then home, with all the senate flocking you, 40  
 Where there's scarce room for all the adoration.  
 Alas, I can't be there nor may observe  
 Those sights! But I, in my imagination,  
*Can* see your absent self and that will serve  
 To warch my consul. May you think of me  
 Sometimes and say, "How's the poor wretch today?"  
 I'll own my exile's better instantly  
 If I should be informed of what you say.

Light couplets, go hence that you might be read  
 By that wise, honoured consul. Far from here  
 Is he, your feet uneven, and you'll tread  
 Upon a snowy mantle. Once you clear  
 Cold Thrace, dark Haemus and the Ionian Sea,  
 In fewer than ten days you'll find great Rome,  
 Although you'll make no hurried odyssey.  
 As soon as you arrive, seek Pompey's home:  
 None's closer to Augustus' forum. Should  
 Someone enquire who you are and whence, 10  
 Beguile him with whatever name cause offence,  
 I feel, a lie will surely mean less fear.  
 Unhindered even, you may hardly see  
 The consul, should you manage to draw near  
 His very threshold, for he'll either be  
 Involved in litigation, on a seat  
 Of ivory, carved splendidly, on high:  
 Or settling, with the spear set at his feet,  
 Revenues, making sure Rome's wealth won't die 20  
 In any way: or, when he has collected  
 The fathers at the Julian shrine, he'll be  
 Concerned with matters intimately connected  
 To a great consul's sphere: or maybe he  
 Will with the customary words address  
 Augustus and his son and seek their view  
 On something new: he has no idleness –  
 Germanicus will claim the residue:  
 After the gods, he worships most of all  
 That man. But when he finds some privacy 30  
 From all these duties, it's for you he'll call,  
 Extending kindly hands, and will maybe  
 Ask what your author's up to: answer thus:  
 "He lives, all thanks to you, he would concede,  
 And Caesar's grace. A world so barbarous,  
 He says with grateful lips, you guaranteed  
 Would be made safe for him: your heartfelt care  
 Made certain that your life's blood would not stain  
 A Bistonian spear: moreover, he's aware  
 That many other gifts that would sustain 40  
 His life you gave: his funds you would not take.  
 In thanks, he swears he'll serve you evermore.  
 Bereft of trees will all the mountains bake,  
 Seas lack swift vessels and, not as before,  
 Streams flow back to their source before I stay  
 My thanks." This said, beseech him to preserve  
 This very gift he's given. In this way

The purpose of your journey you will serve.

## VI

From somewhere you would not want me to be  
There comes my letter, Brutus. Yet grim fate  
Has set me here - a stronger destiny  
Than are your prayers. A five-year span to date  
In Scythia has kept me; I now start  
A second. Fortune, obstinate and base,  
Persists against the wishes of my heart.  
You, Maximus, resolved to try the grace  
Of god Augustus as a suppliant,  
Being the greatest of the Fabii. 10  
You died too soon; though insignificant,  
I take for that responsibility.  
After your death I doubt if anyone  
Could give aid to me now. That succour died  
On your demise. No Caesar had begun  
My inadvertent error to let slide.  
I was bereft of hope and land. And yet,  
Though far away, I sent to you some verse  
About our new god. May this act abet  
My case. And may my miseries disperse 20  
And Caesar's sacred household mitigate  
Its anger. You, I'm sure, swear this as well  
(I know you all too well). You demonstrate  
At all times perfect love to me, yet swell  
With even more in my adversity.  
Whoever saw our tears would have believed  
That *both* of us would pay a penalty.  
You were by Nature, when you were conceived,  
Mad kind to wretches; not a heart so mild  
Has anyone: who knows not your finesse 30  
In law would scarcely think you have beguiled  
The counsel for defence. A cleverness  
In being kind to suppliants and yet  
Being harsh to miscreants, although  
They seem at odds – you have both. When you're sent  
Yourself to serve law's rigours, every blow  
Loosed from your lips is like a poisoned dart.  
May all your foes feel your severity  
In arms and all the missiles that your heart  
Prompts you to throw. No-one would ever see 40

These qualities in you, such care you use  
In wielding them. But if you see someone  
Who has become the victim of abuse  
Through cruel Fortune, there's no woman – none –  
Who's tenderer than is your heart. This trait  
I noticed in you most specifically  
When many folk began to abnegate  
Me as their comrade. In my memory  
They will not live: *you* will, who ease my woes.  
The too-near Hister will from the Euxine  
Go backwards to its wellspring and, as though  
Folks, like Thyestes, once more were to dine  
On human flesh, the chariot of the sun  
Run to the East sooner than I appear  
A negligent ingrate to anyone  
Who grieved that I was exiled way out here.

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## VII

Vestalis, sent to Euxine to mete out  
Justice in polar lands, now face-to-face  
You see my situation nor can doubt  
Complaints are just. Born of a kingly race  
Amid the Alps, you'll give me sure avail.  
You see vines, ice-bound, standing rigidly,  
As fierce Iazygian herdsman carve a trail,  
With heavy wagons, on their odyssey  
Across the Hister, while upon barbed steel  
Poison is cast, a deathly blow times two.  
Would you had merely seen it, not to feel  
It too, a battle of your own! Now you  
Have reached the highest rank, just recently  
Conferred on you. Although this rank contains  
Much privilege, your probity shall be  
Greater than it. This Hister too maintains,  
Whose waters were empurpled by your hand  
With Getic blood. Thus also Aegisos  
Had come to know, when you approached that land,  
That its locale could not prevent its loss.  
For it's uncertain whether to protect  
The town by force or by its situation,  
So loftily it towered, all bedecked  
With clouds. From Thrace's king a hostile nation  
Had fiercely cut it off, the conqueror

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Now holding all the spoils, till finally  
 Vitellius and his soldiers came ashore  
 And charged the Getae. You, great progeny  
 Of lofty Donnus, needed to foray  
 Against the foe. At once, your armaments 30  
 Far-gleaming, you made sure that a display  
 Of pluck is given as the battlements,  
 The steel, the rocks, more than a winter rain,  
 With mighty strides you storm. You're not prevented  
 By countless darts nor those with poison's stain.  
 Arrows with painted feathers are cemented  
 Into your helmet; no part of your shield  
 Is free of marks. You can't dodge every blow:  
 But ardent love of hour in the field  
 Is greater than your pain. Ajax just so, 40  
 They say, in Troy withstood each firebrand  
 Of Hector when defending the Greek fleet.  
 When they came nearer, fighting hand-to-hand,  
 Fierce swords now used close in, each martial feat  
 Of yours – how many slain, their names, the way  
 They died – is formidable to recite.  
 There were so many Getans then who lay  
 Beneath your foot. The victims of your might,  
 Heaped up, you trampled in your victory.  
 The lesser ranks make you their paragon, 50  
 Wounded and being wounded equally.  
 Your virtue so surpasses everyone  
 As Pegasus does every other steed  
 Outstrip. You conquered Aegisos; you'll see,  
 O Vestalis, your each and every deed  
 Shall be remembered in my poetry.

## VIII

Gifted Suillius, your letter, late  
 But pleasing, reached me: if fond loyalty  
 Can by petition calm the gods, you state,  
 You will assist me. Should you give to me  
 No more, I ma your debtor for this boon  
 (The will to help is worthy, I profess).  
 May your resolve not culminate too soon  
 But last an age, and may your faithfulness  
 Not flag beneath my woes. There is some claim  
 Made by our kinship's bonds, which it's my plea 10

May never tire. She who's your wife's the same  
 Lady I call stepdaughter; that same she  
 Who calls you son-in-law I call my wife.  
 If, reading this, you frown and feel distressed  
 To be my kin, you'll cause me further strife!  
 There is nothing you possibly could find  
 That could inflict upon me some disgrace  
 Excepting Fortune, which to me proved blind.  
 If you should take the liberty to trace 20  
 My lineage and check my family tree,  
 You'll find us knights through many a generation:  
 My character? But take one fault from me,  
 You'll find me spotless. If by supplication  
 You hope things may be done, you must implore  
 Your gods, who are – young Caesar. Let him be  
 Entreated. There's no altar that is more  
 Known to you. It allows no litany  
 Said by its priest ever to be in vain.  
 Seek succour for me there. A little breeze 30  
 Of aid will make my vessel rise again,  
 Though lately shipwrecked, from the watery seas.  
 Then to the rapid fire I will throw  
 Holy incense, authenticating thus  
 The power of the gods. I'll offer no  
 Parian-marble shrine, Germanicus:  
 My wealth is gone thanks to that blow. There'll be  
 Rich homes and cities to build shrines for you;  
 I'll give my verse, my one prosperity,  
 In gratitude. It is a paltry due, 40  
 I must confess – mere words in compensation  
 For safety. He, though, who gives everything  
 Displays a sense of massive obligation,  
 Such piety its aim accomplishing.  
 The humble censer of a man in need  
 Has incense that's inferior not at all  
 To that a splendid salver holds. Indeed  
 A milk-fed lamb will at the altar fall  
 Just as the one fed on Faliscan grass.  
 Yet bardic gifts more fully than the rest 50  
 Fit leaders. Eulogistic verses pass  
 Throughout the world in promulgation lest  
 Word of your deeds should die. Virtue through verse  
 Lives on, thus well-known to posterity.  
 Iron and stone are ravaged by the curse  
 Of gnawing time's unrivalled potency.  
 Writing endures. Agamemnon via the pen

We know, his forces, too, and those he fought.  
 Who would know Thebes and its seven leading men  
 If not for verse, besides the exploits wrought 60  
 Before and after? If I have the right  
 To say it, even gods are made by verse,  
 The poet's voice required by their might.  
 By it we know the gaping Universe  
 Cleft from primeval nature to embrace  
 Its own divisions; Jove hurled into Hell  
 The Giants who would rule the heavenly race:  
 Thus Dionysus, when the Indies fell  
 To him, achieved renown, Achilles, too,  
 Upon Oechalia's capture. Recently 70  
 Your grandfather, o Caesar, whose virtue  
 Admitted him to Heaven, poetry  
 In some part sanctified. Therefore, should I  
 Still have some wit, it will in every way  
 Serve you. A bard yourself, you can't decry  
 A poet's office: for it has some sway,  
 You deem. Had not a glorious man decreed  
 That you do weightier work, you'd have become  
 The Muses' non-pareil. You've greater need  
 To give us themes than write: you can't stay dumb, 80  
 Though, wholly. Now in arms, now shaping verse,  
 You find in what irks others satisfaction.  
 Just as Apollo never was averse  
 To bow or lyre, putting into action  
 Both strings with holy hands, you lack nothing  
 Of prince or scholar (Muse and Jove to you  
 Are one). Since I'm not ousted from that spring  
 That Pegasus kicked to life, that we pursue  
 The self-same art, the self-same liturgy,  
 May this give aid to me: may I withdraw 90  
 From shores too open to the Coralli,  
 Fleece-clad, the fierce Getae: if by your law  
 I'm sadly banned from Rome, may I be laid  
 Somewhere less distant from the Ausonian nation,  
 From whence my celebrations may be made  
 In honour of your recent approbation  
 That your great deeds be told with least delay.  
 So that the gods above may hear my plea,  
 My dear Suillius, I beg you, pray  
 For the father of your wife (well, virtually!) 100

Graecinus, from the Euxine, whence I may,  
 Not whence I choose, I send you salutation.  
 I pray that it arrives upon that day  
 That twelve *fascēs* are given by the nation  
 To you: since at the Capitol you'll be,  
 Where, absent, I shall have no part to play,  
 Then let my letter be my deputy  
 And act as friend on that appointed day.  
 With better fate, my axle holding true,  
 The duty which I pen would have been made 10  
 By my own tongue as I saluted you,  
 Kissed you and praised you for this accolade,  
 My honour matching yours: I must confess  
 I would have been so proud that there's nowhere  
 That scarcely could contain my haughtiness:  
 While holy senators enclosed you there,  
 I would be called before you as a knight;  
 Though to be *near* you I was always keen,  
 I'd joy not to be *by* you: injured quite  
 By the mob, I'd not complain: it would have been, 20  
 At such a time, a pleasant thing to me  
 To feel the crush of folk. Such exaltation  
 To see that great line, the immensity  
 Of people on their long peregrination!  
 To show my love for trivialities  
 I'll check your purple cloak, the curule chair  
 Designs, all which are carved with ivories  
 From Africa; when you were led from there  
 To the Tarpeian Rock, at your decree,  
 The victim slain, the god within the shrine 30  
 Would then have heard, though absent, thanks from me;  
 The incense I, with this full heart of mine  
 Rather than with full censer, I'd have thrown,  
 Three, four times revelling in your reputation;  
 I'd be your friend right there had I but known  
 A kindly fate that gave me dispensation  
 To be in Rome, my mental joy committed  
 To optical joy. The gods judged otherwise,  
 Justly perhaps: my error's cause refuted  
 Won't aid me. I will use, then, not my eyes 40  
 But my imagination (unlike me,  
 Not ostracized) to gaze at your *fascēs*  
 And robe. Your legal duties it will see  
 And fantasize that it directs its gaze

In fact, unseen, at each accomplishment,  
 While you deal with the *lustrum*'s interest  
 And contract in good faith, while eloquent  
 Within the senate, seeking what is best  
 For Rome, and for that godlike family  
 Propose your thanks or else decapitate 50  
 Choice oxen. Would that you might beg for me,  
 Once weightier prayers are over, and placate  
 Augustus. May a holy fire fly  
 From a full altar and a lucid flame  
 Send out a goodly omen. Still, lest I  
 Complain of everything, let me proclaim  
 A fête for your appointment. No less cause  
 For joy is that your brother will succeed  
 And at December's end, without a pause,  
 Will win the honour. Such a love indeed 60  
 Exists between you that you'll take joy in  
 Each obligation. Thus you both will be  
 Twice consul – double pleasure for your kin.  
 Though great the rank, while Martian Rome can't see  
 A higher power, it achieves yet more  
 In honour by the consul's stateliness  
 And the giver's majesty. May both, therefore,  
 Forevermore rejoice in the largesse  
 Of Caesar. When more pressing cares of state  
 Leave you some leisure, add your prayers, I pray, 70  
 To mine. And if a zephyr should inflate  
 My sail, relax the cable so I may  
 Leave Stygian waters. Till just recently  
 Your Flavius ruled here: thus the Histrian land  
 Was free from harm, he kept in harmony  
 The Mysian tribes and cowed the archer band  
 Of Getans with his sword. With valorous speed  
 He retook Troesmus while the Danube he  
 Dyed with barbarian blood. Thus, for a need,  
 Ask him about the region's geography 80  
 Or Scythia's dreadful weather or the dread  
 I suffer from the nearby foe: are there  
 Darts dipped in snake-gall? Does a human head  
 Become a sacrifice? Does Pontus bear  
 A cold that freezes? Does the ice extend  
 Far over it? Then ask how people rate me  
 And question further of hours I spend  
 In suffering. The Getae do not hate me,  
 Nor should they. Nor have my views, like my fate,  
 Shifted. That calmness that you used to praise, 90

That old reserve still keeps its wonted state  
 Upon my face. That's how I am these days,  
 So distant, where the barbarous enemy  
 Choose weapons over law. Year after year  
 No man, child, woman could complain of me.  
 It is for this that the Tomitans here  
 Look kindly on my plight: for I must call  
 On them as witness. They know that I yearn  
 To leave and so would have me go. Yet all  
 Prefer to have me stay. This you may learn 100  
 Not just of me: for there are wax decrees  
 That praise me and grant me immunity.  
 Though wretches should not boast of things like these,  
 Towns nearby show like partiality.  
 My piety is known: a foreign land  
 May see my shrine to Caesar. Side by side  
 The pious son and priestess consort stand  
 (no Caesar is a god they both reside  
 As equal deities). Germanicus,  
 To make the house complete, is present there 110  
 At his grandmother's side, while young Drusus  
 Is with his father. I extend a prayer  
 And incense just as often as each day  
 Arises in the East. Throughout this nation  
 They'll say I am not lying (for you may  
 Inquire) and will confirm my dedication.  
 The god's birthday they know I celebrate  
 However I can, my piety no less  
 To those who venture to communicate  
 With me from far Propontis. I may guess 120  
 Your brother, when he governed this grim land,  
 Had heard of it. My wishes and my state  
 Are disparate, yet I, with liberal hand,  
 Though poor, act thus. I cannot demonstrate  
 All this to you, so many miles away:  
 My silent piety contents me, though.  
 All this will come to Caesar's ears one day:  
 Throughout the world, wherever one may go,  
 There's nothing hid from him. Divinity  
 As now you are and lord of every nation, 130  
 You know this. Placed in heaven, my anxious plea  
 You hear. May you hear, too, my compilation  
 Of verse about your new illustriousness.  
 Therefore your holiness will, I foresee,  
 Yield to these prayers, for you've attained no less  
 Than the sweet name of "Father" fittingly.

X

Six years I've spent on the Cimmerian shore  
 Among the skin-clad Getae. My sweet care,  
 Albinovanus, is there any store  
 Of flint or iron that you can compare  
 With my tenacity? For, drop by drop,  
 Will water hollow stones, use wears away  
 A ring, a ploughshare, readying the crop,  
 The soil abrades. So, as day follows day,  
 All is consumed but I: tenacity  
 Keeps even death from me. See Ulysses' 10  
 Excessive pain for an eternity  
 (Well, ten long years) upon the perilous seas:  
 Not all was trouble, though – often he'd keep  
 Periods of peace. Was it calamitous  
 To kiss the fair Calypso or to sleep  
 Alongside a sea-goddess? Aeolus  
 Lodged him and gave him winds, a kindly whiff.  
 It was no chore to hear the Sirens sing:  
 The lotus was not bitter. Oh, but if  
 I could, I'd purchase it that it might bring 20  
 Oblivion of my country – I would pay  
 Half of my life. Nor are they both the same –  
 The tribes through whom the Hister wends its way  
 And Laestrygonians. You could not claim  
 That Cyclops exceeds in brutality  
 Piacches, who's yet but a tiny fraction  
 Of dread for me! There's been more injury  
 To sailors by Hemiochean vessels' action  
 Than Scylla who sends out her beast-like yaps  
 From twisted nether parts. Do not equate 30  
 Charybdis, though three times the flood she laps,  
 Then vomits, with those who peregrinate  
 Freely throughout the East, the Achaei,  
 And keep our shores in peril. Leafless fields  
 Lie here, and poisoned arrows, while the sea,  
 Because of winter, to the walker yields  
 A road: in place of oars a person may  
 Use his own dry feet. All this you mistrust,  
 Those who have ventured here from Rome all say.  
 How miserable is the man who must 40  
 Endure what's too unpleasant to accept!

Accept it! Here's why the Sarmatian sea  
 By this appalling winter's cold is kept  
 Quite hard: the Plough's in close proximity  
 And deathly cold: it's Boreas's source,  
 Who gains his power from a nearby place.  
 The South Wind rarely blows and with scant force,  
 For far away it turns its balmy face  
 Beneath the other pole. The Euxine Sea,  
 Landlocked, possesses many tributaries, 50  
 All mingled, thereby losing potency.  
 Sagaris, Lycus, Hypanis, Cales,  
 And Oenius and Halys, corkscrewing  
 In frequent swirls, join him, Parthenius,  
 So damaging, Cynaspes, swivelling  
 His rocks, flow on, Tyras, more ponderous  
 Than none, and you, known to the distaff band,  
 O Thermodon, and Phasis, once pursued  
 By Grecian heroes, Borysthenius and  
 Limpid Dyrapsus and, in gentle mood, 60  
 Quiet Melanthus, and the stream which goes  
 Through Asian and Europa on her way,  
 And many more, the mightiest of those  
 The Danube who, o Nile, will never say  
 He yields to you. They augment and pervert  
 The Wves, allowing little potency  
 To Pontus. Like a quagmire clogged with dirt  
 Or a still pool, we may no longer see  
 Its blue. Fresh water rides upon the strait,  
 Less heavy than sea-water, which contains, 70  
 Through being mixed with salt, a heavy weight.  
 Why should I tell all this to you? What gain's  
 In such precision? "I deferred my grief,"  
 I'll say, "beguiling time. Now I delight  
 In profit thus, attaining some relief  
 From wonted sorrow through the words I write,  
 Forgetting all Getae." Your eulogy  
 On Theseus shall exalt him, I assume,  
 Just as you echo him. Fidelity  
 You don't Allow, I'm certain, breathing room 80  
 In blithe days only. Though he's glorious,  
 A hero in your poetry, yet we  
 May imitate him thus: each one of us  
 Can be a Theseus in fidelity.  
 You need not overcome with club or steel  
 A foe whoe made almost impassable  
 The Isthmus: for the ardour that you feel



You must make good (it's not impossible  
 For one who wishes it). For to refrain  
 From pure fidelity's not hard. Trust me,  
 My verses are not in a carping vein:  
 You've championed your friend unswervingly.

90

## XI

It had been an unpardonable crime  
 To miss you, Gallio, from my poetry:  
 My wounds were nourished by your tears that time  
 When the celestial javelin injured me.  
 O would that you had felt no further blow  
 When hurt by your friend's loss! It did not please  
 The gods to rule so, for they thought it no  
 Offence to rob you (cruel deities!)  
 Of your pre wife. Your letter recently  
 Described your grief – I washed it with moist eyes.

10

I would not, having less sagacity  
 Than you, attempt, with precepts of the wise,  
 Known to you, to extend encouragement:  
 Your grief, by time if not by reasoning,  
 Has lapsed, I think. The letters that we sent,  
 So many seas and nations traversing,  
 Have seen a year pass. Giving consolation  
 Requires a certain period when grief  
 Is on the move and seeks cooperation.  
 At length those mental wounds find their relief.

20

He who unseasonably lays a hand  
 Upon them but reopens them. Your life  
 Perhaps(may this be true now!) may be grand  
 Because you've gladly found another wife.

## XII

The difficulties in your name, my friend,  
 Preclude inclusion in my poetry:  
 There's nobody that I would more commend  
 For such an honour, if honour may be  
 An aspect of my verse. Your awkward name  
 And metre's law prevent the compliment:  
 You can not fit the mode. It were a shame

To split it through two lines; I would repent  
 Curtailing that third syllable, nor may  
 The first be short, nor should the letter 'i'  
 Be lengthened. I'd mocked and folk would say  
 I had no taste if I should falsify  
 The numbers. That is why I have delayed  
 This duty, though with added interest  
 My love shall render it. You'll be displayed  
 By some notation and with honour blessed:  
 I'll send you verse; you have been known to me  
 Since boyhood and I've loved you every day  
 Just like a brother. Your integrity  
 Has cheered, led, favoured me in every way,  
 While I with youthful hand controlled new reins,  
 Often revising at your stern demand  
 As arbiter my verse and taking pains  
 To take out lines, while the Pierian band  
 Taught you to pen a *Phaeacis* to rival  
 Blind Homer. This devoted constancy,  
 Begun in youth, went on till its arrival,  
 Unweakened, at an age when one may see  
 White hairs. Unmoved by this, you would appear  
 As adamant or with flint-like soul.  
 Sooner would war or cold be absent here  
 (In hated Pontus both things take their toll),  
 Boreas be warm and Auster chill, my woe  
 Less harsh than you would show such cruelty  
 To your exhausted friend. May this last blow  
 Miss me (indeed it does so). Only see,  
 By the gods of whom the one we trust the most  
 Is he whose rule has seen your honours grow  
 Non-stop, that to one cast upon this coast  
 You stay true that my craved breeze may still blow  
 Upon my ship. My wish? Death, might I say;  
 Yet can a dead man die? There's nothing I  
 Can do, want, not want, I'm no use. You may  
 Believe me, foresight is the first to fly  
 From wretches, then sense, with one's fortune, too.  
 In person seek how you may help, I pray,  
 And over what shallows you may pursue  
 This goal and to my wishes find a way.

Greetings, Carus, staunch friend, just like your name!  
 Whence come these words, the form and quality  
 Of what I write to you will soon proclaim,  
 Not that it's excellent but certainly  
 Not commonplace. For it is clearly mine  
 Whatever its merit. I, too, should you take  
 The title from Page One, would know each line,  
 I think, as your own work: one can't mistake  
 It in whatever pile of books; we see  
 There's always something giving it away. 10  
 It's known by Herculean energy  
 And that of him you sing. My own Muse may,  
 Glimpsed by her aspect, though her every flaw  
 Be recognized. Thersites could not veil  
 His ugliness, while everybody saw  
 Nireus's beauty. Should my verses fail,  
 Don't be surprised – I'm almost Getan now.  
 I've written a poem in Getan (shame on me!) –  
 Barbarian words put cheek by jowl somehow  
 With Latin metre. I've begun to be 20  
 Known as a poet by the fierce Getae  
 (Three cheers for me!). My theme? This you should praise:  
 Caesar. This new attempt was aided by  
 His godhead. For Augustus, in his days  
 On earth, I said, was mortal. Now he's gone  
 Into the heavens, a divinity:  
 Tiberius in virtue is as one  
 With him: when begged, he took supremacy  
 (Though often spurned): Livia was, I said,  
 The Vesta of chaste mothers (was she more 30  
 Deserving of the partner of her bed  
 Or of her son?): there were two sons she bore,  
 Staunch bulwarks of their father, who've supplied  
 Sure pledges of their spirit. I narrated  
 These words penned in an alien tongue: when I'd  
 Moved to the final page, all oscillated  
 Their heads and quivers, mumbling lengthily.  
 One said, "Your words on Caesar mean you ought  
 To be restored by Caesar's own decree."  
 And yet, Carus, six winters now have brought 40  
 Me nought but cold. My verse is profitless.  
 It once brought harm, being the major source  
 Of my poor exile. By our friendliness  
 (Not cheap to you) and by the common force  
 Of verse's pledge (thus may Germanicus,  
 The foe in chains, place matter in your mind:

So may his sons, thrive, that joint stimulus  
 Of prayers to the gods, to whom you were assigned,  
 To your great fame, as trainer) use your clout,  
 As much as you are able, to aid me 50  
 And guarantee my safety which, without  
 A change of whereabouts, can never be.

#### XIV

I sent to you a letter recently,  
 Complaining that your name won't fit my metre.  
 In this one, while I fare but reasonably,  
 You'll find my life in no way any sweeter.  
 My health itself I hate: my final prayer  
 Is to go somewhere else from where I dwell.  
 I don't care where I'm sent to – anywhere!  
 For anywhere shall me very well  
 Compared with here. To the Syrtes convey me,  
 Charybdis, so it's not my present home. 10  
 The Styx, if it exists, would even be  
 A welcome change from this place far from Rome,  
 Or even *further* down. A well-tilled field  
 Hates grass, a swallow cold more than I do  
 Detest the region where the Getae wield  
 Their spears. These words enrage the folk nearby.  
 The town seethes at my verse. Shall poetry  
 Forever harm me, shall my tactlessness  
 Forever give me pain? Accordingly,  
 Do I think twice to cut my nails unless 20  
 I write and madly trail those weapons still  
 That injure me? Do I seek out once more  
 The seas and old reefs where I suffered ill?  
 I'm innocent! Though Tomis I abhor,  
 I value you, Tomitans. Scrutinize  
 My work: there's no complaint about you there.  
 The raids upon your walls I criticize,  
 The cold, the feared assaults from everywhere.  
 On land I've levelled censure actually,  
 Not men. You do it, too. Hesiod's Muse 30  
 Warned everyone from Ascrea constantly:  
 Though he was born there, Ascrea did not lose  
 Her temper with her bard. Who loved his nation  
 More than the cunning Ulysses? Yet we  
 Can see its harshness by his confirmation.

Not land but Latin idiosyncrasy  
 The Scepsian sourly censured and accused  
 Our Rome: she bore it well, though – nothing dire  
 Befell the waspish author. I'm abused –  
 A wilful critic raised he people's ire, 40  
 Impeaching me anew. O would I were  
 As happy as I'm guiltless! No-one still  
 Is wounded by my words. Though inkier  
 Than Stygian pitch, I would incur no ill  
 Upon a loyal folk. You harboured me,  
 Tomitans, gently, proving kindness  
 Inherent in the Greeks. The Paeligni  
 And Sulmo, where I'm from, could not be less  
 Unfeeling of my woes. An accolade  
 You would not give to one who's maculate 50  
 You lately gave me: I alone was made  
 Upon your shores exempt from any rate  
 Of tax. A sacred crown was given me  
 Against my will. As Delos to Leto  
 Was loved (alone it gave her sanctuary),  
 So I love Tomis, which to those who know  
 The exiled state remains a faithful friend  
 And genial. O how I wish this nation  
 Could hope in tranquil harmony to spend  
 Its time, far from the icy constellation. 60

## XV

If there is someone who recalls Naso  
 And asks how he fares as a refugee,  
 It's to the Caesars that my life I owe,  
 My health to Sextus. After the gods he'll be  
 My Number One. Were I to calculate  
 All hours of my sad life, there'd be no section  
 That lacked his services. These you may rate  
 As equal to a farm-garden's collection  
 Of red seeds, slowly growing, African grain,  
 Tmolian grapes, the cells of Hyblan bees, 10  
 Sicyon's olives. I confess, it's plain.  
 Confirm it, there is no need for decrees,  
 Quirites, for I speak it. Place me, too,  
 A poor thing, with your wealth. However wee,  
 I'm part of your estate, yes, part of you,  
 Like Macedonian Philip's property,

Tha lands of Sicily, the domicile  
 Beside Augustus' forum, your estate  
 That's in Campania and makes you smile,  
 Whatever you own through purchase or a late 20  
 Relation; you're not able to profess,  
 Through this sad gift, you have no property  
 In Pontus; would you could! Would something less  
 Irksome were yours! Would a locality  
 More pleasant house it! Try to mitigate  
 The gods (whose realm it is) and whom with praise  
 You worship ever. For it's hard to state  
 If you're one who evinces or allays  
 My error. Not that I am in my pleas  
 Irresolute: an oar will often speed 30  
 A boat downstream. I feel shame and unease  
 For my incessant theme lest, as I plead,  
 You justly tire. But what am I to do?  
 My wish is endless. Pardon, gentle friend,  
 My fault. I often try for something new,  
 Always degenerating in the end  
 To my old vein: the letters pave the way.  
 Whether your influence has validity  
 Or cruel Fate shall order me to stay  
 And perish in this chill locality, 40  
 Your gifts my mind shall evermore recall,  
 And in my homeland everyone shall know  
 That I belong to you. That goes for all  
 The lands beneath all skies both high and low  
 (If only I transcend the wild Getae  
 In verse): they'll know that my salubrity  
 Has been effected by yourself, that I  
 Belong to you as though you purchased me.

## XVI

Why mangle, jealous one, the poetry  
 Of an exile? As a rule, one's final days  
 Don't harm one's genius: celebrity  
 In creases after death. I garnered praise  
 Even when living, while still breathed Marsus,  
 Macer who wrote of Ilium, Pedo,  
 Celestial bard, loud-voiced Rabirius;  
 And Carus, who have enraged Juno  
 In *Hercules* (if Hercules and she

Were not now kin-in-law), and Severus, 10  
 A regal bard, smart Numa, both Prisci;  
 And master of both metres, Montanus  
 (Hexameter *and* elegy bestowed  
 Fame on him; he who wrote Penelope,  
 As Ulysses on that fierce ocean road  
 For ten years wandering; as well as he  
 Who left undone through his ill-timed demise  
 His *Troesmis*, his long-time preoccupation,  
 Sabinus; and the bard who in men's eyes  
 Was aptly named Largus: the Gallic nation 20  
 Through him received Antenor; also he  
 Who sang of Ilium after Hector's fall;  
 And Tuscus who gained his celebrity  
 From his own *Phyllis*, and the one we call  
 Sea-bard (the sea-blue gods you might assume  
 Had penned it); he who wrote of enmity  
 In Libya and Rome; Marius whom  
 We know as multi-talented; and he,  
 Trinacrius, who wrote the *Perseid*;  
 And he who wrote of Tantalus's son 30  
 Returning homeward with the Tyndarid;  
 And the translator of the *Phaeacian*  
 Of Homer; virtuoso of the lyre  
 Of Pindar, Rufus, tragic Tarranus;  
 Comic Melissus; while harsh words of fire  
 Were shouted out to tyrants by Graccus  
 And Varius, while Proculus followed  
 Callimachus's soft path, while Passer went  
 Back to Tityrus' well-known abode  
 And Grattius donned the habiliment 40  
 Of huntsmen; while Fontanus' poetry  
 Was of the Naiads, whom Satyrs held so dear;  
 Capella penned his poems in elegy;  
 And countless more available right here;  
 Here, too, were youths, whom I should hardly name,  
 Being unpublished (though I must make bold,  
 Cotta, to mention you, the Muses' flame  
 And guardian of the forum, you who hold  
 A two-fold lineage, whose family  
 Are Cottas on your mother's side and on 50  
 Your father's side Messallas). As for me,  
 My verse is hardly in oblivion,  
 If I may speak of it, but finds a spot  
 With many great ones. Envy, then, don't mar  
 An exile. Spare my ashes! I have got

No assets now, except a life to scar  
Me in my grief. What pleasure can you gain  
In plunging into limbs bereft of life  
Your weapon? Should you wish to cause me pain,  
There's no space left for you to sink the knife.