

TRISTIA IV

I

Whatever faults you find within my verse
(And you will find them), reader, place the blame
On time of writing. Lest I should immerse
Myself in misery, I seek, not fame,
But solace here in exile. Thus we see
The navvy, though in chains, sings, lightening
His heavy burden with rough melody.
He, too, who walks on wet sand, struggling
Against the sluggish tide and slowly tows
His barge yet sings; and he who plies his sculls 10
In unison, adjusting, as he rows,
His strokes. The weary shepherd likewise lulls
His charges with his flute while on a rock
He sits or leans upon his staff. Some lay
A maid sings as she spins, thereby to mock
Her toil and while away the time. They say
The loss of his Briseis Achilles
By playing the Haemonian lyre relieved.
When Orpheus, by his singing, drew the trees
And rocks towards him, for his wife he grieved, 20
Twice lost. The Muse assuaged me too, when I
Was on my way to exile; in my flight
She succoured me, my sole companion. Why,
It was my Muse alone who took no fright
At ambush, swords, sea, winds, barbarity.
She knew the error which was my downfall
And that a *fault*, no crime, attached to me.
Perhaps for this she's fair now – after all,
She ruined me before when she became
My co-defendant. Since this would undo 30
Me, would that I had not kindled the flame
Of the Pierides. What should I do?
That very flam grips me – I'm surely mad.
Though hurt by song, yet song it is I prize.
The alien plant Odysseus' sailors had
To eat, though tasty, hurt them. His own eyes
Know well the lover's loss, yet still he clings
To it, pursuing what contains his lapse.
Books damage me and yet I love the things;
I love the dart that injures me. Perhaps 40

This passion may seem madness; nonetheless
 There's profit in it, for it counteracts
 The focus of one's mind on one's distress
 And makes one heedless of existent facts
 Of ill luck. Wounded Bacchants feel no smart,
 Shrieking in Ida's beats in ecstasy,
 So when the staff of Bacchus moves my heart
 My mood's too high for human misery.
 It feels no exile, feels no Scythian sea,
 No angry gods, and, just as if I might 50
 Have drunk from Lethe's cup, adversity
 Is absent from my senses. It is right,
 Therefore, that these goddesses I revere,
 Who come, to ease my woe and shepherd me
 In anxious flight, from Helicon to here
 And dog my passage by both land and sea.
 I pray for some support at least from these!
 All other gods with mighty Caesar side
 And load me with as many miseries
 As grains of sand that on shorelines abide 60
 Or fish in seas or fish-eggs. You'd be done
 Much sooner counting flowers in the spring
 Or grain-stalks growing in the summer sun,
 Fall apples, winter snowflakes blanketing
 The earth than what I suffer, tossed around
 Throughout the whole wide world while wretchedly
 I sought the left-hand Pontic shore. I've found,
 Moreover, no relief from misery
 Since coming hither. Here, too, destiny
 Pursued me. Filaments I can perceive 70
 Of my nativity, entwined for me
 From black fleece. Things one scarcely can believe
 Are ambushes and dangers to my life.
 How sad to see the man who was before
 On everybody's lips to live in strife
 Among Bessi and Getae! Sad, once more,
 To guard one's very life with gate and wall
 In such a perilous spot! When I was young,
 I shunned rough soldier-games (in play – that's all –
 I handled arms), but now a sword is hung 80
 Along my thigh, a shield's on my left arm,
 A helmet on my greying hair; a cry
 Is bellowed out to warn of imminent harm
 By watch-tower guards – the blinking of an eye
 And, trembling, I am armed. The savage foe,
 With bow and poisoned arrows, stalks the wall

Upon his panting steed. Just as we know
 The sheep not finding shelter in the stall
 Is carried by the ravening wolf throughout
 The fields and woods, so now this barbarous foe 90
 Upon the plain whoever is without
 The wall's protective care will take: and so
 He bows his neck to chained captivity,
 Snatched off, or else dies from a poisoned flight.
 Here in a region of anxiety
 I lie, a recent colonist. A night
 That never seems to end! And yet my Muse
 Can turn to her old rites and rhythmic flow,
 A friend in need. But there's nobody who's
 Willing to hear my poems – their ears don't know 100
 The Latin tongue. It's for myself I write –
 What can I do? - it's to myself I read,
 My verses certain in their own insight.
 And yet I've often queried in my need,
 "For whom *is* all this toil? Will it be read
 By the Getae or Sauromatae?"
 And often as I wrote some tears I've shed
 Which made the writing wet. Old wounds have I
 Felt in my heart as new ones. Sorrow's rain
 Has fallen to my breast. When I recall 110
 How changing fortune used me, and again,
 I ponder whence and whither my downfall
 Has taken me, often my crazy hand,
 Scolding itself and what it wrote, has tossed
 My poems into the blazing fire. And,
 Since few remain out of the many lost,
 See that you read my verse with tenderness,
 Whoever you are, and practise clemency
 On words no better than my own distress,
 O Rome, a city out of bounds to me. 120

II

Like the whole world, perhaps fierce Germany
 Has to the Caesars yielded, subjugated,
 High Palatine bedecked with greenery,
 While crackling frankincense illuminated
 The day within its fire, the victim too,

Pure white, put to the axe, the ground all sprayed
 With purple blood, while both the Caesars do
 Their preparations for a promise made –
 Gifts to the kindly gods – along with those
 Young men now growing up under the name 10
 Of Caesar, that the palace may impose
 Upon the world its power and its fame,
 With her dear daughters Livia offering
 Some fits perhaps to make her son secure
 To the great gods, gifts she will often bring,
 And mothers and those who, by being pure,
 Preserve their hearths unstained; each senator's heart,
 Each heart of every common man rejoices,
 Likewise the knights (of whom a minor part
 I lately was); the common happy voices 20
 Don't reach me. sent so far away; but slight
 Are rumours reaching here. The whole nation
 May see the triumphs as their eyes alight
 On names of captured towns, the designation
 Of every chief, the manacled kings before
 The festooned horses, some (quite fittingly)
 With downcast eyes, some seeming to ignore
 Their plight with sullen look. The agency,
 The objects, names some folk will seek to know
 And some will make reply to them, despite 30
 Knowing but little. "This man, gleaming so
 In Sidon's purple, was our leading light,
 That one his second-in-command. He there
 With wretched, lowered look, a different face
 Showed when in arms, he with still hostile glare
 Was planner and fomenter. Yonder base
 Turncoat, whose filthy features are obscured
 By his long hair, had trapped through treacheries
 Our soldiery. The next, we are assured,
 Had sacrificed to the divinities 40
 (Who often spurned them) prisoners of war.
 Mountains there are, lakes, rivers and redoubts,
 All filled with cruel butchery and gore.
 At one time Drusus in these whereabouts
 Earned his surname, distinguished progeny
 Of such a sire. The Rhine is over there,
 With broken horns, ill-masked by greenery,
 Stained with his blood. Yes, with her streaming hair
 We now see Germany herself conveyed,
 Sat miserably beneath her conqueror, 50
 The hand that once bore arms in shackles laid,

And proffering her haughty neck before
 The Roman axe." Above them, Caesar, you
 Will ride in purple in your victory car
 Before your people as is custom's due,
 The flowers that are thrown from near and far
 Cloaking the streets. Soldiers, their foreheads bound
 With Phoebus' wreaths, will shout out loud and clear,
 '*Io triumphe*'. With this clamorous sound,
 Songs, cheers, you'll often see your four steeds rear. 60
 The citadel and altars then you'll find
 And give the votive wreaths to Jupiter.
 Out here I'll use the vision of my mind
 (My only way): Rome, though I'm barred from her,
 My mind at least may see: it travels free
 Through lands immeasurable and can enter
 The sky itself with great velocity;
 It takes me down into the city's centre
 And won't allow my eyes to be bereaved
 Of such great blessings; then my mind will spy
 From whence the ivory car may be perceived 70
 And thus at least for a short time will I
 Be in my Rome. These sights, though, will be real
 For blest Romans, who with their chief rejoice.
 Beyond earshot my mind alone must feel
 The joy. My eager ears won't hear the voice
 Of one sent to this strange locality
 So far from Latium – at any rate
 No more than one or two. Who tells it me,
 What's more, tells of a triumph much too late: 80
 Whatever time I hear it, nonetheless,
 I'll be content. One day will be the date
 When I will put aside my gloominess;
 Private affairs are less than those of state.

III

You beasts, the Greater and the Lesser Bear,
 One guiding Sidon's ships, the other Greek,
 Each still unwet, who. planted way up there,
 Are capable of seeing all they seek
 And never sink beneath the westering sea,
 You clasp the heavenly post while orbiting

Above the earth you never touch, let me
 Beseech you, watch the walls where, poets sing,
 Once Remus fatally leapt, and shine out clear
 Upon my lady - does she think of me 10
 Or not? Alas! What is it that I fear?
 I ask what's sure. Why does expectancy
 Lie with vague fear? Believe that all you crave
 Will surely come. What's certain do not fear.
 When there's unwavering confidence, behave
 Inflexibly towards it. What's not clear
 From pole-flames tell yourself in truthful tone.
 She thinks of you who is your greatest care;
 She keeps your name within her – that alone
 Is all she has. As if you still were there 20
 She bends over your face. Though far away,
 She loves you, if she lives. When a sick mind
 Broods on just grief, can restful sleep allay
 An anxious heart? That is the time you find
 Cares, while my bed and this locality
 Affect you so that no forgetfulness
 Of me is granted. Does anxiety
 Now haunt you, does the night seem limitless,
 Your tossing body forcing weary bones
 To ache? These things - and more – occur, I'm sure, 30
 Your love providing tokens of sad groans.
 Theban Andromache did not endure
 More agony when she was made to see
 Hector dragged by the car of Achilles
 Than you. I don't know what should be my plea,
 And what I want your sensitivities
 To be I cannot say. You're woebegone?
 I burn, then, to have caused this. No? Yet you
 Should of your absent life-companion
 Be worthy. Dearest wife, give loss its due 40
 And grieve; express your sorrow for my lot:
 There is some joy in tears, for grief is fed
 To surfeit by one's weeping. Would you'd not
 Grieve for my life but for my death instead
 And you the sole survivor! For my soul
 Would then have fled to Rome, my pious tears
 Wetting my breast, and on that well-known pole
 My eyes would, at the end of all my years,
 Affix their gaze, closed by your fingers' stroke;
 The tomb of my forefathers would admit 50
 My mortal ashes, and the ground would cloak
 My frame, that terra firma which I hit

When I was born; then, as I'd lived, I 'd die.
 Stainless. But by its very penalty
 My life is shamed. O! how downcast am I
 If, called the consort of a refugee,
 You turn your head and blush! If you should shame
 That you are thought my wife, o! how downcast
 Am I, if you should shame to take my name,
 O! how downcast am I! The time goes fast: 60
 You used to boast of me, never concealed
 Your husband's name. Where is the time – unless
 You don't want this to be again revealed –
 When you were pleased when people would address
 You as my own? As somebody so true,
 You liked my every trait – and many more
 You added through your love. I was to you
 A splendid thing – you placed no-one before
 Myself – no taste for anyone but me.
 And even now don't be ashamed Naso 70
 Is still your spouse. This should bring misery
 But never shame. When, by a sudden blow,
 Capaneus fell, Evadne you won't read
 Blushed for her spouse. When fire was quenched by fire
 By the world's king, his friends could find no need
 To disown him. Because a funeral pyre
 Was her reward for her ambitious prayer
 Cadmus did not withdraw from Semele
 His love. Don't let your tender visage flair
 With purple shame since Jove's harsh flames struck me. 80
 Rise to my aid and be the paradigm
 Of a good wife and fill a tragic text
 With virtues: glory has a perilous climb.
 And who, if Pergamum had not been vexed,
 Would have known Hector? Public misery
 Constructs the road of worth. Your art is hollow,
 Tiphys, if there's no wave upon the sea:
 Yours, too, if men are hale, Phoebus Apollo.
 The virtue that in happy times conceals
 Itself and Lags unseen adversity 90
 Draws out and flaunts. My fortune now reveals
 To you some scope for fame – your piety
 Now has the chance clearly to show its face.
 So make good use of this predicament,
 Whose gift has brought you to a boundless place
 And given you the chance of compliment.

IV

Though nobly born, your character transcends
 Your birth: your father's candour still exists
 Within you, though your disposition tends
 Its own as well; his eloquence persists
 Within your mind (there was no better voice
 In all the Forum(- here you are addressed
 By symbols, not by name – it's not my choice:
 Pardon these praises: I have not transgressed:
 Your well-known gifts betray you. Should you be
 What you appear, I've been absolved of blame. 10
 And yet I do not think the eulogy
 My poetry accords to you can maim
 So just a prince. Our country's father – who
 Is milder? – in my verse accedes to be
 Oft mentioned; he can't render it taboo,
 For Caesar is the state and even me
 The common good involves. To poets' art
 Jove gives his godhead, sanctifying praise
 From every mouth. Two deities impart
 To you such licence (one in people's gaze 20
 A god, the other in belief). Though I transgressed
 My duty, I shall be the one accused.
 You'd no check on the letter I addressed
 To you. This talk is no new crime: I used
 Often to speak with you when I was free.
 Allay your fears – my friendship's not your crime;
 The hate, if there be such, redounds on me,
 Its causer. For from quite the earliest time
 I prized your father – please do not conceal
 This fact! – and he admired my talent more 30
 (You may recall) than I myself would feel
 That I was worthy of and he spoke for
 My verses with those lips that were a part
 Of his great fame. It wasn't you – no, he
 Was cheated earlier for your generous heart
 And welcome to me. But, believe you me,
 There was no cheating. Save for the last one
 Of all my deeds, I'm worthy of protection.
 And even that fault you'll say was not done
 With criminal intent on close inspection 40
 Of how it happened. It was either fright
 Or error (error first!) that ruined me.

Ah, do not let me recollect my plight;
 I would not open up an injury
 That's not yet closed. It won't be mitigated
 By rest itself. As I pay, as is right,
 The price, no plan or deed's associated
 With my misdeed. The god knows this – my light
 Of life was not snuffed out, my property
 Not given to another. P'raps one day, 50
 If I should live, he'll disencumber me
 Of this exile, should he in time allay
 His wrath. I beg to be dispatched elsewhere
 If I am frank and honest in my plea,
 Where Rome's a little nearer, my welfare
 More calm, where savage foes are far from me.
 Caesar's so kind, should one make a request
 For me, perhaps he'll grant it. Of the shores
 Of frigid Pontic Euxine I'm a guest
 (Entitled 'Axene' by our ancestors), 60
 For moderate winds don't agitate her sea,
 No quiet ports receiving foreign prow.
 Tribes round here look for spoil and butchery;
 Thus land, as well as sea, its denizens crows.
 Those bloodshed-mongers that you hear of dwell
 Almost beneath the same axis as I;
 An altar that's bespattered quite with fell
 Extermination also dwells close by,
 The Tauric shrine of feathered Artemis:
 This was, so it is said, Thoas's sphere 70
 In former times, a place no man would miss,
 Nor good, nor bad; Iphogeneia here,
 For whom a doe was switched, for her goddess
 For human sacrifices took great care.
 Orestes came (was it in piousness
 Or sin?), by his own Furies driven there,
 And his true friend Pylades (but one mind
 Within two bodies were they). Instantly
 To that sad altar were they led, confined
 In chains – that altar reeked of butchery 80
 Before the twin doors! Neither, nonetheless,
 Feared his own death – no, each was in despair
 About the other's fate. Now the priestess
 Stood with a drawn knife, her barbarian hair
 With a Greek fillet bound. Through conversation
 She recognized her brother and then she
 Clasped him in lieu of his annihilation.
 From that location with felicity

She took the statue of the goddess who
 Loathed cruel rituals to a better spot. 90
 Here, almost the last place to travel to,
 Shunned by men and gods, became my lot:
 Near to my land, if here I have to stay,
 Exist the rites of death. O! may the breeze
 Which transported Orestes far away
 By Caesar's fiat take *me* overseas.

V

The first among my dearest friends and found
 To be the sole shrine for my misery,
 And who, through our communion, brought round
 This dying soul, as flames are wont to be
 When touched by oil; who did not fear to offer
 A loyal harbour for my bark to lodge
 When it was struck by thunder; by whose coffer,
 Should Caesar seize my wealth, I was to dodge
 Distress – while I rushed on in fervency,
 Forgetful of my plight, how close your name 10
 Came to escaping me. But this you see
 And, craving praise, would hanker to exclaim
 Out straight, "I am the man." Should you approve,
 I'd honour you, a loyalty that's rare,
 Uniting with renown. I fear my love,
 Expressed in verse, might harm you and impair
 Your well-being by this untimely fame.
 Rejoice (you may, and safely) in your mind
 That you've been staunch and I recall your name,
 And strain your oars, continuing to be kind 20
 To me (as now you do) until a breeze
 More gentle from a blunted god blows here;
 Save one whom none can rescue save that he's
 To pull him who submerged him from the mere
 Of Styx and give yourself continually
 To every service of dependable
 Friendship. Thus may you thrive and penury
 Be absent. In virtue perennial
 May your bride be your equal and within
 The marriage-bed no discord. May there be 30
 True friendship with the man who is your kin,
 As Pollux had with Castor. May all see
 Your traits in your young son and may the flame

Of Hymen shimmer for your daughter, too,
And son-in-law, and in your prime the name
Of grandfather be also given you.

VI

In time the peasant's bull bends to the plough
And to the curved yoke offers to submit
His neck; in time the spirited horse will bow
To pliant reins, accepting the hard bit;
In time the Carthaginian lions' spleen
Is gentled and his former savagery
Is gone; the Indian elephant is seen
To heed his master's bidding and to be
Subdued by Time. Time makes the grapes dilate,
The berries scarcely holding their secretion. 10
White ears of grain, too, Time will germinate
From seeds and bring sweet apples to completion.
It thins the plough as it renews the soil,
Wears rigid flint and adamant away,
Taking harsh anger gently off the boil,
Lessens affliction and makes sad hearts gay.
Hush-footed Time can take away all pain
Except for mine. Since my deported fate,
Twice has the threshing-floor been swept for grain,
Twice grapes have spilt their juice beneath the weight 20
Of naked feet. I find no dauntlessness,
However, all this time; my woe's still new.
Even old bulls will shun the yoke, I guess;
The mastered horse will often resist too.
My grief's yet greater than before and, though
It's like itself, it grows with time. To me
It's more familiar now Since now I know
It better than I did, more heavily
It weighs on me. It's not a little thing
To give it fresh strength and not be worn out 30
By time's ills. When an athlete's wrestling
Upon the tawny sand, he is more stout
Than he who's weak through being long detained.
The shining gladiator still in breath
Is better off than one whose armour's stained
With blood; before the tempest's threatening death

A new-built ship fares well; an old one snaps
 At just the slightest shower. All my distress
 I bore more patiently before the lapse
 Of time increased! I'm fading, I confess, 40
 And, judging by my frame, my end is near:
 I'm weak, I'm pale, my thin skin overlaps
 My bones but barely, yet my mind, I fear,
 Is sicker than my frame – for countless days
 It's viewed its woes. My city is a long
 Distance from here, dear friends, a wife whom I
 Have always worshipped. Here there is a throng
 Of Scythians, the rabble of Getae,
 A trousered horde. Those things which I both see
 And do not see affect me. My belief, 50
 However, comforts me in misery:
 That through my death my troubles will be brief.

VII

Twice has the sun since icy winter's chill
 Approached me, ending his peregrination,
 The Fish being touched. Why have you failed to fill
 A few lines, after such a long duration,
 With verse? Your constancy has failed, although
 But distant friends still write. When I'd unbind
 The bonds of someone's note, I hungered so
 To read your name. Gods grant that you have signed
 It many times but none has made it through
 To me. My prayer is true, it's manifest. 10
 I sooner would believe that it is true
 That the Medusa's countenance is tressed
 With the Gorgon's snaky locks, a virgin bears
 Dogs deep beneath her womb, a lioness
 And vicious snake split by a fire's flares
 Are called "Chimaera", some creatures possess
 Four feet yet human breasts, that somewhere dwell
 A man three-headed, a three-headed hound,
 Sphinx, Harpies, Giants with snakes' feet as well,
 The hundred-handed Gyas, a compound 20
 Of man and bull than think you've jilted me,
 Dear one. So many mountains lie between
 Us two, roads, rivers, fields and many a sea.
 Why many missives by me were not seen
 There are a thousand reasons. Nevertheless,

To those one thousand reasons make an end
By writing to me many times unless
I have to keep excusing you, my friend.

VIII

My temples bear the likeness of the quills
Of swans and white old age has turned my hair
From black. Inactive life and years of ills
Are on me now, too hard for me to bear.
Now should I cease my toil, no anxious fright
Distressing me, enjoying breathing-space
Which always pleased me, taking snug delight
In my pursuits, tending to my small place,
My household gods and my ancestral land
That lacks me now and reach senility 10
In my wife's embrace, with dear companions and
In my own Rome. That's how I hoped to be
When I was young: it was a fitting fate.
The gods thought otherwise and cast me here
Through land and over sea – the desolate
Sarmatian country. Ships with battered gear,
Lest they should founder in the open sea,
Are conveyed into ports. Ex-champion horses,
To shun disgrace, now crop grass lazily.
A soldier who has outlived his resources 20
To his Lares the armour that he wore
Commits. Therefore, my strength being abated
By old age, Likewise I am ready for
The wooden sword. My thirst should not be sated
By Getan water, nor should foreign air
Fill up my lungs. Rather I should retire
To my lost gardens in the city where
I might enjoy the sights. Thus my desire,
Not thinking of the future, was to be
A tranquil old man. This the Fates forbade: 30
They brought me comfort once but latterly
Oppressed me. Fifty flawless years I've had;
In harder times, though, I am subjugated;
Close to the goal almost within my grip,
My Car by grievous fate was lacerated.
Did I, in madness, cause that man to rip
Me open wide than whom in gentleness
There is no other? Was his clemency

Quelled by my sins, yet did my sinfulness
 Not crush my life? The life assigned to me 40
 Is far from Rome beneath the Northern Star,
 West of the Euxine. If Delphi had told
 Me this or Dodona, both would be far
 From worthy of belief. Nothing can hold
 So tightly, though by adamant bound,
 As to withstand Jove's rapid fire, nothing
 So high and danger-free as to be found
 Not lower than a god whose underling
 It is. Though I've caused some of my distress,
 A god's wrath caused yet more. This fate of mine 50
 Consider and to this yourselves address:
 That you be worthy of this man divine.

IX

I'll veil your name and deed, should you agree;
 Your acts to Lethe's waters I'll consign;
 Your tardy tears have won my clemency
 So long as, chastened, you yourself malign,
 Asserting, if you can, that you desire
 To leave your retribution days behind.
 But if your heart with hate is still afire,
 Unhappy rage will arm himself, you'll find.
 Though banished to the world's edge, even so
 My anger will hold out its hands to you. 10
 My rights are still intact (did you not know?):
 Caesar's sole penance is that I must do
 Without my Rome. And even Rome, I pray,
 Should he continue on, be granted me:
 After Jove's thunderbolt an oak-tree may
 Be green again. No opportunity
 For vengeance showing, the Pierides
 Will offer strength and weapons. And, although
 I dwell far off in these extremities,
 Dry stars so near me, my heralds shall go 20
 Across vast tribes: my charge will have renown
 Throughout the entire world; what I shall state
 Shall from the East to where the sun goes down
 Proceed: so shall the East authenticate
 The voice heard in the West. Over both sea
 And land shall I be heard, and my lament
 Shall be a mighty cry. Your guilt shall be

Not only for your age: it will be sent
 Into eternity. Already I rush
 To battle, though as yet I'm not decked out. 30
 Would there were no cause! The arena's hush:
 The tawny bull is tossing sand about
 And with a hostile hoof he stamps the ground.
 This also is much more than I could claim
 To want to happen. So, o Muse, pray sound
 Retreat, while me may still conceal his name.

X

You of a latter time, that you may know
 Me better, one who writes love poetry
 That you have read, now hear my words. Sulmo
 Is where I lived, with cold streams copiously
 Equipped, just ninety miles from Rome. That's where
 I first saw day – the day both consuls died
 As one. From ancestors the rank I bear
 Is knight, not by a recent boon supplied.
 Not first-born, by a brother was I preceded
 Twelve months before: each birthday the same date 10
 Beheld, two cakes for that one day were needed –
 It's one of those five days which celebrate
 The armed Minerva, the first to bedew
 The sand with blood of combat. While still green
 We started learning. Those who truly knew
 The liberal arts we were extremely keen
 To drink in. My sibling to oratory
 Was drawn from early on, one born to fight
 With words in legal combat. As for me,
 In things religious would I take delight, 20
 And gradually the Muse would draw me on
 To do her work. My father would complain,
 "Why waste your time? Of riches there were none
 Even for Homer." I to these words bent
 My ear and, leaving Helicon behind,
 Attempted prose, but verse would all the same
 Make its appearance. What I wrote I'd find
 Was always verse. Silently the years came
 And went: the toga of a freer way
 Of life I and my brother took, that stripe 30
 Purple and wide, continuing every day
 To study as before. Now, barely ripe,

At twenty years my brother ceased to be;
 Thenceforth I lacked my other half. Then I
 Received, while still a youth, some dignity
 As a *tresvir*. The senate-house was nigh,
 My stripe I narrowed, though: a public life
 Was too much for my powers: I possessed
 No hardy frame and for political strife
 A mind unsuitable. I had no zest
 For tense ambition. I was motivated
 By the Muses to seek out safe liberty.
 Which I has always loved. I venerated
 The poets of that time – they seemed to me
 As gods. Already old, Macer recited
 To me of healing plants and noxious snakes.
 Propertius, too, would read me his ignited
 Love poems, joined by the ties which friendship makes.
 Iambic Bassus, epic Ponticus
 Were pleasant members of that coterie,
 And Horace, skilled in metrics numerous,
 Held us in thrall, his splendid poetry
 Tuned to the Roman lyre. Vergil at most
 I saw, not granted by rapacious fate
 Acquaintance with Tibullus. He could boast,
 Gallus, that he succeeded you. Of late,
 Propertius followed him; next came Naso.
 As I revered those bards, accordingly,
 The young admired me. I was not slow
 To make my mark. When first I publicly
 Declaimed, but once or twice my facial hair
 Had been shaved off. My genius was stirred
 By her who was exalted everywhere,
 Corinna (not her real name). Many a word
 I wrote, and what I thought inferior
 I burned and then revised. In deportation
 I even then burned verses destined for
 Delight, my poetry and my vocation
 Incensing me. My tender heart's no match
 For Cupid's darts, moved by the slightest thing.
 That's how I am - the slightest flame will catch –
 Yet I was never touched by gossiping.
 While still a boy I wed a hopeless bride,
 Mine only for a while. My next, despite
 A blameless life, would not be by my side
 For long. Remaining into my twilight,
 My last saw me an exile. Twice fertile
 By two husbands, my daughter rendered me

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Grandfather status while a juvenile.
 My father now had reached senility 80
 And died at ninety. No more tears I shed
 Than he would shed for me. Next did I bear
 For Mother sacred offerings to the dead.
 A timely death for both! A death so fair,
 Predating their son's exile! As for me,
 I'm happy that they did not know my woe
 And so could not bewail my misery.
 But if there's something left in those below
 Besides a name, if any slender shade 90
 Escaped the lofty pyre, if you've heard tell
 Of my fate, if the charges that were laid,
 O parents, live beyond the gates of Hell
 Know, I beseech, what I must not conceal:
 An error, not a crime, caused my exile.
 Dear hearts below, who wish me to reveal
 The story of my life, I turn the while
 To you. My best years gone, my hair's now white;
 Since I was born, equestrians had held,
 Bewreathed, the prize ten times, when from the sight
 Of our aggrieved Caesar was I expelled 100
 To Tomis on the left side of Euxine.
 The cause, well-known to all, must not by me
 Be told. My friends' ill faith, those slaves of mine –
 Who hurt me – why speak of such perfidy?
 I've suffered much in exile, but my mind
 Refused to quit and showed itself too stout
 To be defeated, leaving all behind –
 Myself, my leisured life – so I set out,
 A tyro, to apply Time's arms; on sea
 And land I've borne as many agonies 110
 As there are stars within the galaxy
 Between the dark and light antipodes.
 Long roaming, finally I came to land
 Where Getan archers sojourn cheek by jowl
 With the Sarmatians. Though at every hand
 Arms clash about me, miseries most foul
 I ease with writing verses, when I can,
 And that is how I while away the days
 Despite there being not a single man
 To hear them. That I continue to gaze 120
 At daylight's woes and outwit hard distress
 I thank you, Muse: you gave relief to me,
 You come with ease and comfort for my stress.
 You guide me and you give me company,

Take me from Hister and in Helicon
You placed me; you gave me the rarest thing –
A celebrated name while I live on,
Which fame is wont to grant after the sting
Of death. No jealousy, which takes away
The present, has attacked a work of mine. 130
Although great poets flourished in this day
And age, no-one was tempted to malign
My genius and, though I might choose many
Over myself, I'm not thought worse, it's said,
Throughout the world I'm read by more than any,
And if a poet's prophecies be read
As truth, then, even should I die today,
I won't be earth's. Whether my fame is due
To favour or to verses, I must pay
My gratitude, kind readers all, to you. 140