

Eclogue I

Return and Flight

Tityrus

Meliboeus,
a god made this good life for us.
My god he'll be forever.
A little lamb from my flock
will spill blood on his altar,
lots. He has let my cattle roam
you see and I can play
what I will,
the old-timey melodies.

Meliboeus

Tityrus,
you lay yourself down
under beeches left and right,
make études for a reed pipe,
the Muse of the woods.
We are leaving
our homeland borders,
our sweet home fields,
we flee. Tityrus, you
at ease in the cool,
teach pretty Amaryllis
to make the music of the woods.

I'm not jealous. I'm in awe.
The rest of the world is chaos.
I force my goats on in angst,
one she-goat is loathe to go.
Tityrus, she just had twins,
our future hope,
where hazels grow she crouched
on bare rock, left them.
Time and again oaks struck by skyfire —
an omen of these woes —
I had remembered if my mind
hadn't been asleep.
But Tityrus, who is this god?
Tell us.

The city known as Rome,
Meliboeus, I thought she was like ours
here where we shepherds wean
lambs of tender age.
The fool I am!
Dogs and puppies,
mother goats and their kids,
I know the parallels.
I can compare little to big.
But this city holds her head
up so high amid the crowd.
Picture hoarwithy twisting
around cypresses twisting.

And to see Rome,
your main reason?

Freedom.
She was late, I was not trying,
yet she turned her gaze once
my white stubble was shaved clean.
She turned her gaze still
and, much time passing, came.
After I was Amaryllis',
Galatea left. I can confess,
so long as Galatea had me,
there was no hope of freedom,
no looking after flocks,
notwithstanding all
the sacrifices from my stables,
the rich ricotta I pressed
for finicky urban dwellers.
I never came home with my hands
weighed down with coins.

I was wondering why, Amaryllis,
you called the gods in melancholy —
who was it for you let apples
stay hanging on their trees?
Tityrus, he was gone away.
Tityrus, you,
the very pines, the very streams,
the very orchards called.

What could I do?
I was a slave. I wasn't allowed
to leave,

and the gods, the gods near to me,
knew no other way.
Then Meliboeus,
I saw him. The young man.
And every year for twice seven days
our altars will smolder in his honor.
I made my petition. At the very start
he answered:
'Graze your oxen as before, boys,
rear your bulls.'

That's luck old friend—
and so,
your holdings will abide in harvests fine,
barren rocks, bogs, mud and reeds
strewn in every pasture despite.
Your soon-to-be mother goats
won't taste exotic feed, won't catch
your neighbor's animals' mad disease.
That's luck old friend—
right here by the rivers,
the venerable waters
you know you'll be in cool shade,
from now on (for you, always)
a willow fedge boundary to sleep
will coax, whispering light,
feeding Mt. Hybla's bees blossoms,
from now on vineyard workers
will sing to breezes below high cliffs.
And amid all your charges
raucous doves and turtledoves in the air
still will not cease
chirruping from elms.

Swift stags will feed in the skies —
seas strand fish dry on the shore —
Parthavan and German refugees
roaming our borders east and west
drink the Saône, the Tigris rivers before
his image will fall from my heart.

And we will go to thirsting Africa,
some few in exile to Scythia,
we will come to the Yangtze
swirling chalk and deep among
the Britains, split off from all
the world.

My native land,
my sod roof shed,
my kingdom, a few wheat rows,
will I ever see you
long off into the future
and wonder?
A loathsome soldier will occupy
these fields so loved,
an outlander will own these crops.
Strife's harvest is citizens' woe:
We ploughed our land for them.
Meliboeus, graft your pears,
put your vine into rows.
My goats, my herd,
happy once upon a time,
go.
Go.
The future:
In a green chasm
tossed aside
I will not see you perched
on thorn tree cliffs.
I will sing no songs.
Minus me, your shepherd,
goats, you will graze on
moon trefoil and bitter willows.

For this night you could still rest
here with me under green tree cover.
We have ripe apples, sweet chestnuts,
a store of fresh cheese and now far away,
the villas' peaked rooftops smoke
and shadows from the mountains, greater, fall.