

MY NOVA ROMA

Poems for Nova Roma
by C. Maria Caeca



Collected, edited in chronological arrangement and published
by Cn. Cornelius Lentulus

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Poems written to Nova Roma by Maria Caeca in Chronological Order

The following are the poetic works written by Maria Caeca, Chief Vestal, senator and praetor of Nova Roma, as collected by Cn. Cornelius Lentulus, who also arranged them in chronological order and added some necessary notes. The dates that precede the title of the poem reflect their date on which the post containing the poem was published on the Forum of Nova Roma. Some of these might have been actually written in an earlier date, but we could not establish that. Sometimes a dating concludes the poem which reflects its actual writing posted with the poem by Maria: in such cases, her own dating was retained.

1.

Hymn to Vesta

Jun. 8, 2009

At the center of my home:
At the center of my hearth:
At the center of my heart .
Your immaculate flame burns, white hot
Pure, bright, eternal;
Lighting my heartspace;
Guarding my hearthspace;
Warming my homespace.

Vesta, Mistress of virtue,
Guide my willing hands
That I might make of my home
A fit sanctuary in which to honor you.

Mighty Vesta, you who
Guard and bless the home,
Let the brilliant heat
Of your eternal flame keep safe my hearth
That nothing may invade, infect or despoil
My dwelling, from without or within.

Loving Vesta, gentle keeper of trusts and secrets
 Fill my heart with your life giving, ever vigilant fire
 That I may,
 By my thoughts words, and deeds
 Reflect, however dimly, Your great glory
 For You are beacon and lodestone,
 Guiding my steps and drawing me back to my center
 You, Vesta, are my joy, my security, my inspiration .
 And I, who adore You
 Entreat Your blessing.

2.

Books Are

Oct. 15, 2009

Books are the portals through which I can travel to anywhere and everywhen;
 I can experience the full panoply of human passion, glory, emotion and experience:
 delve into any area of human endeavor, and learn to my capacity:
 touch the unspeakable beauty of exquisitely verbalized thought:
 or investigate the intricacies of minds whose shaping has been vastly different from my
 own.
 With each book I read, I am made a little more than I was,
 thus, for me, books are, ultimately the expanders of my mind and soul.

3.

A Small Offering for Vestalia

Jun. 8, 2010

Vesta Mater,
 When I must walk through mists of uncertainty,
 When I become lost in the fog of doubt,
 When the tiny, sharp claws of fear
 Tear at my will, and savage my spirit,
 When the harsh flames of anger
 Threaten to sear me from within,

When the seeming fair false rectitude of arrogance lures me on to dangerous paths,
 When I become careless of the hurt I may do to those I love,
 When darkness hides my knowledge of right ...

If I can stop: wait: be silent:
 If I can turn my regard inward,
 deep into my center, to that place where I
 am connected with all that is,

Your steady flame reveals itself, calling me,
 Drawing me gently and surely
 back into the balance of your brilliant silence
 Back to the shelter of your quiet, steady strength,
 Back into the light of your eternal flame,
 Back to you ..where I may abide,
 without uncertainty, doubt, fear, anger or arrogance,
 Held in balance and protected by your living light.

You, who have always been, and will always be, so long as 1 hearth burns, so
 long as one flame is kept for you in one heart, to you, Vesta Mater, I now freely offer
 Those few things I possess;

My mind, that I may serve you with diligence and learn of you;
 my voice, that I may sing your praises,
 my hands in your service:
 my heart ...in simple, wordless, joyous love.

6/7/2010

4.

In Praise of Apollo

Jul. 13, 2010

When you, Glorious One, Beautiful One,
 Lay your gleaming hands upon your golden lyre
 The music that flows from it, from you,
 Teaches birds their rightful songs .

Makes water droplets dance in joyous sparkles .
 Strokes the meanest streets with loveliness .
 Draws the hues of roses and of lilies
 Into trembling, vibrant richness .

Fills the hearts of children with wondering laughter .
 Brushes the faces of all men and all women with a shadow of your own radiance .
 Warms the stone of walls,
 Where warm furred cats sleep, and lovers sit together .

Heals the hurts of dark loneliness
 Replaces fear with hope,
 Restlessness with rest,
 Enmity with accord

For with your music, you bestow all living things
 With the beneficence of your undying light.

5.

Offering to Vesta

Aug. 14, 2010

Your eternal fire
 Shields against oblivion
 Holds chaos at bay,
 Guards against danger,
 Answers fear with steady brilliance.

With open heart, I extend my hands
 Laying the fruits of my sorrow before you,
 Pouring out the wine of my tears,
 A storm wrenched leaf trembling on the brink.

Your gentle presence surrounds me,
 Reaches into my center, holding me fast,
 A cloak enfolding me, warm and safe
 Against the splintering cold.

You accept my meager gifts, and to my wonder
Transform them into radiance
That guides my steps through uncertainty
That illuminates and orders confusion,
That, by its presence, brings chaos into order.

With inexpressible gratitude
I take what you have bestowed
And carry it, quietly, into duty.

6.

Vesta's Fire

Aug. 15, 2010

On the hearth at the heart
An Ancient city sleeps:
In the darkness,
In the silence,
Vesta's fire burns,
Strong and bright.

Careful, tender hands
Reach into light to tend;
Whispered prayers float
Like a soft breeze upon
The sleeping stillness

There is light.
There is safety.

So it was, in long past times,
And so it is, again,. Her fire
May burn low, but it will leap
Into exuberant brilliance, always.

Her Fire may die. It will be relit, always.
 For there will always be tender, reverent
 Hands to tend .loving, whispered prayers
 In the darkest hours of the night
 This is our unbroken lineage.

No malice, no irreverent act, no danger
 Can destroy that which is eternal,

Rome .Nova Roma will abide in light
 There is protection, here.
 There is safety, here.
 Her fire burns bright, here, and always always will.

8/15/2010

7.

Dedication

Aug. 21, 2010

I come to you, Great Vesta, as I am;
 Pretending nothing: claim no merits
 I do not possess: I bring you my virtues and
 My faults: Knowing my unworthiness, yet
 Knowing also that, within my heart, I can find
 And have always found your bright, steady flame:

I do not know what my ancient sisters felt, or brought
 Of themselves to lay before you: I only know
 That what I have of love, and will, and purpose
 I offer you, and can only hope that you, in your
 Wisdom find them, and this, your servant, worthy.

8/20/2010

8.

Nova Roma

Aug. 29, 2010

Oh, my Nova Roma! Home of my heart
 Republic of my mind, dream in the making!
 You lie, gravely wounded, in the street,
 And none will stop to help you! Why?

Will no one kneel beside you in the dirt?
 Will no one tend your hurts? Salve your wounds?
 Will no one even offer you the solace of cool water?
 They pass you, some look down, curse you, wish you dead
 Yet you struggle for each painful breath.
 Some pour salt into your wounds, and call it
 Purification, and some sweep aside their
 Pristine togas .not wishing to be sullied.

I can give so little, but what I have is yours:
 I lift you in my arms, trembling with weakness,
 Accepting your blood on hands and garment,
 As honorable: as trust: as cause for savage grief.
 Warm you against me, like a child:
 Cradle you, singing softly, my Mother, my babe
 Whisper words of reassurance to you,
 Which we both know are of little meaning:

But I will go and find those things that may heal you
 So, I cover you, beloved mother, with my stola,
 And walk with uncovered head into the city,
 To seek that which I need, content to address
 My own dignitas when you have received what little
 I can bring. From behind me, flung filth clings to my
 Tunica. Taunts and jeers follow me, from both sides
 Of the street: I continue, looking straight ahead,
 With unbent back, head erect, hiding my tears.

9.

Penelope's Lament

Sep. 19, 2010

O Athene! Grey-eyed Goddess,
 You who capture knowledge and
 In whom all wisdom abides, you
 Whose deft fingers weave the
 Colors of the heart into a web
 That can touch and teach, I
 Extend my hands to you,
 Beseeching, as I have done
 Each dawn, for 10 long years,
 Your guidance, your help,
 That, once again, I may defy
 And deceive those who would
 Take from my beloved all that he
 Has built, and me, as prize. By
 The wan light held by Artemis, did I
 Unravel, yet again, yesterday's tapestry
 And now, I will go back into the hall, speak
 Fair words of future promise .and weave again,
 Changing a hue here, a leaf there, making the web
 Just a little different, in ways that cannot be quite
 Defined, so that they will think it new. I will listen
 Once again, to their entreaties, their blandishments,
 Their unceasing demands, suggestive glances,
 And make no outcry of dishonor, lest they
 Abandon the tactic of persuasion, and
 Enforce their wills with sword and destruction.

My son, my Telemachus, vessel of my hopes
 Is still too young, still to inexperienced to
 Confront them. But he grows, HE GROWS,
 Each day I can deceive, I buy him time. But, oh,

I yearn for my beloved! My Ulysses, so strong,
 So wise and cunning, who knows the hearts of men

And the hearts of women, too. I well remember how
 Gentle he was with his new bride, how tender
 And how thoughtful, that I not be humiliated by
 His other women. I knew, of course .how
 Could I not? And they are now, I know,
 But I also know that he will come home to me
 If life persists. I know that, at the end,
 When he turns his face away from life, mine
 Will be the hand he holds.
 His last words of love will be
 For me, as mine have always been
 For him, and it is enough.

So, I will adorn myself, and go into my own battle
 With my son beside me, and the image of my husband
 Held fast in my heart .but Oh, Athene,
 You of undaunted courage, warrior, protector,
 It has been 10 long years, and I am soul weary!

10.

Memory of a Poem

Oct. 16, 2010

His hand becomes a metronome
 Finding rhythm, keeping time.
 His voice follows, adjusts.
 He reads, words metered,
 Syllables measured, a dance
 Of speech .Latin cascading,
 In intricate, spoken song.
 Flowing over me like silk ..
 A disciplined sparkle.

11.**Vobis Do¹***Mar. 30, 2011*

If my arms could reach wide enough
 If the chambers of my heart were large enough
 I would draw each of you close holding you gently
 Just long enough that you would always know
 You are never quite alone,

* *

If the gods would favor me
 When your road is most arduous in the darkest hour of the night
 When your eyes plead for portents of dawn and find none
 Mine will be the quiet step beside you
 My voice will speak softly of companionship and reassurance
 My hand will offer support just long enough for you to regain your balance,

* *

When as it must, darkness gives way to light
 And I shall share your triumph singing as you stride into sunshine.

12.**Proserpina speaks²***May 2, 2011*

I stand, one foot in shadow, 1 foot in son.
 One hand reaches back one reaches forward.
 Behind me stands my husband: looking at me.
 With sad, pleading, beseeching eyes.

¹ Latin, its meaning is: 'I give to You'

² This preface from the post indicates that it is two poems, or maybe it is one of two, and the other poem has not yet been located. Maria Caeca wrote in the preface: "These two poems were intended as gifts to Ceres during her games, but life intervened a bit."

He says nothing, but I know what he feels in his heart.
He would have me choose to stay.

Before me, the earth rushes into vibrant life; my mother's joy overcoming
her deep sorrow. The sun warms my hand, and reminds me
of all that I have missed for these long months.

I think back on my terror when I first
beheld my husband, garbed in black armor.
Even his face covered with a black veil.
To protect him from the sun.
He swept me up, screaming, and bore me away.
I cried out for my mother, but she did not come. I called to my companions,
but they did not hear.
I entreated the gods to save me, but they did not heed.

And so I came into the world of darkness.
He brought me to his great hall, a place
Of shining wonder, but no life.
Precious metals gleam but do not grow;
gems are glorious in color, but they are cold in the hand.
Still, my captor used me gently.
He showered me with gifts, placed me
On a crystal throne; while tears fell from me as from an eternal fountain.
He spoke to me of love, and taught me patiently,
of loving. I learned that this was sweet,
and found my comfort in his arms.

I look and see her! My mother.
standing all in sunlight, arms outstretched. With cries of joy.
I run to her and fling myself into her embrace.

Yet, dearest mother, I am not the child.
I was when I left. I have learned the secrets.
Of being a woman. When I am with you,
I will miss him. When I am with him,
I will miss you. Thus, am I divided.

13.**Devotional To Pax, Goddess of Peace***Sep. 17, 2011*

Serene Pax, man has praised
 You since we knew how to praise;
 You are dearly loved; most of all
 By those in thrall to fierce Bellona.

We yearn for you, illusive Lady,
 Even when the eagles soar and stoop
 Most, when we must fight to protect
 Those things we hold most dear, when
 We must give aid to allies who need us
 Or defend the innocent from Bellona's
 Unrelenting savagery. Still we yearn,

For we know that it is within the compass
 Of your gentle smile that we will thrive,
 That it is under your mild rule that we
 Will create, grow; truly come to understand
 The goodness of life.

14.**The Guardians***Nov. 12, 2011*

He looks into the fire; at camp's edge
 The sentries walk; watching, always
 Waiting for trouble. Rome fills his mind
 The market where his mother buys food;
 A girl...a love .a baby not yet seen, but born
 He knows; he stands at the edge of what could
 Hurt her, his city; all the little things
 He treasures, knowing how much, now.

Deep in a trench, they huddle; frightened boys;
 One tries to read; one prays; beyond them, the guns
 Give merciless music. They wait to go out, to search
 Between the lines; perhaps to die here, in a land not known
 To them before, except by name: Flanders. A shape on a map.

A girl sits in a small room; curtains drawn tight
 To hide her lamp, and writes; "I miss you, my love"
 Then she holds her child's hand, and guides letters
 "I love you, Papa, Gretchen"

Above England, 2 planes soar and dive.
 Muzzles flash; pilots seek
 Advantage; not thinking, but
 Knowing that what they do will
 Protect what they hold precious.

We, whose birth and life were given
 To us by them, the Guardians
 Of our futures, pause now,
 To honor them; to give homage
 To their inestimable gift: Because
 Of what they did; we are what we
 Are, and because of what they do now
 We are kept safe from the terrors
 Of unimaginable destruction.

15.

Devotional to Iuno

Mar. 3, 2012

Consort of mighty Iupiter,
 Majestic Mother,
 Great Lady, whose smiles
 Bless the verdant Earth,
 Whose jeweled veil flows
 In glory from pole to pole

In the midnight velvet sky,
I lift my hands to you, in adoration.

Gentle Iuno, who gives solace to the widow
Who comforts the mothers of dead sons,
Who rocks our children, protecting them
In your warm and ample lap,
I salute you.

Mighty in anger, you
Who set your geese to warn
You who send your peacocks
To watch the acts of faith and
Faithlessness, avenger of wronged women,
I sing your praise.

16.

Devotional to Minerva

Mar. 4, 2012

Daughter of mighty Iupiter, your gifts,
Bounteous and infinitely precious
Are eternal in their beneficence

Wisdom, that we may use thought,
Reason, that we may perceive and judge,
Strategy, that we may plan, in peace and war,
Skill, that we may make those things of use and beauty
Learning, that we may lift ourselves from ignorance.

Your swift sword cuts through illusion
And sweeps away the detritus of ignorance.
Your discernment lets us find the truth, the
True and constant value in any controversy
Because of you, we are able to ask
The questions that most need answers
Because of you, we can take the measure
Of those answers and gauge their worth.

You have given us skill
 In all things of handwork,
 You taught us the way of looms,
 You showed us the grace of building,
 These gifts brought with them comfort and ease.

These things, Lady, have you given us
 And so, we return to you our endeavors,
 Written and spoken, tales and histories;
 And we, offer to you our honor and the gratitude
 That can only come when the worth of gifts
 Can be truly valued, and that, also, is your gift.

17.

Tribute to Quirinus

Mar. 5, 2012

When your feet stepped upon Earth,
 When your eyes closed in mortal sleep,
 You, Quirinus, founded a city:
 You, Quirinus, forged a people:
 You, Quirinus, gave Rome to the world
 The Romans were your people
 And returned veneration and honor
 For your gifts, spoke of your great deeds;
 We, Quirinus, are also your heirs, and we
 Like our ancient ancestors, give you praise,
 Do you honor, and carry your vision in trust.
 That the light of Rome, and Nova Roma may flourish.

18.**Devotional to Vesta**

Mar. 6, 2012

Eternal fire, eternal light;
Your warmth has protected
Your Romans since the first days
When you were honored, and when
You were not, at least so men could see

We are born, grow old and die;
But your light burns on:
Laws and customs change,
But you do not, and your fire,
The ever shifting, never quenched
Flame teaches us the constancy
At the heart of change,
Though different hands may tend your flame
Though you may be adored by those
Who have never walked the streets of
Ancient Rome, you remain, a beacon
Of strength; of protection, and we see
In the ever shifting light of your sacred
Fire, all the fires ever lit for you,
And in their depths, the hearts of all
Who ever prayed to you, then and now,
And our tomorrow rises like incense
Placed in your heart, blessing and promise
That you, Vesta Dea, contain; protect.

19.**For Apollo and Diana***Mar. 10, 2012*

Beautiful twins,
 Brother and sister,
 Lord of day, Lady of night,
 Golden light, silver light:
 Apollo, drawing the sweet grass
 With your warm light,
 Diana, moving the tides
 With your cold luminescence:
 You create a balance, within which
 we, Terra's children
 Can flourish, but we offer you
 Good prayers and sweet wine,
 Because we also know that
 Apollo's light can deny
 The gentle rains that our wheat must have,
 And that the tides by which sailors swear
 Can draw themselves together and drown
 The shore where they should end.

Therefore, be gentle with us, dear twins,
 And remember that we are helpless
 Against your displeasure.

*03/09.12***20.****Ceres, Bountiful Mother***Apr. 19, 2012*

You smile your promise, Great Ceres,
 And tender shoots spring forth from fecund
 Fragrant earth, in response. You lift your hands
 Drawing forth the green corn, raising it into
 Sunlight, into golden glory, and we, your people

Tend them, singing your praises, and dreaming
 Of full barns in Winter, and the warm scent
 Of bread, fresh from our ovens, and the fulfillment
 Of your Spring promise, in Winter abundance.

21.

Contemplation

For the 15th Anniversary of Nova Roma

Mar. 1, 2013

This, my Nova Roma.
 This, my home, impervious
 To , place to boundaries;
 Drawing together from
 Many cultures, many native
 Tongues: each with a vision,
 Each vision connected: separate:
 Each personal ideal
 Creating imperatives that must
 Mesh to become one
 To form something unique; each citizen
 A brick in an edifice always
 Being built; changing yet solid:

Dea Concordia, be the mortar
 That holds our bricks, keeping
 Them together, strongly bonded;
 Holding our patterns; making many
 Into one; dreams into dream:
 Energy and effort united
 Making of us a structure that
 Can and will withstand all tests:
 Defined by its unity,
 Celebrating each living brick
 And always mindful that it is you,
 Concordia, that holds and keeps
 This, my Nova Roma safe
 For all of us.

22. Guardians

For the 15th Anniversary of Nova Roma

Mar. 12, 2013

We who stand here now
Have been purified in the
Crucible of conflict.
Our spirits forged by the fires
Of anger and betrayal;
Shaped on the anvil of purpose.

We who stand here wear
Our history as armor; our shields
Crafted from determination
Our swords from unshakable purpose.

We who stand here now guard
With minds and hearts our greatest
Treasure, holding it dear and close,
For it is irreplaceable; the infinite riches
Of friendship and the desire to create
A legacy of inestimable value:
Our Res Publica;
Our Nova Roma.

We have stood unshakable for 15 years
We will so stand, undaunted by assault
We will hurdle all obstacles, because
We know the worth of what we do.

23.**To Apollo³**

Sun Jul 7, 2013

I am the tool; the sacrifice:
My essence flows from me
In every breath to be replaced
With his brilliant, divine essence.
I fall gently back into Golden arms,
A dream of adoration, of more beauty
Than the soul can hold. Words flow
Through me, my voice, but not my mind.
I do not know them, will not remember them,
They are not for me, but for one who comes
Seeking the wisdom of Great Apollo.
I am the tool; the sacrifice: each breath
Takes a bit of my life with it, and I know
How my usefulness will end. I will be replaced
But, while I serve, this is my life, my joy, my love.

³ The poem didn't originally have a title, but it was marked by Maria as a "Ludi Apollinares poetry offering."