

EPODES

I

Maecenas, on Liburnian crafts you'll sail,
With other towering vessels, to assail,
At your own risk, all perils threatening
Great Caesar. What of us, though? Life's a thing
Most joyful but is full of heaviness
When you're not there. Shall we to peacefulness
Devote ourselves, as you bade us to do,
A state that's never pleasant without you.
Or would you have us bear our misery
With such resolve as men of bravery 10
Possess? We'll bear them, whether we should tread
The Alps and savage Caucasus or head
Out to the farthest corners of the west,
With courage in our hearts. Now you request
Of me how my adversity will ease
Your own – and yet warfare's calamities
And rugged strength aren't for the likes of me.
For I'll attend to you less fearfully.
For there's more fear in people who are far
Away, as mother-birds more keenly are 20
Afraid of serpents that may pounce upon
Her yet unfledged nestlings once they have gone
From them, although they could not help them more
Should they be present. This and every war
I'd gladly tackle to win your goodwill -
Not that more bullocks at the plough may fill
My fields, nor that my flock may start to graze
Lucanian leas before the Dog-Star days,
Nor that a gleaming villa I may come
To own, close to the walls of Tusculum. 30
Your gifts have honoured me enough and more:
I'll not lay up my treasure, either to store
It in the ground, like Chremes, niggardly
Or, like a spendthrift, blow it recklessly.

II

“Happy the man who, far from business woes,
Just like the early race of mortals, goes
To work his steers in his ancestral ground,
From usury's discredit quite unbound
Not roused to battle by the trumpet's blare
Nor facing angry seas; he has no care
For law or men of power: no, he'll wed
His poplars to his well-grown vines instead

Or watch his steers in some secluded glade
 And cut off dead boughs with his pruning-blade, 10
 Engrafting those more fruitful, and he'll stock
 Pressed honey in clean jars or shear his flock;
 When autumn in his fields has come around,
 Raising his head with ripened produce crowned,
 He plucks the pears and grapes, which, Priapus,
 Will honour you, and you, too, Silvanus.
 The guardian of every boundary.
 Indeed, beneath some ancient ilex-tree
 To lie is fine, or on soft grass to bide
 While through their lofty banks the streamlets glide 20
 And birds chirp in the trees and fountains spray,
 A sound to welcome sleep. But, come the day
 When Jupiter's winter bring the rain and snow
 He'll take his pack of hounds that he may go
 To hunt the fierce wild boars hither and yon
 And drive them into waiting snares, or on
 Smooth poles stretch out their wide-meshed nets and snare
 The thrush or with a noose entrap the hare
 And the migrating crane, a splendid prize!
 And yet one must not fail to realize 30
 The cares that passion brings. But if one's spouse
 Should look after one's children and one's house
 With modesty, as Sabine women can,
 Or the swart wife of some Apulian,
 Piling up high the seasoned kindling
 Before her husband from his labouring
 Returns, confining in the wattled pen
 The frisking flocks, draining their udders, then
 Pouring out from the jar the vintage wine
 And cooking a home-grown dinner; no Lucrine 40
 Oysters would please me more than this, no scar,
 No turbot, should they be brought from afar
 Hither on eastern waves; I could not be
 More pleased with fowls conveyed across the sea
 From Africa or pheasants that were shot
 In far Ionia than olives got
 From rich boughs or the plant that loves the lea,
 The sorrel, and that wholesome remedy
 For ailing folk, the marrow, or that beast,
 The lamb, that's always offered at the feast 50
 Of Terminus or else a kid that's been
 Snatched from a wolf's jaws. What a pleasant scene
 At such a feast! - to see sheep scurrying
 Back to their home and oxen dawdling,
 Dragging their ploughshares, and that home-bred band
 Of slaves who serve a wealthy house and stand
 About the Lars." Alfius, whose usury

Is known, said this when just about to be
A farmer, then called in his funds and then
A little later farmed them once again! 60

III

If ever anyone should wickedly
Strangle the man who fathered him, then he
Should eat but garlic, which is deadlier far
Than hemlock. Ah, how tough its reapers are!
Its poison burns my guts. Has there been brewed
Somehow a viper's blood within this food?
Or has Canidia tampered with it? When
Medea fell for handsome Jason, then
With this she smeared his frame, as he essayed
To yoke wild bullocks; and of this she made 10
A present to her rival in her spite
Before upon her dragon she took flight.
Apulia never felt such fieriness
And Hercules's shoulders burned much less
With Nessus' present. If you should repeat
This jest, Maecenas, your girl, I entreat,
Should dodge your kisses as much as she can
And sit on the far side of the divan.

IV

The enmity that Nature's laws decreed
Twixt lambs and wolves is just as great indeed
As that twixt me and you – your flanks are scarred
With Spanish lashes, and your legs are hard
With calluses produced by chains. Although
You boast about your riches, even so
You cannot change your breeding. Can't you see
The passers-by watch you indignantly
As in a toga that is three yards wide
Along the Sacred Way you grandly glide. 10
“This fellow, beaten by the officer's knout
Till by his lashing he is tired out,
A thousand acres of Falernian ground
Now ploughs and with his mules is often found
Upon the Appian Way. Otho's decree
He spurns, and therefore there sits this grandee
Among the knights! I ask you, what's the sense
In sending many well-beaked vessels hence
With hordes of slaves against thieves of the sea
When this man's tribune of the soldiery?”

V

“But by the gods in Heaven who rule the race
 Of men, what does this tumult mean? Your face
 Is savage as you look on me, and me
 Alone! I beg you by your progeny
 That if Lucina, to whom you have prayed
 To effect an honest birth, gave you her aid,
 Then by my purple rags, by Jove, who's sure
 To disapprove these acts, why is it you're
 Glaring at me like an old beast that's sought
 By a hunter with his hunting-spear and caught,. 10
 Or like a stepmother?” Now, when this lad,
 His lip a-quivering, these cavils had
 Spoken, stripped of his boyhood seals, he stood
 Silent, a youthful form, and surely would
 Have softened even a Thracian anywhere,
 Canidia, with vipers in her hair
 And all dishevelled, gave a stern command
 That fig-trees should rise from the tombstones and
 Eggs, cypresses, a night-owl's feathers be
 Smeared with a foul toad's blood, additionally 20
 Send Iolcian and Spanish herbs (for they
 Are rich in poison) and bones snatched away
 From a starving bitch, then in a magic flame
 Burned them. But then eager Sagana came
 And poured Aventine water everywhere
 Throughout the house, with her long, bristling hair
 Streaming, just like an urchin of the sea
 Or a fast boar, Veia, mortality
 Not checking her, was digging up the ground
 With a stout mattock (one could hear the sound 30
 Of moans she made at this) and in this way
 She brought food twice and thrice during the day
 And then removed it so the lad, his head
 Barely above the ground, would soon be dead.
 His marrow and his liver then she'd slit
 Open and desiccate and make of it
 A love-charm, once his eyeballs, fixed upon
 The food he was forbidden should be gone.
 Naples and all the neighbouring towns around
 Thought that the ogress Fabia could be found 40
 There, too, who plucked from every constellation
 The stars with her Thessalian incantation
 And stole the moon. Canidia, as she chewed
 Her nail with her black tooth, in cruel mood
 Said (or left unsaid!): “Diana and Night,
 Queens of the silent hour when every rite
 Is wrought, my faithful friends now give to me
 Your help! Now turn your wrath and energy

To hostile homes! While all the wild beasts lie
 In fearsome woods in peaceful slumber, I 50
 Fervently wish that the old libertine
 Is barked at by Subura's dogs – a scene
 To raise a laugh! -The preparation he
 Was smeared with I devised incomparably.
 What happened? What went wrong? I failed to make
 Those dire philtres work – what a mistake! -
 That alien Medea employed to bring
 Vengeance on Creon's child, then vanishing.
 The present that she gave her was immersed
 In poisoned blood, which caused the maid to burst 60
 In flames. And yet no root or herb has found
 Me wanting. See! - the man is sleeping sound,
 Forgetful of his mistresses. Yes, he
 Is free, unharmed by the chicanery
 Of some enchantress. Varus, here you'll dwell
 With heavy tears, and there's no Marsian spell
 To bring you back to me. I'll formulate
 A stronger dose so that I may frustrate
 Your scorn. The skies shall sink below the sea,
 The earth spread out above, before for me 70
 You'll burn with love like flaming pitch.” The lad,
 When he heard this, no longer, as he had
 Before, tried to assuage those impious
 Creatures with gentle speech but, dubious
 Of with what words the silence he should break,
 He cursed her thus: “You magic spells won't make
 Right wrong, and also they can't turn aside
 Human reprisal. So I swear I'll ride
 You with my curses, and no offering
 Will expiate my fearful threatening. 80
 And even when I've given up life's fight,
 I'll haunt you like a Fury every night:
 And with my claws your faces I will tear,
 As is the right of spirits everywhere:
 And on your restless bosoms I will press
 And from you banish sleep with fearfulness.
 The rabble will pelt you on every side,
 You filthy hags, and soon both far and wide
 Wild beasts will strew your limbs. My parents will
 See this, alas! For they'll be living still. 90

VI

Why worry guiltless strangers, reprobate,
 A cur who faces wolves? Why not rotate
 Your idle threats to me, who then will strike
 You in return and bite you, too? For like

A shepherd's sturdy friend, the Molossian hound
 Or tan Laconian, I'll roam around
 And follow any beast amid deep snow.
 When you have filled the woods with yelps, you'll go
 And sniff at any food that's flung at you.
 Beware, beware! For very fiercely do 10
 I raise my horns at wicked men (you might
 Recall deceitful Lycambes's slight
 To his own son-in-law, Archilochus,
 Or else the bitter foe of Bupalus).
 If I'm assailed by someone, should I not
 Revenge, not merely whimpering like a tot?

VII

Where are you rushing to, you wicked men?
 Why are you brandishing your swords? So then,
 Have we not bled enough on land and sea? -
 Not that we might burn down triumphantly
 Carthage's towers or that the Briton, still
 Unscathed, might not in iron fetters fill
 The Sacred Way, but that our Rome might die
 By her own hand and thereby satisfy
 The Parthians' prayers. Such acts do not belong 10
 Either to wolves or lions, for, among
 Their breed, their fury's always turned upon
 Beasts of a different kind. Are we pressed on
 By some blind, stronger force or guilt? Reply!
 They do not speak: a ghastly pallor I
 Can see upon their cheeks. They're mystified
 And all their senses have been petrified.
 Rome undergoes a bitter fate – the guilt
 Of fratricide, since Remus' blood was spilt
 In all his innocence, has proved to be
 A constant curse upon posterity. 20

VIII

Imagine what has stolen all my strength
 Away, you stinking slattern, all this length
 Of time, when you have one black tooth, and now
 Old age has furrowed wrinkles in your brow,
 And a disgusting fissure can be seen,
 Just like a tough old cow's, that gapes between
 Your withered buttocks. Yet those flabby tits,
 Just like a mare's, can still thrill me to bits,
 Your flaccid stomach and your feeble knees
 Held up by swollen legs. Gods give you ease! 10
 And may triumphal statues beautify

Your funeral train, and may no dame be nigh
With richer pearls! So Stoic works would choose
Silk pillows? Well then, ignorant sinews
Stiffen no less. To raise fastidious
Penises you must be industrious.

IX

Happy Maecenas, at your groaning board
When shall I drink your Caecuban wine that's stored
For banquets in your high halls (it would please
Great Jove!) and hear the mingled melodies
Of Phrygia and Doris? Recently
Pompey was wrecked and driven from the sea:
He'd threatened Rome with chains he took away
From his allies, all eager to betray
The city. He's a Roman (although he
Will be denied that by posterity) 10
And puts his armour on at a maid's say-so
And tends to withered eunuchs, even though
He is a soldier, while the sun shines on
The standards and the base pavilion.
At this, two thousand Gallic cavalry
Turned round their snorting steeds while raucously
Shouting "Caesar!" The vessels of the foe,
Called to the left, lay in the port. *Io*
Triumphe! Bring the golden chariots! Bring
The untouched heifers, too! Let *Triumph* ring! 20
You never sent back such a glorious
Commander from Jugurtha's war to us.
And Africanus, too, fell short, though he
Obtained a tombstone for his bravery.
The foe, on sea and land meeting defeat,
Has changed his cloak to black: perhaps to Crete,
Famed for her hundred settlements, he flees
Against opposing winds or the Syrtes,
Tossed by south winds, or more uncertainly
Sail other seas. Come hither, lad, to me!
More wine, the Chian or the Lesbian!
Or maybe you should pour the Caecuban
To calm us down. To banish fear is fine
And hope for Caesar's good with mellow wine.

X

The ship sets sail most inauspiciously
With nasty Mevius. So, viciously,
South Winds, lash both her sides! And you, too, black
East Wind, blow hard! Scatter the sails and crack

The oars! And you, West Wind, in fury rise,
 As you the quivering oak-trees pulverize
 Upon the mountain-tops! In murky night
 Let no congenial star project its light
 When grim Orion sets! Allow no sea
 Calmer than that which caused Greek victory 10
 When Queen Athena after Troy's defeat
 Against Ajax's ship levelled the heat
 Of all her anger, Ah, what is there yet
 Awaiting all your sailors – toil and sweat!
 What pallor, what unmanly wails, what praying
 To hostile Jove, the rainy South Winds flaying
 The vessel there on the Ionian Sea!
 But on the shore you'll be a delicacy
 To gulls and to the Storm God I'll devote
 An offering of lamb and frisky goat. 20

XI

O Pettius, no more do I delight
 Than in the days far in the past to write
 My verses, since by Cupid's dart I'm hit -
 The blow indeed is ponderous, for it
 Has kindled me beyond all other joys
 With passion for young girls and tender boys.
 Three winters have removed the pageantry
 Of forests since I lost my lunacy
 For my Inachia. For truly I
 Am so ashamed to be afflicted by 10
 How I was talked about throughout the town.
 I hate to think how desperately down
 And silent I have been. To think that I
 Betrayed my love-lorn state with many a sigh!
 "A poor man's innocent heart cannot compete
 Against the power of gold," I would repeat.
 When once the shameless god had heated me
 With wine, revealing what had recently
 Been hidden. "But should open indignation
 Boil up in me and scatter consolation 20
 That does not ease my grief, my modesty
 I'll banish and give up my rivalry
 With lesser men." To you I praised this course:
 You told me to go home and I perforce
 Set off with hesitant step, but spitefully
 The doors I knocked upon tormented me.
 I love Lyciscus, and he makes the claim
 In tenderness he rivals any dame.
 From him no-one can ever set me free
 Through stern reproaches or advisedly. 30

No, he or she must be slender or fair
And sport a knot that holds in place long hair.

XII

“Woman, a big black elephant would be
Fitting for you, so why do you send me
Letters and gifts? - I'm not the stalwart sort,
Nor am I youthful and I do not sport
A great big nose. Besides, I am unique
In sniffing out a polyp or the reek
Of goats beneath those arms: like a bloodhound,
I'll find out where a porker may be found.”
Her shrivelled limbs sweat, and there's a foul smell
When, as my cock lies there and will not swell, 10
To quench her rampant frenzy she is hot;
Her damp cosmetics and her rouge cannot
Stay on; since with a crocodile's dung it's dyed.
She made the bed and canopy collide.
'You're less tired with Inachia than me,
For you can do Inachia constantly,
Three times at least,' she says to me, 'although
With me you're flaccid after just one go.
A curse on Lesbia! While confident
I'd have a bull, I find you impotent. 20
I could have had Amyntas with a prick
Like any mountain-tree, both young and thick.
These woollen fleeces with their Tyrian dye -
For whom were they prepared? It's clear that I
Want you unless you have a guest somewhere
Among your equals whose girlfriend might care
For him more than for you. You shrink from me
As lambs and deer shrink from their enemy.

XIII

A dreadful storm contracts the sky, while rain
And snow bring Jupiter to earth. The main
And forests with the Thracian northerlies
Are rained on. Come, my friends, and let us seize
The day while limbs are strong! The time is now!
Cast gravity from off the clouded brow!
Bring out the vintage wine that had been pressed
In my Torquatus' year! But of the rest
Be mum! The god will mend our ills perchance.
The time has come now for us to enhance 10
The head with nard from Persia and to ease
With music all of our anxieties,
As famed Chiron to his strong foster-son

Sang, 'Son of Thetis, o invincible one,
Assaracus's territory, through
Which scant Scamander ripples, waits for you,
And Simois, whence by their fixed decree
The Fates ban your return; nor from the sea
Will Thetis bring you home again. While there,
With wine and song lighten your every care, 20
For wine and song can give you sweet relief
From your afflictions and your bitter grief."

XIV

Honest Maecenas, you brought me distress
By asking why such passive idleness
Has made me as distracted as if I
Have had a throat so parched that I've drained dry
Some soporific, for a deity
Forbids me to conclude the poetry
That I've begun, the verse I promised you.
Anacreon had been impassioned, too,
They say, by his Bathyllus – frequently
He played his strains of love ingenuously 10
Upon his weeping lyre. You, too, blaze
With Cupid's flame; but if in former days
No fairer flame kindled beleaguered Troy,
Then in you destiny you should feel joy.
With free Phryne I live in such torment,
For she with just one man is not content.

XV

It was at night, while in a cloudless sky
Among inferior stars the moon shone high,
When you, soon to outrage the majesty
Of all the mighty gods, pledged loyalty
To me. Indeed more closely did you cling
To me than ivy when encompassing
The lofty ilex, swearing that as long
As wolves show their hostility among
The flocks or as Orion, enemy
Of sailors, aggravates the wintry sea, 10
And that as long as all the breezes cast
Phoebus's hair about, our love will last.
Neaera, you will bitterly regret
My manhood – if there's one scintilla yet
In me of manhood, he will not agree
To let a favoured rival constantly
Lie with you: no, he'll seek a mate more true
And with his stern resolve won't yield to you

And all your sweet charms, now that bitterness
Has gripped your soul. Ignoring my distress,
Whoever you are, you gaily walk about,
Much happier than I and not without
A wealth of flocks and acreage, although
For you the waters of Pactolus flow
And you possess a deal of information
About the secrets of reincarnation,
Fairer than Nireus, I must laugh to know
That you must mourn your loss in all your woe.

XVI

Through civil war a second generation
Is fading – by her former domination
Rome totters, whom even the neighbouring
Marsi and the Etruscans' threatening
Armies could not destroy, nor Spartacus,
Nor Capua nor the Gauls, so treacherous
In tumult, nor the youth of Germany,
Blue-eyed and fearsome, nor the soldiery
Of Hannibal, defeated in the past -
For we will self-destruct: we cannot last. 10
Wild beasts will prowl once more throughout our land;
Alas, the savage conqueror will stand
Upon Rome's ashes and his cavalry
Will trample it, and (impious to see!)
Our bones, once from the wind and sun protected,
Will all be disrespectfully ejected
And scattered far and wide. Perhaps it's best,
As most of you may think, that, thus distressed,
You seek escape, as once the Phocaei,
Cursing their fields and gods, preferred to flee 20
To exile, leaving boars and wolves to roam
Around the shrines, which they would then call home.
Indeed than this there is no better plan -
To go where we are borne by Fate, to span
The seas where northern gales or boisterous
Tempests of Africa may summon us.
Have you a better one? The signs are fair,
So wait no more to board the ship! But swear
That once the rocks shall rise above the sea
And float again, there's no iniquity 30
In coming back. We'll trim our sails and go
To sea once more but when the river Po
Washes Matinia, when into the sea
The Apennines, that stretch through Italy,
Jut out, when tigers love to mate with deer,
And kites with doves, when trustful herds don't fear

The lion, and when in the briny sea
 The goat, grown smooth with scales, swims happily.
 Thus, giving all the reasons that preclude
 Returning, let us, better than the crude 40
 And ignorant herd, set out! Those others? Well,
 Let them still in their fated houses dwell!
 Speed past Etruscan coastlines, you who own
 Your manhood! Let us hear no womanish moan
 From you! The ocean waits. Let's find our rest
 In golden fields, the islands of the blessed,
 Where every year there is a constant yield
 Of corn that's reaped out of an unploughed field.
 The unpruned vines bloom everlastingly;
 The olive never fails its native tree; 50
 The dark fig ever thrives and honey glides
 From hollow oaks and from the mountainsides
 The fountain splashes, leaping daintily.
 There, to the pail the goats come willingly,
 As does the flock; at eventide the bear
 Won't growl around the sheepfold, nor is there
 A swelling heap of vipers. Even more
 Impressive marvels will we have in store -
 How Eurys will not deluge with its rain
 Our cornland, and there'll be no single grain 60
 Burnt in the clods, for heat and cold both are
 Tempered by Zeus. No vessels from afar
 Come hither, as the *Argo's* oarsmen sweat
 Upon the oars; no Colchian queen has set
 Her shameless feet here; and towards this coast
 No merchants from Sidon have sailed, no host
 Of toiling sailors who served Ulysses;
 The flocks of sheep have suffered no disease;
 No blazing planet burns the herd. This place
 Was set by Jupiter for a righteous race 70
 Since he obscured the Golden Ages' sheen
 With bronze – with bronze and iron they have been
 Hardened, from which good men have happily
 Escaped, if you will heed my prophecy.

XVII

"I yield my potent skill: on bended knee,
 By the dark mansions of Proserpine
 I beg, and by Diana and by all
 The books of incantation, which can call
 The stars down from the sky, Canidia, stay
 Your spells and turn your whirling wheel away!
 Achilles once was moved to sympathy
 By Telephus, whose Mysian infantry

He set against him as his spears he threw
 In all his pride. The Trojan women, too, 10
 Anointed Hector, although he was prey
 To dogs and kites, when Priam ran away
 From Troy and piteously fell before
 Achilles' feet. While straining at the oar,
 Ulysses' men from hide-bound limbs won free,
 Regaining speech, looks, rationality
 Through Circe's will. I've compensated for
 The debt that I have owed you, even more,
 You who are idolized exceedingly
 By peddlers and those who sail the sea. 20
 My youth and rosy bloom have vanished quite,
 My skin is yellow and my hair is white
 Due to your smelly unguents. The distress
 That you have brought to me is limitless.
 Night follows day, day night: I cannot still
 My straining heart by breathing; plagued with ill,
 I'm forced to think what I have formerly
 Denied: Sabellian charms cause injury
 To hearts and Marsian spells can split asunder
 A head. What more do you desire, I wonder? 30
 O sea and earth, I'm burning so much more
 Than Hercules who suffered long before,
 When he in Nessus' blood was saturated,
 And than the blazing flame that radiated
 From Etna. But your shop of poisons flashes
 With magic drugs, so I a heap of ashes
 May then become, then scattered. What of me?
 What end's awaiting me, what penalty?
 The penalties that you demand I'll pay
 And expiate myself, whether you may 40
 Demand a hecatomb or maybe hire
 Someone to play on his mendacious lyre
 And sing my praises. Chaste and virtuous,
 You'll be a constellation clear to us.
 Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri,
 Who were incensed by the indignity
 That was endured by Helen, were, though, swayed
 By supplication, and therefore they made
 The poet see again. Please take from me
 My madness (you have the ability), 50
 And you're not soiled by some ancestral shame
 And don't resemble a disgusting dame
 Who has been hired to brush and sweep away
 The ashes from a funeral every day
 For nine days round mean graves. Your hands are pure,
 Your heart is kindly, and it's very sure
 That Pactumeius is your son: we say

It was *your* blood the midwife washed away,
Though you recovered quickly.”

“Ah, my ears
Are barred against your prayers! Nobody hears!! 60
Not deafer to a shipwrecked sailor's screams
Are those high cliffs against which Neptune teems
In winter. You laugh with impunity,
Disclosing the Cocytian rites. Make free
With Cupid's worship, would you? Talk about
Me all about the town, yet go without
Penance, despite the fact that you divine
The incantations of the Esquiline!
What use was there to have taught sorcery
To hags who live among the Paeligni 70
So that a swifter poison they might brew?
A slower fate, though, is awaiting you
Than what you prayed for. Wretch, much lethargy
Must you endure to meet such agony.
The faithless Pelops' father Tantalus
Hankers for rest to reach that plenteous
Banquet; Prometheus, too, hankers for rest,
Tied to an eagle; on a mountain-crest
It was the wish of Sisyphus to set
A rock, but Jupiter's decrees won't let 80
Him do so. From the highest tower your fierce
Desire's now to leap and now to pierce
Your breast with a Noric blade, and you will chain
A noose about your neck but all in vain:
You sadly loathe yourself. I mean to ride
Your shoulders, and the earth will then subside.
I bring wax images to life (a thing
You know of by your constant meddling);
I, by my incantations, from the sky
Am able to snatch down the moon, and I 90
Raise ashes of the dead and cleverly
Concoct a potion that will prove to be
An aphrodisiac. Am I to moan
A craft that's futile against you alone?

