

HORACE ODES II

I

You've steered the Civil War since Scipio
Was consul, roots, faults, steps and Fortune's game
And princes' complex
Friendships and arms

Smeared with unexpiated gore, a task
Of perilous risk; you're walking over embers
Hidden underneath
Treacherous ash.

Let the dark tragic Muse not stay too long
Away from theatres: public life completed,
Your great gifts you'll show
In tragedy,

Famed counsel for defence, the Senate's prop,
Pollio, recipient of eternal fame,
Bay-wreathed, conqueror
Of Dalmatia.

Your menacing horns and trumpets fill our ears
With sound; already glittering armour daunts
The fleeing horses,
Their riders, too.

I seem to hear great leaders, bodies smeared
With not inglorious dust, the globe subdued
Except the ruthless
Grit of Cato.

Juno and the African gods who, powerless
In their revenge, left; at Jugurtha's tomb
They make sacrifice
Of their victors'

Grandchildren. What fields are with Roman blood
Not rich, to testify our dreadful strife?
Even the Persians
Know our ruin.

What pool or river does not know our pain
In war? What sea's not stained with Roman gore?
Show to me the shore
Not red with it.

But, wanton Muse, lest you leave happy themes
And turn to the Cean's strains, come seek with me
A lighter measure
In Venus' cave.

II

Silver, when hidden in the greedy ground,
Lacks colour, Crispus, who's such metal's foe
Unless in useful service it is found
Brightly to glow.

Proculeius will live forever. Kind as he
Is to his brothers; Fame that will prevail
Will bear him on her wings eternally
And never fail.

Taming a greedy spirit, you will reign
More widely than if you were to unite
Libya with the bounds of furthest Spain
And, within sight,

Rule Carthage. Dropsy with indulgence grows;
One thirsts unless from illness one gets free
And from one's pallid body languor goes,
So watery.

Phraates rules again, though Probit, y,
Not of the rabble, keeps him far away
From the blest and schools folk from mendacity,
Bestowing sway

And safe command and lasting dignity
On him alone who can look on a stack
Of massive treasure and then leave it be
And not look back.

III

When times are troubled, keep an even mind;
Likewise, in happy days temper your joy
For, Delliuss, you're
Destined to die.

Whether you're ever sad or on far lawns
Delight in constant holiday and quaff
Your Falernian
In privacy.

Why do tall pines and show-white poplars twine
Each branch in friendly shade? each winding stream
Contain swift waters
Toiling in haste?

Let them bring wine, perfume, the all-too-brief
Fair roses while the world, years, Sisters Three
Who ply their black thread
Allow such joy.

You'll leave your purchased groves, home and estate
Washed by the yellow Tiber; then your heir
Shall own your riches
Piled up so high.

Born of rich Inachus or grinding-poor,
Of humble birth and living out of doors –
No matter! Cruel
Orcus has you.

We're all bound thither; our Fate, soon or late,
Will leave the urn and place us in that boat
Of Charon for exile
Everlasting.

IV

Xanthias, don't shame to love your serving-maid;
Briseis with skin of a snow-white shade
Aroused desire in hot Achilles' gaze
In earlier days;

A belle roused Ajax, son of Telamon –
His slave Tecmessa, fair to look upon;
In Troy Agamemnon loved deep in his soul
A girl he stole,

The foreign throng now having given way
And Hector dead and Troy, an easier prey,
Now rendered up to weary Thessaly,
Her enemy.

Your fair-haired Phyllis has somewhere maybe
Rich folk to grace a groom with dignity
And grieves your cruel gods, of royal kin
In origin.

Think she you love's not from the wicked throng –
She's faithful and for riches does not long,
So from a shameful mother, certainly,
She cannot be.

Her shapely ankles and her arms, her face
I praise entirely, so do not place
Doubt on one with a forty-year-old span,
An aging man.

V

She's not yet ready for the yoke, nor yet
Ripe for a consort's duties nor the rush
A bull makes when he
Is keen to mate.

Your heifer's set on emerald fields, for now
She cools herself in streams, now yearns to play
In willow copses
With other calves.

Forget your passion for the unripe grape:
Now multi-coloured Fall will dye blue clusters
With a dark purple
For your delight.

She'll trail you soon: fierce age runs on and shall
Give her the years it takes from you, and then

Keenly Lalage
Will seek a mate;

Shy Pholoe nor Chloris are your love,
White shoulders like a moon on a midnight sea,
Nor is that Cnidian,
Lovely Gyges;

Set him among a female choir – no guest,
Though wise, could pick him out from all the rest
With his boy/girl looks
And flowing hair.

VI

You'll visit, Septimius, Cadiz with me
(Our yoke those Cantabri can barely stand)
And the barbarous Syrtes on the violent sea
Off Moorish land.

May Tiber, founded by the men of Greece,
Be home in my old age; when sick of sea,
Manoeuvres war, may I thereby gain peace
And harmony.

Should the cruel fates not grant that, may I stay
Near Galaesus with its sweet sheep pasturing
And seek the place where Phalanthus held sway,
The Spartan king.

That blessed spot is happiest for me:
The honey there equals Hymettus' crop;
Its olives green Venafrum's quality
Can never top;

It boasts a balmy winter and long spring,
And fertile Aulon, Bacchus' comrade, still
Far Falernus' grapes scarce feel the bitter sting
Of its ill will.

Its lovely heights call out to me and you;
There will you, on my ashes that yet flare,
Scatter upon your poet-friend his due –
Your tears of care.

VII

Pompey, with Brutus heading our attack,
With you I faced great threats: who sent you back
To Italy's sky,
A citizen?

You are my dearest friend! I often spent
Long days quaffing with you, my shining hair
Wreathed with balsam
From Syria.

I saw Philippi, ran in headlong flight,
My shield – alas! – abandoned. Smashed virtue
And ignoble threats
Were overturned!

Swift Mercury dragged me, fearful, through thick clouds
Of enemies; the wave drew you once more
In troubled waters
Back to the war.

So render Jove his due repast and lay
Your war-spent frame under my laurel boughs.
Do not stint the jars
You now must broach.

Fill smooth cups with Massic oblivion.
Pour perfume from large bowls. Who'll weave our wreaths
Of dew-wet parsley
Or lithe myrtle?

Who will be Venus' master of the drink?
I'll rage like any Thracian. Revelling
Is sweet with a friend
Who's now back home.

VIII

Perjured Barine, if some punishment
Had ever come to you – a blackened tooth,

Perhaps a fingernail that's spoilt or bent –
I'd take as truth

Your words. As soon, however, as you bound
Your faithless soul by vows, you now appear
Much more attractive and are ever found
The young man's dear.

Thus by your buried mother can you swear,
And night's mute constellations in the sky
And the immortal gods high in the air.
I will not lie –

Both Venus and the artful Nymphs all smile
At this, cruel Cupid, too, who's seen to hone
The hot darts in his quiver all the while
On a bloodstained stone.

Fresh slaves, all youths are being groomed for you;
Your former loves have not abandoned yet
Their cruel mistress' home, which thing to do
They often threat.

Mothers and thrifty fathers all feel fear
Of you, and wretched brides who sought to marry,
Though lately maidens, lest their grooms come near
To you and tarry.

IX

Rain doesn't fall upon the sodden fields
Forever; huge storms do not always vex
The Caspian Sea
And, friend Valgus,

Armenia doesn't stand on solid ice
All year; Garganus' oak-woods aren't always
Pressed by the North Winds,
Nor the ash-trees

Stripped bare: yet you bemoan your Myrtes' loss
Always and your endearments do not end
When evening rises

Or flees the sun.

Yet age-old Nestor did not ever wail
Antilochus nor was young Troilus ever
Mourned by his parents
Nor his sisters.

Stop this unmanly grieving. Let's instead
Sing of Augustus's new victories,
Ice-bound Niphates
And Persia's streams

Which flow less copiously now she is ours,
And the restricted Thracians who must ride
Their steeds on landscape
That's sparser now.

X

Murena, you shall live more virtuously
On land – while fearing storms, don't face the sea
Aboard a ship and do not hug, what's more,
The fatal shore.

Who loves the golden mean will be secure
From shabby lodgings and avoid the lure
A regal palace offers and be free
From jealousy.

A lofty pine more often feels the gust
And soaring turrets crumble into dust
More loudly and it is the mountain-peaks
That lightning seeks.

A heart prepared for each contingency
Hopes in distress and fears prosperity.
Unlovely winters sent by Jove are then
Sent back again

By him. What hurts us now will not remain
Forever: Phoebus sometimes will regain
The silent Muse's interest: his bow's
Not *all* he knows.

Be brave and steadfast in adversity;
And yet be wise and, when you are at sea,
Look to your sails puffed with a too-strong squall
And trim them all.

XI

Don't ask what warlike Spain is planning, nor
The Scythians our Adriatic keeps away
From us, nor tremble
At our life's needs

(She asks so little): beauty and fair youth
Fly from us, dry old age eradicates
Playful affections
And restful sleep.

Spring flowers' glory will not last forever,
The blushing moon won't always shine: why vex
With endless problems
Your little mind?

Let's thoughtlessly, beneath a lofty pine
Or plane-tree, while we can, lie, greying hair
Scented with roses
And eastern nard,

And drink. Bacchus dispels our biting cares.
Let the boy swiftly cut our blazing cups
Of Falernian
From passing streams.

Who'll lure the fickle Lyde from her house?
Tell her to hasten with her ivory lyre,
Her hair all gathered
In Spartan mode.

XII

Numantia's long, fierce wars, harsh Hannibal,
The sea of Sicily now crimson-dark
With Carthaginian blood you would not wish

Sung to the gentle lyre,

Nor drunk Hylaeus nor the fierce Lapiths,
Nor Hercules crushing the sons of Earth,
At which the ancient Saturn's glittering house
Was filled with trembling;

To write of Caesar's battles in cold prose,
Maecenas, would be better, and the necks
Of all those kings who menaced us, now clamped
As they're led through the streets.

The Muse would have me speak of the sweet voice
Of your dear Licymnia and her eyes
That shine so brightly and her faithful heart
That beats with mutual love;

It would become her to be chorus-leader
And vie in wit and give her arms in play
To all the maidens on that sacred day
That celebrates Diana.

Would you exchange one hair upon her head
For all Achaemenes' riches or the wealth
That can be found in fertile Phrygia
Or else the well-stocked homes

Of Araby, while to your passionate kisses
She bends her neck or haughtily denies-
She'd have you take, not beg, and sometimes she
Will take a kiss herself.

XIII

Tree, you were planted on an evil day
With sacrilegious hands: prosperity
Has suffered ruin,
This region's shame;

Your planter would have snapped his father's neck
I think, and strewn a guest's blood in the night
In an inner room
And dabbled with

Colchian bane, whatever evil's planned
And where. Sad trunk, you're destined to fall down
On blameless me, here
In my own field.

None takes sufficient care to shun what's bad:
All Carthage sailors fear the Bosphorus
But not hidden fates
That lurk elsewhere;

Soldiers fear Persian darts and rapid flight,
The Persian fears Italian might and strength;
Yet unlooked-for death
Plucks folk away.

How close was I to gloomy Hell and him
Who judges and the seats set for the good
And Sappho carping
Upon her lyre

About the local girls and you, Alcaeus,
With golden pick sounding the sailors' woe
Yet more loudly still,
And flight and war!

The ghosts wonder at both, who should receive
A sacred silence; but the dense-packed crowd
Drinks in all the tales
Of tyrants' wars.

No wonder when the the hundred-headed beast
Drops his black ears, entranced, the snakes that writhe
In the Furies' hair
Resting a while.

Even Prometheus, even Tantalus
Are lulled despite their toil; Orion, too,
Who eschews to hunt
Lion or lynx.

XIV

Postumus, the years slip fast away and bring
No respite for our wrinkles or old age

That threatens or Death
Invincible:

Though pitiless Hell you may appease each day
With countless bulls and in the gloomy stream
Three-framed Geryon
And Tityos chain,

We all must cross it, all who feed upon
The earth's fruits, whether we have been marked out
For humble farming
Or mastery.

In vain we'll shun all wars, in vain we'll shun
The rough Adriatic's waves and in the fall
Fear the Southern Wind
That shakes our frames:

We'll gaze on Cocytos, and wander by
The languid stream, and Danaus' evil girls
And Sisyphus, damned
To endless toil:

Earth, home, dear wife you'll leave; no tree you planted
Is destined to accompany you, its master,
Thither – none except
The loathed cypress:

A worthier heir will quaff your Caecuban,
Locked with a hundred keys, and satin the street
With fine wine, finer
Than any priest's.

XV

Soon princely piles will leave sparse acreage,
Pools larger than the Lucrine lake we'll see,
The vineless plane-tree
Will oust the elms;

Violet-beds and myrtle and all perfume's wealth
Will strew their scent cross the olive-groves
A former master
Cultivated;

Thick laurel-boughs will not let in the sun's
Hot rays: this Romulus and long-haired Cato
And all the ancients
Did not ordain.

The private land was small then, common ground
Great: no extensive portico was owned,
A shady shelter
Facing the North,

Laws did not ban rude turf for building shrines
Or rule that towns and temples should be decked,
At public expense,
With rare marble.

XVI

On the Aegean sailors pray for peace
When black clouds hide the moon and there's surcease
Among the constellations that they see
Uncertainly;

It's peace for the Thracian, furious in war,
And for the quivered Mede, not purchased for
One's jewels, purple or gold. You see
No treasury,

No consular attendants take away
The wretched mob's upsets and keep at bay
The cares that fly around our panelling.
Sparse life's the thing,

Where Father's meagre table shines below
His old salt-cellar and sweet slumbers know
No fear, untroubled by a sordid greed.
Where is the need

Fiercely to strive for riches? Why do we
Migrate into a new locality?
What exile flees his very self? Foul woe
Will always go

Aboard bronze-plated ships nor fall behind

The troops of horses, swifter than the hind
And swifter than the cloudy easterly.
Contented be

Today; regard with hate the urge to care
For what's beyond and, gently smiling, bear
What pains you; there is not a single thing
That lacks some sting.

Famous Achilles soon was snatched away,
Tithonus lingered in a sorry way;
What is denied to you will yet maybe
Be given me.

A hundred herds of Sicily's cattle moo
Round you, a mare fit for a chariot, too,
Neighs at you; robes from the African coast
You now can boast,

Twice purple-dyed: the Fates have given me
A small estate and fine Greek melody
And taught me common people full of spite
Wholly to slight.

XVII

Why stifle me with your complaints, Maecenas?
Neither the gods nor I would have you die
Before me – you are
My rock, my all.

If some too-early blow took half my soul,
Why should the rest remain, now not as loved,
Not surviving whole?
That day will lead

Us both to ruin. It's no treacherous vow
I make: we'll go wherever you may lead,
As friends preparing
Our final trek.

Chimaera's fiery breath will not tear me
From you nor hundred-headed Gyas: that's
The will of Justice

And the Fates.

Did Libra or fierce Scipio shine more bright
On me at birth? Or was it Capricorn,
Lord of western waves
Round Italy?

Both stars agree remarkably: Jove shone
Protectively, more bright than baleful Saturn,
And rescued you
And stayed Fate's wings,

When people thronged the theatre, cheering thrice
In joy: I would have dropped, felled by a tree
Had Faunus not stopped
With his right hand

The blow, the guard of all mercurial bards.
So make due offering and build a shrine:
I will sacrifice
A humble lamb.

XVIII

My house does not shimmer
With ivory or ceilings wrought with gold,
My pillars do not bear
Far Africa's Hymettian marble beams,
I've not inherited,
As Attalus' unknowing heir, a palace,
No noble ladies trail
Their robes of Spartan purple just for me:
But I have honour and
A vein of kindly wit, and, though I'm poor,
The rich yet seek me out:
I pray for nothing else, my powerful friend
I do not ask for more,
Blessed with my one and only Sabine farm.
Day dogs the heels of day
And new moons still proceed to waste away:
You at your very grave
Must have cut marble – mindless of the tomb,
You build yourself a house
And as the roaring waters of Baiae

The shoreline you extend
Because the coastline is not rich enough.
Why tear down every fringe
That meets your fields and greedily leap over
Your tenant's property?
Man, wife and wretched sons are driven out,
Clutching their household gods.
But there's no courtyard that's more sure to wait
For its rich occupant
Than that of greedy Orcus. Why stretch out
Your time upon the earth?
Equally open is that earth to both
The pauper and the sons
Of kings, while Orcus' ferryman cannot
Be bribed with gold to take
Crafty Prometheus back. For there he keeps
Tantalus and his son,
And whether he's called or not he lends an ear
And to the poor man gives
Release from all the toils he's undergone.

XIX

Posterity, believe me! I saw Bacchus
Far on a rock and teaching poetry
To goat-footed Satyrs
And to the Nymphs.

New fears assail me, Bacchus, in my heart,
Galls and delights me. Spare me, o Liber,
For your great thyrsus
Leave folk in awe.

I must sing of the wilful Bacchants and
Wine-fountains, rivers of milk and speak of honey
Welling and sliding
Inside tree-trunks:

And of the honour of a happy bride
Among the stars and shattered Pentheus and
Thracian Lycurgus'
Unhappy end.

You guide the streams, the barbarous sea, and on

Far summits bind Bistonian women's hair,
While drunk, with vipers
In harmless knots:

When the foul Giants tried to climb the sky
And reach Jove's kingdom, Rhoetus you hurled back
With the teeth and claws
Of a dread lion;

They say dance, laughter, games all suit you more
But warfare not at all, and yet you shared
The thick of battle
As well as peace.

Unhurt, Cerberus, golden-horned, saw you
And gently stroked you with his tail and licked
Your feet and ankles
With triple tongue.

XX

A two-formed bard, I'll not fly through the air
On weak or common wings nor linger long
Upon the earth, for
I'm past envy:

I'll leave the cities. It's not I, poor-born,
To whom you speak, dear patron, it's not I
Who'll die and be held
In Stygian waves.

Even now rough skin is settling round my legs:
Above them I'm a snow-white swan – soft plumes
On my arms and back
Are now forming.

More famed than Icarus, I'll look on
The Bosphorus' loud shoreline and Syrtes
And the northern plains,
A dulcet bird.

Colchis will know me, Scythia, too, who feigns
No fear of us, and the far Geloni;
Those who drink Rhone wine,

And Spain, I'll teach.

No dirge, lament, unseemly grief I want
At my sparse funeral; check your cries and keep
From my sepulchre
Excess honour.