

ODES AND EPODES

THE GOLDEN MEAN¹

You better, sure, shall live, not evermore
Trying high seas; nor, while sea's rage you flee,
Pressing too much upon ill-harbour'd shore.
The golden Mean who loves, lives safely free
From filth of foreworn house, and quiet lives,
Released from Court, where envy needs must be.
The wind most oft the hugest pine-tree grieves;
The stately towers come down with greater fall;
The highest hills the bolt of thunder cleaves;
Evil haps do fill with hope, good haps appal
With fear of change the courage well prepared:
Foul winters, as they come, away they shall.
Though present times and past with evils be snared,
They shall not last: with cithern silent Muse
Apollo wakes, and bow hath sometime spared.
In hard estate, with stout show valour use,
The same man still, in whom wisdom prevails;
In too full wind draw in thy swelling sails.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554-86)

GATHER YE ROSEBUDS

Strive not, Leuconoë, to know what end
The gods above to me or thee will send;
Nor with astrologers consult at all,
That thou mayst better know what can befall:
Whether thou livest more winters, or thy last
Be this, which Tyrrhene waves 'gainst rocks do cast.

1. The Licinius to whom this Ode is addressed may be Varro Murena (brother-in-law of Maecenas), an insolent man who was soon afterwards executed by Augustus for alleged conspiracy.

LATIN LITERATURE

Be wise! Drink free, and in so short a space
Do not protracted hopes of life embrace:
Whilst we are talking, envious time doth slide;
This day's thine own; the next may be denied.

SIR THOMAS HAWKINS (d. 1640)

A NARROW ESCAPE

What slender youth bedewed with liquid odours
Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,
Pyrrha, for whom bindest thou
In wreaths thy golden hair,

Plain in thy neatness? O how oft shall he
On faith and changèd gods complain: and seas
Rough with black winds and storms
Unwonted shall admire,

Who now enjoys thee credulous, all gold,
Who always vacant, always amiable
Hopes thee; of flattering gales
Unmindful. Hapless they

To whom thou untried seemest fair. Me in my vowed
Picture the sacred wall declares to have hung
My dank and dropping weeds
To the stern god of sea.

JOHN MILTON (1608-74)

ENJOY THE PRESENT HOUR

Behold yon mountain's hoary height,
Made higher with new mounts of snow;
Again, behold the winter weight
Oppress the labouring woods below;
And streams with icy fetters bound
Benumbed and cramped to solid ground.

HORACE

With well-heaped logs dissolve the cold,
And feed the genial hearth with fires;
Produce the wine that makes us bold,
And love of sprightly wit inspires.
For what hereafter shall betide,
God, if 'tis worth his care, provide.

Let Him alone, with what He made,
To toss and turn the world below;
At His command the storms invade,
The winds by His commission blow,
Till, with a nod, He bids them cease,
And calm returns, and all is peace.

Tomorrow and her works defy;
Lay hold upon the present hour,
And snatch the pleasures passing by,
To put them out of Fortune's power.
Nor Love nor Love's delights disdain;
Whate'er thou gettest today is gain.

Secure those golden, early joys,
That youth unsoured by sorrow bears,
Ere withering Time the taste destroys
With sickness and unwieldy years.
For active sports, for pleasing rest,
This is the time to be possessed:
The best is but in season best.

The appointed hour of promised bliss,
The pleasing whisper in the dark,
The half-unwilling, willing kiss,
The laugh that guides thee to the mark,
When the kind nymph would coyness feign,
And hides but to be loved again;
These, these are joys, the gods for youth ordain.

JOHN DRYDEN (1685)

POETRY IS UNDYING

Lest you should think that verse shall die,
Which sounds the silver Thames along,
Taught on the wings of truth, to fly
Above the reach of vulgar song;

Though daring Milton sits sublime,
In Spencer native Muses play;
Nor yet shall Waller yield to time,
Nor pensive Cowley's moral lay.

Sages and chiefs long since had birth
Ere Caesar was, or Newton named:
These raised new empires o'er the earth,
And those new Heavens and systems framed;

Vain was the chief's and sage's pride;
They had no poet, and they died.
In vain they schemed, in vain they bled:
They had no poet, and are dead.

ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)¹

WE ALL MUST DIE

Alas, dear friend, the fleeting years
In everlasting circles run,
In vain you spend your vows and prayers,
They roll, and ever will roll on.

Should hecatombs each rising morn
On cruel Pluto's altar dye,
Should costly loads of incense burn,
Their fumes ascending to the sky;

1. This poem should not perhaps, strictly speaking, have been included, since it replaces old names by new, and is therefore an adaptation rather than even the looser sort of translation. See also below, p. 203.

HORACE

You could not gain a moment's breath,
Or move the haughty king below,
Nor would inexorable death
Defer an hour the fatal blow.

In vain we shun the din of war,
And terrors of the stormy main,
In vain with anxious breasts we fear
Unwholesome Sirius' sultry reign;

We all must view the Stygian flood
That silent cuts the dreary plains,
And cruel Danaus' bloody brood
Condemned to everduring pains.

Your shady groves, your pleasing wife,
And fruitful fields, my dearest friend,
You'll leave together with your life:
Alone the cypress shall attend.¹

After your death, the lavish heir
Will quickly drive away his woe;
The wine you kept with so much care
Along the marble floor shall flow.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-84)

STEADFAST OF PURPOSE AND LOVE

The man, my friend, whose conscious heart
With virtue's sacred ardour glows,
Nor taints with death the envenomed dart,
Nor needs the guard of Moorish bows.

O'er icy Caucasus he treads,
Or torrid Afric's faithless sands,
Or where the famed Hydaspes spreads
His liquid wealth through barbarous lands.

1. The cypress was sacred to Pluto.

LATIN LITERATURE

And waiting for her weary lord
With unbought dainties load the board,
I should behold with scornful eye
The studied arts of luxury:
No fish from the Carpathian coast
By Eastern tempests hither tossed,
Nor Libyan fowls, nor snipes of Greece,
So much my appetite would please
As herbs of which the forests nigh
Wholesome variety supply.
Then to the gods, on solemn days,
The farmer annual honours pays,
Or feasts on kids the wolves had killed
And, frightened, left upon the field.
How pleased he sees his cattle come,
Their dugs with milk distended, home!
How pleased beholds his oxen bow
And faintly draw the inverted plough.
His cheerful slaves, a numerous band,
Around in beauteous order stand.

Thus did the usurer Alfius praise,
With transports kindled, rural ease.
His money he collected straight,
Resolved to purchase a retreat.
But still desires of sordid gain
Fixed in his cankered breast remain:
Next month he sets it out again.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784)

CEASE TO MOURN

Not always, Valgius, from the bursting cloud
On ruffled plains descends the rain;
Not always fitful gales and darkness shroud
The Caspian main;

HORACE

Not always on the bleak Armenian shore
Lies and rigid stands the winter snow.
Sunshine returns; the torpid waters flow;
The storm-tossed oak-tree rests its branches hoar;
And the pale ash bewails its shattered leaves no more.

Thou, friend, in endless anguish day by day
Mournest thy Mystes snatched away;
Weeping, when Hesper rises on the night;
Weeping, when Phosphor flies the sun's returning light.
Not thus on Ilion's fatal plain
Grey Nestor mourned Antilochus:
Not thus for ever and in vain
His Phrygian sisters wept their youthful Troilus.

Cease, Valgius, cease thy wailing,
Those sad soft sighs, that sorrow unavailing;
And sing with me great Caesar's trophies won
From conquered realms beneath the orient sun,
Frozen Niphates, and the flood
Of broad Euphrates dyed with Median blood.
More slow today it whirls its humbled tide
And now in narrowed bounds the Phrygian horsemen ride.

SIR STEPHEN DE VERE (1812-1904)

THE GOOD MAN NEED FEAR NOTHING

Not the rage of the million commanding things evil,
Not the doom frowning near in the brows of the tyrant,
Shakes the upright and resolute man
In his solid completeness of soul;

No, not Auster, the Storm-King of Hadria's wild waters,
No, not Jove's mighty hand when it launches the thunder;
If in fragments were shattered the world,
Him its ruins would strike undismayed.

LORD LYTTON (1831-92)

ENJOY YOUR POSSESSIONS WHILE
THEY ARE YOURS

Where the high pine and the white poplar mix,
With twining boughs, their hospitable shade,
And bright streams flee between the crooked banks,
Bid them bring wines, and unguent rich, and flowers;
While age, and wealth, and the black fateful threads
Of the three Sisters join to suffer you.
For soon you leave your purchased groves, and home,
Your villa, which the yellow Tiber laves;
And heirs will seize upon the hoarded gold.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850-94)

ODE TO SPRING

The snows are fled away, leaves on the shaws
And grasses in the mead renew their birth,
The river to the river-bed withdraws,
And altered is the fashion of the earth.
The Nymphs and Graces three put off their fear
And unapparelled in the woodland play.
The swift hour and the brief prime of the year
Say to the soul, *Thou wast not born for aye.*
Thaw follows frost; hard on the heel of spring
Treads summer sure to die, for hard on hers
Comes autumn, with his apples scattering;
Then back to wintertide, when nothing stirs.
But oh, whate'er the sky-led seasons mar,
Moon upon moon rebuilds it with her beams;
Come we where Tullus and where Ancus are
And good Aeneas, we are dust and dreams.
Torquatus, if the gods in heaven shall add
The morrow to the day, what tongue hath told?
Feast then thy heart, for what thy heart has had
The fingers of no heir will ever hold.

HORACE

When thou descendest once the shades among,
The stern assize and equal judgement o'er,
Not thy long lineage nor thy golden tongue,
No, nor thy righteousness, shall friend thee more.
Night holds Hippolytus the pure of stain,
Diana steads him nothing, he must stay;
And Theseus leaves Pirithous in the chain
The love of comrades cannot take away.

A. E. HOUSMAN (1859–1936)