

# To Invoke the Wine: Horace, Ode 3.21

FR. STEPHEN GREGG, O. CIST.

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is not the first of Horace's odes I have worked on out of a *pietas* toward Dr. Maurer's memory, but is the only one good enough that I can imagine sending it for his comments, since even if he disapproved he would fittingly enjoy the opportunity to read this little prayer to wine, or to the poet born with it, or to the poem, or to the glowing gods accompanying it all, or to the friend who requests the good vintage.

Maurer wanted translations to strive for poetry and be metrical, while remaining completely accurate; therefore, I tried to devise a sort of pattern of rhythm that imitates the Alcaic strophe used by Horace. This stanza has four lines, the first two of equal length at eleven syllables, followed by one of nine, concluded by one of ten whose set pattern moves more quickly. English cannot pretend to approximate the interplay of accent and more importantly syllable length that the Latin demands—but the translation tries to imitate this rhythmic flow of the lines by putting five stressed syllables in the first two lines—often with something of a

rhythmic break in the second line—then four stressed in the third, and lastly three stressed in more purely iambic flow in the fourth line. Iambs underlie the language naturally, but I allow many substitutions—I know Maurer would have complained. He might have appreciated that I at least begin each stanza quite close to the Latin, and preserve the triple *seu* of the first stanza.

Obstacles appear at every turn in translating, since one senses at each step the English leaving off a possible valence or echo within the Latin. How many ways do we have to name wine in English? I use "wines" for *vina*, and the Italian "*rosso*" for *Massicum*—a legitimately fancy use of Italian, I think—and the "pure stuff" for *merum*—unmixed wine a bit rough like Cato, in a tone I discern as playful . . . but not playful enough to write "hooch." *quocumque nomine* I translate as "under whatever label," since this is wine after all, but by doing so let go too early of the sense in the Latin that we might be addressing a god "under whatever title." Another difficulty always comes with the names of these gods: do we decode them into something familiar, or keep the more obscure? Venus and the Graces I kept as named, but *rediens Phoebus* I converted into "sunrise" for the sake of the scene. Bacchus is named twice, once as *Lyaeo*, then as *Liber*—I translate the first into its English form "Release," capitalized since it is divine in force but yet impersonal as it seems to be in the Latin; and I leave *Liber* as *Liber*, rather than turning it into the more familiar Bacchus, because it is so much a better sound, and reminds one of the word for a book, or a child, or freedom, a little treat for the thoughtful.

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FR. STEPHEN ANDREW GREGG, O. CIST., is a doctoral candidate in Literature in the Institute of Philosophic Studies, working with a dissertation on the interplay of divine and human love and beauty in the poetry of Edmund Spenser. Before entering the monastery, he studied Classics and Mediaeval Studies at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN, and as a monk has studied Philosophy and Theology at the University of Dallas and in Rome, where he earned a license in Patristics. He has taught as an adjunct at UD, as well as teaching many courses at the Cistercian Preparatory School.

The Latin for this translation is D. R. Shackleton Bailey's in the *Bibliotheca Teuberniana*, from 2001, republished in 2008 by Walter de Gruyter (which matches the Oxford Classical Text in all but punctuation).

## HORACE, ODE 3.21

O nata mecum consule Manlio,  
 seu tu querellas sive geris iocos  
 seu rixam et insanos amores  
 seu facilem, pia testa, somnum,

quocumque lectum nomine Massicum  
 servas, moveri digna bono die,  
 descendere Corvino iubente  
 promere languidiora vina.

non ille, quamquam Socratis madet  
 sermonibus, te neglegit horridus.  
 narratur et prisci Catonis  
 saepe mero caluisse virtus.

tu lene tormentum ingenio admoves  
 plerumque duro, tu sapientium  
 curas et arcanum iocoso  
 consilium retegis Lyaeo;

tu spem reducis mentibus anxiis  
 virisque et addis cornua pauperi  
 post te neque iratos trementi  
 regum apices neque militum arma;

te Liber et si laeta aderit Venus  
 segnesque nodum solvere Gratiae  
 vivaque producent lucernae,  
 dum rediens fugat astra Phoebus.

## TO INVOKE THE WINE

*For Karl Maurer*

O born, like me, in the time of Manlius,  
 if, with you, you bear quarrels or jests,  
 if strife or frenzied loves you bring,  
 or if, kind jug, calm sleep,

under whatever label you seal the select  
*rosso*, you fine pour for a good day,  
 descend, now that Corvinus commands,  
 to produce your mellower wines.

This man, although he's drenched with dialogues  
 of Socrates, does not rudely neglect you:  
 they say that ancient Cato's virtue  
 warmed with the pure stuff, too.

You apply your gentle, kneading pressure  
 to usually harsh characters, and you take  
 wise men's problems and arcane advice  
 and strip them in playful Release;

you bring hope back to anxious minds, and give  
 heart and horns to the poor man who, after you,  
 trembles no more at raging crowns  
 of kings or at soldiers' arms.

Liber and, if in joy she will come, Venus too,  
 and the Graces, slow to open their dancing ring,  
 and living lamps will conduct you forth,  
 till sunrise runs off the stars.