

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

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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).

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. Iambes 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.

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,
 descende Corvino iubente
 promere languidiora vina.

non ille, quamquam Socraticis madet
 sermonibus, te neglegit horridus.
 narratur et prisca 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 anxiiis
 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
 vivaeque 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.