

Horace

The Epodes
And
Carmen Saeculare

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Translator's Note

I have attempted an equivalent in English of Horace's use of Greek metres. Basically the number of metric beats in the Latin feet is reflected by English syllables, and the lines flexed to produce as decent an effect as possible. Rhythm is all important in such an attempt. It should be understood that the natural English line has five strong beats. Equally it can often sound strange when extended to accommodate more. I have not attempted to mirror the long and short beats in the Latin feet only their number, but used my ear to place the strong beats to create reasonable English verse.

Horace uses the Iambic strophe (5+7 syllables, then 8 syllables in alternate lines) for Epodes 1-10: the Third Archilochian (5+7, then 7+8) in Epode 11: the Alcmanic strophe (7+10, then 11) for Epode 12: the Second Archilochian (7+8 stopped, then 8+7) for Epode 13: the First Pythiambic (7+8 stopped, then 8) for Epodes 14 and 15: the Second Pythiambic (7+8 stopped then 5+7) for Epode 16: the Iambic Trimeter (5+7 varying) for Epode 17: and the Sapphic and Adonic metre (5+6 three times, then 5) for the Carmen Saeculare. Those interested in knowing more of the proper details of Latin metre (borrowed mostly from the Greek) should refer to a suitable text, for example the simple but excellent introduction in the Collins Latin Dictionary. Experts will be able to savour my difficulties, and may sympathise with the results!

Carmen Saeculare

O Phoebus, Diana queen of the woodlands,
Bright heavenly glories, both worshipped forever
And cherished forever, now grant what we pray for
At this sacred time,

When Sybilline verses have issued their warning
To innocent boys, and the virgins we've chosen,
To sing out their song to the gods, who have shown their
Love for the Seven Hills.

O kindly Sun, in your shining chariot, who
Herald the day, then hide it, to be born again
New yet the same, you will never know anything
Mightier than Rome!

O gentle Ilithyia, duly revealing
The child at full term, now protect gentle mothers,
Whether you'd rather be known as Lucina,
Or Genitalis.

Goddess, nurture our offspring, bring to fruition
The Senate's decrees concerning the wedlock
Of women who'll bear us more of our children,
The laws of marriage,

So the fixed cycle of years, ten times eleven,
Will bring back the singing again, bring back the games
We crowd to three times by daylight, as often,
By beautiful night.

And you, the Fates, who are truthful in prophecy,
Link happy destinies, as has once been ordained
And let the certain course of events confirm it,

To those that are past.

Let Earth that is fruitful in crops, and in cattle,
Adorn our Ceres with garlands of wheat-ears:
And may Jupiter's life-giving rain and breezes
Ripen the harvest.

Gentle and peaceful Apollo, lay down your arms,
And listen now to the young lads' supplications:
Luna, crescent-horned queen of the constellations,
Give ear to the girls.

If Rome is your doing, and if from far Ilium
Came that band of people who reached the Tuscan shore,
Those commanded to change their home and their city,
On a lucky course,

Those for whom pious Aeneas, the survivor,
Who passed without injury through the flames of Troy,
Prepared a path to freedom, destined to grant him
Much more than he'd lost:

Then, you divinities, show our receptive youth
Virtue, grant peace and quiet to the old, and give
Children and wealth to the people of Romulus,
And every glory.

Whatever a noble descendant of Venus
And Anchises, asks, with a white steer's sacrifice,
Let him obtain: a winner in war, merciful
To our fallen foe.

Now the Parthians fear our forces, powerful
On land, and on sea: they fear the Alban axes,
Now the once proud Indians, now the Scythians

Beg for an answer.

Now Faith and Peace, Honour, and ancient Modesty,
Dare to return once more, with neglected Virtue,
And blessed Plenty dares to appear again, now,
With her flowing horn.

May Phoebus, the augur, decked with the shining bow,
Phoebus who's dear to the Nine Muses, that Phoebus
Who can offer relief to a weary body
With his healing art,

May he, if he favours the Palatine altars,
Extend Rome's power, and Latium's good-fortune,
Through the fresh ages, show, always, improvement,
Lustra ever new.

And may Diana, to whom is the Aventine,
And Mount Algidus, accept the entreaties
Of the Fifteen, and attend, and lend a fond ear,
To these children's prayers.

We bear to our home the fine hope, and certain,
That such is Jupiter's, and all the gods' purpose:
We're taught, we, the chorus, to sing praise of Phoebus,
Praise of Diana.

Epode I – A Tribute to Maecenas

My friend, Maecenas, you'll sail among towering
Bulwarks, Liburnian galleys,
Ready to suffer, yourself, all of the danger
That may be threatening Caesar.
What of us to whom life's a joy if you survive,
Otherwise, filled with heaviness?
Shall we, as ordered, pursue ease and idleness,
That, lacking you, cannot be sweet,
Or shall we endure these hardships with the resolve
That's shown by resilient men?
We'll endure it, with firm hearts we'll follow you,
Whether over the Alpine ridge
Or on the heights of the savage Caucasus,
Or to the far vales of the West.
You ask how I can lighten your hardships by mine,
I, unwarlike, and lacking strength?
If I'm your companion, I'll suffer less fear
That grips us more when we're distant:
As the mother-bird dreads attack from slithering
Snakes on her unfledged chicks much more
When she's left them behind, though she could offer them
No more help if there at their side.
This and every war I will gladly undertake,
In hopes of winning your favour,
Not so that greater numbers of gleaming bullocks
Yoked to the plough can count as mine,
Not so my flocks can exchange Calabrian fields
For Lucanian ones, while it's cool,
Not so I can mention my splendid villa, close
To Tusculum's Circean walls.
Your generosity's enriched me already
Enough and more, and I'll not hoard,
Like Chremes, the miser, burying underground,

Nor lose it, a reckless spendthrift.

Epode II – The Delights of the Country

‘Blessed is he, who far from the cares of business,
Like one of mankind’s ancient race,
Ploughs his paternal acres, with his own bullocks,
And is free of usury’s taint,
Not roused as a soldier is, by the fierce trumpet,
Nor afraid of the angry sea,
Shunning the Forum, avoiding proud thresholds
Of citizens holding more power.
Instead he’s either out tying his full-grown vines
To the heights of his poplar trees,
Or watching his wandering herds of lowing cattle
In some secluded deep valley,
Or pruning the useless branches back with his knife,
And grafting superior ones,
Or storing thick honey away in clean vessels,
Or perhaps shearing helpless sheep:
Or when crowned with a garland of ripened fruit,
In the fields, Autumn rears its head,
How he takes delight in picking the grafted pears
And the grapes that vie with purple,
To honour Priapus, and Father Silvanus
Who’ll protect his boundaries.
It’s pleasant to lie now beneath some old oak-tree,
Or now on the springy turf,
While the streams go gliding, between their steep banks,
And little birds sing in the leaves,
And the fountains murmur, with flowing waters
That invite us to gentle sleep.
Then when Jove the Thunderer’s wintry season
Brings both rain and snow together,
With a pack of hounds you can drive fierce wild-boars,
Here and there, to waiting barriers,
Or on gleaming poles, stretch the broad-meshed nets out,

A snare for the greedy thrushes,
Or catch with a noose trembling hares, and migrating
Cranes, the most joyful of prizes.
Among such delights who can't fail to forget,
The sad cares that passion may bring?
And if a chaste wife should be playing her part there,
In caring for home and children,
Like a Sabine girl, or the sun-tanned wife, of some
Nimble-footed Apulian,
Piling the sacred hearth high with old firewood
For her weary man's arrival,
Penning the frisky flock in the wickerwork fold,
And draining the swollen udders,
Then pouring the year's sweet vintage from the jar,
And preparing a home-grown meal:
Then Lucrine oysters could never delight me more
Or a dish of scar or turbot,
Should winter thundering with Eastern waves
Direct them towards our coastline:
Not African fowls, nor Ionian pheasants
Could more happily pass my lips,
Than the fruit collected from the most heavily
Loaded branches of the olive,
Or the leaves of the meadow-loving sorrel,
Mallows good for a sick body,
Or a lamb sacrificed at Terminus' feast,
Or a kid retrieved from the wolf's jaws.
At such a meal what a pleasure it is to see
Flocks of sheep hurrying homewards,
The listless oxen dragging along an upturned
Ploughshare, yoked to their weary necks,
And the crowd of slaves born there on a wealthy farm,
Ranged all round the gleaming Lares.'
When Alfius the usurer has uttered all this,
On the verge of a rural life,

He recalls his money, once more, on the Ides,
On the Kalends, farms it again!

Epode III – Garlic!

If any man, with impious hand, should ever
Strangle an aged parent,
Make him eat garlic, it's deadlier than hemlock,
O you strong stomachs that cull it!
What poison is this that's burning my entrails?
Has viper's blood mixed with these herbs
Betrayed me? Or has Canidia been tampering
With this unfortunate dish?
Medea, intoxicated with her Jason,
That most handsome of Argonauts,
Smeared him all over with this, while he tried to yoke
Those bulls unused to the harness:
She took revenge on her rival with gifts of this,
Before mounting her winged dragon.
Never did such a vapour from any dog-star
Settle on parched Apulia:
Nessus' gift burnt Hercules' shoulders with no less
Effective a fiery heat.
If ever, my dear Maecenas, you aspire
To repeat the jest, I just pray
That your girl with her hands obstructs your kisses,
And takes the far side of the bed!

Epode IV – An Upstart

Whatever discord obtains, through fate, between lamb
And wolf, it's so with you and me,
You whose sides are scarred by the Spanish lash, whose legs
Are calloused by iron fetters.
Though you may strut around, so proud of your money,
Fortune can't alter your breeding.
As you measure the length of the Via Sacra
In a toga that's three yards wide,
Don't you see the unrestrained indignation,
On the faces of passers-by?
'This fellow, scourged by the triumvir's whip until
That officer was wearied,
Sets plough to a thousand Falernian acres,
His mules scour the Appian Way,
And ignoring Otho's ruling the great man sits,
Right there in the knights' front row!
What's the point of sending out so many sharp-prowed,
So many heavyweight, warships,
Against the pirates and servile hordes, if this,
This, ends up a soldiers' tribune?'

Epode V – The Witch’s Incantation

‘By all the heavenly gods that rule the world,
And command the human race,
What does this hubbub mean, and all these savage
Faces, turned towards me alone?
By your children, if Lucina came when called
To assist at their proper birth,
By these worthless rags of purple clothing, I pray,
By Jupiter who will condemn this,
Tell me why you gaze at me like my stepmother,
Or a beast pursued by the spears?’
When the lad, who lamented with trembling lips
Stood silent, stripped of a boy’s insignia,
His youthful body such a one as might soften
The impious hearts of Thracians:
Canidia, those blunt vipers entangled
In her head of dishevelled hair,
Ordered wild fig-trees, ripped from the sepulchres,
With funereal cypresses,
With the feathers and eggs of nocturnal screech-owls
All smeared with the blood of vile toads,
With herbs that Iolchos and Iberia, fertile
In poisons nurture for us,
And bones snatched from the jaws of a hungry bitch,
All to be burnt in Colchian flames.
Meanwhile eager Sagana, sprinkled water
From Avernus all through the house,
Hair fierce and bristling, like a spiny sea-urchin,
Or like a wild-boar in the chase.
And Veia, unrestrained by sign of conscience,
Was digging the earth, with a sturdy
Mattock, while groaning hard over her labours,
So the lad, buried to his neck,
His face showing like a swimmer’s, chin touching

The surface of the water,
Might die staring at food, brought and taken away
Two or three times each endless day:
This so his marrow and liver, extracted, then
Dried, might form a love potion,
When his eyeballs, fixed on the meal he was denied,
Had shrivelled all to nothingness.
Idle Naples, and every neighbouring town,
Believed that the mannish wanton,
Folia of Ariminum was also
Present as one of that number,
Who spirits away the stars with Thessalian
Charms, and steals the moon from the sky.
Then savage Canidia, gnawing a long nail
With livid tooth, what did she say
What did she not say? 'Oh, faithful witnesses
Of my actions, you, Night,
And you, Diana, who are the queen of silence,
Where our secret rites are performed,
Now, aid me now, now, turn your anger and power
Against the houses of my foes!
While wild beasts lie in the fearsome woods,
Wrapped in the sweetest slumber,
Let Subura's dogs bark at the old adulterer,
He whom everyone laughs at,
Who's smeared with the ointment that my hands prepared,
And never more perfectly.
What happened? Why have barbarous Medea's dire
Potions failed to work, those with which
She took vengeance on that proud paramour, great
Creon's daughter, then fleeing,
When the gift of a robe steeped in poisoned blood,
Engulfed the new-made bride in flames?
And yet no root or herb that may grow secretly
In wild places eluded me.

He is sleeping there between perfumed sheets
Forgetful of mistresses.
Alas! He walks at liberty, freed by the charms
Of some clever enchantress!
O Varus, doomed to a life heavy with weeping,
By use of no common potion
Will you return to me, nor will your devotion
Be revived by Marsian spells.
I'll prepare something stronger, a stronger dose I'll pour,
That will counter your disdain,
And sooner shall the sky sink under the sea,
With all the earth spread over both,
Than you not burn with passion for me, just like
Bitumen with its smoky flame.'
Hearing this the boy no longer tried, as before,
To mollify the impious,
But uncertain how best to break the silence,
Uttered Thyestean curses:
'Your magic spells can't alter right and wrong, or
Avert human retribution.
I'll pursue you with terrors: no sacrifice
Will expiate my dark threats.
Even when, doomed to death, I expire, I'll come
To you as a Fury by night,
A shadow whose crooked claws will tear your faces
With the Manes' divine power,
And settling myself in your unquiet hearts,
I'll drive sleep out with terror.
The crowd will crush you, obscene old hags, pelting you
With stones from every side:
And then the wolves and birds of the Esquiline,
Will scatter your unburied limbs,
And my parents, who will alas survive me, shall
Not miss a moment of that sight.

Epode VI – Reply to the Blackmailer

Why do you worry at innocent strangers, you
Cur, you coward when faced with wolves?
Why not direct your idle threats this way, if you
Dare: try me who will bite you back?
I'll pursue whatever wild beast runs before me,
Ears pricked, through the deepest snow,
Like a sturdy Molossian hound or a tawny
Laconian, the shepherd's friend:
When you've filled the woods with your timorous cries,
You sniff at the food that's thrown you.
Take care, take care: I lower my fierce horns eagerly
Against the doers of evil,
Like false Lycambes' slighted son-in-law, or
Bupalus' bitter enemy.
Do you think if a venomous tooth attacks *me*
I'll cry, un-avenged, like a child?

Epode VII – The Threat of Civil War

Villains where are you rushing to? Why are your hands
Grasping those swords that were sheathed?
Hasn't enough Roman blood been shed over
The fields, and Neptune's waves?
Yet not so that Rome could burn the proud towers
Of an envious Carthage,
Nor that as-yet-unconquered Britons, might descend
The Via Sacra in chains,
But so that fulfilling the Parthians' prayers
This city might destroy itself.
That isn't the way of even the wolves or lions:
They only fight other species.
Does a blind frenzy drive you, or some fiercer power,
Or some heinous crime? Answer me!
They're silent, a ghostly pallor dyes their faces,
Their minds overcome are dazed.
That's so: a bitter destiny dogs the Romans,
The guilt of a brother's murder,
Since Remus' innocent blood poured on the ground,
A curse on Rome's posterity.

Epode VIII – The Ancient Whore

Imagine asking what's stolen my powers, you
Stinking whore, all this endless time,
When you've one black tooth, and when ripe old age
Furrows your brow with wrinkles,
When an ugly hole like a leathery old cow's
Gapes between withered buttocks!
Yet that flabby chest, and those breasts, like the teats
Of a mare, can still excite me,
And that spongy belly, and those scrawny thighs,
Set on those swollen legs.
Bless you, and may masculine figures in triumph
Bear your funeral along.
Let no married woman wander about, weighed down
By rounder fruits than yours.
What if the little works of the Stoics prefer
To nest among silken pillows?
Illiterate sinews stiffen no less, do they:
Bewitched, it droops no less?
Either way to rouse it from a fastidious groin
It's your mouth must labour hard.

Epode IX – A Toast to Actium

Dear Maecenas, when in your noble house, as is
Jove's pleasure, shall I delight
With you in Caesar's triumph, drinking Caecuban
Cellared for festive banquets,
While lyre and flutes sound, mingling their melodies,
That Dorian, and these Italian?
As lately, when Pompey, driven from the sea,
Had fled, with his ships destroyed,
Having threatened the city with shackles he'd taken
From those faithless slaves, his friends.
A Roman, – you'll not credit it, posterity –
Sadly, ups sticks and arms himself,
For a woman's sake, and though a soldier, deigns
To serve the withered eunuchs,
While the sun looks down on her shameful pavilion,
Among the warlike standards.
At this sight two thousand Gauls, chanting Caesar,
Turned their snorting steeds aside,
And the opposing fleet, when ordered to larboard,
Remained there in the harbour.
Hail, Triumph! Why delay the golden chariots
And the unblemished steers?
Hail, Triumph! In the war with Jugurtha, you never
Returned such a general to us,
Nor was Africanus, whose courage made a tomb
For himself of Carthage, such.
The enemy, beaten at sea and on land,
Changes his scarlet cloak for black.
Against opposing winds, he either heads for Crete,
Famed for her hundred cities,
Or tries for Syrtes, blown by the northerlies,
Or is borne over unknown seas.
Bring more spacious bowls, lad, and pour the Chian,

Lesbian, or Caecuban wine
That's designed to prevent all seasick qualms.
Let's delight in banishing fear and anxiety
For Caesar's affairs, with sweet wine.

Epode X – Bad Wishes to Mevius

The ship sets sail, under evil auspices,
Carrying that stinker Mevius.
Remember to strike both her sides with dreadful
Breakers, O you Southerlies.
May a black Easterly scatter her broken oars,
And ropes on a foaming sea:
May a Northerly rise, one that shatters trembling
Oaks on high mountain summits.
May no friendly stars appear in the dark night
When grim Orion is setting:
And may he be borne on no gentler sea, than was
The host of victorious Greeks,
When Pallas turned her anger from blazing Ilium
Against Ajax' impious vessel.
Oh how your sailors will sweat, and you, what green
Pallor is waiting for you,
And that un-manly wailing, and those prayers
Sent up to a hostile Jove,
When the Ionian Sea, bellowing with gales
From the damp south, smashes your ship.
But if you lie a rich prize on a curving shore,
To gladden the sea-birds,
A lusty goat and a lamb will be sacrificed
To the great gods of the storm!

Epode XI – In Love

Pettius, no more do I delight, as before,
To scribble my poetry, I've been struck by love's heavy dart,
Love, that aims to make me, more so than another,
Burn with passion for tender boys, with passion for tender girls.
The third December now is shaking the glory
From the woods, since I left off my madness for Inachia.
Woe to me, ashamed of so ill an affliction,
How I was gossiped about! And I hate to think of the feasts,
Where my listlessness, my silences, and the sighs
That were drawn from the depths of my heart, proved my love-sick
state.

'Oh that a poor man's innocent mind can't compete
With the power of gold!' I'd often complain to you in tears,
Once the shameless god had warmed me violently,
With the wine that discovered where my secrets were hidden.
'If only open indignation would boil up
In my heart, and scatter these unwelcome outpourings of grief,
That in no way ease the pain of my sufferings,
I could banish modesty, and stop vying with lesser men.'
When I'd sternly praised this course of action to you,
And was ordered off home, still I went with irresolute step,
Towards, alas, that unfriendly doorway, towards,
Alas, that hard threshold, where I tormented my loins and sides.
Love for Lyciscus grips me, she who prides herself
On outdoing every other woman in tenderness:
She from whom no frank counsel offered by my friends,
She from whom the sternest reproaches, can never set me free,
Only another infatuation, for some
Sweet girl or tender boy, with their hair gathered up in a knot.

Epode XII – Not up to it

‘What’s up with you then, woman, some big black elephant would suit?

Why are you sending me letters, and presents,
When I’m no powerful youth: nor am blessed with a great fat nose?

Besides I’m uniquely skilled at sniffing out
Whether a polyp, or some goatish stench sleeps in those armpits,
Like a keen-nosed hound, that knows where the sow’s hid.’

What a sweat spreads over her shrivelled limbs, what a foul odour
Rises when, with my penis lying all slack,

She races to quench her ungovernable frenzy, and her
Damp cosmetics and her tinted make-up, dyed
With crocodile dung won’t stay on, and already she’s making
The over-strained bed and its canopy burst.

Or again she’s assaulting my pride with her savage verbals:

‘You’re less tired with that Inachia than me:

You can do Inachia three times running, with me you’re soft
After one. May she end badly, this Lesbia,

I, who’d hoped for a bull, and only proved you were impotent,
And there, I’d Amyntas of Cos right to hand,
He in whose insatiable groin a prick is planted
More firmly than any young tree in the hills.

These woollen fleeces repeatedly dyed Tyrian purple,
Whom were they just run up for? Surely for you,

Lest there might be a guest among your peers, whose woman
Might think more of him than she does of you.

O unhappy me, how you shrink from me, like a lamb
The fierce wolves frighten, or a deer the lion!’

Epode XIII – Defying the Storm

A dreadful storm has contracted the sky, and the driving rain
And snow bring Jupiter to earth: and now the sea and the woods
Resound with the Thracian northerly. My friends let us seize
The chance that the day now grants us, and while our limbs are
strong

And it's right, banish all seriousness from our clouded brows.
Bring out that vintage that was pressed in my Torquatus' year.
Don't speak of those other things: the god perhaps with kindly
Fortune, will make them subside. Now's the time to delight in
The flow of Persian nard, and ease our hearts of the weight
Of this dreadful anxiety, with the Cyllenian lyre,
As the famous Centaur once sang, to his noble ward Achilles:
'O, invincible mortal child of the sea-goddess Thetis,
The land of Assaracus awaits you, through which there flows
The Scamander's trickling stream, and slow gliding Simois,
From which the Fates, with their thread so sure, forbid your return,
Nor can your sea-green mother ever carry you home again.
Over there, ease every ill with the power of wine and song,
With those sweet consolations for your bitter distress of mind.'

Epode XIV – Unfinished Business

Frankly, Maecenas, you hurt me by asking so often
Why passive indolence has spread
As profound a forgetfulness through my senses as if
I had, with a throat quite parched,
Completely drained the cup that brings on Lethean slumber:
For a god, a god forbids me
To draw to their conclusion the iambs I've begun,
The poem that I once promised.
Teian Anacreon, they say, was similarly inflamed
By the Samian, Bathyllus,
And frequently wept of love to the echoing lyre
In the simplest of measures.
You burn yourself, you wretch: and if no more beautiful flame
Set fire to besieged Ilium,
Be happy with your fate: I'm troubled by Phryne, who's free,
Not content with only one man.

Epode XV – Faithlessness

It was night, and a cloudless sky, and the moon was shining
Among the inferior stars,
When you, about to offend against the great gods' power,
Swore words of loyalty to me,
Clinging to me more tightly, with your entwining arms,
Than ivy to the towering oak,
Swore that while wolves threatened the flock, while Orion, the
sailor's
Enemy, stirred the wintry sea,
That while the breezes should flutter, in Apollo's unshorn hair,
Our mutual love would endure.
O Neaera, you're destined to grieve long for my virtues!
For if Flaccus is some sort of man,
He'll not allow you to spend every night with another,
Angered he'll seek a truer mate:
Nor will his lasting injury be assuaged by your sweet charms
Once true sorrow has entered him.
You too, whoever you are, happily walking around now,
Superior to my troubles,
Though you may be wealthy with flocks, and great parcels of land,
Though Pactolus flows just for you,
Though you've the Pythagorean secret of reincarnation,
And surpass Nireus' beauty,
You'll still have to mourn, alas, for affections transferred
elsewhere.
And I, in turn, will be laughing!

Epode XVI – A Remedy for Civil War

Another generation now's been ground down by civil war,
And Rome herself's being ruined by her own power.
What the neighbouring Marsians could not destroy,
Nor the threat of Porsena's Etruscan armies,
Nor Capua's rival strength, nor the fierceness of Spartacus,
Nor the Gauls, who proved disloyal in changing times,
Nor that savage Germany he conquered, with its blue-eyed youth,
Nor Hannibal detested by our ancestors:
Our impious generation, of cursed blood, will destroy,
And the land will belong again to beasts of prey.
A savage victor, alas, will stamp on our city's ashes
The horsemen will trample them with echoing hoof,
And, vile to see, will insolently scatter Quirinus' bones,
That are still sheltered, as yet, from the sun and winds!
Perhaps, as would be wise, all, or the better part of you,
Would prefer to escape this grievous suffering?
Let no other plan be adopted but this, that just as
The Phoceans fled into exile, having cursed
Their fields and ancestral gods, leaving behind their temples
To become the lairs of boars and ravening wolves,
Let us go wherever our feet take us, wherever the Northern,
Or the boisterous African gales, shall call us.
Does that please you? Has anyone a better idea? Why
Wait to go aboard ship when the omens are good?
But swear to this: it will only be right to return when rocks
Shall rise from the ocean depths, and shall float again,
We'll only be ready to trim our sails, turn for home once more,
When the Po shall wash the Mantinian summits,
When the towering Apennines shall jut out into the sea,
When unnatural affection mates monsters together
In strange desire, so tigers will long to take deer,
And the doves will delight in union with kites,
The trustful herd will show no fear of the tawny lion,

And a smooth-scaled goat will love the briny waters.
Pledging this, and whatever prevents return being sweet,
Let all citizens leave, having taken the vow,
Or that part superior to the ignorant herd: the soft
And the hopeless, can keep to their ill-fated beds!
You who have courage, away now with womanish weeping,
Sail on swiftly beyond the Etruscan shores.
The encircling Ocean is awaiting us: let us seek out
The fields, the golden fields, the islands of the blest,
Where the land, though still untilled, yields a harvest every year,
And the vines flower forever, though un-pruned,
Where the shoots of the olive-trees bud, and are never failing,
The dark fig graces the branch of its native tree,
Honey flows from the hollow ilex, and from the lofty hill
The stream leaps lightly down with a splashing of feet.
There the goats come, without being told, to the milking pail,
And the willing flock returns with swelling udders,
No bears roam growling round the sheep-fold when evening falls,
Nor is the higher ground swollen thick with vipers:
And happily we'll wonder at further marvels, how rainy
Eurus fails to deluge the fields with showers,
How the fertile seed's not burnt and killed by the sun-baked soil,
Since the king of the skies moderates rain and sun.
No pine keel, with Argo's oarsmen at work at the oars, sailed here,
Here no shameless Colchian woman set her feet:
No Sidonian merchants turned their yardarms towards this place,
No toiling sailors who crewed for Ulysses.
No contagion comes to harm the flock, no constellation's
Burning violence comes to scorch the lowing herds.
Jupiter set aside these shores for a virtuous people,
When once he had dimmed the age of gold with bronze:
With bronze, with iron, he made the centuries harder, from which
My prophecy grants the virtuous sweet escape.

Epode XVII – A Recantation

‘Now, now, to your powerful arts I at last surrender,
I beg, on bended knee, by Persephone’s kingdom,
And by Diana’s unchanging divinity,
And by the books of incantations, whose effect
Can unfix the stars, call them down from the sky,
Canidia, leave off your magic spells at last
And let the onward whirling wheel, reverse, reverse!
Telephus once moved great Achilles to pity,
Against whom he’d arrayed the Mysian armies,
And, in all his pride, he’d hurled his sharpened spears.
The Trojan women, too, were allowed to anoint
Man-slaying Hector, a prey to dogs and vultures,
When Priam left the city walls behind, alas,
And fell at the feet of unyielding Achilles.
Even the labouring oarsmen of Ulysses
By Circe’s will won free of bristling limbs, tough hides,
So that all regained their speech and intellect,
Won back the usual features of their faces.
I’ve paid what I owed you, and paid enough and more,
You, so greatly beloved by sailors and peddlers!
My youth has fled, my rosy cheeks have vanished:
My bones are covered now with yellowing skin,
My hair is whitened by your odorous unguents,
No respite ever frees me from your torments:
Night urges on the day, day urges night, no breath
Of air I take it seems can ease my straining breast.
Wretched then, I’m forced to believe what I denied,
Sabellian charms can work against the heart,
The head can be split apart by Marsian spells.
What more do you wish? O sea and earth, I’m on fire,
More so than Hercules steeped in Nessus’ dark blood,
More so than all the Sicilian flames, alive
In fiery Etna: you’ll be a glowing workshop

Of Colchian poisons, till I, turned dry ashes,
Am carried far away by injurious winds.
Tell me what end, say, what punishment awaits me?
I'll pay the penalties, faithfully, you demand,
Ready for expiation, whether you order
A hundred bullocks, or wish the mendacious lyre
To ring out for you: chaste and virtuous, you *shall*
Tread through the stars, as a golden constellation.
Castor, and Castor's mighty brother, offended
By that insult to Helen, were wooed by prayer,
And to the poet restored the sight they'd taken:
So you – since you can – please take away my madness,
O you, unsullied by all ancestral meanness,
No old hag skilled in scattering funeral ashes
Each day for nine days round the gravestones of the poor.
No, no, your heart is kindly and your hands are pure,
Pactumeius *is* the son of your belly
The sheets the midwife washed *were* stained with your blood,
However sprightly you were springing from childbirth.'
'Why do you pour out these prayers to ears tight shut?
No deafer to the cries of the shipwrecked sailors
Are the cliffs that wintry Neptune pounds with his surge.
So you'll laugh and disclose the Cotytian rites
Unpunished, make free with Cupid's worship, will you,
You, the high-priest of Esquiline incantation,
Fill the town with talk of me, and go unpunished?
What use would it have been enriching all those old
Paelignian hags, to concoct swifter poisons?
But a slower fate awaits you than you pray for:
Wretch, you must suffer a wearisome life for this,
And be available always for fresh torment.
Tantalus, faithless Pelop's father, yearns for rest,
Forever longing to reach the plenteous feast:
Prometheus yearns, chained fast to the bird of prey:
Sisyphus yearns to roll his rock to the mountain

Summit: but the laws of Jupiter restrain them.
You'll be eager to leap from the highest tower,
To pierce your breast perhaps with an Alpine blade,
In vain you'll go winding the noose about your throat,
Melancholy, with a wearisome mind-sickness.
Then saddled-up I'll ride across your vile shoulders,
And the earth will open wide at my excesses.
Shall I who can bring to life waxen images,
As you know yourself from prying, I who can,
By incantations, snatch the moon out of the sky,
I who can raise again the ashes of the dead,
And mix together subtly the cup of desire,
Shall I weep, shall my art fail to work on you alone?

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