

# Goethe

## Venetian Epigrams



A View of Venice with The Doge's Palace, Saint Mark's Campanile and Santa Maria Della Salute (1821)  
Roberto Roberti (1786-1837)

[Artvee](#)

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### **Translator's Introduction**

Goethe (1749-1832) was in Italy, and Sicily, from 1786 to 1788, his visit having a profound influence on his poetic and philosophical development. Closer contact with the remains, in Rome, of the Roman Classical world, and, in Sicily, with Classical Greek architecture, deepened his knowledge and understanding of ancient Greek and Roman culture, influenced as he had been by the writings of Winckelmann. Classicism tempered his initial leanings towards Romanticism throughout his later career. *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1787), the *Roman Elegies* (1795) the prose journal *Italian Journey* (1817), and the second part of *Faust* (1832), bear particular witness to this. Goethe revisited Venice in 1790, on a quasi-official mission, and the Epigrams which resulted from his visit give a more cynical and disillusioned, some might say realistic, view of Italy, and the city, prompted to a great extent by his personal life and circumstances at the time. His frankness regarding the erotic life, and his expressions of intense dislike with regard to fundamental aspects of Christianity, and contemporary religion, led to much criticism and disapproval of these *Venetian Epigrams* in his day, and some may still find them offensive. Many of the epigrams contain erotic double-entendres. Let the reader beware!

**Epigram I: (Sarkophagen und Urnen verzierte der Heide mit Leben)**

Sarcophagi, urns, were all covered with lifelike scenes,  
Fauns dancing with girls from a Bacchanalian choir,  
Paired-off, goat-footed creatures puffing their cheeks,  
Forcing ear-splitting notes from blaring horns.  
Cymbals and drumbeats, the marble is seen and heard.  
How delightful the fruit in the beaks of fluttering birds!  
No startling noise can scare them, or scare away love,  
Amor, whose torch waves more gladly in this happy throng.  
So, fullness overcomes death, and the ashes within  
Seem still, in their silent house, to feel love's delight.  
So may the Poet's sarcophagus be adorned,  
With this book the writer has filled with the beauty of life.

**Epigram II: (Kaum an dem blauerem Himmel erblickt' ich die glänzende Sonne)**

As soon as I saw the sun gleaming now in a bluer sky,  
Rich ivy, gathered in wreaths, plunging from the rock,  
The vine-dressers busily tying vines to the poplar-trees,  
A gentle breeze came blowing from Virgil's cradle:  
The Muses gathered to meet their friend; and we made  
That broken conversation that travellers ever enjoy.

**Epigram III: (Immer halt' ich die Liebste begierig im Arme geschlossen)**

Ever, I hold my loved one, eagerly, in my arms,  
Ever, my heart is pressed tightly against her breast,  
Ever, my head I lean against her knees, and gaze  
At her lovely mouth, and then gaze upon her eyes.  
'Idler!' They scold, 'Is this how you spend your days?'  
Yes, I spend them badly! Just listen to what occurs:  
Saddened, when I turn my back on life's only joy,  
The carriage drags me back for the twentieth day.  
The coachmen mock me, the chamberlain flatters,  
The servant on the door is full of lies and deceit.

To evade their eyes only the Postmaster will do;  
Postmen are the lords here, and Customs men too!  
'I don't understand! All contradiction, you seemed  
To be wholly in paradise, and as happy as Rinaldo.'  
Oh! I understand it well: my body alone travels,  
While my spirit rests, forever, in my beloved's lap.

**Epigram IV: (Das ist Italien, das ich verließ. Noch stäuben die Wege)**

Here's the Italy I left, the paths still cloaked with dust,  
The foreigner still cheated, let one pretend as one likes.  
Go look, in every corner, for German honesty, in vain;  
There's living and plotting here, no order, no discipline;  
They care for themselves alone, mistrust others, are idle,  
And the leaders of the state look to themselves as well.  
The country is beautiful still; but Faustina I can't find.  
Here's that Italy, no longer, that I left with so much pain.

**Epigram V: (In der Gondel lag ich gestreckt und fuhr durch die Schiffe)**

I lay stretched out in a gondola, gliding among the vessels  
That moor in the Grand Canal, filled with their wares.  
You'll find many a thing there, to satisfy many a need,  
Wheat, wine, and vegetables, billets like leafy bushes.  
As we glided between, swift as a dart, a lone laurel  
Scratched my cheeks roughly. 'Daphne, why harm me?',  
I cried, 'I'd hoped for thanks!' The nymph lisped, with a smile:  
'Poets' sins are not heavy. The punishment's light. Sail on!'

**Epigram VI: (Se'ich den Pilgrim, so kann ich mich nie der Thränen enthalten)**

When I see a pilgrim, I can never refrain from tears.  
Oh, how blessed a false idea seems to humankind!

**Epigram VII: (Eine Liebe hatt' ich, sie war mir lieber als Alles!)**

I had a lover; dearer to me, she was, than anything!  
I possess her no more! Be silent, and bear the loss!

**Epigram VIII: (Diese Gondel verglich ich der sanft einschaukelnden Wiege)**

I'd compare this gondola to a gently rocking cradle,  
And the cabin on top seems like a spacious coffin.  
Quite so! Between cradle and coffin, we float along,  
Swaying, carelessly, on the Grand Canal of Life.

**Epigram IX: (Feyerlich sehn wir neben dem Doge den Nuncius gehen)**

I see the Nuncio walking, solemnly, beside the Doge;  
They are burying the Lord; one of them seals the tomb.  
What the Doge is thinking, I know not; but the other  
Surely smiles at the seriousness of this sad charade.

**Epigram X: (Warum treibt sich das Volk so, und schreit? Es will sich ernähren)**

Why do folk rush around shouting? They wish to eat,  
To beget children, and raise them as best they can.  
Remember that, traveller, and do the same at home!  
None can do better, no matter what they desire.

**Epigram XI: (Wie sie klingeln, die Pfaffen! Wie angelegen sie's machen)**

How they go on, these priests! How eager they are to see  
Folk listening to their babble, today, just as yesterday!  
I don't lay the blame on the priests: they know folks' needs!  
Happy to hear tomorrow the babble they heard today!

**Epigram XII: (Mache der Schwärmer sich Schüler, wie Sand am Meere - der Sand ist)**

Let the zealot gather disciples to himself,  
As the sea collects sand – sand is but sand,  
The pearl is mine, oh my sensible friend!

**Epigram XIII: (*Süß den sprossenden Klee mit weichlichen Füßen im Frühling*)**

Sweet to tread the fresh clover, softly, in the spring,  
And stroke the little lambs' wool with tender hand;  
Sweet to see the branches newly-alive with blossom,  
When the greening leaves entice our longing glance.  
But sweeter, to deck the shepherdess' breast with flowers;  
And let mutual happiness help us forget that it's May.

**Epigram XIV: (*Diesem Ambos vergleich' ich das Land, den Hammer dem Herrscher*)**

I'd compare this land to an anvil, its lord to a hammer:  
The people to a sheet of metal that's bent between.  
Woe then to the metal, when it is struck, at random,  
With unsure blows and the work is never complete!

**Epigram XV: (*Schüler macht sich der Schwärmer genug, und rühret die Menge*)**

The zealot makes many a disciple, by stirring the rabble,  
While the sensible man counts only a single lover.  
Miraculous images are mostly merely bad paintings:  
Works of art and the spirit are not made for the crowd.

**Epigram XVI: (*Mache zum Herrscher sich der, der seinen Vortheil versteht*)**

Forever, those rule who know what benefits them,  
While we'd prefer those who understood our needs.

**Epigram XVII: (Noth lehrt beten, man sagt's; will einer es lernen, er gehe)**

Need teaches us to pray, so they say; if any would learn,  
Come to Italy, the traveller will certainly find need here.

**Epigram XVIII: (Welch ein heftig Gedränge nach diesem Laden! Wie emsig)**

What a vast crowd throngs here in this shop! How busily  
They weigh product, are paid, and hand over the goods!  
Snuff is sold here. Here, one truly knows one's own self!  
Hemlock's swallowed, no need for doctors or prescriptions.

**Epigram XIX: (Jeder Edle Venedigs kann Doge werden; das macht ihn)**

Any Venetian noble could become a Doge, making them,  
From a child, precious, singular, thoughtful, and proud.  
That's why wafers are so thin in Catholic Switzerland,  
From that selfsame dough God consecrates its priests.

**Epigram XX: (Ruhig am Arsenal stehn zwey altgriechische Löwen)**

Two ancient Greek lions stand quiet at the Arsenale;  
Seeming small next to the gates, canal, and tower.  
If Cybele came down, they would nestle together,  
Before her, happy to pull her chariot once more.  
But now they rest there sadly; a new winged tomcat  
Purrs everywhere, and Venice calls him her Patron.

**Epigram XXI: (Emsig wallet der Pilger! Und wird er den Heiligen finden?)**

The pilgrim wanders diligently! Will he find his saint?  
Will he see and hear the man who wrought miracles?  
No, Time snatched him away: he'll only find relics,  
His skull and one or two of his bones, treasured yet.

Pilgrims are we all, we who go searching for Italy;  
Honouring a few scattered bones, in faith and joy.

**Epigram XXII: (Jupiter Pluvius, heut erscheinst du ein freundlicher Dämon)**

Jupiter Pluvius you seem a friendly demon today,  
Granting gifts, many times over, in a moment:  
Grant Venice water, green growth to the land;  
And grant me a few little poems for this book here.

**Epigram XXIII: (Gieße nur, tränke nur fort die rothbemäntelten Frösche)**

Grant water, water, only to the red-mantled frogs;  
Water the thirsty land so it yields us green broccoli.  
But don't water down this book; make it a flask  
Of pure Arrack, so all can make punch as they please.

**Epigram XXIV: (Sanct Johannes im Koth heißt jene Kirche; Venedig)**

This church is called San Giovanni in Bragora; Venice,  
Now, I'm doubly right to call Saint Mark's in the Mud.

**Epigram XXV: (Hast du Bajä gesehen, so kennst du das Meer und die Fische)**

If you've seen Baiae, you'll know about waves and fish.  
Here's Venice; now you know about marshes and frogs.

**Epigram XXVI: (Schläfst du noch immer? Nur still, und laß mich ruhen; erwach' ich)**

'Are you sleeping still?' Be quiet, let me rest; I'm awake,  
Well, what should I do? The bed is wide, but it's empty.  
As bare as Sardinia, everywhere, when you sleep alone;  
Tibur, my friend, all around, when your darling wakes you.

**Epigram XXVII: (Alle Neun, sie winkten mir oft, ich meine die Musen)**

All Nine often used to come to me, I mean the Muses:  
But I ignored them: my girl was in my arms.  
Now I've left my sweetheart: and they've left me,  
And I roll my eyes, seeking a knife or rope.  
But Heaven is full of gods: you come to aid me:  
Greetings, Boredom, Mother of the Muse.

**Epigram XXVIII: (Welch ein Mädchen ich wünsche zu haben? Ihr fragt mich. Ich hab' sie)**

What kind of girl do I want? I have one, I think,  
As often as I wish, though she's wholly within.  
I went to the sea, looking for shells. And in one  
I found a pearl, that remains now, close to my heart.

**Epigram XXIX: (Vieles hab' ich versucht, gezeichnet, in Kupfer gestochen)**

I've tried many things, drawing, engraving on copper,  
Painting in oil, even moulding various things in clay,  
Badly, however, with nothing learned or achieved;  
There's only one skill I've come close to mastering,  
Writing German. And so, a wretched poet, I perish,  
Life and art exist, here, in the poorest material now.

**Epigram XXX: (Schöne Kinder tragt ihr, und steht mit verdeckten Gesichtern)**

You bear lovely children, and beg, with your face covered;  
Which speaks with its own voice to the masculine heart.  
All men want a child, as through your poverty, you show,  
And a beloved, such as one dreams lies beneath your veil.



**Epigram XXXI: (Das ist dein eigenes Kind nicht, worauf du bettelst, und rührst mich)**

It's not even your child she begs for, she who stirs you;  
Oh, how she would stir me if she produced my own!

**Epigram XXXII: (Warum leckst du dein Mäulchen, indem du mir eilig begegnest?)**

Why do you lick your lips, when you meet me so hurriedly?  
Your little tongue's telling me, truly, how eloquent it can be.

**Epigram XXXIII: (Sämtliche Künste lernt und treibet der Deutsche; zu jeder)**

We Germans learn and practice all the arts; and show  
A fine talent for them all, when we treat them gravely.  
But there's one we practice, and never learn: poetry.  
That's why we botch it so, my Friends, as you've seen.

**Epigram XXXIV: (Oft erklärt ihr euch als Freunde des Dichters, ihr Götter!)**

You often declare you're a friend to a poet, you gods!  
Will you grant him what he needs? It's fairly modest.  
First, friendly lodgings, good things to eat and drink;  
A German knows how to sip nectar, the same as you.  
Then appropriate clothing, a few confidential friends;  
And a lover at night who wants him with all her heart.  
These are the five basic things, above all else, I need.  
Grant me a knowledge of languages too, new and old,  
So, I may hear of people's doings, and all their tales;  
Grant me a pure feeling for all that's done in the arts.  
Grant that they'll respect me, and the powerful listen,  
And whatever else seems fitting amongst humankind;  
I thank you, truly you gods; you have almost made me  
The happiest of men: most of those I already possess.

**Epigram XXXV: (*Eines Menschen Leben, was ist's? Doch Tausende können*)**

A man's life, what is it? And yet many a thousand  
Will criticise him, and what he achieves, and how.  
A poem's a lesser thing; though thousands enjoy it,  
Thousands carp. My friend, live your life, write on!

**Epigram XXXVI: (*Müde war ich geworden, nur immer Gemähle zu sehen*)**

I grow weary of looking at all these endless paintings,  
Wondrous treasures of art, such as Venice holds;  
Despite them, relaxation and leisure are needed;  
My gaze, searched longingly for something lively.  
Acrobat! I saw in you the archetype of all little boys:  
Those charming ones Giovanni Bellini gave wings,  
The one Paulo Veronese has sent to the bridegroom,  
Whose guests, deceived, drink water turned to wine.

**Epigram XXXVII: (*Wie, von der künstlichsten Hand geschnitzt, das liebe Figürchen*)**

As if carved by the skilfullest hand, that dear little form,  
All soft and boneless, just like an Octopus swimming!  
All's linked, all joined together, and all of it pleasing,  
All made to measure, with everything moving at will.  
I've come across men and animals, birds, and fish,  
Many a unique creature, amidst Nature's wonders;  
Yet you amaze me, Bettina, you, loveliest miracle,  
You are all of that together, and an angel as well.

**Epigram XXXVIII: (*Kehre nicht, liebliches Kind, die Beinchen hinauf zu dem Himmel*)**

Dear child, don't wave your feet so, at the heavens;  
Jove sees you, little rascal; Ganymede's worried.

**Epigram XXXIX: (Wende die Füßchen zum Himmel nur ohne Sorge!  
Wir strecken)**

Turn your little feet to heaven without a care! I raise  
Arms stretched in prayer; but not as innocently as you.

**Epigram XL: (Seitwärts neigt sich dein Hälschen. Ist das ein Wunder?  
Es target)**

Your neck tilts to the side. Is it any wonder? It often  
Bears a load; you're light, just heavy about the neck.  
I don't mind the inclination of that little head at all;  
No neck ever bowed under a more beautiful burden.

**Epigram XLI: (So verwirret mit dumpf willkürlich verwebten Gestalten)**

So, hellish and gloomily-minded Breughel's darkened gaze  
Confuses us with his dim, haphazardly-mingled figures.  
So, Dürer too troubles our healthy brains with apocalyptic  
Imagery, strange people and whimsical figures alike;  
So, the poet excites us, with sphinxes, centaurs, sirens,  
Singing with curious power, filling the wondering ear;  
So, a dream moves the troubled mind when it grips one.  
You think you're moving; everything changes and floats:  
So, Bettina confuses me, a confusion of lovely limbs;  
And yet she delights me, whenever she stirs her feet.

**Epigram XLII: (Gern überschreit' ich die Gränze, mit breiter Kreide  
gezogen)**

I'd like to cross the line, that's drawn broadly in chalk.  
She's playing 'Shop', the child, and artfully pushes me back.

**Epigram XLIII: ('Ach! mit diesen Seelen, was macht er? Jesus Maria!')**

'Oh! what does He make of all these souls? Gesù Maria!  
Like bundles of washing, all borne away to be cleansed.  
Look, she's fallen! I can't bear it! Up again! How neat!  
Look how she stands! How lightly! Smiling and happy!  
Old lady, you admire Bettina, rightly; and seem to me  
Both younger and lovelier, since my darling pleases you.

**Epigram XLIV: (Alles seh' ich so gerne von dir; doch seh' ich am liebsten)**

I love everything that you do; but what I like best  
Is when the Lord nimbly turns you, upside-down.  
You flip right over, but then, after the fateful leap,  
Stand up, and run about, as if nothing's occurred.

**Epigram XLV: (Schon entrunzelt sich jedes Gesicht; die Furchen der Müh)**

Every face that was frowning before; the furrows of toil,  
Worry, and poverty, all flee, you see only happy people.  
The boatman softens for you, and pats you on the cheek;  
His purse is quite empty, for you he'll untie it though.  
And every Venetian unfolds his cloak, and offers it you,  
Just as if you begged aloud: 'By St. Anthony's Miracle,  
By the Lord's Five Wounds, the Blessed Virgin's Heart,  
By the fiery torment that forever sweeps through souls.'  
Every urchin, gondolier, every tradesman, does the like,  
And, in doing so, is happy to be a child once more, like you.

**Epigram XLVI: (Dichten ist ein lustig Metier; nur find' ich es theuer)**

Poetry is an amusing profession; but somewhat expensive I find:  
The more this little book of mine grows, the more coins vanish.

**Epigram XLVII: (Welch ein Wahnsinn ergriff die Müßigen? Hältst du nicht inne?)**

‘What madness seizes you, Idler? Do you ever stop?  
Will this girl become a book? Pen something greater!’  
Wait, and I’ll sing of leaders, the great of the earth,  
When I understand all their doings better, as I will.  
But I sing of Bettina now; since acrobats and poets  
Are closely related and, ever, seek one another out.

**Epigram XLVIII: (‘Böcke, zur Linken mit euch!’ so ordnet künftig der Richter!)**

‘Goats, to the left with you!’ the Judge will one day command:  
‘And you little sheep, you can stand, quietly, at my right hand!’  
Well! But one thing we might hope for, still, is that He’ll say:  
‘You, sensible ones, come and stand right in front of me!’

**Epigram XLIX: (Wißt ihr, wie ich gewiß zu Hunderten euch Epigramme)**

Do you know what makes me write many an epigram?  
Just the being so far away from the one I love!

**Epigram L: (Alle Freyheits-Apostel, sie waren mir immer zuwider)**

All the apostles of freedom were always repugnant to me;  
Free-will, in the end, is each one looking out for themself.  
If you want to free the many, then dare to serve the many.  
Would you like to know how dangerous that is? Then try!

**Epigram LI: (Könige wollen das Gute, die Demagogen desgleichen)**

‘Our rulers will what’s good for us, demagogues do the same.’  
So, folk say; but they’re wrong: they’re just human like us.  
The crowd never knows what it wants; all understand:  
That whoever knew what he wanted would disclose it.

**Epigram LII: (*Jeglichen Schwärmer schlägt mir an's Kreuz im dreyßigsten Jahre*)**

Every zealot should be crucified, I think, when he's thirty;  
If he never saw Earth again, he'd know himself deceived.

**Epigram LIII: (*Frankreichs traurig Geschick, die Großen mögen's bedenken*)**

Let the great of this world consider France's sad fate;  
And humble folk need to consider it even more.  
The nobles died: and who then protected the masses  
From themselves? It was tyranny, one against another.

**Epigram LIV: (*Tolle Zeiten hab' ich erlebt, und hab' nicht ermangelt*)**

Many a good time I've had, and I've never failed  
To play the fool myself, as the times dictated.

**Epigram LV: (*Sage, thun wir nicht recht? Wir müssen den Pöbel betrügen*)**

'Tell me then, is it so wrong to deceive the mob?  
Just see how rough, just see how wild they are!'  
All folk who are deceived are rough and wild;  
Be honest then, and help them be more human.

**Epigram LVI: (*Fürsten prägen so oft auf kaum versilbertes Kupfer*)**

Rulers often print their noble image on barely-silvered  
Copper coins. For many a day folk have been deceived.  
Zealots likewise stamp the spirit with lies and nonsense;  
Which, lacking a touchstone to try them, folk think pure gold.

**Epigram LVII: (*Jene Menschen sind toll, so sagt ihr von heftigen Sprechern*)**

‘Those voices are powerful’, you say, of such violent speakers  
As one hears crying aloud, in France, in the market-place.  
They seem powerful to me too; but then madmen babble  
Wise sayings, while wisdom enslaved keeps silence alas!

**Epigram LVIII: (*Lange haben die Großen der Franzen Sprache gesprochen*)**

For a long time, our rulers have spoken the French language,  
Only half-paying attention to those who spoke it not.  
Now every nation joyfully embraces the French tongue.  
Don't be angry, dear rulers! What you sought is afoot.

**Epigram LIX: (*‘Seyd doch nicht so frech, Epigramme!’ Warum nicht? Wir sind nur*)**

‘Don't be so bold, you Epigrams!’ ‘Why not? We’re only  
Titles; the world itself contains the Chapters of our book.’

**Epigram LX: (*Wie dem hohen Apostel ein Tuch voll Thiere gezeigt ward*)**

As the Apostle Peter was shown a cloth full of animals,  
Clean and unclean, this little book shows itself to you.

**Epigram LXI: (*Ein Epigramm, ob wohl es gut sey? Kannst du's entscheiden?*)**

‘Is this epigram, any good?’ Can’t you decide for yourself?  
You won’t always know what the rascal was thinking.

**Epigram LXII: (Um so gemeiner es ist, und näher dem Neide, der Mißgunst)**

The nastier it is, and closer to resentment and envy,  
The more, no doubt, you'll understand the verse.

**Epigram LXIII: (Chloe schwöret, sie liebt mich; ich glaub's nicht. Aber sie liebt dich!)**

Chloe swears she loves me; I don't believe it. 'But she does!'  
Someone cried; not so; for if I did believe it, it wouldn't be so.

**Epigram LXIV: (Niemand liebst du, und mich, Philarchos liebst du so heftig)**

You who love no one, 'love' me, Philarchos, fiercely.  
Is there no other way to win me over than this?

**Epigram LXV: (Ist denn so groß das Geheimniß, was Gott und der Mensch und die Welt sey?)**

Is it so great a mystery, what God, Mankind, and the World are?  
No! But none like to hear it; so, it stays mysterious.

**Epigram LXVI: (Vieles kann ich ertragen. Die meisten beschwerlichen Dinge)**

Many a thing I can tolerate. And the most troublesome  
I endure with the firmest courage, as a god commands.  
However, few revolt me as much as poison and snakes;  
Only four: tobacco-smoke, insects, and garlic, and †

**Epigram LXVII: (Längst schon hätt' ich euch gern von jenen Thierchen gesprochen)**

I'd like to have told you about these little creatures long ago,  
They flicker so swiftly, and delicately, here and there.



They seem like little snakes, but have four feet; and run,  
Creep, slither, dragging their little tails behind them.  
Look, here they are! And there! Now they're gone! Where are they?  
What crack, what clump of weed captured them as they fled?  
If you'll allow me, I'll call the little creatures *lacertae*;  
Since I'll need that pleasing image for them, often, now.

**Epigram LXVIII: (Wer Lacerten gesehen, der kann sich die zierlichen Mädchen)**

Anyone who has seen *lacertae*, has those pretty things  
In mind, that roam about the squares, here and there.  
They are swift and agile, glide about, stand, and chatter,  
And their garments rustle behind them as they go.  
Look, she's here! She's there! Lose her once, and you'll  
Look in vain; she won't be reappearing anytime soon.  
But if you're not shy of searching corners, alleys, and stairways,  
Follow her as she lures you, into that *bettola* there!

**Epigram LXIX: (Was Spelunke nun sey, verlangt ihr zu wissen? Da wird ja)**

You'd like to know what a *bettola* is? All too soon  
This book of epigrams is turning into a lexicon.  
They're dark dives in narrow streets; the lovely girl  
Offers you coffee, and she does the work, not you.

**Epigram LXX: (Zwey der feinsten Lacerten, sie hielten sich immer zusammen)**

Two of the finest *Lacertae* always stick together;  
One is nigh-on too big, the other's nigh-on too small.  
Seeing both together, it's an impossible choice;  
Each is special, and seems to be the loveliest of all.

**Epigram LXXI: (Heilige Leute, sagt man, sie wollten besonders dem Sünder)**

Holy people, they say, love a sinner; especially,  
A female sinner. And I feel the same way too.

**Epigram LXXII: (Wär' ich ein häusliches Weib, und hätte, was ich bedürfte)**

'If I were a good little wife, and had what I needed,  
I'd be faithful, and happy, and hug and kiss my man.'  
This amongst other popular songs, a girl sang to me,  
In Venice, and never did I hear a more pious prayer.

**Epigram LXXIII: (Wundern kann es mich nicht, daß Menschen die Hunde so lieben)**

I'm not surprised that people love dogs so much,  
And the worse the more; ever, like man, like dog.

**Epigram LXXIV: (Frech wohl bin ich geworden; es ist kein Wunder, Ihr Götter)**

I've become somewhat naughty; little wonder, you gods,  
Know this, and this alone, that I'm pious and faithful too.

**Epigram LXXV: (Hast du nicht gute Gesellschaft gesehen? Es zeigt uns dein Büchlein)**

'Did you meet no decent folk? Your book shows us only  
Acrobats and such; yes, and sometimes worse folk still.'  
I met decent folk, but the ones that you call decent  
Never gave me a pretext for writing a single poem.

**Epigram LXXVI: (Was mit mir das Schicksal gewollt? Es wäre verwegen)**

What did fate want with me? It's foolish to ask,  
Since with most of us fate has little to do.  
To make me a poet? It might indeed have succeeded,  
Had the language itself not proved an impossible one.

**Epigram LXXVII: (Mit Botanik gibst du dich ab? mit Optik? Was thust du?)**

'Are you studying botany? Optics? Why those?  
Is it not finer to touch, and conquer, a tender heart?'  
Oh, tender hearts! Any blind fool can stir them;  
May it be my joy to touch you, Nature, alone!

**Epigram LXXVIII: (Weiß hat Newton gemacht aus allen Farben. Gar Manches)**

Newton split white light into all the colours. Has he  
Done enough to make you believe in the spectrum?

**Epigram LXXIX: ('Alles erklärt sich wohl,' so sagt mir ein Schüler, 'aus jenen')**

'All is explained by the theories,' a student tells me,  
That are taught to us by the wisest of masters.'  
Once you've carefully crafted a wooden cross,  
A live body is needed to exact the punishment.

**Epigram LXXX: (Wenn auf beschwerlichen Reisen ein Jüngling zur Liebsten sich windet)**

If, on arduous journeys, a young man lacks his lover,  
This little book will charm and comfort him, alike.  
And if one day he expects his girl, and is holding  
This little book, once she's here, he can throw it away.

**Epigram LXXXI: (Gleich den Winken des Mädchens, des eilenden, welche verstohlen)**

Like the glance of the girl, who hurries by, stealthily,  
As you walk by, brushing your arm in a friendly way,  
So, Muses, grant the traveller some little poem:  
Oh, bestow a yet greater favour on your friend!

**Epigram LXXXII: (Wenn, in Wolken und Dünste verhüllt, die Sonne nur trübe)**

When, covered in cloud and vapour, the sun only grants  
Dull hours; how speechlessly along the paths we hasten!  
Rain urges the wanderer on! How welcome the shelter  
Of our rural roof! How deep our sleep on a stormy night!  
But the goddesses soon return! Swiftly, the mists clear  
From mind and brow! Exactly as Nature banishes hers!

**Epigram LXXXIII: (Willst du mit reinem Gefühl der Liebe Freuden genießen?)**

Would you enjoy the pleasures of love with a pure feeling?  
Then, keep Earnestness and Boldness, far from your heart.  
One wants to drive Amor away; one plans to capture him;  
While the mischievous God smiles at both their intentions.

**Epigram LXXXIV: (Göttlicher Morpheus, umsonst bewegst du die lieblichen Mohne)**

Divine Morpheus, you shake the poppy heads in vain;  
For my eyes can't rest if Cupid fails to close them.

**Epigram LXXXV: (Liebe flößest du ein, und Begier; ich fühl' es, und brenne)**

You inspire love and desire; I feel them, and burn.  
You fairest ones, now inspire me with confidence!

**Epigram LXXXVI: (Ha! ich kenne dich, Amor, so gut als einer! Da bringst du)**

Ah! I know you, Cupid, as well as any! Here you bring  
Your torch, and it shines before us, in the darkness.  
Then you swiftly lead us down tangled paths; we need  
Your torch above all and, oh, its false flame expires.

**Epigram LXXXVII: (Eine einzige Nacht an deinem Herzen! - Das Andre)**

A single night on your breast! – What I'd give for  
Another. Amor parts us now in darkness and mist.  
Yet, I've known the dawn when breast upon breast  
Aurora, the early riser, woke Phoebus her lover.

**Epigram LXXXVIII: (Ist es dir Ernst, so zaudre nun länger nicht; mache mich glücklich!)**

If you're serious, don't wait, any longer; make me happy!  
You wish to toy with me? Enough of the toying, darling!

**Epigram LXXXIX: (Daß ich schweige, verdrießt dich? Was soll ich reden? Du merkest)**

Does my silence annoy you? What can I say? Note,  
There's no quieter eloquence than a sigh or a glance.  
Only a goddess can loosen lips that are sealed;  
Only Aurora, who'll wake me one day on your breast,  
Yes, and sound my hymn then to the ancient gods,  
Of why the Memnonian statue sang sweet mysteries.

**Epigram XC: (Welch ein lustiges Spiel! Es windet am Faden die Scheibe)**

What a delightful game! The disc winds, on its thread;  
That which fled the hand soon hastens back again!  
See, Heart, I seemed to cast off one beautiful girl,  
Then another; but now, at once, she returns in flight.

**Epigram XCI: (*O, wie achtet' ich sonst auf alle Zeiten des Jahres*)**

Oh, how I once paid attention to all the seasons;  
Greeting the coming spring, longing for autumn!  
But there's no summer or winter, now I'm happy,  
Cupid's wings above, eternal spring hovering around.

**Epigram XCII: (*Sage, wie lebst du? Ich lebe! und wären hundert und hundert*)**

'Tell me, how are you?' I'm alive! Were hundreds and hundreds  
Of years granted to man, I'd wish for a tomorrow, like today.

**Epigram XCIII: (*Götter, wie soll ich euch danken! Ihr habt mir Alles gegeben*)**

Gods, how can I thank you! You've given me all,  
That a man desires; which is, as a rule, very little.

**Epigram XCIV: (*In der Dämmerung des Morgens den höchsten Gipfel erklimmen*)**

Climb the highest peak in the morning half-light,  
Greet the messenger of the dawn, kindly Moon!  
Impatiently awaiting the Princess of Heaven's glance,  
Joy of Youth, how often you lured me out in the dark!  
Now the messengers of day, are the heavenly eyes  
Of my Beloved; the sun rises ever too early for me.

**Epigram XCV: (*Du erstaunest, und zeigst mir das Meer; es scheint zu brennen*)**

Amazed, you show me the sea; it seems on fire.  
How the tide flames around the nocturnal vessel!  
It's scarcely surprising, the sea bore Aphrodite,  
And did she not bear a flame for us then, her son?

**Epigram XCVI: (Glänzen sah ich das Meer, und blinken die liebliche Welle)**

I saw the sea gleam, and the sweet waves glitter:  
Lively sails crossing it, with a following wind.  
My heart felt no desire: my languishing gaze  
Soon turned back again towards mountains and snow.  
How many treasures lie Southward! Yet one in the North  
Like a great magnet draws me, irresistibly, back.

**Epigram XCVII: (Ach! mein Mädchen verreis't! Sie steigt zu Schiffe! - Mein König)**

Oh! My girl is departing! She's going aboard! – My king,  
Aeolus, mighty prince, hold back the storms!  
Foolish! The god tells me: 'Fear not raging storms:  
Fear the breeze when Cupid gently stirs his wings!'

**Epigram XCVIII: (Ach! mein Mädchen verreis't! Sie steigt zu Schiffe! - Mein König)**

The girl was poor and lacked clothes when I wooed her;  
I liked her half-naked then, and I still like her so now.

**Epigram XCIX: (Oftmals hab' ich geirrt, und habe mich wieder gefunden)**

I've often gone astray, and then found myself again,  
But never more happily; now the girl is my happiness!  
If this is also an error, then spare me, you, wiser, gods,  
And don't correct it, till I'm there on that chilly shore.

**Epigram C: (Traurig, Midas, war dein Geschick: in bebenden Händen)**

Sad, was your fate, Midas: in your trembling hands  
Famished, did you feel the heavy food transformed?  
In a similar case, I'm happier; since what I touch



Will soon be a lively little poem, in my two hands.  
Muses, I won't resist; yet if I press you, my darling,  
Tightly to my chest, won't it become a fairy tale?

**Epigram CI: (*Ach, mein Hals ist ein wenig geschwollen! so sagte die Beste*)**

'Oh, my womb is a little swollen!' said my darling,  
Fearfully. Quiet, my child! Quiet! Hear what I say:  
Venus' hand has touched you; she tells you quietly,  
That soon your little body, alas, will seem distorted.  
That slim figure, those charming breasts will swell.  
Everything swells; the newest clothes no longer fit.  
Quiet! For the fallen blossom tells the gardener,  
That the loveliest blooms swell in fruitful autumn.

**Epigram CII: (*Wonniglich ist's, die Geliebte verlangend im Arme zu halten*)**

It's wonderful to hold your beloved in your arms,  
When her beating heart first confesses her love to you.  
Wonderful to feel, the throb of a new-formed life,  
Stirring, ever-growing, in the lovely womb.  
Already it tries the leaps of swift youth; already  
Impatient, it moves, it longs for celestial light,  
Wait now just a few days more! On every path  
Let the Hours guide you strongly, as fate dictates.  
Whatever happens to you, you growing youth –  
Love formed you; give of the love you share!

**Epigram CIII: (*Und so tändelt' ich mir, von allen Freunden geschieden*)**

And so, far from all joys, I trifled away  
My days and hours in the City of Neptune.  
All I found I seasoned with sweet Memory,  
And with Hope: the world's loveliest savours.

**Epigram CIV: (Saubere hat du dein Volck erlöst durch Wunder und Leiden)**

You redeemed your people through miracles, suffering,  
Nazarene! What then should your followers do now?  
Should they live and bear children in a Christian way?  
Badly, the hand that harms us serves our first intent.  
If the youth would evade evil, and not be destroyed,  
Let Lais bring burning torments instead of pleasure.  
Descend once more, God of Creation, and suffer;  
Come, deliver your people from the double woe!  
Perform a miracle, cleanse the sources of life and joy.  
I'll be your Paul, and your Stephen, as you command.

**Epigram CV: (Heraus mit dem Theile des Herrn! Heraus mit dem Theile des Gottes!)**

'Away with God's relics! Away with the bones of the Lord!'  
Cried a miserable creature, blind with hysterical rage,  
As the holy fragments were shown on Maundy Thursday,  
A prankster, in Saint Mark's, appearing on the scene.  
Poor girl, what good are bits of the crucified God to you?  
Summon a more wholesome part, one from Lampsacus.

**Epigram CVI: (Wundern kann es mich nicht daß unser Herr Christus mit Dirnen)**

It's no surprise to me that Christ lived with prostitutes.  
Having living with sinners, I feel the same way too.

**Epigram CVII: ('Warum willst du den Christen des Glaubens selige Wonne)**

'Why do you wish to cruelly rob Christians  
Of the bliss of their holy faith?' Not I, none can.  
It is clearly written: the Heathen rage in vain.  
Lo, I fulfill the Scripture; read; be edified by me.

**Epigram CVIII: (Krebse mit nacktem Hintern, die leere Muscheln sich suchten)**

Bare-backed crabs must go seeking the empty shells  
That they live in, and imagine to be their own homes.  
They are fine creatures, as clever as they are needy,  
I was minded to think, watching them on the shore.  
'Christ and Mankind are one', says Lavater! It's true!  
Christians cover their naked shame with human reason.

**Epigram CIX: (In ein Puppenspiel hatt' ich mich Knabe verliebet)**

I always loved the puppet theatre I owned as a lad,  
It won me for a long time, till I finally broke it.  
So young Lavater reached for a crucified puppet.  
His heart betrays him still, and robs him of breath!

**Epigram CX: (Guten schreibt er, das glaub ich, die Menschen müssen wohl gut seyn)**

He writes, I believe, that Mankind's inherently good,  
Such that those who read the silly stuff believe him.  
He thinks it's wisdom; I don't know about wisdom:  
But if that is wisdom, by God, I'm glad I'm a fool.

**Epigram CXI: (Dich betrügt der Staatsmann, der Pfaffe, der Lehrer der Sitten)**

Statesmen, priests, and teachers of morals deceive you,  
And all that nonsense, how deeply people admire it.  
Sadly, it's hard to think or say anything that's right  
That fails to rudely violate state, gods, or custom.

**Epigram CXII: (Was auch Helden gethan, was Kluge gelehrt, es verachtet's)**

What heroes did, or the wise have taught, they despise,  
Delusions, says Christian pride, next to God's miracles.  
And yet God adorns himself and his naked Saviour  
With the best of what the heathen have left behind.  
So, the priest gathers those noble, glowing candles,  
About the stamped bread that he himself consecrates.

**Epigram CXIII: (*Viele folgten dir gläubig und haben des irdischen Lebens*)**

Many followed you faithfully, and in this earthly life  
Missed the right path, as happened to you yourself.  
I choose not to follow; I desire at the end of my life  
To remain a sensible man, and a cheerful one still.  
Today I obey you, I take the road to the mountains,  
May you no longer rule; farewell, King of the Jews.

**Epigram CXIV: (*Offen steht das Grab! Welch herrlich Wunder!*)**

'Open stands the tomb! Oh, what a miraculous wonder!'  
Risen! Who believes that! Rascals, you bore him away.

**Epigram CXV: (*Was vom Kristenthum gilt, gilt von den Stoikern, freyen*)**

What's true of Christianity is true of the Stoics, too,  
Free people should not become Christians or Stoics.

**Epigram CXVI: (*Juden und Heiden hinaus! so duldet der christliche Schwärmer*)**

'Away with you Jews and Heathen!' That's Christian tolerance.  
'Christians and pagans be cursed!', murmurs the Jew in his beard.  
'Christians to the griddle, and into the fire with the Jews!'  
A Turkish child chants, mocking Christians and Jews alike.  
Which one is the wisest? Decide! But there are fools,  
Godhead, in your palace, and as for myself, I pass by.

**Epigram CXVII: (*Höllengespenster seyd ihr und keine Christen ihr Schreyer*)**

You're Hellish shades, not Christians, you screechers,  
You who chase away the sweet sleep from my eyes.  
Why does the priest, midst so many thousand gestures,  
Not stir himself, and send you all back to Hell?

**Epigram CXVIII: (*Wenn ein verständiger Koch ein artig Gastmal bereitet*)**

When an intelligent cook prepares a tasty meal,  
He jumbles many things together, all at once.  
So, you enjoy these words and scarce distinguish  
What is it that you enjoy. Still, you'll be fine.

**Epigram CXIX: (*Sagt, wem geb' ich dieß Büchlein? Der Fürstin die mirs gegeben*)**

To whom shall I give this book? The princess who gave it to me,  
She who will soon create, for me, an Italy in Germany.

**Epigram CXX: (*'Wagst du Deutsch zu schreiben unziemliche Sachen!' - Mein Guter*)**

'Do you dare to write vile things in German!' – My good friend,  
I'm afraid German's a lowly province; the world speaks Greek.

**Epigram CXXI: (*Aus zu eklem Geschmack verbrannte Nauger Martialen*)**

Navagero burned Martial's works, disgusted with their style.  
Pedant! Does one throw away silver because it's not gold?

**Epigram CXXII: (Mehr hat Horaz nicht gewollt, er fand es, weniger wollen)**

Horace didn't want more, he found that, desiring less,  
Your money goes further, and you don't need to save.

**Epigram CXXIII: (Wie der Mensch das Pfuschen so liebt! Fast glaub ich dem Mythos)**

How people love botching so! I almost believe the myth  
That declares to me that I'm a botched creature myself.

**Epigram CXXIV: (Das gemeine lockt jeden: siehst du in Kürze von vielen)**

Base things attract a crowd: if you see, to cut things short,  
Something occur, think, instantly, to yourself: this is base.

**Epigram CXXV: (Wären der Welt die Augen zu öffnen! - Das könnte geschehen!)**

'Were the world's eyes to be opened, such and such might happen!'  
Better though to look out for yourself, and seek your share.

**Epigram CXXVI: (Helden herrlich zu seyn beschädigen tausende. Tadelt)**

Playing the great hero damages thousands. Poets  
Should cast no blame, they dream of victory too.

**Epigram CXXVII: (Wenn du schelten willst, so wolle kein Heiliger scheinen)**

If you want to criticise, don't pretend you're a saint.  
The righteous man stays silent, and willingly forgives.

**Epigram CXXVIII: (Unglückselige Frösche die ihr Venedig bewohnet!)**

Unfortunate frogs that have Venice for your home!  
If you leap from the water, you land on hard stone.

**Epigram CXXIX: (Einen zierlichen Käfig erblickt ich, hinter dem Gitter)**

I see a delicate cage, there; behind the bars  
Sweet-singing girls, quick and diligent, stirring.  
Your girls alone know how to tire us, Venice;  
Bless you for teaching them to quicken us too.

**Epigram CXXX: (Alle Weiber sind Waare, mehr oder weniger kostet)**

Women are treated like goods, costing more or less  
To you, the eager young man who chooses to buy.  
Happy the constant man who finds a constant girl,  
A girl to be sold, and be bought, only the once.

**Epigram CXXXI: (Hat dich Hymen geflohn? Hast du ihn gemieden? - Was sag ich?)**

‘Has Hymen fled you? Do you shun him?’ – What can I say?  
Hymen! He’s most charming, but far too serious for me.  
The marriage bed tells no tales, while poets are talkative.  
Free love grants a free tongue, and the courage to use it.

**Epigram CXXXII: (Jungfer! ruf ich das Mädchen, ist, Jungfer, der Herr nicht zu Hause?)**

‘Maid!’ I call the girl, ‘Maid, is the master not home?’  
But she doesn’t hear, the call doesn’t reach her ears.

**Epigram CXXXIII: (Vier gefällige Kinder hast du zum Glauben erzogen)**

You've raised four well-behaved children, I think.  
An old man now, you gather them round you.  
'I carry my treasure with me!' so say the wise,  
'My treasure,' you reply, 'I've created myself.'

**Epigram CXXXIV: (Amerikanerinn nennst du das Töchterchen alter Phantaste)**

You called America the little daughter of ancient dreams.  
Happy man! Haven't you created them here in Europe?

**Epigram CXXXV: (Ich empfehle mich euch! Seyd wacker, sagst du und reichst)**

'I commend myself to you!' 'May you be rich and brave,' you say,  
Handing me the plate, smiling, and thanking me nicely.  
Oh, you'd be commended enough, if you were older,  
If you'd seek to be brave, stay awake till the rooster crows.

**Epigram CXXXVI: (Zürnet nicht ihr Frauen daß wir das Mädchen bewundern)**

Don't be angry, fair women, if I admire the girls:  
One enjoys in the evening what stirred one at dawn.

**Epigram CXXXVII: (Was ich am meisten besorge: Bettina wird immer geschickter)**

What concerns me most: Bettina's ever more skilful,  
Every limb she possesses ever more and more agile;  
If, at last, she's able to tease her vulva with her tongue,  
And play with herself, she'll pay scant attention to men.

**Epigram CXXXVIII: (Auszuspannen befiehlt der Vater die zierlichen Schenkel)**



The master orders those delicate thighs to relax,  
Childishly, the lovely one sinks to the carpet.  
Oh, whoever first loves you will find the bloom  
Already gone, having taken to things too early.

**Epigram CXXXIX: (*Caffé wollen wir trinken mein Fremder! - da meynt sie branliren*)**

‘Would you like a coffee, dear stranger!’ –the girl says;  
My friends, I’ve always, and rightly so, hated coffee.

**Epigram CXL: (*Seyd ihr ein Fremder, mein Herr? bewohnt ihr Venedig? so fragten*)**

‘A stranger, dear sir? Do you live in Venice?’ so said  
Two Lacertae who lured me into a *bettola* there.  
‘Let’s guess! – You’re French! Neapolitan!’ chatting so,  
Every now and then, quickly taking a sip of coffee.  
‘Allow me!’ the prettier said, and set down her cup,  
And I instantly felt her hand there, working away,  
I grabbed it gently, held it tight; but then the other  
Plied her delicate little fingers; I halted those too.  
‘Oh! A stranger, indeed?’ the pair cried, jokingly,  
Demanding a gift or two, that I, sparingly, granted.  
They showed me to a room some distance away,  
And to a much warmer game that lasted all night.  
If you know why I denied those creatures, at first,  
You’ll know why Venetians creep about, looking pale.

**Epigram CXLI: (*Gieb mir statt ‘Der Schwanz’ ein ander Wort o Priapus*)**

Find me another word for ‘the tail’, O Priapus  
Since I’m German, I’m badly served as a poet.  
Phallos, they called it in Greek, music to your ears,  
And in Latin, Mentula, that’s a passable word;  
Mentula from *mens*, with a ‘tail’ at its backside,

Yet backsides never brought me the slightest joy.

**Epigram CXLII: (*Camper der iüngere trug in Rom die Lehre des Vaters*)**

Petrus Camper carried his father's teachings to Rome,  
Regarding the creatures we see that Nature created,  
Comparing their bellies or no, necks, paws and tails,  
All in broken German, as well as in borrowed terms.  
At last, he said: 'The four-footed creatures are done,  
And all that's left to do now, friends, are the birds!'  
Poor Camper, fallen foul of ambiguous language,  
For eight days afterwards, swallowing Mercury pills.

**Epigram CXLIII: (*Knaben liebt ich wohl auch, doch lieber sind mir die Mädchen*)**

I love boys well enough, but prefer the girls even more;  
If I tire of one as a girl, she can serve me, still, as a boy.

**Epigram CXLIV: (*Köstliche Ringe besitz ich! Gegrabne fürtreffliche Steine*)**

Costly rings I own! I've dug for excellent gems,  
Grasped higher thoughts, styles of purest gold.  
And rings with fiery stones come at a higher price,  
You often see them gleam on the gambling table.  
But I know a little ring employed quite otherwise.  
It would seem that Hans Carvel had a sad old age.  
He unwisely pushed his little finger into the hole,  
When only, the eleventh, the largest, belongs there.

**Epigram CXLV: (*Alle sagen mir, Kind, daß du mich betriegest*)**

Everyone tells me, child, you're deceiving me.  
Oh, just keep deceiving me, over and over again.

**Epigram CXLVI: (Welche Hoffnung ich habe? Nur eine die heut mich beschäftigt)**

What hopes do I have? There's just one that concerns me today,  
Seeing my darling, tomorrow, whom I've not seen for a week.

**Epigram CXLVII: (Alles was ihr wollt, ich bin euch wie immer gewärtig)**

Whenever you wish, I'll wait upon you as always,  
My friends, but, sadly, I can't stand sleeping alone.

**Epigram CXLVIII: (Nackend willst du nicht neben mir liegen, du süße Geliebte)**

You don't want to lie next to me naked, sweet lover;  
You hide yourself there, in your dress, out of shame.  
Tell me: do I want your dress, or your lovely body?  
Well, shame too is a garment, that separates lovers!

**Epigram CXLIX: (Lange sucht ich ein Weib mir, ich suchte, da fand ich nur Dirnen)**

For long, I looked for a wife, and found only whores,  
At last, I found you, little whore, and discovered a wife.

**Epigram CL: (Eine Liebe wünscht ich und konnte sie niemals gewinnen)**

I desired a true love, and yet could never achieve it.  
You can wish, but can't always succeed right away.

**Epigram CLI: (Fürchte nicht, liebliches Mädchen, die Schlange die dir begegnet!)**

Fear not lovely girl, the snake that nears you!  
Eva knew him before; just ask the priest, my child.

**Epigram CLII: (Ob erfüllt sey was Moses und was die Propheten gesprochen)**

Whether what Moses and the prophets spoke was fulfilled  
Regarding Christ the holy, friends, I really don't know.  
But I know this: that wishes, longings and dreams are;  
When the lovely child sleeps sweetly next to my heart.

**Epigram CLIII: (Weit und schön ist die Welt, doch o wie dank ich dem Himmel)**

The world is lovely and wide, but how I thank heaven  
That one little garden, delightfully, belongs to me.  
Bring me home again! Why should a gardener travel?  
It's in tending one's garden that honour and happiness lie.

**Epigram CLIV: (Ach! sie neiget das Haupt die holde Knospe, wer gießet)**

Ah! She bows her head to the lovely bud that brings  
A rush of refreshing water right down to the root?  
May it sweetly unfold, the sweet hour of blossoming,  
Don't let it pass by too soon, and the fruit will ripen.  
But my head too is bowed – by anxiety and effort.  
Dear girl! Bring me a glass of that sparkling wine.

**Epigram CLV: (In dem engsten der Gäßchen es drängte sich kaum durch die Mauern)**

In the narrowest of streets, I could scarcely thread the walls,  
For a girl was there, in my way, as I passed through Venice.  
It was lovely, that place, where I let a stranger seduce me,  
Oh, a wide canal opened out there, before the observer.  
If you'd girls, Venice, open as your canals; and vaginas  
Like your alleys, you'd be the finest place in all the world.

**Epigram CLVI: (Ein ander Handwerck und doch wer möchte dich nicht hier am Strande sehen)**

A foreign vessel, yet who'd not wish to find you on the shore.

**Epigram CLVII: (Laß die Quellen die 'trocknen' und suche die Quelle)**

Let the springs run dry, and seek out the source  
That flows sweetly in the valley, the source of love.  
Thirsty, the wanderer bows down to the spring,  
Quenches his burning thirst, goes on strengthened,  
Thankful to aim for his goal, blessing the source.

**Epigram CLVIII: (Glücklich wer einst dich genießt wenn du das Wachsthum vollendet)**

Happy the one who'll enjoy you when, fully grown,  
You gently place your thighs across their body.

**Epigram CLIX: (Was ist oben was unten an dir was vorne was hinten?)**

What's over and under you, what's in front or behind?  
Every movement seems filled with anxiety and danger,  
And yet, so delightful you wish for that danger again.

**Epigram CLX: (Wär ich ein Mahler mit lauter Bettinen)**

If I were a painter with nothing to paint but Bettina,  
Then I'd fill all my skies with nothing but Bettinas.

**Epigram CLXI: (Wär ich ein Maler du solltest als Engelchen überall seyn)**

If I were an artist, I'd paint you, everywhere, as an angel.

**Epigram CLXII: (*Ach wie herzt' ich den Knaben den lieben sittlichen Eros*)**

Oh, why do I love that boy, that dear so-moral Eros,  
Today, he proved the son of the sky-born goddess;  
Press him gently to my heart, we'll mingle our tears.

**Epigram CLXIII: (*Aus zu gutem Geschmack verbrennst du, Navager, Martialen*)**

You burnt Martial because of his style, dear Navagero,  
Sadly, dear Navagero, Catullus has burnt your poems.

**Epigram CLXIV: (*Einst wendeten im verdrus die Grazien sich nach Norden*)**

Once on a time, the Graces made their way northwards,  
Three little whores came, shuddering, through the snow,  
And found a door open, the trio tripped through, desiring  
To enjoy the hospitality, there, while finding shelter.  
A drunken fellow entered, said: 'Who are you, then?'  
Tore their veils away with impious hands; they cried:  
'The snow is less bitter to us than the gaze of men.'

**Epigram CLXV: (*Meister der Schalckheit ihr alte verruchte verwegene Heiden*)**

Master of cunning, you wicked and bold old heathen,  
Describing all the boys with your words and gestures.

**Epigram CLXVI: (*Ungern brauch ich meinen Gedichten die anderen Sprachen*)**

I dislike employing other languages in my verse.  
It's safer, though it seems false, and pretentious.  
It's impossible not to; in filling all these couplets,  
There are things I can't say since German can't.

Forgive me, reader, but I sometimes lack a word.  
O, German reader, permit me to speak to strangers.  
If you understood, all languages, as the adept does,  
You'd understand foreign terms, O German reader,  
And grasp these foreign words in my little poems.

**Epigram CLXVII: (So führt der Tonkünstler uns durch viele Töne)**

So, the composer leads us through many a key,  
Till he satisfies us again by bringing us home.

**Epigram CLXVIII: (Was ich geschrieben habe das hab ich vertraulich  
den Deutschen)**

What I wrote I have set down in the vernacular,  
And now it stands forever in the German tongue.  
Many an error I've made, but without deception.

**Epigram CLXIX: (So seht nur wie gefährlich es ist unser Büchlein zu  
lesen)**

Only see how dangerous it is to read my little book.

**Epigram CLXX: (Immer glaubt ich gut müthig von anderen etwas zu  
lernen)**

I always believed I could learn something from others,  
I was forty years old before I relinquished that error.  
Foolish always to believe I was teaching others;  
Fate itself teaches everyone all they need to know.

**Epigram CLXXI: (Leben hab ich gelernt, fristet mir Götter die Zeit)**

I have learned how to live; the Gods have granted me time.

**Epigram CLXXII: (Achte hatt ich gesetzt, nun ist die neune gezogen)**

‘I bet on the eight, and yet what came up was the nine!  
See how close, but the winning number escapes me.’  
So, people who trust in chance are forever complaining.  
We each create our own luck, yet it takes energy too!

**Epigram CLXXIII: (Zum Erdulden ists gut ein Krist zu seyn nicht zu wancken)**

‘To suffer as a Christian is good, and never to waver’;  
Such the teaching first uttered by a Christian zealot.

**Epigram CLXXIV: (Thörig war es ein Brod zu vergotten wir beten doch alle)**

It was foolish to deify bread; all of us pray:  
‘Grant each of us every day our daily bread.’

**Epigram CLXXV: (Pfaffe möcht ich seyn im Glauben und Götter verzehren)**

‘Truly, I’d like to be a priest, and consume the divine,  
I’d produced, with my own two hands, once a day.  
I’d like to be a pilgrim, believing that step by step  
I’ll draw nearer to that goal I’ve not yet achieved.’  
Just don’t be a Lavater, confusing sense with nonsense,  
Such a form of belief is a sin, against the Holy Spirit.

**Epigram CLXXVI: (Stiften die Christen mit Heil viel unheil so stiften die Büchlein)**

If Christians gave us ‘sin’ through preaching salvation,  
Then pagan books offer salvation by preaching ‘sin’.  
But don’t rush, give me time, let Charon’s boat go by.  
If he takes me aboard this day, then farewell world.

**Epigram CLXXVII: (Was ist Reisen? ist fröhlich es Leben)**



What is travel then? It's a life of happiness.

**Epigram CLXXVIII: (*Sagen wir doch Zitrone, es ist ein fremdes Gewächs*)**

Say the word '*citrone*', and it's a foreign fruit,  
Just as '*lacerta*' doesn't sit well with '*echse*'.

**Epigram CLXXIX: (*Brachtet ihr iene Löwen hierher vom großen Pireus*)**

Venice, it's from Piraeus you stole your lion,  
To show us all that this city is not Piraeus.

**Epigram CLXXX: (*Immer hab ich dich heilige Sonne mit Freude verehret*)**

Holy Sun, I have ever worshipped you with joy,  
When you appear out of dense fog or cloud,  
But never as gladly as from a Venetian '*nebbia*'  
When after rain, the gondola, happily, steams.

**Epigram CLXXXI: (*Masten stehen gedrängt an Masten, es trocknet die Segel*)**

Mast on mast crowded together, the sails drying,  
All sunlit, and the boatman at rest on the shore.  
Noble Venice, your palaces tower from the fog,  
But all is lost, my little Bettina, when you rise,  
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It was foolish to deify bread; all of us pray:.....	48
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### Notes to the Epigrams

**Epigram III.** For Rinaldo, see the epic poems of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso, and Handel's opera *Rinaldo*.

**Epigram V.** Daphne was turned into a laurel tree, in order to evade Apollo, God of the Lyre.

**Epigram IX.** On Good Friday the Doge and the Papal Nuncio wore mourning clothes, and attended Mass in Saint Mark's with the Signoria; later the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession around the Church.

**Epigram XX.** The lion is the emblem of Saint Mark. The lions at the Venetian Arsenal one from Piraeus the other from the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens were plundered by Francesco Morisini (later Doge) in 1687, following his conquest of Athens, involving significant damage to the Parthenon.

**Epigram XXII.** Jupiter Pluvius is the Roman Sky-God in his role as God of the Rain.

**Epigram XXIII.** Arrack is a distilled alcoholic drink typically produced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, made from the fermented sap of coconut flowers or sugarcane. Batavian Arrack was an ingredient in the making of punch.

**Epigram XXIV.** One possible derivation of Bragora, is from *brago*, mud.

**Epigram XXV.** Baiae was a fashionable Roman resort on the northwest shore of the Bay of Naples.

**Epigram XXVI.** Tibur is the modern Tivoli, the Romans' favourite country retreat.

**Epigram XXXVI.** See Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna of the Red Cherubim*, and Paolo Veronese's *Marriage at Cana*, both to be seen in

the Accademia during Goethe's visit in 1790. The latter was plundered by the French in 1797, and is currently in the Louvre.

**Epigram XXXVIII.** Ganymede was snatched up by Jupiter (Jove) in the form of an eagle, and became his cupbearer.

**Epigram XLI.** See Jan Breughel the Elder's scenes of Hell, and Albrecht Durer's engraving *The Harrowing of Hell*.

**Epigram LX:** See the Acts of the Apostles 10:11. Saint Peter accepted he should not call any man unclean, Acts 10:28.

**Epigram LXVII:** Lacerta, plural lacertae, is the Latin name for various species of lizard.

**Epigram LXXIV:** Morpheus was a Greek god associated with sleep and dreams.

**Epigrams LXXVII and LXXVIII:** Goethe developed his own subjective Theory of Colours, which differed from Newton's scientific investigations of the properties of light.

**Epigram LXXXIX:** Aurora was the goddess of the Dawn. The northernmost colossal statue (one of two) of Pharoah Amenhotep III, called the statue of Memnon, and sited amidst the Theban necropolis, reputedly made a sound, usually at or near dawn.

**Epigram XCVII:** Aeolus was God of the Winds, which he kept imprisoned in a cave.

**Epigram CIV:** Lais was a courtesan. Paul spread the word of Christ; Stephen was the first martyr for the faith.

**Epigram CV:** Lampsacus, the Greek city on the Hellespont, was famous for its worship of Priapus, the god of fertility and procreation.



**Epigrams CVIII, CX, and CXXLV:** Johann Kasper Lavater was a Swiss author, theologian, philosopher and physiognomist. A friend of Goethe, he believed that every person had latent Christlike powers which could be developed. Goethe wrote to him: 'I am not a Christian.'

**Epigrams CXXI and CLXIII:** Andrea Navagero (1483-1529), his name Latinised as Andreas Naugerius, was a Venetian poet who wrote especially pure Latin verse in imitation of the classical authors. So deep was his dislike of Martial's style that once a year, on a day dedicated to the Muses, he burnt a copy of Martial's epigrams.

**Epigram CXLII:** Petrus Camper (1722-1789, was a renowned Dutch Enlightenment zoologist, anthropologist, palaeontologist, and naturalist. Goethe plays on the German word *vöghlen*, which as a plural noun means 'birds' or as a verb 'to perform sexual intercourse.' A course of mercury was the standard treatment for syphilis.

**Epigram CXLIV:** The tale of Hans Carvel (repeated by Ariosto, La Fontaine and others) involves an old man who seeks a way to prevent his being cuckolded. The Devil gives him a ring, and tells him to put his finger therein, to ensure his wife stays faithful. The double entendre needs no explanation here!

**Epigram CLIII:** The last line is an echo of the ending to Voltaire's *Candide*.

**Epigram CLXXVI:** Charon was the ferryman in Greek myth, who carried the spirits of the dead across the River Acheron, in the Underworld.

**Epigram CLXXIX:** The Lion of Piraeus, one of four lion statues on display at the Venice Arsenal, and a symbol of Venice's patron saint, Saint Mark, was originally located in Piraeus, the harbour of Athens. It was plundered by the Venetian admiral, Francesco Morosini, in 1687, during the Great Turkish War against the Ottoman Empire.