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Horace, (Quintus Horatius Flaccus, 65–8 B.C.) was born to an entrepreneurial former slave who freed himself before Horace was born. His father sent Horace to study rhetoric and philosophy in Rome and—like all good Roman students of the day—to learn philosophy in Athens. Upon Caesar’s assassination, Horace enlisted in the army of Brutus, served at Philippi, (see Shakespeare) and started his civilian life at the age of 24 in a minor clerical job for the Roman administration. But his skill at languages brought him to the

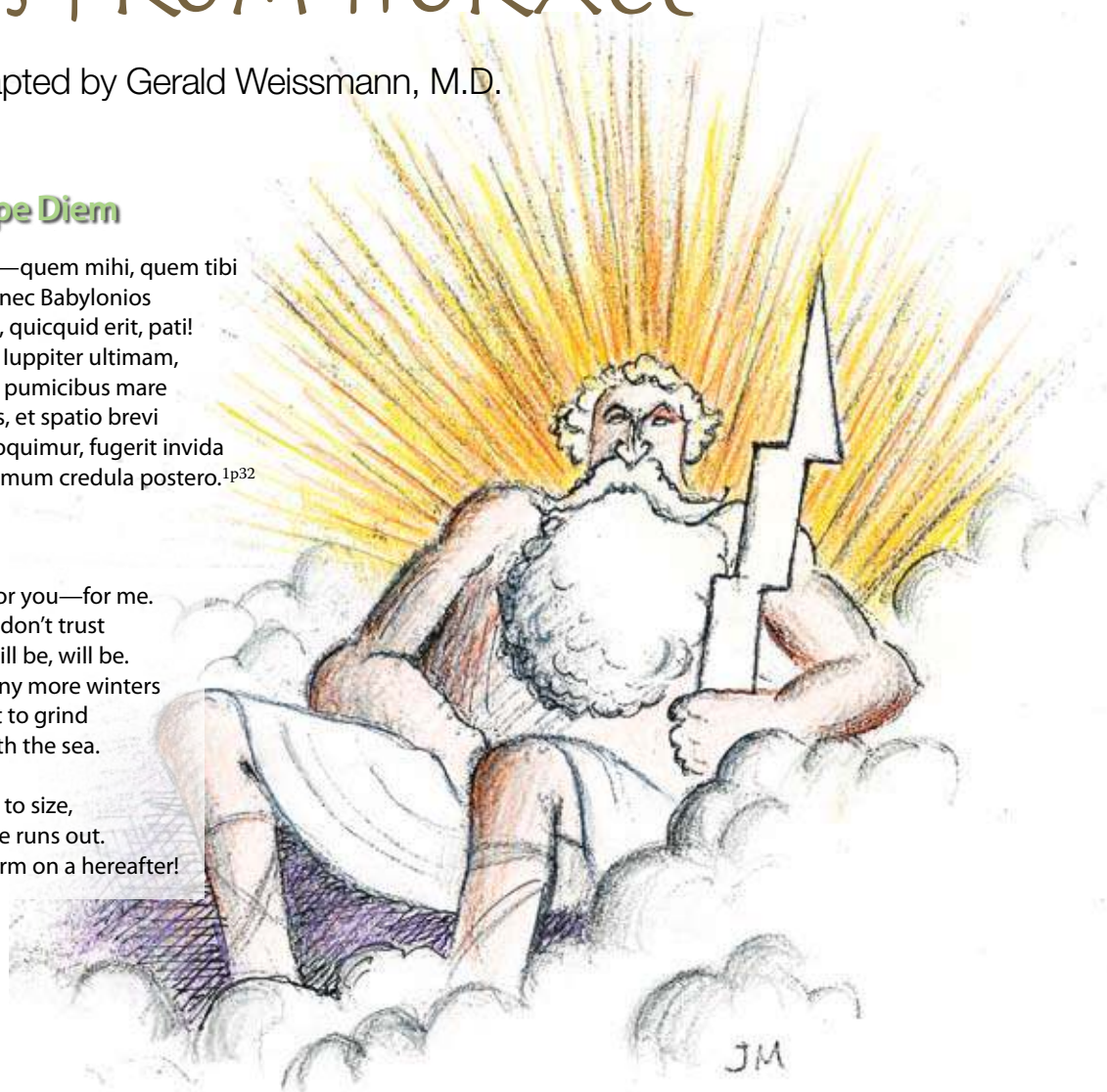
TITLES FROM HORACE

Adapted by Gerald Weissmann, M.D.

Book I, Ode XI: Carpe Diem

Tu ne quaesieris—scire nefas—quem mihi, quem tibi
finem di dederint, Leuconoë, nec Babylonios
temptaris numeros. ut melius, quicquid erit, pati!
seu plures hiemes, seu tribuit Iuppiter ultimam,
quae nunc oppositis debilitat pumicibus mare
Tyrrhenum. sapias, vina liques, et spatio brevi
spem longam reseces. Dum loquimur, fugerit invida
aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.^{1p32}

Ask not the gods, my friend
What fate they have in store for you—for me.
They’re forbidden to tell. And don’t trust
New Age horoscopes. What will be, will be.
Whether Jupiter grants us many more winters
or whether this is the very last to grind
the Tuscan cliffs to pumice with the sea.
Wise up! Decant your wine.
Cut your highest hopes down to size,
for as we speak, invidious Time runs out.
Seize the day: don’t bet the farm on a hereafter!



attention of Maecenas, the prototype of the lavish philanthropist, and with his help, Horace soon established himself as a major literary figure with his Satires, many addressed directly to Maecenas himself. Maecenas supported Horace generously and gave him a lovely farm in the Sabine countryside outside of Rome, where Horace rusticated and composed his odes, epistles, and essays to the end of his life. So well known was Horace in his lifetime that the Emperor Augustus, to whom he addressed the fourth book of odes, considered him the brightest light of his (Augustan) age, which shines from every line

of Horace's work. Horace celebrates the life of civilized Rome at the height of its empire; he also penned witty warnings of Roman decline. As unreason threatens our own civilization, Horace merits our attention today.

Horace remains the favorite poet of rational thinkers, a reminder of why the Middle Ages were called the Dark Ages and the skeptical, wordly poets of Rome were ignored by that period's church. It is no accident that lines from Horace's odes served as the motto of the Royal Society as the New Learning became the New Science in 1662. Horace's first Epistle, a

continued

Book III, Ode I: *Virginibus Puerisque*

Odi profanum vulgus et arceo;
Favete linguis. carmina non prius
Audita Musarum sacerdos
Virginibus puerisque canto . . .

Destructus ensis cui super impia
Cervice pendet, non Siculae dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem,
Non avium citharaeque cantus

Somnum reducent. Somnus agrestium
Lenis virorum non humilis domos
Fastidit umbrosamque ripam,
Non zephyris agitata Tempe. . . .

Quodsi dolentem nec Phrygius lapis
Nec purpurarum sidere clarior
Delenit usus nec Falerna
Vitis Achaemeniumque costum,

Cur invidendis postibus et novo
Sublime ritu moliar atrium?
Cur valle permutem Sabina
Divitias operosiores?^{1p168}

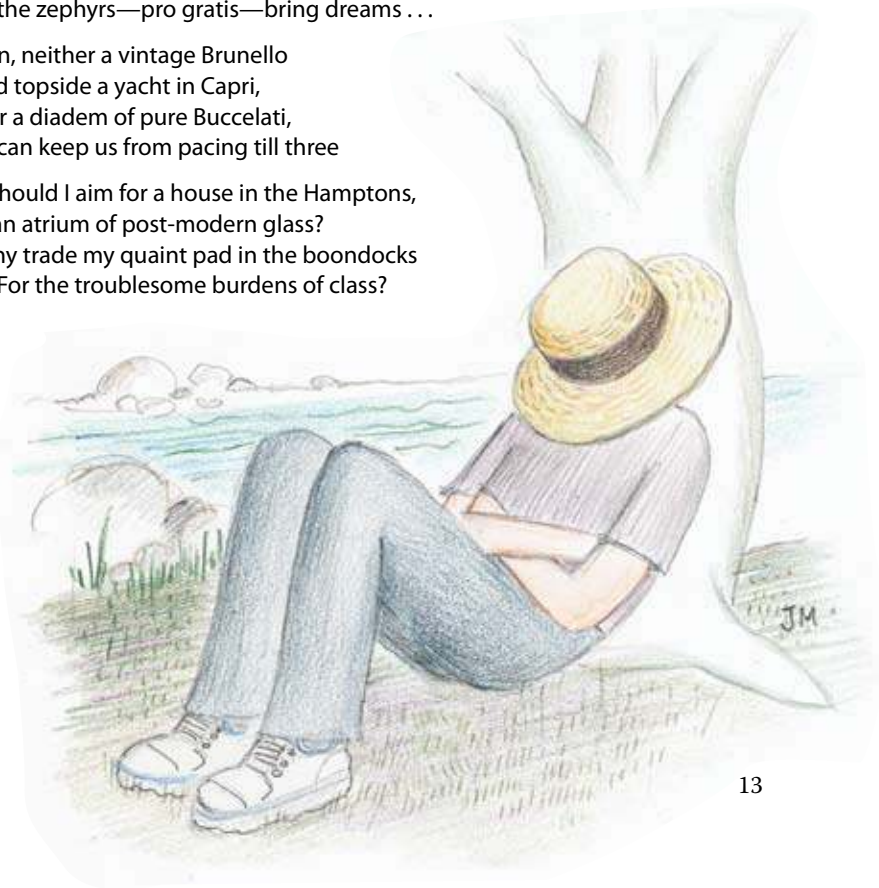
I hate frantic crowds and avoid them.
So hush! On behalf of the muse
I sing songs never heard on this planet
for the pleasure of maidens and youths . . .

The rich with their hedge funds on margin
have swords hanging over their heads;
no feast can delight their dulled palate
no music can lull them to sleep.

But to those slumbering soundly in hovels,
or who nap in the shade by a stream,
who sleep in Arcadian valleys,
the zephyrs—pro gratis—bring dreams . . .

If, then, neither a vintage Brunello
served topside a yacht in Capri,
nor a diadem of pure Buccelati,
can keep us from pacing till three

why should I aim for a house in the Hamptons,
with an atrium of post-modern glass?
Why trade my quaint pad in the boondocks
For the troublesome burdens of class?



skeptic's creed, contains the phrase *Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri* ("I am bound by the words of no master") and the Royal Society's banner bears *Nullius in Verba* to this day.

My translations show that Horace has served a valuable function for modern writers: a model of concision and rational thought for those who share his skeptical temperament, as do I.

Saul Bellow ("Carpe Diem"), Robert Louis Stevenson ("Virginibus Puerisque"), and Wilfred Owen ("Dulce et Decorum Est") used odes from Horace as the titles of their own works.

References

1. Horace. *Horace: Odes and Epodes*. Bennet CE, translator. Loeb Classical Library #33. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 1927.

2. Owen W. *Dulce et Decorum Est*. In: *Virtual Seminars for Teaching Literature: War Poems and Manuscripts of Wilfred Owen*. <http://www.hcu.ox.ac.uk/jtap/warpoems.htm>.

More information on Horace can be found at www.merriampark.com/vitahor.htm.

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Book III, Ode II: Dulce et Decorum Est



Angustam amice pauperiem pati
Robustus acri militia puer
Condiscat et Parthos feroces
Vexet eques metuendus hasta, . . .

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.
Mors et fugacem persequitur virum,
Nec parcit imbellis iuventae
Poplitibus timidove tergo. . . .

Virtus, recludens immeritis mori
Caelum, negata temptat iter via,
Coetusque vulgares et udam
Spernit humum fugiente pinna.^{1p174}

A stint in the army will shape up our young
they'll learn to crave danger and conquer defeat,
learn how our Roman, lance-wielding horsemen
force the fierce Turk to flee in retreat . . .

How sweet and how glorious to die for one's country!
Anyhow, death catches up with deserters at last.
Nor does death overlook the least bellicose youngster,
Bushwhacked with both of his knee-tendons slashed . . .

But manly Worth opens wide the gates of heaven
to those who have done immortal things.
Escaping the masses and damp earth itself,
Worth raises the worthy on beating wings.

**"Dulce et Decorum Est,"
by Wilfred Owen, 1921 posthumously**

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! . . .

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.²

