

Dic mihi, Musa levis: cur tam gravis esse videris? Weighing Poetry in Horace Odes 3.30

1. Horace, *Odes* 3.30.10-16

*Dicar, qua uiolens obstrepit Aufidus
et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium
regnauit populorum, ex humili potens
princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos
deduxisse modos. Sume superbiam
quaesitam meritis et mihi Delphica
lauro cinge uolens, Melpomene, comam.*

Where the raging Aufidus roars
and where Daunus, lacking in water, ruled
over rustic peoples, I, powerful from lowly birth,
will be called the first to have brought down Aeolic
song to Italian verses. Take up your well-earned
pride, Melpomene, and with Delphic laurel
willingly crown my hair.

2. Vergil, *Georgics* 3.10-15

*Primus ego in patriam mecum, modo uita supersit,
Aonio rediens deducam uertice Musas;
primus Idumaeas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas,
et uiridi in campo templum de marmore ponam
propter aquam, tardis ingens ubi flexibus errat
Mincius et tenera praetexit harundine ripas.*

I first, should life remain, returning to my country
will lead down the Muses from the Aonian peak.
I first will bring back to you, Mantua, the Idumaean palms,
and in the green field I will place a temple of marble
beside the water, where the large Mincius wanders with
slow turnings and cloaks its banks in tender reed.

3. Vergil, *Eclogues* 6.3-8

*Cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem
uellit et admonuit: 'pastorem, Tityre, pinguis
pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen.'
nunc ego (namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes,
Vare, tuas cupiant et tristia condere bella)
agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam:*

When I sang of kings and wars, the Cynthian one
tugged my ear and warned: "A shepherd, Tityrus, should
feed flocks fat, but sing a slender song."
Now I (for there will be others besides who want to sing
your praises, Varus, and tell of mournful wars),
with slender reed I'll focus on my rustic Muse.

4. Callimachus, *Aetia Prologue* 21-24

καὶ γὰρ ὅτ]ε πρ[ώ]τιστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα
γούνασι]ν, Ἄ[πό]λλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος·
'.....]... ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅττι πάχιστον
θρέψαι, τῆ]ν Μοῦσαν δ' ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην·

For when I first put tablet to my knees,
Lycian Apollo spoke this to me:
"Feed your sacrifice fat as can be,
good singer, but keep your Muse lean."

5. Callimachus, *Aetia Prologue* 8-12

.....] τήκ[ειν] ἧπαρ ἐπιστάμενον,
.....].. ρεην [ὀλ]ιγόστιχος· ἀλλὰ καθέλ[κει
.... πο]λὺ τὴν μακρὴν ὄμπνια Θεσμοφόρο[ς·
τοῖν δὲ] δυοῖν Μίμνερμος ὅτι γλυκύς, α[ἰ] κατὰ λεπτόν
.....] ἧ μεγάλη δ' οὐκ ἐδίδαξε γυνή.

... knowing how to consume the liver,
... of few verses, but bountiful Demeter
... far outweighs the tall (woman?),
and of the two it was the (slender verses?) that
taught that Mimnermus was sweet, not his great lady.

6. Horace, *Odes* 3.1.41-48

*Quod si dolentem nec Phrygius lapis
nec purpurarum sidere clarior
delenit usus nec Falerna
uitis Achaemeniumque costum,*

*cur inuidendis postibus et nouo
sublime ritu moliar atrium?
Cur ualle permutem Sabina
diuitias operosiores?*

But if neither Phrygian stone, nor
the use of purple brighter than the sun,
nor Falernian wine or Persian perfume
soothe a man in grief,

Why would I hoist a lofty hall with
a modish look and posts that draw ire?
Why would I trade my Sabine valley
for toil-compounding wealth?

7. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.871-79

*Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas.
cum uolet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aeu:
parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum,
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris,
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama,
siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam.*

And now I've finished a work which neither Jove's anger
nor fire nor steel nor gnawing age will be able to ruin.
When it wants, let that day end the space of my uncertain
life (it has the right to take my flesh, but nothing more).
Even so will I be carried above the high stars,
eternal, in my better part, and my name will be indelible,
and where Roman power stretches over conquered lands,
I will be on the people's lips, and through all generations,
if predictions of bards have any merit, in fame I'll live.

8. Horace, *Odes* 2.20.13-20

*Iam Daedaleo notior Icaro
uisam gementis litora Bospori
Syrtisque Gaetulas canorus
ales Hyperboreosque campos.*

*Me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum
Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi
noscent Geloni, me peritus
discet Hiber Rhodanique potor.*

Now, more famous than Daedalian Icarus
I will visit the Bosphorus' groaning shores
and Gaetolian Syrtes and Hyperborean
fields as a songful bird.

The Colchian will know me, the Dacian too,
who hides his fear of Latin troops, and the
farthest Geloni; the learned Spaniard will learn
of me, as will he who drinks from the Rhone.

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