

## Horace Sympathizes With a Fool in Love (*Odes* 1.5)

Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa  
Perfusus liquidis urget odoribus  
Grato, Pyrrha, sub antro?  
Cui flavam religas comam

What slender youngster, swathing you in rose,  
awash in fragrance, now is on to you,  
my Pyrrha, in some alluring hideaway?  
For whom the new blonde do,

Simplex munditiis? heu quotiens fidem  
Mutatosque deos flebit et aspera  
Nigris aequora ventis  
Emirabitur insolens,

so primly groomed? Oh sad how many times  
he'll weep the loss of faith and heaven's grace;  
the spread of sea up-churned by darkest winds  
will stun him long and strange

Qui nunc te fruitur credulus aurea,  
Qui semper vacuum, semper amabilem  
Sperat, nescius aerae  
Fallacis. miseri, quibus

who now enjoys your golden self in trust,  
who hopes you're always free and easy there,  
without a clue how badly breezes lie.  
Oh, sad poor souls for whom

Intemptata nites: me tabula sacer  
Votiva paries indicat uvida  
Suspendisse potenti  
Vestimenta maris deo.

you shine untested. As for me, a shrine  
displays a votive on the wall: it says  
I've hoisted up my own clothes dripping wet  
to this sea's mighty god.

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Some reflections:

1. This poem is especially challenging to translate, so compressed are its phrases. The English version here uses almost twice as many words, in stanzas with three five-beat lines and one of three beats. The content of the lyric seems quite accessible. There is charm and personality, vivid presentation, a knowing smile, and advice for the unwary. The last stanza gives the poem a gently personal twist.

2. The mighty god at the end is sometimes taken as Neptune, but if the sea in stanza two is metaphorical, referring to the travails of love, why should "the god of the sea" be literal? The translation here indicates that the god is not Neptune but rather the god of love.

3. John Milton (1608–74) famously translated the much-admired phrase *simplex munditiis* as "plain in thy neatness." Here is his version, for comparison:

What slender youth, bedew'd with liquid odors,  
Courts thee on roses in some pleasant cave,  
Pyrrha? For whom bind'st thou

In wreaths thy golden hair,  
Plain in thy neatness? O how oft shall he  
Of faith and changed gods complain, and seas  
Rough with black winds, and storms  
Unwonted shall admire!  
Who now enjoys thee credulous, all gold,  
Who, always vacant, always amiable  
Hopes thee, of flattering gales  
Unmindful. Hapless they  
To whom thou untried seem'st fair. Me, in my vow'd  
Picture, the sacred wall declares to have hung  
My dank and dropping weeds  
To the stern god of sea.

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