

**THE EPISTLE  
(INCLUDING  
THE ARS POETICA)**

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The epistle (including the Ars poetica) by Horace

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HORACE  
THE EPISTLES  
(INCLUDING THE ARS POETICA)

A TRANSLATION

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# HORACE.—EPISTLES.

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N.B.—In the few passages where this Translation does not follow Plaistow's Text, the reading adopted will be found in the Notes to his edition.

## BOOK I.

### EPISTLE I.

Do you, *Mæcenas*, sung in my earliest lay, destined to be sung in my latest, seek to enclose me a second time in my old training-school, though I am sufficiently approved, and already presented with the wooden foil? My age is not the same, neither is my inclination. *Veianus*, having hung up his arms on a pillar of *Hercules'* temple, lies concealed on his country farm, that he may not so often on the edge of the arena entreat the people to free him. There is one who often rings through my listening ear, "Wise in time release the horse now growing old, that he may not fail ridiculously in the end and break his wind." And so now I lay aside verses and all other trifles; what is true and fitting I study and inquire, and am wholly absorbed in this. I store up and arrange material, so that I may afterwards bring it forth. And lest, perchance, you ask under what leader, in what home I find shelter; sentenced to swear allegiance to no master, wheresoever the tempest hurries me, thither am I borne as a guest. Now I become an active politician, and plunge myself in the waves of civil life, the guardian and inflexible attendant of true virtue; now insensibly I glide back into the precepts of *Aristippus*, and endeavour to bend circumstances to me, not myself to circumstances. As the night appears long to those whose mistress plays them false, and the day to those who are bound to perform some task; as the year is slothful to minors upon whom the stern control of their mother weighs hard, so for me slow and unpleasant move on the hours, which

hinder my hope and design of doing strenuously that which  
 is of advantage to poor alike, to rich alike, and which, if  
 neglected, will be equally hurtful to boys and to old men.  
 It remains that I rule and console myself with these axioms.  
 You may not be able to see with your eyes as far as Lyn-  
 cæus; nevertheless, you would not on that account refuse  
 to be anointed when troubled with sore eyes; nor, because  
 you may despair of possessing the limbs of unvanquished  
 Glycon, would you be unwilling to guard your body against  
 the knotty gont in the hand. It is possible to advance  
 to a certain point, even if it is not granted to go beyond.  
 Your bosom is fevered with avarice and tormenting desire;  
 there are spells and strains by which you may allay this  
 pain, and get rid of a large portion of the disease. You  
 swell with the love of praise; there are specific remedies  
 which will have power to relieve you, when you have thrice  
 with pure mind read a little book. The envious, wrathful,  
 sluggish, drunken, licentious—no one is so utterly wild  
 that he cannot become tame, provided only he lend to  
 culture a patient ear. It is the commencement of virtue  
 to flee vice, and the commencement of wisdom to be free  
 from folly. You see with what toil of mind and body you  
 avoid those ills which you consider to be greatest—a scanty  
 fortune, and an unsuccessful candidature. An unwearied  
 merchant, you rush to the ends of India, flying from poverty  
 over sea, and rocks, and fires; are you not willing to learn,  
 and hear, and trust a better man, so that you may not care  
 for those things which now foolishly you admire and  
 covet? What boxer around the villages and cross-ways  
 would disdain to be crowned at the great Olympic games,  
 who had the hope, who had the promise of the pleasant  
 palm of victory without the toil (*id. dust*)? Silver is  
 worth less than gold, gold than virtues. "O citizens,  
 citizens, first of all is money to be sought; virtue after  
 wealth." These precepts the whole Janus from top to  
 bottom proclaims, these precepts youths and old men re-  
 echo, with satchels and tablet hanging from the left arm.  
 You have spirit, character, you have a ready tongue and  
 credit; but if 6000 or 7000 sesterces are wanting of the  
 four hundred thousand, you will be a low fellow. But

60 boys, when playing, say, "You shall be king, if you will do  
 well." Let this be our wall of brass, to be conscious of no  
 guilt, to turn pale with no fault. Tell me, if you please, is  
 the Roscian law the better, or the children's jingle, which  
 65 presents the sovereignty to those who do well—a ditty  
 chanted by the sturdy Curii and Camilli? Does he advise  
 you better who says, "Make money, money; if you can,  
 honestly, if not, by any means make money," in order that  
 you may view more closely the lamentable plays of Pupius;  
 or he who, at hand, exhorts and fits you to confront dis-  
 70 dainful Fortune, free and upright? But if, perchance, the  
 Roman people ask me why I do not use the same opinions  
 as they, as I do the same colonnades, why I neither follow  
 nor avoid the pursuits which they love or hate, I shall  
 reply, as once the wary fox answered the ailing lion, "Be-  
 75 cause the foot-prints terrify me, since they all look towards  
 you, none back from you." Thou art a monster of many  
 heads. For what am I to follow, or whom? A part of  
 mankind longs to take state-contracts; there are those who  
 with tit-bits and fruits hunt for avaricious widows, and net  
 old men, that they may send them into their preserves; the  
 80 wealth of many grows by secret usury. But, be it that  
 different individuals are attracted by different objects and  
 pursuits; can the same men continue one hour to approve  
 of the same things? "No retreat in all the world outshines  
 delicious Baiae." If the rich man has so said, lake and sea  
 feel the affection of the hurrying master; then, if morbid  
 85 caprice has lent its sanction, "To-morrow, workmen, you  
 will bear your tools to Teanum." Is the nuptial couch in  
 his hall? He says nothing is preferable to, nothing better  
 than, a bachelor's life. If it is not, he swears the married  
 are alone blessed. With what noose can I hold this Pro-  
 90 teus, who is changing thus his appearance? What does  
 the poor man do? Laugh! he changes his garrets, his  
 seats, his baths, his barbers; in his hired boat he is just as  
 sick as the wealthy man, whom his own trireme conveys.  
 If I meet you with my hair cropped when the barber cut  
 unevenly, you laugh; if I have a threadbare shirt beneath  
 a glossy tunic, or if my toga sits awry and does not fit, you  
 laugh; what do you do when my judgment is at war with



itself? when it rejects what it sought, seeks again what it lately flung away, when it is in a ferment, and is inconsistent in its whole method of life? when it pulls down, builds up, changes square to round? Why, you think I am mad in the ordinary way; you don't laugh at me, neither do you think I am in need of a physician, or of a guardian assigned by the prætor, although you are the protection of my affairs, and are angry about the ill-pared nail of the friend who depends upon you, who reveres you. Finally, the wise man is less than Jove alone; wealthy, free, of high rank, handsome; in short, a king of kings; above all, he is sound, except when a cold is troublesome.

## II.

While you, Maximus Lollius, are declaiming at Rome, I, at Praeneste, have read again the writer of the Trojan war, who tells us what is honourable, what shameful, what is expedient, what is not, more clearly and better than Chrysippus and Crantor. If nothing hinders you, bear why I have thus concluded. The story—in which it is related how, on account of the love of Paris, Greece was dashed in lingering war against the land of the barbarians—contains the fiery passions of foolish kings and peoples. Antenor advises them to cut off the cause of war. What says Paris? He declares that he cannot be forced to reign in safety, and to live happily. Nestor hastens to make up the quarrel between Pelides and Atrides: love inflames the one, anger both in common. Whatever madness the kings commit, the Achæans suffer for. By mutiny, treachery, crime, lust and rage, sin is committed within and without the Trojan walls. Again, he has set before us Ulysses, as an instructive instance of what worth and wisdom can do,—who, vanquisher of Troy, beheld with keen eyes the cities and the manners of many men, and who, over the broad ocean, while he endeavoured to secure for himself and his companions a return home, endured many hardships, not to be overwhelmed by the adverse waves of circumstances. You know the Sirens' songs, and Circe's cups, of which, if with his companions, foolish and greedy, he had drunk, beneath a harlot mistress would he have become a being hideous and senseless, and

would have lived a filthy hound, or hog that delights in mire. We are mere cyphers, and born to consume the fruits of the ground, losel wooers of Penelope, youths of Alcinous', who toiled overmuch in caring for their bodies, to whom it seemed glorious to sleep till midday, and to lull their cares to rest by the strains of the lyre. Robbers arise by night to cut a man's throat; can you not awake to save yourself? But, if you refuse when sound, you will run when dropsical; and unless before daybreak you demand book and light, if you will not direct your mind to honourable pursuits and objects, lying awake you will be tortured with envy or love. For why do you hurry to remove those objects which injure the eye, but, if aught gnaws the mind, put off the season of cure from year to year? Who begins, possesses the half of the deed: dare to be wise; make a commencement. He who puts off the hour of living aright is like the clown waiting until the river flow by; but it glides on and will glide on with rolling waters for all time. "Money is sought, and a wealthy wife for bearing children; and savage forests are reclaimed by the share." Let him to whom there falls what is sufficient covet naught beyond. Neither mansion and estate, nor a heap of brass and gold is wont to dispel fevers from the sick body of its lord, or cares from his mind. The owner must be well, if he thinks of enjoying the things he has stored up. Who desires or fears, him house and fortune delight just as much as pictures delight sore eyes, as foot-wraps the gout, as the lyre delights ears afflicted with collected matter. Unless the vessel is clean, everything you pour in turns sour. Despise pleasures; pleasure bought with pain is harmful. The miser is ever in want: seek some fixed end for your desire. The envious man grows lean at the thriving fortune of his neighbour; than envy, even Sicilian tyrants found no greater torment. The man who will not curb his anger will wish that undone, to which resentment and wrath prompted him, while he hurried to inflict a violent punishment for the gratification of his revenge. Anger is a brief frenzy: rule the temper; unless it obeys, it commands—this restrain with bit and chain. The groom trains the steed while it is still docile, with tender neck, to go the

way its rider directs; the hunting-hound, from the time when it barked at the stag's hide in the court-yard, campaigns it in the woods. Now, while yet a boy, drink in my words with pure heart; now entrust yourself to better men. Long will the cask retain the odour with which when new it has once been tinged. But if you lag behind, or vigorously push on before, I neither wait for a loiterer, nor press on those that go before me.

### III.

I long to know, Julius Florus, in what regions of the earth Clandius, the stepson of Augustus, is serving. Does Thrace detain you, and Hebrus bound in snowy fetters, or the narrow seas which run between the neighbouring towers, or the fertile plains and hills of Asia? What sort of tasks does the diligent staff plan? This, too, I am anxious about. Who is taking on himself to relate the achievements of Augustus? Who is spreading into remote times his wars and times of peace? What is Titius doing, soon to be spoken of by Roman tongues, who has not shrunk from the draughts of the Pindaric spring, daring to scorn the tanks and streamlets open to all? How is his health? How far does he recollect me? Is he eager to adapt Theban measures to the Latin lyre under the guidance of the Muse, or does he storm and rave in the tragic art? And what is Celsus doing?—he who has been, and must be, often advised to seek stores of his own, and to avoid touching the writings which the Palatine Apollo has taken under his charge, lest if, perchance, the flock of birds should come at some time to demand their own plumage, he, like the jackdaw stripped of its stolen colours, should excite laughter. And you, what do you attempt? Around what thyme are you busily flitting? Your genius is not insignificant, neither is it uncultivated, nor rough and unpolished; you, whether you sharpen your eloquence for pleading, or undertake to give opinions in civil law, or whether you compose charming poetry, will carry off the first prize of victor's ivy. But, if you could leave your worries, those numbing bands, you would go whither heavenly wisdom would lead you. This task, this pursuit, let us, small and great, urge on, if we wish to