

Horace

*ARS POETICA*

Translated by Leon Golden



1-33

If a painter were willing to join a horse's neck to a human head and spread on multicolored feathers, with different parts of the body brought in from anywhere and everywhere, so that what starts out above as a beautiful woman ends up horribly as a black fish, could you my friends, if you had been admitted to the spectacle, hold back your laughter? Believe me, dear Pisos, that very similar to such a painting would be a literary work in which meaningless images are fashioned, like the dreams of someone who is mentally ill, so that neither the foot nor the head can be attributed to a single form. "Painters and poets," someone objects, "have always had an equal right to dare to do whatever they wanted." We know it and we both seek this indulgence and grant it in turn. But not to the degree that the savage mate with the gentle, nor that snakes be paired with birds, nor lambs with tigers.

14-23

Often, one or two purple patches are stitched onto works that have begun in high seriousness, and that profess important themes, so that they sparkle far and wide; as when the grove and altar of Diana and the circling of swiftly flowing waters through the pleasant fields or the Rhine river or the rainbow are described. But this

was not the place for such embellishments. And perhaps you know how to draw a cypress tree. What does that matter if you have been paid to paint a desperate sailor swimming away from a shipwreck? You started out to make a wine-jar. Why, as the wheel turns, does it end up as a pitcher? In short, let the work be anything you like, but let it at least be one, single thing.

24-31

Most of us poets, o father and sons who are worthy of that father, deceive ourselves by an illusion of correct procedure. I work at achieving brevity; instead I become obscure. Striving for smoothness, vigor and spirit escape me. One poet, promising the sublime, delivers pomposity. Another creeps along the ground, overly cautious and too much frightened of the gale. Whoever wishes to vary a single subject in some strange and wonderful way, paints a dolphin into a forest and a boar onto the high seas. The avoidance of blame leads to error if there is an absence of art.

32-37

Near the gladiatorial school of Aemilius, a most incompetent craftsman will mold toenails and imitate soft hair in bronze but he is unsuccessful with his complete work because he does not know how to represent a whole figure. If I wished to compose something, I would no more wish to be him than to live with a crooked nose although highly regarded for my black eyes and black hair.

38-45

Pick a subject, writers, equal to your strength and take some time to consider what your shoulders should refuse and what they can bear. Neither eloquence nor clear organization will forsake one who has chosen a subject within his capabilities. Unless I am mistaken this will be the special excellence and delight of good organization, that the author of the promised poem, enamored of one subject and scornful of another, says now what ought to be said now and both postpones and omits a great deal for the present.

46-59

Also in linking words you will speak with exceptional subtlety and care if a skillful connection renders a well-known term with a new twist. If, by chance, it is

necessary to explain obscure matters by means of new images it will turn out that you must devise words never heard by the kilted Cethegi, and license for this will be given if claimed with modesty.

Words that are new and recently coined will be received in good faith if they are sparingly diverted from a Greek source. Why then will the Roman grant to Caecilius and Plautus what is denied to Virgil and Varius? If I am capable of doing it, why am I grudged the acquisition of some few words when the tongue of Cato and Ennius enriched our ancestral language and revealed new names for things? It has always been permitted, and it always will be permitted to bring to light a name stamped with the mark of the present day.

60-72

Just as forests change their leaves year by year and the first drop to the ground, so the old generation of words perishes, and new ones, like the rising tide of the young, flourish and grow strong. We, and everything that is ours, are destined to die; whether Neptune, hospitably received on land, keeps our fleets safe from the north winds, a task worthy of a king, or a marsh, barren for a long time, and suitable for oars, nourishes nearby cities and feels the heavy plough, or a river has changed its course that was hostile to crops and has discovered a better route to follow, all things mortal will perish; much less will the glory and grace of language remain alive. Many terms will be born again that by now have sunk into oblivion, and many that are now held in respect will die out if that is what use should dictate in whose power is the judgment and the law and the rule of speech.

73-88

Homer has demonstrated in what meter we should describe the deeds of kings and leaders as well as gloomy wars. Lament, first, was enclosed in unequally paired verses and later also our grateful thoughts for answered prayer. Scholars disagree about who originally published these brief elegiac verses, and it still is before the court as a matter of dispute. Fury armed Archilochus with his own iambus: both the comic sock and the grand tragic boot took possession of this foot, suited as it was for alternating dialogue and able to conquer the raucous shouts of the audience as well as naturally suited to action. The muse granted the lyre the task of reporting about the gods, the children of the gods, the victorious boxer, and the

horse who was first in the race, as well as to record youthful anguish and wine's liberating influence. Why am I greeted as a poet if I have neither the ability nor the knowledge to preserve the variations and shades of the literary works that I have described? Why, perversely modest, do I prefer to be ignorant than to learn?

89-98

The subject matter of comedy does not wish to find expression in tragic verses. In the same way the feast of Thyestes is indignant at being represented through informal verses that are very nearly worthy of the comic sock. Let each genre keep to the appropriate place allotted to it. Sometimes, however, even comedy raises its voice and an angered Chremes declaims furiously in swollen utterances; and often the tragic figures of Telephus and Peleus grieve in pedestrian language when, as a pauper or exile, each of them, if he should care to touch the heart of the spectator with his complaint, abandons bombast and a sesquipedalian vocabulary.

99,113

It is not enough for poems to be "beautiful"; they must also yield delight and guide the listener's spirit wherever they wish. As human faces laugh with those who are laughing, so they weep with those who are weeping. If you wish me to cry, you must first feel grief yourself, then your misfortunes, O Telephus or Peleus, will injure me. If you speak ineptly assigned words, I shall either sleep or laugh. Sad words are fitting for the gloomy face, words full of threats for the angry one, playful words for the amused face, serious words for the stern one. For Nature first forms us within so as to respond to every kind of fortune. She delights us or impels us to anger or knocks us to the ground and torments us with oppressive grief. Afterward she expresses the emotions of the spirit with language as their interpreter. If, however, there is discord between the words spoken and the fortune of the speaker, Romans, whether cavalry or infantry, will raise their voices in a raucous belly laugh.

114,118

It will make a great difference whether a god is speaking or a hero, a mature old man or someone passionate and still in the full flower of youth, a powerful matron or a diligent nurse, an itinerant merchant or the cultivator of a prosperous field, a Colchian or an Assyrian, one raised in Thebes or in Argos.

119-152

Either follow tradition or devise harmonious actions. O writer, if you by chance describe once again honored Achilles, let him be weariless, quick to anger, stubborn, violent; let him deny that laws were made for him, let him claim everything by arms. Let Medea be wild and unconquerable, Ino doleful, Ixion treacherous, Io a wanderer in mind and body, Orestes filled with sorrow. If you commit anything untested to the stage and you dare to fashion a novel character, let it be maintained to the end just as it emerged at the beginning and let it be consistent with itself. It is difficult to speak uniquely of common themes; and yet you will more properly spin the song of Troy into acts than if you are the first to bring to light what has not been known or recorded in literature. Material in the public domain will come under private jurisdiction if you do not loiter around the broad, common poetic cycle, and do not strive, as a literal translator, to render texts word for word, and if you will not, as an imitator, leap down into a narrow space from where shame or the rules applying to the work forbid you to extricate your foot; nor should you begin your work as the cyclic poet once did: "Of Priam's fate and renowned war I shall sing." What might someone who makes this pledge bring forth that will be worthy of his big mouth? Mountains will go into labor, but an absurd mouse will be born. How much more skillful is the one who does not toil foolishly: "Tell me, O Muse, of the man, who, after the capture of Troy, viewed the customs and cities of many different peoples." He does not aim to extract smoke from the flaming light but rather light from the smoke, so that he might then describe spectacular marvels, Antiphates and the Scylla and Charybdis along with the Cyclops. Nor does he begin the return of Diomedes from the death of Meleager nor the Trojan War from the twin eggs. He always moves swiftly to the issue at hand and rushes his listener into the middle of the action just as if it were already known, and he abandons those subjects he does not think can glitter after he has treated them. Thus does he invent, thus does he mingle the false with the true that the middle is not inconsistent with the beginning, nor the end with the middle.

153 – 178

Listen to what I and the general public along with me desire, if indeed you wish applauding listeners to wait for the final curtain and to remain seated until the singer says "Give us a hand now"; you must note the characteristics of each stage of life and you must grant what is appropriate to changing natures and ages. A child who just now has learned to repeat words and to stamp the ground with a firm footstep takes great pleasure in playing with other children and heedlessly conceives and abandons anger as well as changes moods hour by hour. The beardless youth, with his guardian finally removed, rejoices in horses and dogs and in the grass of the sunny Campus; supple as wax to be fashioned into vice, he is rude to those who give him advice, slow at providing for what is useful, extravagant with money, filled with lofty ideas and passionate, but also swift to abandon the objects of his affection. When one has reached manhood in age and spirit, the objects of his enthusiasm are altered, and he seeks wealth and connections, becomes a slave to the trappings of honor, is hesitant to have set into motion what he will soon struggle to change. Many troubles assail an old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then wretchedly abstains from what he possesses and is afraid to use it, or because he attends to all his affairs feebly and timidly; a procrastinator, he is apathetic in his hopes and expectations, sluggish and fearful of the future, obstinate, always complaining; he devotes himself to praising times past, when he was a boy, and to being the castigator and moral censor of the young. The years, as they approach, bring many advantages with them; as they recede, they take many away. To ensure that, by chance, roles appropriate for old men are not assigned to the young and those designed for mature men are not given to children, you shall always spend time on the traits that belong and are suitable to the age of a character.

179 – 188

Either a scene is acted out on the stage or someone reports the events that have occurred. Actions that have been admitted to our consciousness through our having heard them have less of an impact on our minds than those that have been brought to our attention by our trusty vision and for which the spectator himself is an eyewitness. You will not, however, produce onstage actions that ought to be done offstage; and you will remove many incidents from our eyes so that someone

who was present might report those incidents; Medea should not slaughter her children in the presence of the people, nor abominable Atreus cook human organs publicly, nor Procne be turned into a bird, Cadmus into a snake. Whatever you show me like this, I detest and refuse to believe.

189-201

A play should not be shorter or longer than five acts if, once it has been seen, it wishes to remain in demand and be brought back for return engagements. Nor should any god intervene unless a knot show up that is worthy of such a liberator; nor should a fourth actor strive to speak.

Let the chorus sustain the role of an actor and the function of a man, and let it not sing anything between the acts that does not purposefully and aptly serve and unite with the action. It should favor the good and provide friendly counsel; it should control the wrathful and show its approval of those who fear to sin; it should praise modest meals, wholesome justice and laws, and peace with its open gates; it should conceal secrets and entreat and beg the gods that fortune return to the downtrodden and depart from the arrogant.

202-219

The double pipe not, as now, bound with brass and a rival of the trumpet, but thin and simple, with few holes, was sufficient to assist and support the chorus and to fill still uncrowded benches with its breath; where, indeed, the populace, easy to count since it was small in number, honest, pious, and modest came together. After a conquering nation began to extend its lands and a more extensive wall began to embrace the city, we started to appease our guardian spirit freely with daylight drinking on holidays, and then greater license arrived on the scene for rhythms and tunes. For what level of taste might an uneducated audience have, freed of toil and composed of a mixture of rustic and urban elements, of low life and aristocrats? Thus the flute player added bodily movement and excessive extravagance to the venerable art of past times and trailed a robe behind him as he wandered around the stage. So also the tonal range of the austere lyre increased, and a reckless fluency brought with it a strange eloquence whose thought, wise in matters of practical wisdom and prophetic of the future, was not out of tune with that of oracular Delphi.



220-250

The poet who contended in tragic song for the sake of an insignificant goat soon also stripped wild Satyrs of their clothes and in a rough manner, with his dignity unharmed, attempted jokes because it was only by enticements and pleasing novelty that the spectator, having performed the sacred rites and having become drunk and reckless, was going to remain in the audience. But it is appropriate to render the Satyrs agreeable in their laughter and mockery and to exchange the serious for the comic so that no god, no hero is brought on who, having just been seen in regal gold and purple, then moves into the humble hovel of low class diction; or, while avoiding the lowly earth, reaches for empty clouds. Tragedy, indignant at spouting frivolous verses, like the matron who is asked to dance on a holiday, appears with some shame, among the impudent Satyrs. I shall not, O Pisos, were I a writer of Satyric drama, be fond only of unadorned and commonly used nouns and verbs; nor shall I strive so much to differ from the tone of tragedy that it makes no difference if Davus is speaking with audacious Pythias who, having swindled Simo, now has gained for herself a talent's worth of silver, or the speaker is Silenus, guardian and servant of his divine foster child. I shall aim at fashioning a poem from quite familiar elements so that anyone might anticipate doing as well, might sweat profusely at it, and yet labor in vain after having ventured to do what I have done: so great is the power of arrangement and linkage, so great is the grace that is added to words that are adapted from ordinary language. When Fauns of the forest are brought onstage, in my judgment, they should avoid behaving as if they had been born at the crossroads and were almost denizens of the forum or act ever as adolescents with their all-too-wanton verses or rattle off their dirty and disgraceful jokes. That sort of thing gives offense to an audience of knights, respectable heads of households, and men with substantial fortunes, nor do they accept with a patient spirit, or bestow a crown on, whatever the consumer of roasted chick-peas and nuts approves.

251-262

A long syllable adjacent to a short one is called an Iambus, a "quick" foot; for that reason Iambus commanded that the name trimeter be attached to the lines bearing his name although he delivers six beats a line and from first to last is the spitting image of himself. Not so long ago, in order that the trimeter reach the ears with



somewhat greater dignity and deliberation, Iambus admitted the stately spondee into his ancestral rights, obligingly and tolerantly, but not so sociably as to withdraw from the second and fourth foot of the line. This Iambus appears rarely in the "noble" trimeters of Accius and, as for the verses of Ennius, hurled onto the stage in their ponderous sluggishness, he pursues them with the shameful charge of excessively hasty and slipshod workmanship or of sheer ignorance of the poet's craft.

263 –274

It is not just any critic who will notice rhythmically flawed lines, and indulgence, far more than is merited, has been granted to our Roman poets. Because of that should I ramble around and write without any discipline at all? Or should I consider that everyone is going to see my faults and, warily playing it safe, remain within the hope of pardon? I have then, in short, avoided blame, but I have not earned praise. Your mandate is to hold Greek models before you by day and to hold them before you by night. But (you say) your ancestors praised the meters and wit of Plautus; well (I reply), they admired both with excessive tolerance, not to say stupidity--if you and I just know how to distinguish a tasteless expression from an elegant one, and we have the skill to recognize the proper sound with our ears and fingers.

275 –284

We are told that Thespis discovered the tragic muse's genre, which was unknown until then, and hauled his verse dramas around in wagons; these dramas, actors, their faces thoroughly smeared with wine-lees, sang and performed. After him Aeschylus, the inventor of the mask and the elegant robe, laid down a stage on modestly sized beams and taught the art of grandiloquent speech and of treading the boards in the high boot of the tragic actor. Old comedy followed in the footsteps of these tragic poets and not without much praise; but the license it assumed for itself descended into vice, and its force was justifiably tamed by law; the law was received with approval, and the chorus in disgrace became silent since its right to cause harm was abolished.

285-294

Our own poets have left nothing untried nor have they earned the least glory when they have dared to abandon the tracks of the Greeks and to celebrate domestic situations either by producing serious Roman dramas or native Roman comedies. Nor would Latium be more powerful in courage and in illustrious arms than in literature if the time-consuming effort required for a truly polished revision of the text did not give offense to every single one of our poets. O you, who are descendants of Pompilius, denounce any poem that many a day and many a correction has not carefully pruned and then improved ten times over to meet the test of the well-trimmed nail.

295-308

Because Democritus believes that native talent is a more blessed thing than poor, miserable craftsmanship and excludes from Helicon, the home of the muses, rational poets, quite a number do not trouble to cut their nails or shave their beards; they seek out lonely spots; they avoid the baths. One will obtain the reward and the name of a poet if he never entrusts his head, incurable even by three times Anticyra's output of hellebore, to the barber, Licinus. O what an unlucky fool I am! I have my bile purged just before spring arrives! No one else could write a better poem. But nothing is worth that effort! Instead, I shall serve in place of a whetstone that has the power to render iron sharp but itself lacks the ability to cut; while not writing anything myself, I will teach what nurtures and forms the poet, from what source his power springs, what his function and duty are, what is proper and what is not and in what direction poetic excellence leads and in what direction failure beckons.

309-322

The foundation and source of literary excellence is wisdom. The works written about Socrates are able to reveal the true subject matter of poetry and, once the subject matter has been provided, words will freely follow. He who has learned what he owes to his country, what he owes to his friends, by what kind of love a parent, a brother, or a guest should be honored, what is the duty of a senator, what is the function of a judge, what is the role of a general sent into war--he, assuredly, knows how to represent what is appropriate for each character. I bid the artist,

trained in representation, to reflect on exemplars of life and character and to bring us living voices from that source. Sometimes a tale that lacks stylistic elegance, grandeur, and skill but is adorned with impressive passages and characters who are accurately drawn is a greater source of pleasure and better holds the interest of an audience than verses that lack a vision of reality and are mere trifles to charm the ear.

323-332

To the Greeks, covetous of nothing except glory, the Muse granted inspired talent, to the Greeks she gave eloquence in full measure. Roman youths, on the other hand, learn by means of lengthy calculations how to divide a sum of money into a hundred parts. "You, there, Albinus's son, solve the following problem: If one-twelfth is subtracted from five twelfths, how much is left? Come on, you should have given me the answer by now!" "It's one-third!" "Well done, my boy, you'll surely be able to protect your investments." "Now suppose that one-twelfth is added to five-twelfths, what does that make?" "I've got it—one-half!" When once this corruption and avid concern for material wealth has stained the human spirit, can we really hope that poems will be written worth anointing and protecting with oil of cedar, and preserving in chests of polished cypress?

333-346

Poets wish to either benefit or delight us, or, at one and the same time, to speak words that are both pleasing and useful for our lives. Whatever lessons you teach, let them be brief, so that receptive spirits will quickly perceive and faithfully retain what you have said. Everything superfluous seeps out of the well-stocked mind. In order to create pleasure, poetic fictions should approximate reality so that a play should not claim, on its own behalf, that anything it wishes must be believed nor should it extract a living child from the stomach of the ogress, Lamia, after she has dined. The centuries of elders drive away whatever is without serious value; the high and mighty Ramnes keep their distance from gloomy poems. He gets every vote who combines the useful with the pleasant, and who, at the same time he pleases the reader, also instructs him. That book will earn money for the Sosii, this one will cross the sea and extend immeasurably the life of a famous writer.

347-360

There are, however, mistakes that we are willing to forgive. For the string does not always return the sound that the hand and mind desire, and although you seek a low note, it very often sends back a high one. Nor will the bow always strike whatever it threatens. But where many qualities sparkle in a poem, I will not find fault with a few blemishes, which either carelessness introduced or human nature, too little vigilant, did not avoid. What then? Just as the scribe who copies books, if he always makes the same mistake no matter how much he is warned, has no claim on our indulgence, and a lyre-player is mocked who always strikes the same false note, so the poet who is frequently found wanting turns into another Choerilus who, amidst my scorn for his work, astonishes me the two or three times he is really good; I am also offended when great Homer falls asleep on us, but it is permitted for some drowsiness to creep into a long work.

361-365

Poetry resembles painting. Some works will captivate you when you stand very close to them and others if you are at a greater distance. This one prefers a darker vantage point, that one wants to be seen in the light since it feels no terror before the penetrating judgment of the critic. This pleases only once, that will give pleasure even if we go back to it ten times over.

366-378

And you, the older brother, although you have been molded by your father's voice to know what is correct and you are wise in your own right, take and hold in your memory this warning: only in certain activities are we justified in tolerating mediocrity and what is just passable.

A run-of-the mill expert in the law or pleader of cases is a long way from the skill of the eloquent Messala and doesn't know as much as Aulus Cascellius, but nevertheless he has a value. But neither men nor gods nor booksellers have ever put their stamp of approval on mediocre poets. Just as at a gracious meal a discordant musical performance or a thick perfume or Sardinian honey on your poppy seeds give offense because the meal could have been put together without them; in the same way a poem that comes into existence and is created for the

gratification of our mind and heart, if it misses true excellence by only a little, verges toward deepest failure.

379-384

The person who does not know how to play forgoes the athletic equipment in the Campus Martius, and someone who does not know anything about the ball, the discus, or the hoop stays away from the action in order to prevent the packed crowd of spectators from raising their voices in unrestrained laughter: But the person who has no idea how to create poetry still has the audacity to try. Why not? He is a free citizen, and was born that way, and especially because he is both rich (his property assessment places him in the equestrian class) and he has never been convicted of a crime.

385-390

Never will you say or do anything if Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, forbids it; you have good judgment, you have good sense. But if you shall, one day, write something let it first penetrate the ears of a critic like Maecius or your father or myself; and then keep a lid on it until the ninth year comes around by storing your pages inside your house. You will always be able to destroy anything you haven't published; a word, once released, does not know how to return.

391 –407

When men still roamed the forests, Orpheus, the priest and prophet of the gods, deterred them from slaughter and from an abominable way of life. On account of this he is said to have tamed savage tigers and lions. Amphion, the founder of the city of Thebes, also is said to have moved stones wherever he wished by the sound of his lyre and his seductive entreaties. Once it was deemed wisdom to keep what was public separate from what was private, what was sacred from what was not, to issue prohibitions against promiscuity, to set down laws for those who are married, to build towns, to inscribe laws on wooden tablets. In this way honor and renown came to poets, inspired by the gods, and their songs. After these, Homer achieved fame and Tyrtæus, with his poems, sharpened men's minds for the wars of Mars; oracles were given in poetry, and the way of life was demonstrated, and the grace of kings was tested by Pierian songs; and entertainment was discovered, that

entertainment which brought to a close periods of extended labor. I say this so that you will not in any way feel shame for the skilled muse of the lyre and the divine singer of songs, Apollo.

408 – 418

Is it nature or art, the question is put, that makes a poem praiseworthy: I do not see what study, without a rich vein of natural ability, or raw talent alone, would be able to accomplish. Each asks for assistance from the other and swears a mutual oath of friendship. He who is eager to reach the desired goal at the race-course has endured much and accomplished much as a boy. He has sweated and he has frozen; he has abstained from sex and wine. The flute-player who plays the Pythian piece first learned his skill under a master he feared. Now it is enough to say: "I fashion wonderful poems; may the mangy itch take the hindmost; it's a disgrace for me to be left behind and to admit that what I did not learn, I simply do not know."

419 – 437

Just like the herald at an auction who collects a crowd in order to sell his merchandise, the poet who is rich in lands, rich in money lent out for interest, bids flatterers with an eye on profit to assemble. If in fact he is someone who can properly serve up a lavish banquet and go bail for a fickle, poverty-stricken client and can extricate someone from distressing lawsuits, I will be surprised if the blessed fellow can tell a liar from a true friend. You, then, if you have given, or plan to give, a gift to someone, must refuse to invite him, full of joyful gratitude, to a reading of poems you have written. For he will shout, "Beautiful!" "Great!" "Right on!" He will turn pale over them, he will even let dew drip from his friendly eyes, he will dance and pound the pavement with his foot. Just as hired mourners at a funeral almost say and do more than those who grieve from the heart, so a mocking critic will more easily be aroused than a true admirer. Kings are said to ply with many a cup and test with wine the person they strive to examine with regard to his worthiness of their friendship. If you plan to write poetry, the thoughts concealed within the fox should never deceive you.

438-452

If you ever read something to Quintilius, he used to say, "Please correct this point and that." If you said that you could not improve them after two or three vain attempts, he would advise you to blot them out and to return the badly formed verses to the anvil. If you chose to defend your error rather than change it, he would expend not a word more nor waste any useless effort to stop you, alone, from loving your work and yourself without a rival. An honest and judicious man will be critical of dull verses and disapproving of harsh ones; next to those completely lacking in art he will smear a black line with a horizontal stroke of the pen; he will excise pretentious decoration; he will compel you to shed light on what lacks clarity; he will expose the obscure phrase; he will note what must be changed and will turn out to be a veritable Aristarchus. He will not say, "Why should I displease a friend because of trivialities?" These "trivialities" will lead that friend into serious trouble once he has been greeted with unfavorable reviews and mocking laughter.

453 –476

As when the evil itch or the disease of kings or the frenzied madness and wrath of Diana oppress someone, so sensible people are afraid to touch the mad poet, and run away from him. Inconsiderate children pursue and torment him. He, his head in the clouds, belches out his poems and loses his way; if, like a fowler whose attention is riveted on the blackbirds, he falls into a well or pit, no one will care to raise him up no matter how long he shouts, "Hey, fellow-citizens, look over here!" But if anyone takes the trouble to come to his aid and to lower a rope to him, I will say, "how do you know that he didn't throw himself down there on purpose and doesn't want to be saved?" Then, I'll tell the story of how the Sicilian poet perished. When Empedocles felt the desire to be considered an immortal god, cool as a cucumber he leaped into the burning fires of Aetna. Let the right be given, let permission be granted for poets to die. Whoever saves someone against his will does exactly the same thing as the person who murders him. Not just once has he done this, and if he is extricated now he will not become a mere mortal and put aside his infatuation with a death that will make him famous. Nor is it sufficiently clear why he practices the poet's trade. Did he sacrilegiously urinate on the ashes



of his ancestors or disturb a gloomy plot of consecrated land that had been struck by lightning? Whatever the cause he is certainly mad and just like a bear--if he has succeeded in smashing the restraining bars of his cage--his morose public recitations frighten off the educated and the ignorant alike; once he gets his hands on a person, he doesn't let go until he kills him with his reading--a leech who will not release the skin unless gorged with blood.

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Source : *Horace for Students of Literature: The Ars Poetica and Its Tradition*, 1995.

<http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/DRAMA/ArsPoetica.html>