

ANACREON (c. 575-490 BCE), GREEK POET. For a brief biography of Anacreon, additional poems, and a brief account of his reception, translation, and reputation in early modern England, see the print anthology, pp. 145-6 and p. 187-90.

EDITIONS:

For selected early modern and modern translations of Anacreon's verse and the *Anacreontea*, see the essay 'Anacreon' in "Classical Writers, their Early Modern Reputations and Translations" (*Online Companion*)

ANACREON DONE INTO ENGLISH OUT OF THE ORIGINAL GREEK (1683)¹

From THE PREFACE

The great inducement that drew on my genius² to this bold attempt was the desire of communicating to the world those hidden sweets, that pretty diversion, that long time lay undiscovered in this author; as also the tempting pattern set by the inimitable Mr. Cowley, where he has rendered part of this author so lively in an English dress that I began to esteem it of almost equal beauty with the original. But when I considered the loss of those many insinuating advantages the author had over the ears of his auditors, to whom the inaccessible graces of that language, the delicacies of his wit and style, dished up with all the tickling art of music, could not but yield a very pleasant gust; and now that the same copied out in a less copious tongue and without that additionary beauty of the attuning harp, which was customary in those days, should equally relish with us; I am apt to conclude next of kin to an impossibility.

To supply, therefore, these defects, I have in a looser method, but according to the aforementioned pattern, Englished this author with a parallel fancy of my own here and there interwoven, but as I dare aver nothing derogatory to the sense of the author. And however this method may seem to some to be only the wanton sallies of a ranging fancy,³ and the too licentious play of a poetical mind, yet I can easily satisfy myself that 'tis nothing but what is authorized by Mr. Cowley, nothing but what is adapted to his model [...]

[...]

Neither do I look upon this to indulge too much liberty, but only to grant a freer range to sense and reason. I profess myself an utter enemy to the too narrow tie of a verbal translation, and when I chance to spy an author of this kind who has slavishly confined himself to the least particle of his original, methinks it looks as if not only the motion of the body (according to Descartes' opinion) but that of the mind too was performed by mechanism.⁴ All his uneasy production seems so forced, so much strived for, as if his wit, like the goddess of it, could not be produced without the labour of the brain;⁵ and this,

¹ Translated by Francis Willis, Abraham Cowley, John Oldham, Thomas Wood, and S.B. Oxford: J. Lichfield. For further information on the translators, see the print anthology.

² *genius* natural aptitude or inclination; characteristic disposition.

³ *sallies* outbursts. *ranging fancy* wandering, rambling, or undisciplined imagination.

⁴ *not only ... mechanism* For the French philosopher Rene Descartes' mechanical philosophy as applied to the composition and function of the human body, see *Treatise on Man* (1664).

⁵ *as if his wit ... goddess of it ... brain* Athena, goddess of wisdom, sprang fully formed from the forehead of her father, Zeus, king of the gods.

methinks, is the ready way of burlesquing both himself and the author.

[...]

Thus far I apologized for those licenses I have here indulged myself; and that no one after this might cavil at the design of this piece, where vice seems to be so gaudily apparelled on purpose to draw over some to be its proselytes, I would have the reader know that this is far from the intent of the author, who only designed it as an innocent recreation to divert the mind after it has been teased with the long fatigue of business, and to fill up those vacant hours appropriate to mirth; and also with insinuating delight to please the ladies, for whom great part of this book (*viz.* that product, those enamouring features of love so prettily delineated by this author) was peculiarly intended, in rendering which the only thing I have to glory in is, that whereas I have had such enticements to use a wantonness of speech, and in the plainness of language to display the ladies naked, yet I have been so decently modest as not to admit of one expression that may adulterate the chastest thoughts of a nun, or exact a blush from the most reserved of that sex. I shall only now desire the ladies favourably to accept this, and bless it with their approbation; then I shall be exempted from the fear of any ill-natured critics, being well assured that as for the generality of men they are so much theirs, so much bound in complacency to will and nill⁶ the same, that to dislike what the ladies approve were in some measure to contradict themselves. From these, therefore, I beg that my applause may be uttered with all the emphasis of a smile; yet this alas would be too much, and only render me more unhappy; I should then begin to envy even my own work, and account it my happier rival; nor could I propose to myself any other means of satisfaction than by wishing they would by a kind metonymy accept the author for his book.

S.B.⁷

[...]

ODE 3. CUPID OR THE CUNNING BEGGAR⁸

O'er all when night had silence spread,
 Chained down by sleep and all lay dead;
 When moon and stars below did rest,
 With former watchings much oppressed;
 When even thought in peace was lain,
 And the old Nothing seemed to reign:
 A pretty boy at door did wait,
 And me for lodging much entreat,
 Complaining long of cold and wet.
 "I am," says he, "a fatherless
 And hungry child in much distress.
 My mother to some neighb'ring town

⁶ *will and nill* i.e., agree and disagree.

⁷ S.B. remains unidentified.

⁸ For the original Greek with a modern prose translation, see *Greek Lyric*, 2.33, pp. 202-205. For another translation contemporary with this one, see Charles Goodall's "Ode 1. Love" in *Poems and Translations* (London, 1689). Robert Herrick's version of this poem, "The Cheat of Cupid: Or, The Ungentle Guest," downplays its homoerotic content by modifying Cupid's helplessness and deleting the speaker's appreciative description of Cupid's beauty, his labelling of Cupid as Ganymede, and his hugging and kissing of the little winged god. See *Hesperides* (London, 1648), pp. 26-27.

To beg relief for us is gone,
 Left me and innocence alone.
 Good sir, if the kind gods you love,
 Let me, poor me, your pity move.”
 ’Twas here he stopped, and down his face
 Methought the tears did flow apace;
 His formal cant I soon believed,⁹
 And thought that I his tears perceived.
 Compassion came from every part,
 And pleaded strongly in my heart;
 My heart, which its own ills desired,
 And even I myself conspired.
 I rose and struck a light, then straight
 With pious haste unlocked the gate;
 (So headlong to our fate we fly,
 So fond are we of misery).
 I saw the youth, ’twas wondrous fair;
 His eyes did like two stars appear;
 His limbs upon each other shone,
 And made a constellation;
 But heats as yet I must not feel,
 With wings he did himself conceal,
 (For know with pomp and leisure he
 Prepared at length to murder me).
 His darts and bow did seem around
 To hang, as play-things newly found;
 Destruction then with kind intent
 I modishly did complement.¹⁰
 I warmed his hands with mine, but see
 Two fires did back upon me flee,
 For though more cold than flint he came,
 He had like that a secret flame.
 His hair was wet, but even then
 Some glimmering beauties did remain;
 At length the curls in order lay,
 O’er which (that led my soul away)
 Millions of little loves did play.
 I called him ‘Ganymede,’ I’d swear
 That Cupid was not half so fair.
 Nay, that I might my kindness shew,
 I think I hugged and kissed him too.
 Cheered thus, warm life came up again,
 And all in every part did reign;
 All discontent and cares did cease,
 His bow-strings th’ only thing amiss;
 So prettily he straight forgot

⁹ *cant* given the *adj.* ‘formal’ (i.e., ‘seeming or hypocritical’), the trans. perhaps refers to ‘cant’ as the special phraseology of a religious sect (gesturing to the boy’s soon-to-be-revealed identity as ‘the god of love’); however, it could refer to the speech or phraseology of beggars (which the boy is certainly employing here).

¹⁰ *modishly* fashionably.

Each grave and unbecoming thought.
 “Let’s try,” says [he] (affecting straight
 A meekly look, the greatest cheat),
 “Let’s try; if ’gainst my bow th’ unkind
 Heav’ns rage and malice have design’d.”
 Here to the head the dart was drawn,
 And here the mighty god was shown;
 For (Oh) in my unwary breast
 Death and the fatal steel did rest!
 Impatient sense and nature dies,
 And love alone a life supplies.
 The grinning boy augments my pain,
 With drolls and scoffs he wounds again.¹¹
 “Landlord,” he cries, “my bow you see
 Is much above an injury.
 All ills against your heart were meant,
 Kind ills which heav’n and Cupid sent.
 And you to me that warmth did give,
 A double gift do back receive;
 I grant (my gratitude to prove)
 That thou shalt scorch and burn with love.”

CHARLES GOODALL (1671-89), POET. For further information about Charles Goodall and other selections from his poetry, see the print anthology, pp. 384-99. See also his translations of Theocritus in the *Online Companion*.

From POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS (1689)

ODE 2. THE LETTER-CARRIER

“Tell me, amiable dove,¹²
 Thou great ambassador of love,
 A spokesman fit for amorous Jove,
 Tell me, tell me, why such hast?¹³
 Whither is’t you fly so fast?
 Where didst thou thy breath perfume?
 From what spicy country come?
 From whence, with thy mercurial wing,
 Dost thou these heavenly odours bring?
 Swimming through th’ ambitious air,
 Proud to kiss thy wings so fair,
 Leaving a scent of sweetness there.
 Tell me who it is will be

¹¹ *drolls* jests, mocking words.

¹² *dove* one of the emblematic birds of Venus, goddess of love and sexual desire.

¹³ *hast* i.e., haste.

So honoured with thy company?"
 The dove replied, "What would I give,
 Poor dove, for a preservative
 From coxcombs so inquisitive?¹⁴
 Pray, what are my concerns to you?
 But since 'tis your desire to know,
 And meddlers will not be said 'no,'
 (Save me, ye gods; for what offence
 Must I be killed by impertinence?)
 I am" (and then she curbed her head,¹⁵
 Her tail, fan-like, by feathers spread,
 And walked in state, and clapped her wings,
 And did a hundred pretty things,
 To show her pride) "Anacreon's dove,
 And manage the affairs of love
 With his Bathyllus, that dear boy,
 (Oh, happy state that I enjoy!)
 Lovely Bathyllus, he that can
 By one sweet look ev'n conquer man;
 Can by the magic of his eyes
 Over all things tyrannize;
 Victorious beauty of all Greece,
 The whole creation's masterpiece;
 The pride of Nature, and the fire
 That raises Venus's desire,
 Whom though she envy, she must still admire;
 Could make a Stoic change his mind,¹⁶
 Fixed as the sun, turn like the wind,
 And in Love's school more pleasures find
 Than in his former hermite's cell,
 Principles dark and deep as hell.
 To Venus once I did belong;¹⁷
 She sold me for a trifling song.
 Oh, happy I, that used to run
 From place to place, from sun to sun,
 Managing the intrigues of love
 With Mars and half the gods above,
 With her seraglio of gallants,¹⁸
 That by turns supplied her wants,
 Am servant to Anacreon,
 Who loved by all, yet loves but one.

¹⁴ *coxcombs* fools; interfering busybodies.

¹⁵ *curbed* curved, bent.

¹⁶ *Could ... mind* Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece advocated control of the passions; in the early modern period, they were popularly believed to have embraced celibacy. However, it is just possible that the reference is to the fact that some Stoic philosophers advocated that men should love older youths capable of philosophic discussion rather than uneducated and socially-raw adolescent boys. See Diogenes Laertius, 'Life of Zeno,' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*.

¹⁷ *To ... belong* See n12.

¹⁸ *seraglio* harem. Venus had sexual affairs with many of the Greek gods, including Mars (god of war), Mercury (messenger of the gods), Bacchus (god of wine), and Neptune (god of the sea).

And as you see me now, I bear
 His letters to his lovely fair;¹⁹
 This the perfume that scents the air.
 He promises to set me free;
 Excuse me for such liberty:
 No other freedom would I crave,
 Than name and nature of a slave;
 Nor other slavery can I dread,
 Than being, as he tells me, freed.
 For to what purpose should I fly,
 And ramble in the spacious sky,
 By famine, net, or arrow die?
 Sit starving on a mountain's top,
 Or coo on barren trees, and hop,
 In fear of death, from bough to bough,
 I know not where, I know not how;
 Either die for want of meat,
 Else haws, and chaff, and vetches eat.²⁰
 Nor safety in that wretched fare,
 'Ware birdlime, turtle, and the snare.²¹
 Where puddle-water is the best,
 A hollow tree the softest nest;
 To hear owls' music, nor that long;²²
 She'll make one dance unto her song.
 Is this the freedom I have lost?
 Is this the freedom others boast?
 I by my master now can stand,
 Peck crumbs out of Anacreon's hand;
 And have my little Ganymede
 To give me wine, whene'er I need.
 I in a merry mood, can sup
 Wine out of Anacreon's cup;
 His own pure, choice, delicious wine,
 So smooth, so sparkling, and so fine!
 Which he keeps purposely to treat
 Bathyllus with, when they two meet.
 When I get drunk, I clap my wings,
 And dance, whilst my Anacreon sings.
 And when I am a sleepy grown,
 Upon his harp I lay me down:
 Music and I can there agree
 In one united harmony;
 Both make our master melody.
 Peace and concord is, in brief,
 The perfect sum of my whole life,

¹⁹ *fair* beautiful beloved (a term most often used of women in the period).

²⁰ *haws* fruits of the hawthorn tree, or the heads of wild grasses. *chaff* husks of corn or grain. *vetches* a grain grown as fodder.

²¹ 'Ware Beware. *birdlime* a sticky substance smeared on branches to catch young birds.

²² *owls' music* i.e., the unmelodious screeching of owls (traditionally, the owl was a bird of ill-omen).

Free from danger, noise, or strife.
 Farewell. But now too late I must repent,
 That like yourself I'm grown impertinent:
 For when I'm gone, you'll say you took me wrong,
 To be a dove with a crow's prattling tongue."²³

From THE WORKS OF ANACREON AND SAPPHO, DONE FROM THE GREEK BY SEVERAL HANDS
 (1713)²⁴

THE LIFE OF ANACREON

[...] We can't expect many particulars of his life, because he seems to have been a professed despiser of all business and concerns of the world. And since he designed his whole age merely for one merry fit, it were rather a piece of civility than of injustice in the world to let it be entirely forgotten.

Thus far we may be certain: that wine and love had the disposal of all his hours. And if to divert himself he engages in so delightful a study as poetry, perhaps his intention was rather to pay his respects to some other deities than to compliment the Muses. Ovid himself, though one of the freest livers upon record, yet could censure Anacreon's verses as of a looser humour²⁵ than his own:

Quid nisi cum multo Venerem confundere vino,
 Precepit Lyrici Teia Musa Senis?

Venus with Bacchus madly to confound
 Was all the wise advice the Teian Lyre could sound.

His tippling²⁶ was as famous in the world as his poetry, and when we find his statue in Pausanius 'habited'²⁷ like a lyric professor, we hear at the same time that it was better distinguished by the posture of a drunkard.²⁸

As to the other part of his profession—love—he appears to have been equally enamoured of both sexes, and to have shown as great a veneration for Cupid as he did for Venus. Aelian indeed is very angry if we suspect Anacreon of any dishonesty towards the train of fine boys whom he admired. But the general cry runs too loud against the poet in this point, that there's no need of his own ὦ παῖ παρδένιον βλέπων, to prove that he loved his minions²⁹ on no better account than he did his mistresses.

²³ The *crow*, another ill-omened bird in early modern England, is conventionally contrasted with the dove, emphasizing the former's ugliness and the latter's beauty.

²⁴ This anonymous translation (the preface is signed G.S.) acknowledges that it is based on the 1683 translation *Anacreon Done into English out of the Original Greek*, excerpted above and in the print anthology, pp. 187-90.

²⁵ *looser humour* more licentious tenor.

²⁶ *tippling* habitual drinking of alcohol.

²⁷ *'habited'* clothed, dressed; perhaps, more generally, 'presented.'

²⁸ *Pausanius ... lyric professor* The geographer Pausanius (fl. 2nd c. CE) says that Anacreon's statue on the Acropolis in Athens represents him as a drunk in his posture (*Description of Greece*, trans. W.H.S. Jones, 1.25.1).

²⁹ *minions* [male] lovers; the early modern connotations are uniformly more contemptuous than is the case with

Hermesianax, as he is cited in Athenaeus, gives an account of Anacreon's amours with Sappho. But Athenaeus himself refutes the story, by observing that Sappho and Anacreon could not possibly be contemporaries; the lady living under Alyaetes, father to Croesus, and the gentleman under Cyrus and Polycrates. But 'tis grown a common wish that they had flourished in the same age and country; and had by some nearer relation improved the happy agreement of their temper and wit.

[...]

What became of him after the Athenian voyage,³⁰ or where he passed his last minutes is not on record. But, as his own verses confess his great age (though not the effects of it), so Lucian reckons him among the long-livers, allowing him fourscore and five years.³¹

The manner of his death was very extraordinary. For they tell us, he was choked with an unlucky grape-stone, which slipped down, as he was regaling on some new wine. [...]

[...] it cannot be esteemed a meaner happiness that he has escaped the more dangerous disturbance of the critics. Indeed both the blessings are in great measure owing to himself; one, to the condition of his life; the other, to that of his writings. For as the careless and unconcerned freedom of his manners hindered him from being drawn into the business of the world, so the beautiful negligence and sweet gaiety of his odes have kept him from ever forming an ungrateful field for learned quarrels and encounters.

The masters of controversial philology are utterly disappointed when Anacreon falls under their canvass. He deprives them of all their common places of talk. They can produce no tedious labours on the occasions of his poems, because they were all perfect humours.³² They can neither dispute what examples he followed, nor who have followed his examples, because the natural delicacy of his pieces disdains a copier, as much as it did a pattern [...]

the word 'mistress.'

³⁰ Anacreon reportedly went to Athens to serve Hipparchus, son to the tyrant Pisistratus.

³¹ *fourscore and five* 85.

³² *perfect humours* i.e., the poems all represent simply the humours (dominant or driving passions/inclinations) of the situations and/or persons depicted.